

Customs and Commands – 4

October 1997

Not only is it a challenge to separate culture from command in the NT, it is a challenge to do so today. How would you respond to the following questions? Remember, the issue is not what is beneficial or wise but *authorized or prohibited by Scriptural precept:*

Is it authorized ...

- 1) For a church to put a box in the building for members to contribute on the Lord's day?
- 2) For a church not to reassemble on Sunday evening?
- 3) For a church to support an evangelist to work with another congregation which is large enough to support him on their own?
- 4) For a church to call a special meeting for the purpose of praying for a specific individual or situation?
- 5) For a church to have a period of prayer where men who feel so inclined lead prayers in succession?
- 6) For a sermon to end without an "invitation"?
- 7) For a worship service to dismiss without a "closing prayer"?

Consider ...

- 1) The *day* of the collection is specified (1 Cor 16:2) along with certain attitudes which must accompany giving (2 Cor 9:6-7) but the *method of collection* is not specified.
- 2) Again, the *day* of meeting for the memorial supper is specified (Ac 20:7) but not the *number* of assemblies. A church that assembles once on the Lord's day has fulfilled its obligation and is no less spiritual than the one which meets twice.
- 3) See 2 Cor 11:7-9.
- 4) See Ac 12:12.
- 5) This is the practice in London, England. It was decent and orderly. Prayers are not limited according to number or how many lead them.
- 6) There is no "formula" for how a sermon should be begun or concluded. Preachers have long been criticized for their too long, too short, or inadequate "invitations" as if such were a scriptural requirement. Invitations are merely customary. Sermons in England rarely conclude with an "invitation."
- 7) Again, no scripture so specifies how a worship service should conclude. It would be just as acceptable to say, "We are now dismissed" at the end of the announcements.

Cultural habit is a powerful force. We might experience some discomfort when worshiping where things are done differently, but we must evaluate those feelings on the proper basis. If we judge that some foreign practice fulfills the Scriptural requirements, then our conscience can rest easy and we can participate wholeheartedly.

It is *vital* that we remain flexible in matters of judgment. If a long-standing practice of option or expediency is no longer effective or may be improved upon, we must be willing to make adjustments. Otherwise, we will miss opportunities to grow.

When we get so accustomed to doing things a certain way that it becomes law, we have gone too far (Mk 7:1-9). Let us be careful.