

Building on a Good Foundation, #4 Authority

Review of previous lessons on this theme: Jesus is the *Cornerstone*- the *Head* who has *all authority*, Eph.2:20b; 1:21-23; Matt.28:18; the *apostles* and *prophets* are the *foundation*, Eph.2:20; 3:1-5; 1Cor.2:9-13; 14:37; and, the *Church* is the *house/building* built upon this *foundation*, fitted to this *Cornerstone*, and over which Christ is the *Head*, Eph.2:19,21-22; 1Pet.2:5. So... Christ is the **Head** (lawgiver); the *inspired Word* is the **law** (*New Covenant/New Testament*); and, *Disciples/Christians* are the **citizens**.

That's simple enough for anyone to understand. **So why do so many "churches" all claim to be "His" despite tremendous disparity between them? All claim Christ as Head, the Bible as Law, and themselves as disciples. But are they? Are we? How do we know what (not so much who) is right?**

As always, let's go back to Christ and His Word for answers. He said:

- Not everyone who *claims* Him as Lord *belongs* to Him, Matt.7:21a;
- Not every *plant* is *planted by God*, Matt.15:13;

What, then, determines *which plants God planted*, and *which disciples actually belong* to Christ?

- Those who *do/obey God's will* (as per *Christ's law*), Matt.7:21b; and,
- Those *germinated from pure seed*, Luke 8:11; 1Pet.1:23.

Now, assuming that all these people in all these churches actually *intend* to *obey God's will* and *be in God's field/building*, again, **why is there so much disparity, division, and disputing? What *teaching/practice* is *authorized* and *how do you know*? Is anything with which *we intend to praise/honor* God acceptable to Him? Is "*It seems/sounds 'good' to me/us*" all that is required? Or, does "*in spirit and truth*" count, John 4:23-24?**

It all comes down to **Authority**, cf. Luke 20:1-2 (and whether we seek to *please God* or *ourselves*, cf. Eph.5:10; Phil.3:19). So, how is "**biblical authority**" established? Through one of three avenues:

1. **Christ commanded**, Matt.28:18,20c. All authority is His, v.18; and everyone will be eternally judged by His *words*, John 12:48-50. If "*the Head*" said/commanded it, it's *authorized*.
2. **Apostles taught**, Matt.28:20a. The *apostles* (remember they are the *foundation* of Eph.2:20) were provided with the Holy Spirit to "*teach you (them) all things, and bring to your (their) remembrance all that I (Jesus) said to you,*" John 14:26. Therefore, what the *apostles taught*- by *speaking* or *writing*, was/is "*the Lord's commandment*," cf. 1Cor.14:37; 1Thess.4:2; Eph.3:3-5. If the *apostles* and/or *inspired men* (1Cor.2:10-13) taught it, it's authorized.
3. **Disciples practiced**, Matt.20:28b. *Disciples* are *followers*- of what? Jesus! But how? Through obedience to what *Christ commanded* (John 14:15) and the *apostles taught* (1Thess.4:2). So, if *disciples/Christians* in the NT were *practicing* "it" through the *teaching/oversight of the apostles* or the *command of Christ*, "it" is authorized. Now be careful here- the Corinthians turned the Lord's Supper into a *common* (dare we say "fellowship") *meal* but were acting **contrary** to the *Lord's commandment* (Matt.26:26-29) and the *apostles' teaching*, 1Cor.11:20-34. So not *everything* that *disciples practiced* were *authorized* (sometimes they *violated* and were condemned

instead of *obeying* and being commended)- only those that were in keeping with the Lord's commands and the apostles' teaching, cf. 1Cor.16:1-2ff. But when they did so, if the *disciples practiced* it, it's *authorized*.

Now, let's consider some *modern* examples to help clarify these matters. Is/Are:

- **Instrumental Music in Worship *authorized*?** Jesus commanded "*worship*" that was "*in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:24), but did NOT mention it. The *apostles* said "*sing*" (1Cor.14:15; Eph.5:19; Col.3:16) but did NOT *teach* it. The *disciples* did NOT *practice* it (despite having instruments available and having previously used them to worship under the previous OT/Mosaic Law). Thus, worshipping with instruments of music is NOT authorized (same for *choirs, solos, and special performances, etc.*).
- **Fund-raising other than free-will offering by disciples *authorized*?** Did Jesus *command* other means? No. Did the *apostles teach* other means? No, 1Cor.16:1-2; 2Cor.8 – 9. Did the *disciple practice* other means? No. Then only free-will offerings (on the *first day of the week*, 1Cor.16:2) are authorized.
- **Church-sponsored/run day-care and secular education *authorized*?** Did *Christ command* it? No. Did the *apostles teach* such? No, cf. Eph.4:11-16; cp. Eph.6:4. Did the *disciples practice* it? No. Then it's not *authorized*.
- **Church-sponsored "fellowship meals" and social events *authorized*?** Did Jesus *command* them? No, John 6:48-51. Did the *apostles teach* such? No, and instead condemned them, 1Cor.11:20-22,34. Did the *disciples practice* these things? Only on an *individual* basis rather than as a *collective work of the church*, cf. Acts 2:46. Then they not *authorized* (cf. Rom.14:16-17).
- **Dramatic performances/plays/reenactments, praise-dancing, special "holiday" services *authorized*?** Did *Jesus command* them? No, cf. Luke 22:19. Did the *apostles teach* them? No, Col.3:16-17,23. Did the *disciples practice* them? No, and were warned against such, 2Cor.11:3. Then they are not *authorized*.
- **Church Benevolent/Humanitarian "Programs" (and Offices/Officers to administrate them) *authorized*?** Did *Christ command* them? He did instruct *individuals* regarding these things, cf. Mark 14:7; but issued no such commands regarding the *church*. Did the *apostles teach* these things? They did instruct the *church* to benevolently care for its *own*, cf. Rom.15:25-27; but with *restrictions* and forbade expansion beyond those limits, cf. 1Tim.5:8-16. Did the *disciples practice* these things? If hope so- as per Luke 10:30ff and Jas.1:27, but as *individuals* rather *collectively as the church!* Then, they are not *authorized*.

Other examples could be provided, but it is hoped that these suffice to make the point that what *Jesus commanded, the apostles taught, and the disciples practiced* is authorized, but that beyond these we go *too far*, 2John 9.

Biblical "Authority" is not hard to determine provided we are interested in and intent on *pleasing God* rather than *ourselves*, Eph.5:10; and are willing to humble and content ourselves by not *exceeding* "*what is written*," 1Cor.4:6.

One final thought on these matters: If "it" (whatever *program, practice, or means* is suggested) is such a "good" idea/thing, then why didn't *Jesus command* it, the *apostles teach* it, and the *disciples practice* it? Are we *wiser* than God? Do we *know better* than Him that which pleases Him?