

Whose Doctrines and Commandments Do We Follow?

INTRODUCTION:

- I. On the night Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane He prayed several prayers.
 - A. One of those prayers is found in the 17th chapter of the gospel of John.
 1. Among the things Jesus prayed for was this:
 - a. **John 17:20-23** – *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."*
 - b. Previously, Jesus had been praying for His apostles – but then He turned His attention to those who would believe on Him through the preaching and teaching of the apostles.

- c. In other words, Jesus prayed for those who would become His disciples – those of us who believe in and follow Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.
 - d. Jesus wanted His disciples to be one – to be as united together just as He and His Father are united together as one.
- B. Unfortunately, we live in a world where the followers of Jesus Christ are not one.
- 1. Religious scholars say there are approximately 38,000 religious and religious denominations and churches of all kind the world today.
 - 2. In America alone, there are some 3,000 religious denominations and churches that claim they are believers and followers of Jesus Christ.
 - 3. And yet, when the apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the church at Corinth, he demanded this oneness.
 - a. He commanded the Corinthians: **1 Corinthians 1:10** – *...that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

4. Is this kind of oneness and unity really possible?
 - a. Is it really achievable? Or has the Lord simply resigned Himself to accept all the different opinions and teachings we find in the religious world?
 5. I believe we can have this same oneness and unity among those of us who believe and follow Jesus Christ.
- C. If we want to be simply Christians – simply members of the church 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)**
1. It's impossible to establish and maintain the kind of oneness and unity the Lord demands of His disciples unless we all follow the same standard of authority.
 2. Think of it this way.
 - a. Just imagine the confusion if we didn't have a standard of authority when it comes to weights and measures.
 - b. We couldn't agree on the length of a line, or the volume of a gallon of gasoline, etc.
- D. Therefore, to be united as one we must have a standard of authority that we all accept, and to which we all submit – especially in matters of religion.

1. If we can all agree on one single standard of authority in religious matters, then unity is possible.
 2. But if everyone sets their own standard – which is pretty much what we see in the religious world today – then we will have division and disunity.
 - a. The philosophy of, "Do your own thing your own way" is not what the Lord desires.
 - b. Jesus prayed that His disciples *"all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."* (**John 17:21**)
- II. Since we need some standard of authority in religion, what should that standard be?
- A. Fortunately, we're not left to wonder what that standard of authority should be for believers in Jesus Christ.
 2. The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is the source of authority for every Christian, and His Word is the standard of authority which all of His disciples must follow.
 3. Let's look at some reasons why this is so.

BODY:

- I. First, Jesus Christ is the only source of authority for every Christian because He has been given all authority.
 - A. Jesus claimed He had the right to command us, and the right to expect us to obey those commands.
 1. **Matthew 28:18** – *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."*
 2. Since Jesus has the right to expect us to observe all the things He has commanded, He told His disciples:
 - a. **Matthew 28:19-20** – *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*
 - B. The apostles also taught that Jesus has absolute authority in all things pertaining to His church.
 1. **Ephesians 1:22-23** – *And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*
 2. Therefore, it should be rather clear that the Lord expects us to obey Him and submit to Him in everything.

C. If Jesus were on earth today, we could solve all religious questions by simply asking Him, couldn't we.

1. But He's not on earth. We can't simply walk up to Jesus and ask Him to clear up some misunderstanding about His teaching.
2. So, since we can't go directly to Jesus to get clarification on what He wants us to do, where can we go?

II. We go to the apostles of Jesus Christ.

A. Why? Because Jesus gave His apostles the authority to speak on His behalf.

1. In other words, the apostles operated under the authority of Jesus Christ – everything they taught or said met with the approval of Jesus.
2. In fact, Jesus said if we expect to receive Him, we must be willing to receive those whom He sent: **John 13:20** – *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."*
3. The ones Jesus sent are the apostles – that's what the word *"apostle"* means ("one sent as an ambassador").
 - a. The apostle Paul wrote: **2 Corinthians 5:20** – *Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading*

through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

3. This is why the church we read about in the New Testament, *"continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (cf. Acts 2:42).*
 - a. Believers in Jesus Christ steadfastly followed the teachings of the apostles.
- B. But how do we know the apostles got it right? How can we be sure they didn't misunderstand some of the teachings of Jesus? And how can we be sure they didn't accidentally forget some of the really important teachings of Jesus?
 1. The answer is simple. Jesus promised His apostles that He would send the Holy Spirit to teach and guide them, and to remind them of all the things Jesus taught.
 - a. Jesus told His apostles: **John 14:26** – *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.*
 - b. Jesus also told His apostles: **John 16:12-13** – *"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority,*

but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come."

C. In fact, this is exactly what the Holy Spirit did. The Holy Spirit guided the apostles into "*all truth*" – the same "*truth*" which the apostles preached.

1. This is why the apostle Paul was able to say: **Acts 20:27** – *For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.*
2. This is also why the apostle Peter wrote: **2 Peter 1:3** – . . . *His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue. . .*

D. It's clear that the apostles were given all the "*truth*" Jesus wanted us to know.

1. So, if the apostles were on earth today, we could simply ask them to settle religious differences.
2. But again, they are not on earth. So where do we go to find the "*truth*" Jesus Christ gave to His apostles?

III. The answer? We go to the teachings of the apostles which they put into writing for us to read. We turn in our Bibles to the New Testament.

A. The apostles wrote these things so that we could know what they know about the Lord's commands.

1. The apostle Paul wrote: **Ephesians 3:1-5** – *For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles — 2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:*
 2. The apostle Peter also said something quite similar.
 - a. **2 Peter 1:12-13** – *For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. 13 Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you. . .*
 - b. **2 Peter 3:1-2** – *Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), 2 that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior. . .*
- B. Think of the New Testament as the commandments the Lord in written form – because that's exactly what they are.

1. In fact, the apostle Paul wrote: **1 Corinthians 14:37** – *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.*
 2. Therefore, when we have questions about what the Lord wants us to believe, or what the Lord wants us to practice:
 - a. We don't have to ask Jesus personally, nor His apostles.
 - b. All we need to do is to simply turn to the apostles' writing (i.e., the New Testament)!
 3. The New Testament, is the complete repository of the "*apostles' doctrine,*" and as such it's where we can turn to learn the will of Jesus.
 4. But this raises other questions: Is the New Testament all we need?
 - a. Does the New Testament answer all the essential questions ?
 - b. Can we be sure everything Jesus wants us to know can be found in these pages?
- C. The answer is yes! The New Testament IS a complete, all-sufficient guide that is infallible, inerrant and eternal.
1. We know this to be true, because the New Testament is "*the faith*" that has been revealed "*once for all.*"
 - a. Jude, the Lord's brother, wrote: **Jude 3** – *Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common*

salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

- b. The phrase "*once for all*" means the faith was delivered "once for all time – never to be delivered again."
 - c. This is why it's so important that we "*earnestly contend*" for this faith that has once for all time been delivered through the Scriptures.
3. In fact, the apostle Paul made it crystal clear that the Scriptures are completely sufficient to meet every need we have.
- a. He wrote: **2 Timothy 3:16-17** – *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

IV. But I'm sure someone is probably thinking, "If everyone has the same Bible why is there so much disagreement among churches today?" And that's a great question.

- A. So, let's allow Jesus to explain why there is so much religious division among churches today.

1. In His day, Jesus constantly clashed with a group of Jewish religious leaders known as Pharisees.
 - a. The Pharisees sincerely believed they were the absolute authority when it came to all religious questions – they truly believed they understood the Old Testament Law of Moses better than anyone.
 - b. The Pharisees also held many religious traditions that had been handed down over the years from generation to generation.
 - c. And so, the Pharisees not only taught their own interpretations of the Old Testament Law, they also taught people to keep all those traditions – that is, if you wanted to be pleasing to God.
2. The reason Jesus constantly clashed with the Pharisees was really twofold:
 - a. First, the Pharisees' interpretation of the Old Testament Law was simply wrong – they misinterpreted the Old Testament Law.
 - b. And second, all those traditions came from their forefathers – not from God. Those traditions were traditions invented by men, not traditions given by God.
3. And so, Jesus told these Pharisees: **Mark 7:6-9** – *"Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me*

with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. 7 And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' 8 For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men. . . 9 He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition."

- B. The principle Jesus taught here is that religious leaders will sometimes teach religious doctrines that are really nothing more than the traditions and commandments of men.
 - 1. In other words, sometimes even sincere religious leaders – like the Pharisees – will unintentionally do two things:
 - a. They will unintentionally misinterpret the teachings of the Bible and come up with religious doctrines that are really nothing more than the doctrines and commandments of men.
 - b. And when someone points out their misinterpretations, these religious leaders become prideful – just like the Pharisees – and reject what the Bible says so they can keep their own doctrines and commandments.
- C. So, to answer the question, "If everyone has the same Bible why is there so much disagreement among churches today" – the answer is:
 - 1. Church leaders – as sincere as they may be – are sometimes wrong in the way they interpret the teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

2. And when someone points out their misinterpretation, these church leaders choose to keep their long-held traditions – their long-held doctrines and commandments – rather than follow the Word of God.
 3. And the one factor that lies at the root of this problem is pride.
 - a. It's the attitude that says, "You can't tell me I'm wrong. I know I'm right!"
 - b. Or, it's the attitude that says, "I don't care what the Bible says, I'm going to believe and worship the way I want to believe and worship."
- D. This is why it's so important to constantly challenge our beliefs and teachings and compare them to what the Bible says.
1. This is why it's so important to keep an open mind and an open heart.
 2. And this is why it's so important to make sure we believe and teach the doctrines and commandments of God – not the doctrines and commandments of men.
 3. Jesus called worship based on the doctrines and commandments of men "vain" worship.
 - a. The word "vain" simply means "empty" or "useless."
 - b. Therefore "vain" worship is "empty" or "useless" as far as Jesus is concerned.

4. "Vain" worship is not acceptable to God – even though we might be sincere in the way we worship God.
5. If it's worship based on the doctrines and commandments of men, and not based on the doctrines and commandments of God, it's "vain" worship.
6. That's why our beliefs and our worship must be based on the doctrines and commandments of God found in the New Testament of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION:

- I. When we open our Bibles to the New Testament, what do we have?
 - A. We have the message of Jesus Christ spoken through the Holy Spirit to His apostles.
 1. The apostles then wrote the Scriptures we read.
 2. And when we read what they wrote we can understand His will for us.
 - B. This is how Christ speaks to us today, and this is how He leads us to eternal life.
 1. He speaks to His church through the writing of the apostles – the *"apostles' doctrine"*.

2. Therefore, the "*apostles' doctrine*" which is found in the New Testament, is the ONLY standard of authority for the Lord's church in all matters of religion.
3. I want to be in that kind of church – a church that follows the doctrines and commandments of God, and which refuses to follow the doctrines and commandments of men.
 - a. In some churches, authority for all matters of religion rests in church leaders or in counsels of men who hand down doctrines and commandments that govern all the members of that church.
 - b. I don't want to be in a church like that.
4. I want to be in a church that goes to the divinely inspired writings of the apostles in the New Testament for all matters of religion, and which goes nowhere else.
5. I want to have the same attitude about the teachings of the apostles as the church in Thessalonica had.
 - a. **1 Thessalonians 2:13** – *For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.*

- b. The Thessalonian Christians received the words of Paul and the other apostles not as the word of men, but as the Word of God.
- c. So, I want to be in a church that does the same thing.
- d. I want to be in a church that not only receives the teachings of the apostles as the Word of God, but a church that also teaches and follows the Word of God.

II. Is that how you feel about the teachings of the apostles in the New Testament?

A. Here are two ways you can tell.

- 1. If you read or hear what the apostles taught about coming to Christ in faith, repenting of your sins, confessing your faith in Him, and being baptized into Him for the remission of your sins; and you do those things, you have clearly demonstrated that you believe the teachings of the apostles are the *"word of God."*
- 2. If you read or hear what the apostles taught about living a godly life of faithful service to Jesus Christ; and you repent of sins when you're not faithful, and then confess those sins so that the blood of Jesus Christ can continue to cleans you from all sin, you also demonstrate that you believe the teachings of the apostles to be *"the word of God."*

- B. So, let me ask, "Have you done those things? Are you sure you've obeyed the doctrines and commandments of God, and not the doctrines and commandments of men?"
1. If you haven't obeyed the doctrines and commandments of God, or if you haven't repented and confessed sins in your life, then sadly you're rejecting the doctrines and commandments of God, and rejecting the authority of Jesus Christ.
 2. But you can change all that by simply doing what the Lord teaches and commands in the pages of the New Testament.
 3. If you truly believe the teachings of the apostles are the *"word of God"* then show that belief right now by obeying the *"word of God."*