

When God Speaks...

(by Bob Pulliam)

Is this idea of authority really that important? We've already seen that Jesus upheld the need for authority in religion. Let's look at a few examples that illustrate this need for divine authority:

Strange Fire...

In Leviticus 10:1f, we read of two priest, and the incense they offered up before the Lord. Here is that account:

"Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord."

When a lot of people read this, they are shocked that God would do such a thing. They have not been taught about the kind of respect for God and His commands that should ever be present. These priests were in a position of great responsibility, and had God's explicit command regarding the source of their fire (Lev 16:12). But they disregarded His word! We do not know any details about the fire they used, but we know that it was something for which God had not given permission (v1 - "which He had not commanded them").

The importance of attitude toward God in this matter is seen in verse three:

"And Moses said to Aaron, 'This is what the Lord spoke, saying: "By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.'" So Aaron held his peace."

Do we glorify God when we do it our way rather than His? No, we glorify ourselves. When He tells us what He wants, we must listen and obey. It is important to see that God did not tell them, "Do not use any other fire." He had told them what He wanted, and expected them to follow His word. The same has always been true of God's revelation to mankind. He reveals what He wants, and we obey. In Nadab and Abihu we learn that God expects us the count His will as holy, and obey in all things.

The Touch of Death...

When David went to move the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, a terrible tragedy occurred (I Chr 13:6-10). As they moved it, a man named Uzzah was struck dead by God. Why? At first glance, it would seem that it was only because he touched it. We know from the law that no one was to touch the ark (Num 4:15), except those entrusted with it's keeping. But this was not all the story. When David later gathered the priests to make another attempt at moving the ark, he said:

"He said to them, 'You are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites; sanctify yourselves, you and your brethren, that you may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel to the place I have prepared for it. For because you did not do it the first time, the Lord our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order.'" (I Chr 15:12f)

When David said, "because we did not consult Him about the proper order", he did not mean by prayer. The law had given abundant information on the proper order in carrying the ark (Ex 25:13ff; 37:4f). What he meant was that they did not consult His word; the law given by Moses. This tells us that the problem was acting without proper authority. "God had spoken and we did not obey", is the gist of it. So what do we learn from Uzzah's death? We learn that God means what He says, and we do not have the prerogative to make changes.

Conclusion...

We could talk about the offerings of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4. Cain did not offer his sacrifice by faith, and faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom 10:17), so Cain did not obey God's word. The very first recorded sacrifices teach us about the need for authority in our actions. We could also note how Moses was commanded to make everything according to the pattern he had been given on Mount Sinai (Ex 25:9). The author of Hebrews later quoted this (Heb 8:9). A pattern is a guide for producing something in accordance with the specifications established by that pattern. Why establish specifications if mankind has the right to go and change them all?

Authority is not only seen as necessary, but vital. God has always dealt with man through the authority he passes down by revelation. He revelation to us is the New Testament, and we must be diligent to follow it's pattern.