

- Third, our human traditions—things that we agree as a church body to do, that are not mentioned in the New Testament.”

Learner says, “I see. We obey the commands of Jesus above all else. These commands and the commands of His apostles are the first level of authority. Nothing keeps us from obeying Jesus in love.

“Yes. The second level refers to the practices of the apostles that were not commanded. They are examples to us. We cannot prohibit things they practiced. We cannot command them either, because Jesus never did. These apostolic practices include: meeting on the first day of the week, meeting in homes, immediate baptism, and laying on hands to pray to commission new leaders.”

Learner says, “Human traditions are the third level of authority. Are all traditions bad?”

“No. Most traditions are good. They help us to work together in harmony. However, if a human tradition interferes with the commands of Christ, we must make a choice. Will we follow our church tradition or will we obey the Lord Jesus?”

Practical Work

- Memorize Matthew 20:18-20 with your congregation.
- Baptize new believers without delaying it with man-made requirements.
- Let the newly baptized believers participate actively as members of the church body by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Help new believers to take Christ immediately to their own family and friends.
- Examine the traditions of your congregation to make sure that nothing delays obedience to the commands of Christ and His apostles.

Levels of Authority

- Commands of Jesus and His apostles.
- The apostles’ practices that they did not command.
- Human and church traditions.

Command of Christ #2 Baptize

Baptism teaches to live the holy life with Jesus, that it initiates.

The group meeting in Learner’s house talks about baptism. Mr. Wise says, “It is a basic command of Jesus, in Matthew 28:18-20. Please ask any questions.”

Mr. Foolish argues, “It is too soon to baptize these people! My cousin says that his church waits until the converts are perfect in every way. So be careful. What if you baptize them and some of them fall away from the church? Wait and see how well they behave. Then you can reward those who are very good by baptizing them.”

Mr. Wise groans. “You misunderstand the meaning of baptism. We do not postpone obedience to Christ. That always comes first. Baptism starts the shepherding of new, repentant believers.”

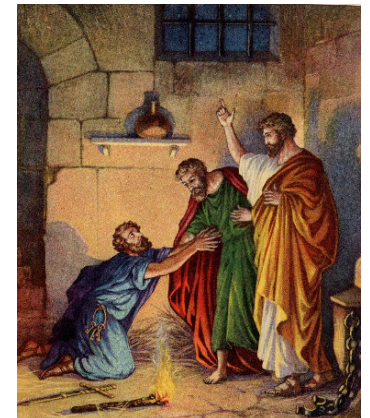
Helper says, “I want to be baptized. What else does the Bible say about it?”

Mr. Wise replies, “Learner, you know the story of The Jailer Who Repented. Please tell them.”

Exercise

Find in Acts 16:22-34 what Learner explains:

- Why did the jailer want to kill himself?
- What did the jailer do immediately after Paul assured him that he could be saved, so that others would also know Christ?
- How soon were the jailer and his family baptized?



Mr. Foolish says to the group that was studying baptism in Learner’s house, “We cannot do as the Bible says. It’s not the same today.”

Learner corrects him, “Yes it is. Sin has not changed. God has not changed. Baptism has not changed. The Philippian jailer feared because he was doomed—he thought he had failed to guard the prisoners and would be put to death. He was afraid and without hope of salvation. He knew he was lost. My relatives are like that, too. They have been really bad, but Jesus came to save those who admit that they are lost and hopeless. Baptism is a gift to people who need strong assurance of forgiveness.”

Mr. Wise adds, “Yes, the apostle Paul explains in Romans 6:3-8 that baptism is not just the washing with water. In baptism, our sin nature is crucified with Christ. We are lifted up with the risen Christ to new life. When people repent, their baptism helps them be sure of their new life in Christ. We explain to them that the Holy Spirit comes to them as a gift from God to make this life possible. How did Paul know the jailer was sincere?”

Learner answers, “By his actions the jailer showed that he trusted in Jesus. He immediately called his family together. They became disciples of Jesus together. And he obeyed Jesus by being baptized. Let us encourage new believers to begin making disciples for Christ immediately, starting with their own families, relatives and friends.

Helper remarks, “The jailer immediately showed his repentance and faith by being baptized.”

“Yes,” Mr. Wise replies, “Baptism is the only rite that Jesus gave His church to affirm our conversion, which is the transformation that God begins in our hearts. The apostles immediately baptized everyone that turned to Christ. They received them into the congregation this way. God added them to the church, the Body of Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Mr. Foolish protests, “But some of Learner’s friends and relatives who want to be baptized are drunks and thieves! People will criticize the church if you let them in before they prove they are worthy.”

One of the men says, “I have lived a very sinful life. I want to repent and follow Jesus Christ. But maybe Mr. Foolish is right. I would bring a bad reputation to the church if I am baptized.”

Mr. Wise encourages him, “Baptism is for bad people. Listen to the story of The Forgiven Tax Collector.

Exercise

- Please find in Luke 18:9-14 what Mr. Wise explained to the discouraged man.
- Two men were praying. Which man prayed the longest prayer?
- Which one did God hear?
- Which one was made right before God?”

The discouraged man sighs with relief. And begins to smile again. Mr. Wise explains to the group, “The apostles did not use baptism as a graduation ceremony after a long course of study. They did not use it to reward those who had proved themselves worthy. These human traditions came later into some churches. In the New Testament, people entered the church through repentance and baptism. Then they grew spiritually with the help of the Body of Christ, the other believers, who loved them and served them.”

Mr. Foolish tells Learner, “You do not have authority from God to baptize these people.”

“Yes, he does,” Mr. Wise says. “We find Our Authority for Baptizing New Believers in Matthew 28:18-20. That is Jesus’ Great Commission. And Learner meets all of God’s requirements to do it.”

Exercise

Please read Matthew 28:18-20 now to find:

- With what authority does Jesus order us to make disciples?
- What two things do we do for people, so that they become disciples of Christ?
- What does Jesus promise to do that makes it easier for us to obey this great commission?

The people leave the meeting but Mr. Wise stays a while longer to explain to Learner The Three Levels of Authority for what we do as a church. “Learner, here is an easy way to remember from where our authority comes:

- First and above all, the commands of Jesus and His apostles.
- Second, the practices of the Apostles, that were not commanded.