



## **The Christian's Attitude Toward Authority in Religion**

**By Keith Greer**

Life on earth would be chaotic if there were no standards or authorities to govern our affairs. Is religion somehow exempt from the need for authority? While Jesus was here, the religious leaders of the day questioned Him concerning this very issue. "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?" {Matthew 21:23} How did He reply? "...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." {Matthew 21:24-27} Jesus did not say authority was unimportant -- but that it must come from the right source! Authority is defined as: "The right to command and enforce obedience; the right to act by virtue of the office." Why should Christians be concerned about religious authority?

This subject deals with man's soul -- that makes it vitally important. Christians need constantly to examine their beliefs and practices to be sure they are in accordance with God's will. Authority determines what is right and what is wrong. Nothing man does is right simply because he does it with sincerity and honesty -- he must have authority for what he does. God gave man the responsibility for knowing what proper authority is. Not knowing that a particular action in which one engages violates God's authority is inexcusable! We must know the standard and be sure we adhere to His will.

Men have some improper theories concerning standards and authority. Christians must reject all such theories. Let us examine some improper standards and the reasons why they are improper.

Worldly wisdom. "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." {1 Corinthians 1:21} Instead of obeying, mankind desires to know the whys behind what God requires of him. We need to remember Naaman who said, "Behold I thought..." (2 Kings 5:11,12)

Our upbringing. We should love and respect our parents for the jobs they did in raising us. But, if what they taught us conflicts with Christ's teachings, we must hear Him. "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." {Matthew 10:37,38} Do we need our parents' approval to obey God? We must obey God rather than men! (Acts 5:29; Romans 3:4)

Voices of the reformers. Many of the Reformation Period reformers saw the error and inconsistency in the Roman Catholic Church. Still, they wanted to reform that which was, by its very concept, in error. Men such as Martin Luther taught that "faith only" saves men. John Calvin taught the points of Calvinism that originated from his mind -- not God's. These men began with one apostasy, the Roman Catholic Church, and began others! Sadly, many accept these religious reformers as voices of authority. Did these men speak for God -- were they inspired?

Special revelation from God. Joseph Smith claimed that God spoke to him and gave him the inspired plates that spawned the Book of Mormon. Ellen G. White of the Seventh Day Adventist church claimed personal revelations. Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the Christian Science religion, also had special instructions. What do the scriptures say about such claims? "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have

received, let him be accursed." {Galatians 1:8,9} There are no latter-day revelations! (1 John 9-11; Jude 3; Revelation 22:18,19)

The Law of Moses -- the Old Covenant was, without a doubt, truth. But did God give this law for all people, for all time? "But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." {Galatians 3:22-25} The law directed us to Jesus Christ -- it was given to the nation of Israel and her people. It was a temporal law for special purposes, and those purposes were fulfilled. "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled." {Matthew 5:17,18} What happened when that law had been fulfilled? "Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ." (Colossians 2:14-17) The Old Covenant served its purpose well, and now it has been set aside for replacement by the Law of Christ. Can we go back to the old law to get what we want and ignore what we don't want?

John the Baptist. John was a faithful, righteous man who pointed man to Christ. "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand! For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight. {Matthew 3:1-3} Did he understand that he was not the answer to man's needs? "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease." {John 3:29,30} John the Baptist knew he was not the Messiah -- the hope of Israel and of the world. "He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." {John

1:20} John is not the authority in religious matters; he pointed man to the One who is -- Jesus Christ!

What does constitute authority in religion? Do we have a standard, and can we know and understand it?

Christ and His words. "And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." {Matthew 7:28,29} God made His choice known to the apostles and to all mankind. "While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him." {Matthew 17:5} God sent only ONE spokesperson -- His Son. "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son..." {Hebrews 11:1,2} God gave His Son all authority in heaven, and on earth (Matthew 28:18). The man who desires to know what God thinks about any subject must consult the Son.

Authority delegated to the apostles. Jesus promised them the ability to "bind and loose" (Matthew 18:18). The Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 14:26; 16:13). These men spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4; 2 Peter 1:20,21). They were ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Words of Christ and the apostles. The doctrine of Christ, and of the apostles, is our authority (Acts 2:42; 2 John 9). All things done in religion originate with man, or with God (heaven). If taught by Christ or His apostles, it is by His authority. Otherwise it is by man's authority. Authority and its source are deadly serious matters. From whence comes the authority for the things you practice in service to Him?