

## AUTHORITY: WHO, WHERE, AND HOW

The sermon I'm going to preach tonight is a needed sermon.

- a. To be sure, it's needed by our denominational friends and neighbors.
- b. But it's also needed by our brethren in churches of Christ.
- c. And it is needed by all of us as a reminder.
  - ▶ 2 Pet 3:1-2 – “Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), 2 that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,”
    - NASB: “This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, 2 that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles.”

Please turn with me in your Bible to Luke, chapter 19 -- and we will read together from Lk 19:45 - 20:2.

- a. Our theme for this sermon will be found in this reading.
  - ▶ Lk 19:45 - 20:2 – “Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it, 46 saying to them, 'It is written, "My house is a house of prayer," but you have made it a "den of thieves."' 47 And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, 48 and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him. 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?**'”
    - That question was, and is, a legitimate question -- a very important question.
    - Because those who were asking the question were deceitful and dishonest and unwilling to answer a similar question themselves, Jesus refused to answer on this occasion, but he had given the answer to that question on other occasions: "Then Jesus said to them, 'When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. 29 And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.'" (Jn 8:28-29)
      - + Jesus was saying:
        - “My Father taught Me these things”
        - “My Father sent Me”
        - “I always do those things that please My Father”

The theme for this sermon is the question asked in Lk 20:2 – “. . . by what authority are you doing these things?”

- a. There was a time when just about anyone who was a member of a church of Christ could answer that question . . . and was glad to answer that question.
  - ▶ There was a time when we could tell anyone who asked why we believe the things we believe, why we teach the things we teach, and why we practice the things we practice.
  - ▶ We said we could give a “Thus saith the Lord” -- and we could . . . and we did.
  - ▶ We said we could give book, chapter, and verse for everything we believe, and teach, and practice . . . and we could . . . and we did.
  - ▶ We said, “We speak where the Bible speaks, and we are silent where the Bible is silent” -- and that was true.
- b. But a change is taking place among churches of Christ -- and it is not a change for the better, but a change for the worse.
  - ▶ I am only 57 years old, but a dramatic change has taken place in our brother hood in my lifetime.
  - ▶ The fact that Max Lucado and Rubel Shelley could be counted as members in good standing in a congregation calling itself a “church of Christ” is evidence of a dramatic change among churches of Christ.
    - Those men now teach the doctrine of salvation by faith only . . . and they deny the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins.
    - And yet they are members in good standing of congregations calling them selves “churches of Christ” . . . and they are invited into the pulpits of many congregations calling themselves “churches of Christ”
  - ▶ Furthermore, when I was a young boy there were no “churches of Christ” holding to any one of the five tenets of Calvinism.
    - But now there are congregations calling themselves “churches of Christ” that have embraced one or more of the five tenets of Calvinism . . . and I know of at least one “church of Christ” (Smith Springs Church of Christ in Nashville, TN) that has embraced all five tenets of Calvinism (hereditary total depravity, un conditional election and reprobation, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints).
  - ▶ And when I was a boy, there was not the remotest possibility that any “church of Christ” would have anything at all to do with a Billy Graham crusade.
    - But we recently witnessed the spectacle of “churches of Christ” right here in Tennessee promoting, and giving help to, a Billy Graham crusade in Nashville, Tennessee.
- c. These changes have taken place . . . and are taking place . . . because many “churches of Christ” are in retreat, and they have been in retreat for the past 5 decades at least.

- ▶ They are retreating from the scriptural slogans of the past:
    - “We call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways”
    - “We speak where the Bible speaks, and we are silent where the Bible is silent.”
    - “We give a ‘Thus saith the Lord’ (book, chapter, and verse) for everything we believe, teach, and practice.”
    - “We are Christians only, and the only Christians”
  - ▶ Many “churches of Christ” no longer oppose denominationalism -- they embrace it.
    - They first borrowed from the *practices* of the denominations . . . and now they are borrowing from the *doctrines* of the denominations . . . and they are well on the road to becoming a denomination.
- d. Listen to me, brethren: Any congregation that accepts even one doctrine or practice that is not authorized by Divine authority opens the door for other doctrines and practices that are not authorized by Divine authority.
- ▶ And the only way to close the door on error is to go back to the Bible for everything we believe, and teach, and practice -- insisting on Bible authority for every doctrine and practice.
  - ▶ It is all a matter of authority.

Tonight, I want to talk to you about authority:

- a. We must be concerned with . . .
  - ▶ WHO has the authority
  - ▶ WHERE that authority is expressed
  - ▶ HOW that authority is expressed
- b. And, we must be concerned with certain principles that must guide us in all that we do.
  - ▶ We must be concerned with . . .
    - the AUTHORITY principle
    - the FAITH principle
    - the LOVE principle
    - the FEAR principle

## **1. WHO has the authority?**

Authority for what we teach and practice is not legitimately derived from (1) creeds written by men, (2) decisions handed down by church conventions, conferences, or synods, (3) brotherhood concensus, (4) the writings and pronouncements of the "leading lights" in the brotherhood, (5) positions taken by the most prestigious journals in the brotherhood, (6) or even the decisions of the elders of the congregation.

- a. There is but one legitimate source of authority in religious and spiritual matters -- and that authority is Jesus Christ.

- ▶ All authority resides in Jesus Christ -- He is the Head, and He has the say-so.
- ▶ Heb 1:1-3 – “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, **2 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; **3** who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,”
- ▶ Matt 28:18-20 – “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.** **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
- ▶ Ac 3:22-24 – “For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. **Him you shall hear in all things**, whatever He says to you. **23** And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' **24** Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days.”
- ▶ Jn 16:12-15 – “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. **13** However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. **14** He will glorify Me, for **He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.** **15** All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.”
- ▶ Eph 1:19-23 – “and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power **20** which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, **21** far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. **22** And **He put all things under His feet**, and gave Him to be **head over all things to the church**, **23** which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

## **2. WHERE is that authority expressed?**

Authority for what we teach and practice is not found in (1) the commands, statutes, and ordinances God gave through the patriarchs, (2) the Old Testament scriptures given to Israel through Moses, (3) the writings of the Old Testament prophets,

- a. Heb 1:1-3 – “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son,”
- b. Heb 8:6-13 – “But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. 8 Because finding fault with them, He says: ‘Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah -- . . . 10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 11 None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. 12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’ 13 In that He says, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”
- c. Heb 10:9 – “then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ He takes away the first that He may establish the second.”
- d. 2 Cor 3:7-13 – “But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? 9 For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. 10 For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. 11 For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious. 12 Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech -- 13 unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.”
- e. Gal 3:24-25 – “Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”

Authority for what we teach and practice is not found in catechisms and creeds written by men (the "traditions of men").

- a. Mk 7:5-9 – “Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, ‘Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?’ 6 He answered and said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: “This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.’ 7 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” 8 For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men --

the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do. 9 He said to them, 'All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.'”

Authority for what we teach and practice must be found in the New Testament scriptures (given by the authority of Jesus Christ).

- a. Jn 16.13-14 – “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.”
- b. Eph 3:1-5 – “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles -- 2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:”
- c. 1 Cor 14:37 – “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.”
  - ▶ And, of course, what Paul claims concerning the things he has written would also be true of the things written by the other apostles and inspired writers.
    - Rev 1:10-11 – “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, 11 saying, ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,’ and, ‘What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”
    - Rev 2:18 – “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass.’”

### **3. HOW is that authority expressed?**

I want you to understand: Authority for what we teach and practice is not derived from the *silence* of the Scriptures.

- a. Silence is silence!
  - ▶ Silence does not and cannot authorize anything.
- b. The fact is: When God says nothing, God says no!
  - ▶ Example: When God said nothing to David about wanting David to build a temple for Him, that meant God did not want David to build the temple.
    - 2 Sam 7:1-7 – “Now it came to pass when the king was dwelling in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies



- ▶ Matt 28:18-20 – “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”
  - ▶ Ac 10:48 – “And he (Peter) commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.”
- b. Statements (tantamount to a command)
- ▶ Mk 16:15-16 -- "And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.'"
    - Obviously, the statement, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” is tantamount to commanding, "Believe and be baptized in order to be saved.”
- c. Examples
- ▶ Through examples of misbehavior being punished by God we can learn what not to do.
    - 1 Cor 10:11 – “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”
  - ▶ Through examples of approved behavior we can learn what we ought to do.
    - Php 3:17 – “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.”
    - 2 Th 3:7-9 – “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; 8 nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, 9 not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.”
  - ▶ In Matt 26:29 Jesus talks about "that day" when He would commune with us in the observance of the Lord's Supper . . . and in Ac 20:7 we learn from the example of the church at Troas that "the first day of the week" was "that day" referred to by the Lord when He instituted the Supper.
- d. Necessary inferences
- ▶ Col 4:10-11,14 – “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), 11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision (Jews) ; they have proved to be a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and

- those in Hierapolis. 14 Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.”
- Necessary inference: Luke and Demas are not “of the circumcision” (Jews) -- they are Gentiles.
- ▶ Mk 7:18-19 – “So He said to them, ‘Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, 19 because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?’”
- NASB: “And He said to them, ‘Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; 19 because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?’ (Thus He declared all foods clean.)”
  - NIV: “‘Are you so dull?’ he asked. ‘Don’t you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him “unclean”? 19 For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.’ (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods ‘clean’)”
  - Necessary inference (in this case, supplied by Mark himself in the text): All foods are clean
- ▶ Ac 8:35-36 – “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. 36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’”
- Philip “preached Jesus” to the eunuch, and that led the eunuch to ask, “What hinders me from being baptized?”
  - Necessary inference: “preaching Jesus” includes preaching the baptism commanded by Jesus that brings one into Christ.
- ▶ Ac 16:6-10 – “Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. 7 After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. 8 So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ 10 Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.”
- Necessary inference: the Lord wanted Paul and his companions to go into Macedonia to preach the gospel

#### **4. Four principles that must be considered in all that we do**

The AUTHORITY principle

- a. Col 3:16-17 – “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And

whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

b. Jesus' attitude when He was in the world:

▶ Jn 8:28-29 – “Then Jesus said to them, ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. 29 And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.’”

- NASB: “Jesus therefore said, ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. 29 And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.’”

c. The Holy Spirit's attitude when He was sent into the world

▶ Jn 14:25-26 – “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. 26 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.”

▶ Jn 16:12-15 – “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.”

### The FAITH principle

a. Heb 11:1 – “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

▶ NIV: “Now faith is being **sure** of what we hope for and **certain** of what we do not see.”

b. Rom 14:23 – “But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.”

c. Rom 14:5 – “One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each man be **fully convinced** in his own mind.”

### The LOVE principle

a. 1 Cor 13:1-3 – “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”

- b. Gal 5:6 -- "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love."
- c. Jn 14:15 -- "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

The FEAR principle

- a. Heb 12:28-29 – “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire.”

## Conclusion

Before I bring this lesson to its conclusion, I want to tell you about a man by the name of Floyd Decker.

- a. At one time Floyd Decker was a Christian Church preacher, but he left the Christian Church in order to work and worship with churches of Christ.
- b. Floyd Decker wrote a well-circulated article entitled “Why I Left the Christian Church” and in the article he identified various unscriptural practices in the Christian Church as his reason for leaving it:
  - ▶ They had women Counselors, Directors, and Lecturers.
  - ▶ They had educational directors, associate ministers, and youth directors.
  - ▶ They had missionary, benevolent, and educational organizations to do the work of the church.
  - ▶ They celebrated Easter, Mother's Day and Christmas.
  - ▶ They had fellowship with various denominations.
  - ▶ They had youth meetings, campaigns for Christ, rallies, drives and promotions.
  - ▶ They had church carnivals, bands, plays, choruses, church kitchens, church camps, and fellowship halls.
  - ▶ They elevated their preachers above the other members by using titles such as pastor, superintendent, president and doctor.
  - ▶ They misused the name “Christian.”
  - ▶ They took up collections other than on the 1st day of the week and used suppers, property rentals and special collections to raise money.
  - ▶ They owned and operated publishing houses, radio stations, hospitals and other enterprises and institutions.
  - ▶ They owned, supported, and operated schools for secular education.

Now, let me tell you why what Floyd Decker wrote is so interesting: Floyd Decker wrote that back in 1944, and in 1944 he could say, "the churches of Christ do not do those things."

- a. But look at the situation today: Virtually every unscriptural Christian Church practice that Floyd Decker listed in giving his reason for leaving the Christian Church is now being practiced by many churches of Christ.

The point I'm making is this: Where liberalism (a loose attitude toward Bible authority) took the Christian Church people in the last half of the 1800s and the 1st half of the 1900s is where liberalism (a loose attitude toward Bible authority) has taken liberal churches of Christ in the last half of the 1900s.

In Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, Jesus addressed the 7 churches of Asia.

- a. 5 of the 7 churches of Asia needed to repent.
  - ▶ Example: the church at Ephesus was told, “repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place -- unless you repent.” (2:5)
- b. I don't know if 5 of 7 churches of Christ today need to repent or not-- but I wouldn't be surprised.

But we come back to our original question from Lk 20:2 – “by what authority do you do these things?”

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