

The Authority Controversy, Part 4

Luke 20:5-8

They don't care about truth. They don't care about authority either, which means third, here's a third point. They don't care about others, which is another way of saying they don't love anyone but themselves. They don't love anyone but themselves. They don't care about others. They don't love anyone but themselves. When the mask comes off, this is the most revealing, this is the most shameful, ugly contour of their hearts. Their self-love, their utter disdain for others. These are bad shepherds. This is bad religion.

Listen, if these religious leaders had really believed the people had been deceived by John, if they really believed that, if they really believed that they were deceived now by Jesus. If they really believed that Jesus was teaching and preaching and performing miracles by the devil's power as spiritual shepherds of Israel wouldn't love dictate their actions and determine their behavior? In this sense, wouldn't love for people mean

telling them what they really believe, telling them what their concerns are, making those public?

Why not quote John the Baptist side, his teaching? Explain to everyone where John has contradicted the Bible. Why not do the same and examine the teaching of Jesus? Obviously it's because they have really no biblical case. They've chosen their position, they've staked their claim, and they are not budging from it.

We're going to see through a little conspiratorial planning later in the text that they try their hand at that with Jesus. They actually tried to bring text to his attention, thinking themselves quite clever. They got scribal support, rabbinical support. They've been studying the text, they know the traditions, and they're about to, to put it all into a ball and throw fastballs and curveballs in Jesus' way. You know what he's going to do with every single one of them. He's going to bust the stitching out of those balls. We'll see that as time comes.

By contrast, once again, the subject of Jesus' teaching and preaching is the Kingdom of God. His, the content of his teaching always has biblical themes, prophetic themes, themes of restoration and hope. He's there to go directly to the heart of the matter and preach to the heart and preach to the spiritual concerns and issues. He's not preaching politics and social issues. He's not trying to keep the Titanic afloat. Rearrange the deck chairs as it goes down. He's not on a speaking tour to promote his new book, Twelve Steps to Better Whatever. He's not, he's not doing anything, he's teaching the people the Word of God. He is preaching the gospel. These people need salvation.

So what's revealed as they reason among themselves, as they decide what they'll say to Jesus? How they answer his question, their disregard for truth, their disregard for the actual question about authority, and their utter disregard for people. Jesus exposes hypocrisy, pride, self-love as a truth teller and a God fearer and a Bible teacher, Jesus is a man of integrity, a man of principle, a man of unassailable character.

It's manifestly clear that these men are not men of principle. They're pragmatists. They're unprincipled hypocrites.

They have no regard for truth. They don't, they do not fear God. They do not love people. They're willing to say whatever works. Whatever mollifies the people keeps them at bay so they can keep serving themselves.

So here's what we've seen so far. The sinful interrogation point one, was answered point two by the humble imposition of Jesus' authority, his rightful authority, his regal authority. His attempt to answer the question that they had asked revealed point three, the shepherds of Israel were exercising hypocritical authority. And this brings us to a fourth and final point, the total disqualification of sinful authority.

The total disqualification of sinful authority. As these men consider how to answer Jesus, even as they correctly identify, there's only two options and they choose neither of them, they disqualify themselves for spiritual leadership. These are unreliable guides. That's what we need to see in verse 7.

So they answered Jesus after deliberating that they did not know where it came from. In other words, we're agnostic on this

subject. We just want to be humble. There's, there, there's good views on either side. There's, there's people who have different opinions, but we, your shepherds, are going to, we're, we're going to stand back from it. We just want to be humble and just say, "Don't know."

Is that humble? They don't know? Is that true, that they're ignorant? We've already seen in their reasoning, this is not a problem of a faulty intellect. Is this an, an issue of a lack of evidence? All the evidence is right there before them. All the evidence, they've examined the evidence before sending a delegation to examine John's ministry in John chapter 1, always dogging Jesus' steps, watching his miracles, hearing his teaching. They know what this is about. They are not ignorant. They're not lacking evidence. They don't have a faulty intellect. Problem is not inability to understand.

The problem is the will to understand. It's a heart matter. They have a sinful will driven by an unconverted, unbelieving heart. And listen beloved, that's what religious agnosticism is really. It's a tactic. It is a cunning way of providing cover for cowardice.

Cowardice, by the way, is not humble in any way. Cowardice is self-centered, prideful, not willing to admit any fault. It's not humble, it's prideful. Intellectually, these men have retreated into a den of agnosticism. They've gone into their cave.

They're hiding from the divine intellect that has just exposed them, flayed them open, spread them open as hypocrites and frauds. They can't deal with this. So Jesus on his, for his part, he refuses to play games with hypocrites. Those who hide like cowards, who won't engage in straightforward communication, who play games all under the cover of agnosticism. And so, in verse 8, he says, "Neither will I tell you."

Notice it's not "neither can I tell you," but "neither will I tell you." In his answer, he's identifying their error. It's not a problem of ability, it is a problem of will. They won't tell him, and so he's not going to tell them. They know the authority by which he does these things, they just refuse to admit it.

So Jesus, for his part, refuses to say anything more. Emphatic denial there in the text. Neither am I myself saying anything to you about the authority by which I operate. Neither am I myself saying, it's a present tense verb, so it's like ongoing habitually. I'm not saying anything like, like now and continuing. I'm not saying anything to you about the authority by which I do these things.

Suppose for a moment, though, just for the sake of argument, just for the sake of learning, suppose for a moment these men really don't know the answer. There really is a problem of ability. Rather than refuse to be pinned down to an answer, which is really what's going on here. But if they really are ignorant, what does this tell us? Tells us that by their own admission, they have no business being in charge, do they?

It's their job to know. They shouldn't be in positions of authority, running the Temple, acting as custodians over the Temple, qualifying or disqualifying teachers and teaching. If they are ignorant and incompetent, they're not qualified. They

have said so. But if they're not ignorant, which is clearly the case, then these men are duplicitous, hypocritical, and again, they have no business in positions of spiritual authority.

In either case, they have totally disqualified themselves, and they've done that publicly in front of everybody on their own home turf, by the way. Look, we all know what's going on here. These men are lying, and Jesus has no interest in engaging with liars.

These men are willing to play fast and loose with the truth, and they are unwilling to state their position openly about John and do that publicly, J.C. Rile said, "lies like this, it may be feared, are only too common among unconverted men. [He goes on to say this.] Thousands will say anything rather than acknowledge themselves to be in the wrong. Lying is just one of the sins to which the human heart is most naturally inclined, and one of the commonest sins in the world." End quote.

So the Lord's question has exposed them as inept and corrupt. Their plan to entrap him has backfired. Psalm 9:16, "The Lord has made himself known, has executed judgment, and the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands." It's exactly what's happened.

So Jesus is not going to waste time with them. He's not going to debate with those who engage dishonestly, insincerely with false pretense. He has higher priorities, he has better and more productive things to do, and he's going to get to them. One purpose of the Gospel writers in recording this inquisition, by the way, all three synoptic Gospel writers record this. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record this, this, this same account.

But this account, the interrogation of Jesus, the controversy over his authority is questioning by Israel's leaders. It demonstrates the illegitimacy of Israel's leadership. It shows them to be false shepherds, thoroughly corrupt and therefore utterly unjust, totally unreliable. They are the bad root at the, at, at the bottom of that fig tree that Jesus cursed.

They're diseased, they're bad, they're dead, and they cannot produce any fruit. So if Israel's chief men, nation's leadership, Israel's shepherds, if they cannot be trusted to come to a right conclusion about John the Baptist, one that everybody else in the land came to a right conclusion about, if they can't be trusted to come to a right conclusion about him, if their view of John is so diametrically opposite of that of the people, and they refuse to admit they're biased against John, how can they be trusted for any future judgement? More pointedly, and more immediate to the purpose of each Gospel writer, why should the readers these Gospels take any position that agrees with the false shepherds of Israel?

They all say he's not Messiah. This should show you that whatever they say, you kind of want to take the opposite position. They're corrupt hypocrites. They're blinded by pride. They're motivated by greed and envy. Why side with them against John, a true prophet? And why side with them against Jesus, who is the true Messiah, the Savior of the world, the Savior of our souls? To deny him is to go down with these hypocrites, down to the bottom of the lake of fire.

There's another chief purpose among all these Gospel writers. They want the readers to see what true authority looks like. They want their readers to see in Jesus how authority is to be used, how the rightful use of authority does the will of God teaches God's word, shepherds God's flock, cares for God's people. God expresses his heart for his scattered sheep. Back in Ezekiel 34, verse 11, he says, "behold, [I] I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out. [He goes on elaborates. In verse 16 he says] I'll seek the lost."

I'm going to do everything these false shepherds failed to do. I'm going to seek the lost. I'll bring back the strayed, I'll bind up the injured, I'll strengthen the weak, the fat and the strong I'll destroy, but I will feed them in justice. And he goes on and he says, all this he's going to do all this righteous shepherding, all this kind, tender, strong, straightforward truth telling, shepherding.

God will do, Ezekiel 34:22 and following, he'll do this through the Messiah. "I'll rescue my flock. They shall no longer

be a prey. I will judge between sheep and sheep, and I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David. He shall feed them. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord will be their God, and my servant David shall be Prince among them. I am the Lord. I have spoken." By His grace, beloved you and I, Christians, we are numbered in this flock. We're following the voice of one Shepherd and we're under his pastoral care.

Now as we draw this to a close, I'd like to take a moment and draw out maybe some implications of this section of Scripture so you can know how to apply this for yourself and so you can also help others apply this as well. I want to bring us full circle back to what we noted at the beginning of the sermon, something Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. He said in Matthew 7:15, "Beware of false prophets," false teachers, false shepherds. They come to you in sheep's clothing. They claim to be expositors. They claim to be Bible teachers. They claim to be pastors. They claim to be evangelicals. And on paper, it's what it looks like.

Jesus says they come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. True shepherds pattern their lives after

Jesus Christ. They follow those who follow him. They're like Paul, who calls people to imitate him as he follows Christ. And so true shepherds are truth tellers and God fearers and Bible teachers, and they are willing to look you straight in the eye and tell it as it is.

They don't rejoice in offending you or anybody, but they are willing to risk offence because they're men of integrity. They hold fast to principle. They're unconcerned about pragmatic outcomes. They're men of unassailable character, and they're less concerned about the fragile feelings of arrogant sinners and more concerned about showing real love and speaking the unvarnished truth of God. Why?

Because the truth feeds sheep, and it drives away wolves. So many of you have rejoiced in finding Grace Church to be a sound gospel preaching church. You've been good Bereans. You've compared what we say from the pulpit and in the different teaching venues to the Word of God. I know that some of you have had questions and said, hey, what is this really what the Bible teaches? And can you help me to understand this? That's being good, Bereans.

So many of you have rejoiced in finding this church. You've come to rest under the spiritual care of men who are like this. Truth tellers, God fearers, Bible teachers, not perfect men, but men who are on that growth, on that trajectory, to continue telling the truth, fearing God and teaching His Word.

Men who are willing to look you straight in the eye tell like it is. There may be a few among us who resent straightforward truth telling, but that is the, far, the exception and not the rule at all. It's a joy to pastor here. It's a joy to serve here. Most of you love the truth. You're aiming to follow the same pattern for yourselves to be confident, truth tellers, joyful God fearers, competent, skillful Bible teachers. Wherever the Lord sends you, it's what you want to be.

But beloved, and I want to say this to you with love, you have to be willing to risk offending family members and offending friends and coworkers and offending neighbors and acquaintances who have taken up residence, spiritually speaking,

in dens of robbers, bad churches. You have to be willing to offend the people that you love who are in your orbit, in your sphere of influence. You have to be willing to tell them the truth, that they have come under false shepherds, people who are willing to say whatever pleases people, to get them into the seats and keep them entertained and keep them giving.

Or maybe they've come under the, they've, they've entered into a den of agnostics, the cowardly and the cunning who want to avoid all risk by avoiding any certainty, by not teaching anything deeply. "Oh, there's no way to know. There's just no way to know. Doctrine has been debated for centuries, and there's good men on all sides. In fact, those who express certainty about doctrine, they're just arrogant and prideful. They want to be right all the time. They're spiritual Pharisees. So I've chosen a higher path. I've retreated to the refuge, being confident in my den of ignorance, certain in this cave of agnosticism. I stand firmly right here knowing nothing."

Beloved, your friends, family members, coworkers are going to churches just like that. Not saying every church out there is like that, but many are like that. The devil has proliferated

bad religion. It's been his tactic ever since the beginning. The majority out there is bad. So if you just look at the percentages it, chances are you've got to talk to people in your life who are under this bad religion.

I don't recommend beloved going in, swords drawn, slaying pharisaical hypocrites with your sword of the Lord, smiting theological Philistines with a great slaughter. That's not what you're to do. But you can't sit idly by and affirm them either. You need to lean in to your friends, neighbors, family members. You need to look at the churches they're going to. Listen to the sermons that they're listening to, hear the podcasts that they're downloading, and at least offer to help to extract them from a deadly spiritual situation.

I'm not being dramatic when I say this. Their immortal souls really are at stake here. You found a good church. We're so thankful for that. These elders, these church members, we rejoice to embrace all, all Christians, people searching, people seeking, people having questions. We want to bring all of you under the shepherding care of this church, want to partner with

you in gospel fellowship. But all of you church members, you have a duty now.

It is a matter of righteousness. And I want to look each one of you in the eye. And I am right now, even though my glasses are very fuzzy and I can't see eyeballs. If I'm looking at you in the eye, and if you think I'm looking at you, I am. You have a charge to take what you're learning here. Live under the authority of Jesus Christ. His authority in your life must be meaningful.

It has to come into your life and disrupt your comfort and your ease. It's got to stir things up a bit in your life. If you come in and out of here every week and you just feel comfortable and nothing changes, check your spiritual pulse. Better yet, have someone around you, a mature Christian, check your spiritual pulse. This authority has to be to make a functional difference in your life.

So let us all, following after the Lord Jesus Christ, let us endeavor to be fearless truth tellers, zealous God fearers.

Skillful, growing in our skill and competency and teaching the Bible, willing to look people straight in the eye as Jesus did and tell it like it is. We're gonna speak the truth in love to people. We're gonna leave the results to God, we're gonna tell them nonetheless. And if you're tempted at all to think it unloving to call people out of bad churches and bad religion, just go back to this text.

Just go back to this. Reflect on Jesus cleansing the Temple knowing that even if many of those money changers and sellers of goods and everything in the Temple, even though they may have not felt loved and affirmed by Jesus on that day, ah they were being loved by Jesus. They just didn't have the eyes to see, the ears to hear, the heart to understand.

That's what we need to pray for, is that by the Spirit God would go before us and prepare the hearts of the people we talk to. We come to them in gentleness and love, but man we have got to shoot straight with people. Do not leave your loved ones to burn because they've been under bad shepherding false shepherds. I love you so much. And through you, I love all the people that you know. I want them to know the truth. I want God's Word, his,

to be vindicated, his gospel to be vindicated, that it truly comes with power and changes the life. That's what we want to see for all the people that we know, right? Amen. We want to see them knowing the Lord be saved from their sins and sanctified by his Word. Let's pray for that now.

Our Father, we love you so much, but we pale so far in comparison when we compare our love for you to the love that Jesus Christ had for you. He is the consummate example, authority. He's truth teller, God fearer, Bible teacher, and we so much want to be just like him. We pray that by his direction, by his authority over us, that's used rightfully and righteously in our lives to shape us, to mold us, to sanctify us. We pray that by the indwelling Holy Spirit that you would make us more like him, that we would speak more like him, that we'd care for people in our lives and not leave them comfortable in bad religion.

That is, that is the, that is the utmost hatred to treat people and their churches with indifference when we know the truth. So we pray that you would help us to be good students, loving, truth tellers, with the hearts of shepherds, with the minds of

PILLAR OF
—TRUTH— 

theologians, thinking deeply about your Word. We pray that you would sanctify us by the truth, renew our minds, and transform our lives so that we would live consistently with the things that we're calling people to obey from your Word and pray that you would go before us and win many for the cause of Christ, for the cause of his gospel. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.