

2016 Authority – Part 6

What Leads Many to Stray

INTRO.: In this final lesson on authority, I want to look at a couple of reasons why so many individuals and churches have such a difficult time maintaining a commitment to exacting obedience to the authoritative commands and examples of the New Testament.

I. A desire to do more than what they have the ability to do.

A. *The history of the church in the last 150 years is of movements created within the church to activate organizational structures within the universal church that the New Testament never authorized – all in the name of doing more.*

B. *If an individual or a church wants to do more than their limited funds will allow, what are they to do? Three possibilities:*

1. The *first possibility* is to organize a para-church organization with either a director or a board of directors – to which churches can contribute money from their treasury to do a greater work than any single church could do on its own. The more churches that contribute, the greater the work that can be done.
 - a. The *American Christian Missionary Society* (for conducting world evangelism) was a para-church organization founded in the mid-1800's.
 - b. The *ACMS* was widely opposed. Familiar names in opposition included David Lipscomb, Tolbert Fanning, and the preacher Benjamin Franklin. They recognized that the New Testament is silent about such organizations.
2. The *second possibility* is for one church to proclaim itself a sponsoring church and request funds from other churches, funds which the elders of the sponsoring church take charge of and distribute as they see fit.
 - a. *The Herald of Truth* – which began as a brotherhood mission to broadcast the gospel throughout the nation, and later throughout the world, and was initially under the oversight of the elders of the Highland Ave. Church of Christ in Abilene – is the quintessential example of an unscriptural church organization set up by men who wanted to do more than they had the material resources to do.
 - b. That example has been followed by hundreds of churches desiring to be sponsoring churches for brotherhood works, that have violated the New Testament pattern of each church doing its own work.
3. The *third possibility* is for the individual or church to recognize that, as bad as they might want to do a greater work than they are financially able, God expects from them only according to what they have, not what they do not have, and they must be content to remain within the confines of the commands and examples of the New Testament.
 - a. Note **2 Cor. 8:12** – “It is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.”
 - b. Isn't that the message of the story of the poor widow's two mites in **Mark 12:41-44**?
 - c. **Deut. 16:17** – In the matter of offerings at the Feast of Tabernacles, “Every man shall give as

he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you.”

- d. **Ezra 2:69** – In Israel’s offerings for the construction of the second temple, the principle that God has always used to measure His people’s work – according to their ability, they gave.”

II. A belief that the gospel just isn’t a big enough initial draw in this day and age.

A. *The argument goes something like this: “No one is drawn into a church by the teaching and preaching of the gospel anymore. We need something else to draw them in, and once we get them in, then we can hit them with the gospel.”*

1. And so, one preacher I know asked his elders why they thought it was necessary to build a \$20,000 playground, and the answer was, “To draw in young families from the community.”
2. It’s the classic *bait and switch* – bait them with something that appeals to the flesh, and then switch to something that appeals to the spirit.

B. *Let me suggest two things wrong with that:*

1. It very rarely works in the long run.
 - a. The bait you use to get folks will be what you will have to continue to use to keep them – and even more.
 - b. As one preacher friend long ago said, “Get them with hamburgers and coke, and you’ll have to keep them with steak and Perrier.”
 - c. Jesus ran into that in His earthly ministry, didn’t He? Note **John 6:24-27**. Jesus wasn’t even trying to get them with loaves and fishes, He fed them because He felt compassion for them. Even then, they stayed only for the loaves and fishes.
2. Even if it does work, we are to be guided by what is scriptural, not by what we deem to be practical.
 - a. *Pragmatism* – the practice of justifying the doing of something just because it seems to work.
 - b. Will food or a playground get them in door? Then let’s do it!
 - c. The problem with pragmatism is that Jesus didn’t say, “Do what seems to you to work.” He said, “Do what I command you.”

C. *The “bait” Jesus commanded the church to use is the gospel.*

1. **2 Tim. 4:2** – Paul charge to Timothy: “Preach the word!” Note **vss. 3-5**. The warning is that eventually it will be fables that the crowd will want. The spiritual pragmatist would say, “If fables gets them in the door, give them fables!” Paul says, “When they want fables, just keep giving them the word!”
2. What must be the draw of Christianity? Playgrounds? Loaves and fishes? Fun and games? Note **John 12:32** – If salvation from sins through the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross doesn’t draw men and women through the door, sorry, there is no other draw that means anything, no other draw we are authorized to use.

CONCL.: There are other things we could talk about if time allowed, including:

The idea that it is better to do too much than to do too little. Balaam exposes the fallacy of that in **Num. 22:18**

– “I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do LESS or MORE.”

The idea that what sounds like a good thing to me surely must sound like a good thing to God. Samuel exposes the fallacy of that in **1 Sam. 15:19-22**.

Close this sermon and series with this point: In the beginning of the American Restoration Movement, Thomas Campbell coined this phrase: “*Let us speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent.*” That phrase is the very essence of what it means to recognize biblical authority, and how we must apply **1 Pet. 4:11** to all that we do: “*If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.*” May God help us to be wise in our commitment to do just exactly that.