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## BY WHO’S AUTHORITY?

### I. Introduction

- a. Many of us tend to get very defensive when God calls for a course correction. We immediately want to retaliate and demand that God change His position instead of changing our own. Of course we don’t directly challenge God, but indirectly, by attempting to strip His messages of their authority. This is well illustrated in a radio conversation rumored to have taken place between a U.S. naval ship and Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland in October, 1995:

CANADIANS: Please divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision.

AMERICANS: Recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the north to avoid a collision.

CANADIANS: Negative. You will have to divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision.

AMERICANS: This is the captain of a U.S. Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course.

CANADIANS: No, I say again, you divert YOUR course.

AMERICANS: This is the Aircraft Carrier USS LINCOLN, the second largest ship in the United States Atlantic Fleet. We are accompanied with three Destroyers, three Cruisers and numerous support vessels. I DEMAND that you change your course 15 degrees north. I say again, that’s one-five degrees north, or counter-measures will be undertaken to ensure the safety of this ship.

CANADIANS: This is a lighthouse. Your call.

- b. The gift of prophecy has always guided God’s church in safe paths. This gift, in accordance with Ephesians chapter 4, has –
- i.) equipped the church for ministry
  - ii.) edified the body by giving clear direction and reproof when needed in the areas of evangelism, health, education, foreign missions, publishing, etc.
  - iii.) brought unity in doctrinal understandings and teachings
  - iv.) preserved the body from the many deceptive doctrines that have been introduced, and
  - v.) challenged God’s people to strive toward Christlikeness of Character, until we come to the “measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”
- c. How has this been accomplished? One word – Authority. God has invested His prophets with authority. Authority is what makes the prophet effective. A prophet without authority is like a justice system without law enforcement officers or a lion without teeth or claws. If a prophet has no authority, everything he says is simply “good advice.”

## II. The Authority of the Prophet

a. “By whose authority...?” (Luke 20:1-8).

- i.) What is the question of the priests, scribes and elders? “Where did you get your authority?” Jesus had just cleansed the temple the second time. “Who authorized you to do this?”
  - (a) Does Jesus answer them? Only with a question. “You tell me, where did John the Baptist get his authority?” They refused to answer His question, so Jesus refused to answer theirs. Why?

b. Those who rejected John the Baptist rejected Christ (Luke 7:24-30).

- i.) John was to prepare the way before Christ. Notice what happened: Those who received John’s ministry and baptism also received the teaching of Jesus. Those who rejected the ministry of John also rejected Jesus.

c. Those who rejected the servants rejected the Son (Luke 20:9-14).

- i.) The issue is one of authority – Jesus would enter into no debate. The priests, scribes and elders asked Him where He received His authority. He responded by asking them where John the Baptist received his authority, because He knew that if they could recognize John’s authority they would recognize His; if they could not recognize John’s authority, He would be wasting His time in answering them. If they could not recognize God speaking through His prophet, neither would they hear God’s voice speaking through His Son.

d. “He that receiveth you receiveth me... (Mt. 10:40-2; Eze. 3:4-7)

- i.) You see, it is God who speaks through the prophet His messages of warning and reproof, as well as comfort and encouragement. Those who reject the prophet are in reality rejecting the one who sent them.

e. The Bible and the Bible only (Jn. 9:28-9; 5:44-7)

- i.) In essence, the religious leaders said, “We have Moses, and that’s all we need. Moses and Moses only!” Had they truly received Moses, wouldn’t they have received Christ, whom Moses said would come (Deut. 18:18-19)?
  - (a) “I am come in my Father’s name and you receive me not... (Jn. 5:44-7)
  - (b) You are not familiar with the Scriptures. *If you had made God's word your study, with a desire to reach the Bible standard and attain to Christian perfection, you would not have needed the Testimonies. It is because you have neglected to acquaint yourselves with God's inspired Book that He has sought to reach you by simple, direct testimonies, calling your attention to the words of inspiration which you had neglected to obey, and urging you to fashion your lives in accordance with its pure and elevated teachings. (5T 664)*

- (c) “Suppose we are about to start upon a voyage. The owner of the ship gives us a book of directions, telling us that it contains sufficient instructions for our whole journey, and that if we will follow them, we will safely reach our destination. Once we’ve set sail, we open our guidebook to learn its contents. We find that its author lays down general principles to guide us in our voyage, and instructs us as far as is practical, touching the various problems that may arise until journey’s end; but he also tells us that the last part of our journey will be especially dangerous; “but for this part of the journey,” he says, “I have provided you a pilot, who will meet you, and give you the extra guidance you will need; you must be careful to pay special attention to his instruction.” With these directions we reach the dangerous time we were warned of, and the pilot, *according to promise*, appears. But as he offers his services, some of the crew rise up against him. “We have the *original* book of directions,” they say, “and that’s enough for us. We don’t need anything else.” Which of the crew members now follow that *original book of directions*? Those who *reject* the pilot, or those who receive him, as that book *instructs* them to do? You be the judge.” – *Uriah Smith, Review and Herald, January 13, 1863 (paraphrased)*.
- f. “They knew Him not, neither yet the voice of the prophets... (Ac. 13:27; 1 Thes. 2:15)
- i.) Note here that those Jewish leaders who rejected the messages of the prophets ended up fulfilling those messages in their rejection of God and His Son, Jesus Christ. If one would have told them early on that their failure to conform their lives entirely to the prophetic messages would result in their rejection of their own Messiah, they would surely have scoffed at the idea. Likewise today, there is an unsettling overconfidence in our own ability to “steer our own vessel safely into the harbor”. ***Could it be possible that our failure to conform our lives to the messages of the prophet could lead us to be unprepared for our Savior’s return?***
- g. “If they hear not Moses and the prophets... (Lk. 16:27-31)
- i.) *Read Lk. 23:8-9.* Why didn’t Jesus answer any of Herod’s questions? Because he had already given him every opportunity of hearing the truth through the message of John the Baptist. There was nothing more to say.
- (a) When a view of Scripture is presented, many do not ask, Is it true--in harmony with God's word? but, By whom is it advocated? and unless it comes through the very channel that pleases them, they do not accept it. So thoroughly satisfied are they with their own ideas that they will not examine the Scripture evidence with a desire to learn, but refuse to be interested, merely because of their prejudices. The Lord often works where we least expect Him; He surprises us by revealing His power through instruments of His own choice, while He passes by the men to whom we have looked as those through whom light should come. God desires us to receive the truth upon its own merits-- because it is truth. (TM 106)

- (b) Whoever turns from the light in one instance hardens his heart to disregard the light upon other matters. Whoever violates moral obligations in the matter of eating and dressing prepares the way to violate the claims of God in regard to eternal interests. (3T 63)
- (c) Had Elder Smith, and those united with him, been standing in the light, they would have recognized the voice of warning and reproof; but he calls it a human work, and casts it aside. The work he is doing he will wish undone ere long. He is weaving a net around himself that he cannot easily break. ***This is not my opinion. What voice will you acknowledge as the voice of God?*** What power has the Lord in reserve to correct your errors, and show you your course as it is?... You have, by your own course, closed every avenue whereby the Lord would reach you. Will he raise one from the dead to speak to you? ***If you refuse to believe until every shadow of uncertainty, and every possibility of doubt is removed, you will never believe.*** The doubt that demands perfect knowledge will never yield to faith... The word of the Lord comes to us all who have not resisted his Spirit by determining not to hear and obey. This voice is heard in warnings, in counsels, in reproof. *It is the Lord's message of light to his people. If we wait for louder calls, or better opportunities, the light may be withdrawn, and we left in darkness.* (Pamphlet 117, p. 51; a portion found in 3SM 69)

h. No Remedy (2 Chr. 36:14-16)

- i.) [Some of the Brethren] talk flippantly of the Testimonies given of God for the benefit of His people, and pass judgment upon them, giving their opinions and criticizing this and that, when they would better place their hands upon their lips and lie with their faces in the dust; for they know no more of the spirit of the Testimonies than they do of the Spirit of God. (4T 443)

Thank God for the prophetic guidance He has given us! We don't have to spend our precious time chasing the devil's rabbits – church steeples, head coverings, feast days, the personality of the Holy Spirit, etc. We have a wonderful lighthouse to guide us safely home; to shed light on the way when we can't see, and to redirect our course when we are going the wrong way. We have wonderful counsel on how to live as Christians, how to care for our bodies, how to raise our children, how to educate them, how to share Christ with those around us. Why is it that we spend so much time reading the works of uninspired authors even to the exclusion of inspiration? If an angel from heaven were to appear with a heavenly message, how many would flock to hear all about it? How much would people be willing to pay just for the smallest piece of heavenly instruction? Why is it we have to a great degree neglected this wonderful gift of light? Are we afraid we may have to change our course? My dear friends, if this light fails to stir us, greater light can do no more. If we wait for louder calls, we may be left in darkness. Today, will you commit your ways to the Lord, and purpose to walk fully in the light, even if it requires a course correction?