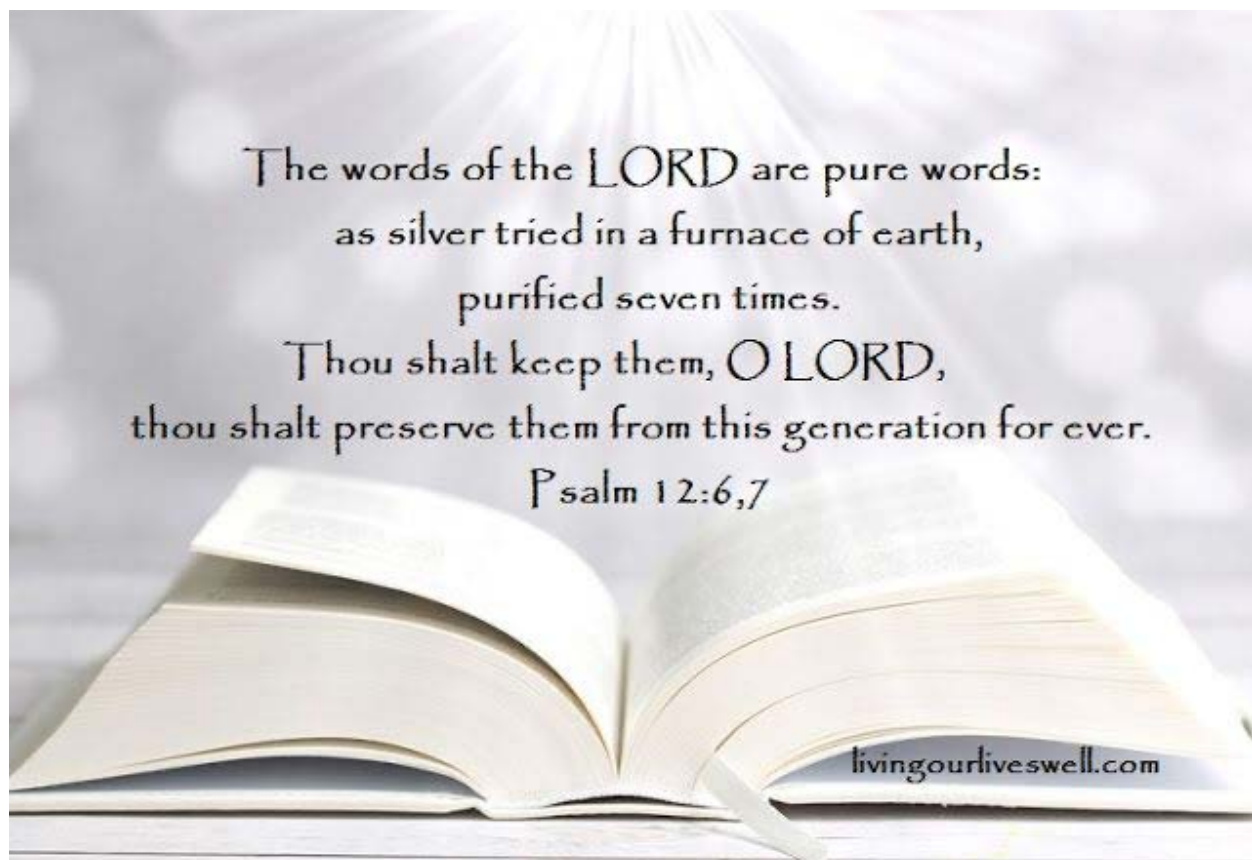


# WHO SAYS?

## LET GOD BE TRUE (6)



Reasons need authority, but which?

T. M. MOORE

*A ReVision Study from*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*Who Says?*

Who Says?  
Let God Be True (6)  
Copyright 2023 T. M. and Susie Moore  
Susie Moore, Editing and Finishing  
The Fellowship of Ailbe  
[www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org)

*Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.*

*Who Says?*

Contents

Welcome to <i>Who Says?</i>	4
1 <i>The Question</i>	5
2 Who's Credentialing Whom?	7
3 Not above the Law	9
4 Authority, All the Way Up	11
5 Reason in Its Place	13
6 The Last Word – and the First	15
7 Ready to Respond	19
Questions for Reflection or Discussion	19

*Who Says?*

Welcome to *Who Says?*

In any situation involving reason, the question of authority comes into play. No one can know everything or be certain that everything they think they know is true. At some point, we must all default to one or another authority to stand behind our views.

The stronger and more reliable that authority, the more sound our reasoning will be.

But what if that authority is flimsy or has proven to be not reliable? Well, then there goes your argument.

When we're reasoning with people about matters of eternal consequence, we do so on the authority of God's Word. We need to make certain those we reason with have considered who or what stands behind their views.

We are happy to provide this resource for your use at no charge. If you find these, or other resources of The Fellowship of Ailbe, helpful in your walk with and work for the Lord, please consider sending a gift to support this work and help us extend our outreach to others. You can donate at our website, [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org), or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 103 Reynolds Lane, West Grove, PA 19390.

Thank you.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 The Question

*Now it happened on one of those days, as He taught the people in the temple and preached the gospel, that the chief priests and the scribes, together with the elders, confronted Him and spoke to Him, saying, "Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave You this authority?"* Luke 20.1, 2

### *The question of authority*

By the time Jesus was bringing His earthly ministry to a conclusion, the religious leaders of the day had had their fill of Him. Having failed at every attempt to outreason, dismiss, or discredit Him, they determined a more drastic course for silencing the Man from Galilee.

We can imagine that the succession of embarrassments they experienced as Jesus exposed their faulty premises, wrong reasoning, and false views fueled a hatred from which they would not be able to back down. But still, they fancied themselves "reasonable" men, so they decided on one more attempt to embarrass and silence Jesus before the admiring multitudes.

In Luke 20, various prominent theologians, intellectuals, and power-brokers confronted Jesus on their own turf – in public, in the temple, under the watchful eye of Rome. Their objective was to shut Him up and shore up their own positions of authority and influence.

In this chapter the opponents of Jesus challenged His authority to teach the people of Israel. Who did He think He was? Where did He get this stuff? Who taught Him to treat them with such contempt?

Over and over they assailed the Lord over the matter of authority. They attempted to expose Jesus as not having the proper credentials for teaching, and as being insufficiently pragmatic, dangerously subversive, brazenly anarchic, and altogether unreasonable in His teaching.

Each time the religious leaders challenged the authority of Jesus, He turned the tables, using a variation of the question, "Who says?" to silence and embarrass them instead.

It's a question – *the* question – each of us must not be afraid to ask of our wrong-believing generation.

### *Unexamined authorities*

All around us every day people are going here and there, doing this and that, making judgments and decisions, choosing spouses and careers, and deciding on matters moral and ethical about this, that, and the other, speaking out confidently about their beliefs and views, and feeling good about themselves and their lives. It's what we do. We're humans. We make choices. We decide. We bolster our frail egos.

But it's important to consider the *grounds* on which we make choices and decisions. *Why* this or that? On what *basis*? What or who is *our authority* for thinking, believing, saying, or doing as we do? This was the challenge the religious leaders posed to Jesus, hoping to expose the flimsiness of His teaching before the gawking multitudes.

Now in some cases, our authority for making a decision or choice is quite clear. Why, for example, do we ease off the gas and tap the brake when we see a patrol car parked on the side of the road up ahead? We recognize the police officer as having a certain kind of *authority* to enforce the rules of the road.

However, as soon as the cop is out of sight, we press on the gas and get up above the speed limit because we don't want to drive as slowly as the law allows. We flout the authority of the state and flaunt our own authority to do as we please, that is, if we think we can get away with it. This presumed ability to make up our own rules to please no one but us – this pretending to *autonomy* in matters of authority – can be deadly.

## *Who Says?*

In other situations we might go along with what others are doing because we don't want to risk losing a job or a relationship or some supposed position of influence we think we possess. We want to remain in what Lewis called that "inner ring" that allows us a certain kind of identity and a perch for looking down on others. We dress or talk or spend or recreate the way others do, even though we might prefer to do otherwise, thus demonstrating that the opinions or views or fashions of others have *authority* to determine our choices and decisions in certain areas.

We call this kind of authority *peer pressure*. It is the source of the new tribalism which is rampant in our day.

Still other kinds of authority shape our lives. Science, for example: Note how many television commercials appeal to some form of science – or what the public regards as science – to make a sale: "Nine out of ten doctors agree..." Or "A recent survey showed..." Or "A new report proves that..." And so on.

Politics wields a certain amount of authority over our lives as well. So do those we love and those for whom we work. So do the subtle and well-schooled marketing geniuses of Madison Avenue and the PhD-adorned professors of academia.

We might call these the authority of *experts*.

### *Authority like Jesus*

Indeed, everywhere we turn, whatever we choose to do, we are confronted with one or another kind of authority either telling us what to do, challenging our authority to do what we want, or exercising its authority to compel conformity to its demands.

The religious leaders of Jesus' day sought to overwhelm and overthrow Him by challenging His authority to teach. They were the credentialed authorities on matters religious, and they were not about to be upstaged by an upstart from the backwoods. So they challenged His authority again and again.

And on each occasion, Jesus' simple, "Who says?" left them speechless, reeling, and angry.

### *For reflection*

1. How does authority function? That is, what role does authority have in our lives?
2. Where do people turn for authority to justify their actions?
3. Is it possible that the authorities people rely on might be bogus and unreliable? How would we know?

*Next steps: What authorities determine the things you do each day? Pay attention to this question for a day. Jot down each time you do or say something in deference to some authority or other. What do you learn? Is this a good thing? Talk with a Christian friend about this activity.*

## 2 Who's Credentialing Whom?

*But He answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, and answer Me..."* Luke 20.3

### *Credentials challenged*

In Luke 20 the religious leaders of Jerusalem approached Jesus while He was teaching on their turf, in the temple. They didn't have the courtesy to wait until He finished His lesson. They simply barged onto the scene and demanded that Jesus present the proper credentials for teaching in the temple (vv. 1, 2).

They recognized, as C. S. Lewis explained, that having proper authorities is an important part of the reasoning process. Once you've set forth your premise, marshalled your facts, and reached your conclusion, you need to seek reliable authorities to back up your claim. The religious knew Jesus did not have the "proper" credentials for teaching – at least, as they saw the matter – and they intended to show that He had no authority. In demanding Jesus present His authority, they hoped to embarrass and silence Him.

That would not prove to be a workable strategy.

The chief priests, scribes, and elders regarded themselves as *the* credentialing authority in first-century Israel. No one could teach except those they accredited, and only the curriculum *they* approved could be taught. Jesus, it was clear, was out of bounds on both counts. He'd never been formally trained as a rabbi – even though almost everyone recognized Him as one – and the Gospel He persisted in teaching was not the approved version of what it meant to be a faithful believer in God.

In effect, here's what the religious leaders were saying to Jesus: "Who do you think you are? We're the authorities here. We decide who gets to teach and what's permissible for instruction. Show us your degree. Present your certificate. Who was Your mentor? Submit to our long-established and universally-recognized authority or leave these premises at once."

That has a strangely contemporary sound to it, does it not? Who are *we* – we Christians – to be speaking about things like truth and morality and culture and the like? What are our credentials?

### *The power of a question*

But the authority those religious leaders presumed to possess was merely a façade, and Jesus could see right through it. Rather than defend Himself or denounce or dismiss them, however, he invited them to exercise their presumed authority to rule on a question that should have been right up their alley: "This John the Baptist: Was he sent from heaven or from men?"

The religious leaders took a moment to confer. Those who exercise flimsy authority are always conferring with one another, comparing notes, trying to get their arguments right, checking out their sources, making sure they're on the "same page" as they assert themselves in the public's eye. Luke gives us a peek into their "closed room" discussion (vv. 5, 6), and it's clear, from what we see there, that these religious leaders are subject to some authority other than the degrees they hold and the offices they occupy.

Let's listen in: "And they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'If we say, "From heaven," He will say, "Why then did you not believe him?"' But if we say, "From men," all the people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet."

Yeah, this is a problem. As it turns out the religious leaders of Jerusalem were subject to peer pressure as much as anything else. The only authority they could cite was what they themselves conjured or feared. They wanted to be neither embarrassed before nor assaulted by the students in Jesus' classroom. And so, to maintain the *appearance* of theological authority, they retreated into mystery: "So they answered that they did

## *Who Says?*

not know where *it was* from.”

These things are difficult. It takes a long time to think through such matters. Research must be done. Papers must be presented. Lab results taken into consideration. Conferences held. Other thinkers polled. And so forth. We can't just give a glib answer to a matter of such profound theological depth.

So, instead of answering, or of challenging Jesus any further, they simply shut up.

But wait – isn't this what they were trying to do to Jesus? Hmmm...

### *Ask it yourself*

Some day someone will ask you to present your credentials for being able to talk about such matters as truth and worldviews and the Gospel. That assumes, of course, that you *do* talk about such matters. That, as a witness for Christ, indwelled and empowered by His Spirit, you are “going public” about your faith as often and to as many people as you can.

Because, if you do, you're going to be confronted, like Jesus was, with people who presume to know better than you do about such matters. They'll tell you there is no God. They'll insist the Bible's just an old book of religious myths. They'll say you don't know what you're talking about, you're not qualified to hold forth on such matters, and that your views are just your own and you should stop trying to cram them down other people's throats.

When that happens, smile and ask, “How do you know that?” To the blank stare that comes back at you – the natural response of someone who's never been asked this question before – ask more fully, “How do you know there's no God, that the Bible can't be trusted, or that I don't know what I'm talking about? What's *your* authority for challenging me on my beliefs, convictions, and experience?”

Then wait. And enjoy the silence.

### *For reflection*

1. Why are so many Christians so reluctant to talk more openly about their faith in Jesus?
2. What authority does the Bible have in your life?
3. Why is it important to help others examine the authorities that guide them?

*Next steps - Conversation: You do talk about the Gospel, I presume? If not, there's no time like the present to begin doing so. Suppose you were asked by a non-believing friend or colleague to explain the hope you have in Jesus – what would you say? (1 Pet. 3.15).*



### 3 Not above the Law

*And when they heard it they said, "Certainly not!" Then He looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written...?"*  
Luke 20.16, 17

#### *Authority challenged*

In both Matthew's and Mark's account of the parable of the vineyard, it's clear that the religious leaders who challenged Jesus' authority were the object of this brief story. And they knew it (v. 19). Jesus intended to portray them, not as they would have liked – as the venerable religious authorities they supposed themselves to be – but as they truly were – self-interested law-breakers.

A man goes on a journey and lets out his vineyard to some tenants, who mistreat and murder his servants when they come looking for their master's share of the harvest. The tenant farmers even go so far as to kill the owner's son, believing they could seize the vineyard. Jesus promised that the vineyard owner would come and destroy those worthless stewards of his property and give the management of it to others.

The leaders and people were shocked. "Certainly not!" They knew what this was about; they understood the point Jesus was making. They were horrified that He should think – and more importantly, that He should voice it before all the people – that something like God's wrath might come down on them! Who does He think He is?

The religious leaders understood that Jesus was exposing the hypocrisy, pragmatism, and self-interest which characterized their exercise of authority. They claimed to be the keepers of the Law of God! Jesus was only confronting them with the fact that the sanctions of God's Law apply to *all* people, even those who deluded themselves into thinking that somehow they were above that Law.

Certainly, Jesus knew that the primary concern of these religious leaders was to preserve their place of deference and privilege, and that they would do whatever was necessary to secure that, the plain teaching of God's Law notwithstanding (cf. Jn. 11.47, 48). His parable struck directly at the heart of their vanity, smugness, and presumptuousness. It exposed their wrong reasoning and established the authority of Jesus to see into their hearts and pronounce judgment.

#### *Exposing the Lie*

The apostle Paul says that everyone who rejects the authority of God, and chooses to follow their own best ideas about life and how to live it, has become trapped in what he called "the lie" (Rom. 1.25). Having refused to acknowledge God and seek Him, they turn from the only Source of truth and embark on a joyride of lies. They go around believing they can think and do as they please in life, making whatever decisions and choices that suit them, without giving any consideration to God or His Law. A day is coming when the lie will be exposed for what it is, and men will rue forever the fact that they preferred their own self-deceit to the truth of God (Jms. 2.12).

It's not a matter of consensus. God is true. All who reject Him are liars, and liars must not be allowed to lead others into their death-spiral path.

In the parable of the vineyard, Jesus exposed the vain and foolish thinking of the religious leaders of the day in front of the very people whose support they required to maintain their place of authority. He was saying to them in effect, "You are kidding yourself if you think you can flout the Law of God and use the gifts and opportunities He gives you for your personal aggrandizement. A day is coming when you will have to give an account for such an abuse of privilege and authority."

No one had ever said that to these religious leaders before – especially not in front of the people. These

## *Who Says?*

leaders had become so accustomed to their routine abuse of authority and practice of the lie that they assumed the status quo would continue in perpetuity. Until Jesus. Until Jesus came along, pulled back the curtain of their traditions, and exposed the sham that underlay their claims to authority.

Jesus' variation of "Who says?" in this case had the effect of jarring His opponents into looking at their situation in a new light. Whether they agreed with Him or not – and subsequent history indicates that many of them finally did (cf. Acts 6.1-7) – at least they were served notice that the ground on which they were standing was not as unshakeable as they thought.

And they knew it. And so did the people who heard Jesus.

### *Challenging the lie today*

People do this all the time. Taking their stand on faulty premises and assumptions, they make wild, unfounded claims about their ability to determine what's best for their lives. They spout opinions, condemn those who disagree with them, champion libertine causes and practices, accumulate wealth, look down on others, and, in general, do whatever they think they must to shore-up their vain self-image and bolster their status in the eyes of others.

With all the love we can muster, we need to challenge the presumed autonomy with which our friends, neighbors, and co-workers deny God and flout His holy and righteous and good Law. They need us to be ready with some form of the question, "Who says?", to challenge their settled assumptions and self-serving ways. We don't have to be angry or condemning. We're only trying to get people to think a little more deeply about matters they've probably never considered before, and to entertain the possibility, if only for the moment, that there might be Someone higher than themselves Whose authority trumps theirs at every point.

So by asking our friends "How can you be so sure?" or "What if there is a God Who has something to say about such things?" or "How did you come to believe such a silly notion?" or "Did you come to this view yourself, or are you just parroting someone else?" – by asking such questions we might incite a trembling beneath their feet or open a fissure in their false worldview to allow the light of truth to find a way into their souls.

### *For Reflection*

1. How do we know that the Law of God applies to all people, that is, that all people have a sensitivity to the Law and its demands (Rom. 2.14, 15)?
2. How did Jesus summarize the Law of God in Matthew 22.34-40? How can you use this summary to help people assess their own relationship to the Law?
3. You need to make sure the Law of God is the underlying premise of your worldview. What can you do to make sure that's the case?

*Next steps – Preparation: Review the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20.1-17). In what specific ways can you see that our society has set this Law aside and is becoming a law unto itself?*

## 4 Authority, All the Way Up

*And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Luke 20.25*

*Oh yeah?*

The Jewish people of Jesus' day hated the Romans, mostly. And for obvious reasons.

The only people they hated more than the Romans were Jewish people who worked for the Romans, especially tax collectors – like Matthew. (Isn't it interesting to consider that Jesus chose such a cast-off, despised, low-down person as a disciple?)

Jesus embarrassed the Jewish leaders twice when they came seeking to undermine His authority, hoping to silence His preaching. So, a bit bruised and chagrined, they retreated for the moment, but they sent "spies" (v. 20) to see if they could put Jesus on the spot another way.

The objective of this encounter about taxes was to trap Jesus on the horns of a dilemma, and thus to discredit Him, either before the people or before the Romans – who were never very far away. If Jesus said it was legitimate to pay taxes to Rome, then the people would see Him as bad as a tax collector, and then they would surely reject Him. If He denied the responsibility of paying taxes to Rome, well, the Romans would take it from there.

The spies sought to force Jesus between a Scylla and Charybdis of authorities – either the people with whom He was so popular or the Romans who could terminate Him forthwith. To which of these authorities would Jesus yield?

*A hierarchy of authorities*

What Jesus did in telling people to render to Caesar what was Caesar's, and to God what belongs to God, was to remind them of the hierarchy of authorities under which everyone lives. In ancient Greek mythology, Atlas was supposed to be holding up the earth on the back of turtle. One wag asked what was holding the turtle up and was given the reply, "It's turtles all the way down." Jesus' answer points the people beyond mere earthly authorities, as if to say, "When it comes to questions like this, it's authority all the way up."

Jesus, on His own authority, asserted the authority of God over people, taxes, Romans, and everything else.

No one is a law unto himself. We can't just do whatever we want to do. We've all heard people who insist there "are no absolutes" or "no truth" and "everyone needs to decide for himself how he wants to live" and other such nonsense. These are the same people who politely wait in line at the post office or the DMV, just like everyone else. They drive on the proper side of the road, show up for work on time, and tend to keep their hands off other people's property. Mostly.

Why do they do this? Because they understand that, as much as they'd like to just "run free" and "have no limits" and do whatever they can imagine or would like, they accept the fact that there are certain authorities, which are as true and necessary for them as for everyone else, and they must submit to those authorities, if only in their own best interest.

Everybody understands this, but sometimes folks can lose sight of the reality. And for most people, you can count on the fact that they haven't identified the whole hierarchy of authorities under which they must live. Part of our job is to invite them to think bigger about this matter – higher up, as it were, all the way up, in fact.

## *Who Says?*

### *And above that?*

In His answer Jesus validated the authority of Rome's government in a way that everyone who heard Him would have acknowledged. It simply made sense. After all, they all used Roman coins, benefited from the Roman Peace, and enjoyed certain economic advantages from having Roman soldiers and administrators stationed in their midst. Jesus said they should give to Rome whatever Rome required of them in return for the benefits gained by the Roman occupation. Hard to argue with that.

To a point, at least. Jesus also reminded them that they and Rome were subject to an authority higher than every other. The "image" and "inscription" of Caesar on that coin, about which Jesus specifically asked, would have reminded the people of their civic duties. It may perhaps also have reminded them of the image of God, in which they were made, and the Law of God, inscribed on their hearts (Rom. 2.14, 15). Thus Jesus pointed them to a higher authority.

The result? "But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent" (v. 26).

When you ask someone a variation of the "Who says?" question, you'll get an answer. "Well, everybody knows that!" you might be told. Or "That's what science says" or "It's the law!" or some other attempt to rally some "recognized authority" in support of their views. The follow-up question is just the same as the original: "OK, but who says this is the last word on the matter?" In other words, "By what authority do you defer to these authorities rather than others? And how can you be sure there isn't some unchanging, eternal, ultimate, 'higher-up' authority you may have overlooked?"

Will pursuing that line of questioning lead people to Jesus? Probably not. But it will cause them to reflect on this important question for perhaps the first time in their lives, and it might cause them to back down on their confidence and be a little less assertive about things they've always taken for granted, but which may not be entirely true. You may get them to begin thinking beyond their own frame of reference to the larger, transcendent question of God.

And if you get someone to that point, well done.

### *For reflection*

1. Everyone lives according to some authority or authorities beyond themselves. Why is this necessarily so?
2. All authorities aren't bad. Some of very necessary. They just aren't ultimate. Why is this an important distinction?
3. Why, in doing the work of evangelism, must we insist that people examine the authorities on which they depend?

*Next steps – Conversation: You can "short cut" this "Who says?" question. Ask a friend if he believes in God. If not, then ask him why not? Then challenge him to account for whatever answer he gives with some version of the "How do you know...?" question. Don't be smug or cocky; just ask and listen.*

## 5 Reason in Its Place

*“But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him.” Luke 20.37, 38*

### *Enter the Sadducees*

Early in the period known as the Enlightenment, philosopher Immanuel Kant published a book which captured the intellectual temper of the times and the direction of thinking for the next 200 years. His book was entitled, *Religion within the Limits of Reason*. Religion is fine, Kant argued, as long as it obeys the tenets of reason.

The Sadducees of Jesus’ day would have heartily approved.

Jesus deflected the challenges of the scribes, priests, and Pharisees three times in Luke 20, leaving them chagrined and silenced. All this must have been great fun for the Sadducees, watching from the sidelines.

We’ve seen this crowd before. The Sadducees prided themselves on not believing in the spiritual world or the resurrection. They were the liberal theologians and rationalist thinkers of their day, believing in God and religion only in terms of what reason and sound thinking could support. We have explored this encounter between them and Jesus previously, but it’s worth revisiting here.

The Sadducees leaned on the authority of reason to try to embarrass Jesus. They were convinced their logic was air-tight, and that Jesus would be reduced to hemming and hawing and looking bad before everyone. Humbled by the power of reason.

Their argument proceeded along these lines: Reason dictates that a wife can only have one husband. Jesus was trapped in one of two ways: If there was such a thing as a resurrection, then this woman was going to be a lawbreaker – an adulteress – and would have to be dealt with accordingly. Further, if she was allowed to have seven husbands in the resurrection, then the resurrection is not a state to be desired, since it sets aside the Law of God.

In the mind of the Sadducees, neither of these courses was reasonable; therefore, the resurrection that Jesus taught was unreasonable and, thus, not true. And so Jesus was not to be relied on because His teaching did not conform to the dictates of reason.

The Sadducees must have whispered “Gotcha!” under their breath as they waited for Jesus’ reply.

### *Here’s your problem*

As we saw in Matthew’s account of this challenge, Jesus began His response by stating flatly, “You are mistaken” (Matt. 22.29). He dared to tell the “most reasonable” people of His day – the paragons of rationality – that they were wrong! And as if that weren’t enough, He told them why: They didn’t know the Scriptures or the power of God.

Ouch! Jesus’ point was that their reasoning in this hypothetical situation might have been accurate except for one thing: It was not submissive to the teaching of God’s Word. Reason outside the bounds of revelation is out of its proper place and will never function as God intends.

God’s Word is a most reasonable Book. God invites us to come to Him and reason with Him over His Word, to use our minds to figure out what God is teaching, so that we can bring our thinking into line with His. But though reason is a rich tool for knowing God and His will, God is not bound by the standards or limitations

## *Who Says?*

of human reason, either in Himself or His will (Is. 55.8-11). God's ways are not our ways, and His plans are not determined according to the tenets of human reason.

The Sadducees' problem was that they started their challenge in the wrong place, leaning on the wrong authority. They sought to make the Word of God – Jesus – captive to the dictates of human reason. Jesus shrugged them off by explaining, as the Word of God, where they were wrong.

### *The god of reason*

For many people today reason, in whatever form it's accessible to them, is god. Or, to be more precise, *they* are god, and reason is their *modus operandi*. Whatever they need to do, decide, or want, it must "make sense" to them. They must be able to reason their way through to an answer or decision. If they can't understand something, then it's just not true, at least, not for them. Whatever wants their endorsement, support, and compliance better make its case in terms they can understand.

Let's face it: The Gospel won't comply with those demands. It's not reasonable, as most folks see it, to think that God should be able to tell them what to do. Or that truth should be anything other than merely personal and relative; that they are sinners in need of God's grace; that God could become a Man, die on a cross, and rise from the dead; or that He's coming again and bringing a day of judgment. That just doesn't make sense to most people.

As Nicholas Wolterstorff showed a few years back in his book, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, such people simply have their authorities backwards. They insist, like the Sadducees (and Kant), that faith must be subject to reason. But, following Jesus, Wolterstorff repudiated Kant and reminded us that *all* reasoning works within the bounds of *some set of beliefs*. And if the beliefs are wrong, the conclusions will be wrong as well.

As Paul says, Let God be true and every man a liar (Rom. 3.4). The Gospel does not have to meet the demands of human reason. We must present the Gospel so that reasoning people can understand its claims and demands; but that's not the same as saying it has to comply with human reason.

So whenever someone challenges the "reasonableness" of the Gospel, or any of the teachings of Scripture, ask them, "Who says? You? On the authority of your own ability to reason things out? Or on someone else's authority to do so? And how can you be so sure that 'reason' is a reliable source for knowing everything we need to know? Who says?"

The Gospel has power, through reason, to redirect reason and lead people to the true knowledge of God. But not if we don't first challenge and expose the false god of reason who sits enthroned in their minds.

### *For reflection*

1. Why must we submit our powers of reasoning to the revelation of God in Scripture? What does that entail?
2. What did Jesus say was the mistake the Sadducees had made? Do people today still make that mistake? How can we help them?
3. How can you keep your reasoning powers from going awry?

*Next steps – Preparation: What do we do to God when we insist that He must be God only in terms of human reason – or science, or philosophy? Talk with a Christian friend about this question*

## 6 The Last Word – and the First

*“Therefore David calls Him ‘Lord’; how is He then his Son?” Luke 20.44*

*You can’t trust human reason*

In Luke 20 we have seen how the religious leaders sought to undermine Jesus by challenging His authority in a variety of ways. They considered themselves the rightful authorities on all things religious. But every effort they made to silence Jesus left them with tied tongues and nothing to say.

In Luke 20.44, Jesus said to the Sadducees, in so many words, “You can’t trust human reason where matters of eternal truth are concerned.” Jesus’ interlocutors all believed that the Messiah would be David’s offspring, David’s Son, so to speak. They believed in the coming of the Son of David Who would take the throne of Israel and restore the people of God to their greatness.

But wait a second, Jesus says: Let’s have a look at that. Is it *reasonable* to believe that the Messiah should be David’s Son? After all, Jesus continued, didn’t David himself call the Messiah His *Lord* (here He references Psalm 110.1)? How could the Messiah be the *Son* of David and yet be David’s *Lord*? That doesn’t make sense, does it?

Mere reason would say that the Christ can’t be both David’s Son and his Lord. Doesn’t work that way.

But the apparently unreasonable conclusion suggested by Jesus’ question only served to highlight again the limits of reason as *the* authority for truth. Reason can understand the claims of truth, but it can’t always make those claims make sense to finite human minds. God is just too big for that.

Can you see the people scratching their heads and looking at one another? “Well, I never thought of it that way.” I mean, they had believed this all their lives. They confessed it in worship. They encouraged one another with the promise of the Messiah, the Son of David. And here Jesus challenged the very idea of this being in line with the tenets of human reason.

And, of course, it isn’t.

*Scripture, first and last*

But Jesus is not trying to bury reason as an authority here. Reason has a role in our lives; things ought to make sense and be explainable. But that always happens within a particular framework. Where the right operation of reason is concerned, the framework is what matters most. Jesus’ point here is that for reason to help us understand about the Messiah and the promises associated with His coming, we must bring our reason into the framework of Scripture, into submission to Scripture. We must look first to see what Scripture teaches on any matter, then let Scripture guide our reasoning so that we bring our minds around to Scripture’s understanding of truth.

In fact, something like this is what anyone does who uses reason in any way. They start with a framework, a frame of reference or a starting point for reasoning about things. Let’s say their framework is something like this: What matters most is what’s good for me, as I understand the terms of good. Start here and you’re going to reason your way through everything in life to return to that starting point, justified and reinforced. Within such a framework, nothing is ever my fault, I don’t have to do anything I don’t want to, and people should defer to me a lot more than they do. If that framework, that starting point is true, then these are perfectly reasonable assumptions.

Another framework for reason might be something like this: Only what science says can be true is actually true; everything else is simply conjecture, opinion, or false. So along we come proclaiming a Gospel that

### *Who Says?*

centers on a Man rising from the dead. Sorry, our “reasonable” friend insists: science says people don’t rise from the dead.

I once had dinner with a prominent scientist who had written a book explaining how God used evolution to create people out of a long line of animal ancestors. I asked if he agreed this was not what the Bible teaches, and he did. Then I asked him – he claimed to be a Christian – why he could not let the Bible speak for itself. “I’m a scientist,” he replied, “and I have to follow the science.” Whereupon I asked him, “What does science say about people rising from the dead?” He had no answer.

If we start our use of reason anywhere other than the revelation of God in Scripture, we’re never going to reach the place where we embrace the teaching of Scripture and then begin to bring our reason into line with what it says.

Unless, of course, the grace of God intervenes to operate on our minds.

#### *The power of the Gospel*

And this is precisely the power of the Gospel, the power of God for salvation, as Paul insisted. The Gospel is not the “most reasonable” explanation for life. It doesn’t “make more sense” than other frameworks or worldviews – at least, not for those who hold those other worldviews.

But the Gospel is the power of God for salvation, and as such it can do several things when used as the beginning and end of our worldview. First, as we have seen in the case of Jesus and His opponents, the Gospel exposes the false assumptions and settled convictions of those who are trapped in the lies of wrong belief. The Gospel upsets the apple carts of people’s worldviews and leads them to look beyond their false frameworks and stupid starting-points to find something “higher” to grasp in order to “make sense” out of their lives. The Gospel opens reason to new horizons of thought and operations of the mind.

The Gospel is power because at the heart of the Gospel is *the Reason* – the *Logos* – of God. Jesus is God’s first Word and last Word on all matters of faith and life. As we use our various “Who says” questions to challenge the false frameworks and stupid starting-points of our cock-sure friends and colleagues, we’ll want to make sure that we bring them around to Jesus before the conversation is over.

He and His Gospel may not make sense to them. But, if He is willing, His Gospel can overcome their puny reasoning and flood their lives with grace.

#### *For reflection*

1. Why do we say that reason functions rightly when it functions within the framework of revelation?
2. Why does so much of God’s revelation not “make sense” to people for whom reason is their authority?
3. How do grace and the Gospel help us in getting reason into a proper framework?

*Next steps: Recall when you first began to believe in Jesus and the Gospel. What obstacles of “reason” had to be overcome in you? This is the grace of God that demonstrates His power and authority to overwhelm our “reasons” and make us His children!*



## 7 Ready to Respond

*Then some of the scribes answered and said, "Teacher, You have spoken well." But after that they dared not question Him anymore. Luke 20.39, 40*

*Then there's this*

In Luke 20 we have seen how Jesus debunked the challenges to His authority – and the implicit claims to authority of His challengers – by asserting His own authority as the Word of God in line with the Word of God in Scripture. At every point in these confrontations, the reasoning of Jesus' challengers was exposed as faulty because they depended on the wrong authorities to support their views. As Jesus calmly but insistently set forth the Word of God as true, the lies undergirding His opponents' position crumbled, leaving them with nothing to say.

At the end of the day, as Jesus demonstrated, what matters in life is the extent to which we agree with God and His revelation, especially as that is made known in Jesus. We may not be able to "make sense" of all that God has revealed, and we may find ourselves completely out of sync with the thinking of most of the people around us. But at least we will agree with God and be in submission to *His* mind, rather than depending merely on the minds of men. People may consider us to be religious fanatics or out of our minds, but if we're right with God, let them think what they will. Let God be true.

People don't like to have their authority challenged. They don't appreciate being exposed as hypocrites or fools. They can sometimes get a little angry when we act like their "authorities" don't cut any ice with us because we hold to the Highest Authority of all and the teaching of His Word.

But that's just part of what's involved in being a follower of Jesus Christ. Dare to ask someone, "Who says?" and, rather than get a coherent answer and a stimulating conversation, you might just get a snide remark and an end to the discussion.

But by asking such questions, you may also sow a seed of uncertainty where before smug self-assurance ruled. Michael Polanyi reminded us that this might be the best and most important thing we can do: "Though powerless to argue with the nihilist, [the believer] may yet succeed in conveying to him the intimation of a mental satisfaction which is lacking; and this intimation may start in him a process of conversion" (*Science, Faith and Society*).

*Jesus understood*

Jesus understood this. He knew where these confrontations were heading. What looked like a clear-cut victory for the Lord in Luke 20 turned out to be more fuel on the fury of His foes, and led to their arresting, condemning, and killing Him. And He knew this.

But He also knew this wasn't the end of the story.

And so should we. The point of taking our stand on the Gospel and of holding fast to the Scriptures as our framework and starting point in life is not that we think, sooner or later, everyone else is going to come around to this position as well. They aren't. We don't believe the Gospel because we think, ultimately, everyone's going to see the reasonableness of it. They won't.

But some will. You and I did, after all.

We believe the Gospel because we can't help ourselves. God has wrought upon us by His Spirit and Word, and we have the mind of Christ to see the world and life and everything the way He does, and not according to the puny and often faulty ways wrong-believers tend to see things.

## *Who Says?*

We understand, as Jesus did, that not everyone will share our views or come around to our way of seeing things. Still, they need to hear the truth, and that involves exposing false assumptions, demonstrating the folly of their worldviews, questioning their authorities, and helping them to consider Jesus and the teaching of God's Word.

Still, they won't all believe.

*Yes, but...*

But that doesn't mean we are failing in our calling; rather, we will find that some people will want to talk more about these matters, and a few people, like ourselves, will suddenly "come to their senses" and believe the Good News about Jesus (cf. Acts 17.32-34). Some will mock and scorn us. Some will be willing to talk further about these matters. And some will believe as easily and as naturally as you and I did when the Spirit of God finally opened our minds and hearts to the holy reasonableness of the Good News of Jesus.

But we must ask the hard questions and keep Jesus in the picture.

We must be ready for each of these responses. For those who get angry, and who tell us they don't want to hear about Jesus anymore, we simply have to say, "OK." But agreeing not to keep "shoving Jesus at them" doesn't mean we agree never to ask them again, "Who says?" Or that we won't be ready to resume our conversation if they indicate a readiness to do so.

For those who are willing to talk further, we must create ways and opportunities of keeping the conversation going. Set up meetings to talk. Give them something to read and get together to discuss it. Keep asking the question, "Who says?", to encourage people to think beyond their safe but unexamined lives into the larger possibilities of the truth that is in Jesus.

And if anyone actually comes to his senses and believes the Gospel – like you and I did at some point – then we need to be ready to show them how to get started in the life of faith. Help them begin reading the Bible and trusting what God teaches there. Bring them into fellowship with other Christians, so that they meet others whose lives show that God's Word has real power to change lives. Pray with and for them, and do whatever you can to help them begin their new life in Jesus in as positive a way as they can.

It's amazing what can happen when we make bold to ask the people around us, "Who says?" Try it yourself; and be ready for the kinds of responses Jesus and the apostles received, and to deal with them with just as much grace.

*For reflection*

1. What three kinds of responses should we expect to meet with as we talk to others about Jesus?
2. By asking people, "Who says?", we invite them to consider the validity of their reasoning process. Explain.
3. What can you do to help a new believer get started in the faith – and in a completely new way of using reason?

*Next steps – Preparation: Review the installments in this series, "Who Says?" Ask the Lord to give you boldness and grace in approaching wrong-believing friends and co-workers with the Good News of Jesus. Rest in the authority of Jesus and His Word as you help your friends reflect on the authorities which prop up their lifestyle.*

*Who Says?*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What are some examples of the kinds of authorities people tend to rely on to support their view of life?
2. Why is it important to help people examine these authorities and to challenge their reliability?
3. What three responses should you expect as you talk with people and challenge their authorities?
4. Reason only works truly and reliable when it submits to the authority of God's revelation in His Word. Explain.
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this series?

*For prayer:*

*Who Says?*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship to help us extend our ministry and resources to others. You can contribute to our ministry by using the Contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 103 Reynolds Lane, West Grove, PA 19390.

Thank you.

*Who Says?*