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The AUTHORITY of God's Word

Lesson 1: Divine Authority

1. God's Right to Command

- A. God's right to command is based upon His creative power: He brought all things into existence by His own will and established the physical laws that make the universe function according to His will.
1. Adam and Eve were commanded positively to "*fill the earth and subdue it*" (Gn 1:28) and tend the garden (Gn 2:15). Negatively, they were told not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gn 2:17). God had the right to create Adam and Eve, to give them purpose and activity, to give them choice by placing limitations upon them.
 2. Psalm 19 – The first half of the psalm praises God for His creative power (19:1-6). The second half praises Him for establishing laws for man (19:7-11), laws that are perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true and righteous.
- B. ALL AUTHORITY originates with God, all moral responsibility, all religious precept, all ultimate duty and obligation begins with our Creator, "*for in Him we live and move and have our being*" (Acts 17:28).

2. Man's Obligation to Obey

- A. Since we exist on God's terms and we have no independent or inherent right to govern our own affairs, we only have one essential duty: "*fear God and keep His commands, for this is the whole duty of man*" (Ecc 12:13).
1. God often bases covenants and blessings on the condition of man's obedience: Ex 19:5; 24:7; Dt 28:1-14.
 2. Obedience is a keyword of faithfulness to God and is tied to genuine love for God (Jn 14:21, 23-24); sincere conformity to doctrine (Rom 6:17); integrity of thought (2 Cor 10:5); submitting to God rather than men (Ac 5:29); eternal salvation (Heb 5:9).
- B. Further, He extensively warns of the consequences of disobedience, which essentially is a rejection of His authority:
1. "*In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*" (Gn 2:17).

2. Rejecting God comes with dire consequences – Dt 28:15-ff; 2 Th 1:7-8; Heb 12:25.

C. It is the duty of each generation to teach the importance of reverence for and obedience to the law of God to the next generation: Dt 4:9-10; 6:7-9; Eph 6:1-4.

3. God's Right to Punish Disobedience

A. To rebel against the One who has all authority and who controls our very existence is pure folly. Yet this is what mankind has done consistently since God created him:

1. From the time of Adam to Noah, mankind gradually sank further and further into apostasy until “*every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*” (Gn 6:5).
2. After the flood, things didn't get much better. Paul details the extensive sinfulness of both Jew and Gentile in the opening chapters of Romans (3:9-23).
3. None are exempt from this judgment: even angels who rebelled and sinned against God were cast from His presence and are reserved for eternal judgment – Jude 6.

B. Punishment of sin is the necessary correlation of perfect justice. If we recognize that human laws must be obeyed under threat of punishment, and if we consider a guilty man going free as a “miscarriage of justice,” then how much more the laws of God?

1. Punishment for sin is a “righteous” penalty – 2 Th 1:6; Rom 2:5.
2. While there might be immediate, earthly consequences to breaking God's laws, there will certainly be eternal consequences, for “*the wages of sin is death*” (Rom 6:23).

C. But thanks be to God that His eternal justice is muted by His eternal grace and mercy, and that such has driven God to find a way to forgive sinners, “*that He might be **just** and the **justifier** of the one who has faith in Jesus*” (Rom 3:26).

Conclusion: As Creator of the universe, the Father of our spirits and the Judge of eternity, God has the right to command His will and enforce it as He chooses. As lowly and sinful creatures, we have the sole obligation to obey that will. Once in God's family, we have an ongoing duty to learn His will more perfectly, obey it more consistently, and do so out of a willing heart.

Questions:

1. Is there always an immediate consequence of disobeying the will of God?
2. Is there such a thing as a “big sin” and a “little sin?” Contrast guilt vs. consequences of sin.
3. Why do you think so many people resent God's authority over them?



The AUTHORITY of God's Word

Lesson 2: Human Authority

1. Approved Human Authority

A. While all true authority resides in God, in His interaction with mankind God often has used selected human agents to communicate His will to the masses. Thus God's authority is **delegated** to those chosen to speak for Him.

1. Early on God spoke via individual heads of families, the patriarchs, such as Noah, Abraham and Job.
2. Later in Israelite history, God spoke through prophets – Heb 1:1; 1 Pet 1:10-12. Note: God did not merely tell the future through prophets; He commanded Israel in specific ways through them. See Jesus' distinction in construction of the old covenant: "*And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures ...*" (Lk 24:27); "*These are the words ... which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me*" (Lk 24:44).
3. Note that the Old Law is even called "the Law of **Moses**" though it originated in heaven (Ex 24:1-8; Jn 7:19).

B. God holds men accountable for not heeding and obeying words spoken through His approved messengers:

1. Lot was expected to leave Sodom at the word of angels, and Lot's children were expected to leave at the words of Lot (Gn 19:12-17).
2. God expected Judah to heed the prophets who urged obedience and warned of coming doom: Jer 25:4-8; 26:4-6.
3. The apostles spoke with divine authority, and they warned of not heeding their declarations (Ac 13:46-47; 2 Th 3:14).

C. Those who are charged to speak with the authority of heaven *must honor the integrity of the message and not tamper with it*. God holds His messengers accountable for revealing His word truthfully and faithfully:

1. Ezekiel, the "watchman" of God – Ezk 3:17-18.

2. Jeremiah was not to diminish a word from God's revelation – Jer 26:2-3.

3. Paul – “*Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!*” (1 Cor 9:16).

2. Unapproved Human Authority

A. There are occasions where men speak for God without any legitimate mandate from Him.

1. Outright falsehoods in God's name – Jer 14:13-16.

2. Substituting traditions and man-made rules for the will of God – Mt 15:1-9.

3. Any who alter God's gospel are “accursed” – Gal 1:6-9.

B. God's people must carefully distinguish the false from the true. This can only be done by studying the true revelation and comparing doctrines and practices with it.

1. The “noble-minded” Bereans – Ac 17:11.

2. Proper handling of truth helps avoid “cancerous” messages – 2 Tim 2:15-18.

3. Blind followers end up in the ditch along with their blind leaders – Mt 15:14.

3. Only Two Sources of Authority

A. When Jesus was challenged about His authority to drive the merchants and animals from the temple, He responded with a question about the authority of the prophet John to baptize: “*The baptism of John, where was it from? From heaven or from men?*” (Mt 21:25).

1. If John had gone about engaging in religious rites and teaching about a coming Messiah on his own accord, his ministry would have been invalid (even as there would be many false messiahs to arise in coming years – Mt 24:23-25; Ac 5:36-37). Even so, there are churches and councils and other religious leaders who proclaim things in the name of God without any authority to do so.

2. But Jesus' point is that John *did* have heavenly authority, and the majority of the Jewish leaders rejected it. Thus, there was no point in answering their question about *His* authority since they had demonstrated complete disregard for heavenly authority.

B. When we speak, we must “*speak as the oracles of God*” (1 Pet 4:11); when we act in word or deed, we must “*do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Col 3:17). The word of God is the key to the mind and will of God which empowers us to speak in His name.

Questions:

1. How did God speak uniquely to Moses (Num 12:6-8)? How should this have affected Miriam and Aaron?
2. Who besides Moses was involved in the giving of the old covenant (Heb 2:2; Gal 3:19)? How was disobedience dealt with by God?
3. How would you respond to someone who based their practice or belief on the basis of an angelic vision? If there were to be such visions today, what would the angel have to comply with in his instructions (Gal 1:6-9)?
4. What would happen if Ezekiel failed to warn a wicked person, and the person died in their wickedness? What would be Ezekiel's fate?
5. How should these principles be put into action when we hear a sermon preached?



The AUTHORITY of God's Word

Lesson 3: Inspired Revelation

1. The Authority of God's Word Is Established in Its Inspiration

- A. If the Bible is not inspired, then it is no more authoritative than any other human document.
 - 1. It may contain wise advice and useful historical information, but it would have no moral authority, no basis to compel obedience.
 - 2. Further, its teaching on heaven and hell, God and Satan, a divine plan of redemption would all be false. Its declarations would be subject to human error, cultural bias and obsolescence due to changing social and political circumstances.
- B. Yet, the Bible declares its own timelessness and enduring applicability – 1 Pet 1:24-25.
- C. The passing of time does not alter or affect in any material way the authority of God's word. Note the following concerning the Law of Moses:
 - 1. Law given approximately 1,500 BC.
 - 2. David violates command concerning moving ark some 500 years later – 2 Sam 6:3-10.
 - 3. Israel rededicates itself to the Law in Nehemiah's day (444 BC) – Neh 10:29.
 - 4. Jesus states that “*one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law until all is fulfilled*” (Mt 5:18).

2. How Do We Know the Bible Is Inspired?

- A. The inspiration of the Bible must be decided on the “preponderance of the evidence.” This means that, given the evidence available, is it more reasonable to believe that the Bible is of divine origin, **OR** is it more reasonable to believe that the Bible is a product of man?
- B. Some lines of evidence to consider:
 - 1. The makeup of the “book” – Actually, the Bible is not a book but a library of books, written by many different authors separated for the most part by language, culture, political conditions, literary genre and lack of acquaintance with each other. Yet this collection of works tells a unified story woven into the very history of man. It deals with

some of the most controversial subjects that the human mind grapples with, including the nature of God, the purpose of man, the problem of suffering, a standard of morality, worship and a host of other complex issues. No other literary work matches this criteria; in fact, men cannot even publish a newspaper of current events without including a section called “corrections.” Yet the Bible presents a logical, consistent, non-contradictory treatment of these and many other challenging subjects. This points to a divine origin.

2. Fulfilled prophecy – Note how God through the Scriptures challenges idolatrous prophets to either reveal what is to happen in the future or give a coherent explanation of what has taken place in the past – Is 41:21-24; 46:8-11. The Bible tells the name of men long before they are born (Cyrus – Is 44:28; 45:1); it tells of the rise and fall of successive kingdoms (Dan 2); it tells of consequences of Israel’s disobedience and their subsequent captivity; it tells of battles to be fought and won or lost; and, most stunning of all, it gives great detail over many hundreds of years about the coming of the Messiah and what would be His manner of life, character, works and fate.
 3. Eyewitness testimony – We place much stock in the testimony of eyewitnesses. People who witnessed a tragedy are interviewed on the news; juries are swayed greatly by those who can testify, “I saw him do it.” The books of the Bible were written in large measure by the very participants in the story. Especially is this true of the apostles, who declare their first-hand knowledge is valid and true (1 Jn 1:1-4; 2 Pet 1:16-18).
 4. Archaeological verification – Though the Bible does not need outside corroboration, it is noteworthy that everything man digs up from the ancient past that has a bearing on the Bible text *affirms and never denies* the truthfulness of the story. In fact, critics have often made accusations about the Bible in the absence of corresponding evidence only to later discover some archaeological item that substantiates the Bible account.
- C. Everyone will have to examine the evidence for him/herself and draw their own conclusion, for our faith must at the end of the day (and the end of life) be our own. But without any preconceptions or prejudices, the evidence appears overwhelming that man could not have produced such a collection of writings as these. They point to a higher intelligence – the Creator – who alone is qualified to speak with such authority on subjects as are treated in the Bible. What do *you* think ... is the Bible the word of God or the word of man??

Questions:

1. When David moved the ark the second time, what did he do differently (1 Chron 15:12-15)?
2. What does “preponderance of the evidence” mean? How do we come to believe that the Bible is inspired?
3. What does the word of God say about the future fate of the earth (2 Pet 3:5-7)? Who ignores this prophecy and what will be his fate? If we believe this prophecy, how will we act (3:11)?



The AUTHORITY of God's Word

Lesson 4: The Law of Christ

1. Jesus: Possessor of ALL Authority

A. Mankind is *always* under law toward God; there is no conceivable circumstance of being absolutely free from divine law.

1. Since "*sin is lawlessness*" (1 Jn 3:4), sin would not exist without law (Rom 5:13).
2. Many have a fuzzy, sanitized conception of Jesus as a good-natured "buddy" who has low expectations of people. They misunderstand passages such as "*for you are not under law but under grace*" (Rom 6:14) to say that grace and liberty free us from the restraints of obedience. This is selective, wishful reading of the Scriptures.

B. Jesus and authority:

1. Everything about Jesus – His teaching, stature, deportment, expectations of others – suggests the possession of authority: "*for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes*" (Mt 7:29). Jesus drove the moneychangers from the temple; He called Himself the Lord of the Sabbath; He accepted worship; He claimed to be a King before Pilate; He criticized the Jewish leadership; He corrected misguided Jewish traditions which distorted the Law of Moses. These facets and many others testify to His authority.
2. Divine credentials – After accusations that He was demon possessed (Jn 10:20) and being threatened with stoning (10:31), Jesus challenges the Jews with this: "*If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him*" (10:37-38). Jesus' miracles substantiated His intent to fulfill the Law of Moses and establish His own law. On Pentecost Peter points some of these same Jews to the miraculous works that verified the claims of Jesus (Ac 2:22) and then speaks of His present glorification at the right hand of God; i.e., possessing all authority (2:32-36).
3. This is why Jesus could claim with all truthfulness "*all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth*" (Mt 28:18). What a preposterous thing to say ... unless it was actually true. And this is the consistent teaching of the NT: Eph 1:22.

C. In Revelation Jesus is pictured standing among the lampstands; i.e., His churches. To each of these churches He issues encouragement, expectations, warnings. They, and we, are answerable to Him because He has all authority.

2. The New Covenant

- A. Hebrews makes the point that a will is in force when the “testator” or will-maker dies (Heb 9:16-22). Jesus has died, fulfilling the purpose of the first covenant (Mosaic Law – Heb 8:6, 13). Another law is now in force, not a limited covenant like the first one, which only applied to Abraham’s descendants, but a universal law which encompasses all mankind.
- B. Paul acknowledges that he is “*under law toward Christ*” (1 Cor 9:21), and he urges the Galatians (and us) to “*bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ*” (6:2).
- C. The new covenant has new motivations of obedience and fresh insights into the nature of God and man, but such terms as “liberty” and “freedom” do not mean that we are not under law toward Christ. Christ commands us, but He hopes for obedience out of motivations such as love, gratitude, respect, i.e., freely given compliance to His laws. This is what every father wants from his children.

3. The Importance of Obedience to Christ

- A. If one does not have authority, he has no right to expect conformity to his will. But Christ *does* have authority, and He *does* demand conformity:
 - 1. Stated *positively*: Jesus “*became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him*” (Heb 5:8-9). Note that Jesus doesn’t ask what He wouldn’t give: He obeyed unto death.
 - 2. Stated *negatively*: “*in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Th 1:8).
- B. Even those who were once believers can lose their respect for Him and His authority: “*Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment ... will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?*” (Heb 10:28-29).
- C. Jesus’ words will judge all mankind on the last day – Jn 12:48. They have the power to do so because the One who spoke them has *all authority*.

Questions:

- 1. By what process do we come to know the laws of Christ?
- 2. Does ignorance of Christ’s law excuse our disobedience?
- 3. Does Christ’s law apply to those who have not yet obeyed the gospel? Cite a verse to illustrate your answer.



The AUTHORITY of God's Word

Lesson 5: The Apostles and Prophets (1)

Introduction: Much confusion exists over the role of apostles and prophets. Some believe the apostolic office is occupied by living men today, thus extending the apostolic role beyond its original intent. Others we'll call "red letter Christians." They believe that Jesus is the only one to be listened to and they reject the teaching of the apostles as doctrine. Both extremes do not take into account the purpose for which the Lord selected and trained these men.

1. Jesus' Statements of Intent Regarding the Apostles

A. The keys of the kingdom – Mt 16:19; 18:18.

1. In His earthly ministry Jesus mentioned the importance of repentance (Lk 13:1-5), confession of His name (Mt 10:32-33) and baptism (Mk 16:15-16) in true conversion, but it was Peter who actually opened the door of the kingdom to Jews (Ac 2) and Gentiles (Ac 10). This fulfills the earlier prophecy of Jesus that Peter would "fish for men" (Lk 5:10).
2. While Peter is given the privilege of initial preaching, all the apostles are empowered by inspiration to reveal God's will to mankind.

B. The words of Jesus at the Passover meal – Jn 14-16.

1. During this last meal before Jesus' death, the disciples are distressed at the thought of Jesus leaving them alone. What does Jesus promise that the Holy Spirit would do for them when He comes (Jn 14:26)?
2. Did Jesus tell the disciples everything they needed to know regarding the kingdom (Jn 16:12)? How much of the truth will be made available to them via the Spirit (16:13)?
3. Jesus has selected these men, trained them through intensive teaching and real-life experiences, and prepared them for duties to be discharged in His absence. They are to be His "ambassadors" (2 Cor 5:20), speaking authoritatively for Him as He directs from heaven.

C. The apostles are "commissioned" to go to the whole world and make disciples, teaching them to observe everything commanded by the Lord (Mt 18:18-20). As the first century unfolds, the apostles are not the **only** teachers, in fact not all the apostles play equal roles in this process (Peter and Paul stand out in the NT record). But they represent the core of in-

spired doctrine, and from them and the truths they established other teachers, inspired and uninspired, go forth to spread the word of the kingdom.

2. The Credentials of the Apostles

- A. It is a fair question: Why should an apostle be believed more than any other man? After all, the first century knew of many who claimed to be the messiah or prophets of God (Ac 5:36-37; Mt 24:24; 2 Cor 11:13-15), and even today many are claiming God told them to preach their messages to the people.
- B. First, from the process of replacing Judas we learn that apostles had to meet certain criteria: a constant companion of Jesus and the eleven from the baptism of John to His ascension, and a witness of His resurrection (Ac 1:22).
- C. Also, apostles had miraculous credentials which validated their heavenly message:
 - 1. How does Paul refer to these miraculous works in 2 Cor 12:12?
 - 2. Note in the early development of the church how the miracles supported the preaching of the word: Ac 2:4-12; 3:10ff; 4:7, 16, 29-30; 5:12-16; 6:8-10; etc. Give two examples of from the world in which establishing credentials is important:
 - a.
 - b.
 - 3. There was no such thing as “healing services,” nor did miracles become the centerpiece of the kingdom. The focus was upon **the word preached**, for it is the gospel which is the power of salvation. Even as one reads through the NT, miracles are referenced less and less, for the purpose for them is being realized: the revelation of God is being established and circulated throughout the world.

3. A Word About Prophets

- A. Others who spoke by inspiration but did not fit apostolic criteria were prophets.
 - 1. The term “prophet” refers to “one who speaks forth, or openly ... the ‘prophesying’ of the NT ‘prophets’ was both a preaching of the divine counsels of grace already accomplished and the foretelling of the purposes of God in the future” (Vine, p. 493).
 - 2. Books written by non-apostolic writers, such as Mark, Luke/Acts and James are considered authoritative because of their origin in inspiration.
- B. What did Agabus prophesy (Ac 11:28; 21:11)? Who else fits into the category of prophet in the NT?



The AUTHORITY of God's Word

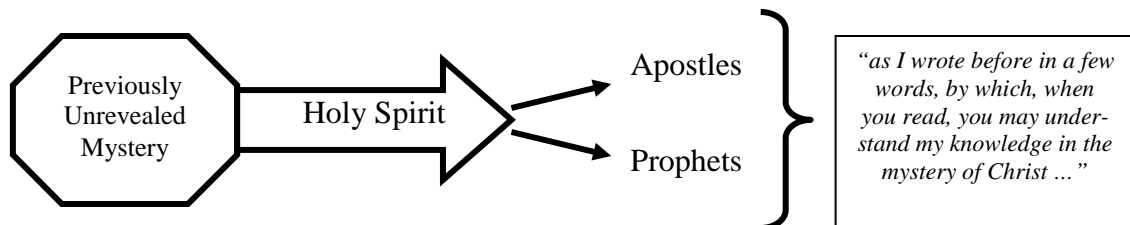
Lesson 6: The Apostles and Prophets (2)

1. Revealers of the Mystery

A. Paul's apostleship was constantly attacked in the first century. He even considered himself "*an apostle born out of due time*" (1 Cor 15:8); i.e., one who did not fit the original criteria. The Lord's special selection of Paul and his apostleship which focused on the Gentiles did not negate his authority, but opponents used his exceptional appointment against him.

1. Paul often refers to his heavenly appointment as an apostle: Rom 1:1; 15:15, 18-19; 1 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1, 11-12; et. al.
2. Paul affirms time and time again that he taught what was given from heaven, not what he stole from the other apostles and modified for his own purposes.

B. Note the pattern of inspiration in Eph 3:3-5:



C. When the time inspiration ended, God had revealed everything that He wanted man to know about things concerning his relationship with Him. Apostles are not needed today because there is nothing else to reveal: "*we have the mind of Christ*" (1 Cor 2:16).

2. What the Apostles Declared About Themselves

- A. They were "eyewitnesses" (see lesson 3, p. 2; Ac 2:32; 3:15; 4:20, 33). Eyewitness testimony is very powerful, especially when corroborated by a number of other witnesses.
- B. Paul delivered what he had received – 1 Cor 11:23; 15:3. To what doctrine and practice do these verses refer?
- C. Paul also cited the "credentials" of self-sacrifice, toil, travel and general hardship as he invested himself wholly in the work given to him (in contrast to the false apostles who came along behind him hoping to "cash in" on his hard work) – 2 Cor 11:16-18, 22-33.

- D. The Lord gave Paul authority to be utilized in ways to foster edification – 2 Cor 13:10. This sometimes took on harsh forms (which Paul wishes to avoid by writing Second Corinthians). For example, he commands expulsion of a sinful brother (1 Cor 5:3-5).
- E. Paul claimed to have been taken either in vision or physical transportation into heaven itself (2 Cor 12:1-5). He refers to this in a passage defending his apostleship. But rather than this being a boast, he says he is not permitted to discuss what he saw and that God gave him some kind of affliction to keep him humble (12:7-9).
- F. John was exiled on the island of Patmos for the gospel when he received the visions of the Revelation. He does not hesitate to say these were the very message of Jesus, Himself, to the churches in the province of Asia. John's own place in the revelations was that of an overwhelmed observer; he does not embellish his role in receiving such grand visions.
- G. John also said at the end of his gospel that he had written accounts of the life of Jesus that would promote eternal life in those who read and believed (Jn 20:30-31).

3. Conclusion

- A. These are such grand and astounding claims that, if untrue, show the writers of the NT to be delusional, self-deceived, manipulative, dogmatic, narrow-minded and a host of other uncomplimentary descriptions. How could such misguided men create such a flawless ethical and doctrinal standard that elevates the virtuous to the highest level?
- B. If their words are **not** true, then there is no moral force or authority in them. In fact, we should not give *any* credence to these writings, for they would be predicated on fraud. On the other hand, if their claims are credible and substantiated, then their words take on the highest significance of any words written by human beings.

Questions:

1. Where did the Holy Spirit get the information He revealed (1 Cor 2:10-12)? If any man today says his message is from God, what must he know about God?
2. How does Paul term his affliction that was allowed to come upon him to keep him humble?
3. Paul said we could read what he wrote and know what he knew. What does that say about the need for further revelation from God today?



The AUTHORITY of God's Word

Lesson 7: The New Testament Pattern (1)

Introduction: “Have we ever stopped to consider why God caused holy men of old to record, not just the life of Christ, but also the work and worship of the first generation of Christians? If the ultimate aim of apostolic instruction regarding the work and worship of the church is to bring us back to God, as more and more are urging, then it becomes all the more important that we follow the apostles’ authoritative lead in that specific area of Christian practice. Proper church organization and function does not in itself get us ‘right’ with God. But improper church organization and function (whether because of sterile tradition or unbiblical innovation) may indeed get us ‘wrong’ with God” (F. LaGard Smith, *The Cultural Church*, p. 42).

What Mr. Smith is saying is that the NT establishes a pattern in both personal righteousness *and* how a church should be organized, function, worship and what it should teach. The less emphasis placed on the authority of the Scriptures, the more contradiction will arise among religious groups who base their beliefs and practices on their own desires and opinions.

1. What Is the Purpose of the NT?

- A. Basically, there are only two reasons for recording the history of the life of Christ and the early church: 1) to simply document historical details (as in a church log), and from which perhaps we might learn some basic lessons; 2) to provide an authoritative foundation for how to pattern ourselves individually and collectively. Clearly, we see the NT as fulfilling the latter purpose. Is there any evidence to support this conclusion?
- B. First, refer to previous points: Jesus empowered and commissioned His ambassadors to establish a kingdom via preaching the gospel. Was this the activity and mission of a single generation only? Were the doctrines taught by the apostles *only* for the peculiar social/political arena in which they lived? Was the structure of the church merely for the initial days of the kingdom, later to be transformed into other forms by the will of uninspired men?
- C. More specifically, were the personal letters – the epistles – written only to address interests in the first century? Do we go beyond their scope and purpose to use them as doctrinal declarations for all time?

2. Some Basic Considerations

- A. If the purpose of the epistles was only to address first century issues, then there should be some kind of language indicating this. The opposite, however, is true:

1. The epistles were to be circulated – Col 4:16.
2. Some epistles were sent to regions; i.e., Galatians, James, 1 Peter, Revelation. Other epistles were sent to brethren in unspecified locales: 2 Peter, 1 and 2 John, Jude. Further, the gospels were intended for broad distribution. Even though some writings are addressed to individuals – Luke/Acts to Theophilus, Timothy/Titus/Philemon to their namesakes – it is apparent that they rest on broader authority via inspiration. The personal correspondence was not strictly personal but addressed broader, timeless issues.

B. There are express statements indicating the authority of what is written in the NT:

1. What did Paul say he wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor 14:37)?
2. In what two ways does Paul refer to teaching the Thessalonians (2 Th 2:15)?
3. What does Paul say should be done to those who do not obey his epistle (2 Th 3:6, 14)?

3. Uniformity, Completeness of Doctrine

A. What does Jude find necessary to exhort brethren to do (Jude 3)?

B. What does Paul do “*everywhere in every church*” (1 Cor 4:17)?

C. How far does Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor 7:17 apply?

D. We should speak according to what standard (1 Pet 4:11)?

E. How much deviation is allowed from what the apostles originally taught (Gal 1:6-9)?

Conclusion: In these and other passages, there is a clear appeal to the authority of the NT scriptures. Since there is no oral history of what Jesus and the apostles taught, if the NT writings are not authoritative, there is *no other authoritative source* to which we can appeal. The consequences of this are destructive to Christianity itself as it would be subject to whatever changes men wish to make. God has “*in these last days spoken to us by His Son*” (Heb 1:2). He has given us His definitive word in regard to both personal righteousness and church structure/doctrine. While many see this authority as “stifling” to their faith, the truth is the opposite: it is liberating to know the mind of God on how we should live. It frees us from opinion, superstition, erroneous ideas and human fallibility of every sort. What a blessing is the NT to us!



The AUTHORITY of God's Word

Lesson 8: The New Testament Pattern (2)

Introduction: There are never-ending efforts to circumvent the teaching of the NT. This was true in the first century, so we should not be surprised that the tendency exists today. To those who see godliness as “*a means of gain*” (1 Tim 6:5), the NT is too restrictive. Those who wish to alter God's will to fit modern values try to loosen the bonds of authority. God's people must always be on guard against these undermining influences.

1. Some Common Misconceptions of the New Testament

- A. “The NT writers didn't know they were writing ‘law’ when they wrote their histories and epistles. To make these writings ‘law’ and bind them on others is legalism.”
- B. “The NT should be looked at as ‘love letters,’ designed not to establish law but to gently encourage people to do better.”
- C. “The NT was not inspired. The epistles reflect the biases of the author and the cultural standards of their day. Paul, for example, continued the male-dominant values of the Jews, and his chauvinism is an insult to women today.”

2. Exhortations and Warnings from the Epistles to Timothy

- A. Paul gives extensive directives to Timothy to study, practice and advance what he had learned from the great apostle. The following passages support the idea of a fixed body of revelation as opposed to a “fluid” message that will be supplemented or supplanted in the future. (Supply the missing words):
 - 1. “*Teach _____ doctrine*” – 1 Tim 1:3. What were some brethren leaving the truth for according to 1 Tim 1:4, 6?
 - 2. God gives law to curb behavior “*that is contrary to _____, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was _____*” – 1 Tim 1:10-11.
 - 3. “*If I am delayed, _____ so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*” – 1 Tim 3:15. Can we not learn to conduct ourselves properly today by the same correspondence?
 - 4. “*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from _____*,”

giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons ...” – 1 Tim 4:1. “The faith” refers to the objective body of revelation (the new testament) that produces faith in men.

5. *“If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in _____ and of the _____ which you have carefully followed”* – 1 Tim 4:6. By contrast, what should be avoided (4:7)?
6. *“These things _____”* – 1 Tim 4:11. Paul (and by extension the other apostles) has set forth a body of teaching that Timothy is to follow.
7. *“Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine ... meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them ... take heed to yourself and to _____. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you”* – 1 Tim 4:13, 15-16. Note that salvation depends on devotion to the revealed doctrine.
8. *“If anyone teaches _____ and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words ...”* – 1 Tim 6:3-4. Again, there are always reasons that men advance to set aside the authority of the NT. But what results from this abandonment of truth are mere judgments and opinions that degenerate into controversy.
9. *“O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and vain babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge – by professing it, some have _____”* – 1 Tim 6:20-21. “The faith” is a body of knowledge that can be strayed from.
10. *“Who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through _____, to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles”* – 2 Tim 1:10-11.
11. *“And the things that you have _____ among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also”* – 2 Tim 2:2. Here is the pattern of continuing the pattern: teaching handed down from generation to generation.
12. *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* – 2 Tim 2:15. Whose message is different from this, and what is the result of their teaching (2:16-18)?
13. There are men who seem to have religious interests but who are *“always learning and never able to come to the _____*. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth, men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith” – 2 Tim 3:7-8.
14. *“But you have carefully followed my _____ manner of life, purpose, faith ...*

but as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them ...” – 2 Tim 3:10, 14.

15. “_____ is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” – 2 Tim 3:16-17. This is one of the clearest passages which point us to a pattern, a body of doctrine to which a man may appeal for living a God-approved life.

16. “For the time will come when they will not endure _____, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from _____, and be turned aside to fables ...” (2 Tim 4:3-4).

17. What reward in the end to say with Paul: “I have kept the faith ...” (2 Tim 4:7)!

B. Just this one epistle, written to a young evangelist who is laboring in Ephesus in Paul’s absence, sets forth clearly the principle of holding to the divine standard, “the faith,” which Timothy has learned in all accuracy from the great apostle himself. If we do not likewise hold to revealed truth, to what shall we appeal that provides assurance that we are following God’s will and thus in possession of His approval?

3. Observations

A. The apostles **did** know they were speaking authoritatively, for they would otherwise have no right to make demands of others and set forth their teaching as rigid and unchangeable.

B. To follow the NT pattern carefully is not legalism. To assert that one is saved by his perfect adherence to the law, and to look down on others who are less perfect, is legalism.

C. There simply is no warrant in Scripture for seeing the NT as the gentle suggestions of love letters. This is just an attempt to dodge the issue. Paul and others may give advice and personal guidance at times, but these are clearly delineated. Inspired men are fully aware that they are revealing God’s will, and they held men accountable for deviating from it.

D. To say that the NT is full of personal biases and cultural viewpoints of the first century, rather than eternal divine decrees, is to deny inspiration. It also denies that God is capable of addressing the deepest needs of His creatures in a comprehensive declaration, that man too sophisticated for such a simplistic notion. But this is egotistical. Men in all ages share common natures, weaknesses, objectives, tendencies, etc. God can speak to us in an ultimate way that crosses cultural, political, material and other circumstantial lines. The Scriptures speak to the true essence of man, and to forfeit that for the unstable doctrines of man is to build on a foundation of sand (Mt 7:24-29).

Question: How did Jesus’ teaching differ from the scribes in Mt 7:29?



The AUTHORITY of God's Word

Lesson 9: Determining Authority Within the New Testament (1)

Introduction: Establishing that the NT is authoritative revelation from God is different from determining the applicability of individual passages. How do we properly apply teaching in the NT to our own situation today? Are there parts of the NT that are culture-specific? Are there some features that applied to the first century and not to modern times? To put it mildly, religious groups today are all over the map on how to correctly discern application of NT principles to our own generation. What guidelines will help us make accurate use of the NT and thus demonstrate our faith to God as submissive servants?

1. Direct Statement (Command), Example and Inference

A. Direct statement – There is much in the NT that is simply a direct command of God through inspired writers. There are no mitigating circumstances which limit these statements to a certain time or society. Fill out the lists below:

Things Prohibited by Direct Statement Ephesians 4:25-5:11

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Things Commanded by Direct Statement Romans 12:3-21

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

B. Approved apostolic examples – By “approved” is meant that not *everything* an apostle did

constitutes either permission or command. The apostles did things incidentally to the discharge of their duties or in response to cultural issues.

1. For example, the clothes worn by apostles, their characteristic meetings in “upper rooms,” Paul’s participation in Jewish vows, preaching till after midnight (whew!) are incidental aspects of their lives and work.
2. On the other hand, when there is evidence that an apostle is carrying out the express will of God, and it is not tied to any cultural feature or an expression of pure judgment, then it is right to appeal to that example as authority for doctrine, work, worship, etc. This is the logical conclusion of the “ambassador” role fulfilled by the apostles; they acted in an authoritative capacity to complete the will of Christ and set in order kingdom matters.
3. Paul was conscious that he served the Lord in such a capacity: “*The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you*” (Phil 4:9).

4. Examples:

- a. There is no direct command to take the Lord’s supper on Sunday. But we see this was the practice of the church in Troas, and Paul participated in the memorial – Acts 20:7.
- b. There is no direct command to limit benevolent help out of the collective funds to Christians only, but the consistent example of the apostles shows that the early church was not a general charity organization. Passages like Acts 4:32-35; 11:27-30; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1, 12 and 1 Tim 5:16 clearly support the example of apostles in that they were providing necessary funds for saints, not the entire unbelieving society.
- c. Appeal was made to the example of the apostles in converting the Gentiles without circumcision in Acts 15:12. The force of this example was in the fact that God upheld the preaching by miraculous works, something that wouldn’t have been done if the apostles were acting in error.

C. Necessary conclusions or inferences – Sometimes God directs us by giving information that would lead us to a necessary outcome or conclusion. This is something that is so commonly done in human interaction we don’t even think about it; we simply draw the conclusions and move ahead. For example: Suppose a parent hands car keys and a \$5 bill to their teenager and says, “Go to the store and get some milk.” Should the teen ask, “Can I take the car?” Should he ride his bike just to be on the safe side? Or is there *implied directive to take the car* in the handing over of the keys?

1. A good example of Jesus teaching in this way is His answer to John’s inquiry: “*Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?*” (Mt 11:3). How does Jesus answer this? What conclusion is John to draw?

2. Other examples of necessary conclusions:

- a. How many first days of the week during the year should we observe the Lord's supper? Does not the term "first day of the week" imply that every time a week has a first day the Lord's supper is observed? (Doesn't the directive "Your rent is due on the first day of the month" imply that every time a month has a first day, your rent is due?)
- b. Since no specific instruction is given concerning the place of meeting, is it not a necessary conclusion that any place suitable to accommodate the purpose is authorized? Purchase, rental, private home, etc. are all valid on the basis of necessary conclusion.
- c. There is no direct statement that miracles would cease in the early days of the church, but one reaches this conclusion in part by considering the method of transmission. The NT teaches that "*through the laying on of apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given*" (Acts 8:18). Therefore, it is a necessary conclusion that when there are no longer apostles, there will no longer be a method of transmission for these gifts. This is a self-limiting feature of miracles.

D. Dangers – We must be careful to engage in this process accurately. We might confuse a *possible* conclusion with a *necessary* one. We also need to take into account *all information available* before drawing a conclusion. Other Biblical information may show that a certain doctrine or course of action has other options and possibilities, so we must be careful in discerning what is a *necessary* conclusion.

2. All Things Unto Edification

A. It is not enough simply to determine what God's word *authorizes me to do*. The Scriptures show that Christians are a community, and as such we have responsibility to each other. From a positive angle, we are to build up, edify and encourage each other:

- 1. 1 Cor 10:24 – "*Let no one seek _____, but each one the other's _____.*"
- 2. Phil 2:3-4 – "*Let each of you look out not only for his own _____, but also for the interests of _____.*"

B. Negatively, we are not to be the source of another's downfall:

- 1. Rom 14:13 – "*Therefore let us ... resolve this, not to put a _____ or a cause to fall in our brother's way.*"
- 2. 1 Cor 8:12 – "*But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you _____.*"

C. Therefore, establishing authority from the Scriptures goes further than determining what we have the "right" to do. Our rights must not be exercised to the hurt of others, and when this is the potential outcome, we are to forego those rights.



The AUTHORITY of God's Word

Lesson 10: Determining Authority Within the New Testament (2)

1. General and Specific Authority

A. A greatly misunderstood facet of authority is determining when something is permitted under a general principle and when it is specified.

1. General authority means that the NT directs something to be done in only a general way; various specific details are left to the judgment of men. *In contrast to the OT, there is actually much in the NT that is left to individual judgment and less is directly specified.*
2. Nothing directly is said about owning a church building in the NT, so is it lawful? As we already noticed, the place of meeting for worship and teaching was not specified in the first century. Christians gathered in the temple, by a river, in upper rooms, in private homes, etc. *But they are authorized to meet.* So, it can truthfully be said that a church building owned by the church is *authorized*, even though it is not *specified*.
3. Many items that *expedite* or help us obey other commands fall under the heading of being generically authorized: pews, song books, cups and plates for the Lord's supper, a wall clock, whiteboards, projectors, waders/baptismal garments, stationery, advertising, etc.

B. Specific authority is just that, *specific*, with no room for alteration. Write some examples of things you would consider to be specifically authorized: _____

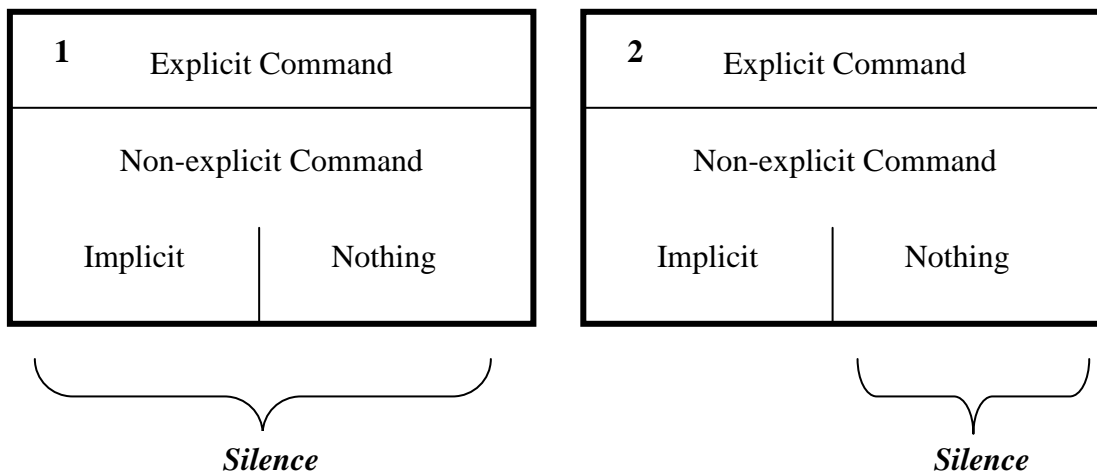
C. **Note:** If something is utilized to expedite or carry out some command of God, it follows that this thing itself must be authorized; i.e., it must not violate other parts of the law.

1. Some try to incorporate instrumental music into worship on the grounds that it *aids* or *expedites* singing. At the very least, we can say that this is a debatable opinion. Some music interferes with singing, with understanding the content of the song, etc.
2. But more than this, instrumental music is *another type of music* that itself is not authorized by God. The NT consistently says that we should *sing* and offer to God what is in our hearts (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). History shows that the mechanical instrument encroaches until it becomes a *substitute* for the plain vocal music the Lord has commanded.

3. Would you consider these to be lawful expedients (LE) or unlawful additions (UA)?
- An “after dinner” mint following the Lord’s supper – LE or UA?
 - Using Powerpoint or projectors to teach with – LE or UA?
 - A bookstore/gift shop in the building to sell products that advertise the church and raise funds – LE or UA?
 - Building a clinic in third-world countries to treat the sick and pass out Bibles – LE or UA?
 - Installing an elevator to help handicapped people have access to the building – LE or UA?

2. Silence: Does It Permit or Prohibit?

- A. Two major thoughts on the silence of the Scriptures have led to much religious disagreement. One side thinks: “If the Bible doesn’t *expressly prohibit* something, then it is allowed.” The other side says, “The silence of the Scriptures *is restrictive*; we must have some form of positive authority from the Bible in order to act.”
- B. We must be very careful in understanding “silence.” Note the following charts: (Source: Walton Weaver, *That They May All Be One*, p. 256, quoting from G.F. Beals, “*How Implication Binds and Silence Forbids: Studies in Biblical Hermeneutics*”)



- In chart #1, the Bible may be silent about a particular thing in that it is neither implicitly authorized nor is it mentioned at all.
- In chart #2, the Bible may be silent about a particular thing in that it may not be specifically mentioned, but it may be permitted implicitly.

3. Look at three shopping lists:

#1: Meat, white potato, box of cereal #2: Pasta, loaf of bread, apples #3: Loaf of white bread, cheese slices, dozen eggs

- a. Examine the lists carefully: list #1 is “silent” about buying a loaf of white bread. It is not “authorized” at all by the list, either implicitly or explicitly.
- b. List #2 doesn’t *explicitly* say “white bread,” but white bread is included under the non-explicit heading of “loaf of bread.” If a mother gave this list to her teenager, and he came home with white bread, his action is acceptable as the mother did not specify which kind of bread. *But it is not correct to say list #2 is **silent** about white bread.* White bread is implicitly authorized because it is included under the generic term “loaf of bread.”
- c. List #3 *explicitly* says “loaf of white bread.” Any other kind of bread violates the authority of the list.

C. People frequently fail to make these distinctions as they seek to justify including unauthorized elements into the work or worship or organizational structure of the church. They say things like: “Well, the Bible doesn’t say anything about church buildings or pews or song books, but we have them. So an instrument of music is no different. The Bible doesn’t say we *can’t* have an organ, so it isn’t wrong to have one.”

1. It is wrong to say that we don’t have authority for a church building. If this was true, then we ought to get rid of our buildings, not justify other unauthorized things.
2. The Bible authorizes church buildings and a host of other implicit expedencies as they assist in discharging other commands and duties.
3. Things that are completely omitted in the Scriptures, and which do not expedite the execution of commands, are *prohibited* because they do not have Bible authority.
4. Silence prohibits: infant baptism, the Lord’s Supper on weekdays, observing Christmas or Easter as religious holidays, burning incense in worship, churches building schools or hospitals and a host of other practices common to denominations of our day.
5. Note Heb 1:5 – “*For to which of the angels did He ever say, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You’?*” The implied answer: none. God was **silent** on the subject of considering any angel His Son. See also Heb 7:14; Ac 15:24; 1 Chr 17:6; Jer 19:5.

Conclusion: It takes careful consideration to determine whether a doctrine or practice is authorized, and if so, how. We can err in either adding things that are not authorized, or raising an expedient to the level of law, or omitting something that is demanded by the law.



The AUTHORITY of God's Word

Lesson 11: Determining Authority Within the New Testament (3)

Introduction: While there are clear principles to follow in determining Bible authority, this does not mean it is always easy. It isn't, and the confusion and contradictions in the religious world, as well as congregational strife both in the first century and in our own experience, attest to how difficult it is to reach agreement. Here are some factors which make objectively determining authority difficult:

1. Opinions – It is very easy to substitute our opinions for what is actually taught in the NT. Sometimes this is unconscious, but other times it is pure self-will.

A. We can hold views very strongly, for most people believe they are acting in the most sensible fashion possible. We account for all the variables of our lives and make decisions accordingly, whether it is buying a car, choosing medical treatment, securing insurance, etc. It is easy to project our conclusion on to others, not knowing all their circumstances.

B. Paul even gave advice:

1. What does Paul advise the Corinthians in 1 Cor 7:36-38?

2. What does Paul advise Apollos in 1 Cor 16:12?

C. But Paul clearly delineated between advice and command, and he did not pressure or coerce others to accept his personal judgments.

2. Emotion – This is a component of being opinionated, for it is often our feelings which drive us to unduly influence others. Some “doctrinal” views are nothing more than raw emotion with a few (often misapplied) Scriptures thrown in.

A. A good example of this from history is the “infant baptism” issue. In a certain meeting in the early 1800s, “(Thomas) Campbell’s speech closed with the famous motto: ‘Where the Bible speaks; we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent.’ ... For the first time there were some who realized that the motto struck with equal force against human creeds as it did against Catholic traditions. Quite naturally, then when Campbell first spoke these words, and paused, there was a solemn hush that fell across the assembly that showed the intensity of the emotions of the hour. Campbell sat down. A Scottish bookseller, Andrew Munro, a rather sentimental person, was the first to break the silence. ‘Mr. Campbell,’ he said, ‘if we adopt *that* as a basis, then there is an end of infant baptism.’ Campbell replied: ‘Of course, if infant baptism be not found in the scriptures, we can having nothing to do

with it.’ Thomas Acheson then arose and cried: ‘I hope I may never see the day when my heart will renounce that blessed saying of the Scripture, “Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”’ Saying that he burst into tears. James Foster ... arose and cried out: ‘Mr. Acheson, I would remark that in the portion of Scripture you have quoted, *there is no reference whatever to infant baptism*’” (West, *Search for the Ancient Order*, p. 47-48).

B. The destructive intensity of emotion can be seen in the Jews’ rejection of Jesus. They opposed His words, accused Him of demon possession and blasphemy, made several abortive attempts to stone Him, and finally coerced the Romans into executing Him. All of this was done according to prophecy, but the Jews could not see through their intense emotion their role in fulfilling the Scriptures.

3. Traditions – It is easy for humans to become predictable and routine in life, to search for the “path of least resistance.” The tendency is then to hold to that path without thinking, to rest on the judgment and habits of earlier generations. One element of this mindset is putting people on a pedestal and attaching too much significance to them: parents, friends, a mate, a preacher or theologian, a group (religious denomination). Of course, not all tradition is wrong. But it is easy for tradition to crystallize into law, to lose sight of what is truly *Scriptural* and what is an expedient way of accomplishing something.

A. The term “tradition” in the NT is neutral; there is nothing wrong with following traditions per se. But when tradition displaces God’s law, it has gone too far. This is what Jesus accused the Pharisees of doing: “*Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition*” (Mt 15:6).

B. Paul uses the term “tradition” in a positive sense in 2 Th 2:15 – “*Stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught ...*”. In this case, what should be handed down from generation to generation is true doctrine. What must be modified from time to time due to changing circumstances are things within the realm of judgment. If these things are not altered to fit the occasion, then the church becomes a mere relic, dated and out of touch with the thinking and the values of the society at large.

4. Arguing from Consequence – It is not unusual for people to see some Scriptural truth and then reject it when they are faced with the application of that truth. The Bible may contradict a theological position; it may condemn their practice or that of someone they love.

A. Some may reject a view of Scripture because it is a “plank” in their doctrinal framework. I have heard some say, “That passage *can’t* be saying *that* because we will lose an argument against false doctrine.” First, this is approaching the Scripture with preconception. While all tend to do this, we must not willfully blind ourselves to a different explanation without critical examination. Secondly, there are not many doctrinal concepts that are substantiated by *one verse only*.

B. Others simply may lack faith to follow the truth wherever it leads them. Some are not willing to pay the price of accepting a truth that condemns someone they love. But God gives

us all the right to choose, either to accept Him *fully* or reject Him. If someone I love exercises that right to reject God, I cannot reject Him to side with them. This free will of those we love is often a test of how much we truly love God.

C. Paul didn't compromise the truth about Gentile salvation in order to spare the feelings of either Peter or Barnabas (Gal 2:11-13).

5. Playing “Connect the Dots” – Another hindrance in the proper use of Scripture is to string together a number of passages which are unrelated (or taken out of context altogether) to prove a point. Those who do this are usually those who recognize the need for Bible authority (thus they search the Scriptures for “proof”), but they do not know how to handle the Scriptures correctly. A passage that may “sound like” the thing they want to prove is used without further investigation.

A. Premillennialists violate the principle constantly. So much of their “theology” involves yanking totally unrelated Scriptures from their context and weaving them together to form elaborate but erroneous doctrinal schemes. Figurative expressions are literalized when convenient and made to apply to modern nations, leaders, boundaries, treaties, instruments of warfare, etc. People are deceived by the millions (cf. 2 Pet 3:16).

B. Others might reason: 1) the Bible says “make a joyful noise,” 2) David made a joyful noise using musical instruments, 3) the word “psallo” in the NT means “pluck on an instrument,” 4) angels play harps in heaven ... SO, it is right to use instruments of music in worship today.

C. Others might misuse a single passage: “The Bible says ‘avoid every appearance of evil.’ Playing cards are associated with gambling, and gambling is evil. So, we must avoid even the appearance of evil, even if what we are doing is right.” This is essentially supporting a personal opinion by misusing Scripture. What 1 Th 5:22 actually says is, “*Abstain from every form of evil*”; i.e., in whatever form evil may appear, no matter how pleasant or enticing or innocent, see it for what it is and abstain from it.

6. Other Challenges

A. There are many other challenges to extracting from the Bible the true authority for us to act today in worship and in the work of the church. The bottom line is that we must be honest, we must be industrious, and we must use sound investigation principles in order to sift out the true and applicable to our day and time.

B. And these good principles of study must be instilled early. We must teach our children from their youth to respect God's word, see the wisdom in following it, receive the joy in discovering truth within it. And the best way for them to learn this is to *see it in our own example*.



The AUTHORITY of God's Word

Lesson 12: The Law of Moses

Introduction: In Acts 21:20, James and the other elders in Jerusalem say to Paul, “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law ...”. James, of course, refers to Jewish converts, but there is still much zeal for the law today among believers. Appeal is made to the law in order to justify certain doctrines and practices that cannot be substantiated in the NT.

1. Some False View Concerning the Law of Moses

A. “If God gave it, it should be observed.” *Answer:* The *Giver* of the law isn't the issue. God has given a multitude of directives and commands throughout history that do not apply today (“*Make ... an ark of gopherwood*” [Gn 6:14]; “*Get out of your country, from your kindred ... to a land that I will show you*” [Gn 12:1]; “*Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year*” [Ex 23:14]).

1. If someone argues, “Well, God was not speaking to *me directly* when He told Noah to build an ark or Abraham to leave Ur,” that is exactly the point. When God gave the law of Moses, it was given *to Israel*, the descendants of Abraham, not to anyone else.
2. When God limits a law or commandment to a particular purpose, recipient or duration, we have no right to extend that directive to ourselves or others without warrant.

B. “Parts of the Law are still in force today.” *Answer:* Those who say this usually make a distinction between “ceremonial” aspects of the law and moral aspects. They say the ceremonial elements have been taken away while the moral elements remain. However, the Bible does not make a distinction.

1. The only word approaching “ceremonial” in the OT is the term “ceremonies” as it applies to the observance of the Passover in Num 9:3. The word carries the idea of “procedures.” God is saying to Moses, “Whatever procedures are involved with observing the Passover, observe them beginning on the fourteenth day of the first month.”
2. A definitive passage on this subject is Dt 4:1-2: “*Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you*” (see also 4:5-6, 13-14, 44-45). We read in the OT of laws, statutes, commandments, ordinances, judgments, testimonies and other

descriptive terms, but not “ceremonial” and “moral” aspects. And God warns Israel to keep *all* of His directives, not pick and choose which to observe and which to ignore.

C. “The Old Testament prophecies about things yet in the future.” *Answer:* Some prophecies concern the national fate of Israel, as well as neighboring nations. Other prophecies anticipate the coming of the Messiah, who fulfills all of the redemptive plans of God (which was His reason for selecting the descendants of Abraham in the first place and establishing a unique covenant with them).

1. While there may be aspects of OT prophecy which foreshadow future events, such as the final judgment, the prophecies point to the entrance of the Messiah into the world; His works, character and purpose; His death and resurrection; His enthronement as the spiritual king of a spiritual kingdom and His eternal rule.
2. Jesus said, “*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill*” (Mt 5:17). After His resurrection, Jesus summarizes the prophecies from the span of human history: “*And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself*” (Lk 24:27).
3. Premillennial doctrine which cites current events as fulfillment of OT Scripture is perverting those passages. The prophecies we should be most concerned with are those spoken by Jesus and His apostles, for they reflect the authority of the new covenant which Jesus inaugurated by His death.

2. Putting Mosaic Law Into Perspective

A. The law: a ministry of death and condemnation.

1. Paul said, “*And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death*” (Rom 7:10). He is referring to the law of Moses, for he cites the tenth commandment in 7:7.
2. This echoes what Paul had earlier written in 2 Corinthians: the law was “*a ministry of death, written and engraved on stones*” (3:7), and “*a ministry of condemnation*” (3:9).
3. Paul called the law a “*yoke of bondage*” (Gal 5:1), and Peter referred to it as “*a yoke on the neck ... which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear*” (Acts 15:10).
4. Why such negative terminology, especially in reference to something that God had given? Is this blasphemy?
 - a. No, because elsewhere Paul says the law was “*holy, and the commandment holy and just and good*” (Rom 7:12). So what’s the point of this seeming contradiction?
 - b. Paul says the law of Moses was death and condemnation and bondage because it couldn’t provide man what he needed most: *exoneration from violating God’s law.*

Since everyone sins, mankind was in desperate need of a system that tempered justice with mercy and provided atonement for sin. The law of Moses, which only provided animal blood for sin, was inadequate to provide this: *“there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect”* (Heb 7:18-19a).

- c. This is achieved in the new covenant by the atoning sacrifice of Christ (1 Pet 1:18-19; Heb 9:12-14). Thus *“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’) ...”* (Gal 3:13). The gospel is, therefore, a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-19); and Christ is the mediator of a new covenant (Heb 9:15), a better covenant (Heb 8:6), in which God says, *“I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more”* (Heb 8:12).

B. The law: A temporary arrangement.

1. This is a major point missed by many. The law was temporary, designed to *prepare* mankind for something greater. Perhaps the illustration of martial law would be helpful. Martial law is imposed on a society in chaos until a more stable and permanent system can be put in place. So it was with the Mosaic law.
2. It was a tutor or guardian: *“But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. **But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor**”* (Gal 3:23-25).
3. This preparatory aspect of the law is suggested by terms such as “shadow” (Heb 10:1; Col 2:17), “copies” (Heb 9:23), “symbolic” (Heb 9:9), “copy and shadow” (Heb 8:5).

C. The law: An all or nothing proposition.

1. Many treat the law of Moses as a cafeteria food line: they choose what they like and pass by the rest. Even Jews in the first century used the law in this way. They emphasized circumcision above all else, but they also stressed the Sabbath, paying the temple tax and other selective commands.
2. However, we’ve previously seen that God’s expectations for the Jews was that they observe *all* of the law. Paul says to Christians who had been persuaded that circumcision was necessary for Gentile Christians: *“And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace”* (Gal 5:3-4). The force of Paul’s argument is: “The law of Moses is not valid anymore (*“nailed to the cross”* – Col 2:14), *but if it were* you could not practice circumcision without observing the rest.” If we want to keep David’s instruments, we must also take David’s animal sacrifices. If we want to observe the Sabbath, we must also observe the Passover.

3. The Value of the Law of Moses Today

- A. We **do not** learn from the law what rules and regulations are active, for the law as a judicial document is no longer valid. But we do learn some very valuable principles that, when considered with care, enhance our own standing before God today.
- B. As the old law anticipates the new, the new law comments on the old and puts it in its proper light:
1. Timothy was taught “*the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith*” (2 Tim 3:15). This is similar to Gal 3:24: “*The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*” Also consider Rom 10:4: “*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*” The law of Moses gives context and background to the present day reality of the gospel.
 2. Paul told the Romans “*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*” (Rom 15:4). As we are instructed about God, His nature, the principles of His interaction with man over centuries, we gain much resource which provides patience and comfort, for God is “*the God of patience and comfort*” (Rom 15:5).
 3. There are also moral lessons to be learned from the historical record: “*Now these things became our examples to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted ... Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition ...*” (1 Cor 10:6, 11). While the law has changed, human nature has not. We learn from the mistakes Israel made, and that the patriarchal ancestors made as well.
- C. Although God’s moral nature does not change, the specific laws that He institutes may be revoked or altered. All law is consistent with His being, but the law of Moses emphasized different things than the law of Christ. However, we can still learn much about our Creator by examining *His own inspired record* of His interaction with man through the ages.



The AUTHORITY of God's Word

Lesson 13: False Sources of Authority

Introduction: The NT is *full* of warnings against abandoning the truth for false ways. As we have noted, there are only two sources of authority: heaven or men (see lesson 2). Unapproved human authority is invalid and often disguised in religious robes. We must always be wary.

1. Some NT Warnings

- A. Paul warned the Ephesian elders that *“from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves”* (Ac 20:30).
- B. Paul warned the Galatians about Judaistic teachers: *“They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them”* (Gal 4:17).
- C. Paul warned the Colossians: *“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ”* (Col 2:8). He continues his grave warning: *“Let no one defraud you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind”* (2:18).
- D. Peter also is concerned about subversive teaching: *“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies ... and many will follow their destructive ways ... By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words”* (2 Pet 2:1-3).
- E. John chimes in: *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world”* (1 Jn 4:1).
- F. These and other warnings (refer to the extensive list from 1 & 2 Timothy in lesson 8) have one idea in common: man was substituting his thoughts and ideas for God's, and they were doing it so subtly that many Christians were being led away from the truth.

2. Some Modern Applications

- A. Church councils and creeds: *“A creed is a concise, formal, and authorized statement of important points of Christian doctrine, the classical instances being the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed ... The Council of Nicaea (325) put in a credal form the profession of faith ... as a general standard of orthodoxy; and the use of creeds for this purpose rapidly spread in the 4th century”* (*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 358).

1. Creedalism grows out of an institutional view of the church, that “truth” somehow resides in a body of men. Further, fellowship with God is conditional upon adopting the formal statement or creed.
 2. Churches today still meet in national conventions to formulate and establish their formal statements of church policy. This is often determined by delegates voting on various proposals which, when approved, become official church dogma.
- B. Traditions: Another outgrowth of an institutionalized view of the church is the elevation of tradition to a place of authority. “In a more modern sense, tradition means the continuous stream of explanation and elucidation of the primitive faith, illustrating the way in which Christianity has been presented and understood in past ages. It is, that is, the accumulated wisdom of the past ... In the Reformation era the relation of unwritten tradition to the Scriptural revelation was the subject of acute controversy between Protestants and Catholics. As against the Protestant belief in the sole sufficiency of the Bible, the Council of Trent (AD 1546) laid down that Scripture and tradition were to be received as of equal authority” (ibid, pp. 1388-1389).
1. Again, this notion defines the church as an institutional body which has authority to interpret the Scriptures and set policy. Over time the policies and practices become authoritative; i.e., they set precedent that is just as valid as what the Bible actually says.
 2. Many people blindly follow tradition because they are comfortable with it. They ascribe to it an aura of invincibility (“How could *everyone* be so wrong, *for so long*??”). The fact that something has been in place for generations lends a sense of legitimacy to it.
 3. Lest we point fingers too quickly at others, we must honestly assess ourselves in this regard. Is it not possible for us to become set in our ways and mistakenly equate “the way we’ve always done it” with what the Scriptures actually say?
- C. Popular authors: The Bible is a single collection of 66 individual works, a rather short account of the history of God’s interaction of mankind throughout human history. But when one walks into a Christian bookstore, or a theological library, he is surrounded by thousands of works written by men *about* the Bible. And while the Bible may still be the world’s best seller, one wonders which works are more *influential*: books by Tim LaHaye, James Dobson, John MacArthur, Joel Osteen, Max Lucado, et. al. or those by Peter and Paul and John??
1. I believe there is a place for commentaries, reference works, periodicals and other books written by uninspired men, they must be appreciated for what they are: uninspired works riddled with the prejudices, ignorance and judgment of fallible men. Many human authors have good things to say and say them well, but we must sift through the chaff to find the wheat.
 2. We must be careful not to confuse *popularity* with *authority*. This applies to preachers as well as writers. Charisma can be disorienting.

3. Standing for the Truth

- A. Jesus addressed the unfortunate fate of those who are persuaded to follow false religious authorities. Of the Pharisees He said, *“Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch”* (Mt 15:13-14).
1. The blindness to be led into the ditch is willful and chosen because God has given us enough light to distinguish truth from error.
 2. Error often spreads like cancer (2 Tim 2:17) because it is what people want to hear: *“The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so”* (Jer 5:31).
- B. Jesus also said that by becoming His true disciple we would *“know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (Jn 8:32). What is a true disciple? *“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed”* (8:31).
- C. It is our hope that this study will invigorate us to seek the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. There is much counterfeit religion in the world. We must desire only the pure, unadulterated word of God and apply ourselves to attaining knowledge of it by every resource available to us. We hope this study is part of that resource.