

JESUS CHRIST'S VISION AND ORDER FOR HIS CHURCH – Part II

“Now, the **eleven disciples** went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And Jesus came and said to **them**, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
Matthew 18:16, 18-20 NRSV

“Are you familiar with Christian teachings?”

“Yes, quite familiar, though I find that many Christians are not. I have found very few who really know Jesus in any depth, which is sad, because he really is the Christian religion, not theology or the Bible.”

“That is a remarkable observation, Joshua...How do you mean that the Bible is not the Christian religion? Do you not look upon the Bible as the rule of the Christian faith?”

“No, Jesus is the rule of the Christian faith.”

“But do we not get to know Jesus and his teachings through study of the Bible?”

“That is one way, but Jesus never told anyone to write a Bible. The early Christian teachers wrote the New Testament part of the Bible, so it shares only as much authority as the early Church had to write it.

“Jesus gave authority to the apostles and to those upon whom the apostles would lay their hands in imparting their authority. Jesus committed his message to them. They are and always will be the rule of faith in Jesus’ mind. The New Testament is an expression of a part of their teaching.

“In keeping with his promise to send the Holy Spirit, Jesus has been guiding the apostles through the centuries in an ever-deepening understanding of his message. To go back to the book alone is to deny the Holy Spirit’s two thousand years of guidance and all the growth in understanding that has taken place in those two thousand years.”

One of the elders commented, “But when Church leaders of the past have led such scandalous lives, don’t you think people were justified in going off on their own, out of loyalty to Jesus?”

“Would Paul have been loyal to Jesus if, because he disagreed with Peter on important matters, he went off and started his own religion, saying, ‘I alone am worthy to spread the gospel because Peter is a hypocrite?’

“Or would Barnabas have been loyal to Jesus if he started his own religion because he

couldn't get along with Paul? Jesus never guaranteed personal sanctity to the leaders of his community, only that he would guarantee the faithful transmission of his gospel until the end of time."

"We do have an authentic authority. Elders are chosen by the community and receive their call from the community. The community gives us the authority to teach and to govern."

"Quite a democratic process!" Joshua responded. "Is that the way Jesus established the Church and the way the apostles passed on their authority?"

"Not exactly," John responded.

"Well, that should be the key to understanding the instructions Jesus gave to the apostles for the passing on of authority, if you want to be faithful to Jesus," Joshua responded.

"It is essential to follow what Jesus established thorough the apostles, otherwise any group can presume to give authority to someone. But why should God be expected to honor what they have decided?"

"This is a serious problem in Christianity, people making their own plans and expecting God to do what they decide. God does not work that way. People are expected to do things the way He has directed; then they have the assurance of God's blessing and guidance.

"Joshua, you don't make it easy for us. For all these many years, we have lived this way, and now you shake our faith and suggest that what we have been doing is wrong."

"Your personal lives are still holy. You are good people, and God blesses your sincerity and your honesty. So you need not fear that your lives have not been pleasing to God."

"Are we now to find a church where these traditions are honored, do you think?"

"God is a gentle God. All He expects is your openness to His grace. In time, He will lead you where He wants you to be. In the meantime, just live out each day prayerfully. You need not be anxious."

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