

Are We Being Too Strict?

by Bryan Gibson

In our worship, are we being too strict when we do only that which the Lord has commanded, nothing more and nothing less? When we organize ourselves under elders and deacons (Philippians 1:1), are we being too inflexible? Could we do it some other way and still be pleasing to the Lord? When it comes to the work of the church, it is being too narrow-minded to insist on doing only that which the Lord has authorized? Wouldn't it be okay to do something else, as long as the Lord did not expressly forbid it? We do not believe so, when we consider the words of our Almighty God.

To the Israelites under the law of Moses, God made it clear that he wanted them to do all His will, nothing short of it, and nothing beyond it. He told them plainly not to turn aside to the right hand or to the left (please read Deuteronomy 5:32; 17:20; 28:14; Joshua 1:7; 23:6).

This same emphasis is found in the New Testament, the law we are under today. Different words are used, but the principle is the same. Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are my disciples indeed" (John 8:31). When we practice something that Jesus did not teach, when we go beyond His commandments, clearly we are no longer abiding in His word. Here is how it is expressed in 2 John 1:9: "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son" (NASV). 1 Timothy 6:3 offers further support: "If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ..." Everything we teach and practice must be examined in light of this question: Did Jesus Christ teach it in the New Testament? Realizing that the Lord communicates His will in various ways, we should ask these questions: Did He command it? Did He give us an example of it? Did He clearly imply it? If the answer to these questions is no, then we must put it aside.

The path we should follow is laid out in the New Testament; we must not turn aside to the left hand or to the right.