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THE BAPTIST HERITAGE

VOLUME XXVII ISSUE 9 *OCTOBER 20, 2003*

By What Authority?

This article is slightly revised from when it first appeared in the June 2002 issue of The Baptist Heritage.

> Matthew 21:23 And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

I 'preached' my first message in the fall of 1958. I felt then and I believe now that it was a pitiful failure. A fellow student at Bob Jones University invited me to speak to his youth work. As a freshman Bible major, I was being 'introduced' to New Testament Greek and, believing that I should 'share my knowledge,' I consulted, in my preparation, all the commentaries that I could find and read the 'original' Greek. When I stood before that handful of 'inner city,' under-privileged youngsters, I proceeded to share with them the rich nuggets that I had discovered in Wuest, Thayer, Trench, Vincent, Robertson, The Pulpit Commentary, and the several other volumes available in the university library. That night as I spoke, those youths sat staring at me, obviously spellbound and speechless—at least there was no visi-

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this and that

Editor and Staff
Jerald L. Manley Gary Roland
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Before the LORD

In recent weeks, we have received, in larger quantities than usual, requests for prayer from readers. Each is prayed for and then passed along to the congregation to remember in prayer. Those that are of sensitive nature are shared with the congregation as "unspoken."

Some months ago, we were moved to begin praying for those who receive The Baptist Heritage. We have not solicited requests from you, but many of you have done so. These two events have so closely coincided that we believe this to be indication that our burden to pray for you was proper. Our mailing list continues to grow—it is impossible to cover each name daily, but we do pray for you.

We appreciate your prayers for this effort. It is a constant mystery why or how our attempts are an encouragement or

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This publication is mailed to you on purpose. Someone who knows you believed that you would profit by receiving and reading it. If you do not agree, we will remove your name from the next possible mailing. We have no desire to intrude or offend.

this and that

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challenge to others. The mailing list is not a purchased one; it grows by referrals from a reader. Even so, we do visit mailboxes where we are unwelcome. This is not intentional by us or by the person who gives the name. When it happens, we remove the offended address in the next possible mailing.

Hopefully, while you will find some things with which you disagree, you will find much that stirs your heart and mind to mediation and consideration. Perhaps, it will help some to remember that your only expense is the time involved in reading. The Heritage Baptist Church of Pensacola bears all the monetary expense. This is sent as a gift. We only hope it is a useful gift.

—Pastor Manley

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A Final Thought

The theistic evolutionist is one that feels compelled to blend that which is revealed ("to make known through divine inspiration"—Merriam Webster, first definition) with that which is determined by evidences that are empirical ("originating in or based on observation or experience" "—Merriam Webster, first definition). The theistic evolutionist believes that God was fully capable to begin the creation of the world, but that God was actually incapable of completing creation without the providential use of 'natural' means. The theistic evolutionist contends that God did it, but that He was compelled to supernaturally use natural means to accomplish His purpose.

In like fashion, I am assured by learned men that, in every generation, God has providentially "ensured that there have been qualified textual critics" present within the community of believers to sift the chaff from the wheat and to recompile the word of God from among the various available dismembered, discarded, disinterred sources. In other words, God was fully capable to start the process of giving His word, but was actually unable to preserve His word without the use of 'natural' means. Strangely, even though the assurance is given, the faithful, capable scholars of the past obviously never achieved the task, because the process is ongoing and the same learned men that propagate this approach also give assurance that, if ample discoveries occur and if "textual critics do their work well," we someday might once again have what God first gave.

Is the rationalistic accommodation of theistic biblical criticism really any different than the rationalistic accommodation of theistic evolution? Do not both give God the wisdom and power to begin, but not the wisdom and power to accomplish? Do not both substitute faith in science and human reasoning for faith in God? It seems so to me.

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ble sign of response—stunned, I thought, with my amazing ability to contextualize my message amid the historical and theological implications of the rich nuggets diligently panned from Alexander's Koine Greek.

Nearing the mid-point of the 'message,' I realized, with an abruptness that physically jarred me, much as would a blow to the stomach, that my elucidation was so out of place as to be humorous—except for the fact that I was there as a preacher. As such, I was supposed to be exalting the LORD Jesus and revealing His offer of salvation and applying His call to discipleship to those young people. Instead, I was a pathetic, parroting parody of a preacher. When I returned to campus, I found a quiet, lonely spot, beneath the stars, and confessed to the Lord my foolishness and my sins of pride and arrogance. Instead of the Scripture, I had given to those young people, a considerable quantity of scholarship, none of it mine and little of it pertinent to their lives. I did not comprehend the details; I simply knew that, despite the praying and the studying, I had failed to be a preacher.

The aspect that troubled me most that night was that I knew I lacked something. Though I was not able to identify the deficiency with any precision, I did have a vague awareness of the cause of the problem even before I left the room where the meeting had taken place. I knew I had diligently studied for the message. High school speech class had given me the tools to know how to prepare for a debate or a speech; and all that preparation I had done. Wherever I had failed, it was not in a lack of study. I also knew that I had added the 'spiritual' element to the preparation; I had earnestly prayed over that message in the days before I was to speak. Additionally, I knew that I was called to preach. Even so, I had no doubts that while I might have delivered a speech, taught a lesson, or had lectured, I had not preached.

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Whatever 'preaching' might be, I knew that night that 'preaching' is not what happened that night. I talked, but I did not communicate spiritual truth; there was no evidence of any spiritual influence upon the hearers.

As we returned to the campus, I began the searching for whatever was lacking—the struggle that would continue for some time. The events of that night planted the seed of an idea that would slowly germinate and would finally produce, in time, a full concept. My text that night was simple. 1 John 2:6, "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." The text had convicted me and I was certain (*before* the message attempt) that it would convict others also. The trouble could not be the text; of that, I was certain, because it was the word of God. Whatever went wrong went wrong with my 'preaching.' My intent was noble. My approach, however, was truly "zeal without knowledge." I, who barely knew the Greek alphabet, was so pretentious as to exegete the 'original' Greek text. Certainly, as you are obviously able to see from your vantage, I was a novice trying to be wise beyond my years, but there was something else and that 'something' was much deeper than affected knowledge. More was involved than youthful inexperience or a simple misstep in timing or presentation. The problem was beyond the folly of an ostentatious discourse, but I would not get a handle on the depth of the implications of my 'preaching' that night. I only realized that I had made a serious mess of my first 'official' message.

That evening I began a process of soul-searching that would continue for years; I would, in fact, finish my schooling and be involved in starting a second church before I grasped exactly what I had done in that message. As I thought of the message, I described it as one that had not 'jelled.' That term has stayed with me ever since. Either a

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preachers that make such corrections, as a Baptist, I believe (because the Bible teaches it) in soul-liberty, in the priesthood of the believer, in soul competency, and in the Lordship of Christ; therefore, each, as individually accountable, must make the choice as to how to answer the question and must individually and personally accept the responsibility for that choice.

I appreciate the other material those men provide me when they are not "correcting the ancient scribes and the old translators" and, with Christian compassion on them, I simply ignore their own interpolations. We will walk together as far as we "be agreed." However, what I find is that while I do not break fellowship with them (over their personal exercise of soul-liberty), they, taking indignant umbrage and personal offense over my own application of soul-liberty, resort to scorn, derision, and McCarthy-like branding and sever the fellowship. (The first principle of dishonest debate is "when facts will not defeat the proposition of the opposition, resort to ridicule.") Labeling and name-calling are the tools of the politician; exchange of information and deliberation of reasoning are the instruments of diplomats. My experience would suggest that Baptist preachers include in their number more politicians than diplomats.

Being neither politician nor diplomat, as a preacher, I am content to say, "Thus saith the Lord" and, therefore, "whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear," I have done my duty. I cannot do otherwise, knowing that I must face that old question before the Judgment Seat: "Is true authority 'from heaven' or 'of men'?"

By the way, what answer are you going to give?

—Pastor Manley

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Scriptures; he called them "the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law" (Romans 2:20). Then, he uses the same (Greek) word later as he describes those who have the Scripture, but who do not acknowledge it as truth. The Apostle describes religious people who have the "form," but who deny the "power" of that form. 2 Timothy 3:5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. The context of this statement is touching upon "truth" and "Scripture"—verses 2:25; 3:7,8, 10, 14, 15-17; 4:2-4.

My faith in the integrity of the word of God and of the God of the word does not answer the retort of every skeptical mind, not even mine. My own old nature can produce more potential apostasy, let alone unanswerable questions, than I will permit to hold court. I simply rule such objections as 'out of order' and, leaning not unto or upon my own understanding, I trust the Great Jehovah, Who cannot lie, to have kept His word. Rather than accepting the premise of 'lost and in need of recovery' Scripture, I have chosen to accept the unassailable truth of Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret *things belong* unto the LORD our God: but those *things which are* revealed *belong* unto us and to our children for ever, that *we* may do all the words of this law." I cannot "do all the words of this law," if those words are unobtainable for me to have and to hold. The authority is in the words of the word and not in the diligence and faithfulness of honest, sincere, restoration. What I do not understand in the *'how'* of preservation, I am quite content to leave within the file marked 'secret things'—a file to which I do not have the combination or password. It does not belong to me or to you.

I leave it to each person to answer the unavoidable question of the Lord Jesus: "Is true authority 'from heaven' or 'of men'?" While I obviously disagree with those writers and

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message jells or it does not. The phrase was likely suggested to me by a lifetime of having watched my mother make jelly. Occasionally, a batch of the mixture would simply not produce jelly. The proper ingredients were there; the timing and the heat were appropriate, but the concoction would not jell. It became a kind of thick syrup; but it was not jelly. Going over that first message in my heart, I could only describe it as not having 'jelled.' As did my mother with her non-jelly jelly, I knew what the *result* of the problem was; I did not know the *why* of the problem.

Examining the sermon, I realized that I had often said, "Thus saith this scholar or that commentary, and the 'original' says" but I had not said much that "The Lord said." That night I decided that the proportions of 'sources' and Scripture might have been wrong. I resolved to use more Scripture and to place less emphasis on the Greek and the quotations from commentaries. Years passed before another incident took place that revealed to me exactly *why* I had prepared as I had for that first sermon and to some extent why I had continued preparing as I did over those years. Through this period, as I continued to preach, some sermons proved effective and sometimes I would again feel that my effort was a useless failure. In time, I came to believe that a 'non-jelling' message was one lacking the ingredient of *authority*. It took more time before I understood what the authority that 'jells' a sermon is.

The experience of that first sermon and my response to it both helped me and, at the same time, hurt me. The benefit was that I developed an urgency to study the English Bible, to seek to understand English grammar, to strive to learn to compose understandable prose, and to concentrate on speech and diction. This was a feeling and not an intelligent conclusion derived from logical considerations. I began

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to read my Bible through once each month; and sought opportunities to preach. I took every speech course the University offered, was involved in the start of a radio ministry, and began to write sermons for broadcast. These were all positive, productive influences; I regret none of them and profited from all of them.

The determinant was that though I felt a pressure to learn the languages of the texts, it became a horrible struggle. Somehow, I could not retain what I was studying in New Testament Greek. The Greek instructor in a private session suggested that I had "a mental block" when it came to Greek. It seemed that no matter the time devoted or the effort expended, I could not hold on to the material. It was, apparently, as my teacher discerned that my mind was rejecting the Greek. I had been exposed to both Latin and French in high school and found them profitable. I believed then, and still do, that Greek (and Hebrew) has considerable value to the student of the Scriptures.

In the third year after my graduation and ordination, in the second ministry, a visiting preacher asked me a question after a message. He asked as a friend, with a proper spirit, and in such a way, that it was instructive to me far beyond what he could have imagined. I had preached from one of Paul's epistles. In the course of the message, I suggested that a phrase in the passage needed to be corrected so that my congregation might understand what was actually intended. When he and I were later alone, my friend asked, "Who made the mistake?" That simple question had the same effect on me as I had experienced during my first sermon. It certainly caught my attention.

In the days that followed, as I thought about that question, several possibilities of an answer occurred. (1) Did the

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scholarship was cited to authenticate these contentions. His position, and that of many others, is a straightforward expression of faith in the integrity and the skill of the scholars. That particular writer and those who adhere to his perspective are not embarrassed to state their faith in those terms of percentages. They do not hesitate to write further bold professions of faith that, if the Lord tarries long enough, such scholarship shall restore the entirety of the lost words, giving a one hundred percent Bible. Until then, we are to rejoice that we have a Bible that is thus a ninety-two to ninety-four percent trustworthy, accurate, reflective presentation of the word of God. Every plank of this platform is "a statement of faith." To believe this premise is to believe it by faith.

I also believe what I believe about preservation by faith. That faith is anticipatory on what may have been accomplished or which yet might be achieved by the efforts of good men; my faith is reflective in what the good God has already performed. My faith is not in the ability of humanity to recover, but in the ability of the Triune God to preserve. By faith, I believe that the God of Heaven gave His word and has preserved His word—not in the sands of Egypt nor in the cloistered libraries, but in the hands and hearts of His people. My faith is based upon the promises of Jehovah God. My assurance is built upon the record He has maintained since creation. Human scholarship, even sanctified, sincere human scholarship, has a record that does not inspire trust nor convey assurance. I have little faith in humanity. It seems to me that a goodly number of men fail in the same way that I did by placing authority in the "of men" rather than in the "from heaven."

The apostle Paul used an intriguing word to describe the

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sessed was that which God had said. The integrity of the Hebrew Scriptures, "the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms," therefore, should be beyond challenge, directly or by inference, to any believer.

What the God Who gave the word did for His word from the day Moses wrote the first word (or perhaps I ought to say Elihu, whom I believe recorded the book of Job) until the birth of Christ, I believe He has continued to do from the time the apostles wrote to our very hour. As for me, I accept by faith this act of the consistent, faithful transmission of Scripture, of the deliberate, planned preservation of the text, and of the unceasing, continuous perpetuation of truth. I do not believe—indeed, I cannot believe—that the God Who gave the word, Who requires me to "preach the word," and Who expects my listeners to receive "the word of God . . . not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:13) would or could ever have allowed that word to "pass away" and be lost to those to whom He sent it. I believe that He Who did not let a single word of His prophet Samuel "fall to the ground" (1 Samuel 3:19) would never permit His Own word to fall <u>into</u> the ground.

Recently, I read a well-written opinion that Christians should realize that the Hebrew and Greek texts as provided by scholarly research are so close to the original autographs in content that only six to eight percent of the words in the newer Greek and Hebrew editions of original texts even have a questionable heritage. There is no debate over the exactness of ninety-two to ninety-four percent of the original Hebrew and Greek words and, the degreed writer continued, among that six to eight percent of doubtful heritage there are no words that affect any doctrine. A goodly selection of

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Holy Spirit give Paul the wrong word? (2) Did the apostle dictate the wrong word to the one who actually wrote the words on the parchment? (3) Did the amanuensis (In this case, it would have been either Stephanas, Fortunatus, Achaieus, or Timotheus.) write a different word from what Paul had dictated? (4) Did a sleepy or "over-wise" copyist misread or change the word (to correct a perceived previous error) sometime after it was written? (5) Did a translator read the wrong word or select the wrong manuscript? (6) Did the expositor that I had read provide me with the wrong word? Or perhaps, (7) was it that I had decided to alter the text for a 'better' word choice to strengthen my message? These seemed to be my only choices of an answer. The first three seemed to be impossibilities, deserving no real consideration. That left me with four choices—all interconnected. I had not used only one commentator, but the influence of those consulted was real. Those writers used numbers (as I have given them here) "four" and "five" to justify their arguments and beliefs. This realization shocked me in its implications. Moving into these areas was much like stepping into a minefield. If words were changed by copyists, translators, commentators, or <u>me</u> to validate a pre-conceived concept, then the conclusion was obvious. I had in my possession and had given to my congregation the words of men rather than the word of God.

Questioning the legitimacy of one word and accepting the possibility of an erroneous word opened the door to doubting the authenticity of any other word, even if not <u>all</u> other words. Rather than holding a settled, sure, and steadfast text, I held, instead, a potential text or an approximate text. It seemed to me that I was saying, "It is highly likely that this is what the Lord intended to say" as opposed to declar-

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ing, "Thus saith the Lord." I faced a crisis of confidence—the predicament was simply phrased as "in whom should I place my faith?" I had assumed that depending upon 'conservative' or 'fundamental' scholarship provided safety and reliability. Now, I was unsure. If the text was indeed subject to correction, how could I be positive that a conservative viewing of the Scripture was valid? The issue was whether I even had the Scripture or not.

Accepting one scholar or one group of scholars meant, of necessity, rejecting another scholar or another group of scholars. I was passing judgment upon the scholars who were passing judgment upon the words of Scripture. Because I had a bias toward the Scripture being the word of God, I was willing to give more weight to the corrections of conservative men than I was to liberal writers. Now, as I considered the matter, I wondered how, if I continued to accept this premise of having 'a tentative text in need of correction' I could ever be certain that minor, non-essential mistakes were the only flaws transmitted in that text? With what measure of assurance did or could I know that errors of fact and substance were not included in my Bible? The only basis for that belief was the assurances of the conservative scholars stating that the only mistakes contained in the text were of an inconsequential nature and affected no major doctrine.

I had moved into the realm of the faithfulness, the consistency, and the actual integrity of the transmission of the authentic words of God. I began to realize that I was not dealing, in my replacement and alteration of the text, with the simple issue of selecting one synonym to replace another nor was I using an expanded English definition to broaden the meaning. I was not 'tweaking' or explaining the tense of a verb to add clarity of action or exactness of expression. I

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tries and an executive of a corporation than he is the shepherd of sheep. Too many pastors have an office, not a study. I have known a few who spent more on their golf clubs than on their library. His church employs a business manager, rather than electing a treasurer, because of the importance of the bottom-line. I have been told of preachers who use a notebook computer in the pulpit so references are quickly located—it is more efficient time management than page turning; just as the projector and screen are more cost effective than hymnals. The pressure is production, production, and more production.

When we preachers deliver the message is His word in our hearts "as a burning fire shut up" in our bones, so that we grow weary with forbearing and dare not, for we can not, *but preach?* (Jeremiah 20:9)? Does such a burden rest upon us that it is truly, "Woe is me, if I preach not the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16)? When we 'assume the position' behind the sacred desk, do we preach as "a dying man to dying men?" Is it "Thus saith the Lord?" Or, is it "Thus speaketh learned men?" Do we depend upon the Holy Ghost to convict our listeners "of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" or have we learned the sanctioned techniques that will manipulate the psyche of the attendees so that we might gain guaranteed results? As the passage from Matthew given above demonstrates, the only authority that the Lord Jesus Christ ever cited for His actions or His words was "the Scriptures:" those books that you and I know as the Old Testament. He quoted Moses and the prophets and never once—not once—did He indicate that He needed to correct a scribal scribble or a transmission error. He declared most clearly that what the common people, who heard Him gladly, and the rulers, who listened only to catch Him in His word, pos-

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need to read and meditate over the works left us by the previous generations. The man who has been left a bridge to use, but insists on fording the stream by himself or of building his own bridge, is influenced by the deceitful spirit of his pride; he is not led by the Holy Spirit of Truth. We preachers need the help of those who walk ahead of us. We are not to follow them blindly, but the effort of straightening a 'broken trail' is much easier *and safer* than hacking our own way into the wilderness. The preacher can spend the gold another has found even as he can be assisted in learning how to tell fool's gold from gold through observing another's mistakes. Experience is never the best teacher and experience is only a good teacher when I learn from the experience of another and avoid the mistakes and injuries that person sustained in getting that experience.

Thus, I am pleading for more preparation, not less, more study, not less, and more use of helps, not less. I am also contending that the source of our authority is not that study—but the word of God that diligent, consistent study enables us to present faithfully. Too many preachers have Psalm 81:10 for their life verse: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." We have forgotten that the Apostle charged Timothy to study to show himself "approved unto God." The use of the word "shew" with the word "approved" conveys the fact of accountability and the possibility of not receiving an approval or a disapproval. The area of accountability is not in 'crowd gathering' or 'recognition gathering.' The preacher will be approved for having "rightly dividing the word of truth" but disapproved should he wrongly divide the word of truth. To divide the Scriptures 'rightly' requires much study.

Today's pastor is often more an administrator of minis-

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had not cross-referenced to another usage of the word to give a comparison or alternative flavor to the word. I was not probing the etymology of the word to give background color. All of which are legitimate and proper exegesis tools.

What I had done was entirely different. I was challenging whether or not the words on the pages of my Bible were in fact the words of God or the substituted words of humanity. In the message, I had replaced, by the authority of scholarship (even if conservative scholarship), one Greek word for an entirely different one. In doing so, I was accepting that either proposition 'four' or 'five' was an undeniable, unquestionable fact. Whichever one it might prove to be was immaterial. I had acknowledged and had propagated to my people that the biblical text in our hands (mine and theirs) was untrustworthy. If what I had said about the necessity of correcting the text were factual, then there existed in our Bibles either a scribal error (the inclusion of a corruption by some individual transcriber of the text either accidentally or intentionally) or a textual stream choice error (the decision by a translator to use or not to use a particular manuscript or fragment thereby omitting truth or introducing error). No other possibilities existed. I had, in the text, the right word or I did not.

The consequence of rejecting the premise of the faithful transmission of the authentic word of God became obvious. If the words in my Bible were not accurately reflective English equivalents of the very words that God had originally given, if the actual words had been lost, then what I held was not *wholly* the word of God. Whether the failure of continuity was through an unintentional act of careless or a deliberate manipulation of corruption was immaterial. If this were true that the words God gave were now no longer known,

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then the book I held, at best, could only contain an approximation of the word of God; and, only with the assistance of reconstructive, rehabilitative scholarship would I ever know the validity of any given word. The irrationality of that position was suddenly fully rational to me. My error of mindset became visible with as much clearness and simplicity as if I had a blindness lifted. My faith must be either in the providential preservation of the Sovereign God or in the practical perfection of sanctified fallen humanity.

Through my friend's question, I understood, as never before, the *why* of the *what* I had done that long ago night when I had so miserably failed. I also recalled another night that same year. In the spring of 1959, my father visited the campus for the Bible Conference. As Dad left, he gave me a new Bible, the remains of which are on my desk as I write this article. Sometime between his visit and the end of the school year, I was again in engaged in this heavy struggle over the accuracy of Scripture. One evening, I sought a quiet place on the back campus and determined to settle the issue. Before I went to bed that night, on a front page of the Scofield Bible that Dad gave me, I wrote the following note: "This is the word of God precisely and exactly as He wants us to have it."

I believed what I wrote in 1959 (in theory as it were), but I was not practicing that belief in 1964. The lure of 'superior knowledge' had proven stronger than I could withstand. My authority for what I preached had become again, as it was for that first sermon, the scholarship of good conservative men. I had allowed their credentials and my perception of their godliness to entice me to accept and to preach their authority instead of the authority of the text in my hand.

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ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." It is clear that the authority of the message must come from the content of the message. A sermon may be entertaining, a genuine crowd-pleaser, and still not be authoritative. It might be intellectually illuminating, even while it lacks any real spiritual authority. Educating an assembly is a noble occupation; but education without authority will produce mindless robots. Authority is not the same as charisma, native talent, or learned qualities. Having the ability to motivate is not the same as having authority.

This is not an argument for neglecting the brain-sweat of study. I have no quarrel with diligent study, with earnest investigation, or sincere research. Too many sermons are, as my Dad was wont to say, "just slapped to" on a Saturday night. Walking the biblical fields plowed by godly men of previous generations is never wasted time. A Spurgeon sermon each day and two or three Puritan sermons a week would not be a worthless endeavor for any preacher. Sifting through volumes of word studies (Hebrew, Greek, and English) for rich nuggets of gold is profitable indeed for all who deliver the word of God. Reading commentaries in the place of works of fiction is the better choice of habit for the pastor. Nothing, however, will ever take the place of prayerful, consistent reading of the Bible itself. Becoming a clone of Dr. Such and So or a parrot of Teacher Here and There is the work of "the wicked and slothful servant." A great many sermons are biblical in theme but lack Bible substance. The reading of a text does not an authoritative sermon make. Some texts are employed as a springboard for a spectacular splash or a launching pad for flights of fancy.

The preacher who rejects all study helps 'except my Bible' is opening himself to the counsel of his own foolishness. We

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"of men," then the correcting of 'evident' scribal errors and 'apparent' transmission inaccuracies through the work of scholars is proper and should be accepted. If, however, the authority is "from heaven," then it is not to be ceded to human ingenuity, research, or scholarship because of the weight that I or anyone else might accord to education, investigation, or creativity on the part of any human being.

By what authority does the preacher preach? On what authority does the hearer believe? Those questions are not casual inquiries.

The issue of authority is the most serious question to be asked of any of us. That question deserves solemn consideration and requires a serious answer. Each preacher and every hearer needs to be certain from where or in what his authority is vested. The laying on of hands in ordination is the evidence that his church recognizes with approval the claim of the man that he is called to preach, but ordination does not endow any authority to the preacher. Not even the call to pastor a church instills authority within the man. Some call it *unction;* others label it an *anointing*. Numerical results do not prove authority. Jeremiah failed to acquire a following, but he spoke with authority. Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:1-3:11), while explicitly told that he would not be well received, was just as explicitly told that he would stand before those unresponsive people with the authority of Jehovah God. Paul charged Timothy (2 Timothy 4:1-14) to "preach the word" and to remain "instant in season" and "out of season." He was to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." Even while he was to accept that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away *their*

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I realized that I had accepted the premise that I needed the 'original' that only my use of scholarship could provide for me, before I could adequately present the word of God. I do not wish to state that the Greek instructor exactly intended to convey the fullness of that concept to me; but that is how I had interpreted his comments as well as the comments of others. I blame no one for my arrogance other than my prideful self. As I prepared for that first message, I demonstrated, albeit unknowingly, a lack of confidence in the text of the Bible that I held and was seeking the comfort of the un-held "original." My faith was transferred from the words *in English* as found in the text of my Bible to the words *in English* as found in the scholar's books. In effect, I was seeking a translator that gave me what I wanted to read and to teach. It was indeed a subtle transference. So subtle, I did not begin to realize what I was doing until I stood before that group of young people and tried to educate them on the *real* meaning of the text. Even realizing my folly, I did not consciously understand *what* I was doing or *why* I had done what I had done. It would take those several years before I grasped the full significance of my faulty mindset. It took that simple question of a faithful friend to reveal the *why* of the *what*.

I am now more than four decades and five years beyond that first message. It was almost thirty-nine years ago that my preacher friend asked me that simple question. After all these years, I was recently reading a familiar passage of Scripture that firmly, finally, and fully placed that long ago struggle in proper perspective. I share that passage, underlined for emphasis, with you.

Matthew 21

23 And when he was come into the temple, the chief

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priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? 24 And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? 26 But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. 27 And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things. 28 But what think ye? A *certain* man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. 29 He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. 30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I *go*, sir: and went not. 31 Whether of them twain did the will of *his* father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen *it*, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him. 33 Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: 34 And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. 35

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And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. 37 But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. 38 But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. 39 And they caught him, and cast *him* out of the vineyard, and slew *him*. 40 When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? 41 They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out *his* vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. 42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? 43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. 44 And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. 45 And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. 46 But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

When His critics attempted to ensnare the Lord with their impudent challenge of His authority, the Lord Jesus asked them the one question, the answer to which answers all the other questions possible. That question is "Is true authority 'from heaven' or is it 'of men?'" If the authority is

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