

Understanding Authority in Religion

"Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things?" (Lk. 20:2).

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Introduction:

1. In religion it is vitally important for Christians to have a standard of authority for what we practice and believe.
2. Most religious division stems from a lack of scriptural authority.
3. Conflicting standards of authority result in divisive doctrines and practices.
4. The primary goal of this study is to establish the correct standard, identify false standards, and make applications using the proper standard.
5. Without understanding how the Bible teaches we will likely be found binding what God has loosed, and loosing what God has bound.

Discussion:

I. Some False Standards Of Authority.

A. Human reasoning alone

1. When we want to see if something is authoritative or not we should not use human reasoning alone.
 - a. Jeremiah 10:23.
 - b. Proverbs 16:25.
 - c. Isaiah 55:8-9.
 - d. 1 Corinthians 1:25, "*Because the _____ of God is _____ than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*"
 - e. We are to walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7), and our faith is to lie in the power of God (1 Cor. 2:4-5).
2. Some people want to escape from reason and become unreasonable when they attempt to get religious.
3. What did Paul reason with (Acts 17:2)? _____

B. One's conscience or feelings

1. The Bible teaches that we are to have a pure conscience in serving God, "I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience. . ." (2 Tim. 1:3). The conscience is something that is trained and is therefore not a proper standard to base faith on.
2. When Paul persecuted the church, he apparently did it with a clear conscience (Acts 23:1; 26:9). He conditioned his conscience to despise Jesus and those who followed Him.

C. Tradition

1. Traditions of men are not proper standards. Any tradition that is out of sync with the New Testament should be rejected.
 - a. Before Paul was a Christian, what was he exceedingly zealous for (Gal. 1:14)?

- b. Colossians 2:8, *"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the _____ of _____ according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."*
- c. Read Mark 7:1-9. A tradition is only authoritative as its source.
- 2. *Note:* Change for the sake of change is also a false standard that goes to the opposite extreme.
 - a. Someone may create a tradition of being “non traditional.”
 - b. Not all tradition is sin.
 - 1) There is an apostolic tradition that is binding even if everyone were to reject it. The tradition that the apostles set forth is to be imitated by Christians today (see 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6; 1 Cor. 11:1-2).
 - 2) There may also be traditions that are merely expedient in carrying out a command. While these cannot be “bound” or “condemned as “sin,” they are nonetheless authorized. Expedients are discussed later on.

D. The majority

- 1. Some people think that the majority is always right.
- 2. The two greatest leaders who walked on the face of the earth condemn the majority!
 - a. Moses (Ex. 23:2).
 - b. Jesus Christ the Son Of God (Matt. 7:13-14).
- 3. If six million people believe a lie, does that make it true?

E. The end justifies the means

- 1. This is a false standard that is embraced by many denominational churches.
- 2. The end does not justify the means. Could we sell beer and lottery tickets so that we could build a building to assemble in (Rom. 3:5-8)?
- 3. Numbers 24:13, *"Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go _____ the _____ of the Lord, to do either good or bad of my own will; but what the Lord says, that I must speak."*

F. What other churches do

- 1. Our doctrines and practices are not true whether other churches do them or not.
- 2. This is a false standard that justifies men's' inventions, but consequently rejects God (1 Sam. 8:5, 7, 20; cf. Hos. 13:9-11).

G. What creeds say (2 Tim. 3:14-17)

1. What if a creed commands more than the Bible? _____
2. What if a creed commands less than the Bible? _____
3. What if a creed commands exactly as the Bible? _____

Consider Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18, 19

H. What leaders in the church say

1. While some may be prone to resist to listen to those who teach, preach or shepherd the church (through the Word of God), many make a leader in the church the standard for which they go by.
2. Neither elders, deacons nor preachers have ‘legislative’ power.
 - a. Paul did not commend the elders to their own thoughts but to God and His word (Acts 20:32).
 - b. What did Paul charge Timothy to preach (2 Tim. 4:1-2)?

 - c. Acts 4:18-20 should set a pattern for all Christians, especially those who teach and preach (cf. Acts 5:29).

II. Jesus Has All Authority.

- A. Jesus Christ has all authority today (Matt. 28:18).
- B. Because of this, the Law of Moses is no longer authoritative for our beliefs and practices.
 1. This does not undermine or release us from studying the Old Testament. We need to study it! There is a great deficiency in studying the Old Testament today.
 - a. 1 Corinthians 10:11.
 - b. Romans 15:4.
 - c. What did the Law serve as (Gal. 3:23-25)? _____

 - d. What is it described as in Hebrews 10:1? _____

 2. Jesus fulfilled the Old Law and nailed it to the cross (Col. 2:14-17).
 - a. The Old Law has ceased ended (Eph. 2:13-16).
 - b. Read Romans 7:1-7
 - 1) How long is a woman bound to the law of her husband? _____

- 2) What happens if she marries another while her husband lives?

- 3) What have Christians become dead to through the body of Christ?

- 4) What Law does Paul identify he is speaking of in verse 7? _____

- 5) Then, what Law have Christians become “dead” to and “delivered” from? _____

- 6) Will you be subject to U.S. law when you die? _____

3. Some reasons why the Old Testament is ‘old.’
 - a. We have a better covenant through Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:22; 8:6).
 - b. God took it away (Heb. 10:9).
 - c. It cannot coexist with the New Law (ibid.).
 - d. God made a new one (Heb. 8:7-8).
 - e. God called it old (Heb. 8:13).

C. All that we do must be done by the authority of Christ.

1. Colossians 3:17, “And whatever you do in _____ or _____ do all in the _____ of the Lord Jesus...”
2. Having the New Testament is in itself the expression of Christ's authority (Jn. 15:26; 16:12-15). The Holy Spirit was sent by Christ from heaven and declared the message and Lordship of Jesus.

There is Strictness in God’s law

- 2 John 9 – “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the father and the son.”

Doctrine of Christ Has God and Christ

SIN

Not with God!

III. Some Principles In Establishing Scriptural Authority.

A. The Silence Of Scripture.

1. In 1808, Thomas Campbell said, "Where the Scriptures speak we will speak, and where the Scriptures are silent we will be silent."
 - a. This statement later came to be the motto of the restoration movement where men put off denominational shackles and took the Bible as the only authoritative book which would lead people to heaven.
 - b. This plea is also the basic principle of 1 Peter 4:11.
2. God's silence is important.
 - a. The Hebrew writer used the 'silence' of scripture to prove that Jesus is superior to angels (Heb. 1:5).
 - b. Is Jesus a high priest (Heb. 4:15)? _____
 - c. Why did the Law have to be changed so that Christ could be a high priest (Heb. 7:12-15)? _____

APPLICATION:

When men assume authority to do something that the scriptures are silent on, they are changing the Law of God.

Do we have this authority?

3. God condemns presumptuous and self-willed individuals.
 - a. Psalm 19:13.
 - b. Deuteronomy 18:20, "*But the prophet who _____ to speak a word in My name, which I have _____ commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.*"
 - c. 2 Peter 3:10. The Greek word for presumptuous, *Tolmetes* {tol-may-tace'}, literally means a daring man. We cannot venture out on our own authority and be pleasing to God.
4. Many people go by the rule that if the Bible doesn't say "Thou shall not..." then it is okay. How do we know that ham and gravy are not suitable for the fruit of the vine and unleavened bread on the Lord's Table? _____

B. A Statement Of Fact.

1. We can establish scriptural authority by a statement of fact.
2. As Christians we know and teach that God created the heavens and earth because of the statement of Genesis 1:1.
3. We know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea because of the statement of fact (Matt. 2:1).
4. We know that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus because of the statement of fact (Matt. 28:18).
5. "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved...*" is true because of a statement of our Lord (Mk. 16:16).

C. A Direct Command.

1. We can establish scriptural authority from studying the commands given by the Lord and His apostles. The Bible is full of commands that deal with what we are to do and how we are to do it (i.e. 1 Cor. 14:37, 40).
2. Name some things that Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:19. _____

3. In the big debate over keeping circumcision and the law of Moses (cf. Acts 15:5-6), one thing that was issued was a command by James (*ibid* vs. 13-20).
4. The commands of the Lord and His apostles are to be obeyed.
 - a. 1 Corinthians 14:37.
 - b. Revelation 22:14, "*Blessed are those who do His _____, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.*"
5. Understanding generic and specific authority: *Generic* is inclusive while *specific* discriminates. When God specifies how to do something, all of man's innovations of executing the command must be rejected.

Command	Generic	Specific
Build Ark Genesis 6:14	Wood	Use Gopher-wood, Pitch, 300 cubits, etc. (Gen. 6:14-15).
Bring Red Heifer Numbers 19:2	Animal	Red Heifer, Without Defect
Praise God Hebrews 13:15	Music	Sing, From Lips (cf. Heb.2:12).
Commit The Things Heard From Paul 2 Timothy 2:2	Commit/Teach	To Faithful Men, Able To Teach.

6. Understanding aids (expedencies) verses additions with specific and generic authority:
 - a. For something to be expedient there must be authorization for the thing done.
 - b. An expedient will not change the thing being done.
 - c. An expedient is not a law, but it is lawful.
 - d. An expedient cannot be specified or 'bound' by brethren as an article of faith.

- e. An expedient must edify and not offend the conscience of a brother (see 1 Cor. 8:7-13; 10:23-33). Dividing over an expedient is no longer “expedient” and is sinful.

7. Fill in the blanks. . .

<u>General Command</u>	<u>Aid (Expediency)</u>	<u>Specific Command (Essentials)</u>	<u>Addition</u>
Make Ark (Gen. 6:13-16)	Utilize Any Tool Or Process To Fulfill Command.	Ark Of Gopherwood, Pitch, One Door, One Window, Three Decks.	Rowboat Of Cedar, Paint, another Door, Two Or More Windows, Etc.
Go Preach (Mk. 16:15)	_____ _____ _____	Preach Gospel.	Teaching Aerobics, Another Gospel, Etc.
Assemble (Heb. 10:25)	Have A Meeting Place (Rent, Own).	_____ _____ _____	Forsaking, Doing Something Else.
Praise God (Heb. 13:15; 2:12,)	Books, Lights, Leader, etc.	Sing (Heb. 2:12; Eph. 5:19).	_____ _____ _____
Baptize (Acts 2:38; Matt. 28:19)	Pool, Baptistry, etc.	_____ _____ _____	Sprinkling, Pouring, A Different Action
Relieve True Widows (I Tim. 5:3, 16; Acts 6:1-7)	_____ _____ _____	The Church (vs. 16).	Another Organization (i.e. A Benevolent Society).

D. An Approved Example.

1. We can derive scriptural authority from apostolic example.
2. We know that we are to study apostolic example because scripture tells us to.
 - a. " _____ me, just as I also _____ Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).
 - b. Philippians 3:17, "Brethren, join in following my _____, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern."
 - c. Philippians 4:9.
3. In the debate in Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas' example (vs. 12) was testimony to prove that the Gentiles were not under the Old Law of Moses (cf. vs. 1, 5), and that God had already accepted them.
4. How do we know when and which apostolic examples are to be followed? Here are some rules to go by:
 - a. **There must be uniformity.** All scriptures must be without exception in the essential details. For example, we understand that baptism was always by immersion, but the details are different. We don't have to be riding in a chariot to learn the truth about baptism (Acts 8:28). Lydia was beside a river (16:13); the jailer was in jail (Acts 16:25-34).
 - b. **The example must harmonize with the entire New Testament to be binding.** For example, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in an upper room (Lk. 22:12). There is an example of the disciples taking it in the upper room (Acts 20:8); however, Jesus taught that acceptable worship has no locality (Jn. 4:21-24). We conclude that the upper room is not a part of the example that is binding¹.
 - c. **It must be universally applicable.** Since the gospel is for all (Mk. 16:15-16; Col. 1:23), the example's provisions must be applicable for all people at all times. It is not universally possible for all people to learn the truth in a jail as the Philippian jailer did. However, wherever there is life, there is enough water to bury a man through baptism.
 - d. **Some examples are limited (restricted) in application.** For example, when Aquila and his wife Priscilla took Apollos aside to teach him the way of God more accurately, this example demonstrates that women can teach men, but there are *limitations*. Apollos was apparently in the same circumstance as the Ephesians

¹This rule takes care of those who try to limit salvation to a few verses. For example, many religious bodies like to teach that all one has to do is believe and confess Christ in order to be saved. They use the example of the thief on the cross (Lk. 23:39-43) and Romans 10:9. They fail to realize that Romans 10:9 states that the belief was in Jesus's resurrection from the dead (which did not happen at the time of the cross). Furthermore, Jesus had power on earth to forgive sins (Mk. 2:10). No mere man has this power. Finally this doctrine ignores all the other passages in the Bible that deal with salvation (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; etc.).

(compare Acts 18:25 to Acts 19:2-5). Priscilla, with Aquila, was teaching a man who did not know of the baptism of Christ. However, this is not authority for women preachers (see 1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-12)².

- e. **There must be competence in the interpretation of the example.** For example, in Acts 16:15, Lydia and her household were baptized. It is an incorrect exegesis to assume that infants were baptized from this example. There are households that have no children, therefore, it assumes too much. Evidence supports that only men and women are subjects of Bible baptism (Acts 8:12). Infants cannot believe, confess or repent, why do some think they should be baptized?
- f. **An example should not be bound when it is disproved.** Peter’s hypocrisy was an apostolic example, but was not approved (Gal. 2:11-14).
- g. **An example should not be bound when it is an incidental.** For example, the upper room in Acts 20:8.
- h. **An example is not to be bound when it belongs to the Old Testament.** For example, Jesus kept the Sabbath. We need to remember that Jesus kept the Sabbath because He lived and was “born” under the law and was to fulfill it (Gal. 4:4; Matt. 5:17-18). Jesus also kept other parts of the law, feasts, circumcision, etc. Inspired revelation tells us that the Old Law was done away with (Eph. 2:13-16; Col. 2:14-17). By fulfilling it, He abolished it.
- g. **An example is not binding when it is temporary.** For example, speaking with tongues (Acts 2:4), was temporary (1 Cor. 13:8-13).
- h. **Finally, an example is not binding when it is a matter of custom.** The washing of feet was a custom that people practiced as an act of hospitality in both testaments (cf. Gen. 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24; Jud. 19:21; 1 Tim. 5:10). The disciples were already practicing foot washing but Jesus was going to use that as an example of humility (Jn.13:12-17; Matt. 20:28).

E. A Necessary Inference.

²The Greek word *Sigao* {see-gah'-o}, in I Corinthians 14:34-35 means utter silence, hold one's peace, to be kept in silence, to be concealed. On the other hand, the Greek word *Hesuchia* {hay-soo-khee'-ah}, in I Timothy 2:11 means a respectful quiet condition in general. There are three conclusions that we can derive from these passages. First, these passages prohibit women from preaching or taking some authoritative position in our worship service (cf. I Tim. 2:8). Second, these passages do not prohibit women from teaching children or non-Christians (cf. Acts 19:26; Tit. 2:3). Third, these passages do not prohibit women from participating in Bible studies as long as it is subjective in manner, where the class is not overrun.

1. A necessary inference is a logical conclusion that **must** be true from the information given. Those who attack necessary inference are probably ignorant of what it is. Necessary inference is something that is *necessarily* inferred! There is no hunch or guess work.
2. This is a part of our everyday reasoning. If we wake up in the morning and discover that frost is on the ground, we necessarily infer that it was below the freezing point during the night.
3. This is another way that we can establish authority for things that we believe and practice.
4. We must understand the difference between an ‘inference’ and a ‘necessary inference.’
 - a. *Inferences* are mere speculations which are sometimes wrong.
 - b. *Necessary inferences* must be true without exception.

Inferences Can Be Wrong	Necessary Inferences Are Not Wrong
The apostles were drunk was a wrong inference in Acts 2:12-15	He is a prophet was a necessary inference in John 9:17, 32-33.
This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub was an incorrect inference (Matt. 12:22-28).	You are a teacher come from God was a necessary inference in John 3:2.

c. A necessary inference is an inference made true.

The Inference	Made Necessary
God saves Jews and Gentiles the same way (Acts 10:34-35; Acts 15:11).	Because of Peter's vision (Acts 10:10-16, 28), and Holy Spirit baptism (Acts 15:7-9).
When Jesus was baptized, He went down into the water.	Because Jesus, "...came up immediately from the water..." (Matt. 3:16).
Temptation is not sin.	Because Jesus was tempted, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22).
The cup is the fruit of the vine and not a container.	Because the cup was divided and drunk—Jesus used the two terms interchangeably (Lk. 22:17-18; 1 Cor. 11:26).

IV. Exercise What We Have Learned.

- A. A meeting house would not be scriptural if there was no authority for _____ (Heb. 10:25).
1. What then is a meeting house?
 2. If a church building is an expedient, can we bind that all churches must have one? _____
 3. An expedient only aids in fulfilling what? _____
 4. What can church buildings be used for? Anything and everything? _____
- B. Why do we have authority for having song books? _____
1. If we have a song book we are still just fulfilling the command to sing.
 2. If we incorporate instruments in our worship, are we still fulfilling the command to sing, or are we incorporating an additional element (Heb. 2:12; 13:15)? _____

C. How do we know that we are to use unleavened bread in the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:17-29)? _____

1. What does leaven sometimes symbolize (1 Cor. 5:7-8)? _____

2. Is the fruit of the vine an expediency, essential, or addition (Lk 22:17-18)?

D. Baptism is a general command (Matt. 28:19). What are some specific commands (essentials) that must accompany baptism?

1. What are some aids (expediencies) that we can use to fulfill the command?

2. What are some additions that men have incorporated into God's commands? _____

3. Name some reasons why we know baptism is a going down or immersion in water. Give references. _____

Conclusion:

1. The Bible is to be our only map to lead us to heaven. God demands that we study it, rightly divide it, apply it and preach it.
2. In order to be acceptable to God, we must *understand authority in religion*.