

By What Authority Do We Exist?

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By What Authority Do We Exist?

The question has been frequently asked, "By what authority do you exist?" This is a valid question and deserves an answer. In this time of religious confusion, uncertainty, and fragmentation, many options are available to both the sincere seeker of truth and the insincere. A wrong choice can cost you eternal life! This candid presentation will help you make the right decision.

In examining the question, "By what authority do you exist?," let us first ask this: By what authority does anyone perform God's work?

There are numerous Scriptural warnings against those who arrogate to themselves this task when they have not been called by God to do so. On the other hand, strong Scriptures censure those who, when called by God to do His work, fail to carry out that responsibility. Therefore, it behooves us—whether ministers or lay members—to *know* whether we have authority to continue in that work to which we were called.

Must Be Called and Sent

The Pharisees challenged Jesus, ". . . By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?" (Matt. 21:23). "And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing. . . . The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?" (vv. 24–25). Jesus' question was embarrassing to the Pharisees. If they admitted John's baptism was from heaven, they must acknowledge Christ as the Messiah. Why? Because John's whole ministry was the preparation for the first appearance of Christ (John 1:6–9, 15; 3:25–36; Matt. 3:11–17). To acknowledge John as sent from God meant acknowledgment of Christ. This they refused to do. So they pleaded ignorance.

Later on, Christ said of John:

But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I *send* my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare the way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist . . . (Matt. 11:9–11).

Christ's acknowledgment of John's authority from heaven was an acknowledgment of His *own*.

Jesus knew a valid servant of God must be called and sent. Furthermore, Jesus recognized all constituted authority was the responsibility of God (John 19:11). While there have been rebellious movements, and the "basest of men" set up, if not appointed by God, they are certainly allowed (Dan. 4:17).

Jesus exercised the God-given authority of His commission in selecting His apostles and disciples. Of His apostles He said, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain. . ." (John 15:16). Of Himself, He said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him. . ." (John 6:44).

True Doctrine

The Apostle Paul also recognized that true servants of God must be sent. He said, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" (Rom. 10:14–15). Paul knew true ministers could comprehend true doctrine only when commissioned and sent from God. Is it the doctrine that provides the key to recognizing God's true ministers? Jesus said, ". . . My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God. . ." (John 7:16–17).

There need be no confusion. The true ministers of God preach the true doctrine. Jesus said those who truly seek the will of God would be able to recognize that true doctrine (compare John 10:14 and 10:22–29).

Warning to Those Who Arrogate Responsibility

But there are serious warnings to those who arrogate to themselves the responsibility of preaching God's word. Deuteronomy 18:20–22 says that even a prophet who speaks in God's name, and says that which he is not told to speak, must die. Therefore, the false words which he speaks should not be feared.

The sword and famine will consume those prophets who prophesy lies in God's name (Jer. 14:14–16). What is made plain in these texts and many more is that unless a man is commissioned and sent by God, the likelihood of his speaking the complete truth is practically nil! This is why arrogating responsibility not given by God is such a serious offense. God says it is the self-appointed servants who have led His people astray (Isa. 3:12; Jer. 23:16–17, 21–22, 26–27; Ezek. 13:2, 6).

Warning to Those Who Neglect God-Given Responsibility

Equally serious condemnations are made against those called of God who neglect or fail to do His work! The servant of God who fails to warn the wicked of his evil way will stand accountable (Ezek. 3:20). "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently [margin], and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood [when punishment is due]" (Jer. 48:10).

God is sore displeased at any time of apostasy, when so few are willing to remain loyal to His truth.

Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil is accounted mad [margin]: and the Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment [Heb. *right*, that which is just, lawful, according to law]. And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor. . . (Isa. 59:15–16).

God thunders, "Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" (Jer. 23:1). "Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life" (Ezek. 13:22).

Those who fail—through negligence or apostasy—to carry out God's work, have a fearful fate awaiting them.

Known by the Fruits

In the final analysis, it is the fruit produced which substantiates truth. Even those who are God's servants, and who know the truth, can apostatize (1 Cor. 9:27; Acts 20:28). It is a serious mistake to assume God's true servants cannot be deceived, or will never fail to preach truth. (Write for our article, *Can True Christians Be Deceived?*) The Bible says the true message will produce the right kind of fruits. It is by examining the results of that teaching that one can know who is proclaiming the truth (Matt. 7:15–20). Those fruits of Christian living were evident in the Church of God for many years. It was not until the failure of prophetic interpretations that the wholesale lowering of standards and watering-down of doctrine began. And since that time the fruit of what was God's work has been anything but godly!

Individual Responsibility

Jesus said, "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit" (Matt. 12:33). Those who "hope against

hope," that things will turn out acceptably as they watch the spiritual deterioration of God's people, should realize a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit (Matt. 7:18).

Jesus promised He would never forsake His Church (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5). However, His church and His people, for the most part, have forsaken Him! Even so, somewhere there is to be that faithful remnant of God's true people, and it is your responsibility to find it!

Christ kept His promise to preserve His Truth (Matt. 16:18), or there is no truth. Therefore, if one believes Christ did not keep His promise, he is admitting he never knew the Truth. That the Worldwide Church of God never proclaimed it. That the Bible is a fraud. And, that one is in hopeless religious confusion. But no one with a spiritual mind could believe that. So we must look to the past.

God's Work in Modern Times

For over forty years the Church of God faithfully proclaimed God's Truth. What began as a fledgling operation in the Willamette Valley of Oregon grew into a worldwide work of spiritual impact. Year after year, the growth averaged approximately thirty percent. Thousands were converted and began to live God's way of life. Hundreds of ministers served brethren around the world. It was a marvelous time, and it was a wonderful way of life.

But something happened. Apostasy set in. God allowed His people to be tested. What most failed to realize is—this was necessary to determine who really was converted and dedicated to God (1 Cor. 11:19). And that test will continue! For a considerable period of time, many of God's people, as God gives them spiritual discernment, will be forced to make a choice between the revealed truth or what is called "the Work." Up to this point, the majority of God's people have failed to see that what was called the "Work of God" has drifted off into secularism, worldliness, and doctrinal error. (For a clear understanding of what has taken place, send for our articles, *What Is the Work of God?* and *Doctrinal Changes—How They Affect You!*)

Because a church leadership apostatizes does not automatically make every member of that church an apostate. Because a minister turns from the Truth is no reason to assume those whom he baptized now cease to be Christians. On the contrary, those brethren who remain faithful to God are the last remaining remnant in the continuity of truth. Any minister who remains loyal and faithful to the truth taught to him, continues as a true minister of God. While the church was the instrument God used to bring the truth, it was God who called and brought forth repentance (John 6:44; 1 Pet. 1:15; Rom. 2:4). We owe allegiance to no religious body or group of men who turn from God's Truth. To be loyal to such a body is idolatry (Ex. 20:3–4).

The Past Is Key to the Present

It is the past that is the key to the present. Our past conversion is valid only if we remain faithful to the truth God gave (1 Cor. 4:2; Matt. 24:45–46). Ordinations are valid for those ministers who continue to keep and preach the Truth (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 2:2; Titus 1:9). Either the Worldwide Church of God taught the Truth, or we have no basis for calling ourselves Christians today. Those who refuse to accept the validity of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's original commission (Matt. 28:19–20) and the revealed truth, are denying the validity of their baptism. If one has accepted doctrinal changes, then he is admitting he never knew the Truth. He is admitting his baptism and conversion were false, because one cannot be converted to error (John 14:16–17, 26; 17:20–21). What is now taught as truth is totally the opposite, in major doctrines, to what was taught in the past. If one accepts doctrinal changes, then he is admitting it is only now that he received the truth, and that his past baptism is invalid!

Apostasy Foretold

What God's people must realize is that the Bible foretold apostasy at the time of the end. There was to be a true work of God in the latter days (Matt. 28:20; 10:23) which would apostatize. Read it in 2 Thessalonians, chapter two.

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away [Greek *apostasia*] first, and that man of sin be revealed . . . (2 Thess. 2:1–3).

An apostasy does not involve disassociation from an organization. The "falling away" was not to be from a church. When members, for example, quit the American Legion, they don't apostatize, they just quit. Apostasy involves a rejection of truth—a turning *to* error. So the people of God—God's Church—were prophesied to apostatize from the Truth! And this apostasy was to be great (2 Pet. 2:1–3). (To limit 2 Peter to Peter's day, of necessity means limiting the entirety of the New Testament to the time period during which it was written. All informed Bible students know better.) The truth is made plain! God's people have turned from "the faith once delivered unto the saints"—the faith delivered in our day (Jude 3, 18). They have gone off into adultery, Sabbath-breaking, paganism and despicable error. But it need not happen to you. There is yet time for you to act—to recapture your true convictions and to "shore up" your faith.

Responsibility of the Individual

Too many of God's people, for too long now, have hidden behind the cloak of what is called "the work" or "the church." It is time we realize we are each going to answer to God for the decisions we make. Members who have condemned historical leaders who "obeyed only what they were commanded" have now done exactly the same thing spiritually by obeying only what they were commanded in opposition to the truth and their own conscience! To say, "It is the church's responsibility to decide doctrine, and all I am expected to do is obey," is avoiding a responsibility God gave to each one of us! It is just as wrong for the ministry to teach such dogma as it is wrong for members to obey it. There was a time we thought the corruption of doctrine could only go so far. "Surely they will never teach Sunday worship." And yet, that is exactly what has happened. Even though it took two decades to occur, the ultimate result of a corruption of the smallest doctrine has been the eventual corruption of it all. Once we become conditioned to accept the smallest of changes, we condition ourselves to allow greater and greater perversion. God will hold us each responsible for upholding the totality of His revealed Truth.

For those who are members or former members of the Worldwide Church of God, who called you to a knowledge of the Truth? Let the Bible answer! ". . . God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto *he called you* by our gospel. . ." (2 Thess. 2:13–14). Therefore, your allegiance must be to the God who brought you to conversion. Do not disregard it! God did not call you to witness your rejection of His true way. He did not call you to follow an organization of men whose top leadership no longer has either the inclination or the desire to live godly.

If one follows men, God will yet deal with him in the future (1 Cor. 3:15), but obedience to His true way will come only after one has paid a terrible price. It is your responsibility now to remain faithful and loyal to the truth once given. Do you have the courage? Do you have the faith? Do you have the character to put God first in your life?

Responsibility of the Ministry

What is the responsibility of the called and chosen minister of God? Is he free to hide behind the cloak of organizational structure? Or that which the leadership or doctrinal committee, contrary to the Bible, decides is truth? What does the Bible say?

First of all, the basis for a minister's ordination is not the church. While it is true the church was used as an instrument in his ordination, it is God who placed him into the ministry (2 Cor. 3:5–6; 1 Thess. 2:4; Col. 4:17; Acts 20:28). Therefore, when a church turns from the Truth, the true minister of God must not be locked into that apostate physical organization through the ordination.

Second, the true minister of God is responsible for teaching truth (Matt. 5:19; 1 Cor. 9:16; 2 Tim. 4:2). When he is forbidden by a religious organization to preach the Truth, then he must decide whether to obey God or men (Acts 5:29; 4:19). Woe to him if he allows himself to be muzzled, and refuses to preach what he knows is truth! To conform to doctrinal change for the sake of position, salary, or job security makes him a hireling.

God condemns hirelings (John 10).

Third, the true minister does not abandon the flock. While he may be forced out of the organization, he does not turn from his God-given responsibility to assist those who want help (Ezek. 34:4–10). Those ministers who have forsaken the truth (while still in any apostate organization), and have forsaken their calling to faithfully proclaim that truth, will have much for which to answer. God places great import upon the kind of influence that "converts a sinner from the error of his way" (Jas. 5:19–20). And if those who are or were the ministers of God have eyes to see and ears to hear, they had better begin to "seek out that which was lost" before God requires it at their hand (Ezek. 34:4, 10). Ministers are held accountable for failing to teach the Truth (Jer. 23:13, 22).

Last, true ministers of God must continue to teach and preach the Truth. Even if the church or the people turn from God, the true minister remains faithful (Matt. 24:44–46; Ezek. 22:28–30). This is why Paul told the Ephesian elders, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God. . ." (Acts 20:28). Paul knew apostasy was coming and admonished the elders to be faithful and loyal (v. 29). Ministers must have godly motivation in their service to God (1 Pet. 5:1–4); otherwise, they will not have the character or devotion to remain faithful in a time of crisis.

Likewise, a true minister will never separate for anything but a departure from revealed truth. Those who have left and started their own works because of personal differences or administrative debates outside the realm of doctrinal perversion, prove by such actions, that the Word, the Truth, is not paramount in their thinking.

Must Hold Fast to Truth

Regardless of whether one is a minister or a layman, God holds him accountable for the truth. If one is in agreement with the doctrinal changes in the Worldwide Church of God or any of its many splinter groups, then the only basis for his conviction is "scholarship." The Worldwide Church of God has repudiated divine revelation and the Holy Spirit as a source of strength to overcome. (Write for our article, *What Liberalism Has Done to the Church of God.*) If the past teachings were not the result of divine revelation, then God has not been a part of any religious activity in modern times! One is, then, free to "let his conscience be his guide" and

attend the church of his choice. In its formative years, the Church of God was the only organization founded on divine revelation. No *present* religion is founded on the validity of divine revelation, not even the Worldwide Church of God, since its apostasy! All regard scholarship as the basis for truth. Yet, to accept scholarship is to accept confusion, because scholarship is in total disagreement as to what constitutes truth. Either God revealed the truth, or there is no such thing as truth! There is no other way.

At whatever segment of time God reveals truth (Heb. 1:1–2), Christians are expected to hold fast: ". . . he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matt. 10:22). What is there to endure if doctrine and lifestyle can be changed from generation to generation? What is there to overcome if the standard for character (God's law) can be altered to suit the times in which we live?

It should be clear to any thinking person that the basis of conversion was the past teaching in God's church. To accept anything else is to deny one's baptism and conversion. We must not throw away salvation by being led to believe that whatever comes out in the name of Christ is truth. The Bible proves there was to be an apostasy. That apostasy has occurred. We are told further doctrinal changes will occur continually.

The only authority we have for calling ourselves Christians is our past baptism. How can one turn from God and reject that baptism by accepting these new doctrines which all knew, for years, were error?

Those faithful brethren and faithful ministers have every God-given right to continue in the Truth.

It is the purpose of the Church of God, The Eternal, to hold fast to that truth and to teach and proclaim it to any and all who come. The authority and basis for that truth and that work comes from God who gave it. To deny that truth, and to deny that responsibility given to those of us in the ministry, is to deny God and Jesus Christ. We manifest that denial if we forsake that responsibility and fail to teach and preach the Truth! Likewise, one manifests the same denial by accepting erroneous doctrinal changes which are turning him away from God's revealed way of life.

God help us to recognize and remain loyal to the Truth He gave us!