

Bible Authority

Introduction:

- 1) This material is excerpted from [*Centuries of Change vs. the Unchanging Word: A Look at God's Plan for New Testament Christianity and Some Changes From It.*](#)
- 2) This study is taken from a section dealing with division that took place among brethren in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

I. CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARD SCRIPTURE.

A. Points of Disagreement.

1. Brethren came to view the Scriptures quite differently.
 - a. Some insisted on a “progressive” approach to the Bible (often referred to as liberal by their critics), while others insisted on a more conservative interpretation (sometimes called legalists and traditionalists by their opponents).
2. While some of the more “progressive” began to have little interest in Bible authority, for many conservatives and “moderates” the hermeneutical questions raised were vitally important.
 - a. Was Bible authority vital?
 - b. Was silence prohibitive or permissive?
 - c. How was Biblical authority to be established?
 - d. What are allowable aids and expedients?
 - e. Issues of expediency (i.e. things necessary to carry out a command) were hotly contested.

B. Importance of Authority.

1. All of the above questions are important, but the importance of authority must be first.
 - a. Authority may be defined in different ways, but I use it to mean “authorization, permission, instruction.” I include both requirements and permissible options.
2. We must do the will of the Father. Matt. 7:21-23
3. That will cannot be known except through revelation. Isa. 55:8, 9; 1 Cor. 2:10-13
4. God's will is found in its completeness in Scripture. 2 Tim. 3:16, 17
5. *To minimize the importance of Biblical authority is to reject the truth and refuse to abide in the _____ of _____. 2 John 9

C. How Is Authority Established?

1. There are three basic ways. Direct Command or Statement; Approved Example; Necessary Inference or Implication (Inescapable Conclusion).

2. While these are often seen as artificial rules, in reality they are the means by which we learn many things.
3. Someone beginning a new job would learn his responsibilities by these 3 methods.
 - a) Direct commands/statements. "Report to work at 8:00 AM."
 - b) Necessary implication. "You will be driving a truck to make deliveries."
 - 1) Though not expressly stated, it is necessarily implied that a driver's license is necessary.
 - c) Approved example. The new worker might initially be assigned to ride with an experienced driver. He also might watch some of the employees that are in the boss's good graces.
4. These three means of establishing authority or determining God's will are not a "Restoration Hermeneutic," but are the result of much careful thinking about this subject.

II. DIRECT COMMANDS OR STATEMENTS.

1. While it should be obvious that God's will can be determined this way, not all see it that way.
 - a. Many think a spirit of love or a good heart will suffice. They ridicule those who think the commandments matter by calling them legalists and Pharisees.
 - b. Just as in the 1800s, some brethren today seek to eliminate the idea of commandments, even referring to the epistles as "love letters."
2. There are many references to the importance of obeying commandments and/or the recognition that the Bible is to be understood as a book containing such.
 - a. Matt. 28:18-20; John 14:15, 21; 15:14; 1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Thes. 4:1, 2; 2 Pet.3:1, 2; 1 Jn. 2:3,4
3. These commands and/or statements are found in different forms.
 - a. Classic form of command. Eph. 5:25; Col. 3:9
 - b. Conditional statements or declarations. Matt. 7:21; John 3:3, 5; Mark 16:16
 - 1) None of these are "*commands*," yet each informs us as to the will of God and implies a commanded action.
 - 2) Having read these statements of fact, we can know something about God's will.
 - c. Rhetorical questions. Rom. 6:1,2
 - 1) The question makes the statement that God commands those who have died to sin to quit living in sin.

III. APPROVED EXAMPLES.

A. God Intends That We Learn From Examples.

1. Jesus is held out as an example for us. 1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:3-6
 - a. Note the connection between keeping commandments and following Jesus' example.
2. Paul held himself up as an approved example. 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 2 Thes. 3:7-9
3. 1st century apostles were guided by the Spirit into all truth (Jn. 16:13), so when these churches were

approved by inspired men, they can serve as examples for us today. 1 Cor. 4:16, 17; 1 Thes. 1:6, 7

B. Using N.T. Examples.

1. With examples we must avoid the extremes of binding (imitating) examples not meant to be bound (imitated) and completely dismissing all examples as not binding.
2. All examples teach, even if they do not bind any particulars upon us.
 - a. E.g., Jesus washing feet in John 13 is an example to learn from, but does not make washing feet part of the Lord's Supper or any other congregational activity.
 - b. Note: some prefer not to say *binding examples*; they suggest that an example "*looses*" or shows that we are permitted to do a certain thing.
 - 1) E.g., Acts 20:7 does not bind the 1st day of the week, but shows that this is an authorized day and we conclude it is the only day for eating the Lord's Supper when we find that no other day has been "loosed."
 - 2) Not a lot of difference in expressing it either way.
3. Consider the following guidelines.
 - a. Harmony with other NT teachings.
 - 1) We can learn from the "beyond their ability" giving in 2 Cor. 8:1-5, but the command is, "*as he may prosper.*" 1 Cor. 16:1, 2
 - 2) The Macedonian example *permits* giving beyond our ability, but 1 Cor. 16 shows that such is *not commanded*.
 - b. Uniformity.
 - 1) Every example of elders is plural. Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:4; 20:17
 - 2) Acts 16 shows that people can be taught in various places, therefore the place of teaching in the different examples is not an essential part of the example.
 - a) Yet we still learn something from each example.
 - c. Universal Application.
 - 1) Can everyone follow it?
 - 2) We might learn from Acts 2:46, but we can't go to temple for worship.
 - d. Apply to our Time and Situation? Are Circumstances Similar?
 - 1) Does the example deal with an emergency, temporary, unique situation? 1 Cor. 7:26
 - 2) We can learn from Peter's actions in Acts 3:6, but can't imitate them.
4. It may take some thought, but examples of approved action can certainly help us understand the will of God. Matt. 7:21

IV. NECESSARY IMPLICATIONS/INFERENCES (INESCAPABLE CONCLUSIONS).

1. We often use implications and inferences in our communication and expect others to draw the inescapable conclusion.
 - a. A parent may say, "If this room is not clean by Friday, someone will be staying home."
 - b. Didn't say, "Clean up your room," but come Friday the room had better be clean.
2. The Bible teaches by implication.
 - a. *Where in the NT did Jesus draw from the "*one flesh*" of Gen. 2 the implication that divorce is wrong?
 - b. "I AM" implies life after death. Matt. 22:29, 31, 32
 - c. According to Heb. 7:11-14, Psalm 110:1-4 implied that perfection could not come through the Levitical priesthood; a change of priesthood was coming; and the law would be changed.
 - d. *What inescapable conclusion did Peter draw from the things he saw and heard. Acts 10:9-16, 28, 34, 35
3. This does not mean we resort to guessing.
 - a. We are forced to conclude that infants are not to be baptized. Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:12; 18:8; Rom. 6:3, 4
 - b. Those verses inescapably imply that one must be old enough to believe and repent before baptism.
 - c. *Necessary* and *inescapable* are key. Though some have thought infants were implied in Lydia's household, they are not necessarily implied and as with examples, a verse cannot imply anything out of harmony or inconsistent with other passages.
4. Some have argued against the use of implications by saying that God has then made it too difficult.
 - a. He has not made it too difficult, but the precious truths of Christ are to be regarded as a pearl of great price worth a little effort.

V. REACTING TO GOD'S SILENCE.

A. Our First Concern.

1. Must begin with the desire to know what God wants. Matt. 7:21
2. Realize that man's wishes are not always the same as God's. Isa. 55:8, 9; 1 Cor. 2:11
3. *How does Jesus describe the worship of those who teach the commandments of men? Matt. 15:6-9

B. The Completeness of Revelation.

1. If God has told us all that He wants us to know, then silence should mean something to us.
2. *How much truth did Jesus promise the apostles in John 16:13?
3. The mind of God as it relates to salvation has been fully revealed. 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17

C. Jesus and the Apostles Respected God's Silence.

1. *Where did Jesus read that divorce was specifically forbidden? Matt. 19:3-6
2. "To which of the angels did He ever say...?" Heb. 1:5, 13
3. That Moses said "nothing," meant something. Heb. 7:11-14

D. Respect the Boundaries of Truth.

1. If God has revealed all truth and we impose on His silence, are we not adding to God's word?
2. OT warnings. Deut. 4:1, 2; 12:32
3. NT warnings. 2 John 9; Rev. 22:18, 19
4. Nadab and Abihu. Lev. 10:1-3
 - a. When they offered that which God had not commanded, it did not glorify Him.
5. Uzzah and David. 2 Sam. 6; 1 Chron. 13:9, 10; 15:12-15

E. Summary.

1. God has not provided a list of all the things we might wish to do that are wrong; He has by command, example, and implication shown us what He wants.
2. Search the Scriptures for what God wants and trust that God has told us exactly what He wanted.

F. Questions.

1. Can we have a building, song books, projector, etc. and still claim to respect the silence of God?
2. Understanding 2 principles will help us:
 - a. Some commands are specific, while others are general.
 - b. There's a difference between an aid to doing God's will and a change to doing something else.
3. In the remainder of this lesson we want to look more carefully at the idea of general and specific, aids and alterations and see that this is not just "preacher talk."
 - a. We sin if we create or follow a preacher's hermeneutic, but we want to understand the Bible as God meant for it to be understood.
 - b. Bible authority is sometimes made to seem complicated and the words we use in talking about divine authority may not be words we use everyday, but the concepts are everyday concepts.

GENERAL and SPECIFIC AUTHORITY; AIDS and ALTERATIONS

1. Imagine you have been given \$50 and the following grocery list:

Grits	Cereal (3 boxes)
Heinz® Ketchup	Apples (1 doz.)
Clorox® Lemon Scented Bleach (1 gal.)	Boneless Chicken Breasts

Pillsbury® Hungry Jack Biscuits (10)
Instant Banana Pudding (6 serving box)

LeSueur® English Peas (2 cans)
Skim Milk (1 gal.)

2. *If you did the following would you have followed instructions?
 - a. Purchased Martha White® “instant” grits?
 - b. Purchased Jim Dandy® “quick” grits?
 - c. Bought chicken thighs since they were on sale?
 - d. Used a calculator to keep up with your total?
 - e. Bought Rocky Road ice cream (it has milk in it)?
 - f. Purchased 6 Rome apples and 6 Red Delicious apples?
 - g. Purchased 12 yellow apples and 1 watermelon?
 - h. Purchased 6 apples and 6 oranges (adds up to 12 pieces of fruit)?
 - i. Purchased 3 boxes of Cap’n Crunch® cereal?
 - j. Bought Heinz 57® sauce?
 - k. Carried your groceries around the store in a plastic basket?
 - l. Pushed a shopping cart through the store?
 - m. Carried the groceries home in plastic bags?
 - n. Carried the groceries home in paper bags?

3. If we understand how general and specific commands are used in everyday life, we should be able to see how they are used in Scripture.
 - a. Can we see that Heinz® Ketchup is specific as to product and brand, while the size is optional (within the \$50 constraints)?
 - b. Some brands were specified and others were left in the generic category. Even the specific instructions left certain choices to our discretion.

4. The same goes for aids and alterations.
 - a. We do not have any problem seeing that an orange changes the list, while a shopping cart only expedites the purchase and is an expedient or aid.
 - b. One might keep up with his money spent in his head or use the calculator. Both aid the process of carrying out the expressed will of the grocery list.