

LESSON 11

AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH



Scripture Texts: Galatians 1:8-12; Matthew 15:3,9; Isaiah 8:20; Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:15-20

All authority rests in and proceeds from God. Christ is the Head of the church. To carry on His work, He has assigned a measure of authority to His church. Any authority they hold is to be used within the limits God has drawn and not independently. The authority any individual has a right to exercise is according to the spiritual ability the Holy Spirit gives him. It is an authority to make the gift effective in the work he does, not a power to control others. Let us examine some of the authority God has delegated to the church.

MEMORY VERSE: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."*

Romans 1:16

Divine Authority

Galatians 1:8-12 Paul was concerned over a turn of the Galatian church from what he had taught them to some other doctrine. According to his message to them here, they were about to become a sect with a man-made creed. He wrote assuring them that what he had preached was the **ONLY** true Gospel. No man, not even **an angel from heaven**, had any other true Gospel for them. There can be but **ONE** truth. Paul's basis for saying this did not rest in his authority but in God's. **The gospel which was preached of me is not after man.** He had received it **by the revelation of Jesus Christ.** In Paul's preaching, it was God who was persuading men, not Paul. It was the same Gospel which gives the church authority today and in every age (Romans 1:16). We learn that the Bible concerning salvation is from God and authority is given to preach it. No one is given authority to change it.

Traditions and Customs

Matthew 15:3, 9 The Jews had added rules, teachings, and traditions to the law God had given them. Jesus said their tradition transgressed the commandment of God. **In vain they do worship me**—their worship brought no favor from God, no good results, because it was false worship. This is the normal, but tragic, result of **teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.** We learn here that to add tradition to God's commandments is sin, and it is wrong to teach men's commandments as being binding like those of God.

Isaiah 8:20 Look into God's Word, compare all teachings with the Bible. This is a good test in trying the spirit. **If they, any teachers, speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.** We learn here that teachings differing from the Bible are not true or right, and that teachers who add to or differ from the Bible do not have divine authority. We have learned this far in the lesson that no human being or angel (Paul included himself) has authority to change the Bible.

Sin and Forgiveness

Matthew 16:19 To receive the keys to anything as big as the Kingdom of God carries with it authority. Christ has won this authority by His death, resurrection and return to Heaven, and he assigns a measure of His authority to human beings to carry on His work—delegated authority (Isaiah 22:22; Revelation 3:7). When the church receives this authority from Christ, great responsibility comes with it. The authority of the church is the Gospel of Christ. One should take seriously the Gospel because one's attitude toward it, belief or unbelief, determines whether he is bound or is set free.

Matthew 18:15-18 In the very Words of Jesus, here are instructions for handling problems of personal wrongs within the church. He gave three steps to be used in order until the offender is won to right action, or proves unwilling to change. The wronged one is to talk with the offender, first privately, secondly, with one or two witnesses, and thirdly, he is to bring it before the church. If one of the steps is successful, it is good. If none are, the offender is to be treated as **an heathen man and a publican**—as a sinner and outside the church. Jesus said, **Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and . . . loose on earth . . . loosed in heaven.**

Notice a few points:

- (1) Authority is given to the church to be advised of the facts of the offense.
- (2) The disciplinary power of the church is limited to the use of persuasion and withdrawal of fellowship. No penalty is to be inflicted.
- (3) God counts the judgment of those in authority as binding.
- (4) That the authority to bind and loose does not include the right of adding rules and laws to what God has given.
- (5) It does not include the right of any to exercise dominion over others (Matthew 20:25-28). Where duties are given there must also be authority given to carry out the duties.

Matthew 18:19-20 **If two of you shall agree . . . it shall be done . . .** what tremendous authority is this?—to call upon God and to get His attention. How is it done? There is agreement of those asking, unity of purpose and of spirit. They are gathered in Christ's name. They are His, are yielded to His will, exalt Him and believe Him. Christ is **in the midst of them**. He in their hearts so influences their thoughts and desires that they ask **according to his will**, are heard, and are granted their petitions (1 John 5:14-15).

The Authority of God's Workers

Authority is necessary to the successful progress of the church. Each member has the authority of truth in the Gospel message he teaches. Truth is powerful and authoritative (Hebrews 4:12). Each member also has the authority of his commission (Matthew 28:19-20). With every gift that the Spirit gives to carry on any work of the church, God gives the authority necessary for the proper exercise of that gift. As long as the worker is obeying his call, he has divine authority in the doing of the work God has given him. When the gift is lost the authority is taken away.

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