

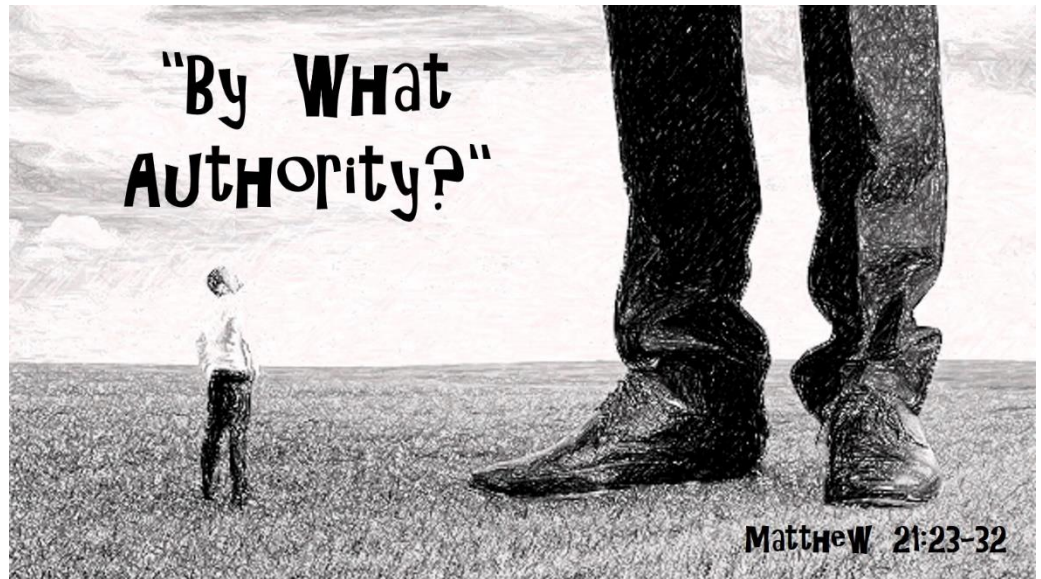
“By What Authority?”

Matthew 21:23-32

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Matthew 21:23-32 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?" 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: "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?' "But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet." 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. "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.' "He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went. "Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go. "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. "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.



“Question authority.” (Timothy Leary 1960’s)

It was a philosophy born out of a weary and disillusioned generation. One originating upon the perception of increasing abuses by those who held the power. On the heels of a plethora of business scandals, corrupt politicians and corporate failures we were left with a seemingly entire generation skeptical of authority. No more could anything be taken for granted. No more could even fundamental and historical truths be accepted as fact. Everything was to be examined. Everything was to be questioned.

Jump ahead a half century, and for many today the term "authority" is synonymous with "tyranny." Fairness, structure and societal care is quickly sacrificed on the altar of social reform by those who see no difference between cultural order and rules and a repressive boot pressed across the neck of the people. "Question authority" stickers appear even now on our bumpers. It seems that while on some level the justification behind our knee-jerk may ultimately be at least somewhat righteous, our cultural swing away from any and every authority has gone further than many were prepared to embrace. And it all has come at a price.

Vast segments of our society have now moved well beyond calls for open eyes and an alert mind. Far beyond a need for discernment and a "balanced view of the world" and have instead plunged headlong into the realm of outright rejection of authority on any level and in any situation. Suddenly we are *antagonists*. Ironically, while claiming to be an individualist and independent, we inadvertently become part of the “herd mentality” ...following along as part of the protesting masses who all are wearing “lone wolf” t-shirts.

Sadly, the greater Christian church and faith have not escaped this cynical and oft extreme rejection of authority. Unwittingly, a new generation has risen which now answers the issue of corrupt authority with the same individualistic, anti-submissive skepticism as the world. Yet again, such a response is also not without reason! For fraud, power exploitation, financial and sexual abuses have become commonplace throughout the greater church.

Thus we too have rebelled. The confusion that followed has birthed much of the “House Church” movement, motivated church splits, written many of the emergent church doctrines, and spawned the “seeker friendly” church culture. The mantra was birthed: *“I am against organized religion.”*

We would however be mistaken if we are to think that the reasons for our rejection of authority were somehow a 21st century occurrence. What we tend to believe is a new social development is in fact merely a more publicized one. Social media and the internet has taken care of that for us. Even the rejection of biblical and church authority was not born on the wings of the “don’t trust anyone over 30” historical period. A sizable authority-rejecting attitude and posture existed even in Jesus’ day! No doubt that’s why Jesus was “amazed” when he encountered a man who both respected authorities over him and exercised authority over others (Luke 7:8-9). It seems that seldom, *if ever*, is the questions considered: *“Is it possible that all of this is just further exercise of the historical “me first” heart of sinful man? Could this be just more individualized agenda and selfish criteria that is rejecting **any** allegiance on my part? Did all this begin in the garden?”*

In Luke 6:46 Jesus asked, *“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”* (Luke 6:46). The question should make us pause, for such implies that there can be no proper and healthy participation in the Christian faith without submission to authority. And further, the scriptural truth is that the real Christian owes a *joyful* submission to authority, not just the skeptical, reluctant “caving in” to some sort of religious mandate. In our skeptical age of individualism and moral relativism, maybe we need to step back and consider that perhaps we are simply being blinded by Satan and our own flesh, and by such, we are literally hampering the furthering of the Kingdom of God. 2 Peter 2:10 speaks of *“those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness **and despise authority**. They are presumptuous, self-willed.”*

It is certain that sooner or later every pastor-leader will have his authority questioned, if not literally threatened. While those in ministry today cannot compare their work to that of Christ on any real level, the manifest of this issue is experienced by us on a practical level as it was also with Christ. Sadly, for the sake of public opinion and popularity, there are today many within the greater church leadership that have surrendered this ground. Both then and now, many of those who lead the established religious world are far more concerned with public opinion and the majority view than they are with the **actual** truth, let alone the **biblical** truth! Popularity and power were and **are** the driving forces. These folks asked Jesus about the basis of His authority, but such was effectively meaningless because the truth was that they would never recognize **any** authority other than their own. And many of these folks still walk amongst us today.

Ironically, while Jesus **did** ask for faith, he never asked for **blind faith**. Even John the Baptist had his trepid moments! We know He sent some of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him...to clarify *if you will*, whether Jesus was really the “one” that He claimed to be. Jesus didn’t scold John or rebuke him, but rather sent this message back: *“Go back to John and tell him what you have seen and heard — the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor. And tell him, ‘God blesses those who do not turn away because of me.’”* (Luke 7:22-23) Peter and the apostles were well into their experience with Christ...having traveled many months and many miles together before Jesus finally asked that fateful question: *“...who do you say that I am?”* to which Peter answered and said, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*

In a nutshell, Jesus was telling them that “seeing was believing.” That the trust and faith He was asking for was not a blind demand but rather something He had righteously earned. He had over time, testing, and trial, “proven his salt.” Honor for someone in position is something that is to be given because of position. But respect and allegiance is *earned*. Recognition of authority is also something that is *earned*. I as a pastor have never demanded or even **asked** for more than that and neither did Jesus. However, we both are righteously *asking* for such once our integrity and faithfulness have been proven in battle and time. Paul wrote to Pastor Titus telling him in 2:15 *“Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke **with all authority**. Let no one despise you.”*

These that challenged Jesus that day were not there for discussion or even a righteous “show-and-tell.” They had *already* seen what Jesus had! They had witnessed the power, righteousness, integrity and holiness already. No, they were looking for a way *out* of acquiescing! A way *out* of coming under His authority. And like many folks since then, they were likely seeking a way out from under *any* authority in their lives except their own! And today, that thinking is so entrenched in the cultural attitudes that it is literally akin to being an American! Nationalism, as well as the existence of real or perceived acute power corruption has given us permission to isolate and rebel.

But let it be known, that such is not *by* Christ, *of* Christ, or *with His* blessing! Many of us seek every flaw and imperfection for which to reject authority and submissiveness. But what *began* as a righteous response to corruption has become a dishonest excuse for self-exaltation. All the while we ignore the scriptural mandates, calling, and necessity of authority in our Christian lives. And ironically, our rejection of such prevents us from ever knowing the blessing of such a gentle order in our lives. The battle cry is lifted up: *“I don’t need anyone, and no one is my chief! I am master of my own domain.”*

Jesus throughout His earthly ministry would give no permission or excuse for such rebellion. For Jesus was absolutely an advocate for “organized religion” having set forth a great deal of structural directions and positional design. Ephesians 4:11-12 says *“He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”*

He would not let these men “off the hook” as they sought for a parliamentary “loophole.” A “back door” where they could “slip out” on a technicality! For the fact remains: Christianity is innately and intrinsically a unity of men and women in a corporate albeit singular force. A “body” of Christ! Each taking his or her place in that body and living and serving for the blessing and furtherance of the other members of that body as well as ultimately Christ Himself and His kingdom! One cannot live the Christian life outside of such a dynamic. It is impossible! If you stand alone, then you are indeed “alone.”

Ephesians 5 calls upon us to *“submit to one another in the fear of God.”* But make note that it does so after a long focus upon our faithfulness, righteousness, holy living etc...in other words, a submission to others *after such has been earned*. However, let us not fail to take the next step and actually be submissive once that has happened! Jesus was always patient and loving toward the individual who was truly seeking Him. But there were and are those who were more concerned with looking for a way “into the sheepfold” without coming in through the door. Matthew 18:4 *“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”*

As Jesus went on in this account, he began to tell a story to drive home his point. *“A man with two sons told the older boy, ‘Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.’ The son answered, ‘No, I won’t go,’ but later he changed his mind and went anyway. Then the father told the other son, ‘You go,’ and he said, ‘Yes, sir, I will.’ But he didn’t go. ‘Which of the two obeyed his father?’ They replied, ‘The first.’ Then Jesus explained his meaning: ‘I tell you the truth, corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do. For John the Baptist came and showed you the right way to live, but you didn’t believe him, while tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even when you saw this happening, you refused to believe him and repent of your sins.’”*

Notice the specifics of this father’s direction: *go, work, today*. Love, respect, and authority are implied, with an expected result of service and obedience. Much of mankind has flinched at such a humble position, only to answer the call in time. Others however, like these men, feigned a righteous response to God, but in truth never repented. Jesus asks, *“Which is righteous?”* The men present that day answered appropriately and in doing so, condemned themselves with their answer.

A profound response is given by Christ. One that no doubt shocked and appalled these pious men. Jesus tells them that tax collectors and harlots would enter the Kingdom of God before them! To say that this was hard to swallow would be an extreme understatement! But there is a great mandate in our approach to Christ and salvation...one that

often sticks in our throats and in our hearts: *there must be a surrender*. There is an absolute agreement here playing out. A “covenant” between us and God. We *repent* of our sin and the life path we were traveling, giving control and authority for our lives over to Christ, and He gives us salvation, forgiveness, and a “new life” that is controlled by Him.

The fact is, many of us want to come to Christ on a “level playing field.” With a socialist “knights-of-the-round-table” mentality, where we are given the blessings of being on the team yet able to retain the “equal” control and status of our lives. This is where the idea of “Christ my friend and buddy” was born. A “comradery” with God instead of the Biblical principles of King and Lord over us.

Who does the first son represent? He represents the sinners, harlots, tax gatherers, and all the outcasts. The outcasts initially were saying by their life style that they didn’t want to follow God. But when confronted by their sin, they changed their mind (repented) and believed. Who does the second son represent? The second son represents the folks who said “I will obey and submit” but didn’t and don’t. In fact, their claim is so often not that they *will* obey, but that they “*do*” obey - all the time! This truth was obvious to Christ...obvious to the Father, and obvious to everyone around them that was living in the truth.

The reality today is that there are many amongst us that attempt to play that same game! We come to Christ on the wings of the gospel cross, but we want absolution without surrender. We want to remain in control of our lives but still have salvation, and there is no such path! Again, the words of Christ in John 10 speaks of the individual who tries saying, “*I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber!*” Jesus in that passage says He is the “door.” And the only way into the “sheepfold” is **through Him**. He then becomes our shepherd and leads us to “*green fields and still waters.*” (Ps 23) It is a place where we the sheep “*recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice.*” (John 10:3-4) A true redeemed person follows Him. They do not seek Jesus to follow **them** and make **their** plans a reality.

So are we to see this story as a “works based salvation?” No. For the work did not make the son, his choice did. It was the surrender to the authority of the Father that made him a righteous son. The work was merely the outcome of obedience...the outcome of the surrender to God’s authority. And it still is. When people refuse to accept the Father as the authority in their lives, they set themselves up as God. But God will not give His glory to another. “*We have become like those of old, over whom You never ruled, those who were never called by Your name.*” (Isaiah 63:19)

1 Cor 7:23a (Liv) ***You have been bought and paid for by Christ, so you belong to him.***

1 Cor 6:19 (Phi) ***You are not the owner of your own body.***

1 Cor 6:19b-20a (Jer) ***You are not your own property; you have been bought and paid for.***

Since Jesus has purchased us with his blood, we should recognize the fact that we are no longer in control of our lives. We have been bought, and are now under the Lordship of our new Master.

“*If I offer a car for sale, which I think is worth 7K, and offers are made ranging from 2K to 9K, how much is the car worth? The 7K that I think it's worth? The ‘low-ball’ offer of 2K? No. The car is worth what the highest bidder is willing to pay in the open market. People are ‘traded’ in a spiritual and eternal market. We are not worth what we happen to think, or any ‘low-ball’ offer. We are worth what the highest bidder will pay. The highest bidder is God, and the price-tag is the Cross. God looked out across the eternal ages and said, ‘I’ll take that one, even though the price is steep!’ Our worth is established once and for all, and can never change or diminish. God has made the ultimate offer and paid the highest price.*” (Sandy Gregory's Car Parable)