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DRAWING THE LINE BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE CHURCHES

BY: Mark W. Fenison

What are the bare essentials to be recognized as a New Testament Church and when should a church cease to be recognized as a New Testament church? These are important questions for the day in which we live. God is interested in such an "esoteric matter" as truth is narrow. *"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."* Matthew 7:13-14. *"He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For*

verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." Matthew 13:11-17.

The Limitation of Authority

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth... Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Matthew 28:18, 20a.

No church has "all authority." Only Jesus has "all authority." Everyone else has delegated authority. Delegated authority is limited authority. Governments are limited to "ministers of righteousness" in their authority by God. *"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no*

power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he

is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." Romans 13:1-4. Husbands are limited "as it is fit in the Lord" over the wife by the Lord. *"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord."* Colossians 3:18. Parents have limited authority over their children "in the Lord." *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right."* Ephesians 6:1. Churches are limited by the Lord to *"whatsoever I have commanded you."* Matthew 28:20. *"Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."* Matthew 18:18.

Hence, no church has authority to disobey the Lord and we should not recognize such authority.

"No church has authority to disobey the Lord."

The Authorized Limitations

"Go ye therefore, and teach [literally make disciples of] 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 alway, even unto the end of the world." Matthew 28:19-20.

What are the limitations of delegated authority being set forth in this commission? Per-

haps this question can be better answered by considering it negatively. For instance, is Christ authorizing anyone to teach things He never has commanded? Is he authorizing anyone to go with another Gospel He never preached? Is he authorizing anyone to administer a baptism He never administered or submitted to?

In all these areas Christ limits their authority to *"teaching them whatsoever I HAVE COMMANDED..."* Positively, this means that Christ has defined the delegated authority of His commission within the limits of obedience to the SAME gospel. SAME baptism and SAME observances He Himself commanded them.

This means that no person or church has authority to teach any other gospel, administer any other baptism or teach others to observe any other doctrine than what Jesus commanded. We should not recognize what Jesus did not authorize.

The Limitations of Like Faith and Order

In the Great Commission the English word "teach" is repeated twice. However, there are two different Greek terms being translated "teach" or "teaching." The first "teach" of this commission represents a Greek term that literally means "make disciples" whereas the second term "teaching" represents a Greek term that means "teaching."

The first term "make disciples" is the main verb in this commission which is modified, further explained or defined by three participles in the Greek text. These three Greek participles are translated "go" (literally "having once gone"), "baptizing," and "teaching."

What this means from a grammatical point of view is that Jesus is defining how He wants them to

"make disciples" or what making disciples consists of.

Making disciples is a three-fold process. First it takes "having gone" (literally Greek) with the gospel. *"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."* Mark 16:15. A person is not a disciple if he has not been gospelized first. Second, the gospelized are to be properly baptized. Third, the baptized are to be properly instructed in the observance of all things Christ commanded them.

This definition by Christ means that a disciple is one who not only is saved and going to heaven some day, but is now being utilized by God to honor and serve Him obediently as commanded.

Furthermore, this definition by Christ limits the authority to make disciples to those who share in common with Christ these three specifics. We are not authorized to recognize churches that are not of like faith and order in these three areas.

The Limitations of Origin and Reproduction

"...and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

The authority delegated is not only limited to the reproduction of **like faith and order** in three specifics, but is limited to those originating from this same cycle of like faith and order.

Notice that the last command of this commission *"teaching them to observe all things"* requires the obedience to the first command "go make disciples" and so on ad infinitum.

Jesus is authorizing an unending cycle of like faith and order *"unto the end of the world."*

The nature of this cycle is brought out more clearly when the Greek words translated by the one English term "always" are literally translated "all the days." The idea behind this expression is

"day in and day out until the end of the world."

By divine intent this commission is designed to reproduce like kind as defined by the three specific participles in a never ending continuous cycle until the end of the world. This would mean that by divine intent there never will be a day in any generation when there will not be this KIND upon the face of the earth preaching the SAME gospel, administering the SAME baptism and teaching the SAME observances Jesus delivered once and for all time.

He promises "and lo, I AM WITH YOU day in and day out until the end of the age." This promise guarantees the success of this cycle of like kind until Jesus comes.

This is what Jude means when he says, *"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was ONCE delivered unto the saints."* Jude 3. If Jesus created a never ending cycle of reproduction of like faith and order and promised it to be successful, then, he needed only to deliver this FAITH AND ORDER but once as He promised to preserve it until the end of the world.

What we have in the Great Commission is the creative principle AFTER ITS OWN KIND with the promise of no extinction until the end of the age. Individuals of that kind go extinct but not the whole species.

What this means is that Christ has limited authority to make disciples to those within this cycle of LIKE FAITH AND ORDER. No church originating apart from this cycle is authorized and we should not recognize it. It means that LIKE FAITH AND ORDER is confined to those who identify with the SAME gospel, SAME baptism, SAME observances as once delivered by Christ. Hence, the authority by Christ to produce "disciples" is restricted to those that continue

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within three restricted limitations (1) the SAME gospel as Christ preached; (2) the SAME baptism that Christ submitted to and administered; (3) the SAME observances that Christ commanded.

In regard to our first questions, this means that Jesus has authorized a specified KIND and any other kind is without authority. If a church departs from any of the three specifics it ceases to be the SAME KIND and becomes another kind and thus ceases to have authority from Christ to make disciples in His behalf.

The Identity of the Authorized

Who is being authorized to make disciples in this passage? The Lord is authorizing a plural "you" in this commission. He has promised to be with the same "you" day in and day out until the end of the world. Obviously this "you" is representative of more than just individual disciples as no individual lives that long.

Another defining factor is that this plural "you" is in doctrinal unity with each other. They all are unified in the SAME gospel, the SAME baptism and the SAME observances. This is not true in regards to professed Christianity nor of all true Christians.

Another defining factor is that this plural you must physically assemble together with each other. There is no other way to "teach them to observe all things" without actually assembling to be taught.

Another defining factor is that this plural you must be a New Testament church as it is impossible for them to teach them to observe "all things" commanded, such as, "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or

three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matthew 18:15-17), unless they exist as a local church. The observance of the Lord's Supper as instructed, "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives." Matthew 26:26-30 also infers a church state.

All the evidence points to the fact that Jesus is here authorizing the first church as the first of a KIND through its first ordained officers. "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." I Corinthians 13:13. "Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." Acts 1:22.

This age-long promise to endure until the end of the age corresponds perfectly to the promise given His church in Matthew 16:18, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," as a self-perpetuating kind of institution.

This commission is delegated authority given to the Lord's kind of church and that church is defined by four characteristics:

(1) It is the kind of church that preaches the SAME gospel that Christ preached. "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I

say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:3-16.

(2) It is the kind of church that administers the SAME baptism that Jesus submitted to and administered. "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him." Luke 7:29-30. "When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples)." John 4:1-2.

(3) It is the kind of church that teaches its membership to

The church is a self-perpetuating kind of institution.

observe the SAME faith and practice once delivered. *"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils."* I Timothy 4:1; Jude 3; *"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."* Romans 16:17.

(4) It is the kind of church that must be produced, originated and authorized through a previous church of like faith and order due to the very nature of this promised reproductive age long cycle.

Any church that does not originate with this kind of cycle or departs from this kind of church has no right to claim authority to make disciples in behalf of Jesus.

Conclusion

What kind of church should not be recognized as authorized to make disciples in behalf of Christ? When by doctrine and/or practice any church characteristically:

(1) Embraces another kind of Gospel other than the gospel of grace.

(2) Embraces another kind of baptism other than the baptism of John.

(3) Embraces another kind of faith and order other than the faith once delivered.

(4) Embraces another source of authority to make disciples other than from churches originating from and continuing in this authorized age-long cycle of like kind.

These four specifics draw the line between the kind of church that is authorized by Christ and the kind that is not.

The Bible is very clear as to how we are to deal and treat individuals or institutions that depart from "the faith once delivered." Romans 16:17. *"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of*

us." II Thessalonians 3:6. *"And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."* Revelation 18:4.

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What this means is that Christ has limited authority to make disciples to those within

this cycle of LIKE FAITH AND ORDER. No church originating apart from this cycle is authorized and we should not recognize it. It means that LIKE FAITH AND ORDER is confined to those who identify with the SAME gospel, SAME baptism, SAME observances as once delivered by Christ. Hence, the authority by Christ to produce "disciples" is restricted to those that continue within three restricted limitations (1) the SAME gospel as Christ preached; (2) the SAME baptism that Christ submitted to and administered; (3) the SAME observances that Christ commanded.

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(4) It is the kind of church that must be produced, originated and authorized through a previous church of like faith and order due to the very nature of this promised reproductive age long cycle.

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