

The Nature of Divine Authority

Matthew 21:23

I. INTRODUCTION:

A. *The Text in Context—*

1. Jesus cleanses the Temple (Matthew 21:12-17).
 - a. The money changers, sellers of cattle and sellers of birds are driven out.
 - b. Jesus also forbade any to carry vessels through the temple (Mark 11:16).
 - c. Upon doing many came to Him to be healed in the Temple (Matthew 21:14).
 - d. As a result the people praised Jesus as the Messiah (21:15).
2. The next day this question offered (Matthew 21:23-27).
 - a. Jesus having instituted these sweeping reforms is challenged by the Temple hierarchy for His “credentials” (21:23).
 - b. This was not an improper question. As a matter of fact, it is the question that ought to always be asked: “By what authority doest Thou these things, and who gave Thee this authority?”
3. Jesus by His answer identifies the only acceptable authority in religion (21:25a).
 - a. There are only two sources of authority: “from heaven or from men.”
 - b. Jesus, by implication, demonstrates that only one of these sources is truly authoritative, that which is “from heaven.”
 - (1) This point was not lost on the Temple hierarchy (21:25b-26).
 - (2) They understood that divine authority was to be obeyed.

B. *The Design of This Study—*

1. By what authority doest thou these things?
 - a. It shall be our purpose in this study to ascertain the authority which Christ possessed.
 - b. It is apparent from the narrative that both the “chief priests and elders,” as well as Jesus, were in possession of some authority. Jesus’ authority was of a superior nature. Why?
 - c. When we ascertain that truth, the plea for a “thus saith the Lord” in matters of religious practice will be evident. We hope to convince you that there is an authority above that of human tradition.
2. Who gave thee this authority?
 - a. Once we discover the nature or divine authority it will be necessary to explore the extent or degree to which Jesus is a possessor of it. Did (and does) Jesus act with the full strength or capacity of the authority of God?
 - b. Has any other man ever been possessor of the same authority and do any now speak and act with the authority with which Jesus did?
 - c. When this area of the question of divine authority is completely explored we hope to have resolved the issues that arise from the creeds produced by church councils, pontifical decrees and the revelations of modern day Messiahs.

II. DISCUSSION:

A. There Are Two Types of Authority—

1. The authority of position or rank:
 - a. Man over animal (Genesis 1:26).
 - b. The strong over the weak (Matthew 12:29).
 - c. State over the citizen (Matthew 22:21; Romans 13:1-6; 2:13-17).
 - d. Owner over property (Acts 5:4; 1 Timothy 6:10).
 - e. Master over slave (Colossians 3:22; 1 Timothy 6:1, 2; Titus 2:9, 10).
 - f. Parent over the child (Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20).
 - g. Husband over wife (1 Peter 3:1; Ephesians 5:22, 23; Titus 2:5).
2. The authority of truth:
 - a. "Truth" is that which conforms to fact or reality, as such, it can neither be denied nor controverted.
 1. For example, various concepts of the solar system have been held—earth-centered vs. sun-centered.
 2. Once it was definitely proven that the earth revolved around the sun as did other planets, all other theories were discarded.
 3. Many fields of study are affected by the discovery of truth.
 - b. "The lip of truth shall be established forever; but a lying tongue is but for a moment" (Proverbs 12:19).
 1. That is, Truth will out!
 2. If it is true, it will never fail.
 3. Falsehood cannot stand before truth.
3. Any conflict between truth and position results in revolution and division.
 - a. Governments have been overthrown because of iniquity and lies.
 - b. Men of power and wealth have lost all by dishonesty and unethical behavior.
 - c. When men are lovers of truth the lying lip cannot prevail.

B. Divine Authority Is Ultimate Authority—

1. Ultimate
 - a. Webster defines *ultimate* as "that beyond which it is impossible to go, or in which the process or series comes to an end."
 - b. In explaining *ultimacy*, the ISBE states, "The ultimate must bear witness of its own ultimacy, the absolute of its own absoluteness, and authority of its own sovereignty. If there were a court of appeal or a standard of reference to which anything called ultimate, absolute or supreme could apply for its credentials, it would therefore become relative and subordinate to that other criterion" (p. 334).
 - c. Thus, *ultimate* is that beyond which it is impossible to go in an appeal for judgment, or in testimony for witness; it is subordinate and comparable to none.
2. *Ultimate* Authority
 - a. Ultimate authority results from the harmonious blending of the highest position and knowledge of all the truth.
 - b. No man is an ultimate authority on anything, because:
 1. Physical strength is no guarantee.

2. Political power is insufficient.
3. Nobility of birth goes unrecognized.
4. No man has all the truth. Wisdom and knowledge are infinite. What man knows he derives empirically (cf. John 18:38).
- c. God alone answers to the demands of ultimate authority (Acts 17:22-31)
 1. He is the Creator of all things, as such He occupies the highest position.
 - a. Self-existent (Genesis 1:1; Exodus 3:13, 14).
 - b. Under subjection to no one (Hebrews 6:16-17).
 - c. Judge of all (Luke 12:5; Genesis 18:25).
 - d. Self-witness (Romans 1:18-21).
 2. He is the God of all truth (Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 31:5; 33:4; 86:15; 89:14; Isaiah 25:1; Micah 7:20; Hebrews 6:13-18; Titus 1:2; 1 John 2:21).

C. Jesus Possesses Divine Authority—

1. He is the Son of God (Romans 1:1 4; Acts 2:36-37).
 - a. The Father has put all things in subjection unto Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 1:19-23; 1 Corinthians 15:27-28).
 - b. Jesus speaks only the truth (John 3:31-36; 8:14-19, 42-47, 54, 55; 14:6).
 1. The church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18).
 2. The angels (1 Peter 3:22; Colossians 2:10, 15).
 3. Satan (Matthew 12:28, 29; Luke 10:18, 19; Hebrews 2:14).
 4. Unregenerate mankind (John 5:27-29; Acts 17:31).
 - c. Therefore, Jesus occupies the highest position (Hebrews 1:5-8; 1 Timothy 2:5; Philippians 3:5-11).
2. Unto Him we are to hearken (Matthew 17:5; Hebrews 1:1-4; Acts 3:22).
 - a. He shares this authority with no man (Hebrews 3:1-6; cf. Matthew 17:1-5).
 - b. Jesus retained authority over His church for himself (Matthew 16:18, 19).
 - c. Jesus exercises every degree of authority over the church (James 4:12).
 1. Legislative (Matthew 7:29)
 2. Judicial (John 12:48)
 3. Executive (Matthew 16:18).
3. Jesus retains it until the end of the age (Hebrews 1:1-2, 1 Corinthians 15:22-28).
 - a. No latter-day Messiahs such as Mohammed or Moon.
 - b. No vicars of Christ such as the Pope.
 - c. No prophets or revelators such as Smith or Russell.

III. CONCLUSION:

A. There Are Two Kinds of Authority—

1. The authority of rank.
2. The authority of truth.
3. Ultimate authority combines rank and truth.

B. Divine Authority Is Ultimate Authority—

1. Jesus has divine authority.
2. Jesus retains this divine authority over all things to the end of the age.
3. It is unto the authority of Jesus that all men must yield.