

## *The Local Church and the Words of the Apostles*

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**Introduction:** Local churches exist through the delivered words of the apostles.

A. Jesus during His ministry chose apostles that would execute an essential work to the salvation of men. **(Jn 17:6-8)**

**John 17:6-8** - "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. <sup>7</sup> "Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. <sup>8</sup> "For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.

1. Our very relationship with the Father and Son depends on how we handle these words. **(Jn 14:21-24; 15:7-8)**

**John 14:21-24** - "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." <sup>22</sup> Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" <sup>23</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. <sup>24</sup> "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.

**John 15:7-8** <sup>7</sup> "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. <sup>8</sup> "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

2. These words would in fact be a "law" with "commandments." In other words they would "bind" and "loose" showing defined path that we are to follow. **(Mt 16:18-19; 18:18)**

**Matthew 16:18-19** - "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

**Matthew 18:18** - "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

B. It is shocking to see brethren today casting aside these words as if they are trivial!

1. One preacher, rather than showing from the Bible what to believe, instead quoted many theologians and made disparaging remarks about brethren.

2. Recently one of this man's disciples enthusiastically shared this quote:

"God said it, I believe it, that settles it"...Uhhh...no...God said it, someone translated it into your language divorcing it from its own culture, you read it with a preconceived belief lens, then interpreted it and became convinced in your heart you knew what meant even

though it bore no resemblance to the original audience or culture it was spoken into to begin with..."

3. This man proclaimed that the Bible was not authoritative! It asserts that you cannot understand *without the help of other men!*

4. The purpose of this study to understand the place and work of the apostles from which we can understand the place and work of local churches. **(Eph 2:20)**

**Ephesians 2:20** - having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*,

### ***I. What was the work of the apostles with local churches?***

A. What was the nature of the work of the apostles?

1. The words of the apostles were crucial to the work of Jesus Christ.

**(Jn 16:13; 15:16, 26-27; Eph 3:3-5; 5:17)**

**John 16:13** - "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

**John 15:16** - "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

**John 15:26-27** - " But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.<sup>27</sup> "And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

**Ephesians 3:3-5** - how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already,<sup>4</sup> by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ),<sup>5</sup> which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:

2. Salvation would come from the giving of these words. **(Acts 2:14, 22, 38-40)**

**Acts 2:14** - But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words.

**Acts 2:22** - " Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know –

**Acts 2:38-40** - Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup> "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."<sup>40</sup> And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."

3. The early church was founded upon and sustained by the apostle's doctrine.  
(Acts 2:42; Eph 2:20)

**Acts 2:42** - And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

**Ephesians 2:20** <sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*,

4. Remember that the Holy Spirit was guiding the delivery of these words and Jesus promised that His words would be preserved! (Mt 24:35)

**Matthew 24:35** - "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

B. How did the early church view the epistles giving the words of the apostles?

1. God showed all the importance of the Apostle's work.

(1 Cor 12:28; 1 Thess 2:6; 2 Pt 3:1-2)

**1 Corinthians 12:28** - And God has appointed these in the church: *first apostles*, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

**1 Thessalonians 2:6** - Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

**2 Peter 3:1-2** - Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in *both of which* I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), <sup>2</sup> that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,

2. Satan tried to attack genuine apostles while providing counterfeits of his own making. (2 Cor 11:5, 13; Rev 2:2)

**2 Corinthians 11:5** - For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles.

**2 Corinthians 11:13** -For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.

**Revelation 2:2** -"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;

3. Satan seeks to destroy or substitute lying words for the apostle's words.

C. All of the teachings and practices of the early church came from the apostles.

1. The Apostles simply "handed down" what they had received from Jesus.

Pay attention when you see these words: "tradition, delivered and received"

(1 Cor 11:2, 23; 15:3)

**1 Corinthians 11:2** - Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and *keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.*

**1 Corinthians 11:23** - For *I received from the Lord* that *which I also delivered to you:* that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread;

**1 Corinthians 15:3** - For *I delivered to you* first of all *that which I also received:* that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

2. To fail to obey this “tradition” delivered from the apostles is to forsake Jesus Christ Himself. (**2 Thess 3:3-4, 6, 12, 14**)

**2 Thessalonians 3:3-4** - But the Lord is faithful, who will *establish you and guard you from the evil one.* <sup>4</sup> And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both *that you do and will do the things we command you.*

**2 Thessalonians 3:6** - But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and *not according to the tradition which he received from us.*

**2 Thessalonians 3:12** - Now those who are such *we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ* that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

**2 Thessalonians 3:14** - And if anyone does not *obey our word in this epistle,* note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.

3. When an epistle was given to one church it could then be given to other churches and thus to other generations with understanding.  
(**Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27; 2 Pt 3:1-2**)

**Colossians 4:16** - Now when *this epistle is read among you,* see that *it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans,* and that *you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.*

**1 Thessalonians 5:27** - I charge you by the Lord that *this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.*

**2 Peter 3:1-2** - Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in *both of* which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), <sup>2</sup> that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,

4. Under the guise of “cultural context” many cast aside the apostle’s words.  
***II. Did the apostles give sufficient instruction for there to be a uniform practice and teaching among the churches?***

A. Paul plainly stated that there was an expected uniform teaching and practice among the churches of God. (**1 Cor 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33-34, 37**)

**1 Corinthians 4:17** - For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of *my ways in Christ*, as *I teach everywhere in every church*.

**1 Corinthians 7:17** - But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And *so I ordain in all the churches*.

**1 Corinthians 11:16** - But if anyone seems to be contentious, *we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God*.

**1 Corinthians 14:33-34** - For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, *as in all the churches of the saints*.<sup>34</sup> Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says.

**1 Corinthians 14:37** - If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that *the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord*.

1. Did God wish that there be uniform teaching and practice in the 1<sup>st</sup> century? Does He wish that happen today?

2. How then can we know what to teach and practice? God has made it clear that a perfect revelation was once and for all delivered! (**Jude 3, 17**)

**Jude 3** - Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to *contend earnestly for the faith* which was *once for all delivered to the saints*.

**Jude 17** - But you, beloved, remember *the words* which were spoken before *by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ*:

3. Take all that was delivered on any given subject and let's simply stay within that which was delivered. Without instruction then we will say and do nothing!

B. How do we observe the Lord's Supper from the apostle's words?

1. Paul delivered an example to the church at Corinth. (**1 Cor 11:23-26**)

**1 Corinthians 11:23-26** - For *I received from the Lord* that which *I also delivered to you*: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread;<sup>24</sup> and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."<sup>25</sup> In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me."<sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

2. When we limit ourselves to all the apostles revealed then we consider two kinds of authority -- **General authority** and **Specific authority**.

3. *General authority* results from a necessary conclusion. When the apostle's words instruct us to do something, then *all things necessary* to fulfilling those words are included even though not specifically named.

4. *Specific authority* is when the words give specific named instructions.
5. We may have authority for a practice even though it is not specifically named or shown by example. As an example we need a place, lights and containers!
6. We can understand the day of observance from considering the significance of the first day of the week. (**Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2 NASV**)

**Acts 20:7** - Now on *the first day of the week*, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.

**1 Corinthians 16:2 NASV** - On *the first day of every week* each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

7. A thing may be authorized but not expedient or profitable. (**1 Cor 6:12; 10:23**)
- 1 Corinthians 6:12** - All things are lawful for me, but *all things are not helpful*. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.
- 1 Corinthians 10:23** - All things are lawful for me, but *not all things are helpful*; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.

C. Those that practice things *not delivered by the Apostles* destroy the purpose of God.

1. When the Corinthians went beyond the example to the Lord's Supper to include a common meal *it no longer was the Lord's Supper!* (**1 Cor 11:20-23; 34**)

**1 Corinthians 11:20-24** - Therefore when you come together in one place, *it is not to eat the Lord's Supper*. <sup>21</sup> For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk. <sup>22</sup> What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? *Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you*. <sup>23</sup> For *I received* from the Lord that which *I also delivered to you*: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; <sup>24</sup> and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." **1 Corinthians 11:34** <sup>34</sup> But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.

2. Paul pointed out the absolute authority that was found in that which was delivered. Even *he* would be rejected if he varied from it!  
(**1 Cor 11:1-2; Gal 1:6-10**)

**1 Corinthians 11:1-2** - *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ*. <sup>2</sup> Now I praise you, brethren, *that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you*.

**Galatians 1:6-10** - I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, *to a different gospel*, <sup>7</sup> which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you *than what we have preached to you*, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other

gospel to you *than what you have received*, let him be accursed. <sup>10</sup> For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

3. To change or ignore any writing from an apostle would be to sever yourself from the blessings from God. **(Rev 22:18-19)**

**Revelation 22:18-19** - For I testify to everyone who *hears the words of the prophecy of this book*: If anyone *adds to these things*, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; <sup>19</sup> and if anyone *takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy*, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from the things which are written in this book*.

4. Consider who God honors in heaven! The work of the apostles is much more than a narrative! **(Rev 18:20; 21:14)**

**Revelation 18:20** - "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!"

**Revelation 21:14** - Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were *the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*.

#### **Questions to consider**

1. How do we know that the apostles expected uniform teaching and practice among all the churches? Is this possible? How?
2. What should we do if a teaching or practice is not delivered from the Apostles?
3. How did the apostles give instructions to churches to keep the Lord's Supper?
4. Are all things we are authorized to do specifically named? Explain.

### **The Form of the New Testament**

*"Why isn't the New Testament written in legal form; i.e., broken down into encyclopedic categories and lists? Instead, it contains much historical, biographical and personal material. Yet we are asked to believe that this is God's law for us today. How can this be?"*

The above paragraph sets forth a question which we believe is legitimate and needs to be carefully considered.

As a point of fact, some of the New Testament does have catalogs or lists of things both right and wrong (see Galatians 5; 1 Corinthians 6; Ephesians 4-6; Colossians 3-4; etc.). Therefore, the negative effect of the question is somewhat mitigated. Our remarks will be directed to the bulk of the New Testament - why it should indeed be considered as our law and standard of authority.

Consider what would be lost to us if the New Testament consisted only of categorized lists of "thou shalts" and "thou shalt nots":

**1. The personality of the speakers.** Specific statements in legal form tell us very little about the law-giver. We may conclude that the author of a law forbidding stealing held stealing in abhorrence. Beyond that we are left in the dark. But not so in the New Testament. When Jesus laid down the law that we should "love one another," His inspired biographies reveal how He lived this law every day of His life. This serves to give a moral force to the law which would not otherwise be possible. Much of the "non-legal" portions of the gospel set forth the sinlessness or holiness of Christ. Man is more inclined to heed the precepts of a righteous law-giver than those of evil-doers. Therefore, the scriptures which tell of the holiness of our Lord do not distract from the authority of the New Testament. On the contrary, such accounts establish its authority!

**2. Corroborative Material.** The historical statements in the New Testament regarding rulers, customs and events, are necessary in that they furnish corroborative evidence for the accuracy of the gospel. The accounts of the miracles were given for the stated purpose of creating confidence in Jesus (John 20:30-31). That which serves to confirm a document surely cannot be cited as evidence against its authority.

**3. Illustrative Material.** Laws become exceedingly difficult to apply when dealing with complex situations. However, Jesus cut through this problem by demonstrating the truth in stories, illustrations, and parables. He couched the underlying law in language that only the hard of heart would fail to understand. Truths taught in "doctrinal passages" are exemplified in such historical books as Acts. The New Testament is thus made meaningful and alive for those who will recognize it.

There may be other considerations that should be added. But a New Testament without the above material is unthinkable. *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable..."* - 2 Timothy 3:16. Every word in the New Testament is there by God's design. Therefore, an encyclopedic catalog of laws would be far inferior to what we have now - God's living law for mankind. -- *Bob West, The Milpitas Messenger, February, 1996*