

By What Authority?

Joe Slater

Jesus respected the principle of authority, and so should we. After He had cleansed the Temple the second time, and as He taught and preached there, His critics demanded to know: *“By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?”* (Matthew 21:23). Of course they were looking for some human authority. Had Jesus received a license after graduating from one of the rabbinical schools? Had the chief priests ordained Him to preach in the Temple? If not, then what gave this carpenter’s son from Nazareth the right to single-handedly drive out the merchants and money-changers, and then to proclaim His own controversial ideology on this sacred ground?

His answer shows that Jesus respected the principle of authority, though He differed with His critics on the proper source of authority. Since they had set themselves up as being qualified to judge His credentials, Jesus put them to the test by asking: *“The baptism of John, where was it from? From heaven or from men?”* (Matthew 21:25a). Our Lord concerned Himself not with human authority, but divine authority. No human authority had anointed John as a prophet. Either he had divine authority or he had none at all. Surely these self-appointed judges of the Lord’s credentials would have no trouble judging John’s!

Jesus’ critics found themselves on the horns of a dilemma. *“If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why, then, did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet”* (Matthew 21:25b-26). So, they chickened out, claiming, *“We do not know”* (Matthew 21:27). By doing this, they admitted that they were not qualified to judge anyone’s credentials, including the Lord’s.

The truth, of course, was that John’s authority came from heaven (God), not from men. So did Jesus’ authority. Our authority today must come from God through His word. No human or group of humans has the right to add to God’s word, to take from it, or to modify it in any way. Religious councils, conventions, synods, and suchlike are utterly without divine authority. God has spoken! *“Let all the earth keep silence before Him”* (Habakkuk 2:20).

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What does God Expect from Me?

Modern religion has tried to make Christianity “user-friendly” by taking a marketing approach to recruiting new members. Popular TV preachers never use the “S” word – sin! Churches openly trumpet a “come as you are” approach; and they mean casual both in dress and in lifestyle. Today’s pulpit mutes repentance and shouts self-esteem. Hell is old-fashioned. Feel-good is in. Life change is out. God is remade in man’s image.

Jesus took a different approach. His religion is high-stakes: *“Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple”* (Luke 14:33). We risk everything to gain everything.

Christ was up-front with people. He put nothing in the fine print – no “gotcha” clauses to be discovered later. He said simply, *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it”* (Luke 9:23-24).

--Allen Webster (adapted) – via House-to-House

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There is more to being a soldier of Christ than showing up to formation in a clean, pressed uniform.

--Jamie Beller (Greenville, SC)

Faith

What is faith? Is it wishful thinking? Is it blind? In other words, is it based upon wanting something to be true, but without evidence to back it up ?

Basically, Romans 1:19-20 tells us that we should know and understand that there is an all-powerful Creator just by our looking around at the universe and nature. We have no excuse for not accepting that all this was created, and it wasn't a blind cosmic accident.

First, my faith is based first on common sense. The universe is here and so am I; therefore, the universe and I are products of an all-powerful, awesome, intelligent Creator.

Second, my faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is firmly based upon the Bible. After all, how else can I know that God is a rewarder of those who seek Him? I also understand that God will punish those who do not seek Him. Faith comes from hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17).

Hebrews 11:6 clearly teaches that we must believe that God exists, and we must trust that He will do what He says He will do. Is it all I have to just to believe that there is a God and seek Him? That would be nice. However, God desires a changed and obedient life. Hebrews chapters 3 and 4 make it clear that we can lose out if we are disobedient. First John stresses keeping the commandments of Christ. We demonstrate our faith and trust in God by keeping His commandments.

Is your faith based upon what you hear from the pulpit? Is your faith based upon what you read in books written by men? Or is it based upon God's standard, the Bible. Are you building your faith upon God's word or man's?

--Ed Wittlif (Denver, CO)