
BIBLE TALK

Welcome to "Bible Talk." This week the question is: **"By what authority do you do these things?"**

Listen carefully to the following passage:

Matthew 21:23-27

²³ Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?"

²⁴ But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things:

²⁵ "The baptism of John; where was it from? From heaven or from men?" And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'

²⁶ "But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet."

²⁷ So they answered Jesus and said, "We do not know." And He said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

In the beginning of this passage the Jewish leaders were concerned about Jesus' authority. What gave Him the right to go around teaching and doing all the things He did? The question was legitimate and Jesus promised to answer the question if they would first answer a question of His. "The baptism of John, was it from heaven or from men?" Jesus asked. These crafty leaders discussed among themselves how they should answer.

- a) If they chose to say that John's baptism was from heaven, Jesus would then ask, "Why then did you not believe him?" John had already answered their question. John had already pronounced Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (Jn. 1:29). John had also told the people that Jesus was greater than he was and that he was not worthy to carry Jesus' sandals. If they really wanted to know where Jesus got His authority, all they had to do was decide if John's authority to preach and baptize came from heavenly authority, or from human authority.

- b) On the other hand, if these leaders chose to say John's baptism was from human authority, they would enrage the multitude of people standing around, for the multitude held John to be a prophet indeed! They were afraid of choosing this answer for fear that they would incite the multitude and be beaten, killed, or at least discredited.

In response, these rulers said they could not tell by what authority John baptized. Because of their unwillingness to answer the obvious, Jesus knew they were not sincerely searching for truth and He then refused to answer their question.

HUMAN AUTHORITY

From this story we learn there are two possible sources of authority in religion:

- a) Heavenly authority
- b) Human authority

Human authority is not binding upon men. If one human, or one group of humans declare something to be wrong, another group of humans would have just as much right to say that thing is right. What right does one person have to bind his beliefs on someone else? What right does one group have to say that something is right or wrong because in their opinion it is right or wrong?

Human authority produces arguing and division. One group trying to bind its opinion on others has resulted in countless wars and strife in religion.

Most importantly, when men by their own authority decide what is right and wrong in religion and in morality, they do not please God.

Matthew 15:9

⁹ And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "

God has told us what we should do in our religious service to Him and how we should live our lives and He will not accept anyone substituting their own forms of worship and morality.

DIVINE AUTHORITY

In contrast to human authority, the Scriptures reveal divine authority - authority from heaven. At one time divine authority came thru Moses. God began to speak to the people with His very own mouth, but the people were so afraid to listen to the voice of God that they pleaded with Him to use Moses as His spokesman.

Exodus 20:18-19

¹⁸ Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off.

¹⁹ Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."

In keeping with their request, God used Moses as a mouthpiece to communicate His laws to the people. What Moses said was authoritative because he was speaking on behalf of God Himself.

But the law and words which Moses delivered would not always be the source of authority for God's people. God would one day send His very own Son to deliver a new law for the people:

Deuteronomy 18:17-19

¹⁷ "And the LORD said to me: 'What they have spoken is good.

¹⁸ 'I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.

¹⁹ 'And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.

This passage was speaking of Jesus Himself. When Jesus came He would bring God's new covenant which people must listen to.

Matthew 28:18

¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Jesus, not Moses, is now the authority in matters of religion and morality. What He said is now binding.

Just as God used Moses as a spokesman, Jesus likewise used His apostles as official spokesmen to finish delivering to the people all of the New Testament law. In speaking to His apostles Jesus said this:

John 16:12-13

¹² "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

¹³ "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

All religious and moral truths were eventually revealed to the Lord's apostles. They were His ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20). When they spoke, they were really speaking and writing on behalf of Christ Himself (1 Cor. 14:37). Because "all truth" was delivered to them by the Holy Spirit, and recorded in the New Testament Scriptures, we have God's complete, authoritative will in those Scriptures.

Our authority in religion and morality should be based upon the New Testament Scriptures. If men would agree upon this, and this only, there would be no arguing and fussing over religious matters. If all would agree to do only what the Lord and His apostles taught in the New Testament we could have unity rather than division.

Each individual must decide for his or her self what shall be their standard of authority in religion and morality. Everyone must decide between either heavenly or human authority. But while God gives us this choice to make, we must remember that only one choice brings a blessing from God.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Well ... thanks for listening to our message this week. We invite you to visit our website www.WillOfTheLord.com. There you may download the notes and the audio file of the message you just listened to.

Call again next week when we consider a new subject on *Bible Talk*.