

From Heaven or From Men?

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In His immortal Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:

Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Mat. 7:21–23).

This passage teaches a great and fundamental Truth: the vanity, presumptuousness, and danger of doing anything that Jehovah has not authorized. In His sweeping principle, the Lord embraced every item that one might list as an ingredient of faithfulness to God and His Son. If one has his heart set on doing "all in the name of the Lord" (Col. 3:17), he will be faithful in all things. Jesus' statement demonstrates the insufficiency of several things upon which millions are relying in religion. It is not enough to:

- Believe in Christ
- Confess one's faith in Christ
- Prophesy or preach some religious message
- Do religious works, even those that appear to be great
- Be sincere in one's religious doctrine or practice
- Be zealous in one's religious activity
- Do or teach something because one "likes it"
- Do or teach something because it appeals to and attracts large crowds
- Do or teach something because a large congregation somewhere is doing or teaching it
- Do or teach something because some "great name" in the church is doing or teaching it

All that matters is, does God authorize it?

To merely speak the Lord's name over something we are doing is no sign of His approval. The sons of Sceva quickly learned this to their own dismay and discomfort (Acts 19:14–16). Jesus' statement conclusively shows that God not only requires more than mere faith and its confession for salvation, but that he requires more than mere works, also. If one's works are not the works God has authorized His servants to do, they are all done in vain. **That which God does not authorize, He does not recognize!**

Jesus' once asked the Jewish rulers if the baptism of John was of Heaven or of men (Mat. 21:25). In doing so, he exhausted all possibilities. The wicked Jews knew better than to argue that there was a third possible source of authority. Every doctrine and practice in religion is either authorized by God—or it is human in origin.

Faithful men have restored and maintained the New Testament church in modern times on the premise of book, chapter and verse—explicit or implicit Scriptural authority—for all that we do and say. The essence of faithfulness as individuals and congregations is two-fold: (1) Searching the Scriptures to determine what they authorize, and (2) doing only what they authorize with all of our might. My, how all men, both in and out of the church of Christ, need to be reminded of this fact! Much of the preaching and practice among us over the past thirty years has had no more “authority” for it than one of the well-known evangelical preachers/writers, some popular psychologist or philosopher, John Calvin, or one’s personal preference. A sad fact to contemplate in all of this is that thousands of saints (including many preachers and a host of elders) do not know how to go about determining whether or not a given practice or doctrine is authorized. Such terms as *explicit*, *implicit*, *optional*, and *obligatory* are like a foreign language to them. Those who teach and preach are greatly culpable in this matter, for we have not taught and preached on these subjects as thoroughly or frequently as the need required.

One is not faithful to God who is not faithful to Christ (John 15:23). One is not faithful to Christ who does not honor His Word (John 12:48; 14:15). God has given His Son "all authority" (Mat. 28:18), and we must scrupulously submit to it. Those who are careless about this subject, whether in the church or out, will arrive at the Judgment to hear the Lord ask, "Who are you? I don't believe we have met, and it is too late to get acquainted now."

[Note: I wrote this article as part of my *Editor's Clippings* column in the February 2005 edition of *The Gospel Journal*, of which I was editor at the time.]

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