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“BY WHAT AUTHORITY ARE YOU DOING THESE THINGS?”

INTRODUCTION

A. **Matthew 21:23** (402)

Jesus was once asked, *“By what authority are you doing these things?”* His inquisitors had improper motives in asking, but they understood something lost on most people today, the fact that authority is required for all that we do in religion.

B. **The Need For Authority Illustrated**

1. **Proverbs 20:10** (265); **Deuteronomy 25:13-15** (84)

It is dishonest to use varying standards of measurement in the marketplace.

2. It is equally dishonest to use varying standards of measure in religion. It would be altogether unprofitable for two parties to initiate a study of the scriptures without first agreeing on one standard of authority.

I. **STANDARD OF AUTHORITY**

A. **Accurate Standard**

1. God exists.

a. **Hebrews 3:4** (485)

Nothing can exist without having been built. God is the answer to the existence of the universe.

b. **Romans 1:20** (456)

Proof of God’s power and existence is obvious in creation.

c. **Psalms 19:1** (225)

His work identifies Him.

d. **Acts 14:17** (449)

He is born witness by having provided for His creatures.

2. **Matthew 28:18** (406)

- a. Jesus Christ claimed **all** religious authority.
 - i. **Matthew 6:24** (395)
He does not share His power.
 - ii. **Acts 4:12** (443)
No one else has the power to save, neither the Pope, nor Buddha, nor Mohammed, nor Joseph Smith.
- b. His authority was bestowed upon Him by God the Father.
 - i. **John 12:49** (437)
Jesus acknowledged that His authority came from God.
 - ii. **Acts 2:36** (442)
Jesus was made Lord by God.
 - iii. **Matthew 17:1-5** (400)
God told men to listen to Him.
 - iv. **Hebrews 1:1-2** (484)
It is through Christ that God communicates with man.
- 3. **Luke 24:46-49** (430); **Acts 1:8** (442); **2:1-4** (442)
 - a. The authority of Christ was vested in His chosen apostles.
 - i. **2nd Corinthians 5:20** (469)
They are His ambassadors.
 - ii. **John 13:20** (438)
Acceptance of Christ is entirely dependent on acceptance of those whom He sent.
 - b. **1st Corinthians 14:37** (467); **1st Thessalonians 2:13** (479)
The authority of Christ is revealed to us in the writing of the apostles.
 - i. **2nd Peter 1:20-21** (492)
Those who wrote the scriptures were not recording their opinions, but God's will.
 - ii. **2nd Timothy 3:16-17** (483)

God is the source of every scripture.

4. **Jude 3** (494)
 - a. Because “*the faith... was **once for all** delivered to the saints*” we know that it is not in God’s plan to supplement, supersede, or modify it by additional or progressive revelations to future generations.
 - i. **2nd Peter 1:2-3** (492)

“*All things that pertain to life and godliness*” have been supplied by our Lord.
 - ii. **John 16:13** (439)

Jesus stated that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles “*into **all truth,***” thus there exists no spiritual truth beyond what the apostles had.
 - a. **Acts 20:20, 27** (452)

The knowledge of the apostles was withheld from no one.
 - β. **Ephesians 3:4** (474)

It is available to all who will read their writings.
 - iii. **Galatians 1:6-9** (472)

All revelations past the Bible are untrustworthy.
 - b. Because “*the faith... was **once for all** delivered to the saints*” we know that God preserves His word perfectly for us.
 - i. **1st Peter 1:25** (490)

The word of God will always endure.
 - ii. **Luke 21:33** (428)

The words of Jesus will never pass away.

B. False Standards

1. Human Wisdom

a. Science or Philosophy

It is not unusual that a person will rely on what a particular preacher, philosopher, or scientist has said, rather than on the word of God.

i. **1st Timothy 6:20-21** (482)

What men often regard as “knowledge” is what leads them away from God, not toward Him.

ii. **1st Corinthians 1:18-25** (462); **2:1-6** (463); **3:18-19** (463)

The world poorly esteems the wisdom of God, but what might be called foolish with God is truly greater than the wisdom of men.

b. Conscience

The adage “Let your conscience be your guide” is a dangerous philosophy in religion.

i. **Titus 1:15** (483)

The conscience is subject to being defiled.

ii. **Acts 23:1** (453); **24:16** (454); **26:9** (455)

Paul never violated his conscience, even when he persecuted Christ.

iii. **1st Corinthians 4:4** (463)

Paul knew very well that he could not be his own judge.

iv. **2nd Corinthians 10:12** (470)

Man must never use himself as a measure of righteousness.

v. **Proverbs 14:12** (262); **Jeremiah 10:23** (311)

Just doing what feels right is highly destructive.

vi. **Proverbs 3:5** (258); **Isaiah 55:8-9** (300)

People should not rely on their own understanding, but God’s, because God’s ways are superior.

c. Majority

Oftentimes, people are drawn to a certain religious persuasion because it is popular and shy away from another because of how few practice it.

- i. **1st Peter 3:18-20** (491); **2nd Peter 2:5** (492)

The way of salvation has always been the way of the few, as in the days of Noah, when the whole earth perished in the flood, except for eight souls.

- ii. **Luke 13:23-27** (424); **Matthew 7:13-14** (395)

Jesus was asked directly, “Lord, are there few who are saved?” In His straightforward reply He answered affirmatively.

d. Parents

Many people practice the religion they do, not because of personal conviction, but because their parents did so.

- i. **Ephesians 6:1** (475)

Children are required to obey their parents, but only “*in the Lord.*”

- ii. **Matthew 10:37** (397)

To love parents more than the Lord is sinful.

- iii. **Galatians 1:13-14** (472)

Paul was so enthusiastic for the religious traditions of his parents, that he persecuted the church.

- iv. **Ezekiel 18:1-20** (343)

Children do not inherit either their parents’ wickedness or their righteousness.

e. Religious Tradition

Many practice their religion based on centuries’ worth of tradition, regardless of the scriptures.

- i. **Matthew 15:1-9** (399)
Jesus observed that many transgress God's commands because of religious tradition, saying that it is useless to worship Him and teach human tradition at the same time.
- ii. **Colossians 2:8** (477)
Paul warned against being cheated by tradition.
- iii. **1st Peter 1:17-19** (490)
Peter noted that Christ's blood, not tradition, redeems the soul.

2. **Misapplication Of Scripture**

The potential to abuse scripture (**2nd Peter 3:16**; **Matthew 4:1-11**) demands that we learn to use it accurately (**2nd Timothy 2:15**).

a. **Old Testament**

- i. **Hebrews 8:7-13** (486); **10:8-9** (487)
The Old Covenant is so described for a reason; it is obsolete and has been replaced.
- ii. **Galatians 3:19, 16, 23-25** (473)
The Law of Moses was a temporary measure by God, designed to last until Christ.
- iii. **Colossians 2:14** (477)
It ceased to be valid when Christ died on the cross.
- iv. **Romans 15:4** (461); **1st Corinthians 10:11** (465)
Nevertheless, the Old Law remains useful for learning.

b. **Modern Spiritual Gifts**

- i. **1st Corinthians 12:28-13:13** (466)
 - α. Paul promised to "*show... a more excellent way*" than the spiritual gifts he listed (**12:31**). Love is superior over such things (**13:1-7**).

- β. Love will never fail, but spiritual gifts would fail, cease, and vanish away (13:8).
 - γ. Spiritual gifts brought only a part and would be done away with when that which was complete had arrived (13:9-12).
 - ⋈ **2nd Timothy 3:16-17** (483)
The scriptures provide the completion lacking in spiritual gifts.
 - ⋇ **2nd Corinthians 3:7-18** (469)
“In Christ,” as compared to *“the Old Testament”* (14), the veil is removed in order to see face to face in the mirror that which remained dim while spiritual gifts were in use (1st Corinthians 13:12).
- ii. **Mark 16:20** (415); **Acts 2:22** (442); **14:3** (449); **Hebrews 2:1-4** (484)
The explicitly stated purpose of miracles, signs, and wonders was to confirm that the word spoken came from God.
 - α. **John 20:30-31** (441)
Miracles were recorded in scripture for the same reason.
 - β. **Luke 16:30-31** (426)
Those who reject God’s written word would not be saved even if they witnessed a miracle.
- iii. **Acts 8:14-17** (445)
 - α. Philip was a man full of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 6:3, 5**), who exercised his spiritual gifts to convince and convert the Samaritans (**Acts 8:5-13**).

- β. Nevertheless, for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit, the apostles had to lay their hands on them.
- γ. Therefore, the gifts could not be relayed from person to person, except by the apostles.
- iv. **2nd Corinthians 11:14-15** (471); **2nd Thessalonians 2:9-10** (480)
Anyone now claiming spiritual gifts or private revelations of any kind is deceived by Satan.
- v. **Ephesians 5:18-20** (475); **Colossians 3:16-17** (478)
In order to “*be filled with the Spirit*” now, one must “*let the word of Christ dwell in*” him.

II. PRECISION ACCORDING TO AUTHORITY

A. Possibility Of Error

1. Many apply to religion an idea they would never consider applying to any other subject, that any method will do.

2. **Matthew 15:7-9** (399)

Jesus plainly says that it is possible to worship Him in vain, that is: uselessly.

- a. **Genesis 4:3-5** (2)

The first recorded example of worship demonstrates that not all worship is acceptable, for God had no respect for Cain’s offering.

- b. **Leviticus 10:1-3** (44)

Nadab and Abihu, priests of God, were destroyed by Him when they presented unholy worship.

B. Strictness Demanded

1. Knowing that the scriptures provided by God are sufficient (2nd Timothy 3:16-17), we trust there is no need to add or subtract from them.
 - a. **Deuteronomy 4:2** (75)
 - b. **Revelation 22:18-19** (502)
2. Many are guilty of taking away from God's word, not by cutting it up and burning it like king Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 36:21-23), but by failing to fulfill all of the commands.
 - a. **Matthew 23:23** (403)
 - i. It is presumed that because there are "*weightier matters of the law*" that the lesser things may go undone.
 - ii. However, Jesus said, "*these you ought to have done without leaving the others undone.*"
 - b. **Matthew 22:36-40** (403)
 - i. Again, it is presumed that because there is a "*first and great commandment*" (38) and a "*second like it*" (39) that other commands may go unheeded.
 - ii. Christ explained, though, that these two commandments are the greatest because they represent the categories into which all other commandments may be classified (40).
 - iii. Thus, by obeying all of God's commands, the first and second are fulfilled.
 - c. **Psalms 119:160** (252)

All of God's will is important, such that nothing should be disregarded.
 - d. **James 2:10** (489)

God holds man accountable to His every precept.
 - e. God does not tolerate disobedience.
 - i. **Genesis 2:16-17** (1); **3:1-24** (1)

Adam and Eve ate fruit that God had forbidden, so He expelled them from Paradise.

ii. **Numbers 20:7-12** (65)

Moses struck a rock he had been told to speak to, so He was prevented from entering the promised land.

3. Many are guilty of adding to God's word by practicing more than He has authorized in religion.

a. **Proverbs 30:6** (269)

No truth is found in adding to God's word. Thus, it is directly forbidden.

b. **Galatians 3:15** (472)

This principle is true among men, so why not with God?

c. **2nd John 9** (494)

To go beyond the teaching of Christ is to be without God.

d. **1st Corinthians 4:6** (463)

We must learn *"not to think beyond what is written."*

e. **1st Peter 4:11** (491)

We should have nothing to say if God has not already said it.

f. The silence of God must be respected.

i. Some would rearrange the letters in the word to say that in God's "silence," He gives "license" to act according to one's own discretion, but that is not so.

ii. **2nd Samuel 7:1-7** (129)

God clearly indicated that David had no authority to act by asking him, *"Have I ever spoken a word to anyone... saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'"*

iii. **Hebrews 1:1-13** (484)

Angels are prohibited by God's silence (5, 13) from assuming prerogatives given only to God's Son.

- iv. **Hebrews 8:4** (486); **7:14** (486)
 - α. God's strictness applies even to His Son, who, *"if He were on earth, He would not be a priest."*
 - β. The reason He could not have filled that role during His earthly lifetime is that *"our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood."*
 - γ. When nothing is said in scripture, there is no authority to act.

III. UNDERSTANDING THE AUTHORITY

A. **Ephesians 5:17** (475)

We are commanded to understand the Lord's will.

1. **Ephesians 3:1-5** (474)

This we can do, if we are willing to study.

a. **2nd Timothy 2:15** (482); **Ecclesiastes 12:12** (274)

It requires a great deal of effort.

b. **Acts 17:11** (450)

It evidences an honorable mind.

2. **1st Corinthians 1:10** (462)

Furthermore, we are required to understand the Lord's will alike.

3. There must be a common rule by which we abide when interpreting the will of God. Rules for interpretation are called "hermeneutics," and correct hermeneutical procedure is limited to the following:

a. **Direct statement, either command or prohibition.**

i. A command from Christ certainly establishes authority.

α. **John 14:15, 21, 23-24; 15:14** (438)

β. **1st John 2:3-5** (493); **3:22** (494); **5:3** (494)

ii. Commands from His apostles are equally authoritative.

- α. **2nd Thessalonians 2:15** (480)
 - β. **2nd Peter 3:1-2** (492)
 - b. **Approved scriptural precedent, or example.**
 - i. Christ and His apostles commanded that we observe His example and pattern our conduct accordingly.
 - α. **John 13:15** (438)
 - β. **1st John 2:6** (493)
 - γ. **1st Peter 2:21** (491)
 - ii. The apostles' examples are equally binding.
 - α. **1st Corinthians 11:1-2** (465); **4:16** (463)
 - β. **Philippians 4:9** (477); **3:17** (476)
 - γ. **2nd Timothy 1:13** (482)
 - c. **Implication or inference.**
 - i. **Matthew 22:23-33** (402)
 Jesus told the Sadducees they were mistaken, being ignorant of the scriptures and God's power, because they failed to understand that the resurrection of the dead was implied by God when He used the present tense to speak of His relationship to dead saints.
 - ii. **Acts 10:9-29** (446)
 Peter inferred that God no longer considered the Gentiles unclean based on a vision he saw in which God declared clean animals that had been unclean under the Law of Moses.
 - iii. **1st Corinthians 15:24-28** (467)
 It is by inference that we conclude God is excepted from the rule of Christ.
 - iv. **Hebrews 11:17-19** (487); **Genesis 21:1-12**; (8)
 Without God specifically saying so, Abraham concluded

that God would raise Isaac from the dead, knowing the promise made concerning him.

d. Acts 15:1, 6-19, 22-24 (449)

This method of interpretation was used by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.

- i.** Peter appealed to **apostolic precedent** (7-8), reminding them that he had already been sent to preach to gentiles, and that while yet uncircumcised, they had received the Holy Spirit as had the apostles initially.
- ii.** Barnabas and Paul relied on **necessary inference** (12), reporting of the miracles that God had worked among the gentiles, which He would not have done if He disapproved of them.
- iii.** James quotes a **direct statement** from God (16-17; cf. **Amos 9:11-12**), speaking of the gentiles called by His name.
- iv.** All the brethren agreed that **silence** on their part was prohibitive on the part of others (24), stating that they had given no commandment to those who had gone forth from them with the erroneous doctrine of circumcision.

B. 2nd Peter 3:14-16 (493)

Although we are required to understand the scriptures, it is not always easy to do so.

1. Some guidance is appropriate.

a. Acts 8:30-31 (446)

When asked whether he understood what he read from the scriptures, the treasurer of Ethiopia admitted that, without help, he could not.

b. Nehemiah 8:8 (200)

When the Law was read to Israel, some were appointed to make sense of it to the people, helping them to understand the reading.

2. If you are willing to abide by the strict authority of the Lord, we are willing to aid you in understanding, as well.

CONCLUSION

A. Summary

1. Do you accept the sole authority of Christ Jesus?
2. Do you realize that God requires strict obedience to His will?
3. Are you willing to be informed so as to understand the Lord's will?

B. John 12:48 (437)

1. The words of Jesus are the standard by which all will be judged.
2. Therefore, submission to His will is essential.