

CHURCH AUTHORITY

One of the criteria that distinguishes the Lord's true church from imposters, is her authority. Every scriptural New Testament church has the authority to operate, while every phony church lacks that authority. To better understand these statements, let's look into the Word of God.

We know that Jesus Christ himself is the founder, cornerstone and head of the Church. It belongs to Him, as He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). The gospels record how He started calling certain men to follow Him. Then, in Mt. 10:1-4, Mk. 3:13-19, and Lu. 6:12-16, we have the record of how Jesus ordained the original 12 Apostles. Based on I Cor. 12:28 and Eph. 2:20-22, we understand that these were among the first members of the original Church that Jesus organized during His personal ministry. Of course, others were added through His ministry and that of the Apostles, so that by the time He was ready to ascend back to heaven, Jesus explained that He was entrusting the operation of the Church to that body which was worshipping in Jerusalem. He had told them already in Mt. 16:18-19 that the decisions and actions taken by them here on earth would be recognized and sanctioned in heaven, assuming of course that they were in accordance with His teachings. Then in Mt. 28:18-20, Jesus affirms that all power (authority) belongs to Him, which He then delegated to the Church for the purpose of spreading the Gospel unto all the world. So we see that the authority to do the Lord's work was not given to a particular person, but rather to a body of baptized believers.

We know that not long after Jesus ascended, He sent the Holy Spirit, who gave the new Church the power they needed to carry out this commission. From Jerusalem, we understand that the church at Antioch (Syria) was established (Acts 11:19-30). It was by the authority of the Church at Antioch that Paul and Barnabus, and later Silas, were sent forth as missionaries (Acts 13:1-3, & 14:26-28). Through these multiple missionary journeys, daughter churches of Antioch and granddaughter churches of Jerusalem were established throughout modern day Turkey and Greece. Additional mission points spread further west in Italy, Spain and eventually to Britain. Strawberry plants send out runners which touch the ground, take root, and become established strawberry plants of their own. In a similar manner, a mother church authorizes mission efforts to go forth which eventually "take root" and become organized churches of their own.

Bodies that spring up without any authorization from an established mother church do not have the biblical authority to operate. Many organizations that call themselves churches have such an origin. Some minister decides he wants to start a church, and without the proper authority ("arm"), simply rents a building, hangs out a shingle and starts holding services - and administering baptism and the Lord's Supper. However, these observances have no validity because the body lacks the proper authority. To share an earthly illustration, false churches are the equivalent of a rogue entrepreneur deciding to open his own KFC Restaurant, without obtaining the proper license/franchise agreement. He rents a building, buys some equipment, puts up a sign and opens his doors to begin serving customers. However, without the proper authorization, his operation is fraudulent and in violation of the law. And, any customers who had previously tasted **real** KFC chicken, would immediately know his product was not authentic, as it would lack the original and proprietary recipe of 11 herbs and spices!

Jesus promised to be with His Church "always, even to the end of the world" - but that promise is contingent upon each body maintaining His doctrines and practices. We have not been authorized to operate using different ones, and we are answerable to Him. The authority and autonomy of a church is represented in the Revelation as a candlestick. Notice in chapter 2, verse 5, Jesus threatens to remove the candlestick (authority) of the church at Ephesus if they did not repent and return to the first works (original teachings and practices as they were given). Truly, it is crucial that we hold fast to Bible practices, and exercise much caution when dealing with organizations claiming to be churches, but lacking proper scriptural authority.

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Discussion Questions

1. What was the reason that Paul and his traveling companions made follow-up visits to churches that had been established earlier?
2. Look at Is. 4:1. How does this relate to our study of church authority?
3. How do scriptural churches guard against legitimizing false churches?
4. What needs to occur if a body without proper authority has truly born again people with valid baptism attending?
5. Can churches that lack proper authority administer scriptural baptism or the Lord's Supper?
6. If a saved person had previously been baptized by a church that lacked proper authority, what would be the correct course of action?
7. Why is religious hierarchy (where a church reports up to a higher council or individual) not scriptural?
8. True or False When proper authority exists, the founding of a daughter church will have been approved by a mother church.
9. Who is the head of a scriptural Baptist church? A. The pastor B. The Association
C. Jesus Christ or D. The Board of Deacons
10. J.M Pendleton teaches that the formation of a new church should occur "when the interest of Christ's kingdom requires it." new churches are started for the wrong reasons. Can you name a few?