

Redwater Restorer

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

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Standards Of Authority - Part 2

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Services:

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Bible Class 10:00 a.m.
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Bible Class 7:00 p.m.

Address:

P.O.Box 229
Redwater, Tx. 75573

Phone:

(903) 671-2369
(903) 671-2515

E-Mail:

MILBY2@JUNO.COM

Web Address:

WWW.ARKLATEXGUIDES.
COM/REDWATERCHURCH

Edited By:

Mark Miller

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In our previous study, I endeavored to show... 1) That it is through the writing of the apostles, the "apostles' doctrine," that the Lord speaks to and directs His Church, 2) That the "New Testament" is how Christ speaks to us today and leads us to life everlasting, 3) That it is the "apostles' doctrine," which ought to be our standard of authority in matters of religion, and in which we must "continue steadfastly" (**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. This is easy to do, and perhaps the best way to avoid this is to be aware of invalid 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. In this article 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. Let's start with...

I. Invalid Objective Standards Of Authority

One such invalid objective standard is the Old Testament. It is common for people to resort to the O. T. to provide authority for some practice when they can't find authority for it in the teachings of Christ and/or His apostles. For example, a clergy-laity system, burning of incense and use of instrumental music in worship, keeping the Sabbath, etc. The O.T. was designed to be temporary, to fulfill a specific purpose and as a covenant has been replaced by the New Covenant (i.e., the New Testament). It was given because of transgressions, till Christ should come (**Gal. 3:19**). For those under the Law (Israel), it was a tutor designed to lead them to Christ (**Gal. 3:24**). A tutor that has been taken away (**Gal. 3:25**). When those who were under the Law came to Christ they became dead to the Law (**Rom. 7:4**). They were

delivered from the Law (**Rom. 7:6**). As prophesied by Jeremiah, God has made a "new covenant" to replace the "first covenant" which is now obsolete (**Heb. 8: 7-13**). 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. Some sought to enforce circumcision and the Law upon Gentile believers (**Acts 15:1,6**), but the apostles, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, were able to defuse the problem by simply stating they themselves "gave no such commandment" (**Acts 15:22-29**). This is not to say the O.T. is not of value to Christians for it was written for our learning, to provide patience, comfort, and hope (**Rom. 15:4**). It was written for our admonition, that we not make similar mistakes (**1 Cor. 10:6,11**). We just can't use it to enjoin religious practices upon others, or ourselves, which the apostles' themselves did not teach!

Another invalid objective standard is "majority rule." Many people accept whatever the majority thinks about something. But consider the words of Jesus, in describing the end of the majority (**Matt. 7:13-14**). If you followed the majority in Noah's day, you would have perished in the flood and in Joshua's day, you would have perished in the wilderness. 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" (**Josh 24:14-15**).

Another invalid objective standard is "Parents." Some think "If it was good enough for Mom and Dad, it is good enough for me." Yet as much as we may love and respect our parents, Christ must come first (**Matt. 10:37**). If every generation had simply followed their parents, then we who are Gentiles would likely still be idol-worshippers and polytheistic!

Another invalid objective standard is "Preachers." It is common for people to place their trust in their "preacher," "priest," or "pastor."

Standard Of Authority (Cont.)

They reason in their hearts that surely these "men of God" could not be wrong or lead them astray. Yet Paul warned of how we can easily be misled (**2 Cor. 11:13-15**). And Jesus warned about the "blind leading the blind" (**Matt. 15:12-14**). Our attitude needs to be like that of the Bereans, who carefully examined Paul's teachings in light of the Scriptures (**Acts 17:11**).

Still another invalid objective standard is the "creeds and traditions of men." This is where the denominations really get most of their authority. Indeed, adherence to the creeds of men is what produces denominations. Accept the Bible only, and you become a Christian only! Accept the Bible along with some Creed, and you become something else! Accept the Bible and the Book of Mormon, and you become a Mormon. Accept the Bible and papal authority, and you become a Roman Catholic. Accept the Bible and the Lutheran Catechism, and you become a Lutheran. Creeds are really not even necessary. If they say more than what the Bible says, they say too much. If they say less than what the Bible says, they say too little. If they say exactly what the Bible says, then why not let the Bible be our creed book? The fact is, creeds are filled with the traditions and commands of men, many of which conflict with and displace the commands of God! (**Mark 7:6-9**). Creeds of men, preachers, parents, majority rule, even the Old Testament itself, are some of the "objective" standards that people turn to rather than the authority of the Lord's apostles. But there are also...

II. Invalid Subjective Standards Of Authority

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

Another invalid subjective standard is "wisdom." Many feel that through their own wisdom they can determine right and wrong. But God's thoughts and ways are not always our own (**Isa.55:8-9**). In fact, God has chosen to save man in a

manner specifically designed to confound those who depend solely upon human wisdom (**1 Cor. 1:18-29**). For us to know God's will, it was necessary for Him to reveal it to us (**1 Cor. 2:9-12**). This He has done through His Spirit-inspired apostles, who in turn shared it with us through their writings (**Eph. 3:1-5**).

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

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. But which "objective standard"? Not creeds of men, preachers, parents, majority rule, or even the Old Testament. Only the "apostles' doctrine", i.e., the New Testament. For the apostles were personally selected to be Christ's ambassadors. For the apostles were inspired by the Holy Spirit, to be guided into all the truth and they were inspired to write all that Christ would have us to know and do. When we are content to abide in the "apostles' doctrine," then we can be assured that we are following Jesus without denominationalism! Are you following Jesus by "continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine"? Or do you follow some other standard of authority in religion?

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P.O.Box 229
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