

## **"FOLLOWING JESUS WITHOUT DENOMINATIONALISM"** **What Many Accept As Authority In Religion**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the previous lesson, it was seen that it is through the writing of the apostles, (i.e. the "apostles' doctrine"), that the Lord speaks to and directs His Church, and that the "New Testament" is how Christ speaks to us today and leads us to life everlasting. Christ having all authority means that the New Testament is our standard of authority in matters of religion. Therefore, we must endeavor to "continue steadfastly" in the apostles doctrine (cf. Acts 2:42). Many people say that they accept the "apostles' doctrine" as their authority in religion, but when faced with an issue in which a cherished position or view is being challenged, they often appeal to a source for their authority that is quite different. Perhaps the best way to avoid this is to be aware of other sources of authority in religion. Some are "**objective**" standards of authority - sources outside of ourselves that we look to direct us. Others are "**subjective**" standards of authority - where we look within ourselves for the answers we want. With this in mind, in this study we shall briefly touch upon various "standards" that people commonly turn to when faced with questions about what they believe and why they practice the things they do in religion.

### **I. "OBJECTIVE" STANDARDS OF AUTHORITY**

#### **A. THE OLD TESTAMENT...**

1. It is common for people to resort to the O. T. to provide authority for some practice
2. But the O.T. was designed to be temporary, to fulfill a specific purpose and as a covenant it has been replaced by the New Covenant (i.e., the N.T.)
  - a. It was given because of transgressions, till Christ should come  
- **Gal. 3:19**
  - b. For those under the Law (Israel), it was a tutor – **Gal. 3:24-25**
  - c. When those who were under the Law came to Christ they became dead to the Law – **Rom. 7:4,6**
  - d. As prophesied by Jeremiah, God has made a "new covenant" to replace the "first covenant" which is now obsolete – **Heb. 8:7-13**
3. In their handling of the issue of circumcision, the apostles demonstrated that one cannot use the O.T. to teach something which the apostles themselves did not command – **Acts 15:1,6,22-29**
4. However, this is not to say the O.T. is not of value to Christians...
  - a. It was written for our learning, to provide patience, comfort, and hope  
- **Rom. 15:4**
  - b. It was written for our admonition, that we not make similar mistakes  
- **1 Cor. 10:6,11**

**B. MAJORITY RULE...**

1. Many people accept whatever the majority thinks about something
2. But consider the words of Jesus in this regard – **Matt. 7:13-14**
3. If you followed the majority...
  - a. In Noah's day, you would have perished in the flood
  - b. In Joshua's day, you would have perished in the wilderness
4. Rather than simply follow the majority, let our attitude be like that of Joshua: "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."  
- cf. **Josh. 24:14-15**

**C. PARENTS...**

1. Some think "If it was good enough for Mom and Dad, it is good enough for me."
2. Yet as much as we may love and respect our parents, Christ must come first  
- cf. **Matt. 10:32-38**
3. If every generation had followed their parents, then we who are Gentiles would likely still be idol-worshippers and polytheistic – cf. **Exo. 20:3**

**D. PREACHERS...**

1. It is common for people to place their trust in their "preacher," "priest," or "pastor"
2. They reason in their hearts that surely these "men of God" could not be wrong or lead them astray
  - a. Yet Paul warned of how we can easily be misled - cf. **2 Cor. 11:13-15**
  - b. And Jesus warned about the "blind leading the blind" – **Matt. 15:12-14**
3. Our attitude needs to be like that of the Bereans, who carefully examined Paul's teachings in light of the Scriptures - **Acts 17:11**

**E. CREEDS, MANUALS AND TRADITIONS OF MEN...**

1. This is where the denominations really get most of their authority
2. Indeed, adherence to the creeds of men is what produces denominations
  - a. Accept the Bible only, and you become a Christian only
  - b. Accept the Bible along with some Creed, and you become something else!
3. Creeds are really not even necessary...
  - a. If they say more than what the Bible says, they say too much
  - b. If they say less than what the Bible says, they say too little
  - c. If they say exactly what the Bible says, then why not let the Bible be our creed book?
4. The fact is, creeds are filled with the traditions and commands of men, many of which conflict with and displace the commands of God!  
- cf. **Mk. 7:6-9**

## **II. "SUBJECTIVE" STANDARDS OF AUTHORITY**

### **A. CONSCIENCE...**

1. "Let your conscience be your guide" is the motto of many
2. But our conscience cannot always be reliable
  - a. Paul had served God with a good conscience throughout his life  
- **Acts 23:1**
  - b. Even at a time when he was persecuting Christians! - cf. **Acts 26:9-11**
3. Our conscience is like a clock, which works properly only if set properly
4. Once our conscience has been "set" by the "apostles' doctrine", then it can be a good guide

### **B. HUMAN WISDOM...**

1. Many feel that through their own wisdom they can determine right and wrong
2. But God's thoughts and ways are not always our own - cf. **Isa. 55:8-9**
3. In fact, God has chosen to save man in a manner specifically designed to confound those who depend solely upon human wisdom  
- cf. **1 Cor. 1:18-29**
4. For us to know God's will, it was necessary for Him to reveal it to us  
- **1 Cor. 2:9-12**
  - a. This He has done through His Spirit-inspired apostles
  - b. Who in turn shared it with us through their writings – **Eph. 3:1-5**

### **C. FEELINGS...**

1. This is often the "standard of authority" for many people
  - a. Who go by whatever "feels right"
  - b. Who place stock in a religion "better felt than told"
2. Yet the Bible declares the danger of trusting in "feelings"
  - a. "There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death." – **Prov. 14:12**
  - b. "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool..." – **Prov. 28:26**
  - c. "O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps." – **Jer. 10:23**

## **CONCLUSION**

Because the way we should live is "not in man"... we need an "objective standard" for our authority in religion. We can't depend upon "subjective standards" like conscience, human wisdom, or feelings. It must be the right "objective standard". Only the "apostles' doctrine", i.e., the New Testament that was given by the authority of Jesus will gain favor from God. When we are content to abide in the "apostles' doctrine", then we can be assured that we are **"Following Jesus without Denominationalism"**!

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

**(Questions compiled by instructor)**

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**Discussion Questions:**

1. Describe how important it is that mankind understand that we cannot please God by trying to live by the Old Testament and the New Testament.
2. Discuss some ways that Satan will entice us to follow the majority.
3. What are some of the challenges that some may face when standing against the wishes of those whom they love and respect do not coincide with the will of God? Is it worth the price that may be encountered?
4. Can one truly say that they are following Jesus while holding on to the creeds and traditions of men? Discuss what will happen at the judgment if doctrines and traditions of men have not been renounced or forsaken.
5. Discuss how that when one looks to conscience, human wisdom, and feelings for his/her right relationship with God, this goes against the plain teaching found in Prov. 3:5-6.