

San Juan Church of Christ

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What Does God's Word Say About...

Authority of the Church

What is your attitude toward the church? For many sectarians a foundational belief is that the church has all authority. Whatever the church says to believe and practice, that is what must be done without question. This is the basic attitude of the vast majority of Roman Catholics. They believe the church derives neither her existence nor her teaching authority from the New Testament. Their belief is that authority lies within the Catholic church and its traditions, not the New Testament. Devotion to the scriptures is secondary to devotion to the church. Contrary to this belief, the church secured her being, her teachings, her authority directly from Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:19-20).

Members of other various denominations believe they are under the authority of the church as well. A preacher of the Southern Baptist Church feels obligated and responsible to teach Southern Baptist doctrine. If one is a preacher of the Methodist Church, then he feels obligated to teach Methodist doctrine. They must teach within the rules and regulations, so to speak, of the church to which they belong and they have agreed to serve in the capacity of that church's doctrine. This philosophy is the same as that of the Catholics. The Bible must be interpreted in the light of what the church (denomination) teaches. Sadly, most of the religious world believes this.

Contrary to these beliefs, the New Testament is not the product of the church, but of God. There is no doubt that the existence of the Lord's church preceded the completion of the New Testament (Acts 2:14-36, 41, 47). Both the church and the Scriptures derive their existence from heaven. The word of God was given to be the church's guide book. Consider what Jesus said on the matter: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you [disciples] all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you..." But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you [disciples] into all the truth"... (John 14:26; 16:13). The apostle Paul later wrote "Now we [apostles] have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God... These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but what the Holy Spirit teaches..." (1 Cor. 2:10-13). The apostle Peter adds, "for prophesy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

Catholics, as well as other denominations, place the Bible on the same authoritative level as tradition [the writing of the "church fathers"] so that their doctrines can be changed from time to time, contrary to God's word (Matt. 15:1-14). But if we understand that the Bible is the living word of God, and that God tells us not to add or take from it (Deut. 4:2, 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Matt. 5:18; Gal. 1:8-9; Rev. 22:18), we will respect the authority of God's Word above all. We will be judged by God's words, not the doctrines of men (John 12:48).

Please send any comments, questions, or requests for a Bible study to:
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