

# Redwater Restorer

*"The voice of one crying in the wilderness..." (Matthew 3:3)*

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## Standards Of Authority - Part 3

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### Services:

Sunday  
Bible Class 10:00 a.m.  
AM Worship 10:45 a.m.  
PM Worship 6:00 p.m.

### Wednesday

Bible Class 7:00 p.m.

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Four States  
Lectures  
Sept.24-26

Camp Ida Youth  
Encampment  
June 6th-11th  
June 13th-18th  
June 20th-25th  
June 27th-July 2nd

In the past two articles in this series, I have stressed that to be free of religious division we must have the same "standard of authority." That standard is the will of Christ as revealed in the "apostles' doctrine." That is, the teaching of Christ's apostles as inspired by the Holy Spirit, and preserved for us in the pages of the New Testament. Other standards, both objective and subjective, are not suitable guides to lead us in the way of salvation. Not the Old Testament, majority rule, parents, preachers, creeds and traditions of men, nor conscience, human wisdom, or feelings. But before we leave the subject of authority, there are some questions I believe worthy of our consideration. Exactly how does one use the New Testament to establish authority? Are there limitations placed upon how far we may go in matters of religion? Will having the same standard of authority "guarantee" unity among the followers of Christ? In this article I wish to share some thoughts along these lines.

### HOW AUTHORITY IS ESTABLISHED

Authority can be established in one of three ways. First, direct command - a direct statement of something that must or must not be done. Such as "repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38), or "love one another" (John 13:34), or "abstain from fornication" (1 Thess.4:3). Second, approved example - an illustration that shows a practice was done with the approval of the Lord's apostles. As an apostle, Paul taught by both precept and example. He encouraged others to imitate him, and sent Timothy to remind people of "my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church" (1 Cor.4:16-17). The God of peace will be with those who do the sort of things both heard (precept) and seen (example) in an apostle like Paul (Phil.4:9). So when we have an example that meets with apostolic approval, we know there is authority for the practice. Such as, meeting on the first day of the week for the purpose of breaking bread (the Lord's supper, 1 Cor.10:16-17; Acts 20:7) Third, implication - something neither expressly stated nor specifically exemplified, yet it is necessarily implied by the language used so that one can only draw a particular conclusion. Jesus appealed to implication when He reasoned that there must be a resurrection of the dead based upon the implication of God's statement to Moses (Matt.22:29-33). Therefore, if the evidence of the Scriptures warrant it, we may draw certain conclusions because of the necessary implication. For example, the issue of baptizing infants. The prereq-

uisites for baptism include faith and repentance (Mk 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:37). Infants are incapable of faith and repentance - therefore the necessary implication is that baptism is not required of infants.

There is both general and specific authority. For example, a "direct command," may sometimes be "general" in its authority. That is, "not limited in scope, area, or application." For example, the command to "go" in Matthew 28:19 is generic enough to authorize all methods of transportation. Sometimes a "direct command" is "specific" in its authority, it is explicitly set forth; definite. Such as when God commanded Noah to build the ark with "gopher" wood (Gen 6:14), the specific nature of the command ruled out using any other kind of wood. A "specific" command may itself have a degree of "general" authority. Such as, the command to "sing" specifically authorizes acapella music. It is not generic enough to authorize instrumental music, which is totally different class (or kind) of music, but it is generic enough to authorize different aids or "expedients," such as song books, to carry out the command to sing.

Expedients may be used to carry out authorized practices. "Expedient" means "appropriate to a purpose" (The American Heritage Dictionary). Thus an "expedient" is an aid that is suitable for carrying out that which is authorized. Sample "expedients" based upon what is authorized in the Scriptures: (a) Assembling is authorized, so the worship building is an expedient to carry out the command to assemble (b) Teaching is authorized, so arrangement in classes is an expedient to carry out the command to instruct (c) Giving is authorized, so collection plates are an expedient for gathering the contribution (d) Baptism is authorized, so the baptistery is an expedient to provide a place for immersion (e) Singing is authorized, so hymn books are expedient to helping us sing.

Are there limitations placed upon how far we may go? Must we have authority for all that we do in religious matters? To help answer such questions, consider these:

### WARNINGS FOUND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We must not change its message (Gal.1:8-9)! Even if we claimed a change was authorized by an angelic

## ***Standard Of Authority (Cont.)***

messenger, we would be accursed! Therefore, the gospel of salvation in Christ must be preserved in every respect.

We must not add to or take away from it (Rev.22:18-19)! Though primarily applicable to the book of Revelation, this warning is consistent with others pertaining to the revelation of God's will to man (Deut.4:2; Pro 30:5-6).

We must abide in the doctrine of Christ. Otherwise, we will not have fellowship with the Father and the Son (2 John 9). Is this passage referring to the doctrine "about" Christ, or the doctrine "taught by" Christ (along with His apostles)? The question is of little importance for John holds equally to both positions. It is fundamental to the faith to hold to the proper views about Christ (2 John 7). It is fundamental to the faith to obey the commandments of Christ (1 John 3:24). Thus what John says here applies in either case.

We must not allow the traditions of men to make the commands of God of no effect. Jesus charged the Pharisees with "vain" worship for doing this (Mark 7:5-13). In view of this warning, we should evaluate our religious practices. Are they based upon "traditions of men", or the "commandments of God"? If "traditions of men", does our keeping them render the "commands of God" of no effect? For instance, by keeping the man-made tradition of sprinkling for baptism, we render the command of God for immersion of no effect

We must not abuse our liberty in Christ. In Christ we enjoy wonderful freedom, but we must be careful in our use of it (Gal 5:1, 13). We must be considerate of our brothers' consciences (Rom.14:14-15:3). We should be willing to forego our liberty rather than let it destroy a brother (1 Cor.8:9-13). We should not only ask "Is it lawful?", but also "Does it edify?" (1 Cor. 10:23-24,31-33).

With such "warnings" weighing upon our hearts, we are more likely to approach the Word of God with the humility it deserves as we seek to establish the authority for our service to God. But one last question related to having the same standard of authority: Will it "guarantee" unity among the followers of Christ?

### ***AGREEING UPON THE SAME STANDARD WILL NOT GUARANTEE UNITY***

There are still challenges to face. As individuals seek unity in Christ we need more than just the same standard of authority. Barton W. Stone, an effective promoter of Christian unity in the early 1800's, had these insightful words in an article entitled "Christian Union" published in The Christian Messenger (1828): "*On no other foundation can the parties ever meet, than on the Bible alone,*

*without note or comment; and in no other name will they ever unite, but in that given to the disciples at Antioch--CHRISTIAN. But should all the professors of Christianity reject all their various creeds and names, and agree to receive the Bible alone, and be called by no other name than Christian, will this unite them? No, we are fully convinced that unless they all possess the spirit of that book and name they are far, very far, from Christian union."* In addition to agreeing on the same standard of authority (the Word of God), we need the proper attitude (Eph.4:2,3) to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim.2:14-16). As Paul told Timothy, the servant of the Lord must carefully apply the Word when seeking to teach others (2 Tim.2:23-25).

The apostle Paul has more to say on the attitudes necessary to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace", but we will consider those in our next article. My purpose in this article has been to share some thoughts that I pray will help steer us in the right direction as we strive to follow Jesus without division. The Bible teaches us, not only by way of direct commands, but through approved examples and necessary implications. It is helpful to understand the principles of general and specific authority, and when something may be expedient to fulfill things that are authorized. Warnings throughout the scriptures should serve to keep us on the "straight and narrow" But as valuable and needful the same standard of authority may be, simple agreement on what the standard is will not guarantee unity - we need to apply the proper spirit of love, patience and humility as we grow together towards unity in Christ What is your attitude toward the authority of God's Word? Are you willing to accept the authority of Jesus Christ, as delegated to His apostles, that true unity can be attained? (Matt.28:18-20; John 17:17-23). We hope and pray that you will and that you will continue to study with us toward this good end.

If you are interested in any of the following please check the appropriate box and mail to the address below. Please include return address and phone number if possible.

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