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# Words of Truth

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## **“We Cannot Tell”**

By: Brian A. Yeager

Our study in this article is going to come from the following text: *“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? 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. 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? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. 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”* (Matthew 21:23-27).

First, we should start by noting the fact that the question asked of Jesus by the chief priests and elders was not an honest question. Their goal was to trap Jesus (Matthew 22:15 and Luke 11:53-54) and find a way to destroy Him (Luke 19:47-48). Had Jesus said all power was given to Him of the Father (Matthew 28:18 and John 5:22-27) they would have attacked Him as they did at other times (John 8:48-59 and John 10:25-39). Thus, Jesus asked them a question to expose their impure motives.

The baptism of John, and the teaching of John, was most certainly from Heaven (Matthew 3:1-6 and Luke 1:5-80). Even Jesus submitted Himself to the baptism of John (Matthew 3:13-17). In addition to that, had the chief priests and elders ever really listened to John, they would have known the answer to their question to Jesus. John taught that Jesus' authority was from the Father and was greater than his own (John 3:25-36).

Like all who choose to reject the truth, it is not a matter of not being able to hear the truth that stands in their way. The problem comes with how they choose to respond to the truth. In the case of our study of the discussion between Jesus, the chief priests, and the elders we see that they were faced with answering a question about John's baptism. With that question they “reasoned with themselves...”. Instead of weighing whether or not they had properly obeyed God, they reasoned about the consequences of honestly answering the question Jesus asked. Consider this... Is it better to reject the word of God and honestly repent or to deny you ever did anything wrong to begin with and perish?

### **Being Able To Admit Error And Truly Repenting**

If you continue reading in Matthew 21 you find this is what happened next in the discussion between Jesus, the chief priests, and the elders: *“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. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the*

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*second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. 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. 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” (Matthew 21:28-32).*

From what Jesus said, we know it would have been better had the chief priests and elders just admitted they erred rather than their dishonest answer. Brethren, we need to learn from this discussion. We need to learn that it is not good for us to justify ourselves when we are wrong. That is easy to do (Proverbs 16:2, Proverbs 16:25, Proverbs 20:6, Proverbs 21:2, Proverbs 30:12, Galatians 6:3, and James 1:21-25).

When confronted because of something you have done wrong, “I [we] cannot tell” is not a good response. If you or I or we find (speaking of Christians here) that we have done something wrong we have to be willing to make that right. Consider the following Scriptures for the right way to handle a moment wherein you (A Christian) realize you have erred: *“I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin... He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy... Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me... But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judæa, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance... Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death... If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (Psalms 32:5, Proverbs 28:13, Acts 8:22-24, Acts 26:20, II Corinthians 7:9-10, and I John 1:9).*

Brethren, all we do is about pleasing the Lord (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 and Revelation 4:11) and getting to Heaven (Matthew 25:31-46, John 5:28-29, II Corinthians 4:18-5:1, Hebrews 13:14, and I Peter 1:3-9). Defiantly choosing not to acknowledge error and repent of it will cause us to perish (Luke 13:1-5). If we have done wrong we can tell and we can make it right. The opportunity to repent of sin and have them forgiven is a blessing, not a curse.

### **Conclusion**

All who can read and understand can see how the chief priests and elders simply did not want to honestly answer for that answer would condemn them. If you are reading this article you are blessed with yet another opportunity to examine yourself (II Corinthians 13:5). That gives us the opportunity to think on our ways and to quickly right any wrongs in our lives (Psalms 119:59-60 and Lamentations 3:40). When you have the knowing feeling that you are wrong in the sight of God, what do you think He sees (I John 3:20)? We can tell when we are wrong and we can make the right decisions to correct those things. Don't lose your soul because you don't want to say that you're wrong!

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## Milkshakes

### The Importantnace Of Context

By: Brian A. Yeager

“I am going to kill her”! What does that statement mean or infer? How can you know without a context to look at? Wouldn’t a video game clarify the meaning of that statement? Most statements, out of their original contexts, can be completely misunderstood. The Scriptures are supposed to be handled properly or rightly divided (II Timothy 2:15). When you take a Scripture and remove it from its context, you can make it say something that was not originally intended. In such a case, you would be twisting Scriptures. This has always been a problem (II Peter 3:15-18).

Take this statement for an example: *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end”* (Jeremiah 29:11). Most people incorrectly use this Scripture to teach that God has a plan for each person in the world.

Look at Jeremiah 29:11 in context: *“Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon; (After that Jeconiah the king, and the queen, and the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, and the carpenters, and the smiths, were departed from Jerusalem;) By the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent unto Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon) saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the LORD. For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive”* (Jeremiah 29:1-14).

When you read the whole context of Jeremiah 29:11 you see it is Judah being discussed. It was God’s intentions for Judah once He ended their seventy-year captivity in Babylon. It has nothing to do with anyone today! Context matters significantly. Out of context one or several verses can be incorrectly used to teach a host of errors. It is upon us all to study Scriptures given to us to be sure they are used correctly (John 5:39 and Acts 17:10-11). To properly do this, we also have to understand that the context of a Scripture often goes beyond even a chapter or book. That will be our next study!