

NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY
(PART FIVE A)

Introduction

1. This is the fifth lesson of a series designed for those who are seeking to be members of Christ's church and who desire to practice simple, New Testament Christianity.
2. A brief review of the first four lessons:
 - a. In lesson one we discussed two major points:
 - 1) Jesus promised to build or establish ONE CHURCH, His church (Matthew 16:18).
 - 2) The spread of Christianity throughout the world and the establishment of new congregations (Acts 8ff). We paused at this point to expound on the difference between establishing a new **congregation** and a new **religious organisation**.
 - b. In lesson two we discussed two major points:
 - 1) The Great Commission in the synoptic gospels (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:46-49).
 - 2) The beginning of the fulfilment of the apostolic commission recorded in Acts chapter two – It is here that we saw what must one must do to be saved and how one is added to Christ's church (Acts 2:1-47).
 - c. In lesson three we discussed two major points:
 - 1) Finding a local congregation of Christians with whom to place membership.
 - 2) We then asked, "Once a person has found a congregation that belongs to the Lord, does that mean our search is over?"
 - d. In lesson four we demonstrated that each congregation must organize itself, worship, and work according to the commands of the Lord handed down by the apostles (Colossians 3:17; 1 Corinthians 14:37).
3. This is a two part lesson: A and B.
 - a. In part A we shall answer two very important questions regarding the authority of the church: (i) What law are Christians bound by – the Law of Moses or the law of Christ? This could be phrased another way: what covenant are Christians living under – The Old Testament covenant or the New Testament covenant? (ii) What is the standard of authority for Christ's church? Please bear in mind that this is a brief guide, not a comprehensive study.
 - b. In part B we shall discuss (i) The organisation of a congregation, (ii) Acceptable worship, and, (iii) The authorised work of a congregation.

"Paul and Timothy,
bondservants of Jesus Christ,
to all the saints in Christ Jesus
who are in Philippi, with the
bishops and deacons"
(Philippians 1:1)

I. A QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

The Mosaic Law has been abolished and Christians are now under the law of Christ. This being true, the standard of authority for the church is the teachings of Christ.

- A. Generally speaking, the Bible consists of two testaments – "The Old Testament" and "The New Testament". There has always been law but it was not until the nation of Israel came to Mount Sinai that it was codified and written down. It is also called God's covenant.
 1. Facts about the Mosaic covenant or law:
 - a. It was given *only* to the nation of Israel (Deuteronomy 4:8; 5:1-3).
 - b. The Mosaic covenant was temporary (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 37:26-27; Galatians 3:19).
 - c. The Law was a schoolmaster intended to bring people to Christ (Galatians 3:24).

"I will raise up for them a
Prophet like you from among
their brethren, and will put My
words in His mouth, and He
shall speak to them all that I
command Him. And it shall be
that whoever will not hear My
words, which He speaks in My
name, I will require it of him"
(Deuteronomy 18:18-19)

2. We are now under a new covenant or law (2 Corinthians 3:5-6; 1 Corinthians 9:21; Hebrews 9:15), which was ratified by the blood of Jesus (Matthew 26:28; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Hebrews 12:22-24).
 - a. The new covenant came into effect when its mediator and testator (Jesus Christ) died (Hebrews 9:15-17).
 - b. The old Law has been fulfilled (Luke 1:1; John 19:30; Luke 24:44; Ephesians 2:14-15) and, therefore, has passed away (Matthew 5:18; Colossians 2:13-17). Paul used marriage as an illustration to demonstrate that we are no longer under the old Law (Romans 7:1-6).
 - c. Some attempt to divide the Law of Moses, making a distinction between *moral* law and *ceremonial* law. They teach that the ceremonial law was abolished but not the moral law. Paul argued that Christians are “dead to the law through the body of Christ”. He further contended that we are “discharged from the law”. What “law” did the apostle have in view – the ceremonial law? No, because he then says, “For I had not known coveting, except the law had said, ‘You shall not covet’”. In Paul’s mind, the law to which Christians are dead and discharged included the ten commandments. Let us be clear – Paul never divided the Law of Moses into moral and ceremonial; in Paul’s mind, the entirety of God’s word constituted “The Law” (Romans 7:1-7).
- B. In view of the fact that the Law of Moses has been abolished, Christians must subject themselves to the law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21).
 1. Christ is the head of the church which is subject to Him in all things (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22; 5:23-24).
 2. In fact, Christ has been given *all* authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:20-22; Philippians 2:9).
 3. Since Christ has all authority and is head over all things to the church, it means we must do all things in His name or by His authority (Colossians 3:17).
 4. It is essential to understand that the apostles were Christ’s ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) and spoke in His name; they revealed Christ commandments: Paul said, “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37). This is why John said, “We [the apostles] are of God. He who knows God hears us [the apostles]; he who is not of God does not hear us [the apostles]. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6).

II. ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY

It is essential to know *how* to establish authority.

- A. It is essential that we “continue steadfastly in the apostles doctrine” (Acts 2:42), which, as we have seen, is really the doctrine of Christ (1 Corinthians 14:37; cp. 4:6). A failure to abide in the doctrine of Christ means we do not have fellowship with God (2 John 1:9). So it is vital to ensure that we do all things by Christ’s authority (Colossians 3:17).
- B. The question arises, how do we establish authority? How do we know if something is authorised or not? There are three basic ways of establishing authority that are essential for us to understand as we seek to determine how a local church is to be organised, how it is to worship, and what is the work the church.
 1. By a **Direct Command**. Here are two examples: (i) Paul wrote to Titus, saying, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city **as I commanded you**” (Titus 1:5). (ii) After the household of Cornelius had been baptised in the Holy Spirit, Peter said, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? And **he commanded them to be baptized** in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days” (Acts 10:47-48).

HOW AUTHORITY IS ESTABLISHED

Authority is established by...



2. By an **Approved Example**. There is no direct command telling us to partake of the Lord's Supper every Sunday. Referring to the Lord's Supper, Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19), but no frequency is mentioned. Paul said to the Corinthians, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). The Corinthians knew how often they partook of the Lord's Supper, which, perhaps, is why Paul doesn't mention the actual frequency. We do, though, have an example – Luke writes, "Now **on the first day of the week**, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight" (Acts 20:7). The apostle Paul himself met with the brethren and so we have, not just an example, but an apostolically approved example. Remember, Paul taught the same things in every church (1 Corinthians 4:17).
 3. By a **Necessary Inference** (or necessary conclusion). This does not mean to establish authority by inference, but by *necessary* inference. The word "necessary" means that no other conclusion can be drawn from the text. Here are three examples of a necessary inference:
 - a. Peter related to his Jewish brethren at Jerusalem how God had acknowledged the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit. Peter then concluded or inferred that God "made no distinction between us [Jews] and them [Gentiles], purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:-19). He then made the application, saying, "Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they" (Acts 15:10-11).
 - b. The frequency of the observance of the Lord's Supper is established by necessary inference. The disciples partook of the Lord's supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). By necessary inference we infer that since every week has a first day that they partook every single week.
 - c. While in Troas, Paul had a vision in which a man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:8-10). Luke then says, "Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them" (Acts 16:10). They necessarily inferred that the Lord had called them to preach the gospel to the Macedonians.
- C. We have briefly considered how to establish authority, but it is essential to understand how we **do not** establish authority:
1. **The Mosaic Law**. We understand that the Law of Moses has been done away (Romans 7:1-6; Galatians 3:23-25; 5:1-4; Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:13-14; Hebrews 8:1-13; 10:1-10). While the Law has its place (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Timothy 3:14-17) it cannot be used to establish authority because a Christian must do all things by the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17; cp. 1 Corinthians 9:21).
 2. **The traditions of men**. Jesus condemned the Jews for teaching as doctrines the traditions of men (Matthew 15:8-9; Mark 7:10-13). Traditions, in and of themselves, are not wrong. As Christians we may hold to certain traditions – whether observed individually or collectively – and that is perfectly fine. But it is wrong to (i) bind the traditions of men on others as though they were taught in the scriptures, (ii) continue in a tradition that makes void the word of God, and, (iii) teach that traditions are to be received with the same internal assent of Scripture.
 3. **Self-styled prophets**. Many religious organisations were founded by men and women claiming to have had revelations from God (e.g., Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy), and other false prophets have arisen within existing religious organisations (e.g., David Koresh). Such people lead many astray with their false teachings and writings. In regards to establishing authority, some religious organisations appeal to the words of their prophet, some to the writings of their prophet, and others to the twisted interpretations of the scriptures of their prophet. However, we know that Jesus was the final prophet of God and that we must only listen to him (Hebrews 1:1-2). There are no more revelations because the faith was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3).

4. **Majority rule.** Some religious organisations decide upon congregational matters by a majority vote. If we voted on whether to introduce musical instruments into our worship and the majority were in favor, would that make their use authorised? No! We must do all things by Christ's authority (Colossians 3:17).
5. **Conscience.** As Christians, we understand that we must "strive to have a conscience without offence toward God and men" (Acts 24:16). However, we also understand that the conscience is like a clock that only works properly if set properly. To "set" the conscience properly means we must ensure it is continually informed and governed by the word of God. This is why Paul says "be renewed in the spirit of your mind" (Ephesians 4:23).
6. **Human wisdom.** Many religious organisations have rejected the wisdom of God in regards to the organisation, worship, and work of the church revealed in the scriptures and established their own hierarchies, forms of worship, and works. As Christians, our aim is to please God (2 Corinthians 5:9), and we can do this by understanding what *His* will is for us (Ephesians 5:17) and ensuring we do all things by His authority (Colossians 3:17). In regards to the organisation, worship, and work of the church, there is a clear pattern that we must follow. Our place is to follow the pattern (1 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Timothy 1:13), not to alter it or seek to improve upon it. The church must make known God's wisdom, not its own (Ephesians 3:8-12). If we do things our way, then this is not God's will, it is our will. We can only know God's will if He reveals it to us (1 Corinthians 2:11).
7. **Feelings.** Many religious people are in the habit of trusting in their feelings when it comes to determining whether something is right or wrong. People will often start projects, choose a church to attend, and even determine truth based on nothing more than a feeling, which they attribute to God's leading. As Christians, though, we understand that trusting in one's own feelings to determine the way and the truth can only lead to death (Proverbs 14:12). In fact, the one who does so is a fool: "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool..." (Proverbs 28:26). (i) If we want to know what God wants us to do, we look into God's word and find out (Ephesians 5:17; Acts 17:11), (ii) If we want to "find the right church", then we look into God's word to discover it (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47; Ephesians 4:4), and, (iii) If we want to know the truth, then we must diligently search the scriptures (John 17:17; Psalms 12:6; 119:151; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). A Christian knows "It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).
8. **The silence of the scriptures.** You may have heard someone try to justify the use of musical instrument in worship, not by citing a scripture, but by saying, "Well there's no scripture that says you can't use them". But if we are to do all things by the authority of Christ, then we must be able to cite a scripture (Colossians 3:17). We must not add or take away from God's word (Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18-19).

Conclusion

1. In determining how the church is to be organised, what constitutes acceptable worship, and the work it has been assigned, it is essential to understand the correct standard of authority to which the church must appeal. We understand that the Law of Moses has been abolished and that we are now under the law of Christ. Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth, and He is head over all things to the church. This means the church must do all things by His authority.
2. During the process of considering what the Scriptures teach regarding the organisation, worship, and work of the church, we will be establishing truths by appealing to direct commands, examples, and necessary inferences; and some people may not understand what is going on! This is why it is necessary to understand *how* authority is established. It is also essential to understand how we ought not to go about establishing authority.
3. In part B we shall consider how a local congregation is to be organised, how it is to worship, and the work that has been assigned to it.