

# Is Authority Really Necessary?...

(by Bob Pulliam)

If we were to ask Jesus today whether or not authority was all that essential, what do suppose He would say? It might be easy to guess what we think He might say; but will we accept His answer if we can find it in the Bible? Well, He does answer a question very similar to this in scripture.

## ***Two Sources of Authority...***

In Matthew 21:23-27 we read of a confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees on this very subject. Here is the text, for your convenience:

"Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?' But Jesus answered and said to them, 'I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: 'The baptism of John; where was it from? From heaven or from men?' And they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'If we say, "From heaven," He will say to us, "Why then did you not believe him?" But if we say, "From men," we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet.' So they answered Jesus and said, 'We do not know.' And He said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.'"

Now if there were no need for authority in religion, Jesus would have evaded their trickery in a different way. But notice that He not only upheld the need for authority, but also pointed out that there are only two sources of authority: Heaven and men. If there were more choices, don't you think the Scribes and Pharisees would have made their choice from them? The Scribes and Pharisees also asked something else that Jesus did not challenge. They asked, "who gave You this authority?" They saw that authority cannot come from just any source. The one giving authority has to have the power to do so, or he has given nothing. If I came up to you on the street and offered to renew your driver's license for half the cost charged by the DMV, would you go for it? And if so, would the police officer who stopped you after it expired understand when you explained about this man and his cut-rate license renewals? Would the judge decide you had every right to get your license wherever you pleased?

## ***Authority and Unity...***

Division in the religious world bothers a lot of us. Some do not know why it exists, and for that reason conclude it to be a necessary evil. But the very subject we are studying gives us the answer to why disharmony exists in religion.

To illustrate what I mean, take a guess at the length of this line:

I'm going to guess that it is five inches long. I have a friend who says it's five and one-half inches long. So we have three guesses, yours and ours. Can they all be correct? No, the line has a certain length, not two or three lengths. I haven't seen how the line displayed on your monitor, so mine is a blind guess; but the line on your monitor has a definite length.

So all of our guesses cannot be correct when they differ. Could all of our guesses be wrong? You can be sure of that. There is a pretty good margin of error when you're taking guesses. And all three of our guesses could be wrong.

How are we going to know for certain what the length of the line is? We use a standard of measure to determine the truth on this matter. A ruler that is marked in accordance with the authority passed down by the governmental agency that regulates weights and measures. If we all agree on the ruler to use, can we all agree on the actual length of the line? Sure we can.

Now what if you put the ruler up there and find that your guess was correct and the other two wrong? And what if I said, "Well, I know the ruler says that, but I can't help but feel that..."? This is what happens in religion. People like to say they follow the Bible until someone pulls out the "ruler" and measures something. When it doesn't measure up, they then proceed to rationalize (explain away) the truth. This happens all the time! You see, division in religion is not the result of the Bible being too difficult to understand. Division is the result of men following the authority of men, rather than heaven.

Before Jesus was betrayed, He prayed to the Father:

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me." (Jn 17:20-23)

When Jesus prayed about "these alone", He was referring to the twelve apostles (minus Judas). He was not praying just for them, but also for all who believed through their word. That's you and me. Jesus' prayer was that all may be one. And He characterized that unity by saying "as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us". That is not a unity in diversity. It is not an attitude of everyone can do their own thing and we'll just agree to get along about it. It is a unity. It is an harmony. And it is the will of God; but it is only possible when we accept, follow and defend the principles of authority laid down in God's word!

### ***Conclusion...***

Just because someone says they have power to give authority doesn't make it so. And we must be very careful where we are looking to for our authority in religion. More will be seen on the necessity of authority in our lesson on When God Speaks.