

## Whose Authority?

By Ginny Larsen

*"And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes."*

(Matthew 7:28-29 ESV)

In John Gill's Exposition of the Bible Commentary for verse 29 above, he says, "This chiefly regards the method he used in preaching, which was by delivering truths of himself in his own name, and by his own authority; often using those words, 'I say unto you': he spoke as a lawgiver, as one that had authority from heaven, and not from men."

Jesus astonished the people of His day, proving Himself to be an authority above that of the Scribes and Pharisees. He showed them there was no authority above God Himself, including their religious leaders. Yet today, many look to the authority of Church leaders, teachers, and those who proclaim themselves to be prophets or apostles. If they are popular, write books, or are on TV, they are treated as though they have authority, and we are expected to listen to every word they teach without taking it to the authority of the Word of God.

Whenever we place the authority of a man's word over the Word of God and His authority in our lives, we set ourselves up for deception. In fact, we've chosen another to stand in the place of Christ's authority in our lives. We may do this as a way of giving up our own responsibility to follow God's authority, thinking we can place that responsibility on another. If they're wrong, we rest assured that we're just being obedient to *authority* so we will not be held responsible, but God always holds us accountable to **His** authority.

God convicted me of this early in my Christian life as I sought counselors to help me with spiritual or personal problems. I was convicted that I was allowing them to take the place of the Holy Spirit in my life as my counselor and teacher in place of going to the Word of God to seek my answer. I thought I was obeying Him by going to Christian counselors, but I was leaning on them to give me counsel that I could just blindly follow and act on and that would solve my problems. I had a lot to learn yet in my walk with the Lord! All counsel we receive is to be taken to the authority of the Word under the authority of the Holy Spirit. We trust in Him to be our teacher, examining everything to see if it is truly His counsel. Anyone who insists that you follow their counsel, word, or teaching is not trusting in the Holy Spirit to be the teacher of His children. I actually had a Christian counselor say to me once, "I'll be your Holy Spirit for now. You do as I say."

The only job of those who counsel others is to guide them to the Word of God and pray for the Lord to teach their hearts and minds. Because of spiritual laziness, we allow ourselves to be spoon-fed by another, rather than learn to "eat" the Word and "chew on it" for ourselves and spend time asking the Lord to teach us. It's so much easier to have someone else do that for us and tell us what to do. It's so much easier to have flesh and blood give us a quick answer, instead of spending time before God, seeking His face and allowing Him to examine our hearts to know Him for ourselves. Only He can truly probe our hearts and minds and know all the deep things in our inner beings. Only He knows His will for us.

Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines authority as:

1. Legal power, or a right to command or to act; as the authority of a prince over subjects, and of parents over children. **Power; rule; sway.**

2. The power derived from opinion, respect or esteem; influence of character or office; credit; as the authority of age or example, which is submitted to or respected, in some measure, as a law, or rule of action. That which is claimed in justification or support of opinions and measures.

Who have we chosen as our "authority?" Who or what do you allow to influence or sway you? We make choices every day regarding what we consider an authority. God has put many authorities in place in this world. But none is to usurp the place of Christ. God has given many teachers to lead people to a greater understanding of His way, but He said, "*Call no man teacher*" (Matthew 23:10). Teachers are only true if they are under God's authority, leading others to Him. As they do so, they are to be held accountable to Him and to His Word.

Matthew 23:8-12 KJV: "*But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.*"

There is a sense of authority in these words – Rabbi, Master, Father – yet there is only one true authority behind each, and that is Christ Himself as the only true Rabbi, Master, Father. Those called to do His work are merely His servants and have no authority of their own. They are to point people to Christ Himself and His authority. If they fail to do that, they are to be held accountable by their brothers and sisters in Christ who are also under the authority of Christ. This is true for **any and all** authority, placed by God, above man or woman. Christ is the true authority and must be obeyed above man.

Acts 5:27-29: "*And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, **We ought to obey God rather than men.***"

Many today have their favorite teachers, authors, or preachers whom they devotedly follow. They learn from their teachings, believe, and act on their every word, arguing with others who have other teachers who teach a little differently. Under men's teachings, we adopt a theology or way of seeing the Word of God or a doctrinal system and think we're learning the Word of God when actually we're learning a man's view of it. Today is a day when we need discernment from God's Word to understand the authority of the Word in our lives more than ever. We need to especially beware of those who claim to have secret knowledge and understanding or "deeper" teachings.

1 Corinthians 1:11-13: "*For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?*"

1 Corinthians 3:5-8: "*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.*"

I guess we could say, as well, "Who is Wesley? Who is Darby? Who is Luther? Who is

Calvin?" Or we could say, "Who is \_\_\_?" You could fill in the blank with any modern-day preacher, so-called-prophet, or evangelist.

We put ourselves under denominational authority. But we as believers in Christ who are born again, born of His Spirit, are all members of one body. We are under one authority, one headship, members one of another, on equal ground under Christ. Our authority is the Word of God. Our membership is of Christ (Romans 12:5; 12-21; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Our responsibility is to the whole body of Christ. Our service is to God Himself. Only Christ is our head. One day we will stand before Christ as our Judge. We won't stand before a denominational board or any man to be examined on whether or not we kept all the regulations of a particular denomination or religious leader. We'll stand before Christ, and our hearts will be laid bare before Him. All will be exposed, and we'll be examined for our obedience of love and faith in Him alone and His authority in our lives.

All lack of obedience to God Himself comes out of lack of faith in Him as our Head and our source. It comes from placing our faith in another. Idolatry is a very subtle sin. It is something we can be guilty of without realizing it. Idolatry is very deceptive, and we can believe we are not guilty of it; however, if we serve anyone or anything above God or trust in and rely on anyone or anything above God, then we become idolaters. If we have an authority that is above God in our lives, that authority has become an idol to us. If we've been given positions of authority, we'll be judged by our faith and obedience to God's authority and whether or not we were true to that.

We can also unwittingly as believers put ourselves under the authority (persuasion, power, rule, sway) of demons. We are living in the last days, in perilous times, a time when deception is especially prevalent. There are many new age and mystical practices that have been brought into the church and "Christianized." Again, what is their root? What is their "authority?" Did they originate from God and His Word, or did they originate from new age (occultic) thought and practices?

You cannot take something of the devil and change the terms to Christian terms and turn it into something acceptable to God. Only God's way of faith in His work and power is acceptable. Only God's authority and His righteousness is acceptable. What is the authority of what you are hearing? What is the authority of the new practice, mysticism, or experiences that are coming into your church? Trace their roots. Don't just trust in them or their teacher because he/she has added Christian terms to them. Go to the Word, look at the way Christians lived and walked in the Spirit, and what was taught to the church as the way of Christ. Many who promote these things use Scripture. Satan is probably more of an expert at handling Scripture than any man on earth. He knows how to twist it so that even God's children are deceived. It sounds good because it is Scripture. It sounds like it has authority that we can rely on because it is Scripture, but it is Scripture used out of context and misapplied.

Go to the very Scriptures used; read the context and intent around them. What is the true authority of that Word saying to those for whom it was written? Cross check it with other Scriptures. Look at the whole Word of God. Examine what God says about the subject. Don't think you can't be fooled. The enemy really hopes you think you can't be fooled! Those who rely on their own intellect or intuition are the easiest to deceive.

1 Timothy 4:1-2: *"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron."*

The more we harden our responses against our true Authority – Jesus Christ and His written

Word – and trust in the word of another, the more we sear our conscience and open ourselves to the authority of another. The less we are in His Word as our daily bread, listening to His voice, the more we are open to other authorities that “sound” right to us and appeal to our fleshly desires and thoughts. They may even seem spiritual and good for us. If there is anything in our flesh that is not under the authority of Christ, not under the power of His cross, we are open to being seduced in our flesh and believing a lie that will appeal to our flesh. Let us daily come before Christ, trusting in no other authority than Him! He is able to keep, lead, and deliver us, as our authority above all authority and power and dominion (Ephesians 1:19-23)! We can fully trust in His authority to the end.