

A Study of The Local Church
Lesson I - Attitudes Toward Open Study And Bible Authority
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Introduction: The Need of Loyalty to Jesus Christ

- A. Throughout history men have had a resistance to listening and obeying.
 - 1. Men have found it easier to substitute other things for a careful study of His word.
 - 2. Then upon finding truth we must stand for it lest we give it up because of pressures from men.
 - 3. We realize that God's way is not easy, but it is the only way God can work with us and make us right with Him. **(Luke 6:46-49)**
- B. Men have substituted their loyalty for God for loyalty with other things. Consider some common substitutions.
 - 1. **Loyalty to a church** - Often church traditions and church doctrines will not be given up or even be tested by a study of the Bible.
 - 2. **Loyalty to a man** - Sometimes devotion to a famous preacher, a close friend, or a famous editor causes one to refuse to test or go against their teachings.
 - 3. **Loyalty to family** - Many simply follow in the way they were raised without a willingness to test their religion. In some cases if the family makes a change, loyalty to the family means following without question.
 - 4. **Loyalty to self** - Without question this is the most common loyalty that keeps men from listening to God. Study and change is time consuming, often emotionally draining, and requires strong faith and love for God and His word. It is usually easier to follow the established pattern. The question each of us must face: "Am I willing to listen to Jesus Christ?"
- C. The focus of this study will be "What saith the Lord".
 - 1. Since we will be dealing with controversial issues, it will be necessary to constantly examine and be sure our focus is on the scriptures and not away from them.
 - 2. Let us be careful to keep listening to the Lord, and show respect for each other as we study.

I. How to Realize the Unity Which God Commands.

- A. We need to place importance upon the things which were important to our Lord. **(John 17:20-23)**
 - 1. Is unity possible?
 - 2. Yes, for those who listen to Christ!
- B. What kind of unity does Christ expect? **(I Cor 1: 10)**
 - 1. Not just a vague belief in the deity of Christ, but rather "speak the same thing", "be of the same mind".
 - 2. Again this is only possible for those willing to make the effort, to study, pray, listen and forbear with others!
- 3. We cannot delegate our responsibility to preachers through their public

efforts. While such studies are good, we still must always be willing to open our Bibles with others.

4. Unity is accomplished one individual at a time! While I cannot change what others may do, I can be sure I am following the Lord. This will produce unity among those of the same mind.
5. The greatest hindrance to unity today in the church is the general unwillingness to open the Bible in the home with family, brethren, the lost, or anyone else!

C. Let us identify things that do not produce unity.

1. **Ignoring the fact division exists** - Like the ostrich, some put their heads into the ground and hope problems go away.
 - a. Many try to redefine the gospel to rule out the need of study. Some things are "essential" and should be studied, while others are "non-essential" and need not be studied.
 - b. The question of what God expects of us is determined by the scriptures. If a subject is either "essential" or "non-essential" this can only be determined by getting the Bible opened.
 - c. Sadly the purpose of this argument with some is to keep brethren from studying over an open Bible, the very thing that will produce unity.
2. **Representing brethren as unworthy of study** - Normally this is accomplished by name calling with the goal of arousing prejudice. Some common names are; "Anti", "Liberal", "extremist", "moss back", etc...
 - a. What do we mean by these names? Are we trying to communicate truth and understand each other better? Or are we trying to produce prejudice and build barriers to an open study of the Bible?
 - b. Please treat each brother as an individual as worthy of study until he proves otherwise. It is an unfair approach to block out a brother from consideration because of the actions and bad attitudes of another. This is like getting mad at the dog and kicking the cat!
 - c. Listen to another before assuming you know what he believes. You may be surprised at what you find out.
3. **Trying to browbeat or force your view by a quick bombastic statement concerning one or two issues** - Some memorize a few cliches and arguments and then feel that by stating them, this satisfies responsibility for study.
 - a. Normally the Bible is never opened or at most a brief look.
 - b. This approach will leave real differences untouched. More heat than light is shed upon the "study".
 - c. Remember that true unity is accomplished by carefully identifying each others positions mid then going to the scriptures to conform to the truth.
 - d. This will take time! Because of this patience, love and understanding are essential to become of one mind.
 - e. The best approach is to begin the study from "common ground,"

that is, areas in which we agree. Then we can proceed to the areas of disagreement.

II What Are the Issues?

- A. In this section we wish to identify specific issues that divide us.
1. It is a serious mistake to represent only one or two issues as the cause of division!
 2. There are many areas of disagreement which must be recognized. These differences will vary from individual to individual. Let us now attempt to identify some issues.
 3. At this point of our study we only want to recognize the differences and not to prove what is right or wrong. By dealing with these subjects in an orderly way, one at a time, we will be able to calmly study each subject.
 4. One problem we must avoid is trying to create a cloud of dust and confusion by jumping from subject to subject.
- B. As an aid to identifying some issues let us examine an article written by Floyd Decker written in 1944. This article is not proof concerning right or wrong but it does show the changes that have occurred since that time.

"WHY I LEFT THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH" Floyd A. Decker (1944)

1. The Christian Church has women Counselors, Directors, and Lecturers; the church of Christ does not (**I Tim 2:11,12; 1 Cor 14:34**).
2. The Christian Church has educational Directors, Associate Ministers and Youth Directors; the church of Christ has elders, deacons, evangelists and teachers (**Eph 4:11; Phil 1:1**).
3. The Christian Church has Missionary, Benevolent, and Educational organizations to execute the work of the church; the church of Christ does not (**Eph 4:4; 3:10,21**).
4. The Christian Church celebrates days of heathen worship, such as Easter, Mother's Day, and Christmas; the church of Christ does not (**Gal 4:10**).
5. The Christian Church fellowships various denominations in their activities, leaving the impression that all are brethren; the church of Christ does not. (**Rom 1:16; 2 Jn 9-11; Gal 1:6-10**)
- 6 The Christian Church seeks to get crowds with Youth Meetings, Campaigns for Christ, Rallies, Drives and Promotions; the church of Christ does not (**Rev 22:18-19**).
7. The Christian Church emphasizes society and the physical man by appealing to the carnal nature--with church carnivals, bands, plays, choruses, dramatics,

church kitchens, church camps, and elaborate fellowship halls; the church of Christ does not (**I Cor 10:7; 11:22-34; Rom 14:17**).

8. The Christian Church elevates its preachers above the rest of the members by using such titles as Pastor, Superintendent, President, Doctor, and Reverend; the church of Christ does not (**Mt 23:5-12; Job 32:21, 22**).

9. The Christian Church takes up collections at services other than on the first day of the week, and uses unscriptural means such as suppers, property rentals, and special collections to raise money for the church; the church of Christ follows **I Cor 16:1-2** by having each member lay by in store on the first day of the week. This is the only way of raising money.

10. The Christian church misuses the name "Christian" (a noun) by speaking of "Christian nations", "Christian schools", and the "Christian Church "; the church of Christ does not (**Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pt 4:16**).

11. The Christian Church owns and operates publishing houses, radio stations, hospitals, and other Benevolent Societies,' the church of Christ build nothing but churches (**Eph 3:21**).

12. The Christian Church owns, supports, and operates schools for secular education, beginning with kindergartens and going all the way through theological seminaries; the church of Christ does not (**I Tim 3:15**).

13. The Christian Church has a compromising attitude and spirit, will not defend its doctrine, is nothing but a man-made denomination, has no regard for the authority of the Bible, bases its practice on the silence of the scriptures, and appeals to the traditions of the elders rather than the simple unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ. the Christian Church is no part of the N. T church, and should not be regarded as a friend of Christ nor of the truth.

C. Be sure your understand not just what name the issues go by but what they mean!

1. On one occasion after reading this article publicly, a young lady left the services believing I was against supporting "missionaries" because of the article against missionary societies!
2. I recommend reading concerning the issues and attitudes that brought about the division producing the Christian Church around the turn of the century (1900).
3. There may be other areas of study to add to this list. One other area I would add is the arrangement called "the Sponsoring Church".

III The Attitude God Requires of Us Toward The Bible

A. The Bible Is Complete (**2 Tim 3:16-17**)

1. The Bible is a product of the Spirit of God. **(John 16:13)**
 2. God's provisions are always complete and sufficient for the purpose He wills. To reflect upon the completeness of the scriptures is to reflect upon God Himself. **(2 Peter 1:3)**
 3. The Bible can and must be understood by each of us. Would God command us to understand a book that is beyond our ability to understand? The answer we give reveals our understanding of God. **(Eph 3:3-5; 5:17)**
 4. Let us then not fear understanding but rather seek it.
- B. Respect Is Demanded For God's Word
1. Some say "I love Jesus", but refuse to be examined by His word. Again your attitude towards God's word is your attitude towards Jesus! **(John 12:48)**
 2. Since I have that confidence in God I will not be afraid to stand upon God's word alone.
 3. God will not tolerate anyone tampering with His word. The principle taught in this verse is also taught in verses throughout the Bible. **(Rev 22:18-19)**
 4. No stronger language is found in the scriptures than to condemn those who will tamper with His word. **(Gal 1:6-10)**
 5. Two questions we need to ask: **(Mt 15:3-9)**
 - a. How do we add to the scriptures?
 - b. How do we take away from the scriptures?
 - c. As an example, how does the use of instrumental music in worship fit into the above questions? Why? **(2 John 9-11)**
 - d. Notice the ASV version of this scripture: "Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God..." How does one "goeth onward"?
 6. Do you see how our attitude toward the completeness of scripture and our willingness to abide only in what it teaches is essential to our salvation? Notice the consequences, "Whosoever hath not God".
 7. What is our response? To trust God and test every practice by the scripture is the only response of saving faith. "Speak Lord thy servant heareth"
 8. Consider some old testament examples of wrong attitudes.
 - a. Notice that the Devil added only one word. **(Gen 2:17; 3:4)**
 - b. Consider several questions concerning Nadab and Abihu. **(Lev 10:1-3)**
 1. Were these two young men worshiping the one true God?
 2. Was offering incense something God had commanded? **(Lev 16:12-13)**
 3. What then is "strange fire" (KJV) or "profane fire" (NKJV)?
 4. What did Aaron understand about the death of his sons?
 5. It is important to see that God does not have to say: "Thou shalt not.." in order for something to be wrong. They had no

commandment or authority from God, therefore it was sin.
c. Look at all the arguments Saul made against doing exactly what God has said. **(I Sam 15:1-4, 18-24)**

1. Was Saul excused because of the peer pressure he felt? **(v15, 21, 24)** Does this mean that God may hold me accountable if I go along with unscriptural teachings and practices at my local church?
2. Does the end justify the means? **(v15, 21, 22)** That is, can I do evil that good may come? **(Rom 3:8)** If a teaching or practice is unscriptural but it brings more people to services, should we go along because it "does good"?
3. If Saul was graded on a percentage basis, what grade would he get..95? ..98? Did this mean he had obeyed the Lord?

C. Some Important Applications and Principles To Consider.

1. Our confidence in the scriptures covers "whatever you do in word or deed" **(Col 3:17)**. Only a complete, sufficient revelation can make this claim!
 - a. "In the name of" means by the authority of In other words we need authority from Jesus Christ in everything we do.
 - b. Since Christ speaks to us through the scriptures, we must have scripture, that is, BOOK, CHAPTER, and VERSE for all that we do. As we have already seen the scriptures furnish us with "every good work" **(2 Tim 3:16-17)**
2. Everything we teach and practice will be based on the scripture. We would not hesitate to give scripture supporting any practice. **(I Pet 4:11)**
3. When the scriptures are silent, that is give no authority for a practice, then we must not assume the right to act anyway!
(Acts 15:24, Heb 7:14)
 - a. NEVER reply when someone questions your practice by saying "Show me where the Bible says NOT TO". Instead always give scripture for your practice or give up your practice!
 - b. Consider the mass of denominational doctrines based on the silence of the scriptures: special priesthood, the pope, church businesses, church political efforts, altar call, infant baptism, church diocese, church creeds,etc. Without an understanding of this principle we could not logically oppose these practices. Can you find where the Bible says "thou shalt not have a special priesthood, a pope...?"
4. How then do we apply Bible authority to everyday actions?
 - a. We need to recognize the various ways God shows His approval of actions in the scripture. Whatever names you wish to use to describe these ways are not important as long as you understand these are principles by which all language is understood.
 - i. **Direct Command or Statement** - God commands are to be

heeded! An example of a command of God is found in **Acts 2:38**, "Repent and be baptized..."

ii. **Approved Example** - When an example is recorded in the scriptures with God's approval we know that action may be followed. (**1 Pet 2:21; 1 Cor 11:1; Acts 20:7**)

iii. **Inescapable Conclusion** or as some describe as "Necessary inference" When there is Only one possible conclusion from the scripture, then it is to be followed as God's will. Please remember there is a major difference between a possible conclusion and an inescapable one. Some inescapable conclusions are:

--"If Jesus came up out of the water, then he must have gone down into the water." (**Mt 3:16**)

-- "God is the God of the living." (**Mark 12:26-27**) -

Jesus

expected the Pharisees to conclude from a verb tense,

"I

Am" instead of "I Was", that God is the God of the living.

b. Realize that while we must have authority for everything we do, we do not have to find everything specifically named. What I mean is that the Bible authorizes in two ways.

i. **By General Authority** - everything essential for carrying out a command (or authorized action) is allowed by God. As an example we are told to baptize which would require a place that has sufficient water. The creek, lake or a man made baptistery would all be authorized but not specifically named. (**Mt 28:18-20**)

ii. **By Specific Authority** - when God specifies an action we are not at liberty to substitute anything else. As an example God specified that Christians use unleavened bread and fruit of the vine in the Lord's supper. Those who would use a sandwich and a soft drink (another food) substitute for what God has specified.

5. Take time to consider the implication and applications of these truths. In lesson three we will go into detail considering what God has authorized concerning the local church.

Conclusion: God has given us a complete, perfect revelation to guide us in every aspect of life. Only by walking by faith, that is having BOOK, CHAPTER, and VERSE for my teaching and actions, can I be pleasing to God. Be sure to take note of any questions you may have and bring them to the next class!