

## How to Establish Biblical Authority

The U.S. Census Bureau's Statistical Abstract dated September 29, 1998, lists 76 faiths in America that had 60,000 or more members. Of this number, 59 considered themselves Christian. Of the 59 "Christian" faiths, there are no two that agree 100% of the time on all issues.

Considering such diversity, one must ask, "How can I be sure that I am interpreting the Bible correctly?" One church uses instrumental music in worship; another does not. Some churches have gymnasiums and dinners on the grounds; other churches condemn such practices. Women preach in some churches; in other churches women are not permitted to preach. How do we establish Bible authority to determine which of these practices, if any, are permitted?

Jesus provides us an example. When confronted by Satan and tempted in the wilderness, Jesus answered each temptation with the phrase, "***It is written***" (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). Thus, we should seek to answer Bible questions with Bible answers because, "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Knowing where to find the answer is only half the battle. Knowing which Scriptures to use and how to apply them is the other half. Fortunately, Jesus and the Apostles provide us with additional examples of how they interpreted Scripture. When referring to the Scriptures to answer Bible questions, Jesus and the Apostles used direct statements or commands, examples, and necessary inferences.

For example, in Acts 11 Peter was confronted by Jews who were unhappy about the fact that Peter had shared the Gospel with Cornelius and other Gentiles. To resolve the controversy, Peter referred to the command of the Holy Spirit to go to Cornelius (Acts 11:12). Peter then tells the Jewish brethren that the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and the others as it had fallen, "*upon us at the beginning,*" (Acts 11:15) referring to the example of the Apostles' baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. Peter then necessarily inferred that because Cornelius and the others received the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the same manner as the Apostles, that God intended for the Gentiles to hear the Gospel (Acts 11:17). After hearing Peter's use of command, example, and necessary inference authority, "*those of the circumcision*" (Acts 11:2) believed that "*God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life*" (Acts 11:18).

Consider the acts and practices of your local church. Most churches meet on Sunday because that is when the Christians in the First Century, under the guidance of the Apostles, met to share the Lord's Supper and collect the contribution of the saints (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2). Most churches share unleavened bread and fruit of the vine when taking the Lord's Supper because those are the materials used by Christ when He instituted the observance (Matt. 26:26-28, Luke 22:19-20) and Paul instructs us to follow the same command (1 Cor. 11:23-29). Churches sing during worship because Paul commanded Christians to sing (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16).

Whether or not one realizes it today, churches participate in these activities in these ways because someone sometime ago was concerned with authority. Churches observed the commands and examples of the Apostles because they realized that the commands were written for all churches (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Churches

also realized that the commands were recorded in the New Testament so that they would be preserved after the Apostles died (2 Pet. 1:15).

Over time, however, authority gave way to traditions, and in some corners, traditions have given way to convenience and preferences (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Consider all of the acts and practices of your local church. Look at each worship activity in minute detail. What is being done, by whom, and in what manner? Can you cite Scriptural authority for the practice? Is there a command, example, or necessary inference that supports the activity? Can you answer, "Because *'it is written'*?"

Although there are more than 59 "Christian" faiths, unity is not only possible, but expected (1 Cor. 1:10). Unity, however, can only come through God's divine standard – the Scriptures. Unity will come when we decide to set tradition, preference and convenience aside, do Bible things in Bible ways, and honor Paul's admonition that, "*whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*" (Col. 3:17).

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