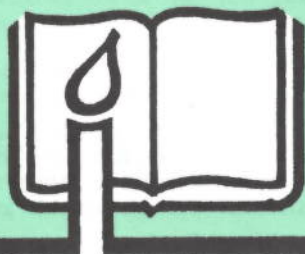


STUDIES IN THE BIBLE



Religious Authority

Lesson 24

Almost the final words of inspired Scripture are, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." (Rev. 22:18, 19.) This passage introduces the two topics which we shall study in this lesson—the book of Revelation from which the warning is taken, and the problem of authority in religion.

The Book Of Revelation

The only book of New Testament prophecy is **Revelation**, sometimes called the **Apocalypse** from its Greek name. It was written by John, the apostle, at the close of his life while he was a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos off the coast of Asia Minor. Probably the last Biblical writing, it was addressed to seven congregations of the Lord's church in Asia Minor. Of these, the book highly commends two, severely criticizes two, and both commends and criticizes the remaining three.

Revelation is an account of a vision seen by John on "the Lord's day". The Lord's day was doubtless the first day of the week (Sunday) since Christ arose from the grave on this day. Probably no book has been the subject of more speculation. Many teachers have dogmatically tried to give a meaning to every figure and symbol with numerous conflicting ideas the result.

A few words of caution are in order. First, Revelation is a record of "things which must shortly come to pass." (Rev. 1:1.) Its fulfillment, then, must be found in what has transpired **since** John penned the words rather than in what occurred before. Next, it is highly symbolic. Most Biblical writing is quite literal, but prophecy is not. Thus, when we read of seven golden candlesticks John explains that they represent seven churches to which the book is addressed. It is not within the scope of this lesson to explain the various symbols and visions, but the student is warned against accepting unquestioningly the many theories which have been propounded. One ought to be especially wary of the teacher who claims to have the answers to all the difficult passages or the man who spends most of his time preaching about what is going to happen. Sensational teaching of this kind attracts crowds, but only confuses the hearers.



Chapters 20-22 present a vivid description of both heaven and hell which will be studied in the last lesson in this course. With the words, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." the Bible comes to an end. But although completed 1850 years ago, the influence of the book of books will continue unabated until Christ returns.

Authority In Religion

The passage noticed at the beginning of this lesson suggests the questions, "Are we today to accept the New Testament as our religious authority? If so, are we free to alter its commands to bring it 'up to date'?"

Basically, the problem of religious division is one of authority. Some believe that authority resides in the church: some feel that the New Testament is authority, but that it should be interpreted by creeds; others are convinced that the New Testament must be our **sole** authority in matters of faith and practice.

What did Jesus say about it? "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." (Matt. 28:18—A.S.V.) The Father Himself attested to the truthfulness of this claim when He declared as Jesus stood upon the mount of transfiguration, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; **hear ye him.**" (Matt. 17:5.) Even the common people were astonished because Jesus "taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." (Matt. 7:29.)

Jesus exercised this authority in His teachings recorded in the four gospels. We must obey His commands to us because they are the words of Jesus Himself. But we must also obey the teachings of the apostles as elsewhere presented in the New Testament. After Jesus had explained that all authority had been given to Him, He delegated that authority to the apostles saying, "Go ye, **therefore**, and **teach** all nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: **teaching** them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:19, 20.) Moreover, Jesus promised to send the apostles the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth when He was no longer with them. (John 16:13.) The apostles taught by the authority of Christ, and in their teaching, both oral and written, they did not teach error. Their admonitions and commands were and are just as binding as the teaching of Jesus Himself.

Divine Warnings

Neither Jesus nor the apostles is with us in the flesh today. Yet we have their words in written form (and **only** in written form) in the New Testament. As such the New Testament is the only standard of religious authority which can be safely accepted by those following Christ.

We are warned against changing the inspired teachings therein found. "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:6-8.) The perverted "gospel" here condemned is one that has been changed by addition or subtraction. Furthermore, "Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son." (II John 9—A.S.V.)

These warnings simply mean that we must not only speak where the scriptures speak, but that we must also be silent where they are silent. They mean that we cannot alter the nature of a command or teaching to fit it to twentieth century thinking. The substitution of sprinkling for the apostolic practice of immersion in baptism is an example of the type of change which the apostles condemn.

Furthermore, we dare not acknowledge any human creed, catechism, or confession of faith as an authoritative interpretation of God's word. Human writings may properly be used as an aid to our understanding the divine writ, but when we accept them as authority we have gone onward and have ceased to abide in the teaching of Christ. The very fact that such creeds are contradictory to one another is evidence that they cannot all be in accord with the Scriptures.

In the following three lessons we will examine the nature of the New Testament church. We will adopt the principle of accepting the absolute authority of Christ and His apostles as revealed to us in the New Testament to determine what the church was like in the first century and what it should be today.

“Seek and Ye Shall Find”

Read Revelation 1 and fill in the blanks:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ gives a record of things which “must shortly come to” It was written by John and addressed to the seven churches in John declared that when Jesus returned every would see Him. He was on the isle called..... on the Lord’s day. Behind him he heard a great voice as of a The voice said, “I am and Omega, the first and the last.” When he turned to see the voice that spoke to him he saw seven golden In the midst of these was one like unto the Son of In His right hand He had seven John learned that the stars were the of the seven churches and the candlesticks were the seven

Read Revelation 2 and 3 (the letters to the seven churches of Asia). Write true or false before each statement:

- 1. The church at Ephesus had left its first love.
- 2. The church in Smyrna allowed Jezebel to teach.
- 3. Nothing good is said about the church in Laodicea.
- 4. The church at Sardis was “dead”.
- 5. Antipas was killed while in the church at Thyatira.
- 6. “Thou has a little strength” was said of the Philadelphia church.
- 7. The church at Ephesus had found false apostles liars.
- 8. The church in Pergamos was “lukewarm”.
- 9. To the church at Smyrna it is written, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”
- 10. Some at Pergamos held the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.

Circle the letter representing the correct answer:

- a b c 1. Jesus said all authority had been given to : (a) Him; (b) the devil; (c) Peter's successor.
- a b c 2. The voice from heaven on the mount of transfiguration told the hearers to: (a) kneel and pray; (b) hear Christ; (c) go down from the mountain.
- a b c 3. Jesus delegated His authority to: (a) the apostles; (b) a church council; (c) the Pharisees.
- a b c 4. In their teaching the apostles were guided by: (a) common sense; (b) a creed book; (c) the Holy Spirit.
- a b c 5. The teachings of the apostles may be found in: (a) the New Testament; (b) the Old Testament; (c) the Apostles' Creed.
- a b c 6. The gospel may be perverted by: (a) abolishing it; (b) adding to or taking from it; (c) leaving it just as it is.
- a b c 7. The one who would preach any other gospel is: (a) forgiven; (b) complimented; (c) accursed.
- a b c 8. A person who goes onward and does not abide in the teaching of Christ: (a) is led by the Holy Spirit; (b) hath not God; (c) hath both the Father and the Son.

Answer by yes or no:

- 1. Does the problem of religious division involve authority?
- 2. Did the Father attest to the authority of Jesus?
- 3. Are the writings of the apostles full of error?
- 4. Are their teachings as binding as those of Jesus?
- 5. Are we warned against changing the inspired teachings?
- 6. If we alter the nature of a divine command have we perverted the gospel?
- 7. Are human creeds necessary to help us understand the Bible?
- 8. Do all such creeds agree with one another?

Name..... Grade.....

Address..... Date.....

City..... By.....