

Introduction

1. Do you believe everything that I teach just because I teach it? I hope not.
 - a. I have an ordination certificate and three seminary diplomas. Come up to my office sometime, and I will show them to you. I have them in a stack somewhere. Are they enough authority to believe what I teach? No.
 - b. What is your ultimate source of authority for the things that you believe? It should not be theological degrees or certificates granted by men. It should be God. The training and degrees are helpful, but the ultimate source of authority and Truth is God as revealed by His Word and Spirit.
 - c. Never believe something because I say it. Believe it because you have tested it with God and confirmed it for yourself in His Word and by His Spirit.
 - d. Always feel free to ask me for biblical support or clarification on anything that I teach.
2. In today's passage, the Jewish leaders seemed to be doing their job by questioning Jesus' authority, but they had ulterior motives that were deceitful, even hypocritical.
3. Daniel Akin states, "Mark 11:27-12:44 records five temple controversies in Jerusalem that parallel five earlier controversies in Galilee (cf. 2:1-3:6). In both cases His opponents are the religious leaders. Now that He is in Jerusalem, the stakes are much higher and the intensity of the conflict much stronger. Things are moving to an inevitable climax: the cross" (Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 259).
4. **Read Mk 11:27-33.**

A. A Question about Authority (27-28)

1. In Mark's narrative, it is now Tuesday of Holy Week.
 - a. Jesus and His disciples had most likely gone back to Bethany to spend Monday night just as they had on Sunday night (cf, Mk 11:11).
 - b. They once more went up to Jerusalem on Tuesday morning and entered the temple (27).
 - c. Akin notes, "Jesus has just cleansed and cursed the temple for its corruptions and abuse (Mark 11:12-25). In response, the religious leaders were 'looking for a way to destroy Him' (11:18). You would think Jesus would avoid the public eye, but He does nothing of the sort! He returns to Jerusalem and the temple with courage, looking for a fight—not a physical confrontation, but a spiritual one that will place His claims and identity front and center" (Akin, 259).
2. Jesus' actions and words had drawn the attention of the Jewish authorities as he cleansed the temple.
 - a. The "chief priests" (Gk., *archiereis*), the "teachers of the law" (Gk., *grammateis*), and the "elders" (Gk., *presbuteroi*) saw Jesus "walking in the temple courts" (27).
 - b. This group was a part of the Sanhedrin, a group of 70 elders with the ruling High Priest as its head, who exercised great political and spiritual authority as the leaders of the Jews.
 - c. They wanted to confront Jesus about His actions in the temple the previous day but were fearful of what the crowds in the temple might say or do. Furthermore, they feared what He might say and do in the temple today.
 - d. Warren Wiersbe rightly states, "As the official guardians of the law, the members of the Sanhedrin had both the right and the responsibility to investigate anyone who claimed to be sent by God, and that included Jesus (see Deut. 18:15-22). However, these men did not have open minds or sincere motives. They were not seeking truth; they were looking for evidence to use to destroy Him (Mark 11:18)" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 137-38).
3. So, they posed a two-part question to Jesus: "By what authority (Gk., *exousia* – a critical word in Mark) are you doing these things? . . . And who gave you authority to do this?" (28)
 - a. They had already concluded that Jesus was not acting in God's authority but in Satan's.
 - b. They had said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons" (Mk 4:22).
 - c. So, they had already had their answer in mind. He is doing it under Satan's authority as his emissary.
 - d. Jesus had refuted that answer well in Mk 4:23-29 by asking them, "How can Satan drive out Satan?" (Mk 4:23).

4. They questioned Jesus' authority openly in the temple courts with the people gathered around hoping that Jesus might stumble or answer poorly in public.
 - a. Perhaps He would be intimidated by their impressive presence in force on their home turf.
 - b. Perhaps He would admit His authority was His own or from another human source like John the Baptist. In this case, the crowd might lose their enthusiasm for following Him as one sent by God.
 - c. Perhaps He would claim to be sent by God. In this case, they could bring the charge of blasphemy against Him. A charge that they would ultimately make in the end (cf, Mk 14:63-64).
 - d. Remember for some time the Jewish leaders had plotted "how they might kill Jesus" (Mk 3:6, 11:18).

B. A Question about Baptism (29-32)

1. As Jesus often did, He did not answer them directly but turned their question into a question.
 - a. This was a common rabbinic technique when debating.
 - b. Jesus added a twist by offering to answer their questions if they would answer His question.
2. Jesus asked them, "John's baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!" (30)
3. William Lane notes, "Their decision about John will determine their decision about him. Jesus stakes his own authority entirely on that of the Baptist . . . John and Jesus stand in common opposition to those who disregard the will of God (William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 413).
4. This question called for a conference and careful thought by the Jewish leaders. (31-32)
 - a. Wiersbe notes, "Why take them all the way back to John the Baptist? For a very good reason: God does not teach us new truth if we have rejected the truth He has already revealed. . . . The Jewish religious leaders had not accepted what John had taught, so why should God say anything more to them? Had they obeyed John's message, they would have gladly submitted to Christ's authority, for John came to present the Messiah to the nation" (Wiersbe, 138).
 - b. The tricksters had in kind received a tricky question of their own.
 - c. There were only two possible answers, and neither one would give them a good outcome.
5. Possible Answer 1: "If we say 'From heaven,' he will ask 'Then why didn't you believe him?'" (32)
 - a. Many of the people had already responded to John the Baptist's call for repentance and had gone out from Jerusalem to be baptized by him in the Jordan River (cf, Mk 1:4-5).
 - b. The people believed John the Baptist was God's messenger.
 - c. Many of the people believed that Jesus was like John the Baptist.
 - 1) Some said that he was John the Baptist "raised from the dead" (Mk 6:14).
 - 2) Jesus' own disciples answered His question about His identity by saying, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets" (Mk 8:28).
 - 3) John the Baptist was believed to be a holy man sent by God. By implication and the belief of the people, so was Jesus.
 - d. The Jewish leaders had listened to John the Baptist but had not believed his words or undergone the baptism of repentance that he proclaimed.
 - e. So, if they acknowledged that John was sent by authority from heaven (i.e., God), then they would be convicted by their own unbelieving actions in the public court.
 - f. They would likewise be condemned by their failure to believe in the God-given authority of Jesus
6. Possible Answer 2: "But if we say, 'Of human origin . . .'" (32)
 - a. Again, this was not a good answer since John the Baptist was acknowledged by the people in both words and actions to have been sent by God.
 - b. Once again, they would draw the ire of the crowd for this disbelief in both John the Baptist and Jesus.
 - c. The Jewish leaders ". . . feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet" (32).
 - d. Many of the people also believed that Jesus was a messenger from God if not the Messiah.
 - e. The Jewish leaders were crowd pleasers who wanted the mob on their side. Above all else they wanted to keep their position of power, authority, prestige, and control.
7. They concluded that there was no good answer to be given to Jesus' tricky question.

C. The Answers (33)

1. So the answer to both questions was no answer at all.
 - a. “So they answered Jesus, ‘We don’t know’” (33a).
 - b. “Jesus said, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things’” (33b).
2. The Jewish leaders did not fulfill their end of the bargain. So, neither did Jesus.
3. Wiersbe concludes, “Jesus did not refuse to answer their question; He only refused to accept and endorse their hypocrisy. He was not being evasive; He was being honest” (Wiersbe, 138).
4. The Jewish leaders knew the crowd pleasing answer but refused to give it because it would:
 - a. reveal their own hypocrisy and
 - b. bring them the point of submission to Jesus—the one whom they hated with great jealousy.
5. It was a standoff for now, but this was not the end of the Jewish leaders’ tricky questions and Mark records four more of their attempts to trap Jesus with His own words (cf, Mk 12:13ff, 12:18ff, 12:28ff, 12:35ff).

D. Questions/Thoughts for Reflection

1. Do you believe everything that is said by a man of God, or do you ask questions and look into that person’s source of authority? You should look into their source of authority with an open, honest Spirit seeking a better understanding of the Truth.
2. Have you accepted the Truth God has spoken into your life already? He will not speak more truth until you receive and act on the truth which He has already revealed.
3. Have you hardened your heart to God’s truth in some area of your life? Are you questioning God or calling His motives into question like the Jewish leaders?
4. Do you fear the wrath of other humans in our cancel culture more than you fear the righteous wrath of God upon sin and hypocrisy?
 - a. What might it cost you socially, culturally, relationally, and financially to submit your life fully and completely to Jesus?
 - b. What will it cost you if you don’t?
5. Will you submit to the authority of Jesus in all areas of your life right now?