

Rise Up And Build

"So They said, 'Let us rise up and build,' Then they set their hands to do this good work," Neh. 2:18

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False Standards of Authority

By Marc W. Gibson

When Jesus was challenged to give the authority for His actions, He answered by posing a question of His Own. He challenged the chief priests and the elders of the people to identify the authority behind John the Baptist's baptism. Jesus gave two choices: *from heaven or from men* (Matt. 21:23-25). Jesus identified two standards of authority — human and divine. The only true standard of authority in religion is that which comes from heaven. Divine authority is expressed in the divinely inspired Scriptures. Human authority is fine if man desires to worship himself, or a religion of his own design, but it will never suffice in pleasing God: *"And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men"* (Matt. 15:9). There are many false standards of authority that would fall in the realm of human authority. Think seriously as you consider the following:

1) Feelings/ Emotion — the good or bad feelings we experience is not an accurate guide as to whether an activity is right in the sight of God. This subjective means of determining authority is not guaranteed to agree with the objective truth of God's revelation in the New Testament. Though emotions may be heightened, an activity could still be wrong. We must first know what God desires, and then we can be joyous in doing it. Evidently king David felt that transporting the ark of the covenant on a new cart was an acceptable idea, and everyone's emotions were heightened by the music being played (I Chron. 13:6-8). Everything changed when a man died trying to steady the ark when the oxen stumbled (vv. 9-12). David learned that it is not right to act when one has not consulted God *"about the proper order"* (15:13). Too many people rely on feelings and emotions to tell them that "they are right." How foolish and dangerous!

2) Creeds, Manuals, Disciplines, Etc. Modern denominations that are founded, organized, and operated by men have publications to inform the members about the

organization they are a part of and what is expected of them as members. With so many religious bodies now in existence, these documents are needed to differentiate one group from another. Therefore, we have various competing creeds, manuals, catechisms, disciplines, and latter-day revelations. If these works contain more than the Bible they are **adding** to God's word; if they contain less than God's word, they lack the truth about what pleases God. Why don't we eliminate such confusion and just follow the Bible? It speaks of one church and gives us all the information we need to be that same church today.

3) Everybody's Doing it—Majority rule is not the way of the Lord. Jesus is the sole head of the body, the church (Eph. 1:22-23). His word is the final authority. Even if everyone else is ignoring the proper way, we should follow the will of the Lord Jesus. God's way has never been the popular way (Matt. 7:13-14). Many will follow strange paths that result in sin against God. One of the most dangerous weapons of Satan is the desire to get along with those in error and compromise the truth. One must be strong and determined in standing for what is right.

4) The End Justifies the Means—Many conclude that if a certain activity results in "good," then it must be right to do. And if that certain "good" end is desired, any means necessary to accomplish it will be justified. This is a deceptive lie of the devil. As Paul affirmed, it is not right to "*do evil that good may come*" (Rom. 3:8). It is important to accomplish good in the way that God authorizes. In God's eyes, a "good" end will never justify an unauthorized means to obtain it. Besides, what is "good" is not up to us to decide. God has already prepared the good works we are to walk in (Eph. 2:10), and the word of God furnishes us "*unto all good works*" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Let us be mindful and faithful to do God's work in God's way. Only in this way can God receive glory.

5) Church/Family/Tradition—Embracing a practice of many years is a powerful incentive to continue in old traditions. "We've always done it this way" is a common cry of those who seek justification for what is unauthorized in scripture. Matters of expediency (Judgment) that fall under generic authority may indeed be practiced "because we have always done it that way" (such as singing an appropriate song just before the Lord's Supper). This would not be unlawful, but to continue in a traditional practice that is not authorized by command, example, or necessary inference (such as infant baptism) is wrong. It matters little in the destiny of your soul what your parents or your grandparents did. Blood is not thicker than truth. Each of us must do what is right, no matter what unauthorized traditions may be left behind.

6) My Preacher Said It Was Right — No earthly person is our authority in religion. The preacher could be wrong. He may be misguided by a human creed or seeking to deceive people for his own selfish interests. Test all things by the infallible word of God in the Scriptures. Take that inspired word as your ultimate guide. If anyone preaches any other gospel than what is in the Scriptures, he is accursed (Gal. 1:8-9).

7) The Bible Doesn't Say Not To Do It—The silence of the Scriptures must be respected. "*Do not add to His words, lest He reprove you, and you be found a liar*" (Prov. 30:6). Let's be content to speak only the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11). God has told us everything we

need to know, and when something is specifically taught in the Scriptures, then all other ways and opinions are excluded.

8) Sincerity — It would be foolish to think that everyone who has ever followed a false religion did it because they wanted to be wrong. Many people do what they do in religion because they sincerely believe it will please God. But **how** do they know that? This is the key question. Saul of Tarsus was sincere in his religious zeal in persecuting Christians, but he was wrong and in sin (Acts 26:9-11; 22:16). How do you know that what you do is pleasing to God? There is only one true way you can know. The Scriptures reveal His righteous way, and faith comes by hearing the word of God.

Faithful obedience pleases God. Take each and every item of your religious belief and see if it is authorized in the New Testament by either a command/statement, approved apostolic example, or necessary inference. If so, you know it pleases God; if not, your religion is vain and your soul is in danger. Is what you believe and practice of heaven or of men? Do you seek to please men or God? If you love Jesus, you will keep His commandments. The Day of Judgment is coming for all of us. Are you ready?
