
Words of Truth

Institutionalism – Unauthorized

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In our previous study we concluded with the fact that the Scriptures contain all the information we need to do every good work (II Timothy 3:15-17). The Scriptures contain all the information we need pertaining to life and godliness (II Peter 1:3-4). We are supposed to live by every Scripture recorded (Luke 4:4). Prior to Jesus ascending into Heaven, He told the eleven Apostles alive at that time this: *“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 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: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen”* (Matthew 28:18-20).

To this very day, we are expected by the Lord to speak and do only those things which He has authorized us to say and do (Colossians 3:16-17, I Thessalonians 4:1-2, I Thessalonians 5:21, James 1:19-25, James 2:10-12, and I Peter 4:11). Going beyond what the Lord has authorized has always been wrong (Deuteronomy 4:2 and Proverbs 30:5-6) and will always be wrong (Galatians 1:6-9 and Revelation 22:18-19).

If you carefully study the written word of God you find no mention of the many human institutions that have been formed today to do “good works”. There is no mention of church schools, Christian colleges, Bible camps, preaching schools, religious publishing companies, orphan homes, widow homes, hospitals, daycares, adoption agencies, etc. in the Scriptures. If God wanted these things to be formed by Christians, He would have told us so.

Is God capable of a good idea? Is God capable of communicating His good ideas to us through His word? I know those two questions seem a bit dumb to most who will read this article. Yet, aren't those that reject God's thinking for their own ways telling God their ideas are better than His? The truth is, if God wants something to be done He would have told us. Let's consider that point for a moment.

When God Has Said Nothing

Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, decided to burn incense before the Lord that God had not commanded them to do. The Lord consumed them in a fire for doing so (Leviticus 10:1-2). David and Nathan the prophet decided it would be good to build God a house of cedar. The Lord pointed out to them that He never asked them to do so and that their plans were contrary to His plans (II Samuel 7:1-17). The Jews had certain traditions that they formed and commanded others to follow them. Jesus rebuked them because they chose their traditions over following the

will of the Lord (Mark 7:1-9). Certain Jews thought it was a good idea to create business ventures in the temple of the Lord. Jesus made a whip and drove them out from the temple (John 2:13-17). Can you see, from God's word, that when He hasn't authorized something He is displeased when people do those things?

Even after the clear Scriptures we have considered, there still will be those who argue that if it is a "good thing" it must be the right thing to do. People emotionally support "Christian education", "benevolent homes", and such because they feel that those things are good. God says: *"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"* (Proverbs 14:12). What seems good to even the most well-intended person doesn't mean it is right to God. Let's illustrate this by thinking about "orphan homes" as an example.

Considering The Orphan Home

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament there are instructions for God's people to care about the "fatherless" (Exodus 22:22, Deuteronomy 14:22-29, Deuteronomy 24:17, Deuteronomy 27:19, Psalms 82:3, Isaiah 1:17, and James 1:18-27). The New Testament instruction is to "visit" ["inspect"; Strong's # 3737] the fatherless. This is the role of every individual Christian. If you know of a fatherless child, look after he or she. Nowhere, in any of the instructions in either covenant, do we find that looking after a fatherless child is done through forming a human institution. We are not authorized, regardless of who funds it, to start an organization to look after the fatherless. Such is your job and my job when the opportunity presents itself and we are capable of doing so. Yet, the discussion rarely is made this simple.

It Has Been Complicated By Becoming A Money Discussion

Instead of keeping the discussion of Institutionalism as simple as looking for authority in the Scriptures and not speaking or acting where there is none, the debates have caused confusion. The debates over the years have surrounded the usage of money. The debates have been about who pays for colleges, homes, etc. rather than whether or not they have God's permission to exist at all. If Christians want to start religious organizations the discussion MUST start with whether or not there is authority for those things at all. Whether the church is to fund them or individual Christians, they cannot even exist until we have authority from our Master in Heaven. What happened to "speak where the Bible speaks..." (1 Peter 4:11)?

Conclusion

God's intelligence far outweighs the smartest of all of us (Romans 11:33-36). Christ has revealed His mind to us through the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 2:9-16). In all of His thoughts, that He has revealed, we never once read of human institutions being formed to do His work on earth. That should solve every question about Institutionalism. We'd do well not to lean on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-7). We'd do well not to seek to justify what we want to do (Proverbs 21:2). Yet, many have chosen to seek ways to justify these unlawful organizations that erring members of churches of Christ have started. For example, the discussion often turns to how an institution is an expedient. This is where we will pick up in our next study.