

LESSON 4 – THE STANDARD OF AUTHORITY FOR THE CHURCH

1) INTRODUCTION

- a) In our previous studies, we've seen that the bible speaks of the church in 2 different senses: a "universal" sense and a "local" sense
 - i) However we do not find the bible speaking about the church in a denominational sense. In fact, we find the concept denominationalism (which results from division) a concept that is condemned in the bible

Question 1: Read **John 17:20-23**, what did Jesus pray for regarding those who believe in Him?

Question 2: Read **1 Cor 1:10-13**. In vs. 10, what was Paul's desire for the Corinthian brethren?

- b) To say that division (denominationalism) exists in the religious world today would be an understatement. But what has contributed to it?
 - i) The problem of division in the religious world always boils down to whether we will all apply the same standard of authority
 - ii) What a local church decides to do and how it decides to function must always derive from the proper standard of authority
 - iii) Unity amongst believers can only be maintained when they agree to come together upon the same standard of authority
 - iv) This is how we achieve what Jesus prayed for in John 17 and how we avoid what Paul condemned in 1 Cor 1:10-13
- c) We all agree that the idea of standards of authority is important in every area of life
 - i) Imagine the confusion in our country if we did not have a standard relating to weights and measures
 - ii) What would happen if we could not agree on the length of a line, the volume of a tank of gasoline, etc?
 - iii) Confusion would reign supreme in the market place if we did not all agree on one standard of currency
 - iv) In matters relating to the church, if we could all agree to the same standard of authority, unity would be possible to all those who submit themselves to applying that standard of authority
 - v) This lesson will focus on what the standard of authority should be for the Lord's church

2) CHRIST HAS BEEN GIVEN ALL AUTHORITY

Question 3: Read **Matt 28:18**. What does Jesus claim for Himself in this verse?

- a) Every person professing to be a Christian recognizes that Jesus Christ has been given all authority in both heaven and on Earth
 - i) And since Jesus has been given all authority, it can be naturally concluded that we are responsible for doing what He asks us to do – **Matt 28:19-20**
 - ii) In fact, Christ’s apostles taught the same thing about Christ’s authority – **Eph 1:22-23**
 - iii) Some have suggested that if Jesus were here on Earth today, we could solve every single religious division and disagreement that exists today
 - iv) But 40 days after Jesus was resurrected, He ascended to heaven knowing His time on earth was at an end until His second coming
 - v) Therefore, since Jesus is not on Earth, what are we to do? What standard of authority has He left us to follow?

3) *TO WHOM DID JESUS DELEGATE AUTHORITY?*

Question 4: Read **John 13:20**. What is a condition that must be met for us to receive Jesus?

- a) The term apostle literally means “one sent.” So when Jesus is talking about receiving those whom He has personally sent, He is talking with specific reference to the apostles – **Luke 10:16**
 - i) The apostles were designated as ambassadors to Christ – **2 Cor 5:20** – The apostles were the men sent by Christ with His authority
 - ii) Therefore it is impossible to say we have received Christ when we do not follow the teachings of His apostles

Question 5: Read **Acts 2:42**. After 3000 Jews became Christians on Pentecost, what does it say they continued steadfastly in?

- b) Since the Apostles were merely men (and fallible men at that), how can we be sure that what they taught was reliable?
 - i) After all, men today say many things about God and the church today that are not true; and this is why we see so much division
 - ii) Some believers will even insist that we should only follow the “words in red”, those words from Jesus we find in the gospel records

Question 6: Read **John 14:26**. Who did Jesus promise to send to the Apostles to help them as they went throughout the world as His ambassadors?

Question 7: Read **John 16:12-13**. Whom Jesus send to the Apostles to guide them into all truth?

- iii) That the apostles received all truth and also taught all truth cannot be impressed upon our minds enough. That was their duty, and the Holy Spirit saw to it that they performed their duty
- iv) In fact, the Apostles themselves gave testimony to having preached the whole gospel – **Acts 20:27; 2 Pet 1:3**

4) *THE APOSTLES HAVE WRITTEN WHAT CHRIST WOULD HAVE US TO KNOW*

Question 8: Read **Eph 3:1-5**. According to vs. 4, why did Paul write what he did?

- a) It was always God’s intention to have His word recorded in writing so that His standard of authority could be observed by future generations
 - i) In fact, Peter said in his epistles that the things he wrote were for the purpose of reminding us – **2 Pet 1:12-15; 3:1-2**
 - ii) So in the NT, we have the words of the Lord Himself; these are the instructions for the church to carry out and to live by

Question 9: Read **1 Cor 14:37**. Where did Paul claim to have received his ideas?

- iii) Peter also claimed that the things that Paul wrote was scripture – **2 Pet 3:15-16**
- iv) We need to understand the implications of this. If there is a question about what we need to do as the church, we don’t have to ascend to heaven for an answer. We also don’t need Jesus or His Apostles here on Earth personally
- v) We simply need to turn to the Apostles writings that we find in the New Testament and we’ll have the perfect standard of authority by which to live by

5) *THE NT IS A COMPLETE, ALL-SUFFICIENT GUIDE*

Question 10: Read **Jude 3**. Has everything we need to know to be right with God been delivered once and for all?

Yes

No

- a) “Once for all” literally means “one time for all time.” The implication is that there isn’t going to be any future revelation given and neither does there need to be
 - i) The writings of the NT, as delivered by the Apostles, contain everything we need to know to be pleasing in the sight of God

- ii) Our job is not to look for further revelation, but to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”

Question 10: Read **2 Tim 3:16-17**. List everything that these two verses reveal about Scripture:

- b) So according to Paul in this verse, Scripture is all sufficient to provide us with what we need and it equips us for every good work
 - i) Peter claimed in one of his epistles that it provides us with everything pertaining to life and godliness – **2 Pet 1:3**
 - ii) It’s when we heed to the writings of the Apostles that we will have the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ – **2 Pet 1:8-9**
 - iii) It’s when we heed to the writings of the Apostles that an abundant entrance will be supplied into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – **2 Pet 1:10-11**
- c) Finally, in **Acts 20:32**, as Paul prepared the elders of the church at Ephesus for his departure, He commended them to God and to the word of His grace
 - i) He did not instruct them to appoint apostles to take his place nor did he instruct them to seek further revelation (for Paul had already proclaimed “the whole counsel of God” to them - **Acts 20:27**)
 - ii) He simply directed them to two things: to God Himself (His divine providence) and to the word of His grace (that word which had been revealed by Paul himself)
 - iii) Paul was confident that these two blessings were able to do two things: build them up and give them an inheritance among all those who are sanctified