

BIBLE AUTHORITY (A SERIES)

by Tom Wacaster

(Part 1)

I have been asked to make some comments relative to Bible Authority. In fact I am in the process of developing an "on line" correspondence course that might be used to help teach others. The very first subject that I address in that series of lessons is this matter of authority. Consider the following:

Why is it that there are so many different churches? Why such division in doctrine, worship, and what it takes to become a Christian? This difference is found in the question of authority. Consider this simple illustration: Suppose I were to walk into a local U.S. Post Office, and inquire the cost of mailing a certain package. And let us suppose that the clerk informed me that the cost of mailing my package would be \$2.50. I respond to his price quote: "You must be joking! That's highway robbery." I go away in a rage. I locate another Post Office in another town, hand my package to the clerk and ask, "How much?" Again the answer is \$2.50. And I think to myself, "Surely someone can give me the answer I want to hear." I leave that town and go to another, locate the Post Office, go in and inquire, "How much to mail this package," and once again the reply, "\$2.50." All their answers were the same. How do we account for that? May I suggest that the reason they all told me the same price is because they all consulted the same Postal guide. I can think of no other reason, can you? Suppose now I visit a church and I ask the man in the pulpit, "What does it take to get to heaven?" He responds, "Why my friend, all you have to do is believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord. Nothing else is necessary." I go my way, pondering the statement he had made, and it is not long until I come to another church. Again, I inquire, "What will it take to get to heaven?" The answer is somewhat different. "Well son, God's grace will save everyone, and really there is nothing you can do. You are totally at God's mercy." I leave somewhat perplexed at the divergent answers, and by and by I come to yet another church. I inquire as to the same manner, and am now told, "He that believes, repents, confesses and is baptized, and then lives faithfully, will be saved." Now, why is it that different answers were given to that same question? It seems clear to me that different guides were consulted. If not, how do you explain the difference?

Some have suggested that the good Bible student must somehow go about "establishing" authority. But the authority of God has already been established. Our responsibility is to "ascertain" what that authority is, and how we apply it to our daily life. To "ascertain" means "to find out or learn for a certainty; by trial or examination, or experiment; to get to know" (Webster's Dictionary). Thus, we do not "establish" authority, but we do determine what IS authorized by God. Another word that begs consideration is the word "authority." When we speak of authority for something we are appealing to the right to command or the right to legislate. The Bible makes it perfectly clear that authority is important in matters pertaining to our faith and practice. Let's consider these passages:

Colossians 3:17 - "And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." The command to do things in the "name of the Lord" is all inclusive for it applies to "whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed." Notice second that all things are to be done "in the name of the Lord." To do something "in the name" of another is to do it with their approval and sanction.

Leviticus 10:1-2 - "And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took each of them his censer, and put fire therein, and laid incense thereon, and offered strange fire before Jehovah, which he had not commanded them. And there came forth fire from before Jehovah, and devoured them, and they died before Jehovah." From this passage we learn, by example, that respect for God's authority is essential. It is not that either of these men refused to offer incense; it is that they failed to do it God's way.

Galatians 1:8-9 - "But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema. As we have said before, so say I now again, if any man preacheth unto you any gospel other than that which ye received, let him be anathema." Though Paul was writing TO the churches throughout Galatia, the principle applies to all men. The warning is clear: if ANY man preaches a gospel other than that which the apostles preached, he is an anathema.

These passages should impress upon our minds the importance of doing WHAT God says to do, the WAY He said to do it, and for the EXPRESS PURPOSE for which He said it is to be done. Before we close this lesson, please notice that in the passages used above we have essentially three ways that authority is ascertained: (1) By direct command [Col. 3:17], (2) by example [Lev. 10:1-2], and (3) by inference [Gal. 1:8-9]. God has commanded us to exercise authority, shown us example as to how important it is to do so, and inferred that you and I cannot preach any other gospel other than that which was delivered by the apostles. We will touch on each of these as we continue our series on this most important subject.

"Bible Authority" (Part 2)

In last week's article we looked at some passages that emphasized authority in general. I am amazed that men are able to see the importance of authority when it comes to shopping lists, doctor's prescriptions, mechanic specifications, and a host of other areas, but become somewhat confused when it comes to authority in religion. No doubt the multitudinous creeds, manuals, and false teachers have a lot to do with keeping men in the dark, and perhaps we will pursue that in a separate article. Many have what I call a "Burger King" mentality when it comes to religion - they want their church, religion, and spiritual world made-to-order. "I'm happy with my church" is a comment that seems to satisfy the multitude. I was knocking doors on one occasion and after introducing myself the lady standing behind the screen said she was not interested in what I had to say. She further added, "I go to the _____ church, and I'm happy there." I'm not trying to question the sincerity of anyone right here, but has anyone given any thought as to whether or not God is happy with the church one might attend? The one factor that men seem to have overlooked when choosing a church is this matter of authority. The longer I preach, the more I am convinced that the "authority" issue is what determines the "line of demarcation" between those who would please God and those who simply refuse to do what God demands. I hope that becomes clearer as we continue this series of articles.

There are a couple of more preliminaries I want to address before we get to this matter of "direct statements," "example," and/or "implied statements." It seems that some have a woeful misconception of what it means to be "liberal" or "legalistic" in one's approach to the Bible and serving God. Legalism is binding where God has not bound. Paul addressed

this in 1 Timothy 4:1-5 when he spoke of those who would speak lies in hypocrisy, forbid marriage, and command others to abstain from meats, things that God said were to be "received with thanksgiving." Let it be stressed right here that legalism is NOT pressing for obedience of God's commands. Liberalism, on the other hand, is loosing where God has bound. It is taking the attitude toward spiritual matters that ignores what the Bible teaches on the matter. It is, as one brother put it, looking at God's word and thinking, "No big deal." Such an attitude is manifested when someone hears the truth, and then says something to the effect, "Well, I know what you are saying, but I know how I feel in my heart." Are they not, in effect, saying, "It's no big deal what the scriptures say; the important thing is how I feel." The faithful child of God seeks to avoid either of these extremes, and to stay within the confines of God's word, going neither to the left nor the right.

A word should also be said about "hermeneutics." Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. It is an appeal to a logical approach to the scriptures utilizing the same principles of interpretation that we use on any printed document. In our estimation God placed within the scriptures the very approach that He intended us to use in our study and application of the word of truth. Hermeneutics is the means of searching out and determining precisely what is to be bound, and what is to be loosed. Our responsibility is not a matter of determining HOW we are going to interpret scripture and arrive at a conclusion which pleases us, but it is a matter of discovering how God reveals His will to us. Some are calling for a "new hermeneutic" for the simple reason that they want to abandon what God has said, and launch out on their own. As we proceed through this study I hope to point out that the approach utilizing command, example and inference is not only been proven true, but is actually according to the principles set forth in scripture.

That brings us to the point in our study where we can deal more specifically with what we mean by command, example and inference. In subsequent articles we will define each of these areas of establishing authority, show the scriptural basis that command, example, and inference has on our approach toward authority, and draw some conclusions that will help us do what God said to do, the way God said to do it, and for the purpose for which God said to do it. I hope you will stay with me on this.

"Bible Authority" (Part 3)

The previous two articles set forth some background material regarding ascertaining Biblical authority. We are now ready to consider what has commonly been referred to as the "three avenues" by which authority for our actions in matters pertaining to religion is determined. As one brother noted, "It is not a matter of determining HOW we are going to interpret scripture and arrive at a conclusion which pleases us, but it is a matter of *discovering* HOW God *reveals* His will to us...." [Don Tarbet]. This is really the purpose in each of these articles. We are seeking to discover what God has revealed to us concerning His will. The three avenues of determining proper authority have been called by various terms. I grew up hearing the statement that we establish authority by direct statements (or commands), by example, and by inference. We need to consider each of these three areas. In this article we want to give some consideration to **DIRECT STATEMENTS**. Most of us use common sense when it comes to determining what we can or cannot do in various walks of life. Seldom do we stop to consider that the very means by which God authorizes are means that are utilized every day by those in

positions of authority. Suppose a policeman stops you for a traffic violation. Let us suppose further that he has a desire to see your driver's license. We can learn precisely what he wants us to do when he expresses his will in a "direct statement." This can occur in at least four ways, all of which are what we would classify as "direct statements," or "commands."

First, the officer might simply make a **declaration – what we sometimes call a DECLARATIVE STATEMENT**. The officer walks up to your car and makes the following declaration: "It is required by law that anyone stopped by a police officer produce evidence that they have been granted permission by the state to operate a vehicle. That evidence consists of a driver's license." Now, were the police officer to make such a statement to me after pulling me off to the side of the road, I would immediately surmise that he wants me to show him my license. God has utilized precisely the same kind of language in conveying His will for me. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). This is a "declaration." The only conclusion I can draw from this "declaration" is this: if I expect to enter into the kingdom of heaven, I must do the will of the Father Who is in heaven. If a policeman stops you and says, "I want to see your driver's license." That is a "direct statement." "Give me your driver's license" would be a "command." In either case the officer has expressed his will to us in no uncertain terms. 1 John 1:6-8 is another "declarative statement": "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 6:8). From such a statement I can only conclude that I must "walk in the light" if I am to enjoy fellowship with the Father. It is important to note here that although these passages do not "command" something, they have the same force as a command.

Second, the officer might make an **interrogative statement**. This is a statement put in the form of a question. "Sir, are you aware that when a person is stopped by a police officer that he is required to produce evidence in the form of a driver's license showing that he is authorized to operate a vehicle?" By his question he has expressed the same thing as if he had made a declarative statement (as per the above paragraphs). We can determine what God expects of us by observing and respecting "interrogative statements." "Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3). One could rearrange the sentence and make it a declarative statement thus: "All those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death." Another example is seen in 1 Corinthians 9:1 – "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle?" Again one could rearrange the sentence and make it declarative: "I am free; I am an apostle." In either case, he has expressed the same truth.

Third, the police officer might walk up to my car and say, "Show me your driver's license." "I command you, in the name of the state of Texas, give me your driver's license!" He has used an **imperative statement**. Imperative statements often use the word "command," or they may allude to the authority behind the command. The same is true in the Bible. "And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:48a). Or, "Bring the books and the parchment" (2 Tim. 4:13). Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" appeals to the authority behind the imperative statement. Actually, we understand precisely what this word "imperative" means, for if someone were to say to us, "It is imperative that you pay your taxes by April 15th," we know that we have no choice if we are to abide by the law.

Finally, the policeman might walk up to your car and say, "Let's have your license." This is what is known as an **exhortative statement**; he is exhorting you to do something, but the exhortation is a command. So it is with the Bible. The book of Hebrews contains a number "exhortative statements." You can recognize them by the "Let us" words that precede the action expected of the individual (cf. Heb. 4:1, 4:11, 4:16, 6:1, 10:22, 10:23). Galatians 6:10 is another example of an "exhortative statement" – "So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith."

Though these four types of statements might be somewhat different in their nature, they all fall into the category of "declarative" or "direct" statements. When you see such sentences you should take note, and carefully study the context to see if the statements apply to you in any way. Sometimes a "command" might be given, but not be applicable to us. For example, God said to Noah, "Make an ark of gopher wood." Would any suggest that God's "command" was intended for those of us living in the 21st century?

Respecting the context of any passage will go a long way in determining whether or not the command, direct statement, interrogative statement, or exhortative statement was intended for me. That is another study in itself, and we may pursue it later. Thus, we can ascertain authority by what we call "direct statements." In our next article we will consider **example** as a means of ascertaining authority.

"Bible Authority" (Part 4)

Another avenue by which we determine what we can, or cannot, do is found in this matter of example. God took the time to provide a great number of examples in the pages of the Bible. He went so far as to inform us that "these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (1 Cor. 10:11). Examples are an effective means of communicating God's will to man. The great challenge is drawing the proper conclusion from the various examples provided. While an example is simply an account of some action done by someone, not all examples are to be imitated. Paul wrote, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). So, how do we go about determining which examples I must imitate, which examples I must not imitate, and which examples I may imitate? Much harm has been done to the Lord's church because some have made examples of "optional" matters binding. Others have taken examples of "obligatory" matters and made the action "optional." Let us then consider the following:

First, there are actions in the Bible which are, quite obviously, sinful. The disobedience of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), the sin of Cain (Genesis chapter 4), the unauthorized actions of Nadab and Abihu in offering worship (Lev. 10:1-2), the sinful behavior of Judas in betraying the Lord (Matt. 26:47-49), the lies of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) are actions that are sinful and which were punished by God. Obviously, these examples should not be imitated.

Second, there are actions in the Bible that were right when they were performed but which would be wrong if we imitated those actions now. When David brought the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem he sacrificed oxen and fatlings (2 Sam. 6:13); Abraham

built an altar to God (Gen. 12:8); Solomon build the temple (1 Kings 6); the church preached the gospel only to Jews in the first couple of decades after Pentecost (Acts 21). This is not an exhaustive list of actions that were right when performed but would be wrong today. This scribe does not know of any denomination that would defend sacrificing of animals for atonement. Nor has he ever heard of anyone building an ark and appealing to the example of Noah for his authority.

Third, there are actions in the Bible which were temporary and obligatory . By this we mean that some things were required of God's people at some previous point in history, but which actions are not required of us today. The early church was told to desire earnestly the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 14:1). We read of various men receiving those gifts. The church of the first century needed those spiritual gifts in order to confirm the word (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:1-4). But those gifts were only temporary. And while the Christians of the first century were required to seek after and possess those gifts to varying degrees, that is not applicable to us today.

Fourth, there were actions which were temporary and optional. Paul circumcised Timothy "because of the Jews that were in those parts: for they knew he was a Greek" (Acts 16:3). There is nothing to suggest that we are to circumcise one another today when we upon the opportunity to preach to Jews.

Fifth, there are actions which are permanent and optional. Take the example of the generous Macedonians. In regard to these wonderful brethren Paul wrote, "For according to their power, I bear witness, yea and beyond their power, they gave of their own accord" (2 Cor. 8:3). We may also give "beyond our power," but it is optional.

Sixth, there are actions that are permanent and obligatory. The early church was obligated to give of their means, partake of the Lord's supper, preach the gospel. We have numerous examples where they did these things.

It is the last two categories of actions with which we are concerned right here: *actions that are permanent and either "optional" or "obligatory."* If we take an example that is "optional," and make it "obligatory," we have in effect made a law where God did not make a law. If we take an action that is "obligatory" and make it "optional," we have ignored a law that God DID make. Here are a couple of suggestions that might help us:

First, if an example is permanent and optional, then it cannot be binding upon another, by the very nature of the case. The apostles traveled to distant lands to preach the gospel using various modes of transportation. They walked, traveled by ship, and rode upon beasts of burden. It is still possible to travel from one place to another by animal, walking, or boarding a sailing vessel, though other means might be more advantageous. Hence the mode is permanent, but optional.

Second, an example is permanent and obligatory (and must be followed) if there is a clear and definite indication that the action was required by the early church. In other words, where there is a specific law that requires a certain thing be done, and be done in the way they did it, then their example of the way they did it would be binding upon us and not optional.

In our next installment we will consider the case of Acts 20:7 as an example that is both

permanent and obligatory.

"Bible Authority"

Or

*Is Acts 20:7 A Permanent and
Obligatory Example?*

(Part 5)

Biblical examples can be used to determine authority in matters pertaining to worship, morals, etc. Keep in mind that some examples are temporary, in that they were examples of actions that were not intended to remain throughout the Christian dispensation. The spiritual gifts are one example of temporary actions. There are also actions that are permanent, but optional. We pointed out in our previous article that unless there is a clear and definite indication that the action was required of them, it will of necessity be optional for us today. Obviously, examples that fall into this class cannot be made a matter of fellowship.

Some examples, however, are both permanent and obligatory. When there is a clear indication that the action under consideration was the fulfillment of a command that was given to the early church, then that example is obligatory. Also, when there is a specific law that required the THING be done, and that it be done in the way they did it, then it is a binding example. I have been asked on a number of occasions why I consider Acts 20:7 a binding example. The passage reads: "And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and prolonged his speech until midnight." Why is it that the "day" for partaking of the Lord's Supper is considered binding (i.e., the first day of the week, every week), but the "place" (i.e. the meeting in an upper room) is not binding? Is there any indication that the disciples in Troas were following a divine command by meeting together on the first day of the week, but were not fulfilling a divine command by meeting in an upper room? Let's take a closer look.

First, it is important that we understand that the New Testament is a "pattern" for godly living and true worship. Some have argued to the contrary, but their arguments are completely without merit. If it is the case that God expects us to have authority for all that we do in word and deed (Col. 3:17), and if it is the case that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all the truth (John 16:13), then it is the case that God intended the Christians of every generation to use that which was provided by the apostles as our guidebook in matters pertaining to godly living and true worship. To reject the New Testament as a "pattern" for our behavior is to reject the only means by which one could ever hope to come to the truth in matters regarding our faith and practice. God expected Moses to build the earthly tabernacle according to divine pattern (Heb. 8:5). Arguing from the lesser to the greater, the writer of Hebrews is implying that we build the heavenly tabernacle, the church, according to the pattern that God has revealed to us. While some may decry our appeal to the New Testament as "pattern mentality," this student plans to stay with that "pattern" given by God's holy apostles and prophets. It is the only safe ground to follow.

Second, seeing that the Bible IS indeed a pattern for godly living, what does that pattern show us? For one thing it shows us that the early church came together on the first day of every week. This cannot be successfully denied. Consider Paul's words to the church at

Corinth: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I gave order to the churches of Galatia, so also do ye. Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come" (1 Cor. 16:1-2). The English Standard Version reads, "On the first day of every week" (verse 1a). Why would Paul admonish the church at Corinth, as well as the churches of Galatia, to obey this command if, in fact, the church did not meet every first day of the week? It is curious that modern denominations have no difficulty following the command regarding giving, but fall short in fulfilling the weekly obligation of partaking of the Lord's Supper each first day of the week.

Third, Jesus commanded us that we are to partake of the Lord's Supper in memory of His body and blood (Matt. 26:26-29; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-29). His words "this do as often as ye" do this have been misconstrued by the majority of the protestant denominational world to mean that Jesus never established a particular time frame for partaking of the Lord's Supper, much less the "frequency" with which it is to be partaken. They are mistaken in their conclusion. Just because the Lord did not give the day or the frequency for partaking of the Lord's Supper does not mean that it is left up to man to determine those things. Just as we turn to the revealed word of God for the day, so also we must look to the "pattern" for the frequency.

Now we come to the passage under consideration (Acts 20:7). This passage contains what we call "an infinitive of purpose" clause. That clause explains the purpose for which an action is to be performed. There are several things that should be noted. First, Luke makes reference to the "bread" but not the fruit of the vine. This shows that he was using a figure of speech known as a synecdoche, where a part of something is used to refer to and/or include the whole. Our studied conclusion on this verse is that Luke was referring to the whole of the worship service, with particular emphasis upon the Lord's Supper.

Second, it should be noted that the point of focus in Luke's account is the Lord's Supper. The disciples came together upon that first day of the week "to break bread" - that is, they came together for the distinct purpose of partaking of the bread. Third, it should be pointed out that Paul and his traveling companions "tarried seven days" upon their arrival in Troas. The only plausible explanation for their tarrying is that Paul wanted to be with the brethren on the first day of week so that he could engage in worship and partake of the Lord's Supper with them.

Now let us reason together. If the disciples at Troas came together every first day of the week as did the churches of Galatia and/or Corinth, and if the purpose was "to break bread," one can only conclude that they came together every first day of the week, and that while they were gathered together, they partook of the Lord's Supper. There is an unmistakable and clear indication that the disciples in Troas were following some definite pattern in fulfilling the command of our Lord that we "do this in remembrance" of Him.

There are two more points that beg consideration before we close this article. Let us assume for sake of argument that there is not enough evidence to conclude that Acts 20:7 is a permanent and obligatory example; that it is only optional at best, and therefore cannot be a test of fellowship. Do you realize that if it is the case that Acts 20:7 is not a clear cut case of a permanent and obligatory example, then we have no example at all of the frequency with which we are to partake of the Lord's Supper. Nor do we have command for such frequency. In the final analysis, such an important part of New

Testament worship is left completely up to man, something that seems completely unreasonable in light of the stress that is placed in the New Testament upon doing things by divine authority. In addition, if there is no clear cut example or command regarding the frequency of the Lord's Supper, and that we are indeed left to ourselves to chart our own course on this matter, then a church could partake of the Lord's Supper once a month with divine approval. Or, a church could partake of the Lord's Supper once a year with divine approval. And some have so concluded and are following the dictates of their hearts and not any specific direction of Holy Scripture. Now watch: a church could partake of the Lord's Supper once every five years, once every ten years, once every fifty years, et al and still be pleasing to God. In the final analysis, they could forgo partaking of the Lord's Supper for a century, perhaps two or three, and still have divine approval, thereby leaving the vast majority of the congregation never partaking of the Lord's Supper at all. It seems that I once heard a good and godly preacher say, "If the implications of a doctrine are false, then the doctrine itself is false." The doctrine followed by the protestant denominational world is, "Frequency is not important." But the implications of that teaching are false, thus making the doctrine itself false. I believe that I will stay with the pattern set forth in the Bible, and follow the only passage wherein frequency is mentioned. At least I know I have divine authority for partaking once a week.