

Establishing Bible Authority – I

By David Phillips

The subject of Bible authority may be one of the most important subjects discussed in the Bible. “Bible authority is critical and yet almost unheard of by modern preachers” (Steve Wallace). Because of the neglect this subject has received, many Christians today are approving works and activities in the church for which they have no Scriptural authority. Because they have not learned how to reason the Scriptures, they often rely on emotions, traditions, and personal preferences to determine what they want to do as a church. As a result, God’s pattern for the work and worship of the church is being left in the dust. But God has not left us ignorant. He teaches us in the Scriptures how to know what He wants. All we have to do is open our Bibles and pay attention to what God has to say.

The Need for Authority

God has shown man from the beginning that we need to respect His authority in order to have life. In the beginning, God gave Adam and Eve a law and said that should they disobey that law, “*you shall surely die*” (Gen. 2:17). They chose to disobey it and as a result they died spiritually (Isa. 59:2) and began to die physically. Therefore it is written, “*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned*” (Rom. 5:12).

In order to overcome the effect of sin, God sent His Son to die on the cross. Though salvation through the death of Christ is offered to all men, it will only save those who come to Him through obedience by faith. “*And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him*” (Heb. 5:9). Therefore, just as we die because of sin, we are able to have life because of obedience. But proper obedience requires a certain respect for authority. The collective body of God’s people (the church) is a body that is committed to doing all things according to Christ’s authority. Jesus made this very clear when He gave the Great Commission in Matt. 28:18-20. He said, “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*” Jesus has all authority because he is King. He has rule over all the earth as well as all things that are in heaven.

Because of His authority, Jesus commands His followers to preach the gospel to all nations, to teach them that He is King and that they can have salvation through Him and be saved from His judgment. Concerning those who are willing to submit to Christ as their King, He instructs, “*teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.*” This is the commitment that every person makes when they obey the gospel: to observe all that Christ commanded. This is the reason we seek to do all things according to His authority. It was for this reason that Paul wrote, “*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him*” (Col. 3:17). “In His name” means by His authority. If we are going to do all things in the name of the Lord, then we must first learn how to establish His authority.

Command, Example, Necessary Inference

In spite of all that the Scriptures say about respecting the authority of God there are still men today who wish to go outside of God’s pattern. They justify their disobedience by saying things such as, “We cannot all understand the Bible alike,” “How can we know that we really know?” “That’s just your interpretation,” or “That’s just what seems good to me.” They claim is that God was not clear enough when He revealed His will for us to be able to understand what exactly we

are supposed to do. However, Paul told the Ephesians that by reading the Scriptures they can understand (Eph. 3:4). He later commanded them saying, “*Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is*” (Eph. 5:17). The fact is, God has shown us through the Scriptures exactly what He wants us to do, and He has shown us how to establish whether or not we have authority for what we do.

In the Scriptures, God shows His approval or disapproval of things in three different ways. The first is by a *direct statement or command*. This is the clearest, most common means by which God establishes His authority. In Eph. 5:19, when Paul wrote, “*speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,*” he was giving a direct command concerning God’s will for singing in our worship. It is a direct statement that gives us God’s authority on that matter.

The second methods which God uses to establish His authority is through *approved examples*. When we see the apostles and the the New Testament church doing things as the church and that God showed His approval of those things, then we know that that is what we must be doing today. Examples are one of the best ways for us to see how things are to be done. God uses examples extensively in the Scriptures as an effective teaching tool. When Paul preached the gospel, he not only spoke it, he also lived it so that people could see how to live as a Christian. Therefore, he wrote, “*Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern*” (Phil. 3:17). In Acts 20:7 there is an account where the church in Troas assembled on the first day of the week to break bread (eat the Lord’s Supper). “*Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread.*” Because of this passage, we know that God wants the church to “come together” to take the Lord’s Supper and to do it on the first day of the week. How do we know this? Because we have an approved example recorded for us in the Scriptures so that we can see how it is to be done.

The third methods which God uses to establish His authority is through *necessary inference*. A necessary inference is simply a conclusion that all of the evidences provided leads us to make. God has revealed His word in such a way that He expects us to make these necessary inferences. He wants His people to be able to put two and two together to come to proper conclusions about His will. Jesus used a necessary inference in Mark 12:26-27 to prove to the Sadducees that men have a spirit and that there will be a resurrection from the dead. When establishing God’s authority for the things that we do as the church today, we are expected to make these same kinds of necessary conclusions. When God tells us exactly what He wants, we must make the necessary conclusion that He does not want us to do anything but what He says.

Abiding Within the Doctrine of Christ 2 John 9-11

The methods described above for establishing Bible authority have been used by God’s people throughout the Scriptures. However, they have been under attack in recent years by people who do not want to limit themselves to just doing what God commanded in the Bible. They claim that the above method of establishing authority was invented by men and not God.

The fact is, God teaches us to use these methods in the Bible. They were used by the church in the New Testament to “*know what the will of the Lord is,*” such as in the Jerusalem counsel in Acts 15. In next week’s bulletin we will discuss where God teaches us how to use these three methods for establishing authority.

For the remainder of this lesson we must emphasize the need to abide within God’s authority. In 2 John 9, John the apostle clearly stated, “*Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God.*” What this means is that those who desire to be faithful to God must treat His instructions in the Bible as a barrier. Not a barrier of confinement, but a

barrier of protection from lies and errors of men; a barrier from error, which prevents us from practicing the truth (Gal. 5:7). That barrier is created by the doctrine of Christ. Where the Bible says we must not commit fornication, that is a barrier that we must not cross. Where the Bible says not to worship idols, that is a barrier that we must not cross. Where the Bible says to worship God with singing, that is a barrier that we must not cross. If we add things like instrumental music, we are going beyond the doctrine of Christ by choosing not to respect His limitations. We are expected to learn the doctrine of Christ and to know and understand all of what it says and to limit ourselves to only that which God has commanded us to do.

In the New Testament, God has told us exactly what He wants us to do as the church. Everything that pleases God has been revealed so that God's people can be perfectly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). What 2 John 9 teaches is that if we cannot find God's approval for something, either through a direct statement, through an approved example, or through a necessary inference, then we must not do that thing. If we choose to do things that God has not expressed approval for then we are going beyond the doctrine of Christ and, as John said, we do not have God!

Conclusion

If we want to have God we must learn to respect His authority; we must learn to test all things to see if we have His authority for what we do (1 Thess. 5:21-22). There are many works being done by churches today which God for which has not shown approval. But if we want to be of the church that belong to Christ, then we need to list out everything that we are doing and ask this question for each item, "Does God express His approval for it either through direct statement, through an example, or through a necessary inference?" If what we are doing cannot be approved of using these three points, then we must cast off that dead work are start doing the things that God does approve. If we want to make ourselves right with God, we must be willing to cast off our dead works, turn our hearts to Him, and start serving Him on His terms. Are you willing to make that commitment?

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