**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 condemnedinstead 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/Mosaical 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-careand 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?**