

A Study Of Bible Authority

Introduction. Every facet of our lives revolves around authority. Authority is the right to command or direct and enforce obedience or administer punishment. The laws of the land that we live by carry the weight of authority. That is why we must obey local, state and federal laws. In divine affairs, however, all authority inheres in God.

Suppose I should tell my son, "Here's ten dollars, go buy a loaf of bread." He returns with the loaf of bread, a candy bar, ice cream cone and gum all paid for with my money. He could correctly argue that I did not specifically tell him, "Don't get a candy bar, ice cream cone or gum." However, if I had specifically told him on several occasions before, "Whenever I tell you to do something, don't add to what I tell you, nor take from it, nor substitute anything else for it," then he would know that he was always restricted to my instructions, no more, no less. I would not have to repeat the restriction with each order I gave.

God has done this in the Bible. God tells us in several places and in several ways that we cannot add to His word, or take from it, or modify anything He has told us to believe and do. God does not have to repeat the restrictions every time He tells someone what to do, though He has stated the restriction several times (Joshua 1:7; Proverbs 30:5-6; Matthew 15:9).

We are going to examine authority today which really is the fundamental issue between the various religious groups. In an appeal to be what the Lord commands us to be, we must rest upon authority. Paul told us in Ephesians 3:3-5 that what he wrote we would be able to read and understand. We can know what God wants us to do. This kind of study is always important, relevant and timely.

I. ***God Has Given Christ Absolute Authority In The Church***

- A. He is God's lawgiver to His people today (Hebrews 1:1; Acts 3:22-25).
- B. "All authority" has been given to Him (Matthew 28:18).
- C. He is "head over all things to the church, which is his body" (Ephesians 1:22-23).
 1. Man can act in the church only by His authority.
 - a) The head controls the body.
 - b) The church is an absolute monarchy (Ephesians 1:19-21; Colossians 1:18-19).
 - c) We are forbidden to go beyond His word (2 John 9-11).
 2. Christians must seek to walk in Him (Colossians 2:6-10).

II. ***Christ Gave Binding And Loosing Authority To His Apostles***

- A. Proper respect for the authority of Christ can be shown only by respecting the authority of apostles (John 13:20; 20:22-23; Acts 2:14; 1

John 4:6).

B. Two illustrations:

1. Matthew 16:19; 18:18.

a) Heaven respects only the authority of Christ through the apostles.

b) All obligations in the Lord's church is established by apostolic authority.

c) No man has any right to go beyond in either direction.

2. Matthew 15:1-14.

a) Human authority makes worship vain (15:8-9).

b) Human authority will be rooted up (15:13).

c) Human teachers are blind guides of the blind (15:14).

(1) Jesus respected and kept the law of God but did not keep what was bound by the traditions of the elders (15:1).

(2) Jesus condemned the Jewish elders for presuming to release men from what the law of God bound (15:4-6).

C. Differences on the question of circumcision were settled by apostles in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1-3; Acts 15:1-31). All matters involving religious questions are to be settled in the same manner.

III. ***The Authority Of Christ Was Fully Exercised By The Apostles***

A. The scriptures are perfect and complete, therefore sufficient (2 Peter 1:3; 2 Timothy 3:13-17; Jude 3).

B. We are forbidden to go beyond these writings (Galatians 1:6-8; 2 John 9-11; 1 Corinthians 14:37).

C. We must follow the apostolic pattern (Philippians 3:16-19; 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:14; 1 Corinthians 4:16-17).

IV. ***How To Establish Authority From New Testament Scriptures***

A. Command -- a direct statement or command in the scriptures. If you were to tell your son or daughter to pick up their toys, you have just given them a direct command.

1. Commands are the most classic expressions of authority. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, we have a direct command to partake of the Lord's supper for a specific reason.

2. Paul received the memorial of the Lord and gave it to the church by His authority (cf. Acts 15:19-20; Mark 16:15; 1 Corinthians 6:18).

B. Approved example -- the practice of the church in the New Testament under apostolic guidance and which the apostles had received from the Lord and therefore by divine appointment.

1. An example is a description of what someone did, teaching by "show" rather than "tell," and it is approved because the conduct meets God's approval.

2. We are told of giving regularly upon the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). If this action was acceptable then, it is acceptable now (cf. Acts 15:12; John 13:15; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11; 1 Peter 2:21).
- C. Necessary inference -- neither expressly stated nor specifically exemplified yet is necessarily implied by the clear import and meaning of the language used. It is a form of authority that is somewhat more "buried." Necessary inferences examine the available evidence and then draws a conclusion.
1. In John 5:39, the scriptures did not testify concerning Christ in direct terms or language, but there were facts that could be pieced together in order to arrive at the conclusion that Jesus was the way to eternal life (cf. Acts 15:7-11; Matthew 16:12; 19:4-5; 22:23-33; 1 Timothy 2:13-14; Hebrews 7:12-14).
 2. Necessary inference can be likened to jury duty. You have the task of evaluating the evidence and making a judgment or a conclusion based on that evidence. The problem in using this approach is not whether necessary inferences are valid, but rather, do the necessary implications exist to point us to an inference.
- D. All of this is nothing but common sense. This is not "church of Christ tradition." We all use these methods everyday on ordinary matters.

V. **General And Specific Authority**

- A. All authority is either general, which includes any thing, method or means of execution that comes within the class or order of the precept, example or thing commanded; or specific, which excludes every thing, method or means of execution in the same order or class which is not particularly specified in the precept, example or thing commanded. General authority includes and specific authority excludes.
1. Illustrations of general authority:
 - a) Matthew 28:19 says "go." We are left with the means to go. We can walk, ride in a train or car, fly in an airplane, or sail on a ship. God did not specify; therefore, we have a choice. No person has the right to bind a specific method.
 - b) Matthew 28:19 says "teach." We can teach in private or in public. We can teach in a class setting if we so desire. God did not specify; therefore, we have a choice. No person has the right to bind a specific method.
 - c) Hebrews 10:25 commands us to not forsake the assembly. Christians must assemble to be pleasing to God. However, we can choose to assemble in someone's home, this building or in any place which we rent. God did not specify; therefore, we have a choice. No person has the right to bind a specific method.

- d) Ephesians 5:19 says "sing." We can sing using song books or we can sing by memory. We can all sing the same part or we can sing our regular four-part harmony. God did not specify; therefore, we have a choice. No person has the right to bind a specific method.
2. Illustrations of specific authority:
- a) God told Noah to build an ark of gopher wood (Genesis 6:14). Gopher wood excluded walnut, pine, ash, spruce, oak and all other kinds of wood. When God specified gopher wood, no one had the right to add another kind.
- b) Numbers 19:2 commands the use of an unblemished red heifer. A red heifer excluded sheep, goats, horses, camels and every other kind of heifer. When God specified a red heifer, no one had the right to add another color or kind of animal.
- c) Ephesians 5:19 says "sing." This excludes every other "kind" of music. Instrumental music is excluded by the fact that God specified "sing" and that does not include "playing" upon an instrument. No man has the right to grant a liberty which God's authority excludes.
- d) The Lord's supper (Matthew 26:26, 29; Acts 20:7). The unleavened loaf and fruit of the vine excludes every other element. The first day of the week excludes every other day. God has made the choice with reference to these matters and man has none but to do the will of God or rebel.
- e) The local church (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1). God has specified congregational government under elders or bishops, whose work is specified (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). There is nothing larger or smaller in the New Testament scriptures. Man has to accept God's arrangement and be satisfied or rebel against divine authority by substituting or adding some other organization.

Conclusion. In order for something to be authorized there must be either precept, approved example or necessary inference in New Testament scriptures. If the means of authority is general then anything included within the scope of the thing authorized is permissible. If God specified the kind or method of execution then no substitute or addition is allowed but everything of the same class or order is excluded.

There are two extremes in consideration of divine authority. One extreme position is taken by the anti-Bible class group of brethren who contend that in order for a thing to be scriptural it must be specifically authorized. Upon this basis they reject the class system of teaching. The other extreme is taken by the "digressive" members of the Christian Church group who contend that in order for a thing to be wrong it must be specifically

condemned. Both are wrong. One binds where God has not bound and the other looses where God has bound (1 Peter 4:11).