

83. Challenging the Authority of God

July 2, 2017

When the people don't like the truth they hear or see from someone, they challenge that person with a phrase, "Who do you think you are?" It is intended to find out if that person has authority over them. But in the background, they have the heart of rebellion and prideful attitude.

During the time Jesus walked on earth, many people asked this very question to Him. They were mostly Jewish religious rulers of that time. Jesus became a major threat to themselves, their social positions, and their wealthy lifestyle. Consequently, they were challenging Him with snares and trapped questions that intend to hurt Him, because they were not interested in finding the truth at all.

Two thousand years later, people still ask Him the same question: "Who do you think you are?" Jesus, being the very God Himself doesn't have to answer them, yet being a gracious God that He is, He answers them through His Word. But the people walk away from the Bible before they find an answer from Jesus.

A. NO FORGIVENESS WITHOUT FORGIVENESS

Mark 11:25-26 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

True prayer involves forgiveness as well as faith. I must be in fellowship with both my Father in heaven and my brothers and sisters on earth if God is to answer my prayers. While we have fellowship with one another, we can and do have conflicts with some people no matter how careful we might be.

The person who does not forgive others is a prisoner of one's own bitterness. Our bitterness comes from dissatisfaction against God who does not punish the one whom we have problems with as we want Him to do. In other words, bitterness is a sin against God. The only way can be freed from any bitterness is forgiving that person as our forgiving God has forgiven us. When we don't forgive someone as we should, we are challenging the authority of our God and our sins remain without His forgiveness.

Forgiveness is essential and mandatory in the Christian life. However, it doesn't mean that everything has to be restored as if nothing happened before.

B. QUESTIONING THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

Matthew 21:23-27 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?" 24 But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: 25 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?' 26 But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet." 27 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."

Upon His return from Bethany, Jesus taught in the temple. With the cleansing of the temple fresh in their minds, the chief priests and elders demanded to know by whose authority He overturned the tables and drove out the sheep and cows.

Jesus was not trying to avoid the issue in the way He answered. If the rulers received John's ministry, they would have received Jesus as their Messiah. Instead, the leaders nodded their heads at Herod to arrest John and then to kill him. If they would not accept the authority of John, they would not accept the authority of Jesus.

These chief priests were true politicians. They were more concerned about popularity than knowing and practicing the truth. However, they were not popular with the Israeli people already. So, they really didn't want to put themselves into further trouble with the people by denying that John the Baptist was from heaven.

It is a basic principle of Christian living that we cannot learn new truth if we disobey what God has already told us. We must practice what we already know.

John 7:17 If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.

Realizing that they were backed into a corner, the chief priests and elders refused to answer. Next, we see Jesus will answer them, but indirectly by telling them that He cleansed the temple by the authority of the Father and by the Son.

In today's world, no one wants to be told what to do and they question the authority of anyone who is over them. However, no matter how we feel, there is the absolute and final authority in this universe. That does not belong to Buddha, Allah, some New Age gurus from a twilight zone, certainly not ourselves. All of us should recognize and submit to God's authority over every aspect of our lives.

C. BY THE AUTHORITY OF GOD THE FATHER

Matthew 21:28-32 "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' 29 He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went. 30 Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to Him, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.

Jesus cleansed the temple by the authority of the Father.

The vineyard in this parable, of course, speaks of the nation of Israel. Jesus put the prostitutes and tax collectors as the first son. They seemed unlikely candidates to receive John's message, but they did with repented hearts. On the other hand, like the second son, the pseudo-religious scribes and Pharisees gave only lip service to the preaching of John.

The leaders committed two sins: First, they would not believe John's message and second, they would not repent of their sins. Their unbroken spirits and pride dug their graves deeper.

In light of this parable Jesus talked about, we must ask ourselves this very serious question: Which sons and daughters are we? Are we the ones who walk around

with pseudo Christian looks on our faces and make others think that we are spiritual, or are we the ones who say 'Yes' to God and follow Him with all of our hearts?

D. BY THE AUTHORITY OF GOD THE SON

Matthew 21:33-41 "Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. 34 Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. 35 And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. 37 Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' 39 So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" 41 They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."

Jesus cleansed the temple by the authority of the Son.

Taken from Isaiah 5:1-7, this parable speaks of Israel as a vineyard and of God as the owner who went into a far country. When the owner sent servants to collect the fruit, the vinedressers killed them just as the people of Israel had killed the prophets God had sent to them.

Did the Owner, then, say, "I'm going to send soldiers"? No, He said, "I'll send my Son." Did the Owner say, "I'll send lightning to strike them"? No, He said, "I'll send the Light of the world to show them of the eternal life in Him."

The response to that generous and ever-patient God the Father's gesture, they killed His Son. God looked for fruit from Israel's leadership, but found little as shown in the fig tree incident in the last study.

I asked you all to underline a sentence of "They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."" If you noticed, the Jewish religious rulers sentenced themselves with their own punishment. When we don't follow our God's will for our lives, we are sentencing ourselves like these chief priests and elders.

As God had provided everything Israel needed in the Promised Land, He gave this land to the early Americans who came over from the tyrannical and oppressive rulers around the world. Our ancestors were thankful to our God, and they found this nation under the authority of God Almighty. There is no other nation on the face of the earth that is blessed as much as America, because our founding fathers honored Him. But like He dealt with Israel for many times, God will deal with this America severely for her disobedience and rebellion.

Luke 12:48 But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

E. FALL UPON THIS ROCK

Matthew 21:42-46 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cor-

nerstone. This was the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes'? 43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. 44 And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." 45 Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. 46 But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.

When the temple was under construction, stones were quarried miles away and transported to the temple mount. Forty feet wide and twenty feet high, these stones were massive. Yet they fit together so precisely that mortar was not needed. Tradition had it that one stone arrived on the construction site, but because no one could figure out where it was supposed to go, the builders rolled it off a cliff into the Kidron Valley. Not until the foundation was complete did the builders discover that they were one stone short. Sure enough, the stone they had rejected at the beginning was none other than the cornerstone. In other words, the builders started the foundation with a wrong cornerstone.

Of course, our Lord Jesus was quoting Psalm 118:22-23 to explain that He was the rejected Son and the Israel's religious leaders were the vinedressers and vineyard's owner's servants were the prophets of God.

Often in the OT, God is referred to as a Rock or a Stone in Deuteronomy 32 and Psalm 18. The Stone is also a Messianic title.

To Israel, Jesus was a "Stumbling Stone" according to Isaiah 8:14-15, Romans 9:32-33, and 1 Corinthians 1:23. Israel rejected the Messiah, but in His death and resurrection He created the church.

To the church, Jesus is the "Foundation Stone", the "Cornerstone" in Ephesians 2:20-22 and 1 Peter 2:4-5.

At the end of the age, Jesus will come as the "Smiting Stone" according to Daniel 2:34, destroy Gentile kingdoms, and establish His own glorious kingdom.

These religious leaders rejected Jesus, because He interfered with the way they had chosen to live. He was a threat to their wallets and to their religious system that gave them social elite privileges. In spite of all their rhetoric and claims of interest in spiritual things, they were not really searching for the truth, nor were they searching for the Messiah. Otherwise, they would have embraced Jesus.

You see, the Pharisees' rejection of Jesus Christ was only a reflection of every person who intentionally rejects Him. People do not reject Jesus Christ because they have examined the evidence and concluded that He is not the Messiah. Most unbelievers whom I talked with have never read the entire Bible. They haven't even read the Gospel of John from beginning to end. They have never carefully examined the claims of Christ. People don't reject Jesus Christ because of any hypocrisy or inconsistent truth from the Bible. They reject Him, because He is a threat to their sinful lifestyle. They don't want to change. They want things left as they are, because they hate the light and their dark sinful deeds will be exposed.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) It is a basic principle of Christian living that we cannot learn new truth if we disobey what God has already told us. We must practice what we already know.

2) No matter how we feel, there is the absolute and final authority in this universe. All of us should recognize and submit to God's authority over every aspect of our lives.