

Jesus once asked, *“The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?”* (Matthew 21:25). By posing such a question Jesus was actually showing that in religious affairs there are only two sources of authority for what men do. All religious teachings and practices come either *“from heaven”* (i.e. they come from God) or *“from men”* (they are man-made). There are no other choices.

Today as we look at the religious world around us we see division, do we not? Why is it that men are so divided in their religious practices? We suggest that one of the main causes of religious division can be summarized in this statement: men are divided *because they actually follow different standards of authority.*

Each of us understands the need to have certain absolute “standards” in various matters in society that are unrelated to religion. For example, we buy milk in gallon or ½ gallon containers. Cloth is measured in inches, feet, and yards. All of these measurements are simply absolute, objective, unchanging standards. If there were no such standards in society and everybody just “did his own thing” when it came to measuring things, chaos would result.

It’s the same way in religion. When folks do not go by one absolute, unchanging standard in their teaching and practices, then confusion and division are unavoidable. Thus, it is always wise to ask this question: What Standard Of Authority Should We Follow In Matters Of Religion?

OUR FEELINGS

“If it feels right, do it.” This is a popular philosophy of our day. It has even become an accepted concept with many in the sphere of religion. But are feelings really a safe guide?

Adolf Hitler was a key figure in World War II. He considered the German race to be a superior one, and at the same time felt that the Jews are an inferior race, and thus ought to be exterminated. But Hitler’s ideas were not based on fact; they were simply his *subjective feelings.*

Yes, Hitler possessed and followed strong feelings, yet his action in murdering some six million Jews was wrong, do you not agree? This shows that a person’s feelings can be wrong.

In the Bible we read about a man by the name of Saul persecuting the disciples of Jesus (Acts 9:1,2). Why did Saul, who is later known as the apostle Paul, do such wicked things? Because he felt in his heart that he should do them! Listen to what he said about his persecution of Christ’s followers: *“I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth”* (Acts 26:9). Paul did what he *felt* was right, but his actions were wrong! This plainly shows that even in religious matters, one’s feelings can be deceptive. Thus, feelings are *not* a safe guide or standard to follow.

THE WISDOM OF MEN

Man’s wisdom is also not a safe guide in serving the Lord. Many accept and do only that which *appears to them* to be wise or logical. The problem is, the way *man* “sees” things is often not in harmony with the way that *God* thinks. *“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death”* (Proverbs 16:25). Some things may “look” right, but they actually lead to spiritual destruction.

We must not forget this truth: *“... the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God”* (1 Corinthians 3:19) When it comes to pleasing God and the salvation of our soul, we must not follow worldly wisdom or what *we* think is best. Why? Because man’s wisdom is not infallible.

THE TRADITIONS OF MEN

In our day great multitudes follow the traditions of men in their service to God. So many have the idea that, if their parents or forefathers “believed a certain way,” then they ought to do the same. But blindly accepting and imitating the religious practices of our family members is not a safe practice. Why? Because all humans, including our family members, make

mistakes. Not only this, the traditions of men often conflict with the teachings of the Bible. In all that we do, *“We ought to obey God, rather than men”* (Acts 5:29).

Think again about the apostle Paul. Before he became a follower of Christ he very zealously followed the traditions of his fathers. Hear what he said about his former life: *“And profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers”* (Galatians 1:14). Yes, Paul followed the traditions of men, but was he pleasing to God when he did so? No! Consider this. During the time that Paul was striving to follow his family’s traditions, the Lord’s messenger told him, *“And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord”* (Acts 22:16). This plainly shows that Paul was not saved, even though he was sincerely doing things the way his family and forefathers had done them.

In our service to Christ, following the traditions of men is not the way of salvation. Who says so? Jesus Himself. He said, *“Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”* (Mark 7:7).

WHAT THE MAJORITY DOES

Surely you have heard someone say, “Everybody is doing it, so it must be right.” What about it, in the sphere of religion does the fact that many people are doing or teaching something make it right in God’s sight? God warned the Israelites: *“Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil”* (Exodus 23:2). The truth is, what many people do or teach could be right, but it just might be wrong, too. The action or teaching of the majority is *not* a safe guide.

How many lives were spared during the great flood in the days of Noah? *“... while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water”* (1 Peter 3:20). The Bible

does not tell us what the population of the world was in Noah's time, but only a "few," eight people to be exact, were saved in the ark that Noah built. The majority of people who lived at that time were lost outside the ark. Clearly, in this case the action of the majority was wrong!

Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13,14, NKJV). If only "few" will receive eternal life, then the majority will be lost. Therefore, it would surely be unwise to accept and follow what the majority does!

WHAT PREACHERS OR PASTORS SAY

Did you ever watch a newborn bird eat? He just opens his mouth and takes in any thing that his mama puts in there. Sadly, many people today, like the tiny birds, just "close their eyes" and blindly accept what their preacher or pastor says about any topic. That is *so* dangerous!

Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7:15). The Holy Spirit further predicted "there shall be false teachers" who would bring in damnable heresies that would deceive "many" (2 Peter 2:1,2). Just because someone preaches does *not* mean that what he says is right in God's sight! We must compare all that we hear or read with what God's word says. Regardless of how much we love or respect someone, if his/her message is not in harmony with the will of God, we must reject it. Why? Again, because, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

As we have seen, one's feelings, the wisdom of men, the traditions of men, what the majority does, what preachers or pastors say – none of these are safe standards for us to follow in our

service to the Lord. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the safe, absolute, unchanging standard or guide that God wants all men to follow.

Why did the Lord give us the Bible? To show us the way of salvation – how to live in this life in order to enter heaven in the next one! "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). God's word, like a source of light, shows us the path to take in life in order to please the Lord.

Jesus declared, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). What is this wonderful truth that can give us freedom from sin and condemnation? Jesus prayed to the Heavenly Father, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth" (John 17:17). According to Christ, what is truth in all spiritual matters? The word of God. Thus, we must accept all that God's word, the Bible, says, and reject anything that contradicts it.

The Bible is God's inspired book that makes its true followers complete. It provides all the instruction that one could ever need in his spiritual life. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

How powerful is the gospel? It is written, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth ..." (Romans 1:16). What is it that can save man's soul? The gospel of Christ!

Jesus commanded His followers to go into all the world and preach the gospel (Mark 16:15), instructing men to observe or follow all things that He commanded (Matthew 28:20). The teaching of Jesus Christ – that, friends, is the only safe standard to follow in all religious matters.

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Service Times: Sunday at 10:00 a.m. & 6:00 p.m.
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WHAT STANDARD OF AUTHORITY SHOULD WE FOLLOW IN MATTERS OF RELIGION?