

Learn Your Bible

Lesson #8

When we come down to authority in the Church that Jesus built, we need to build a foundation of biblical principles. The first of which will be "rightly dividing" the word of God.

We find basically three dispensations in biblical history, (some see more, but with reference to their religious practices, I think all would agree to three.) These are the Patriarchal, Mosaical and the Christian ages, respectively. We might compare these to the starlight, moonlight and sunlight, the degree of light referring to God's continuously clearer revelation of Himself. Of course Jesus Christ is the ultimate in God's revelation to man. "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9)

In the Patriarchal dispensation, we find the father of each household officiating as the priest for the entire family. At that time, the religion revolved around the family. God spoke ("long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways",) Hebrews 1:1 to the heads of the house. Job was one of these patriarchs. "rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings {according to} the number of them all; for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually." Job 1:5 This is perhaps the clearest statement we find defining the role of the patriarch (father) during this period. As far as the Jews are concerned, this period came to an end with the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai.

The Mosaical Age began with the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai. Here, after God had called "a peculiar people," or a special people, He made His will known.

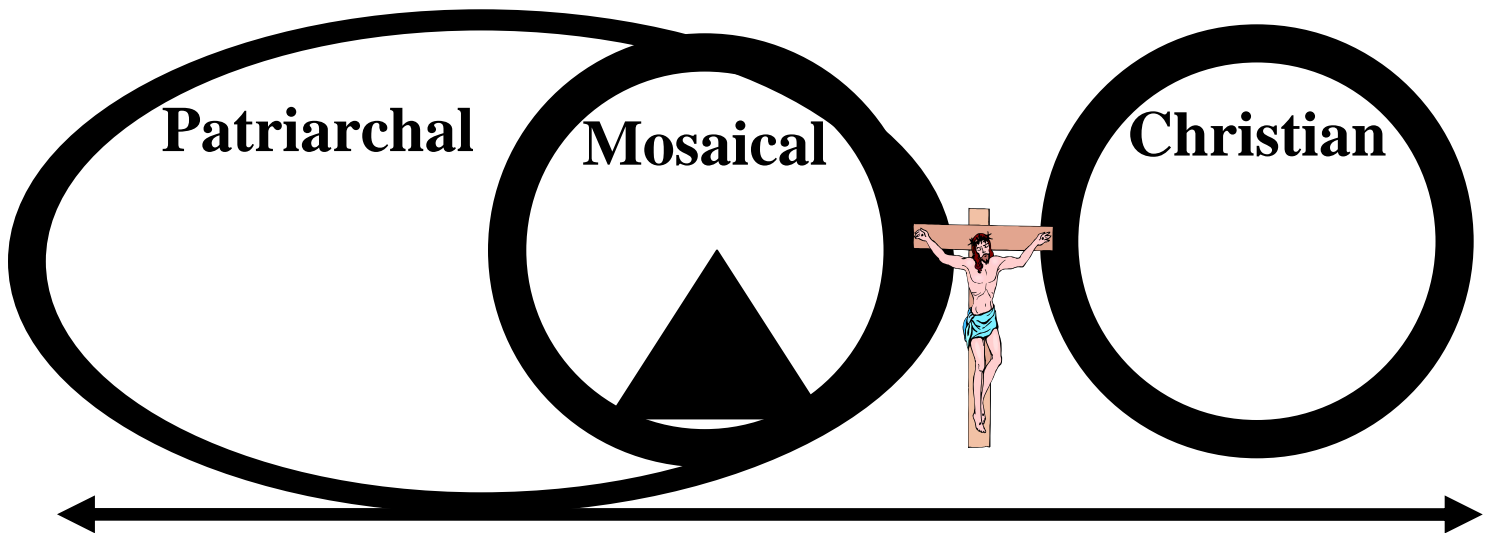
This period was characterized by a national High Priest (he took the place of the patriarch) who once a year offered a national sacrifice for the entire nation. There were also numerous smaller sacrifices, feast days, the Sabbath, etc. The Hebrew author (Heb 10:1) tells that these things were just shadows of the good things to come.

Paul tells us the purpose of the Law was to serve as a tutor to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). The schoolmaster was the guardian given the oversight and discipline of boys. The Law therefore, was to discipline the Jews in such a way that it would bring them to Christ.

The dispensation came to an end with the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. That day the Lord added 3000 souls to the church.

Jesus was born under the Law (Galatians 4:4) “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.” (Galatians 3:25).

When the gospel came it then replaced the old law. Whereas the Old Covenant was for Jews only (a national religion), the New Covenant was for all nations. We have a high priest in heaven rather than on earth (Hebrews 8:1).



For the purpose of authority in our practices offered to God, we can now rightly divide the word of God. Living under the New Covenant we wouldn't go back to the Old Testament to authorize our religious worship.

The book of Galatians was written to some people that were trying to bring the practice of circumcision forward into Christianity. Paul explains to them (Galatians 5:1-4) that bringing anything from the Old Law forward, makes us bound to the whole (old) law (animal sacrifices, etc.). He further explains that it causes us to fall from grace!

THIS ONE EXAMPLE TEACHES US THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CAREFUL NOT TO OVERSTEP OUR AUTHORITY!!!

As a Christian, the first question that comes to mind is "How can I know what constitutes authority?" A direct command to Christians of the New Testament would obviously carry forward for us. An example of this is in I Corinthians 16:1,2 where Paul

commands the churches to take a collection on the first day of the week. Another thing that obviously is binding (and as much so as a command), is a practice of first century Christians...by this I mean biblical concepts, not secular traditions.

A good example of this type of authority would be the assembling together on the Lord's Day (Sunday). Nowhere are we specifically told "Thou shalt go to church." We can figure out that they assembled together by comparing various references. The important thing to note is that forsaking the assembly is a "willful" sin and will cause us to be eternally lost (Hebrews 10:24-31). While we are not specifically told to assemble, we realize they did assemble together and we are therefore bound to do likewise or we will face the consequences.

Another type of authority is in the realm of expediency. Expediency basically means whatever is profitable. In action we might define the rule of expediency as follows: a command given without designating the means to carry it out, leaves the recipient free to choose the most profitable way to carry it out. When the means is designated, however, there is no realm of expediency.

For instance, God told Noah to build an ark out of gopher wood. Noah was at liberty to use saws, hammers, etc. to accomplish this task. Even though Noah was at liberty to choose his tools, he did not have that freedom for choosing his wood. Why? God said "gopher wood." By doing this, God eliminated all other forms of wood. The Lord didn't have to list all other possible types of wood and outlaw them individually... they were already eliminated!

NOTICE THE DANGER OF USING THIS RULE TO JUSTIFY THINGS WE WANT WHEN IT DOESN'T APPLY!

We cannot properly complete a study of this nature without mentioning the silence of God. Some good folks have the attitude that if God didn't specifically forbid them to do a particular thing, then it is all right to (religiously) do it. The example of Noah shows this approach to be incorrect.

Jesus attacks this idea head on. The Pharisees came to him condemning him for not going through the ritual of washing their hands before eating (Matthew 15:1-9.) Jesus goes on to mention another tradition and concludes with the statement "BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN."

The apostle Paul makes an argument from the silence of the Old Testament about a priest from the tribe of Judah. Since God hadn't



authorized a priest from this tribe (they came from the tribe of Levi) it should be obvious to the Jew that the Law had to change to allow for it (Heb 7:12-14). Paul uses this principle as an assumed truth to prove another point!

We can, I think, learn that this can honestly be called the "thunderous silence of God"! Where God has not spoken, we dare not go!

1) List the three dispensations and give a couple of characteristics of each: _____

2) Read Hebrews 8:7-13. The Hebrew author is quoting Jeremiah 31:31 to show what? _____

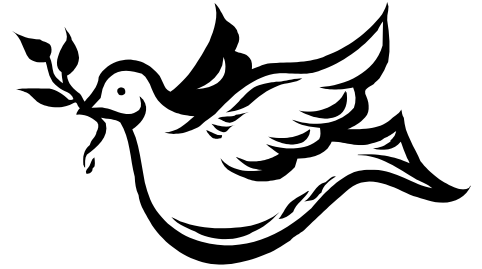
3) Read Hebrews 8:13. When he called one "New", what did that do to the other? _____

4) Read Hebrews 9:16, 17. When did the New Testament come into effect? _____

5) a) Read Matt 5:17,18. What did Christ have to do before he could take the Old Testament out of the way? _____

b) If he hadn't, it would have been (see vs. 17) _____

6) What have we learned about using those practices during the life of Christ as authority today (offering a dove, circumcision, tithing, etc.)? _____



7) What was the purpose of the Old Law? (Galatians 3:24)?

8) It was never intended to be permanent but only until what time? (Galatians 3:19) _____

9) Read Galatians 5:2-4. Since the entire book of Galatians is dealing with people bringing pieces of the Old Testament forward, what does this teach us? _____

10) I Corinthians 16:1-2 is an example of what type of authority?

11) Assembling together (as it relates to us) is an example of what type of authority? _____

12) Read Hebrews 10:24-31. Is this type of authority binding on us?

13) Explain the rule of expediency: _____

14) Using the illustration of Noah, give an example of

a) Noah's liberty under expediency; _____

b) at least two things Noah under this realm, would not have the liberty to do _____

15) Explain the importance of observing the silence of God (see Matt 15:1-9 & Mark 7:1-8) _____

16) Read Hebrews 7:11-14. Paraphrase Paul's argument from silence: _____

17) List a couple of examples where people have not observed the silence of the scriptures today. _____



Jerry Blount 4/81 revised 6/05