

1. Authority in Religion for the Modern World

What is your authority in religion? *An authority* is **one** whose will must be obeyed; *authority* is **the right of one** whose will must be obeyed. To test yourself to see whom you see as your authority in religion. Ask these questions. Do you see your preacher, pastor, or priest as being the one to tell you what is right and truthful in religious faith and practice? Do you believe that the church through its hierarchy (councils, synods, or conventions) can decide religious issues for you? Do you believe that your church can override the teaching of the New Testament on sexual preference and immorality? Do you believe that there are latter day revelations, since the Bible, that provide you with the authority for faith and practice? Do you believe what one person thinks is just as good as what another thinks in religion? Do you follow a creed (manual or book) written by your church leaders? Do you believe that we will all be saved, no matter what religion we follow?

This lesson will contend that Jesus Christ is the only true authority in religion, and the New Testament expresses his will for us in the modern world.

The God of Heaven, the Supreme Authority in All Matters Physical and Religious

God planned and purposed all things that have happened (Eph 1:3-14). In Eph 1:11, Paul taught that he works out everything, "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works **out everything** in conformity with the purpose of his will." Paul also stated this before the Greek philosophers in Acts 17:25-26; 28:

He himself gives all men life and breath and **everything else**. 26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. . . .28For in him we live and move and have our being.

Jesus clearly understood this full and complete authority of his Father and prayed in Matt 26:42, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." In fact he taught his disciples likewise to pray in Matt 6:10, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

By God's very nature he holds all authority over the whole creation. He created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1). Through His plan and gift, redemption came. Paul taught in 1 Cor 2:7-10:

7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 However, as it is written:

"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him"

10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

Of the certainty of what God had prepared and revealed for those who love Him, Jesus said in Matt 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Christ, the One to Whom God Gave All Authority

On the Mount of Transfiguration in Matt 17:5, God said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" The word of Christ superseded the Law of Moses and the word of the prophets. They were true to their times and purposes, but now we are to hear the Christ. He was not only the one to whom we were to listen, but he fulfilled the law and the prophets by his own testimony in Matt 5:17, "17 Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." Heb 1:1-2 asserts this very same fact:

1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

We must not only hear his word, but we must do it. James wrote in James 1:22-25:

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.

The Apostles and Prophets, the Ones Whom Christ Commanded to Teach

In Matt 28:18-20, Christ claimed all authority to himself and gave the apostles the right to teach all things:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

The apostles' word is so certain that to pervert or change it is to risk eternal condemnation. Gal 1:6-9 teaches:

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Only this gospel preached by the apostles saves. Paul wrote in 1 Cor 15:1-3:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance.

God's power is in this gospel revealed by Christ and the apostles. Rom 1:16 teaches, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

Christ gave only the apostles the right to bind and loose. In Matt 16:19, Christ said: "19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." The church is to receive

the teaching of the apostles as the very word of God. Paul wrote in 1 Thess 2:13, “13 . . . you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.” Christ promised the apostles that the Spirit would guide them in all truth in John 16:13-14:

13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.

The Bible, the Standard of Authority for All Ages

The result of the promise to the apostles was the revelation of God in written form. Paul explained thoroughly in Eph 3:3-5:

3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

The result of this revelation was the New Testament scriptures. God breathed [inspired] those scriptures, and they are all that man needs. 2 Tim 3:16-17 teaches, “16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” That no one else can produce scripture is certain, according to Peter in 2 Peter 1:20-21:

20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Jude declared the completeness of God's revelation through these apostles and prophets for all time in Jude 3, “I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.” Not only was it once for all delivered, but God warned against adding to it or taking away from it in Rev 22:18-19:

If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

We have already noted that Paul added the greatest condemnation for those who turn to a different gospel or pervert the gospel of Christ in Gal 1:6-9, “Let them be eternally condemned.

Conclusion

The only true standard of authority is the will of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. When one accepts the teaching of the scriptures and obeys them, one accepts Christ and his teaching. When one accepts Christ and his teaching, one is to be saved. The scriptures are the key to salvation for the modern world. The religious world of the 21st century rejects the authority of the scriptures. They reject God's plan for salvation for obeying the gospel, for worshiping Him, for organizing the church, and for doing His work in this present world. They reject His teaching on His kingdom and the church of the Lord. Yet, the scriptures are clear: Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth. Hear him. The only way to do that is by searching and keeping the scriptures – the religious authority for the modern world.

Study Questions from the Scripture

1. Eph 1:11: What does God work out in conformity with the purpose of his will?
2. Acts 17:25-26; 28: What does God give us? In whom do we live and move?
3. Matt 26:42: Whose will did Jesus seek to please?
4. Matt 6:10: How are we to pray?
5. Gen 1:1: What did God create?
6. 1 Cor 2:7-10: Whose wisdom did Paul reveal?
7. Matt 7:21: Who will enter into the kingdom of heaven?
8. Matt 17:5: Whom are we to hear?
9. Matt 5:17: What did Jesus claim in regards to the Law and the Prophets?
10. Heb 1:1-2: Through whom does God now speak?
11. James 1:22- What authority did Christ claim? What authority did he give the apostles? What are we taught to obey?
13. Gal 1:6-9: What will happen to those who pervert the gospel?
14. 1 Cor 15:1-3: By what are we saved? What must we do with the word preached? When is belief vain?
15. Rom 1:16: What is the power of God for salvation?
16. Who received the keys of the kingdom?
17. 1 Thess 2:13: How are we to receive the word of God?
18. John 16:13-14: What did the Spirit of truth do for the apostles?
19. Eph 3:3-5: How can we understand Paul's insight into the mystery of Christ?
20. 2 Tim 3:16-17: From where does Scripture come? How are we equipped?
21. 2 Peter 1:20-21: How does prophecy come?
22. Jude 3: How many times was the faith entrusted to the saints?
23. Rev 22:18-19: What will happen to those who take away or add to the book of prophecy?