

Bible Authority (3): The Source of Authority: What It Is Not

Matthew 21:23-27

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** This is our third lesson on the general topic of Bible authority.
2. In our previous lessons:
 - A. We gave a general definition of authority: the rightful power to command or act.
 - B. We talked about our need for authority in every realm of life:
 - (1) Without the proper authority, our society would descend into chaos.
 - (2) Examples of authority: e.g., civil govt., traffic laws, licensing laws, school regulations.
 - C. ****** We talked about our need for authority in religion:

Matt. 21:23-27: “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.’”

- (1) Their questions show two important things regarding religious authority:
 - (a) Need for authority: **v. 23:** “By what authority are You doing these things?”
 - (b) Source of authority: **v. 23:** “And who gave You this authority?”
 - (2) **3** Jesus answers with a question of His own (**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?’”).
 - (3) Jesus’ answer tells us two more important things regarding religious authority:
 - (a) First, His answer shows He recognized the need for religious authority.
 - (b) Second, His answer shows there are only two sources of authority in religion:
 - (i) Divine authority: “From heaven”
 - (ii) Human authority: “from men”
 - (4) The Pharisees agree with this important principle (**vv. 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.’”).
- D. **4** We pointed out the Bible plainly tells of the fallacy of human religious 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)

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.”

E. To prove the truth of these important Bible principles, we need look no further than the fact there are over “38,000 Christian denominations” (Wikipedia quoting *Christianity Today*).

(1) Unfortunately, these unscriptural attitudes have also permeated the Lord’s church.

(2) For example, most in the *Restoration Movement* abandoned the scriptural plea of “We speak where the Bible speaks, and are silent where the Bible is silent” (cf. 1 Pet. 4:11).

(a) So many minimize and/or rationalize these matters; but once truth is compromised the floodgate of apostasy is opened and will sweep you away to unimaginable error!

(b) Peter said this about false teaching and apostasy: **2 Pet. 2:1:** “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them...”

(c) ** The “liberal” view of the Scriptures began with a departure from the NT pattern on evangelism (i.e., ACMS) and has resulted in a tidal wave of error and apostasy.

(d) It created a “slippery slope” that has led to instrumental music, institutionalism, social gospel, food/fun/frolic, women elders & preachers, theistic evolution, denial of the virgin birth, miracles, inspiration, resurrection, etc.

(e) It has led to the denial that we must have “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).

(3) **5** Remember my lesson *Three Things Sin Will Do?* This apostasy among our brethren clearly demonstrates these three truths about sin. Sin:

(a) ** Will take you farther than you wanted, or intended, to go (i.e., “slippery slope”; **2 Tim. 3:13:** “evil men...shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.”).

(b) ** Will keep you longer than you wanted to stay (There’s no going back for these folks! They will admit many things they teach and practice are optional, but they will not abandon them for the sake of unity; **1 Tim. 1:19:** Hymenaeus & Alexander “rejected” their “faith and...good conscience”; Rom. 1:24, 26, 28).

(c) ** Will cost you more than you wanted to pay (**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. These matters cannot be ignored or minimized, they are critically important! 2 Jn. 9

3. **6** We gave six Old Testament examples that unequivocally show God’s displeasure when we trifle with His authority, take it into our own hands to determine what we will do and who will do it.

☛ Adam & Eve: Gen. 2:15-17; 3:16-19

☛ Cain & Abel: Gen. 4:3-5; Heb. 11:4; Rom. 10:17

☛ Nadab & Abihu: Lev. 10:1-2

☛ Uzzah: 2 Sam. 6; 1 Chron. 15:12-15; Num. 4:15

☛ Uzziah: 2 Kgs. 15:3-4; 2 Chron. 26:5, 18-21;

☛ Moses: Ex. 17:6; Num. 20:8-12

4. **7** When we take God's authority lightly, regardless of who we are and how good the "results" may be; we are disrespecting God!

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."

****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."

5. **8** Today we continue our study of **Bible Authority** by looking at **The Source of Authority: What It Is Not.**

II. DISCUSSION:

1. **9** Introduction:

A. Recall Matthew 21:23-27

- (1) Jesus certainly did not get His authority to teach and do what He did from the "clergy" of His day, thus they (rightly so) inquired about His authority and its source.
- (2) No doubt they had bad motives; perhaps they thought they could destroy His credibility and influence by showing He taught and acted without authority from them; He was not one of them and didn't attend their "seminary."

B. Regardless of their motives, they establish an important principle all should be concerned: we must have a legitimate source of authority for all we teach and practice in religion.

C. Recall: **Matt. 21:23:** "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?" This shows the importance of authority, recognized even by those who used the wrong source or authority! Matt. 15:9

- (1) Many things in religion are accepted as authoritative without consideration being given to the source from which they are derived.
- (2) We not only must have authority, but our authority must come from the right source.

2. **10** The source of divine authority is not:

Divine authority is not...

A. The doctrine and practices of the Old Testament:

- (1) Many appeal to the Old Testament as their source of authority:

- ☛ Tithing as the law of giving.
- ☛ Instrumental music in worship.
- ☛ Infant church membership.
- ☛ Polygamy among the Mormons.

- (2) **11** The Old Testament is not the source of Divine authority today.

- (a) The Old Testament centered on the Law of Moses which is no longer in force today.

- (i) ****** Law was a “shadow” (**Heb. 10:1**: “For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.”).
- (ii) A new covenant was foretold over 600 years before Christ came (**Heb. 8:7-13**).
- (iii) ****** The first covenant was “annulled” (Strong: cancellation; Thayer: abolition):

Heb. 7:11-19: “Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? 12 For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a **change of the law**. 13 For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. 15 And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest 16 who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. 17 For He testifies:

‘You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek.’

18 For on the one hand there is an **annulling** of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, 19 for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.”

- (iv) ****** The first covenant was removed when Christ died on the cross:

Eph. 2:14-16: “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.” (**Col. 2:14**: “And He has taken it out of the way, having **nailed it to the cross**.”).

- (v) ****** Old law is an “all or nothing” proposition! No “cafeteria-style religion!

Gal. 5:3-4: “For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the **whole law**. 4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.” (**Rom. 3:20**: “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”)

- (vi) ****** Old covenant ended and the New covenant clearly began when Christ died:

Heb. 9:15-17: “And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death,” 16 “For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. 17 For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.”

Heb. 10:8-10: “Previously saying, ‘Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them’ (which are offered according to the law), 9 then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ He **takes away the first** that He may establish the second. 10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

- (b) ****** This doesn’t mean the Old Testament is of no value to us!

Rom. 15:4: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

I Cor. 10:11: “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”

Divine authority is not...

B. 12 What the pastor (or preacher) says:

- (1) Many regard the preacher or pastor’s word as the ultimate authority in religion (“Well, my pastor says such and such, so it must be true.”; recall Henrietta’s friend).
 - (a) To some extent, this may arise from the denominational concept that the pastor (or preacher) has to be “called by the Lord” to preach.
 - (b) “One of the most ridiculous spectacles of the religious realm is the diversity of doctrines taught by (so-called, cvt) ‘God called preachers.’” (Moore, p. 18)
- (2) Preachers (or pastors) do not have divine authority to preach what “I think”; we are to preach God’s word, not our word!

2 Tim. 4:1-2: “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; 2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” (KJV)

Titus 2:1: “But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine.”

- (3) The same is true for “real” pastors (i.e., elders):

Titus 1:9: “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

- (4) Our faith must be grounded in the wisdom of God, not the wisdom of men:

I Cor. 2:4-5: “And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

Acts 17:11: “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”

****Don’t believe what I, or any man, teaches without “searching the Scriptures”!
Be polite, but ask questions and be skeptical.**

Divine authority is not...

C. 13 Creeds (catechisms) of men:

- (1) What is a “creed”?
 - (a) Almost every denomination has a “creed”; it is a document that summarizes its doctrines and practices.
 - (b) A denomination’s creed is peculiar and specific to that denomination; it contains the teachings that set that denomination apart and distinct from other denominations.
 - (c) A denomination’s creed is sometimes called a catechism (e.g., *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*), a manual (*The Baptist Manual*), a book of prayer (e.g., the Presbyterian Church has *The Book of Common Prayer: and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church*), etc.

- (d) Also, most denominations appoint delegates, or representatives, from various local churches, regions of the country (or even various countries of world) to gather regularly (e.g., annually) to discuss and vote what will be, or not be, the formal doctrine of their denomination; e.g.,
- ☛ There is a branch of the “Baptist” denomination known as the *Southern Baptist Convention* (all information on SBC from *Wikipedia*).
 - ☛ They claim to have originated May 8-12, 1845 in Augusta, Georgia, USA.
 - ☛ They have 47,272 congregations with a total membership of 15.22 million (2016).
 - ☛ They have a creed called *Baptist Faith and Message* (BF&M), which was “revised significantly in 1963 and again in 2000, with the latter revision of much controversy, particularly regarding the role of women in the church.” (Note: The SBC claims the BF&M is not a creed, however, “*faculty in SBC-owned seminaries and missionaries who apply to serve through the various SBC missionary agencies must affirm that their practices, doctrine, and preaching are consistent with the BF&M.*”).
 - ☛ This denomination maintains a headquarters in Nashville, TN.
 - ☛ It has an “Executive Committee” which “exercises authority and control over seminaries and other institutions owned by the *Southern Baptist Convention*.”
 - ☛ The denomination has an annual meeting where “*they gather to confer and determine programs, policies, and budget of the SBC.*”
- (e) Thus, denominational creeds, unlike the Bible, are subject to change; e.g.,
- (i) Women pastors and preachers,
 - (ii) Gay clergy,
 - (iii) Same-sex marriage.
- (f) Creeds are not as prominent today as they were in the past.
- (i) But, unfortunately, denominations are not forsaking their creeds for the Bible.
 - (ii) It is merely a sign of our postmodern times where less emphasis is being placed on “formal” or “organized” religion (e.g., rise of “community” church movement).
 - (iii) However, in times past, denominations placed a great deal of emphasis on their creed; they would defend it in debates and ostracize members of their denomination who “broke with the creed” (i.e., expulsion, excommunication).
- (2) It is impossible to please God by accepting and following the creeds of men! Jer. 10:23
- Matt. 15:9:** “*And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*”
- Col. 2:21-22:** “*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?** 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.*”

Divine authority is not...

D. 14 The desires of the congregation:

- (1) Some religious bodies pride themselves in the fact they are democratic; after all, democracy is American as apple pie.

- (a) For example, the SBC denomination, like most denominations, has an annual convention or meeting where their “delegates” meet to vote on policies, doctrine, etc.
- (b) Democratic rule is good and commendable in politics, but that’s not how the Lord’s church is to be run (Matt. 28:18-20; Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11).
- (2) Furthermore, the majority opinion of the church may be wrong.
 - (a) Remember what the majority of Israelites wanted when they first left Egypt and Moses was up on Mount Sinai?
Ex. 32:1: *“Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, ‘Come, make us gods that shall go before us’”*
 - (b) Remember when the majority in Israel wanted a king?
1 Sam. 8:4-5: *“Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, ‘Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.’”*
 - (c) The majority was wrong!
1 Sam 8:6-7: *“But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, ‘Give us a king to judge us.’ So Samuel prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.’”*
- (3) The desires of the majority are almost invariably contrary to the desires of the Lord!
Isa. 55:8-9: *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. 9 ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.’”*
- (4) The very notion of “majority rule” should be abhorrent to God’s people:
1 Cor. 1:10: *“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”*

Divine authority is not...

E. 15 The elders of the local church:

- (1) The Lord has given the elders of the church specific work to do:
 - (a) “Shepherd the flock”: **1 Pet. 5:2-3:** *“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;”*
 - (b) “oversee” the flock: **Acts 20:28:** *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”*
- (2) The elders have no legislative power, but are under the authority of Christ:
 - 1 Pet. 5:2-4:** *“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”*
 - (a) The limited scope of the elder’s authority can be seen in their divine qualifications:

1 Tim. 3:5: “for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?” (i.e., doesn’t run the church, just takes care of it!).

Titus 1:7: “as a steward of God”

Titus 1:9: “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

- (b) Some just assume elders are “running the show,” so to speak.
- (c) They are not! Just because the elders approve of something doesn’t mean the Lord approves (e.g., instrumental music, church funds to institutions, food/fun/frolic; The wayward members at Grayling used this excuse.).
- (3) Jesus Christ is the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:4) and He has “All authority...in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18), and the elders must submit to His authority.
- (4) ** “Elders are under the authority of Christ and have no legislative power. Hence unauthorized practices and organizations cannot be made scriptural by being put under their oversight (1 Peter 5:1-4).” (Moore, p. 19)

Divine authority is not...

F. 16 The results accomplished:

- (1) Some people just assume as long as what they are doing is a “good work,” or it accomplishes “great results,” that in and of itself authorizes its practice.
- (2) It is “The ends justify the means” philosophy.
- (3) This is one of the excuses many of the members at Grayling gave for their unscriptural practices, “We are doing so much good!”
- (4) “The ends justify the means” philosophy is wrong...dead wrong!
 - (a) ** David was doing a “good work” (at least in his eyes) when he moved the ark of the covenant on an ox cart, but God didn’t think so! 2 Sam. 6:1-11; 1 Chron. 15:13; 1 Chron. 15:2
 - (b) ** King Uzziah was engaged in a “good work,” as he tried to worship God by burning incense, but it wasn’t a “good work” God had authorized him to do (2 Chron. 26:16-20).
 - (c) ** Nadab and Abihu were engaged in a “good work,” as they were ministering as priests, but even though they were getting “results” didn’t make it right (Lev. 10:1-2).
 - (d) ** Saul of Tarsus thought he was “doing good,” in reality, he was acting “contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9):

Phil. 3:4-6: “...I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”

Acts 26:9: “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”

- (e) ** The religious people Jesus describes in Matthew 7:21-23 were engaged in “many” “good works,” but Jesus told them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Matt. 7:21-23).

III. CONCLUSION: 17

1. We all need to be vitally interested in understanding the principles, application and consequences of Bible authority.
2. I especially want to appeal to our young people: I am neither a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but I can guarantee you at some point in your life, you and the congregation you work and worship with, will be confronted by these issues and you will have to make a choice!

****Acts 20:28-31:** *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”*

- A. ****** Will you cave and follow the “doctrines and commandments of men”? Matt. 15:9
- B. Or will you stand firm and “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”? Josh. 24:15; 1 Pet. 4:11
 - (1) I can guarantee your faith and spiritual courage will be severely challenged.
 - (2) I can guarantee you it will not be easy or pleasant and it will potentially cost you the love and companionship of friends and even, perhaps, close relatives.
 - (3) I can also guarantee you that if you do not understand these principles of Bible authority you will find yourself swept aside by the tide of error.
 - (4) You will be lost!

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.”*

Adapted from the workbook *A Study of Authority* by Billy W. Moore (pp. 18-19).