

## **THE SOURCE OF DIVINE AUTHORITY IN RELIGION ONE**

### **MT.21:23-27**

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Discuss the text.
2. Since authority in religion is so controversial, so misunderstood, and so often misapplied and perverted, we are laboring to clarify and explain it to God's glory and man's benefit.
3. All religious problems are either directly or indirectly connected with authority in religion. Because so many either misunderstand or ignore divine authority in religion they:
  - a. Either believe, teach and practice things without divine authority.
  - b. Or they fail or refuse to believe, teach and practice things divinely authorized.
4. Authority is the right to command or direct and enforce obedience or administer punishment.
5. To authorize a thing is to empower to act or to direct by authority.
6. In divine affairs, in things pertaining to our souls in serving God in work and worship, all authority inheres in God, the Father, as the ultimate source.
7. The primary difference between the church of Christ and all other religions of the world is the standard of authority by which we are governed and our attitude toward that standard of authority.
  - a. Many in the religious world claim the Bible, even the N.T., as the word of God and as their standard of authority.
  - b. But many of these same people do not have the proper attitude toward or respect for the authority of it.
8. In a previous lesson we have established the need for divine authority in religion for what we are to believe, teach and practice and that we are to have the proper respect for that authority once it is established.
9. We must not only have authority for what we believe, teach and practice, but we must have authority that comes from the right source.
10. There is both a negative and a positive side to our study. In this lesson we shall study the negative side where we examine some of the false standards that are advanced as authority for various religious activities.

#### **II. DISCUSSION**

##### **A. NEGATIVELY: THE SOURCE OF DIVINE AUTHORITY IN RELIGION IS NOT**

1. The doctrine and practice of the O.T.

- a. It is the inspired word of God and was at one time in force and binding on the Jews, Exo.19,20; Deut.5:1-3; Mt.5:17,18; Rom.2:14.
  - b. It is no longer in force or binding on anyone.
    - (1) It has been taken out of the way, nailed to the cross
    - (2) Because it was temporary and provisional in nature
    - (3) Only a shadow of the good things to come
    - (4) It has been replaced by the N.T., the law or the faith of Jesus Christ, the gospel system, Jno.1:17; Col.2:14-17; Eph.2:11-16; Heb.8:6-13; 10:9,10; 9:15-17; 2Cor.3:6-11.
  - c. Many fail to understand, respect and apply this and often appeal to the O.T. and the Law of Moses for authority for their faith and practice. Examples:
    - (1) Tithing as the law of giving.
    - (2) Infant church membership.
    - (3) Polygamy of the Mormons.
    - (4) Mechanical instrumental music in worship.
    - (5) Burning incense in worship.
    - (6) Sabbath keeping.
    - (7) Priestly garments.
    - (8) Special feast days, etc.
2. The creeds, disciplines, manuals, catechisms, prayer books, conventions, councils and democratic decision making originating with and bound by men upon men.
- a. In one form or another every denomination and every other religion, except the church of Christ, has its human creed – its manual, discipline, prayer book that contains its doctrines and procedures for organizing and governing a church, denomination or religion of that kind.
    - (1) In denominationalism it takes their human creed **PLUS** the Bible to establish their particular church or denomination.
      - (a) It can't be done by the Bible and the Bible alone.
      - (b) Furthermore, anytime they try to use the Bible plus their creed to establish and govern themselves, they have to pervert the Bible to do so.

- (2) In many religions of today they totally reject the Bible as the word of God; they do not claim it as their source of divine authority. They claim some other “divine” source!
  - b. There was a time when the denominational creeds were more highly respected and defended than they are today.
    - (1) At that time the rejection or violation of their creed resulted in expulsion from that religious order.
    - (2) There is very little of that today.
    - (3) Today many of them claim to be “non-denominational” churches, which in reality is “inter-denominational” – hold any belief or doctrine you choose and still be accepted into their fellowship.
      - (a) There have been mergers based on this very concept and practice.
    - (4) Some do not claim to be “non-denominational” churches, but still practice the concept.
  - c. These human creeds are wholly without Bible authority, which claims to be complete and all-sufficient, 2Tim.3:16,17.
    - (1) Therefore, if they contain:
      - (a) More than the Bible, they contain too much.
      - (b) Less than the Bible, they don’t contain enough.
      - (c) Anything other than the Bible, they contain that which they should not contain.
      - (d) The same thing as the Bible, why have them? We already have the Bible!
  - d. We cannot please God by accepting the creeds of men; in fact, we sin if we are governed by them. Cf. Mt.15:9; Col.2:20-23.
- 3. The desires, decisions and traditional practices of the people in the local church or local churches, or traditions of men whom ever they may be.
  - a. Jesus and his apostles, by his authority, condemned following the tradition of men in religion; that is, the laws, doctrines, regulations handed down by men in the absence of divine authority, Mt.15:1-14; Mk.7:1-13; Col.2:8; 1Pet.1:18; Mt.21:25; 7:21-23.

- b. He required all men to follow the divine traditions handed down by his chosen apostles, 2Th.2:15; 3:16; 1Pet.4:11; 1Cor.4:6; 11:1,2; 11:23; 15:3; Cf. Mt.21:25.
  - c. In spite of this, some denominations take pride in the fact that they:
    - (1) Are democratic and that their policies are determined by majority vote.
      - (a) Even some churches of Christ are on the brink of such a practice.
      - (b) Some of them practice it in the men's business meetings.
      - (c) Neither majority vote or minority vote is God's method of doing things in matters of faith.
    - (2) Are governed by committee or by delegates to a convention or conference or by synods.
  - d. The wishes of the people in the local church may not be right. For example:
    - (1) The people of Israel, God's people of the O.T., wanted gods to go before them, Exo.32:1,22.
    - (2) They also wanted a king like the nations round about them instead of the rule of the Judges God had established for them, 1Sam.8:5,19,20.
    - (3) Also, king Saul said the people wanted to do this when he was challenged in his disobedience concerning destroying the Amalekites, including all their animals, 1Sam.15:24.
    - (4) In the late 1800's the people wanted and established the United Christian Missionary Society through which to cooperate in preaching the gospel, which resulted in splitting the church and bringing about the establishment of the Christian Church.
  - e. The desires of the people – the people in general – are opposed to the wishes of the Lord. Prov.14:12; Mt.7:13,14.
4. What the preachers say just because they say it.
- a. Many seem to accept or have a tendency to accept the preacher's word as authority in religion, especially if they like him!

- (1) This, no doubt, stems largely, if not solely, from the sectarian concept that the preacher has been “called by the Lord to preach.”
    - (a) That being the case, then it is God’s will that he is preaching!
    - (b) Therefore, we must believe and obey what such a preacher says.
    - (c) And the preachers love to have it so!
    - (d) Some preachers love to have it so even though they don’t claim to be God-called and God-sent. They don’t want their teaching challenged!
  - (2) It doesn’t take a Solomon to see the chaotic conditions and ridiculous spectacles that have been created in the religious realm by the multitudes of diverse, contradictory doctrines preached by these so-called “God-called preachers.”
- b. Anyone who preaches is divinely authorized to preach the word of God, what Jesus Christ has commanded, the oracles of God, the one gospel of Christ, the doctrine of Christ and no other, Mt.28:20; Mk.16:15; Gal.1:8,9; Col.2:9; 1Tim.1:3; 2Tim.4:1,2; 1Pet.4:11; 2Jno.9; Rev.22:18,19.
- (1) Examples of and warnings against those who do or would do otherwise, Mt.7:15; Ac.20:30,31; 1Cor.1:10-13; 2Cor.2:17; 11:13-15; Gal.1:6-9; 3:1; 5:1-6 (Ac.15:1,5-11); Gal.2:11-14; Tit.1:9-11; 1Jno.4:1.
5. The elders of a local church.
- a. Elders of the local church:
    - (1) Are to be appointed in every local church when men are qualified to be elders, Ac.14:23; Tit.1:5 (1Tim.3:1-7; Tit.1:5-9).
    - (2) Are to exercise oversight and to feed or shepherd or pastor the flock among them or the flock over which the Holy Spirit hath made them overseers, Ac.20:28; 1Pet.5:1-3.
    - (3) Are appointed to rule over the local church were they are elders, 1Th.5:12,13; Heb.13:17.

- (4) Are limited in the oversight, rule, feeding or pasturing to the work and worship of the church were they are elders.
  - (5) Are to exercise their oversight under the authority of the Chief Shepherd, who is Jesus Christ, and who has all authority in heaven and earth, Mt.28:18; Heb.1:1,2; Col.3:17; 1Pet.5:4.
    - (a) Thus they have no legislative authority of their own.
    - (b) There is one lawgiver today, who is Jesus Christ, who is under God, the Father, Heb.1:1,2; Mt.17:5; Mt.28:18; Jas.4:12; 1Cor.15:27.
- b. Some assume the elders of a local church:
- (1) Have legislative power.
  - (2) One gospel preacher said: “The elders are to God’s people today what Moses was to Israel.”
  - (3) Another preacher said he would have no objection to the use of mechanical instrumental music in worship if the elders authorized it.
  - (4) One brother told a woman she could stay home and iron her clothes on Sunday morning and worship Sunday night if the elders said it was all right.
  - (5) One man said a woman could teach a class of men, even preach, if the elders authorized it – because then she would not be usurping authority over a man.
  - (6) One group of elders told a preacher friend of mine, whom they were considering to work with them as the local preacher, they would authorize him to count his contribution as part of his wages and thus would not be required to contribute anything into the treasury of the local church on the Lord’s day.
    - (a) His response: “I might please you by doing that, but tell me how I can please the Lord by doing so!”
- c. Since elders are local in oversight and work, and since they are under the authority of Jesus Christ, as our one lawgiver, and have no legislative power:

- (1) They can not as elders oversee the work of anything or any church other than the local church were they are elders.
  - (2) They can not oversee or become the Sponsoring Eldership for the work of another church or any part of the work of another church.
  - (3) They cannot become the receiving and disbursing eldership for the work, or any part thereof, of any other church.
  - (4) No unauthorized practice and or super-organization or centralized organization or federation of churches for doing the work of local churches can be made scriptural by being put under their oversight. 1Pet.5:1-4; Ac.20:28.
- d. We are warned that elders of a local church may “speak perverse things” and cause division, Ac.20:30.
6. The results accomplished, or by the concept that the end justifies the means, or “It does good, therefore it must be right.”
- a. Some assume that if a thing gets results; that is, if it is accomplishing big results or the desired end, that is sufficient authority for its existence. These assume and operate on the basis of the concept that the end justifies the means.
    - (1) Assuming that the end justifies the means:
      - (a) They look at the good, which they think is being accomplished, and assume that whatever means they use to achieve that goal must be right in the sight of God.
      - (b) They attribute to God the feelings which they have about the matter, rather than looking to His word for how they should feel.
    - (2) We may not do evil that good may come, Rom.3:8. We may not do anything without Bible authority.
    - (3) All lawful (authorized, scriptural) things are good, but not all morally good things are lawful for use in service to God.
  - b. This concept fails to qualify a thing as scriptural in the worship and service of God.
    - (1) David was getting the desired results with the cart in moving the ark of Covenant, but it was not

authorized nor accepted as the way for moving the ark, 2Sam.6:6,7; Exo.25:14; Num.4:15.

- (a) Even in case of an emergency we are not authorized to set aside God's laws.
  - (b) The end does not justify the means.
  - (2) Uzziah, the king of Judah, was trying to engage in what he considered to be a good work when he wanted to burn incense to the Lord, but it wasn't a work which God authorized him to do; therefore, was not a good work, 2Chr.26:16-21; 2Tim.3:16,17.
  - (3) Moses struck the rock in Num.20:11 and brought forth water for the thirsty Israelites and their animals in the desert, but the end did not justify the means because it was contrary to God's will, Num.20:11,12.
  - (4) The fire Nadab and Abihu used to burn incense was getting their desired results – it burned the incense -- but it did not make it right or acceptable to God, Lev.10:1-3.
  - (5) The United Christian Missionary Society of the 1800's preached the gospel to a great portion of the world and many were converted as a result, but that didn't make it a scriptural method of congregational cooperation – the end did not justify the means.
  - (6) Mechanical instrumental music in worship may provide wonderful entertainment but such is not authorized for use by Christians in service to God in the N.T. church.
  - (7) Sweet milk and roast lamb might make a good meal but they would not be acceptable on the Lord's table as the elements of the Lord's supper.
    - (a) From human wisdom one might argue that the white color of the milk represents the pure and sinless Christ and that the roast lamb is a fit symbol of the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross.
    - (b) But not so! Jesus has specified what the elements of the Lord's Supper are to be. We have no authority to offer a substitute.
- c. Some things may be right for individuals or secular institutions, but not for the church.

- (1) The parent's association for a school, an athletic association, or a civic club might raise funds through a garage sale, auction, spaghetti supper, etc. Girl Scouts sell cookies.
  - (2) These institutions operate on the basis of human authority and rightly so.
  - (3) But we must have divine authority, Bible authority, for our work in the local church.
7. The fact that "Great Wise Men Favor This Plan Or Practice."
- a. Religious people often quote some great religious leader in defense of their practices.
    - (1) Baptism is immersion, Rom.6:3-5; Col.2:12; Ac.8:38.
    - (2) Those who practice sprinkling for baptism often quote Albert Barnes, Adam Clark, or Wm. Barclay to prove that sprinkling is acceptable.
    - (3) They say to us, "Are you smarter than this man?" "Are you smarter than these men?"
  - b. Our faith must not stand in the wisdom of men but in the wisdom of God, 1Cor.2:1-5.
    - (1) Even Peter, an apostle of Christ, practiced error on one occasion, stood condemned, and was opposed and corrected to the face by the apostle Paul, Gal.2:11-21.
  - c. We should respect those who preach and teach the truth because of their good work, but we must never have so much confidence in a man that we follow him away from the word of God into unauthorized practices.
    - (1) We must take our stand on the word of God so that we can remain faithful.
    - (2) Even Paul said: 1Cor.11:1.
8. The practice of brethren: "Faithful brethren have always done this."
- a. At times there have been trends toward citing the beliefs and practices of the pioneers of the Restoration Movement as a standard of practice for today. More recently leading brethren may also be quoted. Brother So-And-So says this. The practices of a large congregation may be cited.
    - (1) By looking to the practices of these men and churches one may "prove" most anything. One can

- even “prove” the missionary society “right” by quoting such men as Alexander Campbell.
- (2) Practices of churches today can be proved both “right” and “wrong” by the writings of preachers now alive.
    - (a) Sometimes you can prove a practice **wrong** or **right** from the writings of the same man!
    - (b) Men differ and men change their views.
    - (c) But the Bible doesn’t change!
  - b. The wrong thing practiced in all sincerity over a long period of time becomes tradition.
    - (1) Brethren have defended church support of human benevolent institutions and other practices by saying, “We have always done this.” (Even though it may have been done for a long time; that doesn’t mean they had always done it! Illus.)
    - (2) In the 1960’s a leading brother defended the practice of church support of colleges in which the Bible was taught as an “historic and time honored” practice.
    - (3) Jesus warned about long-held traditions which cause one to invalidate the word of God, Mt.15:1-14.
  - c. This whole matter begs the question.
    - (1) When we say that “faithful brethren” have long believed and practiced something we make the brethren the standard.
    - (2) If they didn’t do what was taught in the Bible they were not faithful in the first place and we are not faithful now if we follow that practice.
9. “Other religious groups are doing it..”
- a. Ancient Israel wanted a king like all the nations about them, 1Sam.8:5.
  - b. Sometimes brethren seem to want to compete with the denominational churches about us – to be like them.
    - (1) They want to practice the social gospel; get the church involved in the work of human betterment, entertainment, and businesses.
    - (2) The use of denominational Bible class literature can have serious effects in a church.

- (a) The teacher may know the truth and see the error, but others who use the literature may not.
    - (b) Same is true about using the literature of liberal writers and liberal churches among us.
  - c. Our aim ought always to be to please God, 1Th.2:4; Gal.1:10.
- 10. "I had rather do wrong than do nothing."
  - a. Those of us who are content to do God's work in God's revealed way are often criticized because we are not engaged in all of the social and recreational projects commonly practiced in religion today.
  - b. Some have been known to say:
    - (1) "I had rather do wrong than do nothing at all."
    - (2) "I had rather go to hell for doing it wrong than for doing nothing at all!" (As if there were no other alternative.)
    - (3) "Which is better? What we are doing or what you are not doing?"
  - c. Such people are guilty of fallacious reasoning. They assume that the only choices are **wrong** or **nothing**. There is another choice.
    - (1) We can do nothing. This is wrong.
    - (2) We can do wrong (unscriptural, without scriptural authority).
    - (3) We can do right. Let us choose to do **right**.

### III. CONCLUSION

1. Without a doubt the source of our authority in religion is all important – it must be from the right source.
2. Standards devised by human wisdom may sound good and may tickle the ears of those who prefer smooth speech above truth. They are inadequate and leave us without the ability to please God.
3. Like the prophet Isaiah, let us call men "to the law and to the testimony," Isa.8:20.
4. Negatively we have established that the source of divine authority is not:
  - a. The doctrine and practices of the O.T.
  - b. The creeds of men.
  - c. The desires, decisions and traditional practices of the people or the traditions of men.
  - d. What the preachers say just because they say it.

- e. The elders of the local church.
  - f. The results accomplished, or by the concept that the end justifies the means.
  - g. The fact that great wise men favor this plan or practice.
  - h. The practice of brethren: "Faithful brethren have always done this."
  - i. "Other religious groups are doing it."
  - j. "I had rather do wrong and do nothing."
5. Obviously then, we must always be concerned, as Jesus was, "Is it from heaven, or of men?"
6. Let us be content to do God's will because God wants it that way. Do what he wants, the way he wants it, why he wants it, and when he wants it.