

The Ancient Pattern: The Pattern For Authority

Introduction. The letters SAE stand for the Society of Automotive Engineering. The SAE was founded in 1905 by Andrew Ricker and Henry Ford. SAE currently maintains more than 1,600 standards and practices documents for cars and other road-going vehicles, along with the aeronautical industry. Long ago, these industries understood that they needed to operate with standards.

Man has many different religious standards: the Old Testament (Galatians 3:16, 19, 24-25), conscience (Proverbs 14:12; Acts 23:1), human wisdom (Jeremiah 10:23; 1 Corinthians 2:5), majority opinion (Matthew 7:13-14), and parents (Matthew 10:37).

But if the Bible is what it claims, and it does what it claims (2 Timothy 3:16-17), then it must be the source of authority in everything we do (Colossians 3:17).

When we have the same standard we can have the same answers and we can have unity. If we operate by our opinions or feelings we will have confusion and division. To help us understand the importance of Bible authority, how we establish Bible authority, the limits of Bible authority, and the importance in keeping within it, we are going to investigate a specific section in the book of Acts.

I. *Focusing On Answers*

- A. What will be our source of authority?
 1. All religious truth and authority is found in Christ (Matthew 28:18; John 8:31-32; 12:48).
 2. Authority and truth were given to the apostles (John 14:26; 16:13; 20:21-23).
- B. Our authority is Christ, through His apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:19-22).
 1. The apostles' instructions had to be followed (2 Thessalonians 3:6).
 2. We are to devote ourselves to the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42).

II. *Finding The Answers*

- A. There had to be confirmation for God's apostles and prophets.
 1. This confirmation was not from the Old Testament.
 - a) We're under the New Covenant now, and they didn't appeal to it to make religious proclamations (Galatians 5:4).
 - b) They used the Old Testament to prove the fulfillment of prophecy (cp. Acts 15:15-17).
 2. In Acts 15:1-2, the church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to confirm the teaching of the apostles.
 3. They were determining if these Gentiles needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses (v. 5). That's the fundamental issue: apostles' doctrine vs. the Law of Moses.
- B. They used three methods for establishing authority.
 1. Necessary implication (vv. 6-11).
 - a) God chose Peter to teach the gospel to the Gentiles.
 - b) God gave them the Holy Spirit just like the Jews.
 - c) God made no distinction between the Jews and Gentiles.
 - d) We were unable to bear the burden. Why should they try as well?

- e) We are saved just like them by grace, not through perfectly keeping the Law of Moses.
- f) Peter made a necessary inference from how God treated the Gentiles.
- 2. Approved example (v. 12).
 - a) Peter recounted the conversion of the Gentiles and all they had done.
 - b) But he mentioned the use of miracles — miracles were performed to confirm the word and the one who taught. If they were teaching error, God would not confirm it!
 - c) This is a God-approved example from an apostle and a Christian.
- 3. Direct statement or command (vv. 13-18).
 - a) James quoted from the Old Testament. As has been said previously, they were not under the Old Testament, but the prophets spoke of the change and salvation of the Gentiles.
 - b) This was a great change from the Law of Moses, which was only for the Old Testament Israelites.
- C. The conclusion was that they were not to keep the Law of Moses. But they also indirectly taught additional restrictions for the Gentiles who obeyed Christ.
 - 1. The silence of God is restrictive (vv. 22-29).
 - a) Some people like to argue from silence: “God didn’t say not to!”
 - b) That’s what these brethren were doing. The apostles had not expressly forbidden following Moses, but they were still wrong.
 - c) To clarify, they added explicit directions regarding this specific situation!
 - 2. One vitally important point is that they were not deciding what was true.
 - a) Some may take this and say the church can establish traditions (cp. 1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:15) — that’s not being taught here.
 - b) These people were coming together to confirm what was already taught, and then encouraging others to follow the truth.
- D. This method is used a lot in the New Testament. For example, Paul similarly communicated instructions for the support of preachers in 1 Corinthians 9.

III. Following The Answers

- A. Once they understood the truth, what were they supposed to do?
 - 1. They were expected to teach it (v. 30).
 - a) They gathered the whole church together and read the letter to them.
 - b) What would have happened if they hadn’t taught the brethren? Sin!
 - c) What would have happened if they changed the word? False teaching!
 - 2. They were expected to keep it.
 - a) What if the brethren decided they didn’t like the decision?
 - b) What if they decided to let other churches follow it but not them?
 - c) Could they say they were right and followed the apostle’s doctrine?
 - d) That’s disobedience — not to man, but to God!
 - 3. They were expected to resist those who taught otherwise.
 - a) What would happen if some of these brethren did want to teach something else?

- b) The responsibility of the faithful brethren is to teach them, reprove their error, and ultimately withdraw from them if they persisted (Romans 16:17-18).
 - c) God's truth is not optional. It needs to be discussed and understood. But it must ultimately be followed if we want to be faithful.
- B. The reaction to faithful teaching of God causes rejoicing, encouragement, and produces strength (vv. 31-32).

Conclusion. Standards remove confusion. A lot of people pay lip service to following the Bible. But that means that someone really has to investigate and hold fast to the true standard. It cannot be anything else. All of those standards mentioned in the introduction could be used to discredit the truth. We can know and understand our Bibles. We can know the truth, but we also have to follow the truth.

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