

Seeking the Truth

A Study of Authority

By Rhodes Davis

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Lesson

1

Why Do We Need Authority?

Phil has a problem. After years of neglecting his spiritual growth, he decided to dedicate his life to serving God. On Sunday morning he went down to Church Street.

The streets and sidewalks were busy with people of all ages, races, and economic backgrounds driving and walking to different churches.

Different churches. That sight confused him. There were many buildings with different names but all claimed to be serving God.

There were several kinds of Baptist and Methodist churches, a Church of Christ, a Catholic church, an Episcopalian church, some Assembly of God churches, and a host of churches that had names he had never heard of like Living Waters Community Church, and Church of the Divine Son in Prophecy Full Gospel Community Fellowship.

Phil began asking people on the street which one he should attend. They asked if he were part of any denominational body. Though confused, he felt sure that he was not, he just wanted to serve God.

One person told him to visit them all and choose the one that was most comfortable to him. This sounded more like clothes shopping than finding a place to serve God.

While thinking about his choices, he stopped one man and asked,

“Since I can just choose any church, are they all the same?”

“No,” the man replied, “They believe some of the same things but not all of the same things.”

“Well,” Phil said, “point me to the one that just follows the Bible.”

The man laughed and said as he walked away, “They all use the Bible.”

Phil was greatly confused. As the late worshippers hurried into the buildings, Phil sat on the curb of the now quiet street.

He remembered reading in the Bible of Jesus’ prayer that all of his disciples should be one. (John 17:20-23) Also, Paul told the churches to be of the same mind and spirit and to speak the same thing. Paul also condemned the Corinthians for following after men and claiming allegiance to them (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-4). “Didn’t Christ say he would build his church, not churches,” Phil asked himself.

Phil just wanted to be a member of Christ’s church. He remembered Paul’s warnings about false teachers and false doctrines. He did not want to disobey God.

On Monday morning Phil had a brilliant idea—he thought. “I’ll join all the churches,” he exclaimed.

As he visited each church, the

Why Do We Need Authority?

leaders were glad to hear that he wanted to join their group. However, when he said that he was going to join the other churches as well, the church leaders grimaced. Many of them told him, “You can’t join the _____ church, they teach differently about salvation, or worship, or some other matter.”

“That group uses another book in addition to the Bible,” argued one leader.

“Like your creed?” Phil asked innocently.

“Of course not. The creed is in agreement with the Bible,” the man snapped.

“Then why do you need it?”

“To help us know what the Bible teaches.”

Exasperated, Phil asked, “Then why are there so many different creeds. Shouldn’t we just agree on what the Bible teaches?”

Phil was still confused. Christ built a church and yet there were hundreds of churches around. Christ wanted his followers to be of the same mind and speak the same thing yet there were many, often conflicting, doctrines on this one street. Phil decided to study the history of the church to see where it all went wrong.

Questions for Lesson 1

1. List some problems with the “attend the church of your choice” philosophy.
2. What problem do you think is at the heart of all “unity” movements?
3. How can people be “of the same mind and speak the same thing?”
4. How do you think the religious division of the world can be used by skeptics (enemies of religion) to criticize Christianity? How would you answer it?

Lesson

2

Why Are There So Many Churches (Part 1)?

When Phil studied his Bible he learned that Jesus would build His church, Matthew 16:18. Before He died, Jesus prayed that His disciples would be unified, John 17:21.

The church began in Acts 2 (about 33 A.D.) and the message of the gospel quickly spread throughout the world. Believers established churches in their localities but they followed the same doctrine. In fact, Paul spoke strongly against those who would create confusion and divide the church (1 Timothy 6:3-5). In his many letters, Paul warned the believers of false teachers and false doctrines that would lure many from the truth of the gospel (See question 2). Here we find the seeds of division that have plagued the church. In order to know about the church that Christ built, Phil realized that he must learn the truth of what Jesus did teach and the errors opposing it.

Change in Government

The first error that was obvious was a change in how the church was organized and governed. In the New Testament, men called elders* were overseers of the local churches. The elders would be chosen from among the brethren according to the

qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Their authority would only extend over the local church of which they were a part. They had no legislative power, only oversight over the souls of the members.

Gradually, men began to change God's order. The elders at a church would choose a man of good judgment and wisdom to be the presiding elder, or bishop. He would have to make decisions with the rest of the elders but he had special oversight and delegation responsibilities to the other elders (Mosheim 39).

When large city churches would establish rural churches, the bishop would exercise authority over them as well. He would appoint deputies, called country bishops, to oversee those churches. They occupied a position between the elders and the bishop (Mosheim 39). Eventually, the bishop would rule a specific territory, called a diocese (Cox 27). The diocese was subdivided into smaller districts, called parishes, overseen by a presbyter or priest who would answer to the bishop (Latourette 132). Throughout the second and third centuries, we can see the distinction between the members of the church and the leadership. The idea of clergy (church government) and laity (members) was unknown in the New Testament.

*The terms elder, presbyter, bishop, overseer, shepherd, and pastor all come from three Greek words and all refer to the same office in the New Testament. They are used interchangeably in 1 Peter 5:1-4.

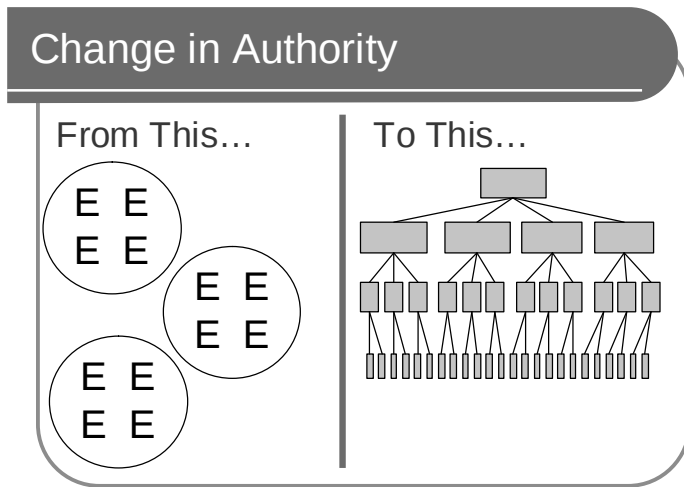


Figure 2-A

Rise of Councils

When problems and questions would arise, the bishops and elders from different churches would meet and discuss them. Early in these meetings, the elders would all have an equal voice and they understood that the conclusions were not binding on all of the churches (Mosheim 39-40). Soon, however, the occasional gatherings became regular meetings called synods (Greek) and councils (Latin) that did have legislative powers. The bishops from the chief cities (Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople), were called patriarchs, or chief fathers and presided over the councils.

The metropolitans, another name for the patriarchs, chose a president of the council (Cox 27-28). The bishops recognized the Bishop of Rome as having greater authority than the other bishops (Latourette

133). The Bishop of Rome, as their overseer, eventually assumed the name papa, or pope.

The most well known council was the Council of Nicea (325 A.D). The council met to discuss various controversies over doctrine. The 318 bishops in the council, under Emperor Constantine's oversight, adopted a formal statement of faith called "The Nicene Creed" (Cox 30-31). We read of no creeds in the New

Testament yet they have defined the divisions between the denominations throughout the centuries.

We can see the change from the simple church government of the New Testament churches to the complex hierarchy of what we know as the Catholic Church (Figure 2-A). Similar governments exist in other religious bodies as well. This form of government consists of many offices that are unknown to the Scriptures. The worldwide councils united churches that were supposed to be independent.

Change in Practice

In the past two thousand years, men have added practices to the worship and new doctrines that are foreign to God's word. Look at the chart of practices that bishops introduced into the Catholic Church. You will find no scripture authorizing these practices for they are the inventions of men

Why Are There So Many Churches? (Part 1)

Strange Doctrines

Date	Practice	Date	Practice
150	Infant Baptism Advocated	1215	Confess to the Priest for Forgiveness
400	Total Hereditary Depravity	1215	Mass as a Sacrifice of Christ
400	Once Saved, Always Saved	1268	Priest's Power of Absolution
431	Worship of Mary	1311	Sprinkling for Baptism Authorized
788	Adoration of Saints, Images, and Relics	1414	Laity Forbidden to Drink Cup in Mass
933	Prayer to Saints	1438	Purgatory
1009	Holy Water	1545	Tradition Equal to Bible
1160	Canonization of Saints	1831	Mourner's Bench
1215	Transubstantiation	1870	Infallibility of the Pope

*Dates reflect formal acceptance. May have been practiced/taught many years before formally accepted.

Adapted from Burton W. Barber

Questions for Lesson 2

1. What is meant by the term autonomous as it relates to the church?
2. List some passages where Paul warned the churches of false teaching.
3. What are some inherent dangers, besides scriptural objections, to churches unifying in councils or a single worldwide government?
4. What did Jesus say about the traditions of men (Matt. 15:9)?

Lesson

3

Why Are There So Many Churches (Part 2)?

The Catholic Church continued to develop and gain power for over a thousand years. The pope's power became stronger and stretched even into political matters. The Catholic Church waged war to increase its power and bishops used political influence and pressure to gain power and influence. The Catholic Church also built magnificent buildings, such as St. Peter's church in Rome. However, warfare and building projects needed money.

In order to raise money, the Church began to sell some church offices to the highest bidder (Cox 50). Another scheme was selling indulgences. The indulgence would pay for sin for the buyer or even for one who was dead. The Catholic Church teaches that when one dies, he goes to purgatory to "purge," or burn off, the venial (mild) sins. An indulgence is a good act that can take away a sin so the believer does not have to suffer long in purgatory. The Catholic Church raised a lot of money for building St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome by selling indulgences (Thomas 52-53).

Seeds of Revolution

Fundraising schemes, political meddling, doctrinal errors, and immorality among the clergy led to dissatisfaction among some Catholics. Some groups tried to reform the church but were often

persecuted and killed by the Catholic hierarchy.

The Albigenses in Southern France (1170 A.D.) opposed the authority of traditions, purgatory, and image worship. Pope Innocent III incited a crusade to slaughter them (Cox 51).

John Wycliffe (1324-2384) opposed the authority of the pope, transubstantiation, auricular confession. He is best known for translating the Bible into the English language for which he was persecuted (Cox 51-52).

John Huss and Jerome Savonarola were two other men who opposed abuses in the Catholic Church and were burned to death by the order of the church.

These people, and more, were but the thunder in the distance for the Reformation Movement which would soon storm over the religious world.

The Protestant Reformation

Though the Church was often successful in persecuting and exterminating opposition, the ideas of reforming the Catholic Church continued to grow. The most prominent of the reformers was Martin Luther.

Luther was a monk and a professor at the university in Wittenberg, Germany. In the early 1500's, a controversy arose which necessitated Luther's presence in

Why Are There So Many Churches? (Part 2)

Rome to represent the two sides in the dispute before the Pope. In Rome, Luther saw the irreverent and immoral behavior of the priests and monks. Luther returned to Wittenberg with a more realistic view of the church and its leadership.

During this period, Pope Leo X sent a man named John Tetzel to sell indulgences to finance the building of St. Peter's in Rome. Luther opposed the selling of indulgences from the pulpit and in writing to Tetzel (Thomas 54). On October 31, 1517, seeing that Tetzel continued to sell indulgences, Luther nailed 95 propositions opposing the sale of indulgences and invited debate. A great debate ensued and many people supported Luther. In 1520, Pope Leo X issued a decree demanding Luther change his views within 60 days. Luther burned the decree and thus severed his relationship with the Catholic Church (Cox 56). He continued to condemn papal authority and the system of sacraments within the Catholic Church. Though brought before church councils, he would not retract his statements and was protected by those who favored his teachings. The Lutheran movement today continues in the tradition of Luther's teachings.

In Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli, a highly educated priest, began a reform encouraged by the success of Luther. Zwingli was a Greek scholar and expounded on the scriptures to his audiences in Zurich. He opposed

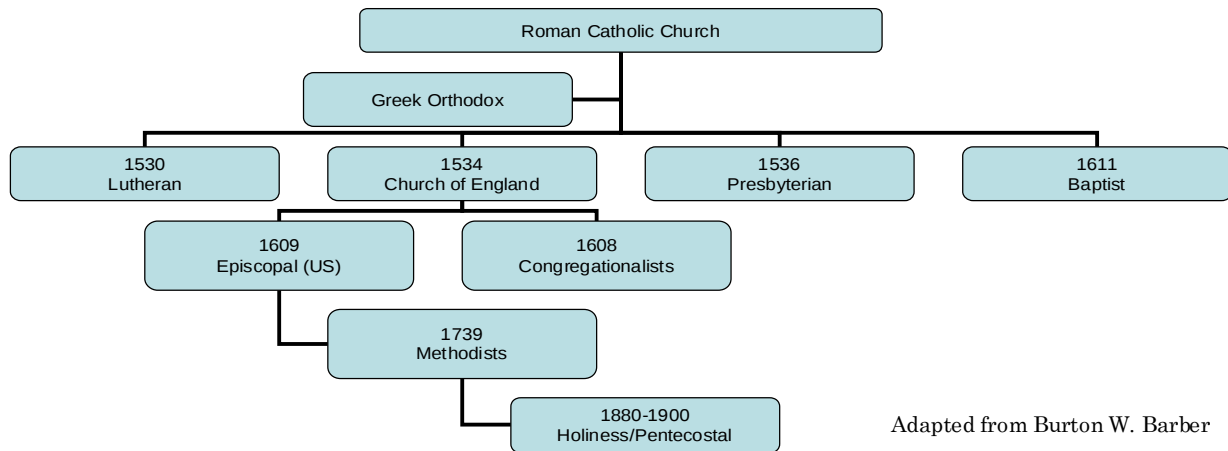
the authority of the pope, human doctrines, prayers to saints and priests, priestly celibacy, and considered the mass idolatrous; favoring instead a return to the simple Lord's Supper (Taylor 23). A primary difference between Zwingli and Luther was their approach to the scripture. Luther favored any practice that was not contrary to scripture whereas Zwingli went further and opposed what was not taught within the word of God.

In France, John Calvin led reformation efforts. Calvin renounced Catholicism desiring a purified Christianity. In 1534 he began to develop a doctrine in a published work called the Institutes of the Christian Religion (Durant 460). The doctrine, though very logical, begins from a false view of God's sovereignty and so contradicts the word of God in that it removes man's free will in choosing to serve or reject God. The doctrine is the basis of the Presbyterian religion. Many other religious bodies have adopted part or all of Calvinism's tenets:

- Total Hereditary Depravity
- Unconditional Election
- Limited Atonement
- Irresistible Grace
- Perseverance of the Saints

Though it seemed that these reformers meant well, Phil noticed that their efforts resulted in the establishment of denominational division. Now he understood the problem, but how could he find a solution?

Main Branches of the Reformation Churches



Adapted from Burton W. Barber

Questions for Lesson 3

1. What are indulgences in the Catholic Church? Why were they such a problem for Luther?
2. How did the Catholic Church treat the early reformers?
3. What was the fundamental difference between Luther and Zwingli's view of the scriptures?
4. Why did the Reformation efforts cause religious division?

The Authority of the Bible

Phil guessed that he would find a solution to his problem in the Bible. But is the Bible accurate and relevant for today?

When we consider the Bible as the word of God, we must accept one of two conclusions:

If the Bible is the word of God then it would be timeless in its application and would need to be read and obeyed by all men. Men would eagerly study it because it reveals the message and mind of our Creator. To snub it or treat it like common books would be to treat God in a like manner. If it is the word of God, we should seek to know it for ourselves as best we can.

If the Bible is not the word of God, then it is untrustworthy, unreliable, without authority, and the hopes and promises contained in its pages are vain and worthless. It would have no more value than any other book, in fact, it would be worse because it claims to be the word of God and commands submission to its precepts.

The Bible claims that it speaks for God with phrases such as “it is written,” “thus says the Lord,” “God spoke,” “The Spirit says,” and other variations. Either men are writing presumptuously in God’s name, or they are writing the words of God. Paul told Timothy, in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that “all scripture is inspired by

God.” Just as God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed life into him, so God took the language of man, and formed it into His living word. In that same passage Paul told Timothy that the word was profitable for teaching, developing faith, changing lives, and equipping every person for God’s work.

Old Testament as Scripture

Some have estimated that 10% of Jesus’ sayings come from the Old Testament. Jesus recognized the Old Testament as authoritative when He rebuked Satan in Matthew 4 with “It is written.” Jesus refers to the Old Testament as scriptures in Matthew 22:29 and John 5:39-47. In John 5, Jesus rebukes His audience for searching the scriptures but not obeying the message as it related to Him. Paul says that the Old Testament scriptures provide examples for us, Romans 15:4.

New Testament as Scripture

The New Testament also claims to be inspired scripture. Jesus gave the apostles the authority to bind and loose commandments while on earth, Matthew 18:18-20. He also promised that the Holy Spirit would help them remember the things He taught, John 14:25-26. When the apostles wrote, they wrote from authority expecting their commands to be followed, 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6-14. Peter

recognizes Paul's writings as scripture, 2 Peter 3:15-16.

Both the Old and New Testaments are scriptures inspired by God. However, only the New Testament is binding on the Christian today (see Lesson 5).

How Is Scripture Inspired?

There are three ways to consider inspiration:

1. Writing that inspires, like motivational literature.
2. God gave writers ideas and they chose the words.
3. God gave the writers the words themselves.

If number one were true, the Bible would simply be the product of man's imagination and of little use to us. A Unitarian preacher thought that one should have a "loose leaf" Bible in which he could add or remove writings that he found inspirational. If the Bible is not the word of God, this is a valid approach for it would be like any other book.

Some liberal scholars consider the Bible to be more the work of man than God. Consider the following quote:

"Its [the Bible] God was not longer the holy one who revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and finally in Jesus Christ, the eternal word made flesh. Revelation was conceived more as a human achievement than a divine gift; the Bible as a collection of human

insights and opinions than a message from God. Since Liberalism rejected all miracles, it believed Christ to be only human; salvation meant self-improvement, and the church was interpreted in sociological and ethical terms. Liberalism's optimism concerning the possibilities of human nature is matched only by its repudiation of the traditional doctrine of human sin and the fall" (M. E. Osterhave, "Theology in the Twentieth Century." Christian Faith and Modern Theology.)

The Bible itself refutes this concept of inspiration. 2 Peter 1:19-21 tells us that "no scripture is of private interpretation...but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." It was not of man's motivation or human endeavor, but men wrote as God moved them.

Some might argue, however, that the Holy Spirit gave the apostles the ideas. However, the New Testament writers recognized that they were writing the words of God and not speaking from their own authority. In 1 Corinthians 2:10-13, it seems clear that God gave the apostles the words to write. The words given were not from man's wisdom but from the Holy Spirit. Though about 40 men wrote the Bible over a period of 1,500 years, the message is a beautiful, seamless story of God's love and plan.

Linguistic specialists who study the word of God note that the writing

styles of the writers are different. If you read Paul and John, you can see their unique styles. Yet God could still have chosen the words based on the background and education of the apostles. Though they had different characteristics, the author is the same. For example, if I pick up a pencil, a fine point pen, a medium point marker, a crayon, and paintbrush I could write the same message but the writing would look different based on the characteristics of the writing instrument. Similarly, the Bible has the same author, God, but uses the characteristics of different writers to bring His message to life.

Evidence of Inspiration - Prophecies

We can see the evidence of inspiration in the fulfillment of many prophecies. These prophecies could have no rational explanation if God had not given the prophecy. The prophets claimed to speak the words of God. There were prophecies about the rise and fall of nations and the fate of Israel.

Of great interest to us are the prophecies of Jesus. Most estimate that no less than 300 prophecies apply to Jesus. Many of these, such as His virgin birth, His birth in Bethlehem, His death on the cross, the soldiers casting lots for His garments, were out of His control. What is more amazing is that the prophets predicted these things

hundreds of years before the events and their prophecies were preserved in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, 250 years before Jesus' birth. The statistical chance of just a few of the prophecies being fulfilled is staggering.

Evidence of Inspiration - Brevity of the Message

The inspiration of God is also evident in the brevity of the Bible message. The Bible covers so many important events briefly or not at all. Only a couple of stories record Jesus' youth and relatively little information is recorded about His three years of ministry. John did not lack material for he said that he could have kept writing and the world could not contain the books that men could write, John 20:30-31; 21:25. But John recorded the events he did to build faith in Jesus.

If uninspired men were recording the events of the Bible, we would expect greater detail and more personal observations. Pick up a history book on any event or nation and you will find much more information about these historical characters than you will find in the Bible regarding its main characters. I have a book on America's involvement in World War II and it is much more detailed than the thousands of years recorded in the Bible. This brevity shows the wisdom of God.

Evidence of Inspiration – Simplicity

Another strong evidence of God's hand in bringing us His word is the simplicity of the message. When Jesus came to earth, the common people heard Him gladly. He spoke deep universal truth in simple form. God used common language to preserve His message. If theologians wrote the Bible, none but the scholars would be able to understand it. As an example, in a book on the interpretation of scripture, the author says, "The reshaping and development of normative traditions is the focus of 'canonical criticism'" (Goldingay 21). The author does not speak in the language of the common person as Jesus did.

Phil realized that religious confusion began when men left the simple teaching of the Bible and followed the doctrines and traditions of men.

Questions for Lesson 4

1. Do you think people give "lip service" to the idea that the Bible is the word of God? Explain your answer.
2. How does an understanding of inspiration affect Bible interpretation?
3. How are prophecies evidence of God's inspiration?
4. Why do you think so little is written about the early years of Jesus or the details of His crucifixion?
5. Why do you think some people say the Bible is too tough to understand?

The Old Law

Bible Ages

The Bible story covers three periods of God's authority: the Patriarchal Age, the Law Age (or Mosaic Age), and the Christian Age. In each of these periods God dealt with His people in different ways.

In the Patriarchal Age, God spoke directly to the patriarchs—the heads of the families. He spoke to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. During this period, God made promises to Abraham and his descendants that they would become a great nation, they would inhabit the land of Canaan that Abraham journeyed through, and that one of his descendants would bless all nations. The patriarchal age spans the book of Genesis and the beginning of the book of Exodus.

The book of Exodus records God's command to Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage. Moses led the people to Mount Sinai where they agreed to make a covenant with God to be His people and He would be their God. God gave them the Old Law as part of the covenant. When the Jews accepted the Law, the Law Age began. The Jews were under the Old Law until Christ abolished it and established His law. The Law Age covers Exodus through the rest of the Old Testament. The events recorded in the gospels also take place in the Law Age.

The Christian Age is the last age. We are living in this age which began on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. When Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead, He put an end to the Old Law and established a new kingdom and a new covenant with a new law. The New Testament contains the law of Jesus. We will discuss Jesus' law in the next lesson.

The Old Law

The Old Testament law was a covenant between God and the Jews. Exodus 24:3-8 and Deuteronomy 31:20-21 record the covenant, or agreement, between the people and God. The Jews could accept or reject God's offer. Upon acceptance, the covenant was binding on the Jews at Mount Sinai and their descendants. Even if the Old Law were still in force, it would only be binding on the Jews, not the Gentiles.

The Old Law contained more than the Ten Commandments. The laws in Leviticus – Deuteronomy (Luke 2:22-24) and the Psalms (John 10:34 – Psalm 82:6) are considered the Law. Luke divided the Law into three parts: Law, Psalms, and Prophets (Luke 24:44).

The Purpose of the Law

The Old Law defined sin and its punishment and proper obedience, Galatians 3:19-20. Ultimately, the Law was to prepare the Jews for the

coming of Jesus, Galatians 3:22-25. The Law prophesied of Jesus and the Law itself manifested the need for a savior. However, when Jesus came, many of the Jews held onto the Law, the tutor, and would not listen to the Master Teacher.

The Temporary Nature of the Law

Jesus said that the Law would pass away when it was completed, or fulfilled, Matthew 5:17. Paul wrote that the Law was to abide until the Seed, Jesus, came to fulfill its promises, Galatians 3:19. He further wrote that the Law could not justify man before God, Galatians 2:16. The Hebrew writer said that the Law was a shadow of the things that God would reveal, Hebrews 10:1. Finally, Hebrews 8:7-13 points out that their had to be a new covenant for the people did not keep the old covenant. The Hebrew writer quotes Jeremiah who spoke of the need of the new covenant. The second covenant would make the first one obsolete.

The Law of Moses was a covenant made between God and the Jews, not all men. It was a temporary law to identify sin and prepare the people for the coming of Jesus. The Old Law could not take away sin, could not justify man, and condemned all of the Jews because they did not keep it completely. Man needed a new covenant that could take away sin and justify him before God.

The Old Law Is Not Binding Today

The New Testament explicitly declares the abolishment of the Old Law. In Ephesians 2:11-16, Paul writes that Jesus abolished the Old Law so that He could make one people from the Jews and Gentiles. He further wrote, in Colossians 2:14, that Jesus nailed the Old Law to the cross, taking it out of our way. In Romans 7:4-6, Paul wrote that we are dead to the Law through Christ, delivered from the Law, and now serve Jesus. The Hebrew writer, in Hebrews 10:9, wrote that the first law was removed to make way for the second. Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews demonstrate the difference and superiority of the New Law of Christ over the Old Law of Moses and warned people not to return to the Old Law.

In Acts 15, some Jewish Christians were trying to bind ordinances of the Old Law on the Gentile Christians. This caused great confusion but the apostles declared that the Old Testament ordinances were not binding on Christians.

In Galatians 5:1-4, Paul told the Galatians that if they sought to keep part of the Old Law, they were obligated to keep the whole Law. Keeping part of the Old Law would separate them from Christ. Some today want to bring part of the Old Law into worship or bind selected commandments on men today (use of instruments in worship, binding the

Sabbath day). However, if we want to take part of it, we must take all of it and resume animal sacrifices, incense burning, the tabernacle, journeying to Jerusalem to worship, the law of the surviving brother (Deuteronomy 25:5-10), etc. In doing so, we would separate ourselves from Jesus.

Conclusion

Christ removed the Old Law to make place for His covenant: a better law, with a better priesthood, a better sacrifice, remission of sins, and justification. In studying this, Phil realized that he could learn much from the Old Testament but its ordinances were not binding today. He knew that if he wanted answers, he needed to study the New Testament, the New Covenant of Jesus.

Questions for Lesson 5

1. What is a covenant? Who were the two parties to the covenant at Mt. Sinai?
2. How did the Old Law prepare Israel for Jesus?
3. Why did the Old Law have to be abolished?
4. According to Galatians 5, what were the consequences of keeping the Law?
5. Why can we not use the Old Law as authority for what we practice?

The Gospel of Jesus

As discussed in the previous lesson, Jesus abolished the Old Covenant with the Jews and established a new covenant with those who would obey the gospel. Jesus and the apostles taught the gospel and offered it to all people beginning on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

What is the Gospel?

The heart of the gospel is the message of Jesus' sacrifice to save men from the penalty due for their sins. We are to tell lost souls about the love and grace of God in offering salvation to humanity and the need to submit to Christ's rule. Some teach that this is the whole of the gospel message, but the New Testament clearly teaches that it is only a part.

Some people want to separate the doctrine of Christ from the gospel of Christ. They want to separate the things that Jesus and the apostles commanded from simple belief. This is an unscriptural distinction. Paul used the terms law, doctrine, and gospel interchangeably in 1 Timothy 1:9-11. Furthermore, Romans 16:17 points out that Christians obey a "form of doctrine" that calls them from sin. Those who would separate the gospel and doctrine forget that Paul told Timothy that by following the doctrine, he would save himself and his audience, 1 Timothy 4:16.

The New Testament makes no distinction between the gospel of Christ, His law, or His doctrine. They all constitute the gospel of Christ.

Law and Grace

If the gospel is the law of Christ, what does that do to grace? Does grace oppose the concept of Christ's law? Not at all, men have made a distinction where the Bible does not.

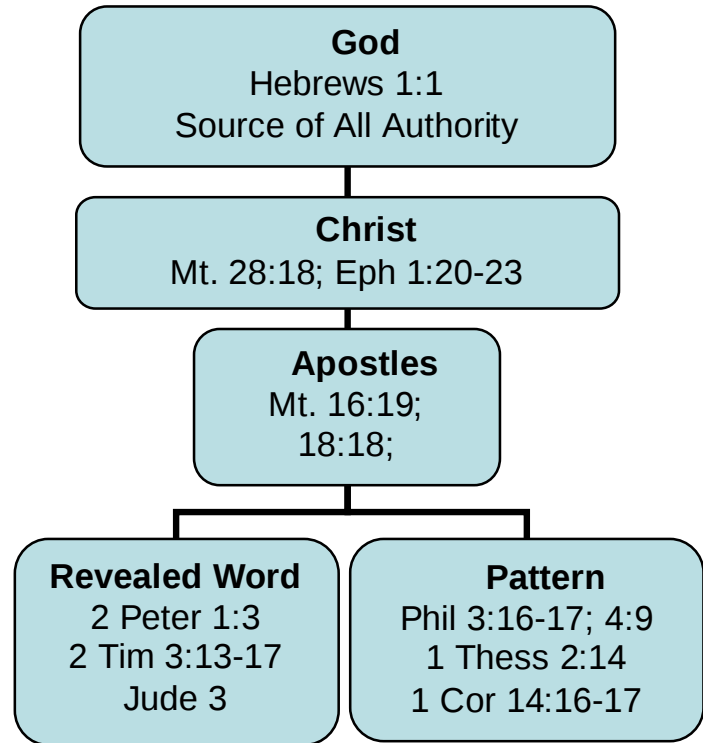
We are saved by God's grace, the Bible clearly teaches this. Salvation is a gift of God and it would be unscriptural to argue otherwise. Yet salvation through grace does not remove man from any obligation of obedience.

Salvation is a gift from God, Ephesians 2:8-9. Yet God has promised gifts to His people for which they had to work. God told Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the nation of Israel that He would give them the Promised Land (Genesis 12:7; 13:15-17; 26:3-4; Exodus 6:2-4; Numbers 14:6-9; Deuteronomy 32:49). However, Israel had to fight to take the land that God gave them (Joshua 1:12-15; 21:43-45). It was a gift from God but they had to conquer the land in order to possess it. Their efforts did not diminish the gift of God for they would not, of their own power, been able to conquer the land. Though they had to fight, it was still a gift.

As Israel began to conquer the land, the first city they encountered was Jericho. God told Joshua that He was giving Jericho to them, Joshua 6:2. However, the Jews still had to take the city. Furthermore, God gave them the instructions on how to take the city (Joshua 6). They had to obey God's commands to receive His gift. Though they did something every day for seven days, they did not earn nor deserve the city; they simply did what God required. The Hebrew writer, in commenting on this event, said that the walls fell by faith, Hebrews 11:30. Salvation by grace through faith does not mean that God does not require efforts on our part. In fact, faith unaccompanied by works is dead, James 2:14-26. Obeying the commandments of God does not earn our salvation (Luke 17:10) but if we do not keep His commandments we will be lost (Romans 2:6-11; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 John 2:3-6)

God has grace towards man, gave Jesus as a sacrifice to satisfy the penalty of sin and calls men by the gospel to obedience of faith. Man must respond by obedience of faith, by believing the word taught in the gospel, turning from sin which leads to further unrighteousness, dying with Christ being buried with Him in baptism, and being raised to walk a new life that maintains good works. We do not earn our salvation, but we are justified by faith, a faith that made perfect by good works, that is, works commanded by God.

New Testament Authority



As the chart illustrates, all authority flows down from the Father, through Jesus to the apostles. The authority from the apostles consists of their teaching and example. The Bible condemns those who do not abide in Christ's doctrine (2 John 7-11), who follow traditions devised by men (Matthew 15:1-9), and any other authority but God's word (Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Jesus and the apostles revealed their authority in several ways that will be discussed in the next several lessons. We learn how to interpret the New Testament from the New Testament itself. Here is a brief overview:

Explicit commands are the simple “do this” and “don’t do this” commands. The apostle’s commands carried the weight and force of the commands of Jesus recorded in the gospel, John 16:13-15; Matthew 18:18-20.

Necessary Inference is a necessary conclusion derived from God’s word. In Acts 15:7-11, Peter concluded that since God gave the Gentiles the Holy Spirit as He gave Him to the Jews, that keeping the Old Law was not necessary to their obedience.

Approved Examples show us how to obey the commands by demonstrating God’s approval on others who have acted in harmony with His will. In Acts 15:12, Paul and Barnabas declared the work of the Spirit among the Gentiles by their hands as evidence of God’s approval of the Gentiles who only obeyed Jesus, not the Old Law.

Expedients are scriptural ways to fulfill the commandments of God. At the end of the meeting in Acts 15, the apostles decided to send a letter to the Gentiles to tell them that they did not have to obey the Old Law in order to be saved. They sent the letter by several brethren. Both the letter and the messengers were expedient ways to deliver the instruction to the Gentiles. Other scriptural methods could have been chosen. Expedients must be lawful, 1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23.

Biblical Principles are taught by the spirit of the commands. A particular type of lustful dance might not be explicitly condemned (named) in scripture but since creating lust is condemned and modesty, holiness, and goodness is commanded, the dance would be wrong.

Questions for Lesson 6

1. Why do you think some people want to separate gospel and doctrine?
2. Explain the relationship between commandments (law) and grace in the New Testament. Are they contradictory terms?
3. How do the apostles still exercise authority today?
4. Read Acts 15:6-29 and note the way the apostles established authority.

Direct Commands

Positive and Negative Commands

The direct command is the simplest and most direct way of establishing authority. A command can be positive or negative; “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not” as in the Old King James Version of the Bible.

Positive commands require us to do something in obedience to God. Negative commands require us to refrain from something that displeases God.

Application of a Command

Though the commands in the New Testament applied to believers in the first century, they are indirectly applied to us. For example, in Mark 16:15, the command to preach to the world was given specifically to the apostles. Yet the early believers understood that this applied to them, Acts 8:4. As people are taught, they have an obligation to teach the gospel to others, 2 Timothy 2:2. These generalized commands constitute the bulk of what we follow. However, we must recognize special circumstances where commands do not apply to us.

- ♦ In Luke 18:18-24, Jesus commanded a rich young ruler to sell all that he had and follow Him. We have no record of Jesus or the apostles telling believers to sell all that they have (see Acts 5:4 as an example). Yet this man

let material things stand between himself and God. He needed to get rid of those things to obey.

- ♦ As noted in lesson 4, the commandments of the Old Law were binding on the Jews only. The Old Law was part of a covenant, or agreement, between the Jews and God. Those commandments are not binding on us today.
- ♦ Jesus told the apostles that “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,” Matthew 18:18-20. No other individuals have the authority to bind or loose commands on others.

General and Specific Authority

God’s commands are either general or specific in their application.

A specific command limits the fulfillment of the command to the specifications given. A specific command authorizes only what is commanded and excludes other ways to accomplish the general goal. For example, when God commanded Noah to build the ark out of gopher wood, it necessarily excluded any other type of wood that could be used. It also follows that if God has given us a specific command, we are not free to treat it as optional. Noah could have chosen not to build the ark, but he would have died in the flood with the rest of humanity.

Direct Commands

authority is expressed in broad commands where the specifics of how to accomplish the command are not given. For example, when Jesus commanded His apostles to go into the world and preach the gospel, some things were specific and some general.

Specific

- ♦ they did not have a choice on what to preach (the gospel was specified)

General:

- ♦ they were free to choose whether they would walk, take a boat, ride an animal, ride a chariot
- ♦ they were free to choose who would go what nation
- ♦ they were free to determine when to visit what nations

We err when we try to substitute something specified by God and replace it with something that is necessarily excluded. For example, singing is a specific command (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16) which necessarily excludes humming, playing, and not singing. The above passages also specify what is to be sung: psalms, hymns and spiritual songs; therefore, patriotic songs and other non-religious songs would be excluded. However, the Bible has not specified the specific psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs we must sing so we are free to choose songs that fit into these categories. We are also free to determine if we will use song books, project the song overhead, sing from memory, or other scriptural means to inform us of the words to sing. We will talk about this in more detail in lesson 9 when we discuss expediencies.

Questions for Lesson 7

Fill out the chart below:

The Specific	Excludes	Includes
Baptize		
Fruit of the Vine (Lord's Supper)		
Teach the Gospel		

Approved Examples

It is clear that the apostles taught by example as well as by word. Paul wrote to the churches urging them to imitate him as he tried to imitate Christ, 1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:9. When we read about the approved practices of the early Christians, we can see how the early church functioned under the direct teaching of Jesus and the apostles.

Approved examples demonstrate how to fulfill a command. For example, when Jesus commanded the disciples to observe the Lord's Supper in the church until He comes again (Mark 14:22-25), He did not tell them when to observe it. From Acts 20:7 we have an example of the church taking the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week. From Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 11:23 we further understand that the church did this on a regular basis. The example in this case provides the basis for understanding when we should observe the Lord's Supper which was instructed by specific command.

We say approved examples because there are some unapproved actions of the apostles and churches that we must not emulate. Paul rebuked Peter for acting hypocritical in showing partiality to the Jews over the Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-16). In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Paul rebukes the Corinthian church for improper observance of the Lord's Supper. In

Revelation 2-3, Jesus, through John, rebukes several of the churches for disobedience.

Principles Regarding Examples

When using examples we must make sure that we do so carefully. Specifically, we must make sure that the example binds a means of obedience to the exclusion of other things that can be done. In the example above, we can conclude from Acts 20:7 and the verses that support the regular Lord's Supper observance that the early church took the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. Historical study supports this conclusion. Since the early church ate the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, so do we. Since Jesus used unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, we use this as well. However, when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper they ate in an upper room. In Acts 20, it is obvious that they were also in an upper room. Does this mean that we must eat the Lord's Supper in an upper room?

When we read about the early church, both in the Bible and in history, we find that they met in houses, caves, forests—wherever they could find to meet. There is nothing specified about the architecture of the place where they should meet. In fact, to demand an upper room would forbid meeting in caves or in the forest. The upper room is not

relevant to the Lord's Supper or the general assembly; it is incidental. This is where they happened to meet but they could have easily met somewhere else. The upper room has no spiritual or symbolic relevance to the Lord's Supper. Jesus only identified two elements that must characterize their observance, namely, the bread and the fruit of the vine. Jesus said that it would not matter where brethren met to worship God, John 4:24.

Ferrell Jenkins in his paper *The Role of Examples in Biblical Authority* identified four main areas of examples that are not binding:

Mosaic Covenant – Although the apostles ate the Passover feast (Matthew 26:17), they did so while the Old Law was in force. Since the Old Law is no longer binding, we do not follow its commands.

Disapproved Examples – No approval for Peter's hypocrisy (noted above) and the numerous problems at the church in Corinth (division, taking brethren to court, abusing the Lord's Supper).

Incidentals – Things that are mentioned but not essential to obeying a command (meeting by the riverside, Acts 16:13; singing and praying at midnight, Acts 16:25; length of sermon, Acts 20:7)

Temporary cultural elements – The holy kiss (Romans 16:16; Acts 20:37) was a common form of greeting, and still is in many countries. Though we do not have to adopt that custom, we must greet every saint, Philippians 4:21, in a culturally appropriate manner.

The approved churches followed the examples and doctrine commanded by the apostles; so must we.

Questions for Lesson 8

Verse	Approved or	Lesson from the Example
1 Corinthians 9:5		
1 Corinthians 5:4		
2 Corinthians 8:5		
3 John 9-10		

Necessary Inference and Expedients

Another factor one must consider in understanding Bible authority is necessary inference. An inference is a logical conclusion (Webster). A necessary inference is a logical conclusion that one must draw from the text. For example, we are commanded to observe the Lord's Supper regularly. We observe that the early church met on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2) and observed the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). We can necessarily infer that since Paul commanded them to meet on the first day of the week, and every week has a first day, that we must meet *every* Sunday.

Peter used this principle of authority in Acts 15 when he pointed out the works done among the Gentiles and their ability to be saved without keeping the Old Law and concluded (inferred) that God did not treat them differently from the Jews and that the Old Law was not binding on them.

The inference must be a *necessary* conclusion. An *unnecessary* inference is speculative and not binding. For example, Acts 16:15 tells us that Lydia and her household were baptized. Some have inferred that this incident sanctions infant baptism. To assert that Lydia's household had infants is an unnecessary inference. In most churches that I have attended there

have been some families with children, all of whom were teenagers. It is an unnecessary conclusion to assume that the household included infants.

Necessary inference is not an independent authority. Necessary inference helps us to understand direct commands and approved examples. Necessary inference must be drawn when all of the evidence is assembled and the logical conclusion cannot be avoided.

Expedients

Webster defines an expedient as something "useful for effecting a desired result." An expedient is a suitable way to accomplish an end, but not the only way to do it. Biblical expedients must be lawful (1 Corinthians 10:23) and must edify (1 Corinthians 10:23-24; 14:26). If it violates God's law or is divisive, it is not expedient.

When Paul was collecting money for the needy saints in Jerusalem, he told the Corinthians they could send the money and, if they desired, a representative, with him to Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:3-4). The church determined whether it was expedient to send the money by Paul or a representative traveling with Paul, or a representative traveling alone to Judea.

We use expediency where God has

not specified how to obey a command. We are commanded to assemble (Hebrews 10:25) but not told where to assemble. We might meet in houses, in a park, a rented room, or construct a building. The meeting place is expedient. We are commanded to baptize those wanting salvation (Mark 16:16). We could use a swimming pool, a lake, a river, a bathtub, or build a baptistery. These are expedient ways to accomplish immersion. We are not free to substitute pouring or sprinkling since that is an addition to baptism, not an expedient way to accomplish it.

Some have falsely argued that something is lawful *because* it is expedient. This reverse logic is contrary to the scriptures. Jenkins quotes Foy Wallace: "The once famous Henry Ward Beecher said, 'infant baptism is like an ox yoke, it works.' So it is now argued that a think is expedient if it works!" We must first establish the legality of the practice before we can determine the expedient way of implementing it.

One cannot disobey God's law in the name of expediency. For example, it would be wrong for me to steal a Bible from the bookstore to fulfill the command to preach the gospel. Likewise, we cannot substitute something contrary to what God has specifically commanded. God commanded Noah to build the ark out of gopher wood. Other types of wood might have been more abundant in his general area

and preferable for constructing a boat, but God commanded gopher wood so any other wood, no matter how convenient, would be wrong. However, Noah was free to choose what tools to use and what work to do each day.

Many unlawful practices have been started and unscriptural organizations formed by men who ignore the law of God in the name of expediency. We must be extremely careful that our "expedient" does not supplant an existing command of God. For example, the missionary societies were separate organizations formed to do the work that God commanded the church to do; therefore, these organizations are unlawful.

As cited above, expedients must edify or build up. Many supposed "expedients," such as the missionary societies and instrumental music, have troubled churches. It is clear from scripture that God wants the church to do the work of evangelism and to sing in worship. No one disagreed with this. However, when men brought innovations that were additions to God's command, they caused dissension.

Men who stubbornly promoted these "expedients" were often divisive for they would not cease to do what God had not commanded in order to maintain peace. A notable example is the introduction of the melodeon at a church in Midway, Kentucky despite the scriptural opposition by

Necessary Inference and Expedients

many of the members. When members objected to the instrument in a service, the preacher said, “play on” and the church split. Hardly edifying. Any expedient must be scripturally sound.

Questions for Lesson 9

1. How is necessary inference used to establish authority?
2. What care must we exercise when using necessary inference?
3. Fill in the blanks below.

The Command	Expedient Included	Not Expedient
Baptism		
Singing		
Go Teach		
Assemble		
Collection		
Lord’s Supper		

4. How can expedients become divisive?

God's Silence

During the Reformation, two approaches to God's silence were offered:

What God has not specifically prohibited we are free to pursue. – Martin Luther

What God has not specifically authorized we are prohibited from pursuing. – Ulrich Zwingli

God's word provides the answer to these contrasting views.

The book of Hebrews directly addresses the issue of God's silence. In Hebrews 7, the writer discusses Jesus as our high priest under the new covenant. He necessarily infers that since the priesthood changed, there must be a change of law, Hebrews 7:12. The priesthood had to change because Jesus could not be a priest under the Old Law. "For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe *Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood*," Hebrews 7:14. The writer argues that God's silence prohibited one from Judah serving as a priest. In the Old Law, God specifically chose the Levites to serve as priests (Numbers 3). God did not have to say, "I have taken the Levites—not the tribe of Ruben, Simeon, Judah, Dan, Asher..." When God specified one tribe, it necessarily excluded all other tribes from serving. God did not *explicitly* prohibit Judah from serving as priests, but when He

specified the tribe of Levi, it *implicitly* prohibited Judah from the priesthood.

Consider the example from the previous lesson about Noah and the ark. When God commanded Noah to build the ark out of gopher wood, God did not have to name every other type of wood as prohibited materials. When God specified one type of wood, all others were excluded.

In Numbers 9:1-14, some wanted to partake of the Passover feast but were prohibited because they were defiled. Moses could not just grant an exception for them because God specified when Israel must observe the feast; it would be presumptuous on his part to change it. Moses presented the case before God and *God* granted the exception for one who was defiled or on a journey. Only God can grant exceptions to His law.

In the New Testament, the argument over circumcision arose over what God did not command. Some teachers were telling the Gentiles that they had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved. In teaching the Gentiles, the apostles told them that they "gave no such commandment," Acts 15:24. In the absence of a command, the teachers were not free to tell the Gentiles to be circumcised and keep the Law.

Silence and Expediency

The silence of the scriptures prohibits us from adding something that God prohibited by exclusion. However, an expediency is not an addition to God's command but a way to facilitate observing God's command. Consider the example from lesson 7 regarding the command to sing praises to God (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Expedients to help us fulfill the command to sing include song books, handouts with the lyrics printed on them, a song projected on an overhead display, and a song leader. Any of these or none of these can be used and we can still fulfill the command to sing. None of these expedients is another kind of music. However, when we play instruments, we introduce another kind of music into the worship. God commanded singing, he necessarily excluded playing. Instruments have existed since the time of Genesis. If God wanted to command instruments for use in worship He could have done so, but he did not.

In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 we find the principles related to giving. We are to give as we have prospered. We could give the money in cash or write a check. We can use metal plates, baskets, or designate a drop box to collect the money. These are expedients to help us fulfill the obligation to give. We cannot have bake sales, raffles, spaghetti suppers, solicit donations from business, offer advertising space, or other means of fund-raising. This is another type of contribution different from giving of our means, therefore, it is prohibited.

Paul warned the Corinthians not to go beyond what was written, 1 Corinthians 4:6. John tells his readers that if they do not abide in the doctrine of God, they do not have God, 2 John 9. We must do what God has commanded and go no further. We do not have the right add or remove commandments,

Questions for Lesson 10

1. Explain the following verses as they relate to silence:

Acts 15:24	
1 Cor. 4:6	
2 John 9	

2. Does the silence of the scriptures conflict with expediciencies? Explain.

Principles

The Bible also teaches us by establishing principles for behavior and life. Some things that are not explicitly condemned might be wrong in principle. For example, there is no scripture that says “Do not participate in lustful dances.” However, the Bible teaches modesty and propriety, 1 Timothy 2:8. The Bible further warns us not participate in evil things or to put a stumbling block in front of others, Romans 13:13; 14:21.

The Bible does not tell us to return money to the cashier when we get too much change back. However, Christians are supposed to be honest and not steal, Ephesians 4:28. The principle of honesty should guide this and similar decisions.

Jesus used principles to teach love for our enemies, Matthew 5:43-48. Jesus gave us the principle; we determine how we will show love towards our enemies. Jesus did not explicitly list the ways we must show love towards our enemies. The fundamental principle must guide our attitude and actions.

The ultimate goal for the Christian is to become like Christ. We are to be transformed so that Christ lives in our lives, Romans 12:2;

2 Corinthians 3:18. With this in view, we should not take a legalistic view of Christianity. As evident from all of the previous lessons, it is extremely important to do things the way God commanded. However, our goal is not to keep commands but to develop holiness; to become like Jesus. The Lord wants our hearts and humble obedience, not just our actions or intentions, 1 Samuel 15:22, Malachi 1.

When questioned about the greatest command in the Law (Mark 12:29-34), Jesus wisely answered that all of the Old Law rested on two foundations:

1. Love the Lord completely.
2. Love your neighbor as yourself.

The gospel rests on this same foundation. God must be the center of our life and love. We must seek to do that which pleases Him, in doing so we demonstrate our love, 1 John 2:3-6. We must also love one another and treat others as we desire to be treated, 1 John 4:7-11; Matthew 7:12.

The commandments are to make us more like Jesus. The gospel of Christ defines holiness and condemns wickedness, Romans 1:16-18.

Questions for Lesson 11

1. What are ways that we can show love for our enemies and fulfill the principle of Matthew 5:43-48?
2. How does the goal of becoming like Christ affect your daily decisions?
3. Can someone do what God commands yet be displeasing to Him? Explain.
4. How does principle relate to our liberty to do certain things? (1 Cor 8:1-13)

Restoration Ideal

Phil realized that many errors grew from other errors. As his understanding of the Bible became clearer, he realized that he needed to use only that for his authority in worship, organization of the church, and holy living. Phil's concept is rooted in what some have called the Restoration Ideal.

The concept of restoration stands in contrast to reformation. Most leaders of the Reformation did not want to establish new religious bodies; they wanted to reform the Roman Catholic Church. Those who hold to restoration principles desire to structure the church and the Christian life around what Jesus and the apostles taught directly and that which they observe in the early church as recorded in the Bible.

A restoration movement swept this country in the 1800's led by men like Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, Moses Lard, and many others. These men came out of various denominations, dissatisfied with the division of the religious world and unhappy with practices not found in scriptures. Their simple appeal to the divided religious community was to throw away the creed books and confessions of faith that bound people to denominations and unite on the word of God alone. To remedy the myriad of conflicting practices, the restoration preachers urged believers to practice only what they could

defend by scripture and to put away any practice that cannot. A phrase that best explains this philosophy is "speak where the scriptures speak; be silent where the scriptures are silent."

The movement grew at a tremendous pace as people came out of denominations to unite on the Bible. However, in the course of time, some of the restoration churches began to introduce practices and institutions that could not be found in the scriptures. Many of these churches continue to organize themselves and associate with one another in ways foreign to the Bible. However, there are still people who desire to restore the worship and individual piety according to the pattern established in the Bible

Continued Restoration

The Restoration Movement did not end in the early 20th century but continues today. Every generation has the responsibility to examine itself in relationship to God's word. We may inherit practices and traditions from previous generations and not examine them to see if they are founded on divine instruction or tradition.

A story often told that illustrates this point is a mother who was teaching her daughter to make a pot roast. Before they put it in the pan, the mother cut off some meat from

the ends and the sides of the roast. A good bit of meat was lost so the girl was confused. She asked her mother why she cut the roast this way. The mother said that is what her mother used to do. The girl asked her grandmother, "Why did you cut the roast before cooking it?" The grandmother said that she learned it from her mother. The girl then visited her great-grandmother. When asked about cutting the roast the grandmother simply replied, "My cooking pan was too small."

We can sometimes take a practice that was an expedient from a previous generation and make it law in our generation. What if we ate the Lord's Supper after the sermon? What if we decided not to have Bible classes? What if we decided to meet once on Sunday, and only at 4:00pm? The order of worship, the use of Bible classes, and service times are examples of things that we have set by expedient that can, in generations, carry the weight of law if believers do not understand what is authorized and what is expedient. I like the order of worship, the Bible classes, and our service times, but I must remember that they could be different and still fully authorized by scripture.

We must ever be mindful of teaching Jesus and His church and not "The Church of Christ." Christ did not come to build a denomination by that name or any other denominations. He died to purchase

a body of believers who would unite in Him, not some organization. Our allegiance must be to Him, not a body of believers who meet in "Church of Christ" buildings. Therefore, our generation, and each generation that follows, must examine its practice and doctrine in light of the scripture and, despite what previous generations taught and practiced, commit itself to following the Bible alone. Though noble in thought and deed, the restoration preachers were fallible men and performed the work of restoration in their time. We can learn much from them and are indebted to them for their courage and wisdom, but we have no obligation to perpetuate anything they taught if the scripture does not support it. We can respect brethren who battled unscriptural innovations in the middle and late 1900's for their courage to stand for what the Bible taught even when many of their brethren would not hear it. However, we have no obligation to perpetuate anything that they have taught that God's word has not established.

What brethren have always taught and practices is an insufficient guide for us; the Bible alone must determine what we teach and do. We must never accept the position of defending what brethren taught in the past, we must know in our day what God's word teaches and embrace that alone. People can be influenced by opposition and their historical place in life to espouse extreme positions that do not

accurately reflect the doctrine of Christ. We must be aware of the influences in previous generations and understand that they might have taken an extreme position in opposition to a popular false doctrine. We must also be aware of it in our time so that we do not adopt positions that go beyond what God has taught.

The Restoration Movement was a pivotal moment in religious history, but its work should never be completed.

Questions for Lesson 12

1. What is the basic difference between the Reformation Movement and the Restoration Movement?
2. How would the restoration ideal, if followed, lead to religious unity?
3. How can expedients become law in the minds of some brethren?
4. How can the church of Christ become a denomination (at least in the minds of some of its members)?

Lesson

13

What Do We Do When We Disagree?

It is inevitable, as we study the scriptures, to find areas of disagreement with others. Our background, educational level, and preconceptions affect how we understand the scriptures. This does not mean that truth will be different for each person. It does mean is that we must subject our beliefs to the crucible of opposition to burn off the preconceptions and bias that we bring to the Bible so we may gain a clearer understanding of the Word. When we discuss spiritual matters with others, we may hear questions that we have not heard, perspectives that we have not seen, and ideas that we have not considered. Through opposition, we challenge ourselves to dig deeper into God's word to make sure we understand what we believe. Often we find that our beliefs might need minor or major modifications. Sometimes we find that we learn more about the Bible and become better at defending what we practice. Sad is the person who will fall back on "My preacher says," "This is the way we've always done it," or "Well, this is just what I believe." As taught in the previous chapter, we must continually examine our life and doctrine in the light of God's word.

Though opposition must come, we must address it properly. Paul told Timothy, "But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the

Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will," 2 Timothy 2:23-26.

When dealing with opposition, we must not engage in arguments over foolish and speculative issues. These discussions generate strife, anger, and sometimes division. We must exercise wisdom in recognizing these disputes so we can avoid them. However, we must not call something an ignorant dispute just because we do not want to discuss it.

The Lord's servant must be gentle to all. He gave no exceptions. Some will be gentle with those whom they love and those they want to impress. They can be arrogant and nasty with those they do not like, against whom they hold a grudge, or those whose religious background is different. We must be gentle with those who oppose us for they are in peril of being lost.

The Lord's servant must be able to teach. Proverbs 15:28 tells us that "The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil." All Christians must be able to teach someone how to become a Christian. We have an obligation to share the truth with others so they can become

What Do We Do When We Disagree?

God's children. If we are uncomfortable with this, we need to get the skills and knowledge to help us in this endeavor.

The Lord's servant must be patient. When answering opposition, we can sometimes get frustrated when someone cannot see the "plain truth" on the issue. We must remember that they may have biases that they have not faced which is skewing their understanding of the scripture. Perhaps we do not know what we are teaching clearly or our biases are preventing us from teaching the way of God more accurately. We must be patient for sometimes much has to be unlearned before real learning can take place.

The Lord's servant must correct others in humility. The goal is not to win the argument and certainly not to embarrass the opposition. The goal is to lead others away from the devil to Jesus through God's word. Paul says that they need to "come to their senses." For whatever reason, they are not thinking clearly and so we must be humble in teaching them. Our humility is also grounded in the knowledge that we may be wrong about a particular issue and so must be ready to change if that is the case. We must have a mutual respect for people and the truth. We must not withhold the truth in order to spare someone's feelings. Neither should we hurt someone's feelings just because we think we have the truth. We must show respect even as we

differ with them. Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15); love for the truth and the soul of others.

In the church, we must especially be humble and longsuffering with one another, Ephesians 4:1. We must not rush to judgment and should seek to understand our brother. Many are quick to say "false teacher" before a matter has been fully discussed. However, some matters of difference may be so strong that we must part. This must be a last, final, drastic measure when all other options have been exhausted. If a doctor wants to amputate one of my arms or legs, I want to make sure that he has considered every other option before proceeding with such a drastic treatment. Likewise, if the Lord's body must be severed, it must be for something clearly taught in scripture and no other option besides division must exist.

Before brethren part they should ask several questions:

"Is it a matter of opinion?" If it is, then it is not a matter that should divide us. Let each one respect his brother's opinion (Romans 14:1-3 – We will discuss Romans 14 in more detail in the next series). In opinions, we must have liberty.

"Could one stop an 'expedient' and bring peace?" An expedient must be lawful and it must edify. If its lawfulness is questionable, or doubtful, it should not be introduced. When some press for its introduction,

it causes contention among those who rightly demand scriptural authority. Though one might the practice is acceptable to God, if it will divide the church it should not be introduced. We are to build up the church, not tear it apart.

“Am I being stubborn?” This is a tough question to ask. I may think I am standing firm on the word but, in actuality, I may be stubbornly holding a tradition. If it is a matter of opinion, I must not press my opinion so that it minimizes the opinion of others. I must be willing to yield when there is a need to yield, James 3:17.

“Is a personality conflict in play?” I fear for many who will have to stand in judgment and answer for strife and division caused in churches because of personality conflicts. We come from different societal, educational, financial, and racial backgrounds. We must learn to live together in Christ for we are all one in Christ, Galatians 3:28. I cannot hate my brother and consider myself in good standing with God, 1 John 2:9-11. Consider well the admonition of Paul, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,” Philippians 2:3-5.

Questions for Lesson 13

1. Why does discussing the Bible with those who disagree with us strengthen our faith?
2. How is an arrogant or argumentative approach to Bible discussions inconsistent with the Christian life?
3. Why do you think some people are willing to allow churches to divide over non-scriptural matters?

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