

# The Matter of Authority

By Bill Crews

On the question of the necessity of authority for religious practices there are but two positions that one can take. Either we must have authority or we do not have to have authority for all that we do in religion. Any position in between would be ridiculous and impossible. If someone should insist that one must have authority for some things, but not for all things, by what standard could he possibly distinguish the things for which he must have authority from the things for which he does not need authority? And how could he condemn anything merely because it was unauthorized in the Scriptures?

May God pity the man who calls himself a gospel preacher and who makes such statements as: "Why we do many things for which we do not have authority"; and "We do not have to have authority for everything we do in religion." Such a preacher would have neither right nor grounds to condemn any of the religious practices around us, which, though without authority, are not expressly forbidden in the Scriptures. On what basis would he show that instrumental music, infant baptism, choirs, missionary societies, quarterly or annual communion, etc., are wrong?

Authority falls into two categories: general and specific. Some things are specifically authorized: baptism, singing, Lord's Supper. Other things are authorized because they are embraced in and necessary to the performance of things specifically authorized: (Some things may be used as "aids" in carrying out a command as long as no Scriptural principle is violated); a baptistry, song-books, containers.

To say that one must have authority for all that he does in religion is a far cry from saying that one must have specific authority for all that he does in religion. Some "gospel preachers" have offered this sort of quibble: "Why if one must have authority for everything, where did Noah get the authority for the tools he used in building the ark since God did not specify any tools." This is nothing more than a dodge, a smoke screen to cover up the fact that many churches today are practicing things for which they have no authority--either general or specific. Certainly Noah had authority in that tools were necessary to carry out the injunction to build the ark. Had God specified the tools, he would have been limited to what God specified.



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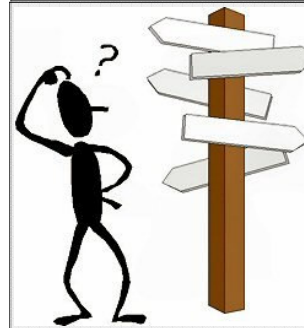
Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

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## The Consequence of Confusion

By Steven C. Harper



### Thought to Ponder

Atheists put on a false courage and alacrity in the midst of their darkness and apprehensions, like children who, when they fear to go into the dark, will sing or whistle to keep up their courage.

Have you ever had the occasion to be involved in a business operation that lacked real organization? I'm talking about those situations in which the operators have an idea about what they want to do and how to do it, but are not quite organized enough to the point that anything ever gets done. Most often, the problem is not that they do not have the capability to accomplish the tasks and goals, but that somewhere down the line, the tasks and goals have not been communicated effectively to all the employees, and more than a few are confused as to their proper role in the organization, with some just not knowing anything at all about what they should be doing. The consequence of the confusion is that nothing - or at least very little - gets done, and an organization that could have been successful fails.

Sad to say, such confusion is often the cause of many local churches not accomplishing much in the work they should be doing. Many members of local churches of Christ are confused as to their part in the work of the local church, and as a result, much work is being neglected and much is left undone. Part of the confusion has come about because individuals do not know the Scriptures well enough to

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know their part and their responsibilities, but some of the confusion has come about because those who are teaching and leading them have deceived them (either intentionally or unintentionally) by saying that whatever the individual Christian can do the church can do. The end result of that argument is that local churches have abrogated the individual's responsibilities by creating additional organizations, attaching it to the local body, and then going to great lengths to convince the members that the work they each should have been doing as individual Christians is now being accomplished through these unauthorized additions

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to the church Christ established.

Think about it for a minute: When your leaders tell you that you do not have to personally lift a finger (except to write a check or donate a sum of money) to accomplish some of the Christian's duties, how likely is it that the members will personally get involved in fulfilling those responsibilities? If I have been told all my life that "we" (the local church) are helping "widows and orphans" (vicariously, through another organization other than the local church itself, such as an orphans' home or "old folks" home), or if I am told "we" are bringing the gospel to the world (vicariously, through a missionary society), or if I am told "we" are feeding the hungry (vicariously, through a "food bank"), how likely will I be to help someone out when they come to me directly? The end result is that individuals have handed over their responsibilities to others to fulfill, and as long as they pay to have it done (no matter how small the amount they may actually contribute), they can rest at ease with the assurance they have "done their duty." This attitude is more common than what you may think, sad to say.

This is not a problem confined to the matter of human institutions, either. When it comes to hospitality, some apparently think the same way, for when they have an opportunity to show true hospitality, they will gladly point the needy one to a hotel, or, in some cases, literally take them by the arm to talk to the elders or to the preacher because they see it as "their job," not one of personal obligation. Especially for preachers who happen to be living in the house owned by the local church, they are often "expected" to accommodate any visiting preachers or Christians who just happen to be passing through. I am not making this up! I can explain this no other way than to say that those who act in this way no doubt believe that "they" are fulfilling their responsibilities because they have contributed money, either for the preacher's support or by monies that paid for the preacher's house, or because they believe the elders are acting "on behalf of the entire congregation."

And what about evangelism? This attitude is seen often when this subject arises. Though many will

not come right out and say it, their actions belie their true feelings: that is "the preacher's job." Believing they have fulfilled their duty to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (**Mark 16:15**), they sit back and wait for "the preacher" to do it, never thinking about their own inactivity in this field. Some are offended when others say they are lacking in their responsibility to teach the lost, and will unashamedly point to their monthly report about how much "they" are "paying the preacher" or how much "they" spent (as a local church) on advertising or tracts or Bible class material or radio ads or billboards or whatever source of communication to which "they" have contributed.

Brethren, it pains me to have to write this about us, but it is true, nonetheless. This is a shameful attitude that has prevented us from accomplishing the deeds that we, as individuals, should be doing and, worse, we believe we are actually doing it. While many Christians are out there taking this meaningful and urgent task upon themselves (as they should), many others are neglecting - shirking - their responsibilities and convincing themselves (and others) that "they" are really working hard to do all the things the Lord would have us do.

It saddens me when I hear such attitudes among my brethren - and not because I am a preacher. It saddens me because I see how much we could be doing and how many could benefit from the teaching and hospitality and benevolence and love for others. I think about the death of Jesus on the cross and how He died in my place, and I wonder how many people may be thinking, "I have paid for my sins," because He died for them. If they think "they" are doing all these other things, why would they not think such when they see our Lord on the cross? God forbid!

Let us not be confused as to our individual responsibilities, brethren. Not a one of us is going to get into heaven because someone else did what we were commanded to do or because we paid for them to do it. In the end, "*we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*" (**2 Cor. 5:10**) We will be judged for what we, as individuals, have either done or left undone (**cf. Matt. 25:31-46**). The consequence of this confusion will be lost souls. So, what are you doing?



## A Cross Moving on Wheels

By Bobby Graham

A few days ago as my wife and I were traveling to a nearby town, we noticed a man rather easily and briskly moving a wooden cross, which was attached to wheels. From his dress I judged him to be a modern imitation of Jesus, just as I took his cross to be an imitation of the cross on which our Savior died. As he wheeled it along rather quickly, without any visible

sign of groaning or sigh from his burden, I also concluded that he had no real conception of what Jesus had done in his act of bearing his own cross.

How similar that cross was to the attempts of people today to "serve the Lord." People frequently carve out their own way and style of serving God, thinking their efforts will enjoy divine favor. It is truly amazing how humans somehow rationalize that if their efforts please them, they also please God. Why do we have such difficulty with pleasing God first in what we do and adjusting our attitude so that it then pleases us? Think of some important observations from this incident:

**Man tends to project his own will on God in an unending display of will worship/self-made religion (Col. 2:18-23).** Both the worship of angels and neglecting of the physical body (asceticism) illustrate such attempts on man's part in the Colossians passage. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (**Prov. 14:12**). Subjective feelings are too often used as the measure of what is right, but God never elevated them to

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that level, did He? How could such sincere efforts be rejected by God? It might be wise to consult Nadab and Abihu, Cain, or David and Uzzah about that matter (**Lev. 10; Gen. 4; 2 Sam. 6**). God has clearly demonstrated his displeasure with such human efforts.

**Man sometimes makes his demands on himself much easier than those**

**of God are.** The cross of Jesus was an instrument of physical torture and death, not a convenience easily handled. When He demanded our taking up the cross daily, He referred to our spiritual crucifixion of self to serve Him (**Lk. 9:23**), not to some physical imitation made comfortable by the addition of modern machinery, such as wheels. There is no way to lessen the impact of that demand or ease its burden and yet please God; there is no short-cut to dying to sin and self!

**Human substitutes are utter failures in divine service.** They show nothing of devotion to the will of the Master, but much to our own spirit of contrivance or innovation. How is that spirit able to serve the Lord? In the Bible the Lord had made known how He desires all to serve Him. Why can we not content ourselves with offering to God that which He has asked or mandated? Those willing to offer the God-appointed service please God; those who contrive their own "service/worship" serve themselves (**Rom. 16:18; Phil. 3:19**).

