

EKKLESIA OF CHRIST

Legalism & Liberty: Authority, Law, Worship, Bondage, & Liberty

“What is your authority?” “Where is your authority?” “Where do you get authorization?” demands the stern old preacher as he chastises a young disciple for using a piano to accompany a hymn of praise during the assembly song service. It does not occur to the minister that a similar question was frequently raised in the Gospels, not by our Lord Jesus Christ, but by his enemies the Pharisees, who, dedicated to the law of their religious system and the traditions of their fathers, attempted to find fault with the Savior in repeating their mantra, “Is it lawful?” “Is it lawful?” “Is it lawful?”

These self-righteous religious teachers kept asking Jesus: “Is it lawful? Is it lawful?” “What is your authority?” They were nitpicking at Jesus and His disciples over healing on the Sabbath, (Mt. 12:10), for not washing their hands before they eat, (Mt. 15:1-9, Mk. 7:1-13), at plucking and shelling corn on the Sabbath (Lk. 6:1-11), and for carrying a mat on the Sabbath, (John 5:10). In Luke 6:11, when Jesus stood up to these hypocrites, the Bible says they were “filled with madness” (KJV), the Amplified Bible says they were “filled with lack of understanding and senseless rage.” Jesus said, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees” (Mt. 16:11-12) which meant to beware of their doctrine or teaching. “In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Mt. 15:9, Mk. 7:7, 13.)

This vain worship and usurpation of apostolic doctrine is still advocated today by religionists who want to create a law where none exists and bind it upon all believers. These legalists believe that where the scripture is silent, it condemns, and they have coined a term to describe their hypothesis, the so-called “law of exclusion,” or the “law of silence.”

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These law obsessed religionists believe that unless one has express authorization from the scriptures for any matter, then they are prohibited from that thing. That thing is considered as “unauthorized,” deemed unlawful, and forbidden.

However, the apostle Paul says twice, “all things are lawful unto me...” (1 Cor. 6:12, 10:23). “All things are lawful for me...” The word “lawful” means “authorized.” According to the Vine’s Dictionary, the word “lawful” here means “authorized,” “allowed,” “permitted,” “let,” “license.” Therefore, this whole debate over whether a Christian has authorization is over. Paul said, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” (2 Cor. 3:17). Therefore, the silence of the scriptures does not condemn, rather each Christian is to judge himself in the things not expressly authorized by scripture through the Holy Spirit who operates in him, (1 Cor. 2:13-15, Rom. 14:17-23, 1 Cor. 10:23-31, Gal. 5:18).

The New Testament gives us an excellent test case on how to handle an issue which would fall under the category of something not expressly authorized in the scripture and that is the eating of meat. Paul again affirmed that “all things are indeed pure” (Rom. 14:20), and that the liberty of a Christian should not be restrained (1 Cor. 10:29) yet Christians should exercise expedience when it comes to the use of their liberty (1 Cor. 8:9).

The legalist does not understand the scriptural teaching on liberty and expedience, however. With his constant harangue, “Where is your authority?” he displays a nomophile spirit, having an ungodly obsession with living under the law, regulations, and “Thou shalt nots.” Since the “law of exclusion” is foreign to the New Testament, the legalist is forced to justify it from the Old Testament, i.e., “God told Noah to make an ark out of Gopher wood, therefore that excludes oak, cherry, pine, etc.” But the theology of legalism goes far beyond this. The legalist has another premise, “musical instruments are forbidden in worship” and he defines worship as what is done in the four walls of the church building, therefore he concludes, one can play an instrument in his home, but not in a “church worship service.” However, false definitions and false

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premises lead to false conclusions.

The legalist falsely calls the building "a church," or "house of God," and the auditorium "a sanctuary." For 100 years he has hung a sign upon his entrance door, "Enter to worship; Depart to serve," epitomizing his confusion over what is New Testament worship. He has shown film strips and videos teaching people that there are "five channels of worship," which is about as biblical as the "seven sacraments."

By doing so, the legalist is subscribing to an Old Testament concept where worship was physical, external, and temporal. What is inexcusable is that such religionists attempt to justify their physical view of worship by citing Abraham and the lad going yonder to worship on Mount Moriah, (Gen. 22:5), or the Ethiopian coming to Jerusalem to worship, (Acts 8:27). The fact is these ritual worshippers are just as ignorant as the Samaritan woman of John 4:20, worshipping "what [they] do not know," equating worship with a particular place "on this mountain" and time.

"God is a spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth," the legalist quotes over and over and yet, sadly, he has no understanding of what Jesus was saying to the woman in John 4:24. New Testament worship was now to be spiritual, internal, and universal. True worshippers (vs. 23) now would worship in spirit because the Holy Spirit would personally indwell believers (Rom. 8:9) whose bodies would constitute the temple of the Holy Spirit, (1 Cor. 6:18-20.) The theology of legalism does not understand that Jesus in His New Covenant, has resurrected a new temple which is His body, (John 2:19-22), whose house we are, (Heb. 3:5), so that we might present our bodies a living sacrifice holy and acceptable unto God which is our reasonable act of LATREUO service or worship, (Rom. 12:1).

Incidentally, worshipping God in Spirit (John 2:24) does not mean "without an instrument," but rather presenting our body and life as a consecrated offering to God as the Romans 12:1 passage defines our service or worship.

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If we define worship as the sacrificial presenting of ourselves in a consecrated life, then the proposition of "mechanical instruments in worship" is moot.

What is this issue of "mechanical" instruments? Why not just oppose "instruments in worship?" They add the word "mechanical" to show that they are opposed to anything in worship which is man-made. They reason that since pianos are artifices made by man, they are not acceptable to God in worship. And yet, one of the greatest man-made inventions ever used in worship was the synagogue. This concept of a religious community center in every town was invented by man (the Jews) during the Babylonian captivity without any authorization or approval from God. Jerusalem had been the only place God had approved for worship, particularly the temple, (Psalms 99:5, 9, 132:7, 138:2) and in the Songs of Ascent, they sang, "Let us go into the house of the Lord..." Psalm 122.

Jesus called the temple, "MY House" (Mt. 21:13) and MY father's house." (John 2:16) And yet what did Christ do? He went into THEIR synagogue (Mt 12:9), he taught them in THEIR synagogue (Mt.13:54), in Luke 4:16-30, "And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue... to read... [He] sat down..." God never gave authorization for the synagogue but He sanctified it and used it as a pattern for the organization of New Testament congregations. The Greek word SUNEGOGH "assembly" used in the Gospels (denoting a Jewish assembly) was transferred in the Acts of the Apostles (e.g. Acts 11:26), to refer to the assembly of the Christian church. Strong's word #4864 says it is an, "an assemblage of persons; spec. a Jewish "synagogue" (the meeting or the place); by analogy a Christian church-assembly, congregation, synagogue. What an awesome thought! God took something man invented and used it to His glory! So then, worship should take place all the time, however we assemble on the first day of the week!

The "law of exclusion" and authorization argument are proven to be nothing more than human deductions and logical fallacies.

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Nowhere in the New Testament do we find any such principle, regulation, command, or condition enjoined upon believers. This so-called "law" is really a synonym for legalism and the end result is bondage. Again, the legalist is wrong in his premise, (authorization is required), resulting in a miscarriage of application (instrument forbidden.) The "law of exclusion is anti-New Testament, contrary to the spirit of the Law of Christ and to the apostolic commands, (Acts 15:10, Rom.14:22, 1 Cor. 8: 8-9, 10:29, Gal. 3:15, 4:9-11, 5:12-15, Col. 2: 20-23).

All of the scriptures which forbade the legalists of the 1st Century from bringing Christians back under law are equally applicable to these modern day Pharisees, who create a law from the authority of their own opinion, bind it on others, and make it a test of fellowship. The legalist professes that the New Covenant supersedes the Old, yet he attempts to take us right back under the bondage of that law as a religious and philosophic system. The logic of the anti-instrumentalist is further shown to be fallacious because he cannot find authority in the scripture to make any determination as to what falls under "law" (instrument) and what constitutes an "aid" (pitch-pipe, tuning fork, public address system, etc.)

The nomophile (obsessed with law) rejects the authorization and liberty that we have in Christ. In fact, he is a minister of bondage, and he imposes a culture of bondage upon his congregation. Paul rebuked the legalists who were trying to bring the churches of Galatia back under the bondage of the law. Paul related how they "came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage," (Gal. 2:4) Paul used the word "bondage" six times in that letter, (Gal 2:4, 4:3, 4:9, 4:24, 4:25, 5:1). Paul refused to make one concession to them in Gal. 2:5, knowing that it was a futile exercise to attempt to conciliate a legalist. Even if we were to discard our musical instruments, (and many of us would gladly do so), we know, as did Paul, that the spirit of the anti-instrumental and his "law of exclusion" dictates that another division will be lying around the next corner. For example, e.g. one cup versus many in

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communion, Bible colleges, dress codes, distribution of collection monies, missionary schematics, the nature of the assembly service, etc.

The remedy for nomophilitis is a word-study on "liberty," "authority," and "lawful." A study of the word "liberty" *ELEUTHERIA* is very enlightening. "Why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?" (1 Cor. 10:29). "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty, (2 Cor. 3: 17). Paul says, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage, (Gal. 5:1.) One of the most powerful verses dealing with liberty is in 1 Cor. 8:9 where Paul said, "Beware lest this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak." The word there for liberty is not the regular word, but is *EXOUSIA*. This is the word for "authority" or "right" and it is the same word that Jesus used in Matthew 28:18, when He said, "All authority is given to me in heaven and in earth." How awesome and humbling that Christians have been granted *EXOUSIA* authority (freedom of action, right to act) in matters where the scriptures are silent. The question, "Where is your authorization?" is rendered moot.

Does this mean that we are "anti-nomial," (against the Law) of God? Of course not. It is simply that when we have a change in covenant, we have a change also of law, (Heb. 7:12.) Our new law, now, is the law of Christ. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ," (Gal. 6:2.)

The law of Christ is the law of love, and love, mercy, and compassion are what we need more than anything else now in the Churches of Christ if we are ever going to win a lost and dying world! Given Blakely conveyed to this writer that the New Testament never commands Christians to "love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself?" It is not commanded because. God has already written His law into our hearts, (Heb. 8: 10-13.) Paul said the same thing in 2 Cor. 3:3; we are the living letter of the New Testament, better than the Law engraved in tablets of stone, because God has chiseled HIS law into the fleshy tablets of our heart.

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However this is too much responsibility for religionists who are obsessed with a culture of law, many of whom have developed a religious legal system for over 100 years, (what is law, what is an aid) yet at the same time have denied the bodily indwelling of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22, Gal. 4:6, Rom. 8:9, 1 Cor. 3:16-17, 6:18-20.)

Paul says that where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty, (2 Cor. 3:17). This scripture suggests perhaps a correlation between the breach of liberty (concerning the instrument) and the breakdown in theology by some in the Restoration Movement in their denial of the personal and bodily indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers. An anti-instrumental preacher from Shenandoah, VA held his Bible up to this writer and declared, "the Spirit of truth is this right here... the Word of truth." Is it possible that this anti-instrumental preacher could have the Holy Spirit in his book but not in him? When I asked him if he believed in the bodily indwelling of the Holy Spirit, he replied, "absolutely no." If someone does not believe the Holy Spirit bodily indwells him, how is it possible that he HAS Him? And if someone does not have the Holy Spirit, (Rom. 8:9) what is his spiritual state? What is the more important issue, having the Holy Spirit in our heart (Gal. 4:6) and bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) in our lives, or using an instrument (psalm) to sing a song of praise in our assembly? (1 Cor. 14:26.)

Excerpts from "Non-Instrumental Discussion," Shenandoah, VA, Nov. 20, 2005

Perry S.: ... This is the same thing we've been looking for ever since I've been in the church, and all of the ancestors in the church before us. And that is for the authority of using the mechanical instruments of music in worship to Almighty God.

John Doughty: And I would like to add that the passage that Larry brought forth in 2 Corinthians 3:17 says that, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

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Larry: Yeah

John Doughty: And I want to know if you, and if people here in this audience, believe in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says...

Perry: (interruption)

John: now, Perry, (commotion) are you going to interrupt or...

Perry: We won't debate on the subject.

John: No, this has everything to with it because, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Now does the Holy Spirit dwell bodily in believers? Let me ask you that question, Perry, Do you believe the Holy Spirit indwells a Christian?

Perry: Uh, yes, absolutely, the Bible teaches that.

John: Bodily?

Perry: Now that's a different question, absolutely no.

John: In 1 Corinthians... (interrupted)

Perry: If you're talking about a personal, bodily indwelling. The body of the Holy Spirit in me or in any other Christian? What kind of body are we talking about?

John: Well the body that we are supposed to flee fornication with in 1 Corinthians 6:19 when he says, "What? Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own." Now is our body a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in us?
[end excerpt]