

A BASIC LESSON ON BIBLE AUTHORITY

Introduction

1. Jesus promised to establish *one* church in which all believers are *one* in Him:

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:20-21).

2. When people look at what they perceive to be Christianity, they see thousands of different churches and believers that are far from being one. This, of course, is in opposition to what Jesus stated (Matthew 16:18) and what He prayed (John 17:20-21). Sadly, even among those that have obeyed the gospel and been added to Christ’s church, divisions abound.
3. One of the reasons for such divisions is because people have neglected the study of the scriptures, and, in particular, the study of Bible authority. This lesson is primarily designed for those that have never studied Bible authority, but it will also serve as a reminder (cp. 2 Peter 1:12; Philippians 3:1) to all of us of some crucial points.

“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of [i.e., by the authority of] the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17).

A. THE LAW OF HARMONY

When seeking to establish authority for whatever we do in word or deed, it is essential to gather all that the scriptures have to say on the matter.

1. Whatever we believe and teach ought to be in harmony with what the scriptures teach. Peter put it this way: “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11). This was Balaam’s attitude: “If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of Yahweh, to do good or bad of my own will. What Yahweh says, that I must speak” (Numbers 24:13).
2. To ensure we speak as the oracles of God, it is essential to find out all that God has to say on a particular subject. David said, “The sum of thy word is truth” (Psalms 119:160).
3. We must also be honest in our study of a subject: (i) each verse should be studied in its context, (ii) if a verse seems to contradict other verses on the same subject, don’t ignore it, and (iii) do not add your opinions to God’s teachings.

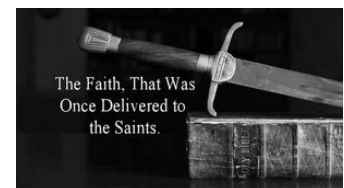


When Seeking To Establish Authority For Whatever We Do In Word Or Deed, It Is Essential To Gather All That The Scriptures Have To Say On The Matter.

B. THE LAW OF COMPLETENESS

The faith has been once for all delivered to the saints and the scriptures provide all we need to live a godly life. This removes the need for any additional revelation and warns us not to add or take away from the word.

1. The Hebrew writer tells us that in these last days God *has* spoken to us by His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). He goes on to speak of the great salvation, which was first spoken by the Lord “and *was* confirmed to us by those who heard Him” (Hebrews 2:2-3). “Those who heard Him” refers to the apostles. The words “was confirmed” points back to an act in the past that was completed. In other words, there is no more to be revealed and, therefore, no further need of confirmation by signs and wonders (cp. 1 Corinthians 13:8-13). By the time Jude wrote his epistle, he could write that the faith “was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3).



- 2. Paul wrote, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16). The scriptures are not only inspired, they are also complete. In other words, all that God wanted to reveal to us has been revealed, and all that we need to know to live a godly life has been made known:

“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:2-4).

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

We speak where the Bible speaks, and we are silent where the Bible is silent.

- 3. If the word of God is complete and provides us with all that we need, then we ought not to take away anything from it or add our teachings and opinions to it as if to provide what is lacking (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Revelation 22:18). And neither ought we to assume authority for a practice where the scriptures are silent. We all know that silence is not permissive, but some people pretend they don't know that because they have things they really want to do. We must learn not to go beyond what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6).

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

“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 1:9).

The Faith Has Been Once For All Delivered To The saints And The Scriptures Provide All We Need To Live A Godly Life. This Removes The Need For Any Additional Revelation And Warns Us Not To Add Or Take Away From The Word.

C. THE LAW OF INSTRUCTION

We understand that we must have authority for all that we do, but some are unaware of the methods. The Bible itself reveals that authority is established by direct commands, apostolically approved examples, and necessary inferences.



- 1. In many churches of Christ, it is taught that authority for all that we do (Colossians 3:17) is established by direct commands, approved apostolic examples, and necessary inferences or conclusions. This is something I was taught soon after I became a Christian. Years later, though, I came across material that challenged this method, saying that it was contrived.
- 2. But such a charge is not true – we can see in the Bible itself where such methods are employed:
 - a. **Commands:** It is a salient fact that God gives commands and expects them to be obeyed. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He commissioned His disciples, “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 of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen” (Matthew 28:18-20). To the Thessalonians Paul wrote, “Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 4:1-2).
 - b. **Examples:** There are many cases of examples being used as a means of determining God’s will. Jesus demonstrated that an exception to the Sabbath command is permitted when a higher command is to be obeyed. To do this Jesus highlighted two examples as a precedent:

- 1) King David when he ate the showbread (**Matthew 12:1-8**).
 - 2) The priests who “profaned the Sabbath and are guiltless” (**Matthew 12:1-8**).
 - 3) Paul says that we are to learn from examples contained in the Old Testament (**1 Corinthians 10:6, 11**), and several times he calls on the example of approved practice in other churches to demonstrate how a congregation should conduct its activities (**1 Corinthians 4:17; 14:33; 16:1**).
- c. **Inferences.** Inference means drawing a conclusion from what has been implied in a statement. The scriptures clearly teach the use of inference or “drawing conclusions from a premise” as a means of interpreting what they mean. A “necessary” inference is one where the implication in the premise is so strong that the conclusion is considered sure. Let us now consider some biblical examples of the use of inferences:
- 1) The Sadducees denied that there was life after death, and so Jesus proved them wrong by pointing them to a passage that necessarily implies there was life after death (**Matthew 22:29-31**).
 - 2) The prophet Joel said, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (**Joel 2:32**), and from this statement Paul draws a series of inferences (**Romans 10:13-14**).
 - 3) The Hebrew writer reminds us that Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, and necessarily concludes that such could only be possible if there had been a change of law (**Hebrews 7:11-12**).

We Understand That We Must Have Authority For All That We Do, But Some Are Unaware Of The Methods. The Bible Itself Reveals That Authority Is Established By Direct Commands, Apostolically Approved Examples, And Necessary Inferences.

Conclusion

1. It is difficult for people to believe that there is only one true church when they see thousands of different religious organizations. Also, it is hard for people to believe that God sent the Son when they witness disunity among those claiming to be Christians.
2. One of the reasons for the religious confusion that exists today is because people fail to seek scriptural authority for all that they do (**Colossians 3:17**). Indeed, they have no idea *how* to establish biblical authority. There is no one individual that can bring today’s religious confusion to an end and unite all God’s people as one, but each individual can strive to keep the unity of the Spirit (**Ephesians 4:1-6**). In other words, *you* have a responsibility to strive to keep the unity of the Spirit, even if no one else is doing so.
3. Anyone whose aim is to please the Lord will search the scriptures to ensure that all they do is done by the Lord’s authority. This means knowing *how* to establish authority. In this lesson, we have considered three basic laws:
 - a. The law of harmony. In order to ensure we speak as the oracles of God, we must find out all the scriptures have to say on subject and study each verse in context before coming to conclusions.
 - b. The law of completeness. It is essential to understand that God has revealed all that we need to live a godly life and be complete. This understanding will prevent us from adding and taking away from His word.
 - c. The law of instruction. To ensure that all we do is with God’s approval, it is vital to understand *how* to establish authority: this is by direct commands, apostolically approved examples, and necessary inferences or conclusions.
4. Those who are sincerely seeking to do all things by the Lord’s authority will study these things further.

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The idea for this lesson came from a sermon outline by John Evans.
http://www.higherpraise.com/outlines/hpserm/7_Sermon490.htm