

LESSON 7 – TO WHAT DEGREE SHOULD WE HONOR AUTHORITY?

1) INTRODUCTION

- a) The past 3 lessons we have shown us that we have a vast responsibility regarding authority
 - i) We must speak strive with all our heart to see if the things we believe/practice are according to God's pattern as taught by the apostles – **Phil 3:17**
 - ii) The way we do this is by observing the direct commands, approved examples, and necessary implications of scripture
 - iii) It is easy to understand that direct commands must be obeyed, but some people still do not see the importance of approved examples and necessary implications as standards of authority
 - iv) Scripture places incredible importance on following the approved apostolic examples of the NT – **1 Cor 1:11; Phil 4:9**
 - v) Scripture also shows us that necessary implication is a powerful form of authority. Jesus used it frequently! – **Matt 22:29-33; John 13:34**
 - vi) Without a proper understanding of these principles, it is impossible to know fully what God would have us to believe and practice

- b) There are two final questions we need to address in our consideration of God's authority:
 - i) First, are there limitations placed on how far we can go in matters of religion?
 - ii) Second, does observing the same standard of authority guarantee unity amongst followers of Christ or is something more needed?

2) WARNINGS FOUND IN THE NT

- a) How do we view God's word as it is delivered in the bible? Do we view them as commands or suggestions?
 - i) In other words, when the bible reveals particular beliefs and practices, how seriously does God expect us to follow them?

Question 1: Read **Gal 1:6-9**. Are there consequences placed on people who change the message of the gospel? If so, what are they?

- ii) The fact that God is places such severe consequences on those who would teach a false message shows us that He means what He says in Scripture
 - iii) In fact, as the verse tells us, if even an angel were to speak directly to us, teaching us things that contradict the bible, the consequences would be severe
 - iv) What can we conclude from this? The gospel must be preserved in it's purest state and must not be altered by anyone

- b) What does "altering" the bible entail? In what ways can we alter it? To what extent will God punish us?

Question 2: Read **Rev 22:18-19**. In what two ways can we alter God's word by which He will condemn us?

- i) This isn't the first time God has stated this. He said it in **Deut 4:2** as well as **Prov 30:5-6**. God only has to tell us something once for it to be so. But He has told us in the beginning, middle, and end of the bible not to add or take away from His word
- ii) Parents should have no problem understanding this. Imagine if our children did this to our words. How would we feel?

Question 3: Read **2 John 9**. What are we told to abide by? How does doing this or not doing this affect our relationship with God?

- c) What if, in our human wisdom, we deem an expedient to be "profitable" and then come to find out that this particular expedient contradicts God's word?
 - i) This is an important question to consider because many in the religious world are abiding by traditions of men at the expense of His word

Question 4: Study the account in **Mark 7:5-13**. What observations can we make about Jesus' view regarding traditions that violate scripture?

- ii) This doesn't mean all religious traditions are wrong. What it does mean is that we must take very careful consideration as to whether they are truly expedient to fulfill God's purposes or cause us to violate God's will
- d) In our studies, if we can take these warnings as seriously as God intended us to take them, it would cause us to approach His word with the utmost humility and reverence
 - i) But sadly, too often we turn to God's word only to justify what we've already decided in our heart, shutting our hearts to the possibility that after all these years, I could be wrong

3) ***HAVING THE SAME STANDARD DOESN'T GUARANTEE UNITY***

- a) Lastly, we should consider the question of whether having the same standard of authority will always guarantee unity amongst believers
 - i) I wish the answer to this question was "yes", but unfortunately reality rears its ugly head and shows us that there can still be disagreements
 - ii) As human beings, we are constantly challenged to put God before ourselves and before one another, but we're all at different levels in our knowledge, attitude, and maturity
- b) For example which commands are binding for us today?
 - i) What I mean is, the letters of the NT were written to Christians in other churches, sometimes dealing with specific problems those particular Christians faced. When we read the NT letters, we're reading other people's mail!
 - ii) With that in mind, we may come to the conclusion that some commands given only dealt with those particular Christians in their particular situation, but not to us in our particular situation. How do we know?

Question 5: Read **2 Tim 2:15**. What does Paul tell us we must do as it pertains to the handling and studying of God's word?

- iii) Rightly dividing and accurately handling God's word means we must pay attention to context, resist the urge to isolate verses by themselves, look at the overall picture of scripture, and host of other considerations
- iv) Some examples of differences and controversies we can struggle with when studying the bible and with one another
 - (1) Can/should a Christian go to war?
 - (2) Must a woman's head be covered when she prays (1 Cor 11)?
 - (3) Is a woman's obligation to keep silent in the assembly a culture of the times or a command for today (1 Cor 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:11-15)?
 - (4) What are the bounds of fellowship with those we disagree with regarding certain doctrines?

Question 6: Read **Heb 5:11-14**. What must happen for us to develop the ability to discern important spiritual matters?

- c) Second, which approved examples are to be considered normative for the church today?
 - i) Much of what we learn about the church pertaining to its work and organization is by example, not command
 - ii) Effort must be made to determine whether an example should be understood as teaching a binding principle for the church to observe universally
- d) Third, when are necessary implications really necessary and inescapable?
 - i) People often infer things from the Bible and call their conclusion a necessary implication when in fact it is not the only possible conclusion to derive
 - ii) It may only be a "possible" implication, not one necessarily inferred. It might be a "reasonable" implication while at the same time not being necessary/inescapable
 - iii) Christians continue to study and work through some of these issues. But we must be convinced in our own mind and keep the dialog open with one another
 - iv) True believers must honor Jesus' prayer for unity (John 17:20-23) and be open to discuss doctrinal differences with one another
- e) Though we may never agree on all these issues, the key to overcoming them will always be applying the spirit of Christ to our own lives
 - i) Barton Stone, a promoter of Christian unity in the early 1800's, had these insightful words in an article entitled "Christian Union" published in The Christian Messenger (1828):
 - ii) "On no other foundation can the parties ever meet, than on the Bible alone, without note or comment; and in no other name will they ever unite, but in that given to the disciples at Antioch - CHRISTIAN. But should all the professors of Christianity reject all their various creeds and names, and agree to receive the Bible alone, and be called by no other name than Christian, will this unite them? No, we are fully convinced that unless they all possess the

spirit of that book and name they are far, very far, from Christian union." (As quoted by **J. M. Powell, The Cause We Plead: A Story Of The Restoration Movement, 20th Century Christian**, 1987, p. 56)

iii) While we believe Stone was correct in his assumption, let's be sure God's word draws this same conclusion

Question 7: Let's read Paul's plea for unity as found in **Eph 4:1-3**, particularly the attitudes he says we must develop to attain to that unity. Discuss the reasons for each of these attitudes as well as why they are so difficult to apply to ourselves:

Humility: _____

Gentleness: _____

Patience: _____

Tolerance: _____

Love: _____

Diligence: _____
