

# The Correct Source of Authority in Religion

(by Bob Pulliam)

If you have not already studied the topics above this one on the left, you may wish to do so before proceeding. Some of the information in this lesson is based on a knowledge of things that have already been studied in those lessons.

Where does proper authority originate? We have already seen the need for authority, and that it must have the proper source. Now we need to determine where it's going to come from. We've also seen that there are only two sources of authority: Heaven and men. Obviously, heaven is the proper source; but man has muddied the waters on this subject. The Pope claims to speak for heaven; Mormons claim to have apostles that speak for heaven; the Jehovah's Witnesses have the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society speaking for heaven; Denominations have inherited the authority of the church concept of Roman Catholicism; and Pentecostals have God laying things on everyone's heart. So the question arises, how do we get the message from heaven?

## ***Going Back in Time for Answers...***

We need to go back in time. I think all of the religions listed above can agree that Jesus Christ was from God, and had heavenly authority. Where does it go from there?

Jesus gave authority to the apostles. However, it was not the kind of authority that some churches like to represent it as. Some like to think that the apostles had authority to make and change laws as situations dictated. We shall find in this study that such could not be further from the truth. The apostles only acted on the revelation given them by God, leaving Christ in control at all times.

This is precisely how Jesus said it would be. He told the apostles, "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you." (Jn 16:13ff) Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would give them what Jesus wanted them to speak and know. When you read the book of Acts, you find that every step of the apostles' movements were all carefully maneuvered by the Holy Spirit.

## ***Was Peter the First Pope?...***

But didn't Jesus give Peter authority to bind and loose on earth? The passage referred to is, "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Mt 16:19) The keys of the kingdom are represented as being the authority to make and change religious law. We are told that this must be true since Jesus went on to talk about binding and loosing as He did. Let's start with the binding and loosing. I am not a Greek scholar, but those who are tell us that this statement in Greek is very awkward in English. The verb tense is future perfect indicative. A very strict translation of this tense would give us the following: "...whatever you bind on earth, shall be, having been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, will be, having been loosed in heaven." Note that we must add punctuation and a great deal of modified verb tense to make the passage come through correctly. This is why it stands as it does in all modern translations. The point of Jesus

statement?... What Peter preaches shall be bound on earth because Jesus has made it so in heaven. The keys are not authority to make and change laws. Keys are a symbol of access. Peter would preach what mankind would need to know for entering the kingdom of heaven. In the book of Acts we find this fulfilled in chapter 2 when Peter preaches the sermon on Pentecost. What was the result? About three-thousand souls entered the kingdom of Christ!

Jesus made this same statement of binding and loosing to the other apostles as well (Mt 18:18). At the same time, all doubt on this matter is removed by knowing that the apostles did not understand Jesus to be making Peter Pope. How do we know this? Look at the question and answer at the beginning of Matthew eighteen. The disciples asked Jesus who was greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Maybe they missed Jesus' pronouncement of Matthew sixteen. If that is the case, then Jesus will refresh their memory and restate Peter's preeminent position. But He does not. Matthew 20:25ff is another good text to consult in this regard.

So we see that none of the apostles had authority to make or change laws. Their authority was delegated by Jesus, who sent the Holy Spirit that they might know His will.

### ***A Good Example of Proper Authority...***

If only we had some guidelines for how authority is determined in a circumstance of disputation. Well, we do. In Acts 15 we find two sides coming together to determine the truth. Do they vote on it? No they do not. Instead, they determine what God had revealed up to that point in time. We begin with what God had revealed through the apostle Peter (Acts 15:7-11). Then Paul and Barnabas related what God had done through them among the gentiles (Acts 15:12). In both of these cases, subjective circumstances of human experience were not used. They did not say, "We went to the gentiles and thousands of them believed, and therefore...". God had worked miracles to confirm His word on this matter. And finally James rose to declare what God had revealed in the Old Testament (Acts 15:13-21). In all, what God had to say on the matter determined the outcome of that meeting.

### ***Does the Church Have Authority?...***

Does the church have authority to make and change the law of God? If the apostles didn't, I don't see how we are going to find the church having that authority. When churches deviated from God's prescribed original pattern, apostles rebuked them, and admonished them to return to the proper path. Paul's epistles to the Corinthians and the Galatians are excellent examples of this. The church did not have authority to deviate, and the apostles rebuked them when they did.

### ***So Who Is Speaking for Heaven?...***

So where do we go to find out what God wants us to believe and do? The answer is simple: The Bible. The New Testament reveals the will of Jesus Christ, and what He expects of us. Within it is a pattern to follow for all that God desires of us. We learn what the church was doing to worship, and how it was organized. We learn what one must believe and do to be saved. We learn how we must live righteous lives, turning from evil to do good works. All is there for us. It is the word of heaven given that we might act upon the authority of God, rather than men.