

# **A Study Of Authority In Religion**

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## Contents:

I.	A Need For Authority In Religion.....	4
A.	A Logical Approach.....	4
B.	The Scope Of This Study.....	4
C.	The Meaning Of Authority.....	5
D.	The Necessity Of Authority.....	7
E.	The Burden Of Proof.....	8
F.	Sincerity And Ignorance.....	8
G.	The Result Of Actions Without Authority.....	9
II.	The Source Of Authority In Religion.....	12
A.	A Place To Start.....	12
B.	Our One True Source For Authority In Religion.....	12
C.	The Confirming Work Of Miracles In Revelation.....	15
D.	Acceptance Of A Fixed Standard.....	16
E.	Wrong Sources For Authority In Religion.....	17
III.	The Silence Of The Scriptures.....	21
A.	The Mind Of God.....	21
B.	Points Within Limits.....	21
C.	Two Viewpoints On God's Silence.....	21
D.	Silence In Application.....	22
E.	Things Practiced Today Under Pretext Of Silence.....	23
F.	Silence Is Not An Option Category.....	23
IV.	The Dispensations Of God.....	26
A.	We Have What God Has Delivered.....	26
B.	Distinction Between The Old And New Covenants.....	26
C.	The Application Of The Old Testament Today.....	28
D.	What God Has Ordained; What Man Has Originated.....	30
V.	Communication.....	33
A.	Language.....	33

B.	The Meaning Of Words .....	33
C.	Context .....	34
D.	Figurative Language.....	35
VI.	The Method Of Interpretation .....	38
A.	Systematic Approach.....	38
B.	Direct And Indirect Authority .....	38
C.	The Methods Combined .....	41
D.	The Methods Illustrated .....	41
E.	Consider Everything The Bible Says On A Subject .....	42
F.	Areas Of Judgment And Matters Of Opinion .....	42
VII.	Binding New Testament Examples.....	46
A.	When Are New Testament Examples Binding?.....	46
B.	Rules And Guidelines For Binding Examples.....	46
VIII.	Specific And Generic Terminology .....	50
A.	Definitions .....	50
B.	The Characteristics Of Specific Terminology .....	50
C.	The Characteristics Of Generic Terminology.....	51
D.	Illustrating The Difference Between Specific And Generic Authority .....	51
E.	The Collective Church And The Individual Christian .....	52
IX.	Expediencies .....	54
A.	What Is An Expediency? .....	54
B.	Rules Of Expediencies.....	55
C.	Applications In Expediencies.....	55
D.	The Use Of Tools.....	56
X.	Reasoning And Argumentation .....	60
A.	Sound Reasoning .....	60
B.	Unsound Arguments.....	62
C.	Resolving Doctrinal Disputes .....	65
XI.	Conclusion .....	68

# I. A Need For Authority In Religion

## A. A Logical Approach

The English word "logical" does not appear in our Bible translations, however, the concept is clearly present. Note Paul's words:

*(NAS) Romans 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*

The word here translated "spiritual" is LOGIKOS {log-ik-os'} meaning "1) pertaining to speech or speaking 2) pertaining to the reason or logic 2a) spiritual, pertaining to the soul 2b) agreeable to reason, following reason, reasonable, logical" (Joseph Henry Thayer: JHT). In 1 Peter 3:15, "reason" is from LOGOS, which Thayer's definition includes the "account... explanation... reason, cause, [and] ground" for something. Here the phrase "give an answer" is from APOLOGIA, which is derived from LOGOS. Throughout Acts where it says Paul "reasoned" with people, it is from the same basic original word in the verb form, DIALEGOMAI {dee-al-eg'-om-ahee} (from whence, "dialogue"), which Thayer's definition includes, "1) to ... mingle thought with thought ...2) to converse,... argue, discuss."

Unlike philosophy in its broad scope, logic contains no doctrine. It is not theological but scientific; it comes by discovery, not invention. It is not concerned about truth but only about how we determine truth. In the "Philosophy Pages" on logic, Garth Kemerling explains, "In general, we can respect the directness of a path even when we don't accept the points at which it begins and ends. Thus, it is possible to distinguish correct reasoning from incorrect reasoning independently of our agreement on substantive matters. Logic is the discipline that studies this distinction."

Logic is also not the application of "common sense" reasoning. Commonly, people believe whatever they think is right in their own eyes. Commonly, people all claiming to follow Christ are going in different directions. This is unreasonable, irrational, and illogical.

The Bible is not a logics textbook, and we do not need to have a college degree in philosophy to understand it. However, since the Bible is a logical, rational book, the study of logic is a vital Bible study aid. Amazingly, a practical application of the rudiments of secular logic will only bolster the truth every time. However, bring logic to an irrational subject matter, and it will only tear it apart every time. This will come out in our study from point to point as we continue.

*Isaiah 1:18 Come now, and let us reason together...*

## B. The Scope Of This Study

Before we begin a study of authority, we should first define our scope of "religion." Merriam-Webster's (M-W) definition of our English word includes serving and worshiping a god, a devotion or commitment to a system of beliefs, attitudes, and practices with ardor. In the original New Testament Greek text, at least two words come into our translations as "religion" or "religious." The definitions from J. H. Thayer (JHT) follow:

- DEISIDAIMONIA {dice-ee-dahee-mon-ee'-ah} 1) in a good sense 1a) reverencing god or the gods, pious, religious 2) in a bad sense 2a) superstitious 3) religious.

The use of this word is infrequent, as it appears only in two places: Acts 17:22; 25:19.

- THRESKEIA {thrace-ki'-ah} 1) religious worship 1a) esp. external, that which consists of ceremonies 1a1) religious discipline, religion.

The usage of these words in scripture indicates that there is more to "religion" than what we do at a worship assembly. James seems to purposefully take the word THRESKEIA beyond its most narrow definition to indicate that true religion does not consist merely in the external trappings of ceremony but also in the heart and in our daily actions.

*James 1:26, 27 If anyone thinks himself to be **religious**, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's **religion** is worthless. Pure and undefiled **religion** in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

Therefore, as this study continues, we should make application not only to things pertaining to the church, such as its worship, mission, and organization, but also to things pertaining to everyday life, such as how we talk, how we dress, our occupation, who we marry, and who we might even divorce. Everything we do in life, in a sense, is service to God, and we should consider these things in the light of His authority over us.

*Romans 12:1, 2 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

## C. The Meaning Of Authority

### 1. Authority Defined

As defined by Merriam-Webster, our English word "authority" has four basic usages:

1. Testimony - The citation of conclusive, credible statements or the source from which the statements are cited for support or defense, as an expert appealed to as a witness in court.
2. Right - The power to influence or command granted by one in authority, as in law enforcement.
3. Government - The agency or corporation by which people are controlled to administer some production or enterprise, such as in business or civil institutions.
4. Grounds - A convincing force in action that warrants accepting one's claims, as in a persuasive presentation or performance.

In the New Testament, at least five Greek words come into our English translations as "authority" (definitions are from Thayer's Greek Lexicon):

- DUNASTES {doo-nas'-tace} (3 NT occurrences); A prince, a potentate, a courtier, high officer, royal minister of great authority:  
*Acts 8:27 So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great **authority** under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship (New King James: NKJ).*
- HUPEROCHE {hoop-er-okh-ay'} (2 NT occurrences); Elevation, pre-eminence, superiority, excellence:  
*1 Timothy 2:2 for kings and all who are in **authority**, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.*
- AUTHENTEIO {ow-then-teh'-o} (1 NT occurrence); One who with his own hands kills another or himself, one who acts on his own authority, autocratic, an absolute master, to govern or exercise dominion over one:  
*1 Timothy 2:12 But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise **authority** over a man, but to remain quiet.*
- EPITAGE {ep-ee-tag-ay'} (7 NT occurrences); an injunction, mandate, command:  
*Titus 2:15 These things speak and exhort and reprove with all **authority**. Let no one disregard you.*
- EXOUSIA {ex-oo-see'-ah} (103 NT occurrences); 1) power of choice, liberty of doing as one pleases 1a) leave or permission 2) physical and mental power 2a) the ability or strength with which one is endowed, which he either possesses or exercises 3) the power of authority (influence) and of right (privilege) 4) the power of rule or government (the power of him whose will and commands must be submitted to by others and obeyed) 4a) universally 4a1) authority over mankind 4b) specifically 4b1) the power of judicial decisions 4b2) of authority to manage domestic affairs 4c) metonymically 4c1) a thing subject to authority or rule 4c1a) jurisdiction 4c2) one who possesses authority 4c2a) a ruler, a human magistrate 4c2b) the leading and more powerful among created beings superior to man, spiritual potentates 4d) a sign of the husband's authority over his wife 4d1) the veil with which propriety required a women to cover herself 4e) the sign of regal authority, a crown.

EXOUSIA is the most significant original word translated as "authority" in our English Bibles. Furthermore, in the KJV, it is translated "power" 69 times, "authority" 29 times, "right" 2 times, "liberty" 1 time, "jurisdiction" 1 time, and "strength" 1 time.

*Matthew 21:23 And when He had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what **authority** are You doing these things, and who gave You this **authority**?"*

The chief priests and elders in Jesus' day recognized, as is true, that authority involves two things: (1) the right to rule, (2) given by one who has the right to give it.

## 2. Over And Under

Since authority is the right to rule, there must be subjects to be ruled over. There is no such thing as a king without a kingdom. The definitions above reveal that there are those who have authority **over** others and there are those who are **under** the authority of others. Jesus meets a centurion who is fully aware of the distinction:

*Matthew 8:9 "For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it."*

When he says "with soldiers under me," he means that he has authority over them. To be under the authority of another means that we must surrender our own will and submit to their will. Furthermore, one who acts under the authority of another must have the proof of that authority to so act. For example, the United States government has authority over who is allowed to drive on our nation's highways and over the rules and regulations governing it. A driver's license is a motorist's proof that such authority has been granted to him, though the ultimate authority still lies in the U. S. government. This is the same as what took place in the days of Esther. King Ahasuerus had ultimate rule, but Mordecai, under the king's rule, had the authority to act by the proving documents:

*Esther 8:8-11 "Now you write to the Jews as you see fit, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring;"... and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded to the Jews, the satraps, the governors and the princes of the provinces.... He wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horses.... In them the king granted the Jews... the right to assemble and to defend their lives, to destroy, to kill and to annihilate the entire army of any people or province which might attack them....*

As this study continues, we will speak of having authority for what we do. The understanding is that the authority is not ours by our own volition but ours by delegation from another.

Our source of authority is the one to whom we submit: the one we allow to rule over us. If we claim to have the Lord's authority but do things contrary to His will, we are self-deceived, following the authority of others.

*Romans 6:11-16 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?*

Simply because we do what another orders does not necessarily mean that we are obeying or submitting to their authority. For a time-honored illustration, consider a land owner who puts his son in charge of executing his wishes regarding the development of his farm. He instructs his son to build the house on the south side of the property, a barn on the west side, and a hen house on the east side. The son thinks the south side is a good place for the house and the west side a good place for the barn and builds them there. However, he thinks the north side is a better place for the hen house and builds it there. Even though he actually executes the father's will in two cases, he submits to his father's authority in nothing.

In each case, he fulfills his own will, which just happens to coincide with his father's will in two cases. True subjection is not in outward actions alone, but it begins in the heart. If we are not submissive in heart, we are not actually in submission to the Lord's authority.

*Romans 6:17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed*

*Galatians 5:24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

*Colossians 3:22-24 Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.... It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. (reference Ephesians 6:5-7)*

*James 4:7, 8 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

The steps progressing from self reliance to self denial and full submission to the Lord's will are as follows:

1. "The Lord's instruction makes no sense to me, so I will not do it."
2. "The Lord's instruction makes no sense to me, but I will do it anyway."
3. "It does not matter whether the Lord's instruction makes sense to me; I will do it anyway."
4. "I have made my will the Lord's instruction, and I will do it gladly."

As poetically expressed in Theodore Monod's popular hymn "None Of Self And All Of Thee," only in the fourth state listed above have we truly submitted to the Lord's will.

## **D. The Necessity Of Authority**

The need for authority is intuitively obvious in every aspect of life. Whether in the family home, the business workplace, or the civic community, without authority, utter chaos and mayhem will result. The need for authority in religious matters is no different. Only in religion will people accept that one source of authority is as good as another, or that one interpretation of the standard is as good as another.

Authority in religion should be a primary concern in the church. If there is not a standard and a method of applying that standard, then anything goes. This is basically what we see in religion today; there seems to be no limit to the things religious organizations today choose to do. All the different denominations are teaching and practicing whatever they please, and the need to establish scriptural authority for what they do is typically never mentioned or considered.

Virtually every false doctrine and practice in religion today has its source in a misapplication of authority. We simply need to have the conviction that if we cannot find authority for what we are doing in religion, we will stop doing it no matter how right, good, traditional, or harmless we otherwise think it is. Most people will probably view this as narrow minded, but we must simply obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

A church that is not soundly teaching about authority is a church that will weaken and eventually wander into apostasy. The distinguishing characteristic of the church of Christ has always been the appeal to provide scriptural authority for everything we do. Only in this way can we attain the unity of the Spirit.

The first observation concerning authority is that God requires it:

*Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.*

*1 Peter 3:15 But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;*

As stated earlier, the original word here translated "make a defense" is the Greek APOLOGIA, meaning "a verbal defense,... a reasoned statement or argument" (JHT). From this, we get our word "apology," which is offering a reason for our action by which we would hope our infraction would be excused. Similarly, our word "apologetics," in theology, is the defending of doctrine on the grounds of reason.

## E. The Burden Of Proof

When proof of authority for action in the church is requested, the one asking for it is often accused of being nit-picky, uncaring, or Pharisaical. (The Pharisees were a Jewish sect particularly known for binding human traditions to the minutest detail: Matthew 23:23, 24; Mark 7:1-13). Though maybe not consciously, those who would so accuse are basically attempting to disparage the process of establishing authority. In application, however, these accusations accomplish nothing. We should still be able to provide proof of authority for every action in the church whether the one requesting it is of pure motives or not.

The burden of proving authority for a certain action in the church rests upon those who wish to perform it, not those who do not. In other words, it is not so much needful to prove from the scriptures what is unauthorized but, rather, that which **is** authorized. Ask not if there are any objections; ask if there is any authority. We will develop this further when we discuss the silence of the scriptures later in this study.

*James 1:22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*

We require proof of authority from other religious institutions. We should accept the same standard for the church and ourselves.

*Matthew 7:1-5 Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.*

## F. Sincerity And Ignorance

When discussing religion, people often say, "God doesn't care how you worship, as long as you are sincere," or "God will not hold us accountable if we don't know any better." However, the Bible is full of lessons that teach ignorance is no excuse and sincerity alone is no substitute for obedience.

It seems some people today often think we should not always be held accountable for our actions. People want to shift blame to their parents, their peers, or their environment for their evil deeds, and they expect God to overlook their ignorance. However, God has given us every opportunity to know His will, and His word teaches us that He will hold us accountable for our deeds. To demonstrate this, Peter states that even those who crucified Jesus did so in ignorance; nevertheless, they needed to repent to receive forgiveness. God was obviously holding them accountable, in spite of their ignorance.

*Acts 3:17, 19 Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers... Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,*

Furthermore, a clean conscience alone is not enough. It is altogether possible that we may be serving Satan while thinking in all good conscience that we are serving God. Before his conversion, this is exactly what Saul was doing when persecuting Christians. Nevertheless, he stood condemned for his actions.

*Acts 23:1 Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all **good conscience** before God until this day."*

*Acts 26:9-11 Indeed, **I myself thought** I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.*



If sincerity is a valid reason to excuse a violation of the Lord's command, then it seems God should have spared the unnamed prophet who in Jeroboam's day was deceived and acted in ignorance (1 Kings 13). Instead, our service to God must not reside in sincerity alone, but in sincerity and truth.

*1 Corinthians 5:8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of **sincerity and truth**.*

## **G. The Result Of Actions Without Authority**

Without authority, the consequences are serious. We may think it is a small thing, but God has rendered severe punishment for those acting without authority. Let's note some examples:

*Leviticus 10:1 Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.'" So Aaron, therefore, kept silent.*

*2 Samuel 6:3, 4, 6, 7 They placed the ark of God on a new cart that they might bring it from the house of Abinadab which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were leading the new cart. So they brought it with the ark of God from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Ahio was walking ahead of the ark... But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God.*

Nadab and Abihu had been told that the fire for the incense was to come from the alter. We may like to reason that fire is fire and it shouldn't matter where it comes from, but God saw it differently. Likewise, Uzzah had been told not to touch the ark, though he probably had all good intentions. We may like to think in this special situation it would be okay to touch the ark, but God saw it differently.

Our tendency may be to think God's punishment was too severe for such minor infractions. However, a closer consideration shows that the infractions were not necessarily as minor as they appeared to be. What was it really that these people did that was wrong? It actually had little to do with fire and a wooden box and more to do with rebellion. Note what is said as the reason for God's wrath: "By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy," and "God struck him down there for his irreverence." We must realize that when we act without divine authority, we are in utter rebellion against God. No matter how much good we may think we are accomplishing, how sincerely we may think we are serving Him, or how innocent the action appears, without authority for our actions, we are profaning and defying the Lord. This is a serious matter not to be taken lightly.

*Matthew 7:21-23 Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'*

In spite of all this, when discussing religion, people will still sometimes say, "I know that's what the Bible says, but I just don't see it that way." When anyone can read and understand plainly what the Bible says and still reject it, this is nothing but brazen defiance. The fundamental matter is that some people are determined to selfishly believe what they want to believe because the truth is uncomfortable. Too many people don't want to take up a cross, they just want to live however they want to live without being accountable to a supreme, divine being.

*Mark 8:31-34 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.*

*2 Peter 2:9, 10 ...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties.*

*Jude 7, 8 Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. Yet in the same manner these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties.*

## Questions And Thoughts For Review: A Need For Authority

1. The concept of religion often has a negative connotation in our society. Explain the difference between how the scoffers view religion and how it is presented to us by God in the scriptures.
2. What would be your brief and accurate definition of authority?
3. How does the attitude of the people of Israel during the period of the Judges (Judges 21:25) relate to a study of authority?
4. Who is the one responsible to show proof of authority for a man's actions?
5. Is authority for a person's action the same as the absence of an objection from people for the action? Give an example that would illustrate your answer.
6. The scriptures indicate that sincerity in our actions alone is not adequate for authority. How about one who is doing God's will by His authority but is insincere, acting in pretence? Validate your response with scripture.
7. Considering Romans 13:1-5, how does submissiveness and subjection relate to us in the matter of authority?
8. What does Proverbs 14:12 teach us about the results of our actions without authority?
9. People today sometimes think civil laws are unreasonable or overly restrictive. What is the danger in thinking that way about religion?
10. In Galatians 2:20, what does it mean to be "crucified with Christ?"

## II. The Source Of Authority In Religion

### A. A Place To Start

The scope of this study assumes that it has already been established by an examination of evidences that God exists and that the Bible is the inspired word of God. A thorough investigation of evidences is recommended as a precursor to this study. For a brief synopsis, the following review is offered.

#### 1. General Revelation

God has revealed Himself in a general way through nature. In His creation, we see purpose, order, design, complexity, and morality. We accept as an axiom that nothing ever comes from nothing and that life comes only from life. So, since living things obviously exist, then some living, ultimate, originator must also exist and have always existed. Looking at the universe, it becomes more logical to conclude that its eternal originator is life and intelligence, not matter and chance.

*Psalms 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.*

*Romans 1:19, 20 Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.*

*Hebrews 3:4 Every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God.*

#### 2. Special Revelation

In the Bible, God reveals Himself in a special way, by which we come to know God personally. This book is truly amazing. It was written during a time period spanning about 1500 years, by 40 different writers, 3 different languages, and over a geographic area extending about 2000 miles. The occupations and cultures of the writers could not be more diverse. Notwithstanding, the message of the Bible is consistent, unified, uncompromising, profound, impartial, pure, and without confirmed contradiction. The Bible even accurately describes scientific matters before the confirming science was ever discovered. Its credibility and authenticity are supported more than any other literary work of antiquity known. The Bible is truly the voice of God:

*2 Timothy 3:16, 17 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.*

#### 3. Two Possibilities

There are only two possible sources for authority in religion, man or God. Only one of these is valid:

*Matthew 21:23-27 And when He had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" And Jesus answered and said to them, "I will ask you one thing too, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. "The baptism of John was from what source, from **heaven or from men**?" And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' "But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude; for they all hold John to be a prophet." And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.*

### B. Our One True Source For Authority In Religion

In secular life, we are authorized to act by numerous sources: civil government, our own free will, employers, teachers, parents. For example, if my boss sends me to Chicago for a week on company business, I have the freedom to visit a museum or library during my off-hours while I'm there. This is because my authority to act is not solely my employer. I am also allowed to act on my own free will (provided by our government for life, liberty, and the pursuit happiness).

## 1. The Authority Of Christ

In religion, however, authority is sole-sourced; all authority belongs to Christ:

*Acts 4:12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved."*

*Galatians 1:6-9 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.*

*Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."*

*Ephesians 1:21-23 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

*Colossians 1:18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.*

No man ever taught like Christ, as one in whom authority resides. He did not have to cite anyone else's sayings. He did not need to rely on quotations from experts, scholars, or prophets for His the authority. He was and is the ultimate source.

*Mark 1:27 They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him."*

*Mark 6:2 When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands?"*

*John 7:45, 46 The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?" The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks."*

Moreover, as Christ is Lord over all things, then all men are subject to Him. There are some today who attempt to teach that not all men are amenable to the law of Christ today but only Christians. The idea that God has certain laws only for Christians and certain laws only the non-Christians is a falsehood.

*Colossians 2:10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;*

*John 17:2 Even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life.*

The definition of authority demands not only the right to rule but also that right given by one who has the right to give it. Even so, the authority of Christ was not merely His own, it was rightfully given Him by God, the Father.

*John 12:49, 50 "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."*

*John 14:10 "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.*

## 2. The Words Of The Apostles

Christ commissioned the apostles to take His message to the world. In doing so, there was no transfer of authority; Christ maintained His sovereignty. The apostles were not lawmakers, only ambassadors. Their words were not their own; they were merely the mouthpieces of God. The Holy Spirit put His words in their mouths and guided the pen in their hands. Some may argue that what Paul said does not carry as much weight as what Christ said. This is not true; the apostles' teachings are most certainly binding and authoritative because they are, in actuality, the teachings of Christ:

*Matthew 18:18 Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.*

*John 16:12-15 "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you."*

*1 Corinthians 11:23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you;*

*1 Corinthians 14:37 If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment.*

*2 Corinthians 5:20 We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us.*

*1 Thessalonians 2:13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.*

*1 Thessalonians 4:2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.*

*2 Peter 1:21 For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*

## 3. The Scriptures

The apostles and prophets are obviously not here with us today. However, the things which they spoke, they have written, and these have been preserved in the Bible and are authoritative for us today. The Bible is, in essence, the voice of God:

*Mark 12:24 Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures, or the power of God?"*

*2 Corinthians 13:10 For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I need not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.*

*2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.*

*2 Timothy 3:14-17 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

*Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

*Jude 3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.*

Our Lord leaves us the perfect example when He is tempted by Satan. He could have responded to Satan with reference to His deity, but instead, appealing to scripture in each case, He says, "It is written..." (Luke 4:4, 8, 10).

The Bible is the confirming document for our authority today. If the scriptures are perfect and complete and thoroughly furnish the man of God for every good work once and for all, then there is nothing more needed. Many religious bodies today augment the scriptures with their creed books and catechisms. Some place equal weight of authority in oral traditions and secular works, such as those of the early church writers ("Church Fathers," as they are usually called). If we accept these other documents as also authoritative in the church, then we are effectively telling God that His Bible is not complete; He has obviously left a few things out.

In modern theology, the concept that only scripture is authoritative has been given a technical name: "solo scriptura." Those who denounce this idea claim that oral traditions of church leaders are also authoritative. They will further claim that solo scriptura is inherently flawed, because in the first century before the written word was completed, the Bible itself asserts that the spoken word was also authoritative:

*2 Thessalonians 2:15 So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.*

This argument is a smoke screen; it is unscrupulous to compare first-century divinely inspired authors who confirmed their words with miracles to later or modern-day orators of tradition. Besides, the New Testament writers made it clear for us that the words they spoke were the same as the words they wrote; that which was spoken eventually became the same as that which was written:

*1 John 1:3, 4 What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.*

God's revelation certainly began in an oral format in the first century, as the Holy Spirit moved men to speak His will. Over time, these things were also written and confirmed. The more the confirmed writings came, the less the oral form was needed. When the written form was finally completed, the oral revelations were done away (1 Corinthians 13:8-12).

### **C. The Confirming Work Of Miracles In Revelation**

A person does not have authority in religion just because he or someone else says he does. He must provide some undeniable proof that his words are coming from God the Father, the only true source with the right to give authority to others. This proof requires a miracle: a sign which demonstrates that the word is coming not from nature, but from a higher power, which created nature. The miracle, then, confirms or gives credence to the words of the one performing it.

The words of the Moses and the Old Testament prophets are confirmed to be the words of God by various signs and wonders:

*Exodus 4:1-5 Then Moses said, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'" The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff." Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. But the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail" -- so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand -- "that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."*

The wonderful works of Jesus, especially His resurrection, are testimony to His divine authority:

*John 2:2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."*

*John 20:30, 31 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

*Acts 1:3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.*

The words of the apostles and New Testament prophets are also accredited as the words of God by the miracles they performed. Their words are further confirmed by their persecution and martyrdom, for no one would be willing to suffer or die for that which he knows for certain is a lie and a hoax (Hebrews 11:32-40). Incidentally, the original word in Greek for "witness" is the word from which we get our English word "martyr".

*Mark 16:17, 18 "These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."*

*Hebrews 2:1-4 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.*

The scriptures themselves bear the mark of miracles, being the product of miracles. The fact that a book as extraordinary as this exists today is testimony to its divine conception. We have received the gospel not only in word but in power:

*1 Thessalonians 1:5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.*

Without the miracles of Jesus and the Apostles, we could have no authority in religion today.

The word has been confirmed by the ones who first spoke it. It does not need to be reconfirmed, and there are no new revelations from God today which would likewise need to be confirmed. We therefore have no need for modern-day miracles (1 Corinthians 13:8-12). The written record of the miracles performed in scripture is adequate to confirm the word today.

## **D. Acceptance Of A Fixed Standard**

We must have a standard to follow, and we must all agree to the standard. We understand this in secular life. Units of measure have been defined and accepted worldwide. In fact, organizations, such as The American National Standards Institute (ANSI), have been established to do nothing more than regulate and publish accepted standards. The acceptance of these standards settles many disputes. For instance, if we go to the store to buy an eight foot long wooden board or five pounds of potatoes, we can know with certainty what we are getting. With a tape measure and scale, a dispute can be resolved.

In application, it is self-evident that for any standard to be authoritative, the following must be true:

1. The standard must originate from one who has the right to originate it, that is, confirmed credible.
2. The standard must be exclusive, that is, there must be only one set of rules in force at a time.
3. The standard must be in an understandable and communicable format, for example, in word.
4. The standard must be available to those who are to be subjected to it, that is, revealed and delivered.

All of these elements were involved in God's law concerning the forbidden fruit in the Garden Of Eden. Without such a credible, exclusive, intelligible, tangible, and revealed set of rules, there can be no religious authority. The scriptures alone fulfill these requirements today. They are originated by One who created all things and are confirmed with miraculous works, they are unified and uncontradictive, they are



discernible and rational, and they are preserved and accessible to virtually all of every language known today. God has certainly given us a standard by which we will all someday be measured. Such a divine set of regulations that we must understand and follow is a biblical concept:

*Amos 7:7, 8 Thus He showed me, and behold, the Lord was standing by a vertical wall with a plumb line in His hand. The LORD said to me, "What do you see, Amos?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "Behold I am about to put a plumb line In the midst of My people Israel. I will spare them no longer.*

*Daniel 5:25 "Now this is the inscription that was written out: 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.' "This is the interpretation of the message: 'MENE' -- God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. "'TEKEL' -- you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. "'PERES' -- your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians."*

*Philippians 3:16, 17 However, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.*

*Hebrews 8:5 Who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "SEE," He says, "THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN."*

*Revelation 11:1 Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, "Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it."*

*Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.*

When a religious issue arises among us, we often hear the question, "What do you think about that?" Someone will say, "Let's find out what the preacher thinks," or "Let's ask the elders what they think." If we do that, we are already headed in the wrong direction. The ideas of men are not our standard of authority. We should be asking, "What does the Bible say?" If we are still confused, there is nothing wrong with asking for help, but demand that a brother provides the answer from scripture. In this way, the answer is never man's but the Lord's alone.

Our plea is that we accept the Bible as our only source of authority in religion. Anything less than this is incomplete; anything more than this is impure.

## **E. Wrong Sources For Authority In Religion**

### **1. Anything Not From Scripture**

If our one true source of authority in religion is Christ through the scriptures, then any religious thing not derived from scripture is wrong. In fact, anything or any body we listen to and follow other than Christ in scripture becomes as a god to us (Romans 6:15).

*Galatians 4:8, 9 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?*

We list here the following examples of things to which people frequently submit and appeal to for authority other than the scriptures:

- What close friends and family members think
- What creed books and catechisms contain
- What gospel preachers proclaim
- What scholarly people profess
- What the commentators write
- What other churches practice

- What we have always done
- What the people desire
- What the elders decide
- What folks used to do
- What our parents did
- What colleges teach
- What the Pope says

The study of logic deals with fallacies of relevance, presumption, and ambiguity. As we consider false sources of authority, some specific types of these fallacies will be brought to light. In the "Philosophy Pages," Garth Kemerling writes, "The fallacies of relevance, for example, clearly fail to provide adequate reason for believing the truth of their conclusions. Although they are often used in attempts to persuade people by non-logical means, only the unwary, the predisposed, and the gullible are apt to be fooled by their illegitimate appeals." Let's take a closer examination at some faulty sources of authority.

## 2. Human Tradition

There are many things done in the church today that are merely matters of judgment and personal discretion, such as where and when we will assemble together to worship. Churches traditionally meet at a certain time and place and have a customary way of organizing worship services. There is nothing wrong with such traditions, until they are viewed as authoritative and binding.

*Mark 7:7-13 'But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." He was also saying to them, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. "For Moses said, 'honor your father and your mother'; and, 'he who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death'; but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."*

*Colossians 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.*

## 3. Man's Opinion And Reasoning

It is only natural to show respect for those with years of experience or a high education. However, God has never placed a great amount of emphasis on a college education. A preacher with a Doctor Of Divinity degree from a respected seminary may have a stronger influence with his opinions. We must be careful not to follow human reason, no matter how distinguished a scholar one might be.

*Proverbs 16:25 There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.*

*Isaiah 55:8, 9 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts."*

*Jeremiah 10:23 I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not in himself, Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps.*

*1 Corinthians 1:26, 27 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong.*

*Colossians 2:21-23 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)-- in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.*

In the light of logic, Garth Kemerling in his "Philosophy Pages" indicates this as the "fallacy of authority," where "the opinion of someone famous or accomplished in another area of expertise is supposed to guarantee the truth of a conclusion.... No proposition must be true because some individual (however talented or successful) happens to believe it.... Personality is irrelevant to truth."

Kemerling presents a similar fallacy, the "appeal to force," in which "someone in a position of power threatens to bring down unfortunate consequences upon anyone who dares to disagree with a proffered proposition." Some today would submit to elders and preachers who teach contrary to the authority of Christ out of fear of being withdrawn from. By submitting, they accept their authority instead of Christ's.

#### 4. The Inconsistency Of Others

Authority in religion is often sought by trying to find inconsistency in someone else's practices. Apparently, the misconception is that if I can find something others are doing without authority, then I should have the right to act without authority, too. Pointing out someone's inconsistency only points out inconsistency, it doesn't authorize anything.

*2 Corinthians 9:10-12 For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible." Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present. For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.*

#### 5. Personal Feelings

Human emotion is a very strong thing. Decisions in the church based solely on sympathy or a sense of obligation to comply with another's wishes are often wrong. If the request is not scriptural, the tendency is often to try to find a way to somehow justify it in order to satisfy someone's desire. Authority for actions can sometimes be overlooked this way.

*2 Kings 5:11 But Naaman was furious and went away and said, "**Behold, I thought,** 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leper.'"*

In logic, Kemerling describes the "fallacy of pity," which "tries to win acceptance by pointing out the unfortunate consequences that will... fall upon... others." He similarly explains "the fallacy of emotion," saying, "Although... flowery language of the premise might arouse strong feelings..., the widespread occurrence of those feelings has nothing to do with the truth of the conclusion."

Superstitions about religion can also draw men away from the truth (Acts 17:22 KJV). A superstition is a thing believed out of fear, ignorance, or happenstance, despite rational evidence to the contrary. In the lyrics of the 1972 American hit song, "Superstition," Stevie Wonder says, "When you believe in things that you don't understand, then you suffer, superstition ain't the way."

## Questions And Thoughts For Review: The Source Of Authority

1. Explain the difference between general revelation and special revelation. Give an example outside the realm of religion.
2. What about people living in the remotest jungles of Africa who have never seen a Bible, much less modern civilization? Can God justly condemn them eternally for their ignorance of the scriptures? Consider Isaiah 59, Romans 1, and 2 Peter 3 in your response.
3. Valid or not, what are the only two basic sources of authority in religion? Which one is valid? What is the significance of this?
4. How are the words "author" and "authority" related? Who has authority over a thing? What is the implication of this relative to our study?
5. Is there any difference between what the apostles and prophets spoke in the first century and what they wrote?
6. Briefly describe the chain of revelation from its source to us today.
7. What is the importance of the scriptures?
8. What is the purpose of miracles? How are miracles related to our authority today?
9. What are four self-evident attributes necessary for authority to be justly conveyed to those whom are to be subjected to it? Give examples of each from outside the topic of authority in religion.
10. Are all things which we might do today as a matter of tradition inherently wrong? Explain your response.

### III. The Silence Of The Scriptures

#### A. The Mind Of God

Other people cannot know our thoughts unless we somehow communicate them. We can do this in only three ways: we can orally tell someone what we are thinking, we can put it in writing, or show them by our actions. So it is with God; we can't read God's mind. When Jesus was in the flesh, He used at least two of these methods to reveal His mind: the spoken word and the example. After His ascension, Jesus continued to reveal His will through the apostles and prophets. By divine inspiration, they utilized the medium of the written word for revelation. Now that they also are departed, we have their preserved writings, the New Testament, as our source of divine authority.

*1 Corinthians 2:7-16 But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written, "things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

The point is this: we can only know the mind of God by that which He has revealed, not by that which He has not revealed. That which God revealed is that which was spoken, not that which was not spoken. We cannot come to know God's will through His silence or that which He has not instructed.

#### B. Points Within Limits

We might illustrate the body of doctrine as a circle. The circle encloses an area so that every other point on the plane is either inside the circle or outside the circle. Every point inside the circle is part of the teaching of Christ. There are no teachings of Christ that are outside the circle. If any point moves from inside the circle to outside the circle, it has moved outside the body of Christ's teaching. This might seem too black and white for some, but the idea that we can cross outside a defined boundary of Christ's teaching is conveyed in scripture:

*2 John 9 Anyone who **goes too far** and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.*

*1 Corinthians 4:6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn **not to exceed** what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.*

The area inside the circle is where God has spoken; the area outside the circle is where God is silent.

#### C. Two Viewpoints On God's Silence

The attitude people take regarding the silence of the scriptures reveals a lot about their understanding of God's authority. A sensible attitude about the matter is essential. There are basically two viewpoints taken by people today:

1. "On matters where the Bible is silent, we are at liberty to act as we think best. The silence of the scriptures thus permits. We are restricted in our actions only where the Bible expressly prohibits."
2. "On matters where the Bible is silent, we are prohibited from acting. The silence of the scriptures thus restricts. We are authorized in our actions only where the Bible expressly permits."

Many people today believe viewpoint 2 is too narrow-minded. However, those who hold viewpoint 1 regarding the scriptures would not apply that principle to any other aspect in life. Only in religion, the most important aspect of life, will people believe that silence authorizes. The misdirected plea is often made, "I have looked all through the Bible and have not been able to find where God said not to do it." Consider whether this is sound reasoning.

In the study of logic, Garth Kemerling deals with a fallacy of relevance termed an "appeal to ignorance." In his "Philosophy Pages" he states, "An appeal to ignorance proposes that we accept the truth of a proposition unless an opponent can prove otherwise. Thus, for example:

- No one has conclusively proven that there is no intelligent life on the moons of Jupiter.
- Therefore, there is intelligent life on the moons of Jupiter.

But, of course, the absence of evidence against a proposition is not enough to secure its truth."

Imagine the end result of the "you didn't say not to" approach to authority. Let's take the view that silence permits to its logical conclusion in everyday life. In order for us to specify anything, we would effectively have to list every possible thing we could imagine to also be restricted. For example, in chess, the movement of the knight can be specified as moving "to the nearest square of opposite color that is not adjacent." That is about all that should need to be said. However, those that think silence permits would have to say more. They would have to say also that the knight does not move like the pawn, and it does not move like the rook, and it does not move like the bishop, and you get the point.

We do not accept this logic, or lack of it, in any other matter of life, not in business, not in government, and not in the home. If a parent gives his child five dollars and says to go to the store and buy a gallon of milk, the parent does not expect the child to also bring home candy with that five dollars. What if the child says, "But you didn't say NOT to buy candy, also?" The parent thinks he should not have to say NOT to buy candy, comic books, soda pop, and the list could virtually have no end.

Turn now again to religious matters. If it does not make sense for silence to permit in secular matters, then it should not make sense in religion. We could again take the view to its absurd conclusion. If God's silence permits, then everything and anything God would not want to be a part of religious practice today would have to be specifically mentioned in scripture, or we could say, "You didn't say not to do it." The Bible could not contain the list of all possible prohibitions.

We conclude, then, that the silence of the scriptures authorizes nothing.

## D. Silence In Application

Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, gospel preachers were pleading, "Let us speak only where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent." This statement is in harmony with scripture:

*1 Peter 4:11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God.*

The New Testament writers used the power of God's silence to reach important conclusions. For example, the Hebrew writer recognized that God's silence regarding Mosaic priests coming from any other tribe than Levi meant that all other tribes were excluded from the priesthood without each one being expressly mentioned as forbidden. On this basis, the writer concludes that Jesus could not be a Mosaic priest:

*Hebrews 7:14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses **spoke nothing** concerning priests.*

During the first century, a dispute in the church regarding circumcision was settled in part by recognizing that God's silence excluded circumcision as a religious rite under the law of Christ. Invalid reasoning would have said, "God didn't say NOT to circumcise:"

*Acts 15:24 Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we **gave no instruction** have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls,...*

When we consider a certain action or function in the church, we need to search for God's word authorizing it rather than looking for a statement that prohibits it. We need to wait until we find a positive indication of authority for our action before proceeding, not acting and then looking for the authority later. Waiting

to hear the word of the Lord was an uneasy lesson for the Israelites. Moses told them to stand by; they did not move until the Lord told them to move:

*Exodus 14:13-15 But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! **Stand by** and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. "The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to Me? **Tell** the sons of Israel to go forward.*

The silence of scripture is not to be confused with that which is included in some generic statement. For example, New Testament scripture reveals that we are to worship God today with singing. Nowhere in scripture specifically mentions the use of song books to accomplish this, however, it is included by the command to sing. God is not actually silent about this. We will further examine this later when discussing generic and specific terminology and expediencies.

## **E. Things Practiced Today Under Pretext Of Silence**

Sadly, much of the religious division today is over what God has said nothing about. Here are some things done in religion today assuming God's silence is license:

### **1. Instrumental music in worship**

The New Testament contains no command not to use mechanical instruments of music in worship. Many people think that by God's silence on the matter, He is permitting us to use our own judgment and do as we think best concerning worship. Those who would use instrumental music in worship must show authority for it, not simply require others to prove it wrong.

### **2. Church-sponsored social and recreational activities**

The New Testament nowhere indicates that the early church as a body engaged in entertainment, social, athletic, or recreational activities. Many people think that since God didn't say the church should not be involved in those things, it's okay to do them. The church needs to be doing only the things God has ordained it to do and nothing He has not ordained.

### **3. Praying to Mary**

In all of scripture, there is never an indication that we can pray to any deceased person or they can hear our prayers, much less respond in any way, not even Mary. However, many people think this is possible, since God didn't say we could not do it. We should be praying as God tells us to, not as He has not told us.

### **4. Burning Incense In Worship**

In the New Testament, the church is never seen burning incense in worship. Many people think that since the Bible does not expressly forbid this in worship today, it doesn't hurt to practice it if we want to. We should be worshipping as God has spoken, not as He been silent.

### **5. Celebrating Holy Days**

The New Testament bears no record that the early church ever celebrated the holidays of Christmas or Easter as religious observances. Many people think it is okay to do so anyway, since the scriptures nowhere expressly condemn the practice. We should be observing the days God has instructed us to observe, not the ones about which He has not instructed. We will expound on this somewhat further when we discuss opinions.

## **F. Silence Is Not An Option Category**

Most people will agree that we are obliged to comply where God has spoken and expressly commanded. However, people seem to consider optional the things practiced today on the basis of silence. For example, it would evidently be wrong to refuse to worship God by singing, because God obviously instructs us to do so (Ephesians 5:19). However, many people believe it is also okay use mechanical instruments in worship today if you want to, because God didn't say not to. Nevertheless, these same people would probably agree it is also okay not to play the instruments, since God didn't say you had to.

This reasoning of silence as an option area is unfounded in scripture. When King Saul was given a divine order, God's silence was not an area of option.

*1 Samuel 15:2, 3 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"*

God did not say NOT to bring back some of the best livestock for a religious sacrifice; that was not an option. Nevertheless, that is just what Saul did, and God considered it rebellion and idolatry:

*1 Samuel 15:20-23 Then Saul said to Samuel, "...But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal." Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry."*

We see from this that God expects us to do what He has commanded, and that which He has not commanded is not an option. If God had desired that we worship Him today with instruments of music, He would have said something about that in the New Testament, and it would not be an option for us. If He had wanted the church to celebrate Christmas and Easter as holy days, He would have said something about that in the Bible, and it would not be an option.



## Questions And Thoughts For Review: Silence Of The Scriptures

1. Explain all the possible ways you can reveal to someone what is in your mind.
2. How does God reveal His thoughts to us?
3. What are the limiting characteristics of God's revelation today? In other words, how has God limited His mode of communication today?
4. Can you think of any matter in everyday life (other than religion) where people use the "you didn't say not to" argument to attempt to justify their actions?
5. What is the applicability of the commentaries written by men -- even this very outline you are now reading? If the Bible reveals nothing on a certain matter, can we justifiably take action on the basis of what the commentators say alone?
6. Is it sound reasoning to search through the Bible looking for the prohibition for the thing we want to do?
7. What should we do instead?

## IV. The Dispensations Of God

### A. We Have What God Has Delivered

God's revelation was hidden until it was revealed; we didn't know it until we were told it. We do not come to know by that which was not written; that which was unknown is now known.

*Ephesians 3:2-5, 9, 10* If indeed you have heard of the **stewardship** of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

*Colossians 1:25-28* Of this church I was made a minister according to the **stewardship** from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

*Acts 16:4* Now while they were passing through the cities, they were **delivering** the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.

*1 Corinthians 11:2, 23* Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I **delivered** them to you... For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you...

*1 Corinthians 15:3* For I **delivered** to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

*2 Peter 2:21* For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment **delivered** to them.

*Matthew 28:18-20* And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

"Dispensation" or "Stewardship" as used above refers to the delivery of God's law, whether through the Patriarchs, Moses, or Christ. It is translated from OIKONOMIA {oy-kon-om-ee'-ah} in the original language, which means "house rules." By metonymy, we sometimes use (or misuse) the word "dispensation" to refer to the age through which God's law is in effect.

So then, the Mosaical dispensation was the written law given to the nation of Israel through Moses, and it endured throughout the Mosaical age for them until the dispensation of Christ. The Patriarchal dispensation was the spoken will of God given to all mankind starting with Adam and continuing through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Patriarchal age endured for the nation of Israel until the dispensation of Moses. The Patriarchal age endured for all others until the dispensation of Christ. In this we see that there has never been a time when all of mankind was not amenable to some law of God.

### B. Distinction Between The Old And New Covenants

The law of God delivered to men is called a "covenant" or "testament" in scripture. A covenant is essentially a contract or an agreement. Both the Old Covenant (Moses' law) and the New Covenant (the law of Christ) were ratified with blood:

*Hebrews 9:15-20 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives. Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you."*

Our agreement with God is that if we follow His law, He will bless us, but if we reject His law, He will condemn us.

We are now in what the Bible calls the "last days." This indicates that there will be no further law changes. If there were new revelations to come, then this would not be the last days. When Jesus brought the new law, the law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21, Galatians 6:2), there was to be no other new dispensations to come in the future. Jesus has the final word.

*Isaiah 2:2, 3 Now it will come about that In the **last days** The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

*Acts 2:16, 17 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 'and it shall be in the **last days**,' God says, 'that I will pour forth of My spirit on all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;*

*Hebrews 1:1, 2 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these **last days** has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.*

The New Testament is perfect or complete. God has now delivered to us everything we need to know. If there were yet more to be revealed, then we would not now have everything. If there were anything else we needed to know that is not revealed in the New Testament, then it would not be complete.

*2 Peter 1:3 Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.*

*Jude 3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was **once for all** delivered to the saints.*

The terminology in Jude 3, "once for all," means "one time for all time." It is the same terminology used in Hebrews 9:27, "And as it is appointed unto men **once** to die" (King James Version: KJV). The faith was delivered once never to be delivered again, just as we will die once never to die again.

In contrast, the Old Testament held no such claims to perfection and endurance. In fact, the Old Testament proclaimed that the New Testament was coming. Therefore, the coming of the New Covenant was not in conflict with the Old Covenant but in fulfillment of it. The New Testament makes no such proclamation of yet another future Testament to come.

*Hebrews 10:1 For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.*

*Hebrews 8:7, 8, 13 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, "Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a **new** covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah"... When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.*

The original word here translated "new" means new in quality (KAINOS) not new in time (NEOS). The former covenant became old because of the coming of a better one, not merely a more recent one.

*Galatians 3:19-25 Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.*

The Old Testament endured until coming of the New Testament; the New Testament will endure until the end of all time.

## **C. The Application Of The Old Testament Today**

### **1. The Old Testament Is Not In Force Today**

The former Law had been delivered by Moses. A new and final dispensation has come into force: the dispensation of Christ. Moreover, when Jesus delivered the new law, He took the old law out of force.

*Jeremiah 31:31 'Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant...'*

*Hebrews 8:13 When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete.*

*Hebrews 10:9 Then He said, "BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL." He takes away the first in order to establish the second.*

*Colossians 2:14 Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.*

At the mount of transfiguration, Peter apparently thinks that Jesus, Moses, and the prophets are on an equal plane. A voice from the heavens made clear that the prophet about whom Moses spoke, like unto himself, was there, and the time was upon them to heed this prophet's words, even above the words of Moses and the former prophets:

*Matthew 17:4, 5 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"*

*Deuteronomy 18:18 (Acts 3:22, 23) I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.*

The apostle Paul allegorically explains that rites and rituals of the Law Of Moses are no longer in effect:

*Galatians 4:22-31 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written, "REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR; BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR; FOR MORE NUMEROUS ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND." And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say? **CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON, FOR***

*THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN."  
So then, brethren, **we are not children of a bondwoman**, but of the free woman.*

Nevertheless, the Old Testament is not a worthless document for us. There are many great lessons we can learn from studies in the Old Testament. We can see how God required them to observe the law He gave them, as was shown earlier in Nadab, Abihu, and Uzzah. He likewise requires us to observe the law He has given us with similar warnings:

*Romans 15:4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

*1 Corinthians 10:6-11 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*

The "ends of the ages" coming upon us means that we are living on the threshold of Christ's second coming, marking the end of time and the beginning of eternity for all. Between now and then, no further dispensations will be delivered.

## **2. Doctrines Derived From Old Testament Misapplication**

The applicability of the Old Testament today is a point easily misunderstood. Let's examine now some specific false doctrines commonly held, derived from this misunderstanding.

### **a. The Ten Commandments in force today**

Some people today are working to have the Ten Commandments taught in our public schools. However, the Ten Commandments were part of the Law Of Moses which has been taken out of force. True, nine of the Ten Commandments are reiterated in the New Testament. However, the commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy is not part of the Law Of Christ. Few people today professing to be Christians keep the Sabbath day holy, yet many want it taught in our schools.

*Colossians 2:16, 17 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day -- things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.*

*1 Corinthians 3:5-11 But our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a **new covenant**, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, in **letters engraved on stones**, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. For if that which **fades away** was with glory, much more that which **remains** is in glory.*

### **b. Instrumental music in worship**

People will often cite the many Old Testament passages about instrumental music in worship as a reason to use it today (Psalm 71:22). That law has been taken away; it is no longer applicable to us. A similar problem was prevalent in the early church; Judaizing teachers were proclaiming that circumcision was required of Christians (Acts 15:5). Paul makes the argument that if we are going to bring back part of the old law, we must bring back all of it. If instrumental music in worship is brought back from the Old Testament, then we must also bring back circumcision, animal sacrifices, feast days, etc.

*Galatians 5:3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.*

### **c. A special class of earthly priesthood**

Many denominations have set up a special class of earthly priests today. Our English word "priest" indicates "one authorized to perform the sacred rites of a religion especially as a mediatory agent between humans and God..." (M-W). This is exactly the role they served under the Old Testament dispensation. However, the New Testament makes clear that the priesthood is now different (Hebrews 7:12). No man other than Christ is necessary to mediate for us. According to New Testament usage, all Christians are priests (Revelation 1:5, 6).

*1 Peter 2:5, 9 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.... But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION,...*

Nevertheless, men today have composed rules not found in scripture whereby special priests are elected.

#### **d. Baptism not essential to salvation**

Those proclaiming the doctrine of salvation by faith only will cite the sanctification of the thief on the cross without baptism as proof that baptism is not essential (Luke 23:39-43). However, this man lived under the old dispensation. After Christ's death and the delivery of the new law requiring baptism (Mark 16:16), the former dispensations not requiring baptism were made obsolete.

#### **e. Divorce for indecency**

Moses' teaching on divorce (Deuteronomy 24) is different than Jesus' (Matthew 5, 19). The Law of Moses, which allowed a man to put away his lawful wife for some uncleanness, such as lewdness, lust, or immodesty, has been superseded by the law of Christ, which permits it for the cause of fornication alone. Some claim that Jesus was only explaining Moses' law. This is untrue; Christ was delivering a new law to supplant the old one, not merely citing reference to it.

### **3. Old Testament References In The New Testament**

In many instances, New Testament scripture will make reference to Old Testament law and practices. The fact that such references are made does not make those Old Testament regulations become part of New Testament ordinances, unless they are stated to be so. For example, Acts 7:8 mentions the law of circumcision contained in the Old Testament. However, the text makes no indication to enforce that rite in the New Testament. We understand that circumcision is not therefore a New Testament ordinance. Likewise, the Old Testament animal sacrifices are referenced in Hebrews 9. Again, the text makes no indication to enforce such in the New Testament. Animal sacrifices are not therefore a New Testament ordinance.

Similarly, New Testament scripture frequently makes reference to the teachings, traditions, and commandments of men. Examples of this include hating our enemies (Matthew 5:43), worshiping angels (Revelation 22:8, 9), and prejudice (Titus 1:12). The mere occurrence of these references in New Testament scripture does not suggest that God sanctions or condones those teachings and practices.

Certainly, the entire Bible is the inspired word of God, but clearly, not every statement contained therein is to be taken as divine ordinance. We must examine all things carefully to determine what God has ordained as law.

## **D. What God Has Ordained; What Man Has Originated**

The revelation is God's; it is that which God has set forth, appointed, legislated, and ordained, not man. Only God is the source, origin, author, and beginning. That which God appoints must be differentiated from that which man originates.

*2 Peter 1:20, 21 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*

*Hebrews 8:2 ...a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.*

*1 Corinthians 9:14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.*

The word "directed" is from DIATASSO {dee-at-as'-so}, meaning "1) to arrange, appoint, ordain, prescribe, give order" (JHT). Translated also "commanded," "ordered," or "ordained" in other versions, it pertains to the edict or decree of one in sovereign power (Acts 18:2).

God ordains things which man had not previously invented, known, or performed. Before God delivered them, they did not exist or were not practiced for God's intended purposes. Things divinely appointed are binding upon us; they are not optional nor subject to change or modification by man. Only God, by means of a new dispensation, can change what He has appointed. This He will not now do, for that which He has delivered in these "last days" is perfect and complete. Some examples of divine appointments are:

- The church (Matthew 16:18)
- Baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38)
- The Lord's Supper (Mark 14:22-25)
- Elders and deacons in the church (Titus 1:5)
- Modes of worship (John 4:24)
- Prayer to God (Luke 11:1-4)
- Civil law (Romans 13:1)
- Marriage (Matthew 19:4-6)

Man has discovered, invented, and initiated certain practices and customs. These matters of human origin are not binding upon us, and we have the right to change them as our traditions change. The Bible mentions many such practices, and God may regulate these practices in keeping with divinely appointed precepts. The fact that the Bible mentions them or that God regulates them does not mean He has appointed them or ordained them. People were doing these things already before God's word makes mention of them. They have not thus become binding upon us. Some examples are:

- Kissing as a greeting (Romans 16:16)
- The therapeutic use of ointments (James 5:14)
- The medicinal use of wine (1 Timothy 5:23)
- Washing feet (John 13:14)
- Women wearing a veil (1 Corinthians 11)
- Bodily exercise (1 Timothy 4:8)
- Athletic competition (2 Timothy 2:5)
- Weddings and other civil ceremonies (Luke 14:8)

As a case in point, when God created Adam and Eve on the sixth day, they were married by divine appointment and likewise for all who become married (Genesis 2:23, 24). However, Adam and Eve had no wedding; wedding ceremonies came later of human origin as a matter of civil custom that varies from culture to culture.

Some have argued that the church is inconsistent here, proposing that if the church does not bind kissing (Romans 16:16), we should not condemn the practice of, for example, instrumental music in worship. However, this is not a fair comparison. The assumption is made that we are arbitrarily binding certain commandments and disregarding others as a matter of tradition. This is simply not the case; the issues are different: one is God-ordained; one is not. Besides, even if this was inconsistent, the inconsistency does not authorize anything. Their argument is basically designed to blur and obscure the lines of doctrine, not to pursue sound teaching.

*1 Timothy 6:3, 4 If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions,*

*Titus 2:1 But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.*

## Questions And Thoughts For Review: The Dispensations Of God

1. What, exactly, is a dispensation?
2. Throughout all time, how many divine dispensations have there been?
3. What is a covenant?
4. How is a covenant put into effect?
5. Explain the meaning of "the last days," as used in Hebrews 1:1?. What is the significance of these being "the last days?"
6. By what distinctive feature of the New Testament is it considered "new?"
7. Has the Old Testament been made void or has it been made obsolete? Describe the difference by an illustration apart from the laws of God.
8. Of what purpose or benefit is the Old Testament to us today?
9. What is the exact meaning of a thing being "ordained" by God?
10. The New Testament scriptures give the clear, specific commands that we greet one another by kissing and that we wash each other's feet. Why don't we practice these things today the same way we follow the direct ordinances for worship and baptism?



## V. Communication

### A. Language

Evolutionists claim that man invented language on his own, beginning with grunts, crude vocalizations, and gestures. This is not true. Language is a creation of God, not an invention of man. God made Adam in His own likeness as a rational being with cognitive skills, a free will, and the capacity for detailed self-expression through language. Adam did not have to learn reasoning and language as we do from childhood; it was a divine gift. Adam understood and was able to intellectually express himself with a full working vocabulary, which he immediately began to expand on his own. The first recorded words from the heart of man are profound: "This is now bone of my bones..." (Genesis 2:23). The basic elements of language are well represented there. God also later redistributed various new languages to mankind through His will and divine power (Genesis 11:7, Acts 2:4-11).

When God and Adam spoke to each other directly, each one understood what the other was saying. For example, when God said, "But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat," (Genesis 2:17) Adam knew what He meant. After his fall, Adam apparently recognized it was pointless to argue with God about what He meant by "eat." Amazingly, some people today are just about that bold.

All language utilizes nouns and adjectives with case, gender, and number to identify things and verbs and adverbs with tense and mood to identify actions. Prepositions and conjunctions connect these all together communicatively. The rules governing any language are established by God. Certainly, any language in use evolves, but its originator is God Himself. He created it so that we might know His will.

The Bible is not a linguistics textbook, but we need to study the rules of language to understand what God is communicating to us, because His word is that by which we will be judged.

*John 12:48 He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.*

### B. The Meaning Of Words

Words are the building blocks of all language. It is important to understand the meaning of words used in scripture. Translations today are very reliable, and it is often beneficial to see how various ones render certain passages. Make sure to use real translations, not paraphrased versions.

For deeper study, it is also helpful to use reference material on New Testament terms, such as a lexicon or a concordance. These works give the words used in the original language and the definitions in English. Language is a living thing, and words change meaning as time goes by. The New Testament was written in the Koine dialect of the Greek language in the first century AD. It is helpful to know what the word meanings were at the time of the writing to truly understand what is said.

Also, it is often beneficial to consider the tense, case, mood, number, and gender of words used. For example, the apostle Paul used number to make an important point on Abraham's promise:

*Galatians 3:16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.*

Problems in authority often arise from a misuse of terms. The study of logic involves the meaning of words. In the "Philosophy Pages," Garth Kemerling writes, "The achievement of human knowledge is often hampered by the use of words without fixed signification. Needless controversy is sometimes produced and perpetuated by an unacknowledged ambiguity in the application of key terms." Know this: the creator of the universe and author of the scriptures did not write in ambiguous terms. Any ambiguity is of human origin, not of God.

*Proverbs 30:5 Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.*

*1 Corinthians 14:33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.*

Kemerling explains two kinds of disputes: genuine and verbal. In a genuine dispute, those involved agree on definitions of terms but disagree on propositions. However, a verbal dispute is over word meanings,

concerning which, he writes, "A verbal dispute disappears entirely once the people involved arrive at an agreement on the meaning of their terms, since doing so reveals their underlying agreement in belief." There is scriptural support for this statement.

We sometimes hear verbal disputes in the church today. Occasionally, an attempt is made by someone to shape the meaning of scripture to fit their personal desires and preconceived notions by suggesting that, in certain contexts, words take a completely different meaning not supported by their usage or proper definitions. For example, some will argue that in the context of 2 Thessalonians 3:6 the word "unruly" actually means, more specifically, "lazy." This places a limit on the meaning and is an unconscionable twisting of scripture. Observe the many New Testament warnings against playing word games:

*1 Timothy 1:3-4 As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith.*

*1 Timothy 6:3-5 If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.*

*2 Timothy 2:14 Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers.*

*2 Timothy 4:2-4 Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.*

### **C. Context**

Words often have multiple meanings in every language. For example, the English word "right" can mean correct or the opposite of left. The intended meaning will be indicated by the context. In some cases, the immediate context is not adequate to indicate the meaning. For example, does the instruction "turn right" mean to turn correctly or to turn opposite of left? In this case, we must see whether the larger context is dealing with the direction one needs to travel or the laws governing turns.

For a New Testament example, consider the word "tempt." Every occurrence of the word "tempt" in the KJV is from the Greek word PEIRAZO {pi-rad'-zo}. Among the various definitions of this word, J. H. Thayer explains that it has a good sense and a bad sense. In a good sense, he defines it as "2) to try, make trial of, test: for the purpose of ascertaining his quantity, or what he thinks, or how he will behave himself." He further defines it "2b) in a bad sense, to test one maliciously, craftily to put to the proof his feelings or judgments 2c) to try or test one's faith, virtue, character, by enticement to sin 2c1) to solicit to sin." By the context alone, we can understand the correct meaning. For examples:

In a good sense:

*John 6:6 This He was saying to test [PEIRAZO] him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.*

In a bad sense:

*James 1:14 But each one is tempted [PEIRAZO] when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.*

By knowing the intended meaning of words from the context, we can reach a true understanding, explain apparent scriptural contradictions, and even refute false doctrines.

In Kemerling's explanation of a fallacy of ambiguity, "equivocation," he writes, "An equivocation trades upon the use of an ambiguous word or phrase in one of its meanings in one of the propositions of an argument but also in another of its meanings in a second proposition.

- Really exciting novels are rare.
- But rare books are expensive.
- Therefore, Really exciting novels are expensive.

Here, the word 'rare' is used in different ways in the two premises of the argument, so the link they seem to establish between the terms of the conclusion is spurious. In its more subtle occurrences, this fallacy can undermine the reliability of otherwise valid deductive arguments."

This would be a technique easily used by a false teacher to make his position appear credible. A thorough study of authority in religion will prepare a Christian to recognize and refute such an error in reasoning. Sound reasoning will be examined more closely later in this study.

## **D. Figurative Language**

Much of the Bible is written in figurative language that ranges from the deepest apocalyptic imagery to satire. Many of the figures of speech we use in our own language are used in the sacred writings: parables, fables, metaphors, similes, allegories, irony, metonymy, hyperbole, synecdoche, sarcasm, parallelism, apostrophe, personification, interrogation, ellipsis, prolepsis, and proverbs. The language of the Bible is also laced with the idioms and vernacular that naturally occur in any language, and our modern translators usually do a very good job of conveying this in our own language. A thorough study of hermeneutics would include examination of the use of all figurative speech in scripture, but for the scope of this study, we will abbreviate.

The question comes: how can we know when the language of the Bible is figurative? Much religious error abounds today because that which is intended to be understood literally is taken figuratively, and vice versa. The following rules are offered to help the student recognize figurative language in scripture.

The first principle to follow is to take the language literally if at all possible. Any passage can have a figurative interpretation applied to it, if our imaginations are allowed to run unabated. However, if a literal interpretation is plausible, it must be accepted. A figurative interpretation will be a necessary, forced, and unavoidable conclusion, and a passage does not become figurative simply because someone says it is.

### **1. The Rule Of Context**

As stated before, nothing should be taken as figurative, unless such a conclusion is not merely suggested but demanded from the immediate context. For example, it is evident from the following context that the building from God is not anything like a literal, man-made building familiar to us:

*2 Corinthians 5:1, 2 For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven.*

### **2. The Rule Of Impossibility**

The text is regarded as figurative if the literal meaning poses an impossibility. In the following text, it is impossible for a literally dead person to do anything. We are forced to conclude that these were dead in a figurative sense:

*Matthew 8:22 But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead."*

We should be careful, however, not to confuse an intrinsic impossibility with that which could be possible miraculously in certain circumstances. For example, it is impossible for us to raise the dead. However, when the scriptures state that Jesus raised the dead, we are not forced to take it figuratively.

### **3. The Rule Of Contradiction**

The scripture is understood to be figurative if the literal interpretation contradicts the teaching in other passages. In the following text, if we conclude that we are to literally hate our parents, this contradicts the instruction to love one another. We must accept this as figurative:

*Luke 14:26 If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.*

### **4. The Rule Of Absurdity**

The passage is regarded figurative if the literal meaning is absurd. In the scripture to follow, it is absurd to think Jesus is a literal door. The language is obviously figurative:

*John 10:9 I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.*

### **5. The Rule Of Revelation**

The language is to be taken figurative when the writer reveals that it is. If for no other reason, we understand in the following passage that Jesus was speaking figuratively of the temple because John said that He was:

*John 2:19-21 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body.*

## Questions And Thoughts For Review: Communication

1. From where does language come?
2. Is it important to pay attention to the meanings of words? If so, why?
3. For words with multiple definitions, how can we know which definition applies in a statement?
4. Does a word utilized in a passage of scripture ever take on a new meaning unsupported by its definition, common usage, or context?
5. According to the Bible, what attitude is in the heart of one who does not agree with sound words?
6. Is a statement in scripture to be taken figuratively on the basis that a seasoned evangelist or elder says that it is to be?
7. What are some plausible purposes or reasons for the use of figurative language as we frequently see in scripture?
8. Choose three different types of figurative language with which you are familiar and give a Bible example of the usage of each one.

## **VI. The Method Of Interpretation**

### **A. Systematic Approach**

So the following questions come to us: how do we reach an understanding of the scriptures? Are there rules and methods of interpretation that must be observed? Should there be some plan of investigation to be followed? The answer to these questions is a branch of study all its own called "hermeneutics:" the science of interpreting, that is, bringing out the message of a writing that might otherwise be difficult to comprehend. This forum does not permit a full investigation of the matter, but a condensed explanation is offered.

Many believe that one person's understanding of the Bible is as good as another's, even if they disagree. "You see it your way, and I'll see it mine" is the frequent response. Supposing the Bible does not have a singular interpretation, many will try to make it say whatever they want it to say. The idea is that no one can really come to a true knowledge of God's will, so no one has the right to say someone else is in error. This is a false supposition; the God that created the heavens and the earth did not give us a book that cannot be understood. If two men have a true understanding, they will be in agreement; confusion is not of divine origin.

*1 Corinthians 1:10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

*Philippians 1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.*

*Colossians 1:9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.*

*Colossians 2:2 That their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself.*

We must accept that there is a right way and a wrong way to interpret scripture. This is readily acknowledged regarding secular documents, whether we are reading a will, a contract, an ordinance, a specification, a policy, or a building code, we understand that it means what it says. The same is true of the Bible.

*2 Corinthians 10:5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*

*1 Timothy 6:20 O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge."*

*2 Timothy 2:15, 16 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness.*

A sound method of interpretation will be logical, consistent, free from human motives, and applicable to all scripture. If we start with an erring method of interpretation, we will end up with an erring interpretation. Let's consider the right way to handle scripture and see what our God is saying to us.

### **B. Direct And Indirect Authority**

The scriptures reveal the method of interpretation; it is not left to man to invent, and it is not "church of Christ theology." Actually, the method of interpreting and understanding scripture is the same as the method we would utilize to understand any other written document. There is not a special set of rules for interpreting scripture different from interpreting any other specification or authoritative secular document. The only difference is that we accept the Bible to be inspired and flawless.

As will be shown, three major processes of establishing authority from scripture are (1) directly, from recorded commands or statements, (2) indirectly, from approved New Testament examples, and (3) from necessary inferences or forced conclusions. These processes should be intuitive, as we are probably already accustomed to using them, though perhaps unconsciously. These are not Bible interpretation tools; these are language tools.

The principle of the necessary inference must first be understood. It is fundamental to the word-method of revelation and communication. All other principles will depend on it.

## 1. The Necessary Inference

Words and phrases have a direct, overt meaning when we hear them. However, these words and phrases also carry indirect and inferred conclusions, some of which are necessary, mandatory, and unavoidable. For example, when we hear the word "drink", our understanding is intuitive. However, certain conclusions about this are forced. For one, when we drink, swallowing is required. Though it is not stated, it is understood; it is not an assumption but a certainty. Swallowing is an unavoidable part of drinking.

Another way to think about things necessarily inferred is by the rules of cause and effect. Logic says that if a cause always produces a specific effect and only the cause is stated, the effect is necessarily inferred. This is easier to understand by illustration: if you have a wood fire in your fireplace with damper open, you can be certain beyond doubt that smoke is coming out of your chimney without going out to see it. Likewise, if an effect is always produced by a specific cause and only the effect is stated, the cause is necessarily inferred. For instance, if there is ice on your car's windshield in the morning, you can be certain beyond doubt that the temperature had dropped below freezing without checking the weather report.

Sometimes words and phrases may suggest a variety of possible conclusions. To assume a possible conclusion when it is not forced is mere conjecture. We can use the same cause-and-effect logic as before. We understand that if our car will not start, it could have no gas, a broken timing belt, or bad spark plugs. We do not assume it is out of gas and add more without investigating further by checking the fuel gage. Assumptions like this are dangerous in religion. For example, it has been argued in favor of infant baptism that when Lydia's household was baptized (Acts 16:15), there were no doubt infants in that household. This is simply not necessarily so. Possible or probable conclusions are not authoritative.

For a biblical example of a necessary inference, consider what is revealed in the New Testament concerning the lawful divorce of a lawful spouse. In Romans 7:2, 3, Paul explains that adultery occurs by being married to one while being bound to another. However, in Matthew 19:9, Jesus indicates that one who divorces his wife because of her fornication and marries another does not commit adultery. This necessarily infers that having knowledge of her fornication means that he is no longer under the covenant bond to her. To have the lawful right to put away forces the conclusion that he is no longer bound to her.

It is important to reiterate that authority indirectly derived on the basis of a necessary inference is equally binding to that based on a recorded direct command or statement. The conclusion is forced, unavoidable, and non-optional.

## 2. Direct Authority: Recorded Commands And Statements

Everything the early church did in practice was in keeping with commands and statements by the direction of the apostles and other inspired individuals. As established earlier, they could not know the church's mission, function, organization, benefits, and conditions of membership unless they were told; the word was the only way. They got their authority directly from the commands and statements of the Lord's ambassadors.

*Matthew 28:20 Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...*

*Ephesians 6:19, 20 And pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*

*Romans 10:13-17 For "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent?*

*Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!" However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*

We obviously do not have with us today God's spokesmen in the flesh, but we have only the words preserved which they wrote with pen and parchment. These documents contain direct recorded statements and commands that the inspired writers gave to the early church. By a necessary inference and through our understanding of God's dispensation in the last days, we recognize that the instructions given to the early church apply to us as well, just as the Law of Moses applied to those in the time of Christ.

The difference between a command and a statement is that a command is in the imperative mood; a statement is in the indicative. In the study of logic, the difference is described as "informative" and "directive" language. Garth Kemerling, in his "Philosophy Pages," explains the informative as "an effort to communicate some content," for example, "The fifth of May is a Mexican holiday." He explains the directive as an "aim to cause... some overt action," for example, "Shut the door." To illustrate biblically, Jesus said, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." This is indicative: an informative statement of fact. However, Peter said, "Repent every one of you and be baptized for the remission of your sins." This is imperative: a directive to action. Since it is linguistically legitimate to rephrase any statement as a command or vice versa, both are equally binding and authoritative. Such a change in mood does not create a change in substance.

### **3. Indirect Authority: Approved Examples**

In some cases, the New Testament tells of the early church performing a certain approved action for which the authorizing command or statement is not recorded. The fact that they were doing such a thing with God's approval necessarily infers they were told to do it. Though we have no record of the command being given, we can be certain beyond doubt the authorizing command was delivered; we simply do not have a record of it. For instance, Jesus said to His disciples, "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:29). He said that there was a certain day when the Lord's Supper would be observed, but the commandment regarding which day, specifically, was not recorded. We have no recorded command or statement for that day we are to do it. We have only one recorded example of the church performing this action on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Though not recorded, we can be certain that the command to observe it on the first day of the week was given, because the early church was doing it with God's approval. The only way they would have known to do it then is to have been told.

Authority for action in the church today can thus be established by approved examples recorded in the New Testament. However, such New Testament approved examples are binding only when the command is not recorded. If the command is recorded, we have that for our authority. Any recorded examples would then simply exemplify. If only the command is recorded but no examples, we would still have authority to act. If, however, the command and examples are recorded, the examples are not restrictive.

This is best seen by illustration. We have the recorded statement that the church is to be the support structure for the truth (1 Timothy 3:15), hence, a medium for sounding forth the gospel (1 Thessalonians 1:8). Also, there are recorded examples of how early churches did this. One way was by sending out preachers (Acts 13:1-3), who went by foot, chariot, or ship. There are no examples of churches sending out preachers going by car or airplane. This does not mean preachers today cannot go by car or airplane. This also does not mean that sending out preachers is the only way a church may sound forth the gospel. Churches may hold week-long nightly teaching assemblies, publish websites, or sponsor radio teaching programs. These are all forms of supporting the truth, as appointed for the church by a direct statement.

To reiterate the point, the recorded examples are not limiting when the recorded authorizing command or statement exists. We should certainly have New Testament authority for everything we do, but we do not need to have a New Testament example for everything we do.

This becomes the source of frequent confusion. For instance, it has been noted that there is no example in the New Testament of a church owning a building in which to meet. However, this does not mean we do not have authority for it. The church is instructed to assemble together (Hebrews 10:25). This necessarily infers a place; it is impossible to assemble together with no place to do it. The New Testament examples only show the church meeting in the Jewish temple, in furnished quarters, or in their homes. However, we are not limited by these examples, because the command to assemble is recorded, and that



requires a place, which can be new or old, wood or brick, rented or owned, air conditioned or not, with or without indoor plumbing, or with a gravel or an asphalt parking lot.

For another example, some will declare that there is no example in scripture of a church arranging children's classes to teach them in separate age groups. However, this does not mean we do not have authority for it. The church is commissioned to teach anyone and everyone, anytime, and anywhere (Colossians 1:24-28). We are not limited by the lack of an example of such a thing, because the statement appointing the church to teach is recorded.

During the apostasy concerning institutionalism, the claim was offered that we do a great many things for which we have no authority. This is not true. Actually, we do many authorized things for which we have no scriptural example. If we are doing unauthorized things, we need to stop doing them. However, this reasoning was used by some trying to justify using the Lord's treasury and what it can buy for unauthorized practices.

### C. The Methods Combined

In reality, all authority in the church today comes by applying these principles in combination. In a manner of speaking, we derive no authority in the church today by a direct command or statement alone. All recorded commands are **examples** of commands being delivered to the churches of those days. However, we understand that the church today is the same as it was then, and the apostles gave the same instructions to every church (1 Corinthians 4:17; 7:17). Therefore, if those **commands** were viable for them, the **necessary inference** is that they are viable for us today.

In another manner of speaking, we derive all authority in the church today by a direct command or statement. To explain, if we only have a recorded **example** of some church function, the example **necessarily infers** that the **command or statement** was given to the church, though not recorded. It is also important to note that, by this reasoning, authority for the church indirectly derived on the basis of an approved example is equally binding to that based on a recorded direct command or statement. Later in this study we will examine more closely when New Testament examples are binding upon us today and when they are not.

### D. The Methods Illustrated

Jesus recognized and utilized these three methods of interpreting Old Testament scripture. If Jesus is seen using these methods, then they are clearly sanctioned for us, since we are instructed to imitate Christ.

Jesus uses a **necessary inference** to interpret the scriptures concerning the resurrection. He reasons that since the scripture does not say "I **was** the God" but "I **am** the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," though they be dead, they must live again in the resurrection:

*Mark 12:26, 27 But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, and the God of Jacob'? "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken."*

Jesus uses the **direct command** to teach from the scriptures what to do to inherit eternal life:

*Luke 10:26-28 And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE."*

Jesus uses the **approved example** to interpret the scriptures concerning the Sabbath. The Pharisees considered their own traditional limits on Sabbath activities to be lawful, which limitations the law never intended. Jesus exposes their error by the example that the priests were permitted by law to do certain works on the Sabbath that would be in violation of the Pharisee's tradition:

*Matthew 12:5 "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?"*

To further illustrate biblically, these methods of interpretation were used by the early church to settle the circumcision dispute in Acts 15. Some were demanding that Christians follow certain aspects of Moses' Law. In verses 7 - 9, Peter makes an appeal on the grounds what occurred in the "early days." This no doubt refers to the conversion of Cornelius. In Acts 10:47 and 11:17, Peter draws the **necessary inference** and applies it here, concluding that God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. In verses 12 - 14, Barnabas and Paul relate their work among the Gentiles, and James concludes from their **approved examples** that God is taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. In verses 15 - 18, James further concludes on the foundation of **recorded statements** in scripture that God is not requiring them to observe Moses' Law. Incidentally, concerning the silence of scripture, verse 24 further indicates that, since no instruction on this had been given, the binding of Moses' Law was not authorized.

To illustrate secularly, our government similarly recognizes the same methods of establishing authority. First, there is Statutory Law; these are the **recorded statements** on the books that spell out what is legal. Second, there is Common Law; this is the **approved example**. At times, a judge or lawyer will refer to a past similar case to see how it was previously ruled. *Rowe v. Wade* has thus set the standard on abortion in our country. Third, when a bill is passed and becomes law, there is an Enabling Clause to include all means and methods by **necessary inference** required to put it into practice.

Some today want to re-think the command-example-inference explanation of establishing authority in the church. Brethren are proposing that these principles are out-dated and not in touch with modern thought. However, as previously stated, these are not Bible interpretation principles but language principles. If these principles are discounted, then the re-thinkers will need to set forth the rules how they propose to decipher not only the scriptures but also secular writings in the language of everyday life. There is no basis by which one method would be used for scripture but a different method used for everything else. If we accept that there are viable rules for deciphering secular documents, then we ought to accept the same for sacred writings. Otherwise, we will find it impossible to understand any written document from a cookie recipe to a contract to build a house. To the contrary, the time-tested command-example-inference principles are just as valid today as they were in former times. Investigation will always show that the re-thinkers have a private agenda: they want to find a way to validate what they want to validate (Jeremiah 18:15).

## **E. Consider Everything The Bible Says On A Subject**

We must take the sum total of God's word on a matter. We are not free to pick and choose only the scriptures we want and disregard the rest.

*Matthew 28:20 Teaching them to observe **all** that I commanded you...*

When we consider every scripture that deals with a certain subject, they must be combined in a harmonious way, not a conflictive way. For example, typical denominational doctrine misses this point concerning the plan of salvation. Mark 16:16 says that one must believe and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. However, Acts 2:38 says one must repent and be baptized, and Romans 10:9 says one must believe and confess. Furthermore, John 3:16 only says one must believe. So which ones are required? These passages are not in conflict with one another; they all state the truth, but no one passage states everything that is true on the whole matter. When we add them all up, we find that one must believe and repent and confess and be baptized to obtain salvation; they are all required.

*Psalms 119:160 The sum of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.*

## **F. Areas Of Judgment And Matters Of Opinion**

Before we start sounding too idealistic, we recognize that there are certain difficult scriptures and complicated situations from time to time that can make it hard for us to agree. Admittedly, some issues also fall into areas of opinion and judgment, and we will not all agree what those areas are. It is not that the explanations don't exist, they are only difficult to find. How can we remain in fellowship and function in unity, even with differences of opinion?

The scriptures give us much insight to this issue. The churches in Paul's day were very much like most churches today. Christians had diverse backgrounds, various former religious beliefs, differing levels of spiritual maturity, and an evil society in which to live. Let's observe how they were instructed to deal with matters of opinion. The entire chapter of Romans 14 involves this and should be studied in detail.

*1 Corinthians 8:9-13 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.*

## **1. Those Weak In Faith**

First of all, in the context of Romans 14, note that the opinions under discussion are of those who are weak in faith (14:1, 2; 15:1), not of the spiritually mature or leaders in the church. Notwithstanding, those who are spiritually mature may also have certain areas of weakness; even elders of the church have room to grow in knowledge, as do we all (2 Peter 3:18). However, any elder who would appeal to Romans 14 to validate a doctrine he cannot otherwise defend is misapplying this text, because to do so is to admit weakness and uncertainty. No elder boldly proclaiming a heresy would ever admit he is weak in the subject matter. Romans 14 does not apply to one who is teaching confidently; it applies to one unsure and doubtful (verse 23).

## **2. Matters Of Indifference**

Note also that every belief specifically mentioned in the context of Romans 14 is a thing not wrong if you do and not wrong if you don't. You can eat and drink or not eat and drink; you can esteem the day or not esteem it; it doesn't matter either way (vs. 3-6). When Paul says, "let us not judge one another" and "nothing is unclean in itself" (vs. 13, 14), he is not talking about things like fornication, drunkenness, lying, swindling, or idolatry. These are matters in which we most certainly are to judge a brother (1 Corinthians 5:9-12). He is talking about things not inherently sinful in which the weak are confused. Certainly, those who are spiritually mature will also hold opinions on various matters of indifference (1 Corinthians 7:25-28), but Romans 14 is not about them.

Some commentaries try to present modern-day examples of such matters of opinion and in so doing misapply Romans 14. For instance, they explain that some new Christians may understand they need to repent of their past sins, confess their faith, and put Christ on in baptism, but they do not yet understand everything a mature Christian understands; they need time to grow in faith and knowledge (Ephesians 4:15; 1 Peter 2:2). For example, a new convert might know that drunkenness is sinful but not yet understand the sin of social drinking. He might know that vulgar speech is sinful but not yet understand the sin of cursing, swearing, or such with euphemisms. These commentaries declare that Romans 14 teaches us that we ought not immediately deliver a severe berating but teach them with compassion, gentleness, and patience (Galatians 6:1; Jude 22). We ought not immediately withdraw our fellowship but give them time to learn and grow (1 Thessalonians 5:14). All these things are absolutely true, but it is not Romans 14 that teaches it. The opinions and doubtful disputations of Romans 14 are contextually matters of indifference: things neither right nor wrong in themselves. Conscientiously wear the veil or don't; eat the meat or don't; observe the day or don't – either way, no sin is committed. However, to apply Romans 14 to matters of doctrine and faith, like social drinking or cursing, is to misapply the passage. Romans 14 says that even if they never learn better, we ought never withdraw over trivial things like veil-wearing or meat-eating. Teach against social drinking and cursing with patience and gentleness for sure, but if a brother persists in these activities after repeated warnings, we must take punitive action (Matthew 18:15-17; 2 Thessalonians 3). Some churches allow Christians to persist in a sinful activity indefinitely under the guise of being patient, gentle, and loving. Allowing a brother to remain in sin without consequence is the most unloving and uncaring thing we can possibly do.

## **3. Practical Applications In Opinions**

### **a. Matters of judgment**

For a correctly applied modern-day illustration in Romans 14, consider a new convert who all his life had given up something for Lent. Though not yet understanding that this is a religious rite of human origin, his conscience, being weak, perhaps tells him he should forgo eating chocolate for a season. To eat chocolate or not is either way not inherently sin, but in his case, if he eats the chocolate, defiling his conscience, he then would sin indeed (14:23). His spiritually mature brethren can try to teach him otherwise in gentleness and patience, but they must not condemn him for it (14:13). In another

application, a weak brother might think he would be sinning to not always kneel to pray, and his mature brethren should deal with him the same way.

Note that Paul does not tell us to stand boldly on matters of opinion, regardless of how others feel about it. He tells us to find common ground and stand there together, where no one has to either compromise their convictions or violate their conscience. Love seeks ways to accommodate one another (Romans 14:15-22; Ephesians 4:3; Colossians 3:13).

## **b. Matters of doctrine**

Occasionally, people will suggest a certain function for the church to engage. Typically, they feel it is authorized, else they would not suggest it, but they believe it is also okay not to do it. If a question of authority then arises, they usually claim that it is an area of opinion, especially if they are having trouble showing scriptural authority for it. When that occurs, the matter needs to be dropped.

We maintain that there is no authority for instrumental music in worship, church-supported human institutions, and church-sponsored recreational activities. Now, most who believe that these things are okay to do also believe that they are okay not to do; they believe they are just differences of judgment. If they were truly just matters of opinion, then the common ground would be to not do them for unity's sake, if for no other reason. There will be much less division in the church today if this attitude is in practice.

Unfortunately, some in the church today try to blur some of God's word to gray instead of diligently seeking the proper understanding. These "gray areas" are apparently comfort zones for some folks. More often than not, the issues are not actually areas where God's revelation is fuzzy, but they are matters in which people need to grow in knowledge. Sometimes, they are matters of tradition and emotion in which people do not easily change. Romans 14 has become today one of the most abused passages in scripture. God never intended it to be a safe haven for heretics who cannot show authority for what they believe, teach, and practice. Standing in the gray areas is a dangerous position. True, some passages are hard to understand, but God obviously expects us to expend the effort required to learn the meaning rather than to twist them into whatever we want to believe.

*2 Peter 3:16-18 As also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

A matter is not an opinion just because it requires effort and patience to understand. A matter is not an opinion just because a preacher or an elder declares that it is. With no reasonable defense against a reproof to the contrary, false doctrines are too often labeled as opinion and then tolerated among brethren. These matters have nothing to do with difficult scriptures and everything to do with self will.

The false doctrine of "unity in diversity" finds its origin here. The claim is that there is a difference between gospel and doctrine. "Gospel," as it is explained, includes the more important teachings of Christ: things concerning the plan of salvation and the atoning power of Christ's blood. These are the things on which we must agree. "Doctrine," as it is explained, includes things of lesser importance: things relative, subjective, and more elusive. These are the areas of differing opinions. There is no foundation for this in scripture (1 Timothy 1:8-11; 2 Timothy 3:16).

If there is no scriptural basis for calling one thing a matter of doctrine and fellowship and calling another thing a matter of opinion and tolerance, then our system of belief is arbitrary and wholly a product of human judgment with no legitimate basis for defending anything as actual truth or refuting anything as actual error. Therefore, one church really would be as good as another. However, if we reject this, then we must accept that there is scriptural basis for making the necessary distinction on matters of doctrine and opinion.

## Questions And Thoughts For Review: The Method Of Interpretation

1. Do you think it is reasonable that you could put instructions in writing, such as a cookie recipe, a contract to buy or build a house, or a last will and testament, and expect others to understand it?
2. Is it reasonable that such written instructions would have only one meaning? Is it reasonable that God delivered to us a discernable message with a singular meaning?
3. What is a "necessary inference?" Do we only find necessary inferences in Bible interpretation?
4. What is the difference between commands and statements? Is one more authoritative than the other?
5. If we are given a generic command in the Bible, do recorded examples of that action place limitations on how we may carry out the command?
6. If two men understand a rational, discernable statement with a singular message, will they always understand it alike? What is "necessarily inferred" if they disagree?
7. What is the difference between one idea that is a matter of opinion and another that is a matter of fellowship in doctrine? In other words, how do we tell opinion apart from doctrine?
8. Is the job of elders and preachers to proclaim for us when an issue is a matter of opinions?
9. Is it sinful for us to disagree on things that are truly matters of opinion?
10. Does God expect us to understand even the difficult scriptures?

## **VII. Binding New Testament Examples**

### **A. When Are New Testament Examples Binding?**

New Testament scripture is filled with examples of Christians doing many lawful things. Bible students must determine which examples are binding today upon Christians or upon churches and which are not. For instance, we see that Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla were tentmakers by trade (Acts 18:3). Does this mean all Christians today must be tentmakers? We also see an example where all in the church who owned land or houses sold them and gave the proceeds to the apostles for distribution to the needy among them (Acts 4:34, 35). Does this mean all Christians today who own land or houses must sell them and give the proceeds to poor saints in the church? We will look for answers to these questions.

Some have postulated that scriptural examples simply authorize optional functions or activities for the church or for individuals. In other words, the proposal suggests that all activities authorized by examples are not binding but are actions which may or may not be discretionally performed. Though this may actually be true in many cases, this postulation is quite arbitrarily derived, and it does not accurately explain the applicability of scriptural examples.

We have already observed that recorded examples do not place limitations on authority when the recorded generic instruction exists. In such cases, those recorded instructions give permission, and the recorded examples are only exemplary instances, not restrictions. However, when all we have is a recorded approved example of a certain corporate action, we know the instruction was given, otherwise, they would not have done what they did. We must use deductive reasoning by what is revealed without exceeding what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6) to reconstruct the instruction from only the recorded examples. However, in these cases, how can we know if recorded examples are indicating specific or generic authority for the church or for individuals today? We will carefully see if some guidelines can be established. It may appear silly that we should need to clarify some of these matters, but if we do not, false teachings and practices will result.

### **B. Rules And Guidelines For Binding Examples**

#### **1. The Rule Of Uniformity**

The instruction was specific if the examples are uniform and generic when not. In other words, if the examples show that the action was carried out with various means and methods from time to time, the instruction must have been generic. Conversely, if the action was carried out with exactly the same detail in every example, we can only conclude that the instruction must have been specific.

##### **a. Applied to tent making**

This applies to the earlier question about whether all Christians should be tentmakers. Though we see the example of some individuals being tentmakers, we also see examples of Christians with various other occupations. Since the examples are non-uniform, authority for individuals to make a living is generic: we can make money by whatever legitimate means we choose. Besides, even if the other recorded examples did not exist, the generic instruction for individuals to earn income by honest labor is recorded (Ephesians 4:28), so any recorded example would only exemplify, not restrict.

Note also that tent making is the action of individuals, not corporate action of the church as a body. Furthermore, we must consider the distinction between what is appointed by God and what is of human origin. Men began making tents even before the institution of the Feast Of Tabernacles. The fact that the inspired record shows that some Christians were tentmakers does not mean that God has hereby ordained tent making as the livelihood of all Christians.

##### **b. Applied to the Lord's Supper**

For another example, as briefly discussed earlier, in every instance recorded where the church observes the Lord's Supper, (there is only one, Acts 20:7) the day of observance was the first day of the week. As this is all we have to go on, the example is uniform, and we must conclude that God has specified the first day of the week for observing the Lord's Supper. We therefore cannot execute this on any other day.

Note also that the Lord's Supper is seen in scripture as a function of the corporate church assembled as a collective body. Furthermore, consider that the Lord's Supper originates from God, not from men (1 Corinthians 11:23). Men did not invent this memorial on their own, and there is no record that it was observed before Jesus instituted it on the Passover before His death.

Someone may argue that even though Acts 20:7 says the church came together to break bread (that is, observe the Lord's Supper) on the first day of the week, it does not say that they did not take the Lord's Supper on any of the other six days Paul and his companions were in Troas. Perhaps they did, however, authority must hereby come by a necessary inference, not merely a possible inference. We have also established the limiting power of the silence of scripture. Therefore, for us to observe the Lord's Supper on any other day on this basis or on the basis that examples presumably indicate optional action is to step out on what the Bible does not say. We must not do this, else, we exceed what is written.

## **2. The Rule Of Harmony**

The instruction was specific if the example is in harmony with all scripture and generic when not. In other words, if assuming the examples to be specific creates a conflict with other related scriptures, the instruction must have been generic, and the example is therefore not binding.

### **a. Applied to selling land and houses**

This applies to the earlier question about whether all Christians should sell their lands and houses and give the proceeds to the poor within the church. If this example is binding upon us today, then the instruction to do so must have been specifically appointed to all. However, this creates some conflict. If all Christians must sell their land and houses, then no faithful Christian today can own any land or houses. However, the New Testament elsewhere reveals that it is acceptable for Christians to own property with the proper attitude (Acts 5:4; 1 Corinthians 7:30, 31; Philemon 1:2). Moreover, if the example is taken as binding, then it would be sinful for anyone to own their house; we all must only rent or lease. However, if all people sell their houses and lands, then no one will have any house in which to live. We could only rent from someone else who is sinning by owning a house. By the rule of harmony, this example is not binding.

### **b. Applied to the Lord's Supper**

For another example, in every recorded instance that the disciples came together to take the Lord's Supper, it was always in an upstairs room (Mark 14:15, Acts 20:8). Does God mean this to be binding on the church today? No, other scriptures indicate that the place of worship is not important; worship in spirit and truth is what God desires (John 4:24). To assume that God specified eating the Lord's Supper only in an upper room conflicts other scripture, so it must have been generic. We can therefore expedite partaking the Lord's Supper wherever we choose to assemble.

## **3. The Rule Of Relevance**

The command was specific if a detail is relevant, material, or essential to the practice and generic if it is not. In other words, things that are not relevant or pertinent to a certain action are never appointed. Incidental matters are always generic and need to be distinguished from divine specification.

### **a. Applied to baptism**

For example, in every instance that the body of water in which one was baptized is revealed, it was always a naturally occurring flowing stream, not a stationary man-made pool. Does God mean this to be binding on individuals today? No, this is entirely incidental and has no relevance to the action at all. The instruction was therefore generic; we can expedite baptism in whatever body of water suitable for immersion we choose.

### **b. Applied to assembling**

Again, in the example of the assembly in Acts 20:8, Luke records that there were many lamps in the room. Since electricity had not yet been discovered, these would have been oil-flame lamps. However, it is not hereby binding on the church today that there be many oil lamps in our worship assemblies. Also, Luke records in verse 7 that Paul preached until midnight. However, it is not hereby binding in the church today that preachers must continue their speeches until midnight. These are merely informative facts of indifference, irrelevant to the various worship activities.

#### **4. The Rule Of Applicability**

The command was specific if it only applied to limited circumstances and generic if universally applicable. In other words, not everything taught in the gospel is possible to practice for all people in all places and at all times. If it is impossible for us to follow the example today, it must have been only specifically given to those in that circumstance.

##### **a. Applied to spiritual gifts**

For example, there are many instances recorded of Christians using miraculous gifts to perform works of healing, casting out demons, and prophecy. These actions cannot be duplicated today, so the instruction to do so had specific divine limitations. This is therefore not binding on Christians today.

##### **b. Applied to giving**

In Romans 15:26 we have the recorded example of the churches in Macedonia and Achaia sending a collection of contributions for the relief of needy saints, and scripture reveals no other authorized method for raising funds in the church other than by free will offerings on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-3). Moreover, we have the recorded example of churches financially supporting preachers (2 Corinthians 11:8). Since there are always in the world needy saints and gospel preachers needing wages, these New Testament examples are applicable and therefore binding in the church today.



## Questions And Thoughts For Review: Binding New Testament Examples

Be prepared to explain all your responses with scripture, utilizing the rules of establishing authority and binding examples.

1. In Acts 1:15-25, we have the example of an apostle being replaced. We do not appoint replacement apostles today. Should we not be following this example?
2. In Acts 1:26, lots were drawn to make a decision among early Christians. Is drawing lots to make decisions in the church a binding example for us today?
3. In Acts 6:1-5, we have the example of the church assigning six men to take care of widows. Following this example, should all churches today have six men assigned to take care of widows?
4. In Acts 6:6 and 13:3, men of the church laid their hands on those commissioned to a task. The teaching in regards to such a practice is part of what Paul calls elementary and foundational (Hebrews 6:1, 2). Since this is not only an approved example but also our instruction, why don't we "lay hands" on people today when they have been assigned some work in the church?
5. There are numerous examples of Christians fasting in the New Testament (Acts 13:2, 3; 14:3). Are these examples binding upon Christians today?
6. In Acts 13:51, the example is recorded of Paul and Barnabus shaking the dust off their feet seemingly in ceremonial protest of those who had driven them away. Is this action binding on us today when people send us away from them as we are trying to teach them the gospel?
7. In Acts 16, Paul had Timothy circumcised. This appears to be an approved apostolic example. Is circumcision hereby binding upon Christian men today?
8. In Acts 20:9, there was at least one window in the room where they met for worship. Is it binding that there must be a window in the place where we meet for worship today?
9. We have several recorded examples of Christians kneeling when they prayed (Acts 20:36; 21:5). Is it therefore binding today that we kneel when we pray?
10. Is it important that we be able to answer all these questions?

## VIII. Specific And Generic Terminology

### A. Definitions

Another basic characteristic of all language is the comparative specific and generic meanings of words and phrases.

"Specific" means precisely formulated and restricted, distinguished from others of a different type, form, class, or category. "Generic" means pertaining to each, any, and all of a class, kind, order, or type that apply to the term. Every word has a generic and a specific significance. For example, "table" is specific as a home furnishing item and distinguished from chairs, carpeting, lamps, appliances, or pictures on the wall. On the other hand, "table" is generic in that the term includes dinner tables, coffee tables, end tables, pool tables, and card tables. This is not church-of-Christ theology; this is a basic rule of all word-based communication.

In the study of logic, specific terminology is called the "categorical term." In the "Philosophy Pages," Kemerling explains, "Usually expressed grammatically as a noun or noun phrase, each categorical term designates a class of things... of any variety.... Thus, 'cows,' [is a] categorical [term]. Notice also that each categorical term cleaves the world into exactly two mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive parts: those things to which the term applies and those things to which it does not apply. For every class designated by a categorical term, there is another class, its complement, that includes everything excluded from the original class, and this complementary class can of course be designated by its own categorical term. Thus, 'cows' and 'non-cows' are complementary classes.... Everything in the world... belongs either to the class designated by a categorical term or to its complement; nothing is omitted."

In the third century A. D., a philosopher named Porphyry outlined a structured method of considering things in an increasingly more specific way. The method came to be called a Porphyrian Tree. His work eventually benefited taxonomy, the categorization of all living things. For example:

living things				non-living
animate			inanimate	
mammals		non-mammals		
land		marine		
cows	non-cows			
dairy	beef			

### B. The Characteristics Of Specific Terminology

To use a Bible illustration, note the Lord's specification for the Passover sacrifice offering:

*Exodus 12:5 Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats.*

The word here translated "lamb" simply means "one of the flock, a sheep (or a goat)," per the Revised Whittaker's Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English lexicon. Therefore, the second part of the verse is only a clarification of "lamb." Anyway, the categorical term would be the noun phrase "a healthy one-year-old male lamb." The complementary class would be literally everything in the world that is **not** a healthy one-year-old male lamb.

Therefore, specific terminology is limiting; it excludes and restricts. When a thing is specified all other things are automatically omitted. For another biblical example, when God specified Noah to build the ark out of gopher wood (Genesis 6:14), whatever that was, all other kinds of wood were automatically excluded. Furthermore, under Moses' law, God said that priests were to come from the tribe of Levi. He did not have to also list by name every other tribe from which priests were not to come. Specifying Levi already excluded all other tribes. This was discussed previously regarding the silence of the scriptures.

Some claim authority for almost anything as a church function by saying it praises and glorifies God or saying that it edifies and encourages people. With such logic, anything and everything would be authorized except that which is expressly forbidden, like adultery. A term that has no specific meaning or

limiting property in its application is a term misunderstood. That which authorizes too much authorizes nothing.

Moreover, specific instruction does not include as authoritative all the possible circumstances in which we could carry out the command:

- We pray at dinner time; this does not authorize church suppers.
- We might sing while we play a piano; this does not authorize instrumental music in worship.
- We can edify at a graduation ceremony; this does not authorize such in church services.
- We can teach at a political inauguration ceremony; this would not authorize such in the church (even though government is God-ordained).

### C. The Characteristics Of Generic Terminology

Generic instruction is loosing; it includes and permits. The means and methods of execution are at the discretion of the doer within the limits of the thing commanded. Generic commands are carried out with expediencies. An expediency is a means to an end, a method of performance, or a tool to aid the action. Expediencies never add to or take away from the thing being done. More about expediencies will be discussed later in this study.

By contrast, to the degree a command is specific, it is not expedited. We either do it or rebel against God.

Two extreme positions are held, both are wrong:

1. In order for a thing to be right we must have specific instruction authorizing it.
2. In order for a thing to be wrong we must have specific instruction condemning it.

A Porphyrian Tree is again utilized to illustrate the specific and generic nature of the Lord's command to teach the gospel (Mark 16:15):

affect			no effect
educate		medicate, etc	
<b>gospel (point of specification)</b>		secular	
Re: moral issues		theology	
Re: sexual sins	non-sexual		
Re: fornication	other		

Note that the fourth line and down are everything that is included in the command to preach the gospel. Administering influenza vaccines falls under the more generic "affect" and is not part of preaching the gospel. To teach knitting or car repair falls under the more generic "educate" and is not part of preaching the gospel. However, the command authorizes a preacher to admonish against fornication specifically, as that is part of the gospel message.

### D. Illustrating The Difference Between Specific And Generic Authority

We can further illustrate the difference between generic and specific authority. For example, if I tell my landscaper to plant an oak tree in my back yard, there are senses in which that is a specific command. Specifying my back yard indicates that he must not put the tree in the front or side yards. He also cannot plant a pine tree or some shrub. When I specify the kind of tree I want and where I want it, I do not have to also list all the other kinds of trees and plants I do not want and all the possible places I do not want it planted.

However, there are also senses in which this is a generic command. Anywhere in the back yard will meet the requirement, either on the left side, the right side, or in the middle. Also, any subspecies of oak will meet the requirement, either a red oak, a white oak, or a pin oak. He can plant a small tree or a large one from any nursery he chooses. He has the freedom to make these choices as he sees fit. In so doing, he is not acting without my authority but within it.

Now let's illustrate the difference between generic and specific authority with a biblical example. The New Testament is specific about music in worship. It says nowhere to make music in general in worship, it says specifically "sing" every time. Where authority is specific, silence does not permit. We do not need to have a verse that tells us instrumental music is forbidden, God has specified what kind of music He wants in worship, and that excludes all other kinds of music. We have no choice but to simply do it.

However, there is also a sense in which the command to sing is generic. To this extent, we have authority to expedite it as desired with whatever means and methods we may choose. We can sing in unison or in four-part harmony. We can sing standing up or sitting down. We can choose to use whatever songbook or no songbook at all. A songbook is only a tool inherent to singing. If I sing using a songbook, am I still just singing; nothing else has been added to what I am doing.

## **E. The Collective Church And The Individual Christian**

Authority is sometimes given specifically for individual Christians and sometimes specifically for the collective church as a body. When the party is specified to whom the instruction is given, it limits the authority to those individuals specifically. For example, certain instructions applied only to those with spiritual gifts or to elders or to women. Authority given to Christians as individuals does not apply to the church as a collective body. The Bible clearly distinguishes between action of the corporate body and that of individual Christians. For example, note how this distinction is made evident in the instructions concerning the care of needy widows:

*1 Timothy 5:16 If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.*

There are often at least two misconceptions regarding this, both are wrong:

1. Whatever a Christian individual can do, the church collectively can do.
2. Whatever the church cannot do, the Christian individual cannot do.

Being a Christian is more than being a part of the collective body; it is a way of life 24 hours a day. It governs every aspect and relationship in life: in business, at school, in the home, with family, in the community, and in civil government. As individuals, God has appointed us a place and a duty in all these things, and He expects us to fulfill his will in those capacities.

However, God has not ordained that the church as a body be involved in all those things. One verse seems to best describe the work God has ordained for the church as a collective body:

*1 Timothy 3:15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.*

The New Testament scriptures reveal that the primary function of the corporate church is to support the truth, that is, to proclaim the gospel. Further work ordained for the church includes the benevolence of needy Christians (2 Corinthians 9:1) and congregational worship (1 Corinthians 14:26). Functions beyond this God has appointed for individuals to perform.

As our study of authority continues, this specificity will at times come into application. Further investigation of the differentiation between the church as a body and the Christian as an individual is left to a separate study. For our immediate purposes, it should suffice to show there is a distinction.

## Questions And Thoughts For Review: Specific And Generic Terminology

1. What is the distinctive characteristic of the specific meaning of a word or phrase?
2. What is the distinctive characteristic of the meaning of a generic word or phrase?
3. When the specific meaning of a command or statement is replaced with a more generic, what is the result? Give an example from everyday life.
4. When the generic meaning of a command or statement is replaced with a more specific, what is the result? Give an example from everyday life.
5. Read Matthew 16:19 and explain how exchanging the specific and the generic will affect the binding and loosing of God's ordinances.
6. Consider the command to praise God (Romans 15:11). From a New Testament dictionary, what is the specific meaning of "to praise?"
7. What are some specific actions which would conform to the meaning? What are some specific actions which would not conform to the meaning?
8. Can you think of an example of a false teaching or practice in religion today as a result of confusing generic and specific terminology?
9. What has God ordained as the primary work of the church as a body?
10. Does the collective church have the authority to perform every function an individual Christian is authorized to do?

## IX. Expediencies

### A. What Is An Expediency?

The English adjective "expedient," has two definitions, each related to the other as follows:

1. "Suitable for achieving a particular end in a given circumstance."
2. "Characterized by concern with what is opportune; especially: governed by self-interest" (M-W)

The first definition refers to the means and methods we might use to carry out a certain action or achieve some result in a given situation. The second definition reflects that whatever convenient means and methods available to us at the time to bring about a desired effect are beneficial, profitable, helpful, and serving our personal interests.

The word rendered "expedient" in the KJV New Testament is SUMPHERO {soom-fer'-o}, defined as "1) to bear or bring together 2) to bear together or at the same time 2a) to carry with others 2b) to collect or contribute in order to help 2c) to help, be profitable, be expedient" (JHT). In the KJV, the word is also translated as to "profit," "bring together," "be better," and "be good." This word in the original Greek more closely matches the second English definition. Note the appearance of SUMPHERO in the following compared translations:

*KJV John 16:7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is **expedient** [SUMPHERO] for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.*

*NKJ John 16:7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is **to your advantage** that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.*

and

*KJV 2 Corinthians 8:10 And herein I give my advice: for this is **expedient** [SUMPHERO] for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago.*

*NKJ 2 Corinthians 8:10 And in this I give advice: It is **to your advantage** not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago.*

To express the specific concept of the first English definition of "expedient," the English translations seem to nowhere use this exact word. Instead, this idea is most vividly described in the following family of Greek words with their definitions as follows:

TELEO {tel-eh'-o} "1) to bring to a close, to finish, to end 1a) passed, finished 2) to perform, execute, complete, fulfill, (so that the thing done corresponds to what has been said, the order, command etc.) 2a) with special reference to the subject matter, to carry out the contents of a command 2b) with reference also to the form, to do just as commanded, and generally involving the notion of time, to perform the last act which completes a process, to accomplish, fulfill 3) to pay 3a) of tribute" (JHT). Examples of this word usage include:

*Luke 18:31 Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be **accomplished**."*

*James 2:8 If you really **fulfill** the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well;*

TELEIOO {tel-i-o'-o} "1) to make perfect, complete 1a) to carry through completely, to accomplish, finish, bring to an end 2) to complete (perfect) 2a) add what is yet wanting in order to render a thing full 2b) to be found perfect 3) to bring to the end (goal) proposed 4) to accomplish 4a) bring to a close or fulfillment by event 4a1) of the prophecies of the scriptures" (JHT). Examples of this word usage include:

*NAB John 4:34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to **accomplish** His work."*

*NAB Luke 2:39 When they had **performed** everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth.*

Conclusively, expediencies are the convenient and available means, methods, aids, and tools beneficial and helpful for us to carry out a particular command, perform some action, or achieve a needed result -- in other words: that which expedites. For example, logic is an expedient tool in the study of authority.

## **B. Rules Of Expediencies**

Review Thayer's definitions of SUMPHERO and TELEO and their scriptural usage and note the following rules which can be derived:

### **1. For a thing to be expedient, it must not add, subtract, or substitute.**

Mere tools and methods should not change or alter the action (1 Corinthians 4:6, 1 Samuel 15:15). Nothing more or less than the action specified should be accomplished. For example, a paint brush is merely a tool. If I paint a fence using a paint brush, I am still doing nothing more or less than painting a fence. However, if I move the fence or add a gate, I am now doing more than painting the fence. Moving the fence is a separate action, which is not part of painting it.

### **2. For a thing to be expedient, it must not be specified.**

You cannot obey advise; expediencies are always matters of choice. It is how to carry out an order, not the order itself. For example, to paint a fence, it is advisable to use a brush, a roller, or a sprayer, which I am free to choose at my convenience or discretion to make the job quicker or easier. However, with respect to a command specifically to paint the fence, to paint the fence or not paint the fence is not an option. I cannot lawfully choose not to paint the fence. To the extent that a command is specific, we cannot expedite; we can only do or not do (Genesis 6:14; Exodus 12:5). Expediencies always apply to the generic.

### **3. For a thing to be expedient, it must edify.**

Matters of choice should never tear down the church (1 Corinthians 10:23-33, 1 Corinthians 14:26). If a thing is merely a matter of judgment, personal preference, or human wisdom, one person's opinion is as good as another's. If one man forces his judgments upon the brethren when other more agreeable choices are available, this only generates strife. If the man is an elder, we surely ought to submit to his rule (Hebrews 13:17), but he also ought not overlord (1 Peter 5:3). Nothing good or beneficial is derived from this. Any such decision that could cause division in the body is sinful. It is better to work more for the common good.

### **4. For a thing to be expedient, it must not offend a weak brother.**

Non-essentials should not lead brothers into sin (1 Corinthians 8:7-13, 1 Corinthians 10:32). A particular choice made within the scope of our liberty ought not be one that makes the wrong impression for a weak brother, which might cause him to violate his conscience by taking part in what he believes is wrong. Anything causing another to sin is by no means profitable to him and therefore cannot be expedient.

### **5. For a thing to be expedient, it must be lawful.**

The means being used should come within the scope authorized (1 Chronicles 13:7-10; 15:2; 1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23). If nothing is altered and no one is made to stumble, then whatever is chosen to execute the generic command is sanctioned by the generic command. All expediencies, if they are truly expediencies, are lawful; it is merely up to human judgment and wisdom which choice is the best or most convenient. However, the method chosen to supposedly fulfill one command must not violate another.

## **C. Applications In Expediencies**

All sorts of activities have been attempted to be included in church functions on the basis that it assists in teaching the gospel. Some people think that if recreational activities can create an opportunity to teach, then it must not be wrong for the church to sponsor them. However, recreation is not an expediency for teaching, and the end does not justify the means. To the extent that recreational activity sometimes creates a learning environment, God authorizes individual Christians in this capacity (Hebrews 13:1, 2),

not the corporate body. Besides, we would like to think the gospel should be enough to draw men to Christ, not food and games.

Expedient things must be inherent to the action. For example, communication by the conveyance of words is an inherent part of teaching. In fact, it is impossible to teach without communicating. All known and currently unknown methods of communicating are therefore at our disposal to use in teaching. The apostles used the spoken word in every language and the hand-written word, but we are not limited by those examples. In today's age of technology, we have many more mediums for communicating.

How can we expedite the teaching of the gospel? What might be an exhaustive list of tools and methods of gospel teaching? These things are only tools, nothing is being added to the function performed, we are still only teaching the gospel if we use any of these means:

- Oral communication, written materials, typewriters, workbooks, tracts, posters, maps, charts, public classes, private classes, children's classes, men's classes, women's classes, boys classes, girls classes, chalk boards, white boards, overhead projector, film strips, telephone, radio, television, Internet, mail, e-mail, fax, microphones, audio recordings, video recordings, computer presentations, photo copiers, gospel meetings.

Things not expedient add to subtract from or substitute the action. Examples of things not expedient to gospel teaching are:

- Suppers: Eating food is added. Eating is not inherent to teaching.
- Sewing parties: Sewing is added. Sewing is not a part of the gospel.
- Missionary societies: An organization is added. "Teach" does not mean "form an organization." The organization has been divinely appointed.
- Summer camps: Fun and games are added. Recreation is not a part of the gospel.
- Civil ceremonies: Human traditions are added. Something more than teaching is being accomplished.

These functions in and of themselves are not wrong for us to practice as individuals (with the exception of missionary societies which supplant the church), but there is no biblical authority for the church as a collective body to perform them. Gospel teaching can obviously be done along with these and other various activities, but the other activities are in addition to the gospel teaching. We must determine whether the other activities are authorized for the church as a body or only for individuals.

For instance, we can teach when we sing, but we are doing more than teaching, we are also singing. However, we have authority to sing as a collective group (Ephesians 5:19). By contrast, Jesus taught His disciples when He washed their feet (John 13:12), but He was also doing more than teaching; He was also washing feet. There is no authority for the church to be in the practice of washing feet. Do we have authority to bring foot washing into the worship services or make it a part of our collective function because Jesus did it? No, because Jesus did this as an individual, not as the action of a corporate body. Authority for us to do this remains only on an individual basis. If we are going to follow Jesus' example, we will do it the way Jesus did it: on an individual basis.

## **D. The Use Of Tools**

To continue the landscaping illustration from our generic and specific discussions earlier in this study, a necessary and unavoidable part of tree planting is digging a hole in the ground to put it in. One way of digging a hole is with your bare hands. A better way is to use a tool: a hand tool or even a power tool. When I order my landscaper to plant a tree, I also authorize him to dig a hole and to apply any means, methods, and tools useful to the task, even if I do not explicitly mention digging a hole or using a tool. If he uses a shovel to dig the hole, he is still not doing anything more or less than planting a tree.

The authority for a tool comes from what we are using it to do. The use justifies the tool; the tool does not justify the use. If what we are doing is authorized, any tools we use to do it are also authorized. If what we are doing is unauthorized, no tool used to do it can make it right.

It will be argued that a piano or any other instrument is also just a tool for singing. You have to consider what you are using the tool to do. You can play music on a piano. If I play a piano while I sing, I have added something else: I am now singing and playing. Unless what I have added is also authorized, it must not be added. We cannot find authority for adding instrumental music to our singing in worship in the New Testament.



Furthermore, the church is authorized to own a computer. A lot of good Bible study, communication, and presentation software is available, which the church can use for authorized purposes. Most computers also come with some amusing video games installed as part of the standard software package. Some people will argue that, since the church has these games available, we can invite all the young people together for church game night using this computer. Meanwhile, we can do some Bible teaching, too. However, these video games are not teaching tools. Remember: the tool does not authorize the use; the use authorizes the tool. The church has no authority to do such a thing, although an individual can have game-night in his home or picnic in the park with whomever he wants and either include or not include gospel teaching during that time.

In leading a popular children's Bible story song, a teacher uses a box of crayons as an illustration to teach a lesson about remembering Jesus by seeing the different colors. At the end of the song, the teacher puts the box of crayons back in its place with other visual aids in the classroom to be used again at a later date. Nothing other than teaching has been performed; the box of crayons is a simple expediency. Now consider if the teacher decides to buy each child in the class a box of crayons they can take home. The difference now is that more than teaching is being accomplished, we are also giving toys as a gift which the children can take home and use as they please. This is no longer simply an expediency. An individual can certainly give to any child any toy he wants and either include or not include Bible teaching when doing so, but such activity has no place in the church as a body.

While we are teaching the gospel, there may be other authorized things we can do as individuals or as a body, but those are not authorized by the command to teach. We must be prepared to show where the biblical authority is found for those other things we might do while teaching. If authority cannot be found for what we are doing as a church, we must stop it.

## **E. Where Will It Lead?**

Regarding any expediency, we need to ask, "Where will it lead?" If a simple children's drama skit is accepted as a teaching expediency, the logical end includes auditions, set designers, set builders, a costume department, stage hands, script writers, directors, and choreographers for a fully developed theatrical production. There will be no logical point at which to say we have gone too far; the whole camel will have to be swallowed. Furthermore, if at the end of such a production, the natural reaction for audience is to applaud, we are obviously doing more than teaching; we are also entertaining. However, a mere expediency would not add anything to the action performed.

Consider another idea. If the church hands out ink pens with a scripture or the telephone number of the meeting place printed on it and considers it a teaching expediency, then where else can we put such information and call it "teaching?" By logical rights, we should therefore also be able to put it on give-away coffee mugs, key chains, ball caps, tee shirts, volley balls, baseballs, rulers, pocket knives, screw drivers, flashlights, or any other imaginable trinket or party favor that we might pick up at a secular trade show. No one will be able to reasonably proclaim that we can put it here but we cannot put it there. These things pertain to much more than teaching. We might easily see the fallacy of sporting equipment and hand tools, because in addition to the teaching information conveyed, we are also giving a gift whose primary purpose has nothing inherently to do with Bible teaching. However, with the pen, the fallacy in principle may be harder to detect, since the recipient could certainly use it to write Bible lesson notes. Nevertheless, by giving the pen as a take-home gift, he can also use it for whatever additional purposes he desires.

Consider yet another example. Suppose a church Bible class instructor is teaching children about how Jesus claims to be the bread of life. In doing so, the teacher passes out bread for all the children to eat, thinking it is just a teaching expediency. If this is a legitimate teaching tool, then we can also feed them lamb when teaching about the Passover, grapes when teaching about the Lord's vineyard, fish when teaching about feeding the 5000, olives, corn, quail, milk, honey, figs, cakes, or any other lawful food or beverage mentioned in the Bible. We can effectively provide a full course meal and call it nothing more than teaching. There will be no logical point at which to stop. Obviously, this accomplishes more than teaching, so none of these things are actually expediences for teaching.

A typical argument in favor of any such thing is "I don't see anything wrong with it." We have already established that this is not the right approach.

Now consider if a Bible teacher in a church assembly hands out workbooks or lesson sheets that contain instruction, scriptures, and questions to stimulate spiritual thinking. Consider also if an instructor hands

out cartoon pictures of Bible story events and characters for children to color. As long as the specific essence of Bible teaching is not added to, subtracted from, or substituted, these things will lead to nothing other than more things like these, such as charts, graphs, and maps. These are expedencies for teaching.

We ought not discourage Bible class teachers from using innovative methods or unusual techniques, as well as unique visual and auditory aids. However, in every case, we need to objectively and honestly ask ourselves whether what we at first think is a mere teaching aid is not in fact somewhat more than that. If the aspect of entertainment, amusement, recreation, refreshment, or something else is introduced, we had better think again. All such aspects indicate carnal mindedness rather than spirituality.

*Deuteronomy 4:2 You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.*

*Proverbs 30:6 Do not add to His words Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.*

*Revelation 22:18, 19 For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*

The use of expedencies is an area where the one true church is going to be particularly distinguished from denominational churches and (accommodatively speaking) "mainstream" or "liberal" churches of Christ. In these institutions, all manner of activities and devices are often utilized, until they have more the appearance of a carnival or exhibition than a church.

## Questions And Thoughts For Review: Expediencies

1. Give a brief explanation of the meaning of "expediency."
2. Briefly list five rules of expediencies.
3. To the extent that a command is specific, can we apply expediencies?
4. To the extent that a command is generic, are there any limits to valid expediencies?
5. Is it a sin to use poor judgment?
6. You can teach the gospel to a friend while you are playing golf together. Is golf a gospel teaching tool? Explain your answer.
7. You can learn selflessness and patience through a volleyball game. Is volleyball therefore a teaching expediency? Explain your answer.
8. The church as a body has the authority to expedite teaching the gospel by the distribution of written material. If we write Bible verses on soccer balls and distribute them to the young people, is it merely a teaching method? Explain your answer.
9. Does the church as a collective body have the authority to pass out teaching pamphlets in the neighborhood? Validate your response with scripture.
10. Does the church as a collective body have the authority to conduct a free neighborhood car wash, as long as teaching pamphlets are given to the drivers?

## X. Reasoning And Argumentation

### A. Sound Reasoning

Now that we have introduced necessary inferences, commands, statements, and approved examples from scripture as authoritative along with specific and generic word meanings, we will now consider the various ways in which from these we derive sound conclusions. We have already discussed reasoning; we now turn our attention the soundness of our reasoning.

*2 Timothy 1:13 Hold fast the pattern of **sound words** which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.*

"Words" here is translated from the familiar LOGOS, but the word "sound" is from HUGIAINO {hoog-ee-ah'-ee-no}, from whence we get "hygiene," meaning "1) to be sound, to be well, to be in good health 2) metaph. 2a) of Christians whose opinions are free from any mixture of error 2b) of one who keeps the graces and is strong" (JHT). There is therefore a sound, wholesome, and healthy way to reason from the scriptures, and there are also perverted, corrupt, and vile ways to handle scripture.

#### 1. The Role Of Logic

We refer once again to the principles of logic. In the "Philosophy Pages," Garth Kemerling explains, "Our fundamental unit of what may be asserted or denied is the proposition (or statement) that is typically expressed by a declarative sentence." Logic accepts that every proposition will be either true or false, but truth or error is not the concern of logic. The truthfulness of a proposition must first be confirmed on the basis of some standard of authority. Early logicians call this declaration a "judgment." We have already established that Jesus, through the revelation of scripture, is our standard of judging the truthfulness of any religious proposition.

The word "proposition" does not appear in our English translations, however, the equivalent words that do appear are "statement" or "saying." Consider these scriptural examples of logical propositions:

*Galatians 5:14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the **statement**, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."*

*1 Timothy 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:8 It is a trustworthy **statement**...*

In the cases cited, the word translated "statement" is the familiar LOGOS, and Thayer further explains that it "embodies a conception or idea,... what is declared,... matter under discussion." When Paul sometimes adds in scripture that a statement is "deserving full acceptance," he is literally identifying it as a divinely true proposition.

Kemerling further states, "The chief concern of logic is how the truth of some propositions is connected with the truth of another. Thus, we will usually consider a group of related propositions. An argument is a set of two or more propositions related to each other in such a way that all but one of them (the premises) are supposed to provide support for the remaining one (the conclusion). The transition or movement from premises to conclusion, the logical connection between them, is the inference upon which the argument relies." In an abbreviated explanation, an argument with exactly three propositions (two premises and a conclusion) and three categorical terms is called a "categorical syllogism." Conclusions thus derived typically become premises for further argumentation. The book of Hebrews is an example of a masterpiece in logical reasoning.

It becomes apparent that the validity of inferences must be understood. Kemerling identifies two separate kinds of inferences: "deductive" and "inductive." Deductive reasoning guarantees that the conclusion is true if the premise is true and the inference is valid. There is no other possible outcome. On the other hand, inductive reasoning is when it is only possible or probable that the conclusion is true; it might be true and it might be false. Further reasoning or a judgment would be required to confirm the truth of the conclusion with certainty. In religious reasoning, only the perfect deductive inference is authoritative; this is a technical description of the "necessary inference." Anything else steps outside the bounds of scripture. For this reason, it is important to examine the characteristics of deductive reasoning.

## 2. Sound Arguments

A valid deductive argument is one having a perfect inference leading from the premise to the conclusion. Kemerling continues, "Notice that the validity of the inference of a deductive argument is independent of the truth of its premises; both conditions must be met in order to be sure of the truth of the conclusion. Of the eight distinct possible combinations of truth and validity, only one is ruled out completely: The only thing that cannot happen is for a deductive argument to have true premises and a valid inference but a false conclusion." Therefore, only by a valid deductive argument, that is, a necessary inference, we can be absolutely certain that our conclusion is true. Kemerling presents the following diagram:

Premises	Inference	Conclusion
True	Valid	True
		<b>XXX</b>
	Invalid	True
		False
False	Valid	True
		False
	Invalid	True
		False

The easiest way to see this is with illustrations. Secular illustrations are presented first, and biblical illustrations are presented afterward. Our present purpose is to consider only the characteristics of sound arguments. Sometimes the soundness of reasoning is easier to recognize with a secular illustration. This is essentially the power of the parable. We intuitively understand rocks and squirrels and birds, but when religious ideas or superstitions are the subject, sound reasoning sometimes vanishes away. If we can identify sound reasoning in earthly things, it will be easier to identify it in spiritual things. The following syllogism is an example of sound reasoning (Premise = true, Inference = valid, Conclusion = true):

- P: Sarah is a legal attorney;  
 I: All legal attorneys have gone to law school;  
 C: Therefore, Sarah has gone to law school.

First, some authority on legal attorneys must declare the necessary credentials for anyone to become such. We could all agree to the truthfulness of this premise. The inference being likewise valid, we could all agree on the conclusion without dispute. Now consider a biblical example of sound reasoning; the conclusion is unavoidable and forced:

- P: Philip preached Jesus to a confused Ethiopian treasurer (Acts 8:31, 35);  
 I: This preaching convinced the treasurer that he needed to be baptized (vs. 36);  
 C: Therefore, the preaching of Jesus must reveal the necessity of baptism.

In the first example, notice how Sarah and law school are tied together in the inference. The job of the inference is to make this vital connection; without it, we only have a collection of unrelated propositions, not an argument. For example:

- A hawk is a bird;
- The moon is made of cheese;
- A wolf is a predator.

These are all nothing more than disjointed propositions, some true, some not true. The central statement makes no connection between hawks and predators or between birds and wolves. Though this is obviously no valid argument, when the same type of reasoning is used in religion, people will sometimes accept it.

## **B. Unsound Arguments**

### **1. False Premises With Valid Inferences**

Let's now examine some unsound arguments. First and most obviously, consider a false premise:

- P: All birds fly;  
I: Rabbits do not fly;  
C: Therefore, a rabbit is not a bird.

Consider also:

- P: All birds fly;  
I: Penguins do not fly;  
C: Therefore, a penguin is not a bird.

First, note that these arguments contain an indisputable reasoning process from premise to conclusion, illustrating that the validity of the inference is independent of the truthfulness of the premise. Notice also that, with a false premise, the conclusion might be true and it might be false; we cannot be certain about truth on the basis of an argument with a false premise, regardless of whether the inferences are valid or invalid. For example, we only know the conclusion about the rabbit is true and the conclusion about the penguin is false because of what we know about these animals apart from these arguments. Now look at a biblical example:

- P: Baptism is a work (Acts 2:38);  
I: We are not saved by works (Ephesians 2:8, 9);  
C: Therefore, baptism has nothing to do with our salvation.

We discussed earlier a fallacy of ambiguity called, "equivocation," where a word with a dual meaning is used in one sense in one statement but used in the other sense in a second statement. To explain, "work" has two meanings: 1) works of merit, where the reward is considered wages duly earned, and 2) works of condition, where the reward is considered an unearned gift to one merely meeting established criteria. Here, the premise is true only if a work of condition is the sense. However, if the works are in different senses between the propositions, the inference is invalid, having no connectivity. Now, if the work in the premise is taken to be that of merit, the inference becomes valid, but the premise becomes false. This fallacy can be very deceitful to the unsuspecting or naïve.

An argument with a false premise can appear deceptively convincing when presented with emphasis on the soundness of the inference, which is the process occurring between the premise and the conclusion. The wise Bible student will carefully check the scriptures first for truthfulness of the premise.

### **2. True Premises With Invalid Inferences**

Now let's examine a true premise coupled with an invalid inference. Again, the outcome might be true and it might be false; we cannot be certain on the basis of this argument alone:

- P: Strawberries are red,  
I: Cherries are red,  
C: Therefore, strawberries are cherries.

Though the first two propositions are true, the implied inference between them is that all fruits alike in color are alike in every other way. From what we know about fruit apart from this argument, we know the inference is invalid. However, as stated previously, this kind of faulty reasoning can sometimes arrive at a true conclusion:

- P: Cougars are tawny-brown,  
I: Pumas are tawny-brown,  
C: Therefore, cougars are pumas.

The implied inference is that all cats alike in color are alike in every other way. We know the conclusion is true, not on the basis of this argument, but from what we otherwise know about cougars and pumas. However, consider the problem that occurs when the subjects are not so well known:

- P: All widgets are blue,  
 I: All gizmos are blue,  
 C: Therefore, all widgets are gizmos.

Since we don't really know anything about widgets and gizmos, the conclusion may be false or it may very well be true; we just cannot know for sure based on this argument alone. This kind of reasoning can easily become a convincing method of false teachers. When a false teacher cites example after example of such arguments where the conclusion is otherwise known to be true, the hearer is more likely to unwittingly accept the reasoning when the conclusion happens to be false. Look now at a biblical example:

- P: If we continue in the Lord's word, we are disciples indeed (John 8:31); if we continue not, we are not disciples;  
 I: If you know these things and do them, you are blessed (John 13:17); if you don't know nor do them, you are not blessed;  
 C: Therefore, all if-then statements are invertible.

Simply because many if-then statements are invertible does not necessarily infer that all are invertible. (If-then statements are essentially compound propositions). James 1:26 says, "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue..., this man's religion is worthless." Obviously, even if he does bridle his tongue, it is not necessarily true that his religion is not worthless, if he persistently sins other than by the tongue. Nevertheless, false teachers will sometimes attempt to justify their arguments by using this invalid conclusion as a premise in another argument. Consider another biblical example:

- P: The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28);  
 I: People formerly disputed and perverted the Sabbath; today they dispute and pervert marriage;  
 C: Therefore, marriage was made for man, not man for marriage.

Simply because we argue about various things does not infer any connection between them. We argue whether there is intelligent life elsewhere in the universe and whether a tomato is a fruit or a vegetable. One has absolutely no connection with the other, so nothing derived from one can be applied to the other with validity. You cannot take something said about one thing in scripture and arbitrarily apply it to something else entirely different. Nevertheless, this argument has been utilized to suggest that, in certain situations, a man can put away the wife to which he is lawfully bound for reasons other than fornication.

Note that an inference is usually not openly stated but hidden in the propositions. If the inference is not plainly stated, it might be much easier to miss that it is invalid, which would make the argument appear acceptable. Consider this example:

- P: Timothy had hands laid on him by those in the eldership (1 Timothy 4:14);  
 I: Timothy had hands laid on him by Paul, a bachelor (2 Timothy 1:6);  
 C: Therefore, a bachelor can be an elder.

The first two propositions are entirely true, being direct quotes from scripture. However, the unstated inference of the conclusion is that in every instance that Timothy ever had hands laid on him, it must have been by elders. When it is actually expressed in words, it is easy to see that it is not necessarily so. This is not "deductive" but "inductive" reasoning, where the inference is merely based on something possible or even remotely probable. This is an abuse of scripture and invalid for establishing authority.

### **3. False Premises With Invalid Inferences**

Consider the following secular example:

- P: A bat is a type of bird;  
 I: All birds fly;  
 C: Therefore, bats can fly.

As before, to understand the fallacy of this argument, we must apply what we know about bats and birds from sources external to the argument. Note also, the conclusion could be true or it could be false. In this case, the conclusion happens to be true, even with both a false premise and an invalid inference. This kind of reasoning is certainly not viable for establishing religious authority.

Now consider a spiritual example:

- P: Brother Smith teaches falsely about withdrawing from disorderly Christians (2 Thessalonians 3:6);  
I: Smith also teaches about marriage and divorce (Matthew 19:9);  
C: Therefore, Smith teaches falsely about marriage and divorce.

For our discussion, consider that the premise is false; Smith actually teaches the truth about withdrawing. Now suppose a brother disagrees with Smith's teaching on both withdrawing and divorce. According to the inference, instead of directly refuting Smith on divorce, he simply discredits him on the subject of withdrawing. This is nothing more than prejudice. Smith may very well teach error on divorce, but if so, it is not because he teaches error on withdrawing. Kemerling, in his "Philosophy Pages," refers to this as a fallacy *ad hominem* (literally, "to the person"), "in which we are encouraged to reject a proposition because it is the stated opinion of someone regarded as disreputable in some way." Even if the premise were true, there is no legitimate reason to conclude he must also teach error on anything else. In the church today, truthful statements of a brother are sometimes categorically rejected because others have rightfully or wrongfully marked him as a heretic. As Kemerling summarizes: "Again, personality is irrelevant to truth." The apostle Paul had to contend with prejudicial attitudes among some who were seeking to discredit him (2 Corinthians 10:10).

This is only a small sampling of the various kinds of faulty reasoning. In the "Philosophy Pages," Kemerling describes seventeen different varieties of informal fallacies. He states, "If we can identify several of the most common patterns of incorrect reasoning, we are less likely to slip into them ourselves or to be fooled by anyone else." He also describes 256 distinctive categorical syllogism forms, of which only 15 are valid. Further examination of this is recommended but beyond our scope in this study. Hopefully, this brief view will help make us more aware of error in religion today. The New Testament epistles are full of warnings to the saints in this regard:

*Romans 16:17, 18 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.*

*1 Corinthians 14:20, 21 Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature. In the law it is written: "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me," says the Lord.*

*2 Corinthians 11:3, 4 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted -- you may well put up with it! (NKJ)*

*Ephesians 4:14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;*

*Ephesians 5:6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*

*Colossians 2:4 I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument.*

*1 Timothy 4:1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,*

*2 Timothy 3:13, 14 But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them,*

*2 Peter 1:16 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.*

*1 John 2:26 These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.*



## C. Resolving Doctrinal Disputes

We previously discussed differences in opinions, judgment, and matters of indifference. However, doctrinal disputes over Bible reasoning will inevitably occur. Some people will say a thing is authorized and others will say it is not. This is not surprising, as doctrinal disputes were abounding even in the days of the apostles. We should be able to learn much about handling such disputes by observing how the early Christians dealt with them.

There are various kinds of disputes; some are worthy, and some are worthless. Jesus says true worshippers serve Him in spirit and in truth. Expounding on this, we must have both the right doctrine and the right attitude, the knowledge and the zeal, the mind and the heart.

*John 4:24 God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in **spirit** and **truth**.*

*1 Corinthians 14:15 What is the outcome then? I will pray with the **spirit** and I will pray with the **mind** also; I will sing with the **spirit** and I will sing with the **mind** also.*

*Romans 10:2 For I testify about them that they have a **zeal** for God, but not in accordance with **knowledge**.*

*Galatians 6:1 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are **spiritual**, restore such a one in a **spirit of gentleness**; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.*

*Ephesians 4:15 But speaking the **truth** in **love**, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,*

Since our doctrinal convictions and our attitudes are independent, four different combinations are possible. Kemerling presents a similar idea involving beliefs and emotions, which is slightly altered for our purposes here.

### 1. Same belief; same attitude:

There is no dispute here, no conflict. This is fellowship.

*Philippians 2:1 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.*

### 2. Same belief; different attitude:

In this case, the parties will continue in pointless bickering over terms describing the same thing. Opinionated and arrogant, one or the other, they will never through patience both understand that they are actually in total agreement. This is consistent with the verbal dispute discussed earlier.

*Titus 3:9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.*

### 3. Different belief; same attitude:

In this situation, two outcomes are possible, depending on the attitude. First, if their attitude is that they really don't care if they agree, they will agree to disagree. This is the unity in diversity doctrine discussed earlier. However, if their attitude is that they want to agree, this is a worthy dispute: what Kemerling calls a "genuine dispute." He writes, "Genuine disputes involve disagreement about whether or not some specific proposition is true. Since the people engaged in a genuine dispute agree on the meaning of the words by means of which they convey their respective positions, each of them can propose and assess logical arguments that might eventually lead to a resolution of their differences."

*Acts 15:5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses." The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. After there had been much debate,...*

vs. 25 ...it seemed good to us, having become of one mind,...

#### **4. Different belief; different attitude:**

Here, the individuals have so little common ground that meaningful discussion is not likely to even occur. Though one party may be open to reason, if the other is not willing to consider the possibility that he might be wrong, he will end the discussion. This is self-will.

*James 3:17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.*

The word here rendered "reasonable" is not a word derived from LOGOS but is EUPEITHES {yoo-pi-thace'}, which Thayer defines as "easily obeying, compliant." The lexicon of Louw-Nida explains it further as, "pertaining to being easily persuaded, with the implication of being open to reason or willing to listen," hence, "easy to be entreated" (KJV). A person who claims he knows he is right and thus has no need of further study is not being reasonable. A person unapproachable and no longer willing to discuss a matter does not abide in the "wisdom from above."

## Questions And Thoughts For Review: Reasoning and Argumentation

1. What does it mean to be "sound" in reasoning?
2. What is the role of logic in the study of authority?
3. In the study of argumentation, what is a proposition?
4. An argument is formed with a premise and a conclusion. What is the process called which connects them together?
5. The premise is the starting point for all argumentation. In religious matters, how do we determine if a premise is true? How do we determine if an inference is valid?
6. What is the only possible condition that will guarantee a true conclusion in every argument?
7. Is it possible to reach a true conclusion by beginning with a false premise? Either way, can you know which one it is by the argument?
8. Is all arguing bad?
9. Describe briefly what is required to resolve a dispute.
10. James describes the "wisdom from above" as "peaceable." What does that mean? Are we being peaceable if we put up with unsound reasoning among brethren in the church to avoid conflict?

## XI. Conclusion

This study has taken us through some fundamental guidelines of Bible study; basic tools of interpreting scripture have been presented. These concepts should influence every other investigation we undertake on a religious subject in scripture. Whether we study the plan of salvation, the operation of the Holy Spirit, or the organization of the church, these rules will apply.

We may be asking if God really intends that our approach to studying His word be this analytical. Does He actually expect us to recognize the difference between direct and indirect authority, generic and specific terminology, or individual and corporate action? Isn't this just a bunch of complicated theology not intended for average people in everyday life? Consider this: the people of Berea in Paul's day were probably not much different in their ability to reason and understand than anyone else in any other time or place. Observe what is said about them:

*Acts 17:11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*

The original word here translated "searched" is ANAKRINO {an-ak-ree'-no}, defined by J. H. Thayer as, "(1) to examine or judge (1a) to investigate, examine, enquire into, scrutinize, sift, question (1a1) specifically in a forensic sense of a judge to hold an investigation (1a2) to interrogate, examine the accused or witnesses (1b) to judge of, estimate, determine the excellence or defects of any person or thing." This word has the same root from which we get our English noun, adjective, and verb: "crisis," "critical," and "criticize." This does not describe the casual observer, but it is used as a legal term of one who critically, technically, and systematically gathers information and judges on the basis of evidence. The Holy Spirit commends this attitude on the Bereans and thereby enjoins it upon us.

In all reality, this process is no more complicated than other language exercises we accept in secular matters for all people as a part of everyday life. However, when it comes to religion, most people apparently don't want to put forth the small amount of effort required.

To be honest, the ordinances of God are not that complicated. His simple instruction is that we follow only His word, nothing else. His word tells us that we all have a common need: the forgiveness of sins. It also tells us that a promise awaits those who serve Him in truth: eternal life. These blessings are found only in Christ and His church: the body of Christ. His word simply tells us that God adds us to His church after faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. His word further describes the work of that church to be teaching the gospel to all mankind and providing benevolence for needy saints. Its worship activities are simply comprised of praying, teaching, singing, giving, and communion. Its organization is simply Christ as its head with elders to oversee the local functioning body and deacons to serve. Its members manifest the fruits of the Spirit in their daily lives. That is about as complicated as it needs to get; it is not difficult to understand or follow.

Man, however, is the one who complicates the matter, not God. Man inserts his bylaws, creeds, catechisms, and prayer books, which God has not authorized. Man introduces new worship modes and church functions, which God has not prescribed. Man adds layers to the church's government, which God has not appointed. Man adds revisions to the terms of admission into the church, which God has not instructed. We have no authority to make these alterations to the ordinances of God, and to do so brings us under condemnation before God.

So what is this all about; where does this leave us? After the Preacher made a thorough investigation of all things, he had this to say:

*Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.*

Let us diligently strive together in unity to serve God with singleness of heart, renouncing our own will and simply submitting to His. Let us follow His precepts alone, living, working, and worshiping according to his authority.

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Some material in this study is derived or directly quoted from the following texts, which are suggested for further study and additional information:

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