

The Nature of Revelation

How does God expect us to construe His Word? Are we limited to what is authorized in the Bible, or are we free to do what is not expressly forbidden? Is a congregation limited by what is authorized or free to do what is not forbidden? Much depends upon the answer to this question.

Some time ago a movement began in America known as the restoration and they adopted the slogan, "Where the Bible speaks we shall speak and where it is silent we shall be silent." Actually this was not a new idea, for Peter said the same thing in 1 Peter 4:11. However, it was news to the people at that time; this was a new understanding of the nature of revelation. If this principle was adopted it would change many things then practiced among religious people. It would mean that they would confine their activities to what was authorized in the Bible. It meant that they would give a 'thus saith the Lord' for all that they did or said. No, not new, but news to most of the people. Until this time people had pretty well done as they pleased. They had acted without authority. Up until this time, if the Bible did not say not to, they thought it was perfectly acceptable to do it, whatever it was.

For centuries, the denominations had done just anything that they desired to do. The 'thou shall nots' of the New Testament are relatively few. So, there was then, and is now, a variety of names by which denominations are called (the Bible doesn't say 'Thou shalt not'). The acts of worship vary from denomination to denomination. The means used for raising finances of these organizations are many. The types of organization by which they are governed are diverse. So the plea went out to confine ourselves to those things that are authorized. Yet, some in this restoration (about 100 years ago) were not long in returning to this thinking of their former days in the denominations of men. This was especially true in the areas of music and "missions." However, once they relinquished the general principle they were not long in traveling the entire distance of digression. They defended their practices with the cry, "But the Bible doesn't say not to." So the age old question lingered on and it still remains; what is the nature of revelation?

Today we are still constantly surrounded by the influences of the denominational world. Individuals are affected by their successes in religious endeavors. We are impressed by their buildings, suggesting that perhaps we should employ their methods and theories. So some have begun to re-examine the old question, are we bound or free? Do we actually need authority or is token authority enough? Those who advocate the theory that we are free to do what is not expressly forbidden cry, "The Bible doesn't say not to." Those who believe that they are limited to what is authorized cry, "Where is your authority?" The decision made will affect the church in every area of faith and practice.

Organization: Can we organize on a state or national level? Can we have a regional headquarters? Can we have inter-congregational organization, sponsoring churches, world fair project? Your answer, yes or no, depends upon what you believe to be the nature of God's revelation. Worship: Are we free or limited? Work: Can the church work in the areas of recreation and education? Are we free or limited?

What does the Bible declare to be the nature of revelation? Certainly the answer is contained in scriptures. First, the nature of the revelation is such that it is complete. I do not believe it necessary to elaborate upon this. Just to refresh your memory you may read the following scriptures: 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter 1:3.

Second, the nature of revelation provides a pattern. There is a pattern in the New Covenant as there was a pattern in the Old Covenant (Hebrews 8:5). Paul told Timothy to hold fast to the pattern of sound words (2 Timothy 1:3; 1 Timothy 1:16). In the light of these scriptures we know that the New Testament presents a pattern for the people of God. What is the nature of a pattern? We have patterns for dressmaking. If one follows the pattern, is he free to do whatever is not expressly forbidden, or is he limited to do only what is authorized? You know as well as I that they can only do what is authorized if following the pattern. If a

contractor builds a building according to the blue print, is he free to do whatever is not expressly forbidden or is he bound by that which is authorized? Does a pattern express liberty or limitation? Do we do as we please or do we follow the authority strictly? The nature of revelation provides such a pattern!

Third, revelation calls for unity (1 Corinthians 1:10). Which of the two beliefs is more conducive to unity? The one which says that we may do anything that is not expressly forbidden, or the one which says that we do only what is authorized? If we go back to dressmaking or the building of buildings, and give out a pattern to several different people, tell them that they may do anything that is not expressly forbidden by the pattern; would the dresses turn out all alike? Of course not, they would be as varied as the number of persons participating. But give the pattern to the same number of people and tell them they are limited by that which is authorized in the pattern and when the product is finished, they would be all alike, if they all followed the pattern. Which one is more conducive to unity? Unity in the church can be maintained only if we limit our action to those things that are authorized.

Fourth, the nature of revelation is such that man cannot direct his own steps (Jeremiah 10:23; Matthew 15:9). If we do what we please then we are directing our own steps. If we do that which is authorized in the gospel of Christ, we are following the steps of Christ. The revelation of God, by its nature, demands that we be limited by that which is authorized! We must be able to give a 'thus saith the Lord.'

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