

Back to the Basics

Who Is In Authority?

Memory Verse:
Hebrews 1:1-2

The Need for Authority

When you look within the religious world today and behold the vast array of religions, churches, and belief systems, you may wonder, “Who is in authority?” While most religious groups profess a belief in God and many of them profess a belief in Jesus Christ, they still differ on what to do and how to do. Such diverse behaviors and practices might leave you wondering who is in control within the religious world? Is it God? Is it Jesus? Is it man?

The fact that there are a large number of differing religious groups in the world suggests that man, in general, does not have a proper understanding of who possesses final authority. As far as some churches or religious groups go, they range from one extreme to the other. Some people will bind where the Bible does not bind and others will loose where the Bible does not loose. Individually speaking, there are plenty of people who live their lives as if no one possess final authority except for themselves. They will ultimately decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong. They base their decisions upon their wants and desires.

With this lesson, we will show who is in authority. Our first step will be to show man’s need for someone greater than himself to possess the final authority.

Man Needs Authority Greater than Himself

In a discussion with Jesus, the chief priests acknowledged the need for authority. Read Matthew 21:23-27. In this text, the chief priests asked Jesus, “*By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?*” (v. 23, NKJV) The chief priests recognized the need for authority. They also recognized the need for someone with authority to grant that authority. Jesus replied by posing a question: “*The baptism of John — where was it from? From heaven or from men?*” (v. 25, NKJV) In Jesus’s question, we see that authority can only come from one of two sources: from Heaven or from man. The authority from Heaven would be authority from a divine source, God.

There are some people who would deny that final authority is needed, especially in matters of religion. Quite often these people will look to themselves as authority. Looking to one’s self for authority is problematic at best. Jeremiah wrote, “*O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.*” (Jeremiah 10:23, NKJV) King Solomon

wrote, *“There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”* (Proverbs 14:12, NKJV) Even looking to other men for authority will make a person’s worship in vain. Jesus said, *“And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”* (Matthew 15:9, NKJV)

The recognition of God’s authority is necessary for those people who desire to have God’s approval and who desire to be in fellowship with God. The apostle John warned, *“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”* (2 John 1:9-11, NKJV) If a person denies proper authority, then he will neither abide in the doctrine of Christ nor in the fellowship of God. Man must recognize his genuine need for authority that comes from someone greater than himself.

Who Possesses Final Authority?

In a simple passage, Jesus established God’s final authority. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus said, *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”* (Matthew 7:21-23, NKJV) Look carefully at the text. According to verse 21, those who do the will of God will enter into the kingdom of Heaven. However, according to verse 23, those who do something other than the will of God are practicing lawlessness and will be rejected by God.

As you continue in your study, you will find that Jesus’s word is also final authority. Jesus’ words will judge the world. Consider the following scriptural evidences proving this fact.

- Q Jesus is God’s spokesman. In Matthew 17:1-8, the Heavenly Father spoke to the apostles. He said, *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”* (v. 5b) In addition, the writer of Hebrews wrote through inspiration, *“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, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.”* (Hebrews 1:1-2, NKJV) The writer clearly states that God speaks to man through His son, Jesus.
- Q Jesus taught the word that came from God. When you read John 17:6-8, you will see Jesus using the following two phrases: *“all things which You have given Me”* and *“I have given to them the words which You have given Me.”* (vs. 7, 8)
- Q Jesus has been given all authority in Heaven and on earth. After His death, burial, and resurrection, just prior to His ascension to the right hand side of His Father, Jesus declared His authority. Jesus said, *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”* (Matthew 28:18, NKJV) Who gave Jesus *“all authority”*? According to 1 Corinthians 15:27, God gave Jesus this authority. Paul wrote, *“For ‘He has put all things*

under His feet.’ But when He says ‘all things are put under Him,’ it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted.” (1 Corinthians 15:27, NKJV)

- Q Jesus declares the wise man will hear His words and obey. In the parable of the wise and foolish builders, Jesus equates the wise man who built his house on the rock to the person who hears Jesus’ teachings and obeys. Just as the wise man’s house stood firm, so shall the person who hears and obeys the teachings of Jesus stand firm. (Matthew 7:24-25)
- Q Another scriptural evidence regarding the authority of Jesus is seen in the fact that Jesus is the head of the body, which is the church. (Ephesians 1:22-23) Just as a body is controlled by the head, so is the church (the body of Jesus Christ) controlled by Jesus.
- Q Let us not forget the simple, yet important fact that God will judge the world by the words of Jesus. In John 5:26-27, Jesus said, *“For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.”* (NKJV) Then again in John 12:47-50, *“And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him— the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.”* (NKJV)

This final authority granted to Jesus Christ was delegated to the apostles so that the world could know the will of God. Jesus delegated to the apostles the authority to bind and loose. However, the apostles could only bind and loose on earth what had already been bound and loosed within the will of God. (Matthew 16:19) When Jesus left this world, He sent the Holy Spirit to aid the apostles in their recollection and knowledge of what was to be bound and loosed. Consider for example John 14:25-26: *“These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”* (NKJV, cf. John 16:12-15)

Being inspired by the Holy Spirit, the apostles and inspired men recorded the word of God in written form so that we might have a complete record of God’s will for man. In Romans 1:16-17, the apostle Paul declared that the Gospel is God’s power unto salvation. The Gospel completely reveals the righteousness of God. (In Galatians 1:11-12, Paul states that the Gospel he preached came by the revelation of Jesus Christ.) In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul declares that all scriptures have come by the inspiration of God. Paul goes on to state that the scriptures are sufficient to thoroughly equip a man for every good work.

In showing the completeness of God’s word delivered to man, Peter states very plainly, *“as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.”* (2 Peter 1:3, NKJV) Please take notice that God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. What more could man possibly need? In Jude 1:3, Jude refers to the *“faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”* This statement shows the completeness of God’s word, the Bible.

The Final Authority Excludes All Other Sources of Authority.

No matter what any man claims, there is no other authority than that of Jesus Christ, found within the Word of God. If a man claims that some great religious leader authorizes an action, then he is appealing to a false authority. If a person follows in the religious foot steps of his parents, using them as his source of authority, then he is appealing to a false authority. If a man claims an angel told him something, then he is appealing to a false authority. Let us consider several sources of authority that is excluded by the final authority of God, found within the Bible.

The doctrine or practices of the Old Testament have been excluded as a source of authority. Many people within the religious world fail to realize this simple fact. Quite often, they will appeal to Old Testament authority to authorize religious actions. However, this cannot be lawfully done. The stumbling block faced by many people is that they fail to recognize that the Old Testament system was removed by the death of Jesus. Read Hebrews 10:1-10 for a better understanding of this fact. Pay close attention to verses 1, 4, 9, and 10. In his letter to the brethren in Colosse, Paul referred to the “handwriting of requirements” that had been taken away. Paul wrote, “*(H)aving 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.*” (Colossians 2:14-16, NKJV)

The words of religious leaders have been excluded as a source of authority. There are those within the religious world who view the “preacher’s” word as final authority in religious matters. Preachers are charged with the responsibility to simply teach what has already been taught in the word of God. (2 Timothy 4:1-2) If any preacher teaches something different, he stands to be cursed, facing the wrath of God. (Galatians 1:6-9)

The creeds of men have been excluded as a source of authority. Practically every denomination has its manual, discipline, prayer book or book of minutes which contains its doctrines and procedures. The fact of the matter is that we cannot please God by accepting the creeds of men. As we have already shown earlier in this study, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men will make a person’s worship in vain. (Matthew 15:9) One such example can be seen in Colossians 2:20-23.

The desires of a congregation have been excluded as a source of authority. Some religious organizations take pride in the fact that they are democratic and that their policies are determined by a majority vote. What they fail to realize is that the wishes of the congregation (or the majority) may not always be right. In 1 Samuel 8, the

Excluded Sources of Authority

Doctrines and practices of the Old Testament.

Words of religious leaders.

Creeds of men.

Desires of the congregation.

The elders of the local church.

The results accomplished.

nation of Israel wanted a king to lead them. However, this desire was not in Israel's best interest. Another example is found 1 Samuel 15. The Lord ordered King Saul, "*Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.*" (v. 3, NKJV) Sadly, King Saul did not obey the Lord. In verses 8 and 9, we learn that King Saul and the people "*spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.*" (v. 9, NKJV) When Saul was challenged by Samuel regarding his disobedience, King Saul tried to shift the blame to the will of the multitude. (1 Samuel 15:15,24)

The elders of a local church have been excluded as a source of authority. The Bible is very clear regarding the roles and responsibilities of the elders (bishops) of a local church. According to 1 Peter 5:1-4, elders are to tend the flock or the local congregation. In verses 2-3, Peter wrote, "*Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.*" (NKJV) In their responsibility of tending the flock, the elders are to exercise oversight. Paul encouraged the elders of the Ephesus church of Christ, "*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*" (Acts 20:28, NKJV) While elders are to lead the congregation (and in that since they have been delegated authority by the Word of God), they have no legislative power in matters of faith. Elders can only bind and loose what has already been bound and loosed in the Word of God.

The results accomplished have been excluded as a source of authority. You may have heard some people reason that the "ends justify the means." This is not a valid standard of authority for religious activities and teachings. Some people assume if a practice is a good work, or if it accomplishes big results, then it must be authorized by the results. They assume the end justifies the means. Consider the case of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron. Leviticus 10:1,2 reads, "*Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.*" (NKJV) In the case of Nadab and Abihu, the ends did not justify the means. Nadab and Abihu should have used the fire authorized by the Law of Moses, given to them by God.

What should you do to anyone who claims to teach the Word of God? Test them by searching the scriptures daily to make certain that they are not taking authority upon themselves. This was exactly what the Bereans did in Acts 17:10-12. If you find that what the person is teaching came first from the Bible, then follow it because the Bible teaches it. As a follower of God, this is your responsibility. This same responsibility is seen in the writings of John. John writes, "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*" (1 John 4:1, NKJV) Be sure to try or test every "spirit" or teaching before you accept it as God's word.

Ten Questions

1. What two questions did the chief priests ask Jesus? _____

2. What will make a person's worship in vain? _____

3. According to the apostle John, who "does not have God"? _____

4. According to Jesus, who will enter the kingdom of Heaven? _____

5. Through whom has God spoken "in these last days"? _____
6. By whose words will God judge the world? _____
7. To whom did Jesus Christ delegate authority? _____
8. What is God's power unto salvation? _____
9. According to Colossians 2, what was "wiped out" or taken away? _____

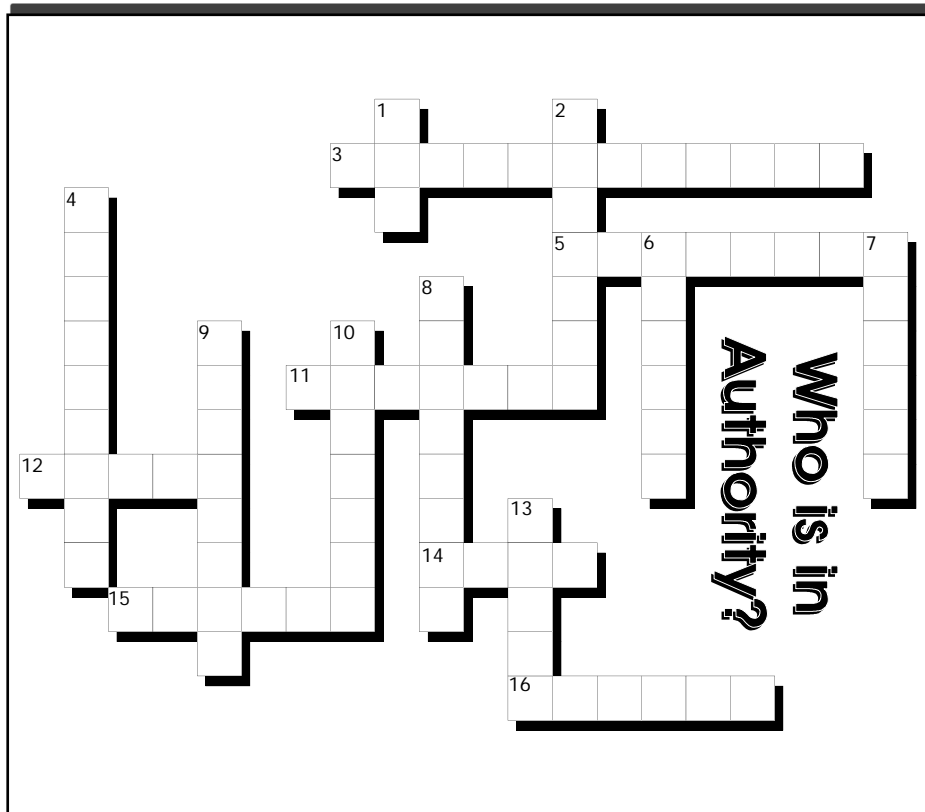
10. What will happen to the preacher who teaches anything different than what Jesus and His apostles taught? _____

True or False

1. T or F : King David wrote, "There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death."
2. T or F : The words of Jesus are final authority.
3. T or F : Jesus has been given all authority, only on earth.
4. T or F : The foolish man built his house on the rock.
5. T or F : Jesus is the head of the body, the church.
6. T or F : The divine power of God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness.
7. T or F : Paul wrote, ". . . faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."
8. T or F : The Ten Commandments serve as authority under the New Covenant.
9. T or F : It is unacceptable to follow the creeds of men.
10. T or F : Elders (bishops) do not possess final authority in matters of religion.

A Little Fun

(Use the lesson text to answer these questions.)



Across

3. The desires of a _____ have been excluded as a source of authority.
5. The person who abides in the _____ of Christ has both the Father and the Son.
11. This book contains the following statement: "God, who at various times and in various way spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, . . ."
12. This person said, "I have given to them the words which you have given Me."
14. King Saul spared this king of Amalek.
15. The _____ of men have been excluded as a source of authority.
16. Those who do the will of God will enter the kingdom of _____.

Down

1. Who said, "This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased . . ."
2. Words of religious _____ have been excluded as a source of authority.
4. We have been given all things that pertain to life and _____.
6. Jesus is the head of the _____.
7. These men are to shepherd the local church.
8. This man wrote, "O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; . . ."
9. Jesus delegated authority to these people.
10. The _____ accomplished have been excluded as a source of authority.
13. This was once for all delivered to the saints.

Passages in this Lesson

Leviticus 10:1,2	pg 31	Acts 20:28	pg 31
1 Samuel 15	pg 31	Romans 1:16-17	pg 29
1 Kings 8	pg 31	1 Corinthians 15:27	pg 28,29
Proverbs 14:12	pg 28	Galatians 1:6-9	pg 30
Jeremiah 10:23	pg 27	Galatians 1:11-12	pg 29
Matthew 7:21-23	pg 28	Ephesians 1:22-23	pg 29
Matthew 7:24-25	pg 29	Colossians 2:14-16	pg 30
Matthew 15:9	pg 28,30	Colossians 2:20-23	pg 30
Matthew 16:19	pg 29	2 Timothy 3:16-17	pg 29
Matthew 17:1-8	pg 28	2 Timothy 4:1-2	pg 30
Matthew 21:23-27	pg 27	Hebrews 1:1-2	pg 28
Matthew 28:18	pg 28	Hebrews 10:1-10	pg 30
John 5:26-27	pg 29	1 Peter 5:1-4	pg 31
John 12:47-50	pg 29	2 Peter 1:3	pg 29
John 14:25-26	pg 29	1 John 4:1	pg 31
John 16:12-15	pg 29	2 John 1:9-11	pg 28
John 17:6-8	pg 28	Jude 1:3	pg 29
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