



“By Whose Authority do you...”

So often, when discussing the merits of the small home style gathering of the saints, leaders from other persuasions will ask that terrifying and cornering question - “Who is your covering? If you mess up, who are you accountable to? Who defines your doctrine and keeps you from heresies?”

The clear implication, though not directly stated, is, if we aren’t under a strict system of hierarchical control or some other type of control system, then we are surely to run on to the rocks and sink the ship of our churches.

The argument sounds reasonable, and it is true that rogues are often vulnerable to dangerous doctrines, but are their claims, though reasonable sounding, claims we are responsible to, or can we look to Jesus to guide us in this matter.

Interestingly enough Jesus apparently faced the very same - “If you aren’t of us you are inevitably going to be subject to error...” type of thinking.

Listen to Luke recall an encounter Jesus had with this line of thinking:

Luke 20:1 Now it happened on one of those days, as He taught the people in the temple and preached the gospel, that the chief priests and the scribes, together with the elders, confronted Him 2 and spoke to Him, saying, “Tell us, **by what authority are You doing these things?** Or who is he who gave You this authority?” 3 But He answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one thing, and answer Me: 4 “The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men?” 5 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ 6 “But if we say, ‘From men,’ all the people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet.” 7 So they answered that they did not know where it was from. 8 And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

“**By what authority are you doing these things, Or who is he who gave You this authority? ...**” Sounds pretty similar to what I frequently hear. Meaning? You aren’t a part of the Pharisees council, nor the Sadducees, nor the Herodians, or the Lawyers guild, and we all know they are the only legitimate sources of truth and practice, so how could anything you are saying be credible and safe for the people’s consumption? Major emphasis on **“he”**. Mind you “he,” not “He.” Often they lack in the knowledge of the “He” and are primarily concerned with the “he.” The “he” has been the problem with the Church down throughout Church history. When we solve the “he” issue, we’ll solve the problem of accountability in one fell swoop.

And what is Jesus’ response? Defensiveness? Nervous justifying? Argumentative retaliation born out of insecurity and fear of exposure? Nope, nope, nope. Only one answer needs to be given to such questions, and He gives it. It is the same answer we should give. Listen to it:

“The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men?” What is He saying? There are two sources of authority. One comes from men, is defined by men, carries man’s authority by way of human reasonings and opinions, seeks approval through carefully constructed human systems of control and definition, and forms fraternities of structure by which if others are not connected with these fraternities they are thereby exposed as being rogues and mavericks, therefore dangerous and to be shunned. The other, interestingly enough, doesn’t seek human sanction or approval. It has no care for man’s approval. It seeks first, foremost, and exclusively for the heavenly stamp of approval. It looks into the face and heart of God alone for sanction and definition, and moves forth into His world with His message, His way, and His agenda. The legitimacy of their message is measured, not by man’s reasonings but by the clear communication of God through His Spirit and that which He has given to man in the form of Scripture, which by the way is not subject to man’s private interpretation or twisting - “2 Peter 1:20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

Only those who are similarly familiar with being moved by the Holy Spirit can hope to accurately reflect or comprehend the source, power, and authority of such communications. When a people are committed to being in agreement with the Spirit, caring for man’s authority, opinion, or allegiances, becomes mute and of no consequence. The all important question hangs over each of us, yea indeed over every fraternity of man, **“Are we in agreement with the Spirit of Jesus Christ?”** This alone is to define and regulate us. This alone grants authority, stability, and safety.

And what if others disagree with this approach, and fail the test of value placement on agreement with the heavenly Witness? Become defensive? Nope, listen again: **“Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”** If they can’t hear the Spirit of Jesus they won’t be able to hear you, so all the arguing and justifying of your approach will fall on deaf ears, only serve to further convince them of your error, and unnecessarily increase your blood pressure. Relax, the Spirit of Christ within you bears witness of the truth in which you walk. What more do you need? When we seek the approval of man to do the work of God we have looked to the wrong source of validation. We are to walk in harmony with God, and those who value harmony with Him will be at peace with us. And what if we think we are in harmony with Him, but are deceived and actually walking in error? Ah yes, such states of mind do indeed exist, Paul answers this concern very handily in Philippians 3:15 “Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.” God will reveal our error. You mean I don’t have to submit everything I believe to the denominational heads and seek their approval and their sanctions for the things I practice and preach? Hmmmm, it would seem not, even if they insist so.

In the end, what does it matter if I’m in agreement with men but not God, and if I’m in agreement with God and not men is this not sufficient? If it’s Jesus’ truth, and Jesus’ Church, then probably heaven has a way of exposing, weeding out, and nullifying the errors of men, without men creating an artificial means of control. God seems to be very confident He can regulate things adequately. Perhaps we should confidently reflect His composure.

I am not called to convince men of the truths I speak, or the source of my authority. I’m called to walk in agreement with and by the power of the Holy Spirit of Jesus. You are to walk similarly, and if you do He is well able to expose my error and protect you. If you think you are protected by some elite guild of men who supposedly have the authority to regulate

the content of truth and practice for the body of Christ, you are surely to be led astray. If history, and especially Church history, teaches us anything, it is to be very suspicious of men who take such authority to themselves and who fail to refer the believers directly to Jesus Himself. When men encourage the body of Christ to follow them, without equally charging them to walk in the Spirit of Christ, and encouraging ultimate adherence to Him and not them, then those men, either unwittingly or wittingly are leading the body astray.

Our charge is to first and foremost come under the authority of heaven, and measure all other ideas, associations, and coverings by this rule of measurement. We can and we must walk by this rule. To do otherwise is to be led astray by every wind of doctrine and cunning craftiness of man. May Jesus Himself be our source of authority, and our deepest associations with man be based on this agreement.

Selah!