

# THE SCROLLS

Meeting The Messiah | Mark 11:27-33

## Life Lesson

This passage reminds us that every temptation and act of sin ultimately stems from a struggle with authority—specifically, God’s authority over our lives. Like the religious leaders who challenged Jesus, we often seek ways to maintain control, justify our choices, or question God’s Word when it confronts our comfort. When we place anything—our traditions, experiences, or reasoning—above God’s Word, we risk following the same path of spiritual blindness as the religious leaders.

## Examine Scripture

**27 They came again to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came 28 and asked him, “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do these things?” 29 Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question; then answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. 30 Was John’s baptism from heaven or of human origin? Answer me.” 31 They discussed it among themselves: “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ 32 But if we say, ‘Of human origin’”—they were afraid of the crowd, because everyone thought that John was truly a prophet. 33 So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”**

## The Horns of a Dilemma

This text addresses the root of all temptation and sin: authority. When we sin, it is rooted in our rebellion against God’s authority. God tells us not to do something, and we do it anyway. God tells us to do something, and we refuse. The issue is authority.

We see this starting with the fall of Adam and Eve. Satan’s temptation was the foundation of God’s authority: “Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, ‘You can’t eat from any tree in the garden?’’ The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, ‘You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.’’ ‘No! You will certainly not die,’ the serpent said to the woman. ‘In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’” (Gen. 3:1-5). So, Satan causes Eve to question, even challenge, God’s authority. As a result, Eve took the fruit, gave it to Adam, they ate it, and sin entered the world simply because they questioned God’s authority.

That’s the temptation we face. Is Scripture alone enough as our authority, or do we need something else? Our initial instinct might be to say that Scripture alone is sufficient, but upon closer examination, we may also rely on other sources of authority in our lives. To explore this, consider the four main areas of authority in doctrine and life. John Wesley popularized this approach, known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Imagine a box divided into four equal parts: Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Reason. Wesley argued that every truth and experience in life should be filtered through these sources of

***And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”***

- Underline “authority” in (v. 27, 29, and 33).
- Draw a line from “authority” to “Jesus” in (v. 29).
- Circle “heaven” and “human origin” in (v. 30).
- Underline “We don’t know” in (v. 33).
- In the margin, write (Matt 28:18 and Rev. 5). Write “Jesus’ authority.”

## Personal Notes

authority. The issue arises when these four sources are treated as equally authoritative, or when one is given undue emphasis. When anything is placed above God’s authority as revealed in Scripture, it leads to sin.

### **Vs. 27-28**

The chief priests, scribes, and elders have been plotting to kill Jesus since (v. 18). They developed a master plan to trap and kill Jesus. Their plan? They asked Jesus, “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do these things?” (v. 28). Basically, they were trying to get Jesus to blaspheme by claiming the authority was His own or at least embarrass Him in front of the crowds.

What are the “things” the religious leaders are referring to? Likely, it goes back to Jesus’ cleansing of the Temple. Again, in (v. 18), we know they were angry and fearful because of His actions. However, it probably encompasses all of His miracles, actions, and teachings. The people marveled at Jesus’ authority and power, but the religious leaders questioned it.

Again, this is the root of all sin: questioning, challenging, and ultimately rebelling against God’s authority. However, it is not always as direct as outward rebellion. Often, our questioning of God’s authority occurs when we prioritize something else above the authority of Scripture. Referring back to the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, tradition, experience, and reason are usually the three main influences behind our doubts of God’s authority. For instance, in many churches and Christian lives, tradition serves as a strong alternative to Scripture. This was true of the religious leaders, scribes, and Pharisees. As we see in (Mark 7:6-9): “He answered them, ‘Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written: This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. They worship me in vain, teaching human commands as doctrines. Abandoning the command of God, you hold on to human tradition.’ He also said to them, ‘You have a fine way of invalidating God’s command in order to set up your tradition!’” Tradition can subtly influence our lives and challenge Scripture as our only authority. Similarly, experience and reasoning do the same. Some say, “I know this to be true because I have experienced it in my life.” Experience then becomes their authority. Others say, “I won’t believe you until you prove it.” Reason becomes their authority.

## Personal Notes

These were not genuine questions, nor did the religious leader really want an answer. They were trying to find a reason to dismiss the authority Jesus held. If the religious leaders could remove His authority, His actions and teaching would be invalid, then they would be able to continue in their sin and hypocrisy. This is precisely why we try to replace God's authority in our lives. In our flesh, we look for ways to continue in our sin by questioning Scriptural authority just like these religious leaders.

### **Vs. 29-30**

In His omniscience, Jesus knew the intentions of the religious leaders. He knew it was a trap, but He set one Himself. Using a popular debate technique, Jesus answers a question with a question and a condition: "I will answer you, but first you must answer me." Jesus asked, "Was John's baptism from heaven or of human origin? Answer me" (v. 30). Jesus has made it impossible for the religious leaders to provide an answer without losing their own authority. Jesus was asking by what authority did John baptize? Was it of God or man?

Once again, Jesus cuts to the core of the issue: is Scripture, our authority, from God or from man? If it is from God, then we have no reason to question or challenge it. If it is from man, then what are we doing? If Scripture is from God — which it is — then we cannot pick and choose what to obey and what not to obey. If Scripture were from man — which it is not — then why would we continue reading it?

### **Vs. 31-33**

Now, when they intended to trap Jesus, the religious leaders find themselves on the horns of a dilemma. The religious leaders hold a mini-conference to decide how to respond to Jesus. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we are given insight into their thoughts. The religious leaders debated: "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin' — they were afraid of the crowd, because everyone thought that John was truly a prophet" (vs. 31-32).

The religious leaders debated and arrived at a clear, concise answer: "We don't know" (v. 33). They sought to undermine and discredit Jesus' authority, but in a twist, Jesus actually stripped them of their authority with His question. They

## Personal Reflection

1. When I choose to sin—either by doing what God forbids or refusing what He commands—how am I really questioning God’s authority in my life? What does my obedience (or disobedience) reveal about who holds authority over me?
2. Do I truly treat Scripture as the ultimate authority in my life, or do I allow other influences—like tradition, reason, or personal experience—to overrule what God’s Word clearly teaches?
3. The religious leaders questioned Jesus not to learn, but to justify themselves. Are there times I question or rationalize God’s commands in order to continue in a habit or attitude I don’t want to surrender?
4. The religious leaders feared losing influence and power. What “authority” in my own life am I afraid to surrender to Jesus—control, comfort, reputation, or something else?
5. When Jesus confronts me through His Word or Spirit, do I humbly submit, or do I, like the religious leaders, respond with “We don’t know”?

## Commentaries

*Exalting Jesus in Mark* by Daniel Akin

*MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Mark 9-16* by John MacArthur

*BECNT: Mark* by Robert Stein

## Mt. Zion’s Mission

*Mt. Zion Baptist Church exists to  
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aimed to embarrass Jesus, but ended up embarrassing themselves. Since the religious leaders couldn't determine whether John's baptism was from God or man, they revealed that their spiritual discernment was flawed. In addition, by refusing to answer Jesus, they relinquished all rights to an answer from Jesus. The hardness of their hearts not only kept the religious leaders from true spiritual discernment but also caused them to refuse the actual authority standing before them.

Since they did not answer Him and relinquished the right to an answer according to rabbinical debate rules, Jesus did not respond. He may not have given the reply they expected, but in His silence, He actually answered their question. Without saying a word in His own defense, His question and the way He stumped the religious leaders proved His authority.

Interestingly, the people—the crowds—understood Jesus' authority. However, the religious leaders—the Pharisees—rejected His authority. Is it possible that it is our hypocritical, Pharisaical hearts that keep us from fully submitting to the authority of Scripture? If Jesus has ultimate authority, do we have any grounds to question or challenge His authority as revealed in Scripture?