

"FOLLOWING JESUS WITHOUT DENOMINATIONALISM" **Determining Our Standard of Authority**

INTRODUCTION

As was studied in an earlier lesson, it was seen that Jesus prayed that all his followers be one (Jn. 17:20-21). We also studied that if we are to be simply Christians, members of the Lord's church as we read about in the New Testament, then we must follow the example of the early church who "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine..." (cf. Acts 2:42). The early Christians were all united in one body just as Jesus had called them by the gospel. The key to having unity on any subject is this: We must accept and submit to the same standard of authority. This is especially true in matters of religion. How do we establish the standard of authority in the Lord's church? In this lesson we shall see the answer which hopefully will further show why denominationalism is wrong in the sight of God.

I. JESUS CHRIST HAS BEEN GIVEN ALL AUTHORITY

A. SO HE STATED HIMSELF...

1. He said all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him
- **Matt. 28:18**
2. Peter heard a voice from heaven signifying this fact – Matt. 17:1-5
3. Christ therefore expects us to observe all things He has commanded
- **Matt. 28:19-20**

B. SO HIS APOSTLES TAUGHT...

1. He is HEAD of the BODY (the church) – **Eph. 1:22-23**
2. As such, we are to submit to Him in everything – **Eph. 5:23-24**

II. JESUS HAS DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO HIS APOSTLES

A. TO RECEIVE CHRIST, WE MUST RECEIVE HIS APOSTLES...

1. As Jesus taught in **Jn 13:20; cf. Lk. 10:16**
 - a. Please note that the word "apostle" means "one sent"
 - b. So as Jesus speaks of "whomever I send", He has particular reference to His apostles
2. The apostles were sent as "ambassadors" for Christ - cf. **2 Cor. 5:20**
3. Therefore the early church "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine"
- **Acts 2:42**

B. TO ENSURE RELIABILITY, JESUS PROMISED THE HOLY SPIRIT...

1. The Spirit would teach the apostles all things, reminding them of what Jesus spoke to them – **Jn. 14:26**
2. The Spirit would guide the apostles into ALL truth – **Jn. 16:12-13**

C. THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDED THEM INTO "ALL" THE TRUTH...

1. Paul said he taught "the WHOLE counsel of God" - cf. **Acts 20:27**
2. Peter wrote that God "has given to us ALL THINGS that pertain to life and godliness" - **2 Pet. 1:3**

III. IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, THE APOSTLES HAVE WRITTEN WHAT CHRIST WANTS US TO KNOW!

A. IN THE N.T., WE HAVE WHAT THE APOSTLES WERE GIVEN BY THE SPIRIT...

1. As Paul explained in **Eph. 3:1-5**
2. He wrote, so that when we read his writings we can have his same understanding
3. Peter wrote his epistles that we might always be reminded
- **2 Pet. 1:12-15; 3:1-2**
4. These men wrote exactly what the holy spirit revealed to them
- cf. **1 Cor. 2:12-13**

B. IN THE N.T., WE HAVE THE COMMANDMENTS OF THE LORD HIMSELF...

1. As Paul made clear in **1 Cor. 14:37**
2. As Peter confirmed, such writings as Paul's were considered Scripture
- **2 Pet. 3:15-16**
3. Therefore, when we have questions about what the Lord would have us to do...
 - a. We don't have to ascend to heaven for an answer
 - b. We don't have to ask Jesus personally, nor His apostles, we simply need to turn to the apostles' writing (i.e., the New Testament)!

IV. THE NEW TESTAMENT IS A COMPLETE, ALL-SUFFICIENT GUIDE

A. IT MUST BE COMPLETE, FOR "THE FAITH" HAS BEEN REVEALED "ONCE FOR ALL" - Jude 3 (NKJV)

1. "Once for all" literally means "one time for all time"
2. We cannot expect further revelation in the future
3. The writings of the apostles as collected in the New Testament are all we have
4. Our task, is not to look for further revelation, but to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints"!

B. ACCORDING TO THE APOSTLES THEMSELVES, THESE WRITINGS (SCRIPTURES) ARE INDEED SUFFICIENT!

1. Sufficient to make one complete, furnished unto every good work
- **2 Tim. 3:16-17**
2. They provide all we need to enjoy life and godliness - **2 Pet. 1:3**
3. By heeding the writings of the apostles...
 - a. We will have the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ
- cf. **2 Pet. 1:8-9**
 - b. An abundant entrance will be supplied into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ - cf. **2 Pet. 1:10-11**

C. WE ARE LEFT WITH GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND HIS WORD...

1. As Paul prepared the elders of the church at Ephesus for his departure, he commended them to God and the word of His grace - **Acts 20:32**
2. He did not instruct them to appoint apostles to take his place

3. He did not instruct them to seek further revelation (for Paul had already proclaimed "the whole counsel of God" to them - **Acts 20:27**)
4. He simply directed them to two things:
 - a. To God Himself (i.e., His Divine Providence)
 - b. The word of His grace (that word which had been revealed by Paul himself)
5. These two blessings, Paul was confident, were able to do two things:
 - a. Build them up
 - b. Give them an inheritance among all those who are sanctified

CONCLUSION

The "New Testament", then, is how Christ speaks to us today, and He will lead us to life everlasting if we follow him. It is through the writing of the apostles, the "apostles' doctrine", that the Lord speaks and directs His Church! It is the "apostles' doctrine" that is the standard of authority in matters of religion. And it is the "apostles' doctrine" in which we must "continue steadfastly"! - cf. **Acts 2:42**.

**** Much of this outline was adapted from outlines by Mark A. Copeland, a preacher in the Church of Christ**

(Questions compiled by instructor)

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the root cause of man's rebellious nature toward authority.
2. Discuss the type of heart (attitude) one must possess in order to submit to authority
3. Does it appear that those who resist the authority of Christ in matters of religion think they know more of what's best for them than the Lord? Discuss how we all should have the heart of Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 10:23).
4. Discuss why on the Mount of Transfiguration, you think that God directed Peter's mind away from Moses and Elijah and redirected it to Christ. (Matt. 17:1-5)
5. Discuss how badly misled a person is to think that one can refuse to abide by Christ's authority, and yet expects to go to heaven (cf. Jn. 14:6).