

## Bible Authority (I): Our Need for Authority

Matthew 21:23-27

### I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. Most here are familiar with the events that took place at the Grayling, MI church of Christ where my son had been preaching (briefly explain).
2. At the heart of the issues that caused this church to split were issues of Bible authority.
3. **2** When we begin discussing the need for Bible authority, some roll their eyes.
  - A. They roll their eyes, because they don't feel that Bible authority is a priority, or even worse, that it is not necessary (I don't think that's the case with anyone here!).
  - B. In their eyes, those (like me!) who think Bible authority is important, are nothing more than modern-day Pharisees.
  - C. Those minimizing the need for Bible authority, or criticizing the concept are dead wrong!
4. **3** The word "authority" in the Bible comes from word *exousia* which means "the right to exercise power" (Vine).
5. **\*\*** *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* (p. 225) gives four definitions of the word *exousia*:
  - A. "Power of choice, liberty of doing as one pleases, leave or permission."
  - B. "Physical and mental power; the ability or strength with which one is endued, which he either possesses or exercises."
  - C. The power of authority (influence) and of right; Matt. 21:23.
  - D. The power of rule or government (the power of him whose will and commands must be submitted to by others and obeyed, generally translated authority Matt. 28:18).
6. **4** When one acts with authority it simply means they have the rightful power to command or act.
7. Despite the claims of some to the contrary, the concept of authority is vitally important in every aspect of our lives!
  - A. Without the proper authority, our society would descend into chaos.
  - B. Examples of authority:
    - (1) Civil government: e.g., criminal laws (murder, theft, kidnapping, etc.),
    - (2) Traffic laws: imagine if there were no traffic laws and no patrolman to enforce them?
    - (3) Licensing laws: would you fly on an airplane if the pilot did not have the proper credentials? Would you allow a person to perform brain surgery on you if he/she did not meet the proper training standards and licensing requirements? There are so many others: food production rules and inspections, FDA drug testing rules and regulations, ATC rules and regulations, etc., etc.
    - (4) School: rules for the obtaining of a graduation certificate, rules or standards of grading, rules of conduct, etc.
8. **\*\*** What we're interested in this series of lessons is authority as it concerns religion.
  - A. Who has the has the rightful power to command us concerning what we teach and practice as Christians? Who or what is our source of authority in religion?
  - B. How do we determine how to establish authority for what we teach and practice? How do we determine what teachings and practices are authorized by the duly established authority?

9. **5** In our first lesson on Bible authority we will examine **Our Need for Authority**.

## II. DISCUSSION:

### I. **6** Man's need for authority in religion: Matt. 21:23-27

A. The chief priests and elders of the Jews were concerned about authority:

**Matt. 21:23:** *"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?'"*

B. Their question shows two important things regarding authority:

(1) Need for authority: **v. 23:** *"By what authority are You doing these things?"* They recognized the need for authority in religion.

(2) Source of authority: **v. 23:** *"And who gave You this authority?"* They recognized that proper authority must originate from a rightful source.

C. Let's note how Jesus answers them (answers their question by posing His own question): **vv. 24-25:** *"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?'"*

(1) **7** First, His answer recognizes the need for authority by the very fact He offers an answer.

(2) Second, His answer shows there are only two sources of authority in religion:

(a) *"From heaven":* i.e., Divine authority.

(b) *"from men":* i.e., human authority.

D. Their answer showed they agreed with this important principle about religious authority (**Matt. 21:25-26:** *"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.'"*).

E. **8** Many deny that authority from God is needed for all man does in the realm of religion; this attitude is prominently recognized in the Bible:

(1) Many look to themselves as a source of authority:

**Prov. 14:12:** *"There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death."*

**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 Kgs. 5:11:** *"But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, '**Behold, I thought**, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.'" (KJV)*

(2) Many look to other men as a source of authority:

**Col. 2:20-22:** *"Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations — 21 'Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,' 22 which all concern things which perish with the using — according to **the commandments and doctrines of men?**"*

**Matt. 15:9:** *"And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines **the commandments of men.**"*

F. These attitudes are responsible for the fact there are over “approximately 38,000 Christian denominations” (Wikipedia quoting *Christianity Today*).

- (1) Unfortunately, these attitudes have also permeated the Lord’s church.
- (2) Just after World War II many churches of Christ became dissatisfied with the Lord’s arrangement primarily regarding how the church would do its work.
- (3) Many brethren engaged in practices having no scriptural authority and when challenged claimed, “We don’t need divine authority for all we teach and practice!” (“We’re doing good!”; “We’ve done it this way for forty years!”; “Elders of churches all over Michigan do it this way!” Amazingly I heard these very excuses from some at the Grayling church of Christ! I couldn’t believe my ears!).
  - (a) This attitude is nothing new. In the 1850’s the issue of the *American Christian Missionary Society* (ACMS) split churches of Christ and led to the formation of the Christian Church (e.g., *Disciples of Christ*).
  - (b) This liberal attitude toward the Scriptures continued into the late 1800’s and early 1900’s as the church split over the use of instrumental music.
  - (c) The issues of the 1950’s and 1960’s also led to a split among churches of Christ; unfortunately, probably 80%, or more, decided to follow the “liberal” viewpoint.
  - (d) The “liberal” viewpoint has proven to be a “slippery slope” (e.g., social gospel, deny verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, virgin birth, resurrection of Christ, etc.).
- (4) This “liberal” view of the Scriptures is the exact opposite attitude and practice brethren made for years toward the denominational world when we insisted we need “book, chapter, and verse” to authorize all we teach and practice; a “Thus saith the Lord” in other words (Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11).

G. \*\* These matters cannot be ignored and swept under the rug (e.g., “It’s just a preacher fuss!”). Failure to recognize the need for Divine authority in all matters religious shows we have failed to learn the most basic Bible principle governing our acceptability with God.

**2 Jn. 9-11:** “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

## 2. 9 Need for divine authority illustrated in the Old Testament:

A. Adam & Eve:

- (1) They were given a simple command by their Creator:

**Gen. 2:15-17:** “Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”

- (2) \*\* Thus, their Creator, the one with authority, gave them positive and negative commands: “the Lord God commanded man...”

☒ **Positive:** “Of every tree of the garden you may eat freely...”

☒ **Negative:** “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat...”

- (3) They substituted their will for God’s will and paid a big price! 2 Jn. 9; Gen. 3:16-19

B. **10** Cain & Abel:

**Gen. 4:3-5:** “And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. 4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, 5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.”

- (1) **\*\*** Note that Abel’s sacrifice was “respected” by “the Lord” (v. 4); the NIV says, “The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering...”
- (2) The Hebrew writer says: **Heb. 11:4:** “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”
- (3) The key thought here is that Abel’s sacrifice was “looked [on] with favor” by God because Abel offered his sacrifice “by faith.”
  - (a) How does faith come? Rom. 10:17
  - (b) This means God told Cain and Abel what to offer; hence, they were authorized by God to offer an animal sacrifice.
  - (c) Cain chose not to do what God authorized; he substituted “the fruit of the ground” instead of the animal sacrifice authorized by God.
  - (d) Cain substituted his own will for God’s will and paid the price! 2 Jn. 9; Gen. 4:5

C. **11** Nadab & Abihu:

- (1) Nadab and Abihu were the sons of Aaron (Lev. 10:1); nephews of Moses.
- (2) As the sons of Aaron, they were privileged to be priests; they were authorized by God to engage in the various acts of worship required of priests under the Law of Moses.
- (3) In Leviticus 10 we find an incident of their dealings with God:

**Lev. 10:1-2:** “Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. 2 So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.”
- (4) **\*\*** Note that the fire they offered was fire “which He had not commanded them” (v. 1).
  - (a) In other words, they offered unauthorized fire!
  - (b) I don’t know exactly what fire they used to burn the incense; I just know it was not from the proper source (fire to burn incense was to come from the altar; Lev. 16:12).
- (5) **Bottom line:** Nadab and Abihu did not have the rightful power to use the source of fire they used to burn the incense; it was “profane fire” (NKJV); “strange fire” (KJV); “unauthorized fire...contrary to His command” (NIV)
- (6) **\*\*** So what! Big deal! In the great scheme of things who cares where they got the fire! In the end didn’t they accomplish what they were supposed to do?! Fire isn’t that important, is it? After all, they basically did what priests were supposed to do? Right?

**Lev. 10:2:** “So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.”
- (7) The source of fire may be a small thing in the eyes of men, but not with God; just ask Nadab and Abihu! 2 Jn. 9

**\*\*Lev. 10:3:** “And Moses said to Aaron, ‘This is what the LORD spoke, saying:

*'By those who come near Me  
I must be regarded as holy;  
And before all the people  
I must be glorified.'  
So Aaron held his peace."*

D. **12** Uzzah:

- (1) We meet up with Uzzah in 2 Samuel 6; as David is moving the ark of the covenant back to its rightful place in the tabernacle.
- (2) Recall that the ark had been captured by the Philistines (1 Sam. 5) and put it in the "house of Dagon" (1 Sam. 5:2).
  - (a) God caused Dagon to fall *"on its face to the earth before the ark of the Lord"* (1 Sam. 5:3) and when the Philistines put Dagon back in place; God caused Dagon to fall again and broke off the *"head...and both the palms of its hands"* (1 Sam. 5:4).
  - (b) God then caused the Philistines to be *"struck...both small and great"* with *"tumors"* (1 Sam. 5:9).
  - (c) The Philistines held on to the ark for seven months and then (hot potato!) send it back to Israel (1 Sam. 6:1ff).
- (3) About 20 years later (1 Sam. 7:2); David decides to finally move the ark to Jerusalem.
  - (a) So David set the ark on a *"new cart"* (2 Sam. 6:3) and off they go toward Jerusalem; but on the way they have a little "accident" when *"the oxen stumble"* (2 Sam. 6:6).
  - (b) When the oxen stumbled and the ark began to fall *"Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it..."* (2 Sam. 6:6).
  - (c) **Important:** There is no indication Uzzah's act was high-handed rebellion against God; he simply reacted *instinctively* to prevent the ark from tumbling off the cart.
  - (d) What was God's response? *"No problem! I understand you were only trying to protect the ark."* **\*\* 2 Sam. 6:7:** *"Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God."*
  - (e) **\*\* Note David's reaction: 2 Sam. 6:8:** *"And David became angry because of the LORD's outbreak against Uzzah; and he called the name of the place Perez Uzzah (lit. 'Outburst Against Uzzah') to this day."*
  - (f) I can understand David's reaction; after all, Uzzah was just instinctively trying to keep the ark from falling off the cart.
  - (g) **13** David, however, reflected on the incident and eventually came to another conclusion (the right conclusion):
 

**1 Chron. 15:12-13:** *"He said to them, 'You are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites; sanctify yourselves, you and your brethren, that you may bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel to the place I have prepared for it. 13 For because you did not do it the first time, the LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order.'"*

    - (i) **\*\* Note the key phrase:** *"God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order."* (v. 13)

- (ii) **\*\*** David was right, but what was the “proper order”? It was the “order” God had authorized!

**1 Chron. 15:14-15:** *“So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel. 15 And the children of the Levites bore the ark of God on their shoulders, by its poles, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the LORD.”*

- (iii) The ark was supposed to be carried only by Levites, and only Levites of the family of Kohath (Ex. 25:10-15; Num. 4:15; Kohath, Gershon, Merari).
- (iv) So God gave authority to carry the ark in only one specific way, by only certain specific persons: **Num. 4:15:** *“And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die.”*
- (h) Remember: Uzzah was struck because *“his error; and he died there by the ark of God.”* (2 Sam. 6:7).
- (i) It didn’t matter that David was trying to “do the right thing” in moving the ark.
- (ii) It didn’t matter that Uzzah had no evil intentions in trying to steady the ark.
- (iii) What mattered? They did not have the authority to move the ark in the manner they were moving it!
- (iv) Remember **2 Jn. 9:** *“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.”*

E. **14 Uzziah:** aka Azariah

- (1) Uzziah was the tenth king of Judah; reigned 52 years (792-740 B.C.):

**2 Kgs. 15:3-4:** *“And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done, 4 except that the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.”*

- (2) However, there are some ominous words concerning Uzziah in 2 Chronicles:

**2 Chron. 26:5:** *“as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper.”*

- (3) The “chink” in Uzziah’s armor is shown when he makes a huge mistake when he acted on his own authority rather than respecting the LORD’s authority (2 Chron. 26:16-21).

**2 Chron. 26:18:** *“And they withstood King Uzziah, and said to him, ‘It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed! You shall have no honor from the LORD God.’”*

**2 Chron. 26:19-21:** *“Then Uzziah became furious; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead, before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the incense altar. 20 And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and there, on his forehead, he was leprous; so they thrust him out of that place. Indeed he also hurried to get out, because the LORD had struck him. 21 King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house, because he was a leper...”*



- (4) \*\* This incident illustrates an important principle: Just because something is a good work, doesn't mean we don't need Divine authority to do it! (1 Tim. 3:2; e.g., women elders)
- (5) Once again, the principles of 2 John 9 are exhibited (**2 Jn. 9:** *"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son."*).

F. **15** Moses:

- (1) Everyone even vaguely familiar with the Bible knows about the great lawgiver Moses.
- (2) Moses is one of the greatest men in the Bible story; but as a man he had his weaknesses.
- (3) Moses constantly had to deal with the obstinacy, rebellion, complaining and murmuring of the children of Israel.
  - (a) In Exodus 17 the children of Israel contend with Moses and tempted the Lord, *"Give us water, that we may drink."*
  - (b) \*\* The Lord told Moses to *"strike the rock, and water will come out of it"* (Ex. 17:6), which he did (v. 6).
- (4) The issue of water comes up again later in the book of Numbers, chapter 20.
  - (a) Recall that in Exodus 17 the Lord told Moses to *"strike the rock"* to obtain water for the children of Israel.
  - (b) \*\* But, this time the LORD told Moses, *"Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water..."* (Num. 20:8).
  - (c) \*\* But Moses took it on his own authority to do something else: *"Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly..."* (Num. 20:10).
- (5) **16** No problem...right? This is the mighty Moses, plus his actions led to what the Lord wanted (i.e., *"water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank."* v. 8).
  - (a) Most people operate on the principle "the ends justify the means"; and they would praise Moses for "getting the job done." But God does not operate on that principle!
  - (b) So, surely what Moses did was not a "big deal," after all this is God's otherwise faithful servant, surely, He will give Moses a pass on this. Right?
  - (c) \*\* Not so! **Num. 20:12:** *"Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.'"*
  - (d) Remember Rom. 15:4 (*"whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning"*) and those things are *"a shadow of things to come"* (Col. 2:17).
    - (i) Thus, the "Promised Land" was a type or shadow of heaven.
    - (ii) So, what does God want us to learn from this incident? We won't make it to the ultimate "Promised Land" (i.e., heaven) unless we respect God's authority!
    - (iii) Remember what Moses said to Aaron when Nadab and Abihu *"died before the LORD"*?

**Lev. 10:3:** *"And Moses said to Aaron, 'This is what the LORD spoke, saying:*

*'By those who come near Me  
I must be regarded as holy;*

*And before all the people  
I must be glorified.'*

*So Aaron held his peace."*

- (6) When we trifle with God's authority, regardless of who we are and how good the "results" may be; we are disrespecting God!
- (7) Not even the mighty Moses got a pass from God; even though the final results were what was intended; that just doesn't matter! God's work must be done in God's way or it is unacceptable! 2 Jn. 9

### III. CONCLUSION: 17

- 1. In this lesson we have defined authority ("the right to exercise power," Vine; When one acts with authority it simply means they have the rightful power to command or act.).
- 2. We have given six examples from the Old Testament that unequivocally show God's displeasure when we trifle with His authority and take it into our own hands to determine what we will do and who will do it.
- 3. Do you believe authority is important?
  - ☛ Ask Adam & Eve!
  - ☛ Ask Cain & Abel
  - ☛ Ask Nadab & Abihu!
  - ☛ Ask Uzzah!
  - ☛ Ask Uzziah!
  - ☛ Ask Moses!
- 4. "Those who scorn the need for authority overlook one of the basic lessons taught in the Old Testament and flirt with danger in so doing." (Moore, p. 7)
- 5. Remember Romans 15:4!

Adapted from the workbook *A Study of Authority* by Billy W. Moore (pp. 5-7).