

## *The Local Church and the Words of the Apostles*

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**Introduction:** Local churches exist through the delivered words of the apostles.

A. Jesus during His ministry chose apostles that would execute an essential work to the salvation of men. **(Jn 17:6-8)**

1. Our very relationship with the Father and Son depends on how we handle these words. **(Jn 14:21-24; 15:7-8)**

2. These words would in fact be a “law” with “commandments.” In other words they would “bind” and “loose” showing a defined path that we are to follow. **(Mt 16:18-19; 18:18)**

B. It is shocking to see brethren today casting aside these words as if they are trivial!

1. One preacher, rather than showing from the Bible what to believe, instead quoted many theologians and made disparaging remarks about brethren.

2. Recently one of this man’s disciples enthusiastically shared this quote:

“God said it, I believe it, that settles it”...Uhhh...no...God said it, someone translated it into your language divorcing it from its own culture, you read it with a preconceived belief lens, then interpreted it and became convinced in your heart you knew what meant even though it bore no resemblance to the original audience or culture it was spoken into to begin with...”

3. This man proclaimed that the Bible was not authoritative! It asserts that you cannot understand without the help of other men!

4. The purpose of this study to understand the place and work of the apostles from which we can understand the place and work of local churches. **(Eph 2:20)**

### ***I. What was the work of the apostles with local churches?***

A. What was the nature of the work of the apostles?

1. The words of the apostles were crucial to the work of Jesus Christ. **(Jn 16:13; 15:16, 26-27; Eph 3:3-5; 5:17)**

2. Salvation would come from the giving of these words. **(Acts 2:14, 22, 38-40)**

3. The early church was founded upon and sustained by the apostle’s doctrine. **(Acts 2:42; Eph 2:20)**

4. Remember that the Holy Spirit was guiding the delivery of these words and Jesus promised that His words would be preserved! **(Mt 24:35)**

B. How did the early church view the epistles giving the words of the apostles?

1. God showed all the importance of the Apostle’s work. **(1 Cor 12:28; 1 Thess 2:6; 1 Pt 3:2)**

2. Satan tried to attack genuine apostles while providing counterfeits of his own making. **(2 Cor 11:5, 13; Rev 2:2)**

3. Satan seeks to destroy or substitute lying words for the apostle’s words.

C. All of the teachings and practices of the early church came from the apostles.

1. The Apostles simply “handed down” what they had received from Jesus. Pay attention when you see these words: “tradition, delivered and received” **(1 Cor 11:2, 23; 15:3)**

2. To fail to obey this “tradition” delivered from the apostles is to forsake Jesus Christ Himself. **(2 Thess 3:3-4, 6, 12, 14)**

3. When an epistle was given to one church it could then be given to other churches and thus to other generations with understanding.

(Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27; 2 Pt 3:1-2)

4. Under the guise of “cultural context” many cast aside the apostle’s words.

## ***II. Did the apostles give sufficient instruction for there to be a uniform practice and teaching among the churches?***

A. Paul plainly stated that there was an expected uniform teaching and practice among the churches of God. (1 Cor 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33-34, 37)

1. Did God wish that there be uniform teaching and practice in the 1<sup>st</sup> century? Does He wish that happen today?

2. How then can we know what to teach and practice? God has made it clear that a perfect revelation was once and for all delivered! (Jude 3, 17)

3. Take *all that was delivered on any given subject* and let’s simply *stay within that which was delivered*. Without instruction then we will *say and do nothing!*

B. How do we observe the Lord’s Supper from the apostle’s words?

1. Paul delivered *an example* to the church at Corinth. (1 Cor 11:23-26)

2. When we limit ourselves to all the apostles revealed then we consider two kinds of authority -- **General authority** and **Specific authority**.

3. *General authority* results from a necessary conclusion. When the apostles’ words instruct us to do something, then *all things necessary* to fulfilling those words are included *even though not specifically named*.

4. *Specific authority* is when the words give specific named instructions.

5. We may have authority for a practice even though it is not specifically named or shown by example. As an example we need *a place, lights* and *containers!*

6. We can understand the day of observance from considering the significance of the first day of the week. (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2 NASV)

7. A thing may be authorized but not *expedient or profitable*. (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23)

C. Those that practice things *not delivered by the Apostles* destroy the purpose of God.

1. When the Corinthians went beyond the example to the Lord’s Supper to include a common meal *it no longer was the Lord’s Supper!* (1 Cor 11:20-23; 34)

2. Paul pointed out the absolute authority that was found in that which was delivered. Even *he* would be rejected if he varied from it!

(2 Cor 11:1-2; Gal 1:6-10)

3. To change or ignore any writing from an apostle would be to sever yourself from the blessings from God. (Rev 22:18-19)

4. Consider who God honors in heaven! The work of the apostles is much more than a narrative! (Rev 18:20; 21:14)

### **Questions to consider**

1. How do we know that the apostles expected uniform teaching and practice among all the churches? Is this possible? How?

2. What should we do if a teaching or practice is not delivered from the Apostles?

3. How did the apostles give instructions to churches to keep the Lord’s Supper?

4. Are all things we are authorized to do specifically named? Explain.

## The Form of the New Testament

*"Why isn't the New Testament written in legal form; i.e., broken down into encyclopedic categories and lists? Instead, it contains much historical, biographical and personal material. Yet we are asked to believe that this is God's law for us today. How can this be?"*

The above paragraph sets forth a question which we believe is legitimate and needs to be carefully considered.

As a point of fact, some of the New Testament does have catalogs or lists of things both right and wrong (see Galatians 5; 1 Corinthians 6; Ephesians 4-6; Colossians 3-4; etc.). Therefore, the negative effect of the question is somewhat mitigated. Our remarks will be directed to the bulk of the New Testament - why it should indeed be considered as our law and standard of authority.

Consider what would be lost to us if the New Testament consisted only of categorized lists of "thou shalts" and "thou shalt nots":

**1. The personality of the speakers.** Specific statements in legal form tell us very little about the law-giver. We may conclude that the author of a law forbidding stealing held stealing in abhorrence. Beyond that we are left in the dark. But not so in the New Testament. When Jesus laid down the law that we should "love one another," His inspired biographies reveal how He lived this law every day of His life. This serves to give a moral force to the law which would not otherwise be possible. Much of the "non-legal" portions of the gospel set forth the sinlessness or holiness of Christ. Man is more inclined to heed the precepts of a righteous law-giver than those of evil-doers. Therefore, the scriptures which tell of the holiness of our Lord do not distract from the authority of the New Testament. On the contrary, such accounts establish its authority!

**2. Corroborative Material.** The historical statements in the New Testament regarding rulers, customs and events, are necessary in that they furnish corroborative evidence for the accuracy of the gospel. The accounts of the miracles were given for the stated purpose of creating confidence in Jesus (John 20:30-31). That which serves to confirm a document surely cannot be cited as evidence against its authority.

**3. Illustrative Material.** Laws become exceedingly difficult to apply when dealing with complex situations. However, Jesus cut through this problem by demonstrating the truth in stories, illustrations, and parables. He couched the underlying law in language that only the hard of heart would fail to understand. Truths taught in "doctrinal passages" are exemplified in such historical books as Acts. The New Testament is thus made meaningful and alive for those who will recognize it.

There may be other considerations that should be added. But a New Testament without the above material is unthinkable. *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable..."* - 2 Timothy 3:16. Every word in the New Testament is there by God's design. Therefore, an encyclopedic catalog of laws would be far inferior to what we have now - God's living law for mankind. -- *Bob West, The Milpitas Messenger, February, 1996*