

## God's Standard of Authority

While Jesus was teaching in the temple, the elders of the people came to him and asked, "By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?" In answering this question, Jesus asked them a most penetrating question, "The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven, or of men?" (Matthew 21:23-25). For various reasons, those who tried to entrap Jesus could not answer this question. However, in Jesus' answer, we learn a most valuable lesson. Concerning religion, there are only two sources of authority — God or man. Of these two sources, only one is the rightful source — God. The right standard of authority is important because when our authority is men, our worship is vain. Jesus said, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9). Thus, whatsoever we do in word or deed, we must do all in the name of (or by the authority of) the Lord Jesus (Colossians 3:17).

### The Bible Is from God

Since God is the only rightful source of religious authority, then how does God communicate with man? The answer is the Bible and only the Bible. Paul wrote, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). "Inspiration of God" literally means "God breathed." Just as we breathe out words, God breathed out the words of the Bible. How did God accomplish this? Peter wrote that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). God is the originator and source, and holy men of God wrote His words as the Holy Spirit guided them. Thus, God is the author, and holy men of God such as Moses, the prophets, and the apostles were the writers.

Therefore, when we study the Bible, we are studying the creator's will for His creation. We are studying God's word. The Bible is not simply a book of words in which it does not really matter whether we read them or not. The Bible does not contain "words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth" (1 Corinthians 2:13). Paul

further explained, "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4). The Bible is as David said, "a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). The Bible is God's authority, and to be approved of God, we must give diligence to the study of the Bible, handling it accurately as the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

### The Bible Is the Complete Will of God

The Bible does not simply contain the will of God. It is the complete will of God. It is God's standard of authority. The Bible, and it alone, is God's communication with man. Peter wrote, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3). Since God has provided "all things that pertain unto life and godliness," then there is nothing beyond what is found within Scripture that we need for spiritual life and godliness. The Bible is, therefore, God's complete revelation.

Furthermore, since Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth would teach them all things, bring all things to their remembrance, and guide them into all truth (John 14:26; 16:13), then the apostles had all truth and revealed unto us all truth. The rejection of the apostles' message is a rejection of Jesus and God, the Father. Jesus said, "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me" (Luke 10:16). Also, consider Paul's instruction to the church at Corinth, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 14:37). Since, the apostles received and recorded all truth, the Bible is, therefore, God's complete revelation to man.

Additionally, since the Scriptures will thoroughly furnish the man of God unto all good works and bring him unto perfection (2 Timothy 3:17), then

what more is needed? What more could something beyond scripture furnish us? Why would we need any more than that which can bring us to perfection? The Bible is, therefore, God's complete revelation to man.

Even further consider this: In Revelation 22:18-19, God commands that we not add to nor take away from His word (see also Proverbs 30:5-6). If we do either, God will punish us by adding to us plagues or by taking away our inheritance. Why are we not to add to nor take away from the Bible? Because the Bible is the complete word of God and to change it by adding to or taking from it either adds more than what is necessary or takes away from what is necessary. To change perfection is to defile it and make it imperfect. No wonder Paul pronounced this curse upon those who would pervert the gospel, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8-9). The Bible is the complete revelation of God. Let us, therefore, not change it by adding to it nor taking from it, and let us have the courage to accept it and act upon it as it has been written.

### The Bible Is Authoritative

Since the Bible is from God and is complete, we must also understand that it is authoritative. Authoritative means that the Bible should be the standard for which all is done in matters pertaining to religion. To the church at Colossae, Paul wrote, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17). What does it mean to do something "in the name of the Lord Jesus"? To do something "in the name of " another is to do it by his or her authority. In Acts 4:7, the priests and elders of the Jews asked the apostles, "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" These Jews were asking about the source of the apostles' strength and their authority

to do miracles. Peter answer, "by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . . this man stand here before you whole" (4:10). The apostles' authority was Jesus. So, it should be with us. The Bible should be our source of authority.

In order to avoid chaos, a standard of authority is essential. This is true in our homes, our schools, our government, and in the church. An organization with too many chiefs is a "jumbled up mess." There needs to be a head. In the church, Christ is the head (Ephesians 1:22-23) and His word, the Bible, is the standard of authority. A failure to recognize this authority will result in division. This was the very problem in Israel during the time of the judges. "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25). Rather than recognizing the right standard of authority — God, their standard of authority was themselves. Sadly, such is too often true today.

True unity can only be accomplished when all recognize the rightful standard of authority. However, it is not enough to recognize it, one must be willing to follow it. In other words, it is not enough to claim the Bible is our authority, one must be willing to follow it and submit his or her own will to it. This was the problem that Jesus addressed in Luke 6:46. Jesus asked this soul-searching question, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" They recognized His authority but were not following it. Until every person recognizes the Bible as authoritative and submits to its precepts, then, and only then, will true unity be accomplished among all men.

### **"The Books Were Opened"**

In Revelation 20:12, concerning the judgment when all men will appear before God, John records, "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." Of the books that will be opened on judgment day, we know from this passage that at least three books will be opened. What books are these?

From the text, we know that one book that will be opened on that great and notable day is the "book of life." This book is the record of all the names of the faithful of all ages. Those found within this book will be clothed in white raiment (Revelation 3:5), worshipers of God (Revelation 13:8), and will not be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15).

Another book that will be opened on judgment day is the record of man's deeds. Since the text says that judgment will be "according to their works," then God must keep an account of each person's deeds (see also Matthew 16:27; 1 Peter 1:17; Revelation 22:12). Describing the same judgment scene, Paul wrote, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). Not only will man's works in general be judged, but also "the secrets of men" (Romans 2:16) and "every idle word" (Matthew 12:36).

The final book that will be opened is God's word — the Bible. Jesus said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). Just as a judge will judge according to a nation's laws, on the day of judgment, all men will stand before God and be judged according to God's eternal word — the Bible. Since we will be judged according to God's word, then God's word must be the final authority. And since God's word is the final authority, we have a responsibility to study, to know, and to live according to its precepts and promises.

Three books will be opened on that day, but only one of those books is needed today. If we follow the one book — the Bible, then our names will be found in the Lamb's book of life, and our good deeds will be recorded in the record of man's deeds. ◼

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