

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

It was not He, but they who lacked authority. They were revered by men. He was no respecter of persons. He shows no partiality. His authority knows no limits. And yet they commanded an answer of Him. But they had no authority over Him.

So He does not give an answer. He is not accountable to them. Rather He responds with a question. But that question they cannot answer. And truth be told, there stammering, plotting silence is their answer. They know neither the Scriptures or the power of God. They fear men more than they fear God.

The chief priests and elders were not worthy to know the answer to their question. The Lord of the Church would not cast His Pearls before swine. The Gospel is free, but it is of great value. And although He would publicly and clearly confess the answer, their stiff necks and stony hearts would prevent them from receiving it, when He confessed: "Before Abraham was" He said, "I AM".

He could have asked them, as He asked Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone?" But they had Job. They taught Job. But they could not see Job's Lord, who stood before them.

The deceit and pride of the chief priests and elders prevented them from receiving the Word of God. So the Word of God

remained closed to them. And where that is true, so also heaven is closed. That is why the Lord says to them "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

The Christ that baffled the chief priests and elders is not a Christ that the world can receive. The world seeks a savior that will tell fallen men that they are not all that bad, and that through great effort and self-improvement they can make themselves acceptable to God.

But the only true Savior does not save by improving men. He slays and makes alive. He destroys and creates anew. To do so, He who alone is worthy died and rose again. He was cut off from God, forsaken, crucified. His question of God the Father, asked in agony in the darkness of Golgotha, went unanswered.

The One John the Baptizer preached died for John's sins. God's Son died for your sins. He died not to help you improve, but to do for you what you could never do yourself – atone for your transgressions, that you stand upright before God.

By what authority did Jesus do the things He did? By all authority in heaven and on earth, the authority given Him by the Father. That is the authority of God alone – and the authority by which God's Son, David's Son, does what He does. He does His marvelous works by Divine authority, not lent to Him, but by virtue of His Divinity.

It is the authority to judge, to declare guilty or innocent, to bind or remit sins. It is His alone, and no one can give it or take it away. But for you, that you be saved, that authority He vests in

the Office of the Holy Ministry, that in the stead of Christ and by His authority the forgiveness of all your sins is proclaimed in His Name.

So by faith, you know the answers that the Pharisees could not give the Lord. John's baptism was from heaven. John's baptism was for men. Like Cana's waterpots, it was meant to show men their sins. It prepared the way for the One who's baptism would open heaven to men.

The God of Heaven Himself called John and sent him to baptize sinners and to prepare the way for His Son. And so, at Jesus' baptism by John, were the Father and the Spirit manifest, showing forth the Holy Trinity. Heaven came to earth in Jesus Christ.

The Spirit of God that descended and remained on the head of Jesus, anointing Him the Christ, the Spirit of God that lit upon the Eleven at Pentecost, is the same Spirit that fills you as you receive your heavenly baptism. In Blood-tinged waters the death and resurrection of Jesus are made your death and resurrection, as the Triune Name is placed upon you, and God fills you.

And so in you is God well pleased. By that Spirit you receive what the chief priests and elders could not – you receive in faith the Word of God. By faith it is written upon your heart and upon your mind, marking you as a child of God, an heir of the New Testament by which your sins are remembered no more.

The Lord of the Church would not cast pearls before swine. The Gospel is free, but if is of great value. Indeed, it is

salutary, saving, healing, life-giving, death-defeating. It brings forgiveness and life.

In mercy, in grace, as the Apostle writes, the Lord of heaven and earth gives you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance, and the exceeding greatness of His power toward you who believe.

This day forgiveness and life are yours, as the saving fruits of Jesus' death and resurrection are delivered to you. He who would not give answer to the chief priests and elders banquets you on the answer to sin and death.

You kneel and eat His Body, you drink His Blood, and He Who has all authority in heaven and on earth forgives your sins and strengthens your faith. And by Divine proclamation, He names you as worthy – worthy to know Him, worthy to receive Him, worthy to enter heaven.

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