

AUTHORITY: FROM HEAVEN OR MEN

(Matt 21:23-27; Isa 22:15-21)

A. **As the stage** is set for the Olympic Games, & as the world travels to Beijing to watch the various athletic events, there will be one thing on the minds of most people – AUTHORITY!

1. The Chinese government retains absolute authority over everyone in their nation (to the extent that God will allow), & no one dares do anything that would put him in jeopardy of displeasing the officials of that nation.
2. Now why can't people have that kind of fear & respect for God Who holds true absolute authority over everyone?

B. **The study of authority** lies at the foundation of everything we believe, teach & practice as individual Christians & collectively as the church.

1. Every religious question is fundamentally a question of authority.
2. And yet many people, who profess to follow Christ, never consider the need for God's authority as derived from His expressed Will.
3. A short survey of the Bible shows that this is a tragic mistake.
4. Many (beginning with Cain) set out to do something in service or in worship to God, but their efforts were not acceptable to God.

C. **Authority**: "the power or right to give commands, enforce obedience, take action, or make final decisions" (Webster's).

1. Authority is the right to tell others what to do, expect them to do it, & punish them if they don't (Isa 22:15-21; Matt 21:23-27).

I. AUTHORITY IS ESSENTIAL

A. **The enemies** of Jesus asked a legitimate question in two parts.

1. The first part: *“By what authority are You doing these things?”*
2. This question shows the need for proper authority.

B. **Authority** is essential & inescapable.

1. God’s Nature Possesses Authority

- a. The Bible doesn’t make an elaborate argument to prove God’s authority over man; it simply presents a God as having all authority.

b. God is first presented as the Creator & our Maker – which implies authority (Gen 1:1).

Neh 9:6 – You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth & everything on it, the seas & all that is in them, & You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You.

Rom 9:20 – But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?” (Isa 29:16; 45:9-11).

2. Man’s Nature Requires Authority

Jer 10:23 – O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.

2 Thess 3:3-5 – But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you & guard you from the evil one. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do & will do the things we command you. 5 Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God & into the patience of Christ.

Acts 26:17-18 – I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, & from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins & an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’

3. Rejecting Authority There Is Disorder

Judg 17:5-6 – The man Micah [from Ephraim] had a shrine, & made an ephod & household idols; & he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. 6 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

4. Accepting Authority There Is Salvation

Heb 5:8-9 – though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

- a. Therefore, authority, His authority over us, is essential.

- b. Even the chief priests & the elders of the Jews understood that one's authority must come from the right Source: God – As indicated by their second question to Jesus, “*And who gave You this authority?*”

[Many will agree that God's absolute authority over them is essential & inescapable & yet people will always look for the source of His authority in places they will never find it.]

II. FAULTY SOURCES OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

- A. **When Jesus** responded to the chief priests & elders; He told them that authority can come from one of only two sources – *heaven or men*.

- B. **People** all around us recognize & submit to either a heavenly or an earthly source of authority in what they choose to do.
 1. **Human Wisdom or Intuition** (Jer 10:23)
 2. **Creeds – Doctrinal Statements** (Matt 15:9)
 3. **Desires Of The Members** (Majority rule)
 4. **Traditions & Long Standing Practice** (Matt 15:6)
 5. **Preacher/Elders** (“My elders/preacher decided”)
 6. **Silence of Scripture** (“The Bible doesn't say not to”)

- a. The things that are *written* reveal the limits of our authority to act (1 Cor 4:6; Heb 7:12-14; 2 Jn 9).
- b. The silence of Scripture is prohibitive, not permissive.

7. Results Accomplished (“The ends justify the means”)

- a. To some, the authority to do something is determined by what they hope the outcome will be.
- b. Remember, God brought water out of that Rock for Moses & the people, but the end did not justify the means (Moses striking the rock).

[People may use these arguments to justify their beliefs & practices, but Authority to act can only come from one who has the power to give it – GOD.]

III. TRUE SOURCE OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

A. God:

Gen 18:25 – Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not *the Judge of all the earth* do right?”

Heb 12:23 – to the general assembly & church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to *God the Judge of all*, to the spirits of just men made perfect,

B. Jesus: (Heb 1:1-2; Matt 28:18)

C. Holy Spirit: The Spirit of Truth (John 15:26; 16:13)

D. Apostles: (Lk 10:16; John 16:13)

E. New Testament: (2 Pet 1:21)

[The Word of God is authoritative & all sufficient.]

IV. THE NATURE OF GOD'S AUTHORITY

- A. **Objective** - "of or having to do with a known or perceived object as distinguished from something existing only in the mind of the subject or person thinking" (Webster's).

- B. **Subjective** - "of, affected by, or produced by the mind or a particular state of mind; of or resulting from the feelings or temperament of the subject or person thinking" (Webster's).

1. Which is it?

- a. **Jude 7** – speaks *the faith*, a body of truth delivered to the saints.

- b. **1 Cor. 1:10** – Paul pled that we would all *speak the same thing & be of the same mind & in the same judgment.*

[God's authority doesn't leave any room for you & I to differ on matters that pertain to our service to Him.]

V. UNDERSTANDING GOD'S AUTHORITY

- A. **God's authority**, then, is revealed to us in His Word the Bible.

- 1. How do we determine, from the Bible, what we have the right to believe & practice?

- B. **God speaks to us in the same way that we speak to one another.**

- 1. Direct Statement or Command – We communicate our will to each other by verbal statements, **so does God** (**Acts 2:38; 17:31; 1 Pet 2:11; Col 3:9; Gal 5:16-21; 1 Cor 11:22**).

2. Examples – We communicate our will by our actions & examples, so does God (Phil 3:17; 4:9).

3. Necessary Conclusion – We expect people infer or make conclusions about what we like & dislike by our words & actions, so does God (Acts 15:7-21; 1 Cor 11:26; Acts 20:6-7).

[This is not a theological formula invented by members of the church; these are the basic rules of communication.

If people would simply approach Bible study with same common sense they use in day-to-day communication, then we could all read & understand the God's word alike.

CLOSING

- A. **God's authority** must be the basis of everything we do as individual Christians & collectively as a church.
- B. **It is vital** that we understand the nature of God's authority over us if we hope to please Him & be accepted by Him.