

# Scriptural Authority

## Introduction

1. Some of the most vital questions we face as a local church and as individual Christians relate to the importance of **doing** God's will.
  - a. The organisation, work and worship of the church – what is God's will in these matters?
  - b. The home, work, relationships, morality – can we know what God requires of us?
2. However, many will have us believe that any insistence upon strict obedience to the teachings of the Bible is legalism and contrary to the principles of the NT.
  - a. Our faith and love for God is all that really counts!
  - b. Its in the Bible!
  - c. Its not condemned!
3. One of the aims of this lesson is to establish that, though He is a God of grace, the Lord expects strict and careful obedience from those that would serve Him.
4. We will also aim to show how we can know what God expects from us, His people, as a church and in our individual lives.

## I. Is There a Need for Scriptural Authority?

A. From Matt. 7:21-23, who does Jesus say will enter the heavenly kingdom?

1. **Thelema**; “signifies (a) objectively, ‘that which is willed, of the will of God,’... the fulfilling being a sign of spiritual relationship to the Lord” (Vine). Mark 3:35; John 6:40; Ephesians 5:17.
2. The Greek word **Anomia** according to Thayer is the “condition of without law... because ignorant of it... (and/or – parenthesis mine) violating it”.
3. “In spite of all their professions they had been evil doers. Their religion expended itself in professions and prayers... It is evident from this passage that many are self-deceived” (PNT).

B. Are we capable of knowing God's will by feelings and guesses, according to Isa. 55:8-9?

1. “But at the same time that this passage, refers primarily to the subject of pardon, and should be interpreted as having a main reference to that, it is also true of the ways of God in general. His ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are not ours in regard to his plans... He has plans for accomplishing his purposes which are different from ours” (Barnes).

C. “No one knows the things of God except \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_” 1 Cor. 2:11.

D. From where did the words that Paul wrote and spoke come, based on 1 Cor. 2:12, 13, and 16?

1. In connection with the above passage, Mark Dunagan in his commentary writes:

- a. “The above argument contradicts those that set aside Scripture, and then boldly claim that they ‘really’ know how God feels about a subject... The case that Paul has made is unbreakable. The ONLY way to know what is on God's mind is for God to reveal it by the Spirit, and have it recorded... And that's the Bible! The Bible tells us EXACTLY how God feels about things. God has no other view concerning a biblical subject, than the view that has been revealed”.

2. Though some today might use this passage in claiming direct revelation from God, it was to Paul and the other apostles that God revealed His truth directly through the Holy Spirit, as Christ had promised – John 15:12-15; Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:4-8; 1 Peter 1:10-12; Eph. 3:3-5.

E. How is the man of God to be equipped for every good work? 2 Tim.3:16-17 cp. Eph. 2:10; Psalm 119:105.

## Summary

- \* It is important that we come to know the will of God through the study of the Bible, and knowing His will we must obey it (Lk. 6:46).
- \* However, we must also answer two important questions: Is the Bible intended to be a loose or strict guide? Are we making the same mistakes as the Pharisees when seeking to strictly follow the Bible?

## II. Is it Legalism to Insist Upon Scriptural Authority?

- A. When proof of religious authority is requested, the charge of legalism, along with nit-picking and acting pharisaical, is leveled at the requester by denominational-minded people, whether or not they are members of what we would call a denomination.
1. The Collins English Dictionary's entry on legalism describes it as, "overly strict or rigid adherence to the law or to a religious or moral code".
  2. This definition conjures up in the minds of many Bible readers the sect of the Pharisees, one of the two most prominent religious groups at the time of Jesus – the other being the Sadducees – known for their rigid system of doctrine and tradition.
- B. However, it was not for being legalistic and insisting on keeping the Mosaic Law in every detail that the Pharisees were condemned by Christ, as is often assumed, and wrongly used against those that advocate the importance of scriptural authority.
1. What was actually the sin of the Pharisees in Matt. 15:6-9?
  2. The Pharisees, along with the scribes, were guilty of teaching the Law while failing to do what according to Matt. 23:1-4?
    - a. "They enunciated the Law, they enjoined obedience to it in the minutest particulars, and yet they themselves continually, in the most important points... infringed, neglected, evaded it... Paul, himself a strict Pharisee, denounces in stern language such inconsistent professors (Rom. 2:21-23)" (Pulpit).
  3. Did Jesus in Matt. 23:23-24 rebuke the Pharisees for insisting on tithes and herbs? Did He encourage them to begin "eating the gnats"?
    - a. "The gnat and the camel, which were alike unclean, stand at the extremities of the scale of comparative size. Our Lord uses a proverbial expression to denote the inconsistency which would avoid the smallest ceremonial defilement, but would take no account of the gravest moral pollution" (Pulpit).
- D. Those that would accuse those that insist on religious authority as being pharisaical are greatly mistaken and, whether consciously or not, only disparage the need for and process of establishing scriptural authority.
1. Does it matter whatever the motive on the question of authority? What was Jesus' attitude? Matthew 21:23; 22:15-22.
  2. Whose responsibility is it to show proof of authority for church and individual action? Col. 3:17; Jas. 1:22.
- E. The error of the Pharisees was their false claim of devotion to God. Today, many claim that sincerity and profession of faith in Christ is all that matters, rather than the need for strict rules for establishing authority.
1. To whom is Jesus the author of salvation? Hebrews 5:8-9.
  2. How is faith and a Love for God demonstrated? James 2:14-226; 1 John 5:3.
  3. What two priests were struck down by God and why in Lev. 10:1-3?
  4. Why was Uzza killed, based on the two accounts in 2 Sam. 6:1-8/1 Chron. 13:1-12?
    - a. Note the emotion and sincerity of that occasion. 1 Chron. 13:8.
    - b. David had failed to consult God about the proper\_\_\_\_\_. 1 Chron. 15:13-15.
  5. What warning is consistently sounded in Deut. 4:22, Prov. 30:5-6, and Rev. 22:18-19?

### Summary

- \* While we are saved by grace, God demands obedience. The Lord has never tolerated changes to His word.
- \* In the next section, we will look at how God communicates His will mankind.

## III. How is Scriptural Authority Established?

- A. Introductory thoughts
1. Discussions of how to determine God's will are often referred to as issues of Bible authority. Because authority can have different meanings, we need to define what we mean:
    - a. The basic meaning of authority is *the power or right to do something*. To have Bible authority for an action means that the action must have God's approval.

- b. Though the word *authority* primarily refers to things permitted but not required, when we talk about Bible authority we also include things required by Scripture.
- c. In fact, rather than use the term “Bible authority”, perhaps we should speak of “determining God’s will”. Matt. 7:21.

2. How do we determine what is required or permitted?

- a. Among churches of Christ the answer has usually been command, example and necessary inference.
- b. In recent years, this means of establishing Bible authority or knowing God’s will has come under attack from many as being *contrived tradition that distorts the meaning of Scripture*.
- c. In the next few sections, we will see that, while it may sound man-made or contrived (to some), it is actually a valid concept used in the Bible *and* everyday life.

B. Commands, Apostolic Approved Examples, and Necessary Inferences:

1. Imagine you have just been hired for a new job and are told the following on your first day:

- a. Load those boxes in that truck.
- b. All our drivers are allowed 30 minutes for lunch.
- c. We want to make it clear that all our drivers are expected to abide by the law.
- d. For the first week we want you to ride with Fred. He’s been doing this for years and will show you the route and how we do things.

2. Think about what just happened, what you learned about the employer’s expectations for you, and how you learned them.

- a. How did you know that you need to start loading the truck?
- b. Are you allowed to drive over the speed limit?
- c. Are you permitted to stop and get a sandwich? Are you required to do either?
- d. Why are you asked to ride with Fred?

C. Commands:

1. Some consider any emphasis on commands to be legalism, Pharisaical, and missing the point.
2. Does Jesus issue commands or does He simply tell us to be guided by the principle of love? Matt. 28:20; Jn. 14:15; 1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Jn. 2:3-5.
3. According to Col. 3:9 what is God’s will for us? How do we know that He does not want us to be dishonest?
4. Sometimes commands are implied in conditional statements or declarations. From Mk. 16:16, what do we know to be God’s will for us?

D. Examples – Apostolically Approved:

1. We learn by example in everyday life and the same is expected in Scripture.
2. 1 Jn.2:3-6 links the example of Jesus to keeping God’s commandments.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ was an example to followed. 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-9.
4. The apostles taught the churches to observe all the commandments (Matt.28:18-20), so the example of the NT church helps us to know the will of God. Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 4:16-17.

E. Necessary inference/implication (inescapable conclusion):

1. Parent: “If this room isn’t cleaned by Friday, no one is going to the football game.” Though never told he “had” to clean the room, the son knows the will of the parent.
2. How did Jesus arrive at the conclusion that what God had joined together was not to be separated? Matt. 19:3-6.
3. How did God convey to Peter that Gentiles were not to be called common or unclean? Acts 10:28.
4. Can we come to an escapable conclusion about infants as proper subjects of baptism by reading Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:12; 18:18; Rom. 6:3-4?

Summary

- \* Once we realize that God reveals His will through commands, examples and necessary inferences, another question arises. How are we to react to God’s silence?
- \* We understand that if commanded to do something, we must do it, and if forbidden to do something, we must abstain. But if God does not prohibit a thing, is it permitted? Does silence permit or prohibit?

F. Silence of Scripture:

1. Whose will are we commanded to obey? Matt. 7:21.
2. Our wishes are not always the same as God’s. Isa. 55:8-9.
3. If we are given a set of instructions, do we need to be told all the things we are not to do?
  - a. Is a builder allowed to add things to the house plans? Is he allowed to add additional rooms if the plans don’t specifically forbid him to do so?
  - b. Has God given us a complete set of instructions?
  - c. Jesus promised the apostles that \_\_\_\_\_ truth would be revealed. Jn. 16:13.
  - d. The mind of God or the desire of God has been fully revealed. 2 Pt. 1:3; 2 Pt. 3:16-17.
4. How did Jesus view the silence of Scripture? Gen. 1:26-31 and 2:21-24 with Matt. 19:3-6. Did Gen. 1, 2 specifically forbid divorces?
5. Jesus, being from the tribe of Judah, could not be a priest under the Law, because Moses said \_\_\_\_\_ concerning priests from that tribe. Heb. 7:11-14.
6. If God has revealed all truth but we use His silence as our permission to do something, are we not adding to God’s word? Dt. 4:1-2; 5:32; 12:32; 2 Jn. 9; Rev. 22:18-19.
  - a. What specific command did Nadab and Abihu break? Lev. 10:1-3.
  - b. Was Uzzah specifically forbidden not to put the ark on a cart? 2 Sam. 6; 1 Chron. 15:12-15.

Summary

- \* God has not provided us with an exhaustive list of things prohibited, but by command, example and necessary inference He has shown us what He wants.
- \* Let us search the scriptures for what God wants and know that if He had wanted anything different He would have told us.
  - a. Does respect for the silence of the Scriptures mean that we must have specific authorization for *everything* we do?
  - b. Some, wishing to justify the use of instrumental music in worship, churches building gyms, donating to a sponsoring church, etc., argue that by the principles in 1-6 (above) we cannot have song books, a building and be consistent. We must understand 2 fundamental principles:
    - 1) Some commands are specific, while others are general.
    - 2) There is a difference between an *aid* in doing God’s revealed will and a *change* in God’s revealed will.

G. General and Specific Commands – Aids and Additions.

1. Imagine being given £75 and the following list:

- |  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Grits                                  | Cereal (3 Boxes)               |
| Heinz Ketchup                          | Apples (dozen)                 |
| Clorox Lemon scented bleach            | Boneless Chicken breast        |
| Pillsbury Hungary Jack Biscuits (10)   | Le Sueur English peas (2 Cans) |
| Instant banana pudding (6 serving box) | Skim Milk (1 gal.)             |

2. Which of the actions below follow the instructions given for the shopping list? Be able to explain your answers.

- a. Purchased Martha White instant grits.
  - b. Purchased Jim Dandy quick grits.
  - c. Substituted Chicken thighs since they were on sale.
  - d. Bought Rocky Road ice cream.
  - e. Used a calculator to keep up with your total.
  - f. Rome apples and 6 Delicious apples Purchased.
  - g. Purchased 12 yellow apples and 1 watermelon.
  - h. Purchased 6 apples and 6 oranges (amounting to 12 pieces of fruit).
  - i. Purchased 3 boxes of Cap'n crunch Cereal.
  - j. Purchased Heinz 57 sauce.
  - k. Carried your groceries around store in a plastic basket.
  - l. Pushed a shopping cart through the store.
  - m. Carried the groceries home in plastic bags.
  - n. Carried the groceries home in paper bags.
3. If we understand how specific and general commands are used in everyday life, we should be able to understand how they are used in Scripture.
- a. Can we see that Heinz Ketchup is specific as to a product and brand, while the size is optional (within the £75 constraint)?
  - b. Some brands were specified and others were left in the generic category. Even specific instructions left certain choices to our discretion.
4. The same goes for aids and alterations.
- a. In everyday life we recognize the orange *changes* the list, while a shopping cart only *expedites* the purchase or task, and is an expedient or aid.
  - b. One might keep up with the money spent in his head or use a calculator. Both aid the process of carrying out the expressed will of the grocery list without altering it.
5. Do things like song books, song leaders, and a piano aid or alter the command to sing? Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16.
6. We have been given the will of God concerning observing the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:17-34). Are the following faithful to His instructions?
- a. Eating the Lord's Supper on any day of the week? On the first Sunday of the month (cp. Ex. 20:8)?
  - b. A single loaf of unleavened bread? Six loafs of unleavened bread? Individual wafers of unleavened bread?
  - c. Taking the Lord's Supper before the sermon? Taking the Lord's Supper after the sermon?
  - d. As a single individual? Together with the whole church?

### Conclusion

1. While there are many that question the need for Bible or Scriptural authority on matters of morality and religion, and accuse those that differ of being legalistic and narrow minded, God is clear in that He expects strict and total obedience from those that serve Him.
2. The term "Bible authority" is simply another way of expressing the seeking of God's will based upon what is revealed in His word, which is the Bible, our only and legitimate source of religious and moral authority.
3. There are three ways in which scriptural authority is established that is compliant with methods used in New Testament times and commonly recognized in everyday life: commands, examples (apostolically approved) and necessary inference.
4. The silence of the Scriptures is appealed to by some as a permission to act in ways for which we have no NT command, example or necessary inference. This reliance is itself unscriptural and contrary to common everyday practice.

(The foregoing material is taken and adapted from a study by John Gibson)

## The Difference Between Expedients And Additions

*Expedients are essential to fulfilling the instruction  
but Additions Change the Instruction.*

<b>Bible Example</b>	<b>Expedients</b>	<b>Additions</b>
	Lawful and Authorized	Unlawful and Unauthorized
Noah's Ark Gen. 6:13-22	Tools to cut, join, and to spread pitch	Larger size, additional windows, additional woods
Tabernacle Ex. 25:9,40; 26:30 Ex. 39:32,42,43	Tools to work silver, gold, and wood in making the tabernacle and its furniture.	Making ark of covenant out of both acacia and pine wood
Lord's Supper Bread and Fruit of the Vine	Trays and Cups	Roast Lamb
Baptize, Be Baptized	Baptistery, pool, river, lake, sea, or bathtub	Sprinkle and pouring Are different actions.
Singing Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 13:15	Songbook	Piano, Organ Different kind of music, Different means of praise

Strictly speaking, a lawful and scriptural aid or expedient is something done or essential and irreplaceable to execute the Lord's instruction, as illustrated in the tools used by Noah in building the Ark.

A place to meet is essential for the purpose of edification, whether in a field or a rented /owned building. If we are to sing and make melody in our hearts we must have a means which enables all present to sing the same words. Hymn books are one way but not the only way to achieve this. They are a means of carrying out the Lord's command.

The pitch pipe is not a musical instrument on the same level as say a piano that, though can give pitch, is played in the place of or along with vocal music, i.e. singing. The use of mechanical instruments in corporate worship is not an essential aid to the completion of the Lord's instruction, but an addition and, thus, alters it.