

Authority is a Simple Matter

by Carl McMurray

The title is a note I have in my Bible by the text of Mark 11:27-33. The occasion is when the chief priests, scribes, and elders came to Jesus and began saying to Him, "By what authority are you doing these things?" You've got to commend them for asking the question. It wasn't acceptable to come to the temple and teach freely without being answerable to someone, having someone's permission to do so. Jesus was certainly willing to answer their questions with the stipulation that they should answer one question of His first.

He asked them about the baptism of John, the one that they had deigned not to receive, was it from heaven or men? Being unwilling to admit it was from heaven, and fearful of the people to say it was from men, they chose not to answer. That choice demonstrated some important points about the subject of authority.

First, we must note that the religious leaders were trapped by this question. If there was any other source of authority they would have named it forthrightly rather than fall back and claim ignorance. ALL spiritual teaching is either from heaven/God or from man. There simply is no other source. This distinction needs to be made because man HAS NO AUTHORITY when it comes to spiritual things and God has ALL AUTHORITY. Sweet flowing speech, big smiles, and deceitful arguments based on taking God's word out of it's context will not give authority where there is none. These are the tools of the false teacher, the sheep's clothing that covers the wolf inside.

Secondly, it is not out of order to ask for authority. We have run into many over the years who have become offended that anyone would even ask for Bible authority for what they were saying. Listeners have the right to know that when one says he is representing God with his teaching then he should be able to show where such teaching is found in God's word and not just being made up from wishful thinking. Asking where the Bible teaches such things as we might hear is one of the quickest ways to get to the heart of this matter. If it is indeed God's will then one should be able to turn in scripture to find such teaching in it's proper context. If anger, indignation, or evasive tactics are the answer to one's question, then one can be sure that the teaching in question is of man's mind (therefore without heaven's authority) and not of God at all. It is heresy.

Authority is simple. If God teaches it, do it. If it is not found in new covenant scripture then do not teach it or practice it, spiritually speaking. And ask supposed Bible believers and teachers to do the same. The answer you get will tell the true story.