

You Must Apply the First Lesson of Baptist History to Your Life

In the second century the New Testament churches were forced to grow by changing the authority of their life from the Apostles to the Word of God. The Apostles were given authority by Jesus Christ and sometimes they referred to their authority to help the transition that had to take place between the Old Testament and the New Testament. This is seen first in Acts 15 when many met at Jerusalem to discuss the matter of the Gentiles getting saved. When this happened the people would get together, and the matter was settled by the authority of the Apostles and their reference to the Word of God. It was through the Apostle James' authority, as he used the Word of God, to bring the matter to a conclusion. As you read the Bible you will notice that the apostles knew that the churches would have to make a transition from their authority to the authority of the Word of God. When you read II Peter 1:13-21, you see God telling us that "*We have also a more sure word of prophesy...*" God uses Peter to instruct them that even after he goes home to Heaven they can build their lives on the Word of God.

The apostles always referred the churches to the Scriptures, and there is no doubt that the Scriptures were their authority, but there is a big difference between someone telling you what the Bible says and you reading the Bible for yourself. There is a big difference between someone telling you what is right and you finding out what is right from the Word of God yourself and then holding to what God has personally shown you in His Word.

The great Baptist Historian Thomas Armitage in 1890 wrote:

It is estimated that at the opening of [the second] century, from two to three hundred churches had been gathered, some of them thousands of miles apart. When the apostles died, their authority died with them and they lived only in their writings. Their office did not allow perpetuation, for they were the chosen witnesses of Christ's life and work, and could not bequeath their oral testimony to others. When these orphaned flocks were left alone in all their humanness, their only directory was the book by which the Apostles had transmitted their witness and revelations, under the infallible inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

For the first time man was left on common ground, with the choice of making the unmixd authority of that Book his guide to Christ, or of committing his soul to the lead of uninspired men. This fact alone put the Gospel to its severest test, and made the second century a most solemn period, as Christians had no alternative but to follow the New Book.

God's Word teaches us very plainly about pastoral leadership. You should love your man of God, stand behind your man of God and support your man of God. (I Corinthians 11:1; Hebrews 13:7 and 17.) God uses your man of God as a spiritual authority in your life along with the Word of God. If you only believe what you believe because your pastor tells you what to believe then you end up with a very weak Christian faith. God gives us our pastor, our man of God to instruct us, teach us and point us to the Word of God. This is so that the Word of God can be our final authority, Ephesians 4:11-12. Everything concerning how the church is run is supposed to be based upon the man of God's leadership as he follows Christ. However, the end authority of your life is supposed to be the Word of God, Isaiah 8:20.

Your preacher is not supposed to be on trial with you every Sunday. The Christians at Berea were nobler because they received the Word of God and then searched the Word of God to see if what they were being taught was true Biblical truth, Acts 17:11. As a Christian you are to go grow in your discernment between right and wrong based on the Bible, Hebrews 5:12-13. In Deuteronomy 18:20-22 we are told to weigh or test what is told us to make sure it is truly from the Lord. In I John 4:1-3 we are told to try the spirits whether they are of God. Just because someone preaches something does not make it right. The Word of God is what determines truth from error.

You are supposed to tithe, do you know why? You are supposed to go soul winning and tell others how to be saved, do you know why? You are supposed to be faithful to church, do you know why? The man of God is used of God to teach you the Word of God so that you can eventually make it your authority, your **final** authority. The early Christians were forced to make this decision when the last of the apostles went to Heaven. Would they continue to follow man and his authority or would they make the Word of God their authority? Have you made this choice yet? This issue of the Word of God and Its authority was faced by the early New Testament Baptist church and it is also one of the first issues that every Christian must decide upon.