

# **Understanding Bible Authority**

*A Study Of How We Can Know  
What God Wants Us To Believe And  
Practice.*

**by Maurice Barnett**

# 1 - Understanding God's Word

A friend walks up to you and kicks you on the shin! He is "saying" something to you that's on his mind; our communications are not always oral. "Body language" plays a large part in how we act toward, or react to, others. A smile, a frown, a grimace, a wave of the hand, or how we stand or sit will tell others something of what's on our mind. That's quite common in our relationships with one another. We communicate love and concern for others in the way we treat them. We are to do that even in the way we greet them, **I Corinthians 16:20**. However, God does not reveal his mind to us by body language.

Others think that God gives a personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The inner urging of the Spirit pushes a person in the direction God wants him to go. Though inspired men in the first century had such direct contact with the Holy Spirit, no one does today. The personal indwelling position shows a lack of faith in the written word. The inspired scriptures will completely furnish us to every good work, **II Timothy 3:16-17**. The personal indwelling of the Spirit position relies on some power apart from that written word for knowledge and motivation.

Still others look to what they call the "chastening" of God to impart knowledge of right and wrong ways. It's like a mouse in training. The wrong button produces an electric shock, and the other one a food pellet. It is said that God treats us the same way. He rewards us when we do right and punishes us when we do wrong; that way we learn. However, we do not have a system of rewards and punishments to give us knowledge of God's mind. God chose another way to give us knowledge and commandments.

God has chosen to use human language to inform us of his will, **I Corinthians 2:6-13**. It was first spoken by inspired men, then written down by them. Spoken, or written, words communicate ideas from one person to another. Paul says that none knows the mind of a man except the spirit of the man that's in him. No one will know what's on his mind unless he communicates that to them in some way. It's the same with God. God communicates his mind to us by the Holy Spirit through the scriptures:

*"not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words,"*

God was very particular in wanting to express by human language what was on his mind. It's absurd to suppose that he failed to express his mind in an understandable way.

**Hermeneutics** is the science of interpretation. It includes many interesting, and sometimes difficult, subjects. It involves the meaning of words, grammar, context, parallels, figures, symbols, social and historical circumstances, style of writing, and other items. By looking at all these areas, we may arrive at a proper "interpretation" of a text, "understanding" what it says. As just one example of the importance of grammar in hermeneutics, which involves words, look at **Matthew 22:23-33** where the argument of Jesus centers on the present tense verb in **Exodus 3:6**.

We will confine this study to how we establish authority. We will not be discussing the authenticity, reliability, or inspiration of the Bible text, nor, to any great extent, the source of authority. Of course, God is the source of all we are to know and do; he alone has supreme authority. The Bible is the record of God's revelation given to man. Having decided just what a passage of scripture is saying, using Hermeneutics, we must then decide what it authorizes us to do. Our first task is to determine just how we can be certain what God requires us to know and do. Our second task is to understand what he lets us decide is the best way of carrying out his will; we do have some choices to make. This is the area of generic authority, which we will discuss in chapter 3.

### EVERY LAW IS OF GOD

The authority of God stands behind every law. The same God that made one law made every other one as well. So, to violate one law makes one guilty of violating all. This is what **James 2:10-11** says:

*"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, do not kill. Now if thou dost not commit adultery, but killest, thou art become a transgressor of the law."*

Violation of one law may bring consequences differing from the violation of another; killing someone has worse consequences than just stealing something from them. That isn't the point of these passages. Notice it says: "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all. For he that said..." To keep the whole law and yet violate one point

makes one guilty of violating all, because **the same God that made one law made every other one as well**. Notice this again: "For he that said" the one also said the other. The number of violations here makes no difference. Breaking one rule or another still violates the law of the one person in authority.

### TRUTH

We will find the "truth" in God's word, the scriptures. In **John 8:31-32**, Jesus said "to those Jews that believed him:"

*"If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*

This identifies the word as being the truth. We read this again in **John 17:17**: "Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth." Of course, there is scientific truth, historical truth, economic truth, etc. We are talking about spiritual truth.

Paul said that God "would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth," **I Timothy 2:4**. To have a knowledge of the truth, man must be able to understand it. John said, "I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it," **I John 2:21**. **II Timothy 3:7** speaks of some, whose minds and attitude are corrupt, who are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Then, he says that some would not have a love of the truth that they might be saved, **II Thessalonians 2:10-12**. In keeping with the passage we started with, **I Corinthians 2:1-13**, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would guide the Apostles "into all the truth," **John 16:13**. This is the gospel, the word, in **Ephesians 1:13**, "in whom ye also, having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." Or, again, in **Colossians 1:5** it is called "the word of the truth of the gospel." And in the next verse, he says, "since the day ye heard and knew the grace of God in truth," identifying the grace of God with it, as in **Titus 2:11-12**. Paul says in **I Thessalonians 2:13**:

*"And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when ye received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God."*

We might well add **I Corinthians 14:37**, that identifies the written word as God's commandments:

*"If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord."*

Error means a "forsaking of the right path." **James 5:19-20** puts it this way:

*"My brethren, if any among you err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins."*

The right way that one departs from is "truth." That results in being in sin, entering spiritual death. Adhering to truth is the only way to please God. Jesus told the Sadducees that "you do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God," **Matthew 22:29**.

The truth of the gospel, mentioned above, contains such things as what God wants us to know about circumcision and observing the Law, according to **Galatians 2:3-5**. In verse **14**, it involves respect of persons, as Paul says: "But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel..." In **I Timothy 4:3-6**, the truth even involves what foods we can eat: "for them that believe and know the truth," vs. 3. Then, in **1 Timothy 6:3-4**, it says:

*"If any man teacheth a different doctrine, and consenteth not to sound words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is puffed up, knowing nothing..."*

Or again, **II Thessalonians 3:14** emphasizes the authority of the written word: "And if any man obeyeth not our word by this epistle, note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed."

Everything God has instructed us on is truth, and everything contrary to that is error, a forsaking of the right path. We are thus admonished to "handle aright the word of truth," **II Timothy 2:15**. God tells us to obey the truth, **Romans 2:8**, **Galatians 5:7**. The truth will judge us, **Romans 2:2**, **II Thessalonians 2:12**, **Hebrews 10:26**, **James 5:19-20**. With a different wording, Jesus said "to those Jews that believed him," "If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples," **John 8:31**. **John 14:21-24** says

that if we love him we will keep his word, and expanded in **John 15:20** to the word of the Apostles in that "if they kept my word, they will keep yours also." The "black" letters are as important as the "red letters." With so much depending on our following the truth, keeping his word, we must also accept that we can understand it. Why would God punish us for not following something we can't understand?

#### RIGHT ATTITUDE IS IMPORTANT

Mo matter what approach one takes to a study of the Bible, it must be with the right attitude. **John 7:17** says:

*"If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself. He that speaketh from himself seeketh his own glory."*

It's not just that it's possible to know God's will, we must want to know it. Far too many misuse the Bible for their own benefit or glory. Mot only did the Jews forsake God's way for the doctrines of men, **Mark 7:5-13**, but when God's word was spoken to them, they reacted to it with deaf ears, a closed mind, **Matthew 13:13-16**, **Acts 7:54-60**, **13:46**. **James 2:21** says we are to receive with meekness the implanted word that is able to save our souls. Jesus said, in one of his parables, that the good ground was "such as in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it fast," **Luke 8:15**. Many do not have a "love of the truth, that they might be saved," or, "that they all might be judged who believed not the truth," **II Thessalonians 2:10-12**.

We find another attitude, expressed a little differently, in **Proverbs 18:13**: "He that giveth answer before he heareth, it is folly and shame unto him."

Many make up their minds about a subject before they ever look at the evidence. They do this with the Bible, too. Then they try to force the Bible to say what they want it to say. Approaching the Bible with the right attitude is essential to understanding it.

#### WE CAN AND MUST UNDERSTAND

The more we study, the more we learn. We all start out as "babes," spiritually, and must grow to maturity by feeding on the word of God, **Hebrews 5:11-14**, **1 Peter 2:1-2**. The responsibility for understanding or misunderstanding is our own.

There is no "enabling of the Holy Spirit," separate from the word, that helps us to understand that word. We cannot look for some miraculous power that is the key to understanding the Bible. In **Luke 24:45**, it says that Jesus "opened their mind, that they might understand the scriptures." This did not mean that whatever Jesus did in "opening their mind" was to give them, miraculously, some complete understanding of the scriptures. It only applied to a particular point about his resurrection. Look at the next verse. By the statement Jesus made, they could understand the scriptures on that point. **He opened their mind by the explanation of that subject.** We see from the same time and circumstances, recorded in **Acts 1:6-9**, that there were many things the apostles still didn't understand. They would understand, later.

Throughout the time they were with Jesus, he expected the apostles to understand what he taught in the same way any other person would understand. The Holy Spirit was promised to be with them after he was gone, **John 14:26, 16:13**. The Holy Spirit would reveal all truth to them. We can understand today what the Holy Spirit told the apostles. Our understanding comes by a study of their record of that revelation. Notice **Ephesians 3:4-5**:

*"When ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ; which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit"*

The Bible speaks of Lydia: ". . . whose heart the Lord opened to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul," **Acts 16:14**. The word "heed" simply means she paid attention to what Paul was saying. There was no miraculous "opening" of her heart either stated or implied; the words Paul spoke captured her attention. God opened her heart by his word. We are still responsible for understanding the word of God on our own. **Ephesians 5:17** says it: "Wherefore be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." **Hebrews 5:11** says: "ye are become dull of hearing." They were the ones responsible. **Matthew 13:15** says:

*"For this people\*s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn again, and I should heal them."*

Jesus also rebuked the Jews, telling them that they were of their "father the devil," saying: "Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word," **John 8:43**. The responsibility for understanding was on those who heard. David, speaking of the wicked, said, "They know not, neither will they understand," **Psalms 82:5**.

Understanding comes from the Scriptures of the Bible, hehemiah called the people together and read to them the Law, **Nehemiah 8:2-8**. It was for "all that could hear with understanding," meaning those who had reached an age that made them able to understand. The Psalmist said in **Psalms 119:103-104**: "How sweet are thy words...through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way." Jesus said: "And he that was sown upon the good ground, this is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it," **Matthew 13:23**. Or, in **Matthew 15:10**: "Hear, and understand." In **Matthew 24:15**, Matthew injects: "let him that readeth understand," referring to the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy. Paul said: "as I wrote before in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ," **Ephesians 3:3-4**. Then, in **Ephesians 5:17**, he insists: "be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." It is possible to read the scriptures and understand what they teach! **II Timothy 3:14-15** says:

*"But abide thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."*

The sacred writings were the scriptures inspired of God. Timothy was able to understand what those sacred writings were saying. Verses **16-17** say:

*"Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."*

Just the way the Bible is written will completely furnish us to every good work. All we need to know from God is contained in it. That means we can understand the instructions given, as Timothy did. **II Peter 3:15-17** says:

*"Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; wherein are some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unstedfast wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, knowing these things beforehand, beware lest, being carried away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own stedfastness."*

**First**, notice that he is talking about all that Paul wrote, and the other scriptures. That would mean all the scriptures inspired of God. **Second**, he says there are some things hard to understand in them. He does not say that all things are hard to understand, nor does he say that there are even some things impossible to understand. For several reasons we may find some things hard to understand. A spiritual babe will find some things hard to understand, **Hebrews 5:11 ff.** **Third**, he identifies the "ignorant and unstedfast" as twisting these scriptures to their own destruction. That emphasizes the authority of the scriptures. **Fourth**, he forwarns us so that we may not be affected by the "error" of these abusers of the word and thereby bring our destruction as well. There's no excuse for such destruction. With a proper approach, we can understand and apply anything God wants us to know.

The Sadducees denied the existence of a soul in man and a resurrection from the dead. They tried to embarrass Jesus with a false argument, **Matthew 22:23-33**. Jesus replied by saying: "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God." Jesus then showed from scripture that a resurrection from the dead is truth. Even some at Corinth denied a resurrection, **I Corinthians 15:12**. That's why Paul spent so much space discussing the subject. They could understand the truth from what Paul wrote. Paul speaks of this in **II Timothy 2:17-18**:

*"Of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; men who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some."*

Remember our discussion about "the truth" as God's word? These men erred from the truth, primarily on the subject of the resurrection. Remember our discussion of **James 2:10-11**? Hymenaeus and Philetus didn't have to be murderers, or the like, to be guilty of violating God's word.

A proper understanding of the resurrection can be found only in the scriptures inspired of God. We are not free to believe anything we want. The resurrection involves belief in what will occur in the future. Believing in the resurrection may prompt us to obey God's will in order to be ready for the resurrection, but the future resurrection is not a command that we obey. Yet, it is clearly taught in the Bible, so God expects us to understand and believe the truth of it. We may well say that we not only cannot do anything we want, but we cannot believe anything we want to believe, either.

## 2 - Fenced In By God's Word

Suppose I should tell my son, "Here's five dollars, go buy a loaf of bread." He returns with the loaf of bread, a candy bar, ice cream cone, and gum all paid for with my money. He could correctly argue that I didn't specifically tell him "don't get a candy bar, ice cream cone, or gum." However, if I had specifically told him on several occasions before: "Whenever I tell you to do something, don't add to what I tell you, nor take from it, nor substitute anything else for it," **then he would know that he was always restricted to my instructions, no more, no less.** I would not have to repeat the restriction with each order I gave.

God has done this in the Bible. We cannot change what we are specifically taught by statement, implication, or example, and can only choose from options contained in the specific instruction. God tells us in several places and in several ways that we cannot add to his word, or take from it, or modify anything he's told us to believe and do. God doesn't have to repeat the restrictions **every time** he tells someone what to do, though he has stated the restrictions several times. **Deuteronomy 4:1-2** says:

*"Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of our fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you."*

**Verse 8** identifies the statutes and judgments as the Law. They could not add to God's word nor take away from it. In **verse 6** he says: "keep therefore to do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." Israel's wisdom, reputation, and influence depended on keeping God's word without adding to or taking from it. **Deuteronomy 5:32** puts it another way:

*"Ye shall observe to do as the Lord your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the ways the Lord your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it*

*may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess.*

God laid out the path they were to take in the instructions he gave them; they were not to deviate from that path. The same point is made in **Joshua 1:7**, that says:

*"Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest."*

It is later said, in **Proverbs 4:26-27**: "Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil."

**Deuteronomy 12:32** says it again: "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." Notice that it would be every single thing that God commanded them; they couldn't add to or take from it. In **Proverbs 30:5-6**, it says: "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."

Balaam was a prophet. Though greedy, he knew what was right. He said, **Numbers 22:18**:

*"If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more."*

In **Numbers 24:13**, after failing to curse Israel, and feeling the wrath of Balak, Balaam says again:

*"If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the Lord saith, that will I speak."*

He couldn't do good of his own mind, that is, originating from himself. What originated with him could not be "good." Many people suppose that what they think is just as good as what God thinks. Balaam's statement snowed he could only speak what the Lord says. That reminds us of **I Peter 4:11** that tells us: "if any

man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." We know what Peter meant here by reading what Balaam said.

The New Testament is just as definite as the Old in insisting that we not add to or change God's word. Let's begin with **Revelation 22:18-19**:

*7 testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book."*

This is the same warning against adding to or taking from God's word that we find in so many other places. Some have said that this passage applies only to the Revelation. Yet, why should we not treat the rest of the New Testament with the same reverence as Revelation? **II John 9** warns:

*"Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son."*

Not abiding in the doctrine of Christ would be going beyond the teaching of Christ. God said the same thing about his word hundreds of years before! **II Timothy 3:16-17** says:

*"Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."*

God's word, just that and nothing more, just the way he presented it to us, will tell us all we need to know and everything we need to do. **Matthew 7:21** says:

*"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."*

It isn't enough just to acknowledge Jesus as Lord. One must do God's will. The next two verses show that some claimed to do what they did "in the name of Jesus, including many mighty works.

Doing something in his name means to do it by his authority. Jesus denies that they did so. To the contrary, they were "workers of iniquity (lawlessness)." Their claim of doing many mighty works did not make it so; it was from their own mind, not the will of God. What was it that Balaam said? "I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind." Then, **Galatians 3:15** tells us:

*"Brethren, I speak after the manner of men: Though it be but a man's covenant, yet when it hath been confirmed, no one maketh it void, or addeth thereto."*

We understand this as the nature of covenants even in our human relationships. So, whether it was the covenant made with Abraham, the Old Covenant, or the New, once confirmed no one could change it. There can be no other substituted for it, no striking out any provision, and no additions made at any point. This is why God said in **Psalms 89:34**: "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips." Once God's covenant is made, he neither breaks nor alters it as long as that covenant is in effect. No human has the right to do it either. We understand that God built into the Old Covenant a time limit; it was intentionally temporary, and we are told when it was to end, which it did. Yet, the full time it was in effect, no one could add to it, take from it, substitute for it, do less or more than what it said.

In **Galatians 1:6-9**, Paul warns about another gospel. No angel or man could preach any other gospel than what was preached, without being cut off from God. That means no one can substitute anything else, add to it, or take from it. In Galatia, the gospel had been "perverted," which made it a "different" gospel. It doesn't take but a drop of poison in a glass of pure water to make it a deadly drink. The same amount of water may still be present in the glass, but the drop of poison makes the liquid something entirely "different." By taking God's word and making some slight change (by addition, subtraction, substitution, or the like) people make something that God did not say. That results in error, departure from the truth. Paul says in **I Corinthians 4:6**:

*"Now these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes; that in us ye might learn not to go beyond the things which are written."*

This **ASV** translation correctly presents the passage; we cannot go beyond what is written, on any subject. That statement is not new to the word of God. In **Matthew 16:19**, Jesus said:

*"Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

This refers to the teaching the Apostles would do, as Jesus said in **John 15:20**: "if they kept my word, they will keep yours also." For more information on binding and loosing, look at **John 7:23**: "If a man receiveth circumcision on the sabbath, that the law of Moses may not be broken..." The word "broken" here is the same word "loose" in **Matthew 16:19**. This simply says that the specific teaching about circumcision had to be obeyed because God said so. They were not "loosed" from that instruction. In **John 10:35**, Jesus said to his enemies: "If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came (and the scripture cannot be broken)..." Again, the same word "loosed" is used here. The scripture cannot be loosed from its authority. They had no right to believe or do any more than what God said. (See, also, **Matthew 5:18-19**).

When the Apostles set out to present God's revelation, they were binding and loosing. The literal meaning of the future perfect tense in **Matthew 16:19** is: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." God, through the Apostles, bound his instructions on man, and unbound (loosed) other things. God tells us which is which, and we have no right to bind or loose where he hasn't. In other instruction, we can see this process of law first originating in heaven. God promised the Holy Spirit to the apostles to teach them all things, guide them into all the truth, and show them things to come, **John 14:26; 16:13**. This is what they preached, **I Corinthians 2:6-13; II Peter 1:20-21**.

In **Acts 2:39**, by revelation, Peter included the Gentiles in those acceptable to God through the gospel. However, it was several years before he completely understood what he had said on Pentecost. The vision in **Acts 10** taught him that what God had made clean was not unclean. So, he could say to Cornelius that "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him," vss. **34-35**. God's will was "bound" and "loosed" in heaven first,

then on earth. At times, inspired men didn't fully understand what they themselves said or wrote as prophecy, **I Peter 1:10-12, Daniel 12:8-9**.

### INCLUSION OR EXCLUSION

Some people insist, very strongly, that specific statements do not exclude anything, they only include; they include only what is specifically stated. So, we are told, we cannot say that instrumental music is **excluded** by the command to "sing." They tell us that the command to sing means it only includes singing; it does not exclude playing an instrument. If someone wants to play an instrument, he must find the authority for it in some other passage. All of that sounds scholarly, but is only playing with words. It confuses people; it is not true. It may be true in the general realm of language, given the proper circumstances. However, we are dealing with the Bible. The Bible says time and again that we cannot add anything to what God said, nor turn to the right hand or the left. We have already seen the evidence. This evidence shows that whenever God specifies something, he **excludes** everything else related to that category.

We are restricted to what God says, however you want to say it. The same fence that keeps things in, also keeps other things out. **Galatians 1:6-9** puts things in the right perspective. Anyone, man or angel, is cursed of God if he preaches any gospel other than what Paul preached. Likewise, anyone who receives any gospel other than what was preached is cursed. Those scriptures specifically forbid, specifically exclude, any gospel other than what the apostles preached! ***This is true of all that God has said.***

Others insist that, if the scriptures do not say "not to," we are free to do what we want. Or, whatever the scriptures do not specifically exclude, we are free to do. Let's see what the scriptures say about this. **Deuteronomy 29:29** says:

*"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."*

Mankind has always tried to dabble in things the Lord has not seen fit to reveal to him. Man assumes that his thoughts are just as good as God's. **Isaiah 55:8-9** says that God's thoughts and ways are not ours; his thoughts and ways are higher than ours.

What God has revealed is just what he wanted man to know and do; "do all the words of this law." What God did not say is not man's business; man must do just what God has revealed. Man can't change it in any way. **Leviticus 10:1** ( also, **Numbers 3:4**) says:

*"And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not."*

It was not that God had specifically forbidden them the fire they used, but rather he had specified what fire they must use. They used fire from some other source. **Leviticus 16:12** specifies that God wanted them to use fire for the incense from the altar of burnt offering. (See, also, **Numbers 16:46**). God didn't have to go down a list of other sources of fire, specifically forbidding each source, for them to know what fire to use. Just telling them what fire to use was enough, coupled with the instructions of don't add to what God says, don't take from it, don't turn to the right hand nor to the left, etc. By telling them what fire to use, God restricted them to that fire; or, expressed differently, it excluded all sources of fire other than that one.

The Law also specifically identified what incense they were to use. **Exodus 30:34-38** gives the formula for making it. Verse 9 says:

*"Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifices..."*

Here it's **stated** that they were not to use "strange" incense. Any incense other than what God specified would have been "strange" incense. God didn't **have** to say "no strange incense" for them to know that they had to stay with what he specifically formulated, but he did. What he said is like, "don't preach any other gospel," or "don't go beyond the doctrine of Christ," or "don't go beyond what is written." Any incense, other than that specified, was "excluded." God didn't even go down a list of possible incense formulas to exclude; "no strange incense" covered it all, just like "any other gospel" covers them all. Any change whatever in the formula would have rendered it "strange" incense. You see, they couldn't add to it or take from it, or use anything else. If God had only given the formula for the incense he commanded them to use, and had not forbidden any other incense, would they then

have been at liberty to offer any other incense? Of course not! They couldn't have done so because of the other instructions forbidding their changing God's instructions, adding to it, or taking from it.

In defending instrumental music in worship today, some have stated they would allow beef sandwiches and buttermilk on the Lord's table, in place of the bread and fruit of the vine, simply because such is **not specifically forbidden**. That's said in order to contend that instrumental music, not being specifically forbidden, must be acceptable to God. However, the fallacy of that argument is easily seen just in what we have looked at so far.

**Mark 7:1-13** records a controversy with the Pharisees over the disciples not washing their hands before eating. Please read those scriptures in your Bible now. The practice of the washing of hands before eating was a religious obligation the Pharisees "established" by "tradition of the elders." There was nothing at all said in the Law about such a practice, either positively or negatively; God did not forbid it, nor did he say anything close to it as a subject in the Law. The violation of the Pharisees was that they had added something to their religious practice "which the Lord commanded not." Jesus rebuked them sharply, quoting **Isaiah**;

*"But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men."*

He also told them "you make void the word of God by your traditions." This condition exists whenever man thinks up something the Lord has not authorized, and then makes it a matter of religious observance. There was nothing wrong with washing one's hands before eating, of itself; most people do. The wrong came in making handwashing a religious ritual not authorized by God. Such are the "precepts of men," meaning originating with man.

In **Romans 14:5-6**, Paul talks about things that are alright of themselves, such as vegetarianism versus eating meat. He says: "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let each man be fully assured in his own mind."

It's perfectly alright for someone to count some day more important than another, whether it's a birthday or the fourth of July. It is equally alright for someone else to make every day without distinction. Christians do have a day of special observance, the first day of the week. God gave us that day, so it's a matter of revelation. However, it would be an addition to the word of God to make

special religious days that God had not commanded, such as Easter or Christmas. **Galatians 4:10-11** warns:

*"Ye observe days, and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid of you, lest by any means I have bestowed labor upon you in vain."*

Just what days, months, seasons, or years he was referring to is not known, but were undoubtedly religious observances. For the Jew, the authority of the Law was taken away, and feast days, new moons, and sabbath days went with it, **Colossians 2:14-16**. To celebrate any day but the first day of the week, as a day of special religious observance, is without authority of God. It would be an addition to God's word.

**Numbers 20:1-12** records a well known story. Israel needed water desperately at one point. God provided it for them in a particular way. In verse 8, God tells Moses to take the rod, call the assembly together, and speak to a certain rock. The rock would bring forth water. Moses didn't follow God's instructions. He got part of it right, but only part. He took his rod, called Aaron and the congregation together, went to the correct rock, and then departed from God's instructions. He hit the rock twice with the rod, and spoke to the people, taking some credit on himself for giving them water. This was all contrary to what God had told him. So, God said in verse **12**:

*"Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them."*

Moses had not become an atheist; he just had not followed God's instruction. God didn't say not to strike the rock, nor speak to the people, taking some credit for himself. God didn't have to do that. Any specific instruction restricted him to what God said.

Another famous story is in **II Kings 5:1-14**. Maaman, the powerful general of the Syrian armies, came to Elisha to be cured of his leprosy. Elisha told him, by a servant, to go dip seven times in the river Jordan. That offended Maaman. In his own mind, the whole thing was wrong. He said: "I thought..." Well, Maaman thought Elisha should have handled it differently, and that the rivers of his own country were better than Jordan. He was finally convinced by his servants to do as he was told. Verse 14 says: "Then he went down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, accord-

ing to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." He had to do "according to the saying of the man of God." He could not substitute another river, nor make any other change. It included only the Jordan river, but excluded all others at the same time.

Jesus uses another Old Testament story to correct the Jews. **Matthew 12:4**, referring to David, says:

*"He entered into the house of God, and ate the showbread, which it was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them that were with him, but only for the priests."*

When we read **Leviticus 24:9**, all that the Law says about who would eat the showbread is:

*"And it shall be Aaron's and his sons'; and they shall eat it in the holy place: for it is most holy unto him of the offerings of the Lord made by fire by a perpetual statute."*

This statement of the Law excluded all others from eating the showbread. Some have supposed that what David did is authority to do whatever is not specifically forbidden, though Jesus says it was unlawful for him to do it. The setting for the argument of Jesus had to do with criticism because of his disciple's plucking grain to eat while walking through the fields; they did so out of hunger. The Jews, to whom Jesus was speaking, did not condemn **David** for eating the showbread because he was hungry. The Talmud, **Menahoth 96a**, says this: "For David had been overcome by faintness by reason of his hunger, and in order to save life all laws may be superseded." Another position the Jews took on the showbread is given at the same place in the Talmud. It's the position that, at the moment the showbread was removed from the table of showbread, it was common and could be eaten by anyone. Jesus denies this by saying it was "unlawful" for David to eat it; it was for priests only.

What Jesus is doing in this instance is to take the inconsistency of the Pharisaical position of condemning his disciples but not David. Jesus said that his disciples were guiltless in the matter, while David did something "unlawful." However, directly to our point, Jesus shows by the positive statement in **Leviticus 24:9**, all but the priests were excluded from eating the showbread. When Jesus said it was only for the priests, that included only the priests, excluding all others!

**Hebrews 7:14** shows the complete absence of authority for priests from the tribe of Judah. It says:

*"For it is evident that our Lord hath sprung out of Judah; as to which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priests."*

What the Law did specify was that Levites would function as priests. See **Numbers 3:5-13, 41-45, 18:1-7, 21-32**. All others were excluded. Now look at **Hebrews 8:5**:

*"Even as Moses is warned of God when he is about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern that was showed thee in the mount"*

God told Moses just how things were to be made. He didn't have to tell him all the ways not to do it. Everything had to be done just as the pattern showed. Moses couldn't add anything, nor take from it, couldn't substitute something else, do less or more, turn to the right or the left. If such restrictions had appeared in no other passage, they are given in "make all things according to the pattern."

### 3 - Specifics And Generics

If I were to step into a room full of teenagers and say, "get some bread," I would have specified something I wanted done. I would have specified locomotion in the word "get." I would also have specified that I wanted "bread." Beyond those specifics, however, are several things that are necessary to "get some bread." I did not specify just **who** was to get the bread. Any one, or a combination of people, or perhaps the whole roomful might go. I didn't specify **where** they were to get the bread, nor even that they were to buy it. They might borrow it from a neighbor, go to a supermarket close by, or across town. I didn't specify **how** they were to go in getting the bread, so they might walk, take a bike, car, cab, bus, or something else. I didn't specify **when** I wanted the bread, though they might assume that I wanted it in a reasonably short time. I didn't specify **how much** bread I wanted, so I might get a little or a lot; I just said "some." I didn't specify **what kind** of bread, so I might get wheat, rye, potato, soy, or something else, in the form of a loaf, buns, rolls, or some exotic foreign "bread."

As long as they do what I tell them to do, they are free to choose the best way to do it. The unspecified options I leave for them to decide are what we call **generic authority**. If I want to place more **restrictions** on them, I must be more specific in what I tell them. I might say, "Charles, here's the money; take my car, right now; go to the grocery on the next corner; buy one loaf of fresh, Holsum, thin sliced, white, sandwich bread, and bring it right back to me." That cuts down on their choices. **Specific statements, or commands, always take precedence over those unspecified options, generic authority**, which should be obvious. We only find generic authority in something specific. When God gives specific instruction, stated or implied, as a statement of fact or a command, we look at the specifics to see his limitations. We then note the unspecified options, that are either necessary or allowed, from which we choose in carrying out what God specifies.

Authority answers to several questions: **what, when, where, why, who, how, how often, how much**, etc. Both specifics and generics answer to any one, or a combination, of these questions. We must understand that a passage may make the who, what, and where specific, and leave the how and when up to us to decide. God did not give specific instructions regarding all possible situations, thereby leaving us **no** choices to make. Let's illustrate.

The command to "Go teach all nations," in **Matthew 28:19**, is specific in regard to what and where. "Go" specifies locomotion, movement, transport from one place to another. There was no choice but to carry out the specific instruction. However, Jesus did not give the **how** of "going." So, the apostles were left to decide the best way to transport themselves to do what Jesus specifically commanded. That makes the **how** of "going" generic: any means of locomotion would do. They could take any available means in the first century; a boat, chariot, an animal, or walking would all do. Today we "go" by automobile, plane, bicycle, train, bus, speedboat, roller skates, walk, or any other means.

"All nations" established a class, or category, or place. Jesus left options of order and priority up to the apostles. Jesus did specify a beginning order for them; the "going" was to begin in Jerusalem, then spread over Judea, then Samaria, and then all nations, **Luke 24:47, Acts 1:8**. Such specifics of priority would only apply to that particular time, place, and individuals.

The command to "teach" all nations specifies the work to be done. However, the **method** of teaching, (such as one-on-one, a group, writing, etc.) was a matter of choice, as long as they did what was specified. **Ephesians 5:19** says:

*"Speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord."*

Here, as in all the New Testament, only "singing" is taught as the kind of music that we express. He **specifies** the "heart" as the instrument involved. If there was instruction for mechanical instruments of music, then a piano and organ would be generic options, along with guitars, harmonicas, or comb and tissue paper. If God had just said "make music," then we could have made any kind of music we wanted, as long as we carried out the specific of "make music." We could sing, or sing and play an instrument, or just play an instrument. However, he specifies **the kind of music**. It's just "sing." An organ is not an option of "sing."

The mechanical instrument is a "kind" or "category" of music. You can play an instrument alone, or play and sing, or just sing alone. This shows that "sing" and "play" are coordinate ways of making music, meaning "of the same order or degree, equal in rank or importance." Yet, they are two separate categories. Singing is an option of the category "make music," just as the mechani-

cal instrument is. However, the category of just "make music" is not in the New Testament. Of the two categories under "make music," the kind of music you sing and the kind of music you play, God specified "sing." Only those options that fall in the category of "sing" will apply.

Many argue that an organ or piano is just an "expedient" of sing. No! Organs, pianos, or what have you, are all "expedients" of mechanical instruments of music, not singing. It's true that the word "expedient" means something "profitable, to advantage," but that doesn't mean we can just tag anything an expedient. **An expedient is just an option of generic authority**. Seeing that God specified the kind of music, singing, then a piano is not an expedient of anything in scripture. The category that would authorize it as an option does not exist.

A similar argument is that a piano is just an "aid" to singing, like a cane is an aid to walking, or glasses are an aid to seeing. (This is just the "expediency" argument with a different word). A cane is an aid, or expediency, to walking. Glasses are an aid to seeing. However, a cane and walking are not coordinate ways of going, like walking and riding are. Nor are seeing and glasses coordinate ways of perception, as are seeing and hearing. All one does with a cane is walk, and all one does with glasses is see. Mechanical instruments and singing are not parallel to that. It would be like saying that a cane walks all by itself, and glasses perceive without being in front of your eyes. You can play an instrument without singing, and sing without an instrument. The illustration they make on "aid" is not parallel. "Aid" is just another word for an option of generic authority, like the word "expediency."

We are restricted, fenced in, to just singing. Yet, there **are** some options to "sing." Some things have to be decided about singing:

**Kind of songs to sing**  
**Order of singing**  
**Purpose and manner**  
**Number of songs**  
**Chromatic scale, chant, etc.**  
**Four part harmony**  
**Volume-tempo**  
**Song leader**  
**Song book**

God has taken some of the choices in this list out of our hands by specifying some of them. He specifies "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs," **Ephesians 5:19**. That limits us to the kind of songs we can sing; no "pop" or "country western." He also specifies we are to teach and admonish one another. Along with the nature of the kind of songs, this gives us some purpose and manner for singing. Yet, notice from what's left of the list, the things God does not specify. Leaving us some choices means that "sing" still has generics, which only refers to those unspecified options.

In **Hebrews 10:25**, we are specifically commanded to assemble repeatedly; it is specific of disciples' meeting together as a group. This specific instruction requires some place to assemble, some number of times at some interval, and at some particularly set time, in order to carry out the specified action. Of course, from other passages, we know that we must assemble at least once every first day of the week. Beyond that, we have some decisions to make. The scriptures do not tell us exactly where we are to meet. Any type of building, or open space, will do. Neither does geography matter, **John 4:21-24**. Exactly when we are to meet, the time of day, number of times a day or week, what days that will be, are all up to us to decide. We must also decide how often we are to assemble. These are all options called "generic authority."

We cannot go beyond the specific details and the options contained in those specifics. That is, we cannot decide to do something and claim it as generic authority unless there is specific instruction that contains the options. Naaman's choice of the rivers of his own country were not options of generic authority unless Elisha had said go dip seven times in "a" river. When the prophet specified the Jordan river, he left no options about the river to be used. Naaman could still choose the exact spot in the Jordan where he would enter, but he couldn't choose another river. Moses could choose just where he would stand in relation to the rock to which God told him to speak. There might be some other items in the circumstance he could also choose, as long as he followed the specific instructions, no more, no less.

Let's keep these facts clearly in mind: **choosing something that is an option of generic authority is not adding to nor going beyond God's word, nor is rejecting one option in favor of another doing less than what God commands.** We just cannot change the specific instruction by adding more specifics, or dropping some of them, or failing to follow them. All specifics must be followed.

### MISAPPLYING GENERIC AUTHORITY

People have always tried to add options not contained in specific instructions. We have seen that in Madab and Abihu, Naaman, and others. They can't find authority for what they want to do in specific teaching, so they throw their plan or project into generic authority, claiming it as their choice of options. We have seen some of that in the issue over instrumental music in worship.

A companion issue with that of instrumental music has been the Missionary Society. The defenders of this organization have tried to authorize it under generic authority. J.B. Briney defended the Society in a public debate, in 1908, against WW Otey. Briney says, in the **Otey-Briney Debate**, pages 193 and 288:

*'And so here, the command is to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. The command is not attended with any specific instructions as to how this is to be done. . . The first point I presented was the fact that the Saviour commanded his disciples to go, and left it to the exercise of their own judgment and their own wisdom as to how they would do that; that is, as to how they would carry on the details of the work that was committed into their hands.'*

The passage he refers to, **Matthew 28:19**, gives the specifics of "go" and "teach." These verbs specify what is to be done in regard to locomotion and instruction. All means of locomotion are options of the command "go," such as walking, running, standing still, riding on animals, in boats, trains, planes, cars, etc. "Teach" involves all methods of teaching, such as oral instruction one-on-one, in small groups, large groups, radio, television, writing in many different styles on many different surfaces, etc. Certainly, none of the methods of going and teaching are specified. Yet, what Briney did was to inject a **who** into the **what** as just a method of going and teaching. He makes the Society an option of generic authority under ways of going, and methods of teaching. However, such an organization, a human institution, is not a method of either going or teaching. It's an organization that **uses and supports methods of going and teaching**. That's the same type of error made in classifying a piano as an option of "sing."

The **who** belongs in another category entirely. The only **organization**, the **who**, that's authorized in the new Testament is the local church; **that** is God's "missionary society." The local church can use methods, and make choices of different options,

in carrying out the work God has specifically given it to do. We cannot build **organizations of our own devising that compete with the local church**. That's like adding "strange fire," or "looking for another river."

Another place people assume generic authority where there is none, is in regard to "good works." A prominent College President said, in a class I attended, that "Elders have the right to do anything they want to do as long as they think it's a good work." Not so! Some may claim that their project is "work," and doing a lot of "good." Therefore, it's a "good work," authorized by passages like **II Corinthians 9:8, II Timothy 2:21, Titus 3:1, and Galatians 6:10**.

If we take this approach, it would mean that whatever man may think is a good work is therefore approved by God. **Matthew 7:22-23** records the arguments of some people on the day of Judgment. They claimed that, in the name of Jesus, they did many "wonderful works." Jesus said it wasn't so. Not denying that they may have been wonderful works in their own eyes, Jesus does deny that the people did them "in his name," meaning "by his authority." Jesus said they were workers of lawlessness, meaning they were transgressors of law. **II Timothy 3:16-17** says:

*"Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."*

The scriptures tell us which are good works and which are not. Note the various scriptures mentioned above. To "abound to," be "prepared unto," and be "ready unto" every good work, requires knowing what a good work is. God has not left it up to us to decide that. His scriptures completely furnish us to every good work. Properly understanding his word gives us not only what we are to do, but also what the limitations are. We must stay within those boundaries.

### GENERIC AUTHORITY AND SILENCE

From pioneer days the slogan has been repeated: "Speak where the Bible speaks, and remain silent where the Bible is silent." This is based on **I Peter 4:11**, that tells us "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." What is meant by speaking where the Bible speaks is not that everything must be specified, for there is this area of generic authority. Nor must everything be

spelled out in a statement, for there is the area of "necessary conclusions," which we will get to in the next chapter. We are to believe, teach, and practice what the Bible authorizes in whatever way it teaches us.

Remaining silent where the Bible is silent refers to things that have no authority of any kind. We are not talking about something not mentioned by name or detail. Generic options are not specified. They are still authorized. Perhaps Moses said it best: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us...that we may do all the words of this law," **Deuteronomy 29:29**. God restricts us to what he reveals.

Perhaps you have had the experience of asking someone for his authority for something he was doing. The reply, thrown back as a challenge, is, "What scripture does it violate?" Most times, such a reply is an admission of the weakness of his case, the absence of authority for the practice. Several things are wrong with his reply. **First**, it is an appeal to "silence." What he is saying is that "the scriptures do not specifically say not to do what I'm doing." He is calling for a particular passage that his practice specifically violates. If nothing more, his practice may violate "don't add to, or go beyond, God's word." We must have expressed authority in the scriptures for the practice we advocate. Silence does not express authority. **We cannot determine what God's will is by what he does not say.**

**Second**, the reply shows that the other party, recognizing the weakness of his evidence, wants to throw the responsibility for proof back on you. He isn't defending anything. So, if you cannot produce a specific statement of scripture that his practice violates, then he can call it "case closed." He will consider he has produced authority for his practice. In fact, **he produced no authority at all.**

What scripture did the Jews violate when they insisted on the washing of hands before eating, **Mark 7:1-8**? Their practice was an addition to the word of God; God had not commanded them to do such a thing as a religious observance. There was nothing wrong with washing hands before eating, except as a religious obligation. Could they argue that the Law didn't say not to? The Law didn't specifically forbid the practice, but the Law didn't authorize it either, and that's the point. Paul said the Galatians were observing "days, and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid of you, lest by any means I have bestowed labor upon you

in vain," **Galatians 4:10-11**. There is nothing wrong with making some special observances of time, **Romans 14:6**. When we put a religious attachment to it, which the Lord didn't command, then we cross the boundary into the silence of the Scriptures. Remember: Madab and Abihu offered strange fire before the Lord, "which he commanded them not," **Leviticus 10:1**.

Some preachers in the Christian Church are now admitting that instrumental music is not found in the New Testament. They say that the instrument is authorized by what they call "permissible silence." Their major argument claims that congregational singing is not found in the New Testament, so the piano is just as scriptural as congregational singing. That's lame.

**Ephesians 5:19** and **Colossians 3:16** cannot be obeyed alone. The verbs "speaking" and "teaching and admonishing," are **active voice**. This requires action for all those addressed. The tense of the verbs is **present participle**, showing action in progress. The word translated "one another" is reciprocal, action taken by two or more with "one another." Congregational singing fits this very well, though it can be fulfilled in groups other than a congregational meeting. It just can't be fulfilled alone. (For a fuller discussion of this, see **Gospel Anchor**, April, 1986, pages 9-13).

On the other hand, the Bible is "silent" about automobiles and airplanes; neither is specifically mentioned. Yet, Bible authority is not "silent" about them, for they are authorized by generic authority.

In the same way, the Bible is "silent" about church buildings with "restrooms and drinking fountains." We have authority for such things in the command to assemble, **Hebrews 10:25**. If we didn't have instructions to assemble together, we would have no authority to construct a building in which to meet. The command to assemble is specific. It does not tell us where to meet. As long as we do what is specified, we can and must choose a "place," even building or buying our own. Restrooms and a source of drinking water nearby are essential to any public gathering.

Whatever activity or responsibility a congregation has authority for, that congregation can provide, or build, facilities in which to do it. If we have authority to assemble together, we can build an auditorium in which to meet. If we have authority for Bible classes, we can build the class rooms in which to have the classes. **What must be determined at the beginning is the authority for a congregation to engage in, or support and promote, a particular activity. Then, we determine what options we have to expedite that activity.**

Another argument some make is based on **Romans 5:13**, "sin is not imputed when there is no law." It is said that, wherever no law exists, we are authorized to act without penalty. So, it is said, there is nothing in scriptures in regard to instrumental music, which means there is no law concerning it, which then means we can use it in worship and not sin. This is just the "if it doesn't say not to" argument in other garb.

All that God says is "law." We have law about worship, including the kind of music we are to use. We have law regarding the church, its' organization and function. We have law about the life we are to live, what we are called on to believe and practice in every part of that life. It's rather interesting that the **very things** people want to use this "no law" argument on are **the very things we do have laws on**. We are limited by those laws to just what they teach. We cannot add to them, substitute anything else, or change them in any way, without bringing the wrath of God on us. That's what is wrong with the "no law" argument. If people had scriptural authority for what they were trying to do, they wouldn't need this kind of argument.

So, "silence," meaning having no authority of any kind, and generic authority are not the same. Generic authority may not mention names or details of something but is authorized anyway.

## 4 - Necessary Conclusions

I recognize that terms can be confusing to many people. At times, either orally or in writing, someone will compare information that is **explicit** to some other that is **implicit**. Or, they will say that something is stated **explicitly**, and something else **implicitly**. That can be confusing because these words are not commonly used by many people. The word **explicit** means that you leave nothing implied, the subject is clearly expressed, fully stated, detailed. If something is **implicit**, then it is not expressly stated. It is without detail, something you imply instead of say. You might take what you see or hear, put two and two together, and reach a conclusion. You would say that the conclusion is implied. Another word for implicit is **inference**. An **inference** is simply a conclusion that you reach from premises. **Premises** are nothing more than the twos in two plus two from which you reach a conclusion. We use this way of reasoning in our every day lives, such as with mathematics, in conversations, reading magazines and newspapers, learning various subjects, and the like; it is inherent in human language. Detectives put "clues" together in order to determine guilt in a crime. We all use the process every day; you can probably think of ways you have used it.

Certain reasons are given by which one concludes something. Neither the reasons nor the conclusions are always specifically stated, but may be implied in the language. A necessary conclusion is one that unavoidably follows from the premises. There are instances where one conclusion, or more, may be **possible** but **not necessary**. We will be studying in this chapter about conclusions that clearly follow from reasons given in scripture.

Back to our room full of teenagers. Suppose I step into the room and say, "get some bread." Three of the teenagers leave immediately. I then walk into the kitchen and note that there is one loaf of bread on the table. After a while, the phone rings and a lady says, "Robert just came by the house and got a loaf of bread and said to tell you he would be there shortly." A few minutes later Charles calls to say, "I just got two loaves of bread here at the grocery, is that okay?" I tell him it is, and as I hang up I notice Shirley walking up the driveway with a loaf of bread in hand. I don't have all the bread yet, but I do know, barring some accident, that I will shortly have a total of five loaves of bread. That may be oversimplifying the point, but that is what we mean by a necessary con-

clusion, or necessary inference. Perhaps the word "conclusion" is more readily understood by people than either the words "inference" or "implication." So, we will use the phrase "necessary conclusion" as the more understandable one.

God reveals information to us in the same way as the above illustration. Sometimes it is more subtle than this illustration, or we must deal with unstated premises, but the conclusion must necessarily follow. The conclusion that's reached is **specific**, with all its attendant options. Berkhof says it well as follows, found in **Principles of Biblical Interpretation**, p. 159:

*"The knowledge of God is all-comprehending and is always conscious knowledge. In giving man his word, he was not only perfectly aware of all that was said, but also of all that this implied. He knew the inferences that are deduced from Scripture by unavoidable inference, and more largely still the consequences that are deduced from a comparison of the various Scripture statements among themselves, were foreseen by infinite wisdom in the very act of supernaturally inspiring the record from which they are inferred: and the revealer not only knew that men would deduce such consequences, but designed that they should do so." (Inspiration of the Scriptures, p. 585) Therefore, not only the express statements of Scripture, but its implications as well, must be regarded as the Word of God."*

To illustrate the truth of this, we'll look first at **I Corinthians 14:34**:

*"Let the women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law."*

The specific statement, "let them be in subjection," is not in the Old Testament, but the fact of woman's subjection to man goes all the way back to creation when woman was taken out of man, **I Timothy 2:12-15**. Man was first formed, then woman. Woman was made for man. This fact is demonstrated in many ordinances and examples throughout the Old Testament. Thus we determine from the Old Testament, not by specific statement, but by a necessary conclusion, that woman is in subjection to man. "The Law" referred to by Paul means the entire Old Testament, including Genesis. Though the Law does not specifically state what Paul

does, the law "saith" it, anyway. This means that a necessary conclusion carries the same authority as a specifically expressed statement.

In another reference to the beginning of things, **Matthew 19:3-12** goes back to the nature of man's creation. The Pharisees asked Jesus: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" Jesus appeals to the scriptures: "Have ye not read?" Then:

*"He who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."*

His later statement in **verse 9** is also based on this. The premises rest on the fact that God made mankind male and female, "from the beginning." That established sexuality, with a sex drive and function. God intended sexual relations to exist. Based on this, "for this cause," a man and his wife would cleave to one another, be one flesh. That established some rules of responsibility between a particular man and a particular woman. God made the rules: rules of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Such rules are inherent in being human. These rules will exist as long as male and female exist, because they are in the nature of God's creation. Jesus points out to the Pharisees that God's rules of marriage go back before the Law of Moses, to the beginning, and have not changed. The form of the argument was necessary conclusion, something necessarily implied in the scriptures to which he directs them.

Jesus told the Jews in **John 5:39**: "Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me." These scriptures bore witness in several ways. **Matthew 22:41-46**, an occasion when he silenced the Pharisees, gives us one way. He asked them about the Christ, and whose son he was to be. They answered that he was the son of David. Jesus then asked how it was that David called him Lord, in **Psalms 110:1**, if he was his son? They couldn't answer. If the Jews had put the two facts together properly, they would have known, by necessary conclusion, the truth about him.

Though the Jews searched the scriptures, they missed the truth because they had closed minds, prejudiced by prior conclusions. Paul said in **II Corinthians 3:14-15**:

*"But their minds were hardened: for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remaineth . . . But unto this day, whensoever Moses is read, a veil lieth upon their heart."*

The Jews read the scriptures with great zeal, filled with the pride of their religious devotion. Yet, they did not understand, and the fault was their own. **Acts 13:27** says:

*"For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him."*

Today, countless people search the scriptures, frequently and diligently, and still don't understand. A searching of scripture means nothing unless you do it with the right attitude, studying it in a proper manner.

#### GOD SHOWS HOW TO UNDERSTAND

Some people think that necessary conclusions are nothing but human reasoning, and we cannot rely on the results. To the contrary, we have already seen that Jesus and the apostles drew such conclusions from scriptures. It amounts to a divine commentary on how to understand the Bible, discovering what is on God's mind, teaching us what we must know and do. Both the Old and New Testaments teach in this manner. The problem in using this approach is not whether necessary conclusions are valid, but rather, do the necessary premises exist that bring a particular conclusion. Like the Jews, we may not look at all the facts properly. Yet, God still holds us responsible for "handling aright the word of truth."

We will now look at several other instances of how Jesus and the apostles resorted to necessary conclusions to show God's mind. We will also see how we can look at scripture in the same way in order to understand truth.

In **Matthew 22:23-33**, Jesus puts a stop to the Sadducees. He answers their error on the resurrection and nature of man by an appeal to what God said to Moses at the burning bush: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." His argument hinges on the tense of the verb God used, "I am." **The present tense verb implies that God was still, at that moment, the God of these men, though they were all in their graves.** God is not the God of the dead but of the living, so these

individuals were still living, though not physically. That proved the existence of a soul, and a resurrection. (See also **Luke 20:37**. Luke says that this proved that the dead are raised). All of that is taught by implication in the very tense of the verb. Such premises are not expressly stated in the Old Testament, but the teaching is there anyway. Jesus says that they were in error, "not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." He established that they were in error by necessary conclusion from the Old Testament.

To illustrate this again, look at **Matthew 16:5-12**, and a lesson on "beware" of the Pharisees and Sadducees:

*"And the disciples came to the other side and forgot to take bread. And Jesus said unto them, take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, we took no bread. And Jesus perceiving it said, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have no bread? Do ye not yet perceive, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not perceive that I spake not to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Then understood they that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees."*

Though the disciples reasoned among themselves, it was faulty reasoning, because they left out important elements. The rebuke of Jesus shows that **he expected them to have figured it out properly by themselves**. He had to specify the premises for them, and they then understood what his statement meant. Another like instance is **Matthew 15:10-11, 15-18**:

*"And he called to him the multitude, and saith unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which entereth into the mouth defileth the man; but that which proceedeth out of the mouth, this defileth the man...And Peter answered and said unto him, Declare unto us the parable. And he said, Are ye also even yet without understanding? Perceive ye not, that whatsoever goeth into the mouth passeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But the things which proceed out of the mouth come forth out of the heart; and they defile the man."*

Jesus expected the multitude to understand what he had said; the disciples especially so. They didn't, so Jesus had to specify the premises and put them together so they could. Jesus sounds exasperated with them for not doing that themselves. He told them, "hear and understand."

**Hebrews 7:1-10** contains a matchless example of necessary conclusion. The account of Abraham meeting Melchizedek is very simply stated in Genesis. Yet, from the short meeting between them, we have some facts with far reaching consequences. In two ways, it shows the superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham, and likewise the superiority of Melchizedek over the Levitical priesthood, which in turn shows the superiority of the priesthood of Christ over Levi. This also shows that the Law had to change. The passage says that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, but the lesser pays tithes only to the greater person. Melchizedek blessed Abraham, but it is the greater person that blesses the lesser one. Since this shows that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, and the Jews recognized that Abraham was greater than the Levites, then it necessarily shows that Melchizedek was greater than the Levites and their priesthood. Seeing that God had said, **Psalms 104:4**, that Christ would be a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, that makes the priesthood of Christ greater than that of the Levites, as well. The priesthood was changed by prophecy. The consequence from that is stated in **verse 12**, since the priesthood was changed, there had to be a change in the Law also. This is a classic argument using necessary conclusion.

In **Acts 2:25-31**, Peter quotes from **Psalms 16**, laying down the premise that David could not have been referring to himself because they all could observe his tomb; he had died and was still dead. He then says David was a prophet, appealing to known passages **II Samuel 7:12** and **Psalms 132:11**. These passages foretold that God would set another on David's throne. He then presents his conclusion, one that necessarily follows, that Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of God and reigns at the right hand of God. Since Peter spoke by inspiration from God, his process of arguing here is God's way of revealing information. He expects us to search out his word and put the evidence together to learn what he wants us to know, "handling aright the word of truth."

Several instances say that the disciples "reasoned from the scriptures" that Jesus was the Christ. That required the drawing of premises from Old Testament passages and relating them to Jesus

to show he was the fulfillment. All fulfillment of prophecy depends on understanding the process of "necessary conclusion."

We may understand the Bible teaches something by necessary conclusion when we determine the meaning by the context in which a statement appears. We may note other statements around it. We may determine the meaning by the grammar, as Jesus did with the Sadducees. We use this way of reasoning when we use the process of elimination. We may eliminate all that it couldn't mean and wind up with the only possible answer. At times, we apply that in dealing with figurative language, in which a figurative statement cannot contradict a plain statement. We use this when we put one statement in one place beside a statement, or statements, elsewhere. By comparison of what is said we reach the only conclusion possible. We use it in the fulfillment of prophecy within Bible times. And in other ways. Jesus and the apostles did the same things in approaching the Old Testament. They leave us examples of **how to study** in order to understand God's will.

We can easily determine the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. Sabbatarians insist that Jesus rose on Saturday, not Sunday. They say that in each account that says "the first day of the week" it only says that he had already been raised by the time the first day came; therefore, Jesus rose on Saturday. Let's see.

**Luke 24:1** identifies the time as "the first day of the week." In **verse 13**, it says that two disciples were going "that very day" to a village and Jesus appeared to them, though they did not recognize him. They discuss with him the events of the last few days in **verses 18-21**, centering finally on his crucifixion and death in **verse 20**. In the next verse they say, "Yea, besides all this it is now the third day since these things came to pass." That is, this first day of the week is the third day since he was put to death. Then, in **verse 46**, Jesus says: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day."

So, **Luke 24** identifies conclusively that Jesus was raised on the first day of the week. We only put together the statements that reach an unavoidable conclusion.

We also might notice in passing that what Jesus says in **Luke 24:46**, "thus it is written," isn't in the Old Testament **as he expressly states it**. What he says is the conclusion from the teaching of the Old Testament. The items of his specific statement are taught in several ways. Truth may be taught by a specifically expressed statement, implication, or example, but it is still truth, "it is written."

Some insist that baptism in the name of Jesus Christ in **Acts 2:38** is baptism in the Holy Spirit, not water. However, when we turn to **Acts 10:47-48**, we read this: "Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized. . . and he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." Putting the fact that baptism in the name of Jesus Christ was in water, along with the like statement in **Acts 2:38** of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, we must conclude that baptism in **Acts 2:38** was also in water. Other premises also strengthen this fact, such as Holy Spirit baptism was never a command, nor for everyone; the baptism all were to Undergo, beginning with John the Baptist, was in water.

The story of the eunuch in **Acts 8** is interesting. He was not understanding what he was reading from **Isaiah 53**. Philip began with that scripture and preached to him Jesus. As they went on their way, coming to a certain water, the eunuch said: "Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" Since the eunuch had made the request, he must have learned of both baptism, and water as the element, from some place. The only one he could have learned it from was Philip. Yet, all that Philip had done was "preach unto him Jesus." We must conclude that, in preaching Jesus, we also preach what one must do to be saved, namely, be baptized in water.

This also sheds light on **Philippians 1:15-18** and what Paul meant when he said that some in Rome preached Christ of envy and strife, but he rejoiced at least that Christ was preached. Some have insisted that this means it doesn't matter what any group believes and practices as long as they believe Jesus existed and died for us. That, they say, is all there is to "preaching Christ," and as long as they do "that," then nothing else matters. However, Paul was not saying that this group at Rome was preaching doctrinal error. He said that some preached Christ of envy and strife, and others of good will. Two groups are mentioned. Both preached the same things. Paul rejoiced in the truth that was preached. It was the  **motive** of some in doing it that was wrong. Paul didn't commend the wrong motives. Just because some group today believes that Jesus died for us doesn't mean that they "preach Christ," or as Philip did, "preached unto him Jesus." Many groups think they preach Jesus, but they don't preach what Philip preached to the Eunuch!

A necessary conclusion reveals information by the authority of God. By this process we can understand many things that God wants us to know and do.

## 5 - Examples

Returning to our previous illustration, suppose that just as I stepped into that room of teenagers and said, "get some bread," one of them had to leave, and did so immediately after the instruction was given. Afterward, that teenager watches as three others come out of the house and take off in three directions; one on a bicycle, one on foot, and another in a car. He happens to see them return after a while, each with a loaf of bread. He saw them carry out the **specific** instruction he had heard: "get some bread." However, he would also understand that the three had options, choices, in carrying out what they were to do; they could have followed the instructions in several ways. Later, he describes this whole episode to someone else, from "get some bread" to the three bringing bread back to the house. The one who heard what happened would have a description of their following **specific** instruction's well as whatever **generic options** they picked for doing it.

In the same way, we find examples, descriptions of things that people did, in the Bible. These examples may describe people obeying some specific instruction. In addition, it may show how those people exercised options in doing it. **An example may reflect both specific and generic authority.** This is important, so remember it! We will come back to this in more detail in the next chapter.

Suppose I stepped into that room of teenagers and said: "Charles, here's the money, take my car right now, go to the grocery down on the next corner, get one loaf of fresh Holsum, thin sliced, white sandwich bread, no more, no less, and bring it right back to me." At this point the above mentioned person leaves, but is able to see that Charles comes out of the house, gets in the car, drives in the direction of the corner grocery, returns in a few minutes with a loaf of bread, which he hands to me at the front door. I take it, smile and nod my head, and Charles and I go into the house. That third party may not have seen the bread purchased, nor been close enough to read the label, nor had seen just what kind of bread it was that Charles handed me. Enough was seen for him to know that Charles had carried out my instructions. His description of this event to another party would be a description of someone following **very specific** instruction.

Let's suppose some more. A neighbor of mine leaves his house just as Charles walks out and gets into the car. The neighbor fol-

lows along to the same grocery that Charles goes to, and they both enter together. The neighbor sees Charles look carefully through the bread rack until he settles on a loaf of Holsum, thin sliced, white, sandwich bread. They both pay for their items and leave. As the neighbor goes into his house he sees Charles hand me the loaf of bread, I smile and nod my head, and Charles and I go into the house. The neighbor didn't hear any instruction given to Charles at all. He concludes from what he saw that Charles was instructed to do just what he did. So, without any statement of instruction, the neighbor learned some things about the authority for what Charles did from the approved conduct he witnessed.

### WHAT IS AN EXAMPLE?

What we mean by an "example," in this study, is **"a description of the conduct or activity of people in the Bible, primarily New Testament disciples, that acts as a pattern that we may imitate or avoid."** We are not talking about commands or direct statements. We mean a **description** of what someone did, teaching by "show" rather than "tell." Of course, there are extensive descriptions of what someone did that contain statements or commands. The account of Paul's giving his last personal instructions to the elders of Ephesus in **Acts 20:17-36** contains many statements and commands interwoven with the description of what Paul was doing. See, also, Paul at Philippi in **Acts 16:19-34**, and many others.

The number of descriptions of conduct presented in the Bible is immense. God must have intended to teach us something by examples in view of the amount and variety of them. God has told us that such descriptions and illustrations are written in the Bible for our learning. For instance, **1 Corinthians 10:6, 11** says:

*"Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. . . Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition."*

**Or, in Jude 7**, Sodom and Gomorrah "are set forth as an example, suffering the punishment of eternal fire."

As these passages show, there are some examples that describe evil conduct; we are to avoid such. Other instances are of Demas, **II Timothy 4:10**, who deserted Paul in the work, Simon the Sorcerer in **Acts 8**, whose name became the word used for

"making profit out of sacred things," Simony. Or, even the conduct of Peter at Antioch, **Galatians 2:11-14**, whom Paul rebuked publicly because he "walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel." **III John 11** says: "beloved, imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good." Whether good or bad, the details of the descriptions are factual; they happened. Such examples are part of God's revelation to us; they're important or they wouldn't be in the Bible. The question here is: **what** does any particular example teach us?

What we call an **approved example** refers to a description of the conduct of people in the Bible, who's conduct meets God's approval. We determine that it is approved conduct from the immediate context of the description and/or from statements and commands from other passages. We are mostly interested in "**descriptions of the conduct or activity of New Testament disciples that act as a pattern we either must or may imitate.**"

Paul said in **I Corinthians 11:1**: "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ." In chapter **4:16-17**, he put it this way:

*7 beseech you therefore, be ye imitators of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, who shall put you in remembrance of my ways which are in Christ even as I teach everywhere in every church."*

Christ and truth furnish the standard behind examples; they are the universal standard. For this, look at **Acts 20:35**:

*"In all things I gave you an example, that so laboring ye ought to help the weak, and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

Here, Paul specifies an area where he left an example to them, in helping the weak, giving to those in need. This is what Jesus taught, what Paul practiced, and the example is left for others to follow. Paul was not saying in these statements that others were to dress like him, look like him, talk like him, or choose the same options he would. In short, they were not to become clones of the apostle Paul. The statement, in **Acts 20:35**, shows what he meant in their following him as he followed Christ. Paul followed the instructions of God; they were to do the same. He set examples in carrying out those instructions. How Paul might do some things

was not necessarily the way everyone had to do them. As long as they did what was specifically taught, they might choose other options than Paul would in order to follow the instruction.

### CLASSES OF EXAMPLES

**First**, we understand the applicability of some examples based on who is involved, what is occurring, where it happens, and the period of time of its occurrence.

For instance, in **Acts 19** we have the description of Paul's work at Ephesus. During that time, Paul worked miracles by the direction and power of God, even to the point of their carrying handkerchiefs or aprons from his body to the sick who were healed thereby, and evil spirits were cast out of those possessed, **verses 11-12**. Modern faith healers attempt to do this, "following the example of Paul." The sons of Sceva at Ephesus tried to imitate Paul too, and suffered for their presumption. The facts are that not even all disciples could work miracles in the first century, **I Corinthians 12:29**. Such miracles were limited to that period of time, **I Corinthians 13:8-13, Ephesians 4:11-13**. So, there is no way anyone can "follow the example of Paul" here, or in any activity like it, even though it was approved conduct for Paul.

Perhaps the most difficult event in the book of Acts to understand is **Acts 21:18-26** where Paul pays for the purification of four Jewish converts in the temple. It seems, as some commentators have said, that Paul acted contrary to what he himself taught in regard to the law of Moses. However, that's too hasty a conclusion to reach. In **I Corinthians 7:18-20**, Paul says:

*Was any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Hath any been called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God. Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called."*

It's evident that once a man is physically circumcised he cannot become uncircumcised. So, Paul is not talking about the literal; this is figurative. The Jewish convert was not expected to become a gentile, or the reverse. Jewish custom and culture was retained in many things. Paul said in **I Corinthians 9:20**:

*"To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law,*

*not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law."*

Paul accommodated himself to Jewish ways wherever possible, so as not to retard the gospel. We see this in **Acts 16:3**, about Timothy:

*"Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and he took and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those parts: for they all knew that his father was a Greek."*

Yet, in **Galatians 2:3**, speaking of the same trip to Jerusalem as **Acts 15**, Paul says that Titus, being a Greek was not compelled to be circumcised, even in the face of the Jewish faction among the disciples. So, we can trace that "issue" back to **Acts 15:1-21**.

Social, civil, and religious laws and customs were inseparable for the Jews. Of itself, there was nothing wrong with the act of circumcision, even to following the customs of one's culture. However, it would be wrong to make it a condition of justification, hence **Galatians 5:2-4**. Wherever it is possible to conform to a culture's law and custom without violating God's commandments, **I Corinthians 7:19**, then it's proper to do so. This was Paul's attitude and approach in every culture he was in. Whatever Paul did at Jerusalem in **Acts 21**, it allowed him to later defend his actions to the Jews in Rome in **Acts 28:17**:

*"And it came to pass, that after three days he called together those that were the chief of the Jews: and when they were come together, he said unto them, I, brethren, though I had done nothing against the people, or the customs of our fathers, yet was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans."*

So, with some examples, the culture, customs, times, people involved, as well as statements of scripture, determine what is applicable to us.

**Second**, descriptions of conduct furnish illustrations for teaching some truth. **James 5:10** says:

*"Take, brethren, for an example of suffering and of patience, the prophets who spake in the name of the Lord."*

We may look to such individuals for details in their lives that illustrate patience in suffering while serving God. Jesus is the prime example in this area, **I Peter 2:21**. In **John 13:15**, Jesus said:

*"For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you."*

He showed them by what he did, thereby teaching a lesson. He was not instructing them in the proper way to wash feet, but the proper attitude of humility, of service to others. In the story of the good Samaritan, **Luke 10:29-37**, Jesus describes the actions of the Samaritan to show the right kind of attitude and helpfulness to those in need. He closes his story with, "Go, and do thou likewise."

**James 5:16-18** gives instructions on prayer and the accomplishments of the prayers of the righteous. Appeal is made to something Elijah did:

*"Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again; and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."*

**Hebrews 11** gives several descriptions of events from the lives of great people in the Old Testament. Each is an illustration of the principle of complete confidence in God and obedience to his will.

However, we must be aware that within these examples are details of conduct that we are not obligated to follow. Immediate context, or applying teaching found in other passages, guides us as to what details or principles apply. Abel, in **Hebrews 11:4**, is an example of the right kind of faith which we are to follow, but we are not to follow him in offering animal sacrifices anymore than we are to offer our children like Abraham in **verse 17**, or build an ark like Noah, **verse 7**, or march around Jericho, **verse 30**. Animal sacrifices have been done away with, **Hebrews 9-10**, and the other instances were limited to the particular people and places involved. What **Hebrews 11** shows is that we are to obey God's will to us today with the same attitude and devotion that these others showed in obeying what God told them to do. The context of **John 13:15** shows that Jesus was not establishing a religious ritual of footwashing, but illustrating humility in service to one another, although given the right circumstances we might wash the feet of another.

**Third**, approved examples describe the person or persons carrying out some specific instruction from God. When we watch the apostles spreading out from Jerusalem to preach the gospel, we are reading descriptions of their carrying out the specific instruction of the "great commission." When we find instances of disciples travelling somewhere to preach, we know it is because of the specific instruction of "go teach all nations" and "go preach the gospel to every creature." Such "examples" have stated authority behind them in scripture. In **I Corinthians 16:1**, Paul says:

*"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I gave order to the churches of Galatia, so also do ye."*

He then gives instructions on what to do in giving. These passages do not comprise an "example" of Corinth doing anything, but rather they are instructions to them, just like Paul gave to Galatia. At this point, Corinth hasn't done anything; he's just now telling them what to do. Though we don't find a description of Corinth carrying out the instructions given, we do have descriptions of other churches doing so. We know that Corinth did make up a contribution for the saints in Jerusalem, according to the instructions given. We know this because of **Romans 15:25-28**, which talks about churches of both Macedonia and Achaia giving. For other descriptions of the churches of Macedonia carrying out the instructions, note **II Corinthians 8:1-15**, and **chapter 9**.

**In I Corinthians 16:3, Paul tells them what he is going to do:**

*"And when I arrive, whomsoever ye shall approve, them will I send with letters to carry your bounty unto Jerusalem,"*

Paul had the authority to "order" them to make up the money to be sent to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Yet, he respected the autonomy of the Corinthian church; Corinth would have to approve the messengers who would carry the money from the church. It was Corinth's money. That amplifies the statements of scripture on the autonomy of the local church.

**Examples of specific authority** are as authoritative as the statements behind them. The description may amplify the specific statement, adding some detail. **Matthew 26:29** presents Jesus' specifying a particular day for the disciples to eat his "supper." It was to be "that day IN the kingdom," though he did not **name** the day in that passage. **Acts 20:7** describes the coming together of

the Troas church on the first day of the week to eat the "supper." It exemplifies specific authority as far as the day, showing that "that day" is the first day of the week. Jesus prescribed a particular day to "break bread." Troas assembled on the first day of the week to do that, so the first day of the week must be the day Jesus was talking about, **necessary conclusion**.

**Fourth**, there are descriptions of **generic options** being used in carrying out some specific instruction. In looking at a description of activity, we must determine which details reflect specific instructions, and which details show options of generic authority. We have already mentioned the great commission command to "go teach all nations." The "how" of going is not specified, meaning God left that up to the Apostles to decide. We find them "going" in different ways, such as walking or in a boat. Such instances show their choice of the moment. We might use the same means of locomotion at some time or other; what they chose, we may choose. We determine they are just options of generic authority by looking at the statements dealing with the subject, in this case the great commission.

**Acts 20:7-8** shows several details of something that happened at Troas. The account shows "approved" conduct in these particulars, so it is an "approved example." However, though only one assembly of the church is mentioned, the disciples were not limited to only one assembly on Sunday, because the instruction to assemble leaves the number of times a matter of choice, generic, **Hebrews 10:25**. The same is true of time of day, upper room, no classes, long sermon, or even lights in the room. These all reflect options of generic authority. We can do just the options Troas picked, but we are not limited to them.

**Fifth**, there is a category of approved examples that have no **statement** of authority given anywhere; the authority is determined from the example alone. That is, there would be absolutely no statement, either spelled out in detail or by necessary conclusion, on that point. Though I believe this **principle** is true, I am increasingly hard pressed to find an instance of it in the Bible.

This is not the same thing as what we call an **exclusive, binding example**. An example is "binding" when it reflects a **specific** statement of authority; it is as binding as the specific statement behind it. Thus, it is "binding" in that we have no choice but to believe the fact presented in it, or we are limited to the conduct shown in the example. The example is **exclusive** when there is **no other** pattern, method, or fact, presented on that subject. Keep

in mind that it must show **specific authority** in order to be **exclusive**. There are examples of **generic options** being chosen and used that are the **only** options on that particular subject exemplified in scripture. We have seen this in **Acts 20:7**, for instance; no Bible classes, one Sunday assembly, and other items, are **exclusive**, as we have already seen. However, they are **not** binding, because they are options of generic authority.

On the work of the church (edification, benevolence, and evangelism), we have statements of fact, commandments, and examples. The examples are all in keeping with the statements and commandments. However, we should always begin a study, on any subject, with statements of fact or command.

We must also look at related teaching, in other scriptures, in regard to congregational independence, and the limits to the oversight of elders, **Acts 20:17-28, 1 Peter 5:1-4**. All scriptures harmonize. An interpretation cannot be put on anything that contradicts some other teaching of scripture. Examples of church benevolence and evangelism in the new Testament illustrate the meaning of oversight of elders and congregational autonomy. From that standpoint, they are examples of specific instruction. Of course, such examples are "exclusive" because there are no examples of anything other than, or contrary to, what they illustrate of specific instruction. For the same reason, they are "binding." We may well appeal to such examples directly for authority, but the best place to start is with all the pertinent **statements** of instruction, and then fit the examples into the pattern.

By God's will, examples are in the Bible for a purpose. **John 20:30-31**, along with **21:25**, says:

*"Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name. . . And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written."*

There are many things disciples did in the first century of which we have no record; notice the bare mention by Paul of some things in **II Corinthians 11:23-27**. Though the book of Acts, more than any other book, describes the activities of disciples in the first century, there is nothing said about the activities of most of the

apostles, and there are great gaps in what is said. Even sermons are not fully recorded, such as **Acts 2:40**. Yet, every essential statement and example that we need to know about is in the Bible. **II Peter 1:3** says:

*"Seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue."*

Examples, and just the way they are given, are there for God's purpose of instruction. However, we must understand examples correctly, noting their details in relation to the context and other passages.

## 6 - Modifying Scriptures

It should be apparent that *specific instruction*, either stated or implied, is the first consideration, and takes precedence over *generic authority or examples*. By "specific instruction," I mean a statement, at times in the form of a command, or one reached by a necessary conclusion. When we are taught something specifically, but not all of the details for carrying it out are given, we are then at liberty to choose the best way to obey what we are told to do. The more details God gives us, the fewer choices we have. That's why the *specific* takes precedence over the *generic*. Remember, ***there are no generics without a specific.***

We have also seen that examples have more than one category. Examples of *specific* instruction being obeyed have the authority of the specific instruction. There are also examples of *generic* options that were chosen and used. Identifying the difference between specifics and generics in examples is as important as doing so with expressed statements. One of the things we must understand, is that ***examples of generic options being chosen and used by New Testament disciples will not alter, modify, or limit generic authority found in statements.*** Or, more simply, ***examples do not limit generic authority.*** This may seem like a minor item, but we will see just how important it is.

Remember our illustration? If I stepped into that room of teenagers and, instead of saying just "get some bread," leaving a long list of options for them to decide, I say, "Charles, here is the money, go get a loaf of bread." The second statement is more specific than just "get some bread," but is still not as detailed as "Charles, here's the money, take my car right now, and go to the grocery down on the next corner, driving no more than 25 miles an hour. Get one loaf of fresh, Holsum, thin-sliced, white sandwich bread, and bring it right back to me."

As the one who gave the instruction, I would have the right to leave it as indefinite and unspecified as possible, as in the first statement. Or, I would also have the right to make some of those decisions for them, and so close off some of the options they might otherwise have. Or, I might choose to take all the decisions out of their hands and be so specific that they would essentially have no, or very few, options from which to choose, as represented in the third statement. God does that in the Bible; the more details he adds, the fewer choices we have.

### HOW GOD MODIFIES HIS REVELATION

In **Ephesians 5:19**, if God had stopped at just telling us to "sing," we would have been limited to just singing, but with a large number of choices to make. We could choose to sing country western, pop songs, or any other kind, as long as we would just "sing." However, God limited us to "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs," by adding those details. God told Noah to build an ark, but didn't leave things at that. He added the details of kind of material, dimensions, and other items, because such details were important enough in his wisdom that he didn't want to leave those decisions up to Noah.

I think it will be seen that instruction, either specific or generic, can only be altered, modified, or limited by a more specific statement, one giving some other detail or details. Such details may be within the same context, or in some other one; it may be on the same subject or another subject that affects it. As in **Ephesians 5:19**, the details of Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, modify the basic instruction of "singing." The details of material and dimensions modify the instruction to "build" the ark.

All scriptures harmonize. This is seen clearly in **Matthew 4** in the temptation of Jesus by Satan. Though Satan quoted scripture, Jesus shows that Satan's use of it put it out of harmony with something else God said. The application of the scripture used by Satan was in error. Or, it might best be seen from the command of **Matthew 28:19**, "Go teach all nations." We have already seen that the generic of "go," allowed the apostles to choose any means of locomotion they wanted. However, though they could ride a mule, they couldn't steal one in order to "go," because that would be contrary to passages that forbid stealing; the end doesn't justify the means. An idea on remarriage was popular at one time, and may still be in some places, based on **I Corinthians 7:9**. Some have claimed that if one cannot contain himself, which means cannot keep his sexual urges under control, then he should marry, "for it is better to marry than to burn." The conclusion was asserted that this applies with God's approval, regardless of the person's previous marital condition, perhaps having been married and divorced many times before. Several things are wrong with that. **First**, it fails to take into account such passages as **Matthew 19:9-12** and **Romans 7:1-3** that place limitations on divorcing and remarrying. **Second**, the next two verses insist that a married person who "departs" is to remain unmarried or go back to her husband. It wouldn't matter what her sexual urges might be, she couldn't

marry, and the only way she could gratify her desires is to return to her husband.

In **I Corinthians 7:39**, it says a woman is bound to a husband as long as he lives, but if he is dead, she is free to be married to whom she will, "only in the Lord." If the statement that she is free to marry whomever she wants was left without any limitation, we would understand that the widow could then marry anyone. Whatever the phrase "only in the Lord" means, we know it limits whom she can marry. Whatever it includes, most certainly **Matthew 19:9**, **Romans 7:1-3**, and others, must be considered. So, there are limitations placed on "she is free to be married to whom she will."

In **Exodus 31:15**, God gives regulations concerning the Sabbath: "Whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath...shall be put to death." That is a clear, precise statement. However, God said some other things that have a bearing on this. **Numbers 28:9-10**, specifies that the priests were to make certain offerings on the Sabbath. Jesus refers to this in **Matthew 12:5**. He points to this law, saying that the priests profane the Sabbath and are guiltless. By this, he is saying that the priests, in butchering animals, and other things connected with the sacrifices, were "working" on the Sabbath. Yet, they were "guiltless." The God that gave the one law also gave the other that modified, or altered, it. If Jesus had not made the statement recorded in **Matthew 12:5**, we would still know of this modification from **Numbers 28:9-10**. The Jews should have put the scriptures together to see that fact.

Another such modification is found in **Leviticus 12:3**, that says that all male babies were to be circumcised on the eighth day. So, if that eighth day fell on the Sabbath, it had to be done on the Sabbath. This is what Jesus said in **John 7:22-23**, that "the law of Moses not be broken." The one law was as much a part of the Law of Moses as the other. Without the point made by Jesus, we would still know the truth by "necessary conclusion," by what was taught in **Leviticus 12:3**; the one statement modified by more details from another statement.

These are two modifications to the law of the Sabbath that showed the Pharisees didn't understand the subject properly. Jesus went to two other passages in the Law to present the full truth on the subject. Notice, also, that the modifications had to be specified by God. Jesus used a necessary conclusion on two levels to make his point. Essentially, this is what preachers do in topical or expository sermons; they go to all pertinent passages

that give a complete picture of what God wants us to know. Each passage or related subject may alter, modify, or limit that subject. However, only God can make any such alteration or limitation by giving some other specific detail.

There are several New Testament passages dealing with the duties of elders. **I Peter 5:1-4** commands that elders are to "tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight." **Acts 20:28** says much the same thing. These specific instructions limit elders. They cannot oversee more than one congregation, nor the work of any congregation but the one where they are elders, nor anything other than a local congregation. Whether the subject is benevolence or evangelism in the scriptures, any passage must be modified, or limited, by these instructions on congregational autonomy, independence, and the oversight of elders. The one set of instructions affects the other. Many have appealed to emotions to authorize their schemes, going on the basis that the end justifies the means; after all, doesn't God say we are to be benevolent, and are to preach to the lost? Certainly! But, we cannot lift some subjects from the Bible and apply them the way Satan did, a way that puts them out of harmony with other instructions from God. The Missionary Society was formed with the noble purpose of preaching to the lost. However, it violated so many other scriptures that it has no authority from God for its existence.

We must take into consideration what God says on everything to arrive at just what he is saying to us. What may be said on an entirely different subject may contain some modification or alteration. A statement, or even a command, in one context may be altered by a statement or command in another context. Or, a statement may be followed by an alteration within the same passage, as we have seen.

### EXAMPLES AND GENERIC AUTHORITY

Our question here is concerning the role that examples play in regard to generic authority. Simply put, examples do not limit nor alter generic authority. For illustration, let's return to **Ephesians 5:19**. Out of the generic options of the instruction to "sing," we may choose four part harmony and only three songs to any assembly. Does our choice of these items thereby limit the list of options to the choices we made? That would make our choice, from that point on, the only way it could be done. If so, in the first century, the first time any disciple chose something from a list of options, in order to carry out some instruction from the Lord, his

choice limited every disciple thereafter to his choice. His choice of generic options would immediately make specific authority out of a generic, and that disciple would have become a lawmaker.

Our choice, out of a list of options, does not limit nor alter that list of options for us or anyone else. The choice of options by first century disciples did not change the nature of the stated authority; it only reflects their choice of that particular option, not limiting themselves or anyone else to that first choice.

We have already noted the great commission, "go teach all nations." We find several examples of this specific instruction to "go" being carried out, examples of specific statement. By not specifying the means of locomotion, God left up to disciples to choose the best method of "going" at the time and place. When we find some disciples walking and others on a boat, we are just looking at their particular choice of options. Their choice does not limit us to their choice. The fact that there are examples of more than one way of "going" is not what gives us a choice of options. With generic instruction, the number of examples is of no consequence. Whether there is one example, a dozen examples, or no example at all, the choice of options found in a statement remain choices. The examples of walking and boating do not establish the authority is generic; we knew that by looking at **Matthew 28:19**. We would still know that if there was only an example of walking. We would still know that if there was no example at all.

One may frequently hear something like, "you can't do that, because we don't have an example of their doing it in the first century." Well, we don't have to have an example for everything we do because of generic authority. We don't have, and don't have to have, an example in the New Testament of disciples singing with the use of a song book, and another example of singing without a song book, in order to know song books are just options of generic authority found in "singing." If we had just an example of singing with a song book, we would still know that it is just an option. Having no example of the use of a song book at all, we still know it is just an option. When the scriptures make a statement on a subject, we must first determine what are the specifics, then determine what generics are allowed. We then fit whatever examples there are into their proper place. We determine what, in the example, reflects specific authority or an option of the generic.

Every so often someone insists that when we baptize it can only be in "running water." The reason, they say, is that not only did John the Baptist baptize in the Jordan, which was running water,

but Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan. Since there is no example of baptizing anyone in any place other than running water, the examples of Jesus and John the Baptist limit us to "running water." The problem with that reasoning is just what we've been talking about. None of the statements or commands about baptism and water ever specify water in motion, running water. Baptism is specified, and water is specified. Whatever qualifies as "water" will do, whether running or not, whether in huge amounts or just enough to baptize, in a natural depression or man-made tank. It is said of John that he also baptized "in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there." That was an "expediency" move. John picked the best possible place that would fill the commandment given to him that God "sent me to baptize in water." When you talk about picking the best place, you are talking about an option of generic authority. Neither his choice of Jordan, nor that Jesus was baptized there, as examples, limits us to running water any more than it would limit us to the Jordan river!

**Acts 20:7-8**, is an "approved example." In that example, we see the disciples at Troas assembling at night, in an upper room of a building, in only one "undivided" assembly, with one eating of the Lord's Supper, and some other items. At various times, some have insisted on binding one or more of the items in this example, and invariably are very selective about what they want to bind or loose. Well, can we do just what Troas did? Since it is an approved example of meeting at night, in an upper room, in only one "undivided" assembly (no Bible classes), with one eating (and serving) of the Lord's Supper, we can do just that. However, we are not limited to just what Troas did. Each of these items involve generic authority.

For instance, I know, even without the example, that an upper room place of meeting is authorized because the statements about meeting leave the "place" generic, **Hebrews 10:25**. **Acts 20:7-8** reflects only the choice of the Troas church as to "place," which does not limit us to their choice. If examples do limit generic authority, then the "upper room" in this passage will modify the generic nature of such passages as **Hebrews 10:25**, **John 4:21-24**. That goes for every other item in the passage as well.

It's true, we have no **examples** of our Bible class arrangement of teaching. The no-classes brethren have insisted for years that the class arrangement is unscriptural because of this. What they overlook is what we have tried to show them. We have generic authority for arrangements, means, and methods in the com-

mands to teach and edify. They also miss the fact that examples do not limit generic authority! If their argument means anything, it would require us to meet every item of **Acts 20:7-8**. If examples limit generic authority, then we are obligated to meet only in an upper room to eat the Lord's Supper, only at night, having only one assembly on Sunday. We would also have to baptize only in running water, and a host of other positions that are a consequence of the position. Of course, we don't have to have Bible classes, seeing they are options of generic authority, but they aren't unlawful either. Let's take care we neither bind where God looses, nor loose where he's bound.

Some want to throw such items into a basket called "incidentals," and, by a wave of the hand, dismiss them as unimportant. That is their way of not having to deal with them. Yet, what is an incidental, except an option of generic authority? That's all an "expediency" is, just the best possible choice of generic option. We can practice the "incidentals" and "expediciencies" of first century approved examples, but we are not limited to them, either.

In all this, let's fit **Titus 1:5** into the picture. Paul said Titus was to "appoint elders in every city" on the island of Crete. It has been said that this does not show the appointing of a plurality of elders in every congregation, but rather in every city. That means if a city had two congregations, then appointing an elder in each one would be a plurality of elders in that city. So, it is said, the only way one can demonstrate the necessity of a plurality of elders in each congregation is by an example, **Acts 14:23**, "they appointed for them elders in every church..." That proves, it is said, that examples do limit generic authority. If that is true, then the principle should be applied consistently; **Acts 20:7-8** would limit us to all its particulars, etc. Of course, that isn't so, but how do we know that there is to be a plurality of elders in every congregation that has qualified men? Let's see.

The book of **James** was written to the Jewish Christians scattered abroad. No particular city or congregation is considered. The book would involve numerous cities and congregations, including Crete! Yet, in **James 5:14**, they are told, "Is any among you sick? let him call for the elders of the church." The word "elders" is plural and "church" is singular. Wherever the particular Christian might be that would be sick, he is to call for the elders of the congregation where he lives. The Christian, the elders, and the church are all right together at the same place. The only way any Christian could follow that instruction is for there to be a plurality

of elders in the church where that Christian is a member. The instructions consider no other situation. This is made even clearer in **I Peter 5:1-4**. That letter, also, was written to the Christians scattered in many regions, which he names. There is no particular city or congregation under discussion. He says to the elders, "Tend the flock of God which is among you." "Flock" is singular, "elders," and the pronoun "y<sup>o</sup>" are both plural. Notice the emphasis on the "flock among you" elders. Peter does not address any instructions to any elder except those who form a plurality in a given flock, a congregation, regardless of the country or city in which it's found. Like James, he knows of no other condition, and gives no instructions on any other basis. Notice, we are not referring to examples, but rather statements, and by necessary conclusion, understand there is a limitation to a plurality of elders to a congregation. As we have seen, God modifies the less detailed instructions with the more detailed ones. **Titus 1:5** is modified by the statements of James and Peter. But, there's more.

Paul speaks to the elders of the church of Ephesus in **Acts 20:28**, telling them to "take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops." This is a statement of fact, not an example, and shows that only a plurality of elders were appointed in that one flock by the Holy Spirit, just like James and Peter.

All examples on the subject harmonize with these statements; they are examples of specific authority as far as this subject is concerned. **Acts 14:23** describes ordaining elders in every congregation. **Philippians 1:1** notes the plurality of bishops at Philippi. **I Thessalonians 5:12-13** speaks of a plurality of those who "are over you in the Lord, and admonish you."

Whether there was one congregation or more than one in each of the cities of Crete, Paul's instruction would be understood in the light of what else God has stated on the subject. The statements and examples must be put in their proper places.

The only thing that can limit a statement from God is a more specific one; the more general is limited by the detailed statement. **Examples cannot limit, modify, or alter generic options.**

## 7 - Effect of Circumstances

Suppose I should step into that fictional room of teenagers and say: "Charles, go to the grocery store on the next corner and buy one loaf of bread. I want it purchased at that store only." When Charles arrives at the store, he finds it completely sold out of bread. There's no way he can fulfill my instructions. There are times when something God tells us to do cannot be done, because of the circumstances. We must then take into account the nature of the instructions and how we can apply them.

An argument, as a purely fictional story, has made the rounds the past few years. There are several forms of it. Depending on who's telling it, and what they are trying to prove at the moment, it goes something like this: A Bible is washed up on the shore of some far distant land where the people have never heard of the Bible nor of Jesus Christ. Somehow, one of them finds it and is able to come to an understanding of the language and message. He believes what it says and gets a neighbor to baptize him. He continues to study and tries to put into practice what he learns. He attempts to convince others of what the Bible teaches. Months of preaching go by without success. He studies, prays, and works diligently to serve the Lord. Six months after his baptism, he dies.

He never had any connection with any church of Christ anywhere else in the world; for all he knew he was the only Christian in existence. So, his conversion did not depend on any church anywhere, nor on any other Christian, either. He had never assembled with any saints. He had never engaged in any congregational worship nor any other congregational activity. Everything he did was as an individual, alone. The question is, when he died, **was he saved or lost?**

Given the story as I have presented it, I have no hesitation in saying he was saved. Yet, once that has been admitted, **at this precise point**, some people start jumping to some very wrong conclusions. Immediately, some will say that everything, therefore, must be "individual." If one can be saved without doing anything with other Christians, then doing anything at all with others is "not important." One can be saved without a "local church," or "contributing money into a congregational treasury." They will say we don't have to engage in "congregational" worship, such as singing, being edified by sermons, eating the Lord's Supper with others, etc. Some will even say there is a difference between "gospel" and

"doctrine." We must believe and obey the first, and the second is a matter of judgment. So we are told. In short, a large number of things are put in an "unimportant to salvation" category. That line of reasoning, however, is a grave error. The fact is that all of God's instructions are important for salvation, but circumstances may affect and change our responsibility.

For example, the rules governing spiritual gifts, in **I Corinthians 14**, had to be obeyed by early disciples. Paul said in verse **37** that those rules were the "commandment of the Lord." Since such spiritual gifts do not exist today, the regulations of such gifts do not apply to us. Yet, even then the use of such gifts depended on the circumstances. Verses **27-28** says:

*"If any man speaketh in a tongue, let it be by two, or at the most three, and that in turn; and let one interpret' but if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God,"*

He is only to speak given the right arrangements. If the right circumstances aren't there, then he is to keep quiet. This is the nature of "contingency" legislation; **"it depends on the circumstances."** God used that extensively in the Law of Moses and many times in the New Testament. We must understand first, however, that there are things every person must do to be saved and all are capable of doing them.

Everyone must believe in the God of the Bible in order to be saved, **Hebrews 11:6**. God's existence, nature, and dealings with man are presented to us in several ways, **Romans 1:18-32, Acts 17:23-31**. All men everywhere must believe what God says about himself and react accordingly, **Acts 17:30**.

All must believe who Jesus is in his very nature, **John 20:30-31**. Jesus said that people would die in their sins if they did not believe the facts about him, **John 8:24**. John says a lot about this, **I John 2:22-25, 4:2-3, 5:1, 10-13, II John 7-8**.

The gospel revealed in the New Testament must be believed in order to have salvation, **Mark 16:15-16, Romans 1:16-17**. Not any "gospel" will do; there are false gospels, **Galatians 1:6-9**, just as there are false gods and false lords, **I Corinthians 8:5-6**. Basic to Mormon teaching is faith in God, Christ, the gospel, repentance, and baptism for the remission of sins. However, their "salvation" breaks down at the beginning of things. When they get through explaining the "God, Christ, and Gospel" they believe in, there is no resemblance to the same named persons or items in the Bible.

Further, the gospel contains some facts that must be believed, such as the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, that are central to our salvation, **I Corinthians 15:1-19**.

Repentance is essential; no one can be saved without it, **Luke 24:46-47, Acts 2:38, 3:19, 17:30**.

We must understand that one can believe some things correctly and still be baptized wrongly. In **Acts 18:24-26**, we are introduced to a powerful preacher named Apollos. He "taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, knowing only the baptism of John." Notice, he understood and taught accurately some things, even that they had to be baptized and that the authority of someone was behind it. Yet, he still taught some error concerning baptism and had to be instructed in "the way of God more accurately." The next chapter says that Paul came to Ephesus after Apollos had been there and found some disciples who had been baptized with "John's baptism." Paul baptized them again after teaching them properly. This shows you can't be "taught wrong and baptized right." Belief in the right things, and repentance, precede baptism.

From just this item alone, we understand that remission of sins depends on right belief and obedience. Every person must meet the terms required. The citizen of that far distant land was capable of believing and doing all of these things, and more. Whatever he could do as an individual alone, he was responsible for doing.

With a change in circumstances, that citizen would become accountable to God for other instructions. It would be accountability he did not have before. Paul said: "I was alive apart from the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died," **Romans 7:9**. When Paul was a child, he wasn't accountable for the Law, but when age and circumstances changed, sin and spiritual death followed.

The responsibilities of an unmarried man change when he takes a wife. (See **I Corinthians 7:1-40**). All instructions regarding a husband then apply to him, and he will give account to God for how he carries out those instructions. **I Peter 3:7-8** speaks of responsibilities between a husband and wife that must be carried out "to the end that their prayers be not hindered." God wouldn't hear their prayers if they didn't fill their responsibilities to one another. A man can be saved, now and forever, and never marry. All of the rules concerning marriage do not apply to him, and he will not be held accountable for them, **Matthew 19:10-12**.

When someone talks about the "priesthood of all believers," that nothing stands between the individual and God, **we must un-**

**derstand that how we act toward, and with, others affects our "direct access to God."** Jesus said that when your brother has anything against you, leave your offering at the altar and first go make things right with your brother, then come make your offering, **Matthew 5:23-24**. Part of keeping our direct access to God is in fulfilling what God commands about things we do with, and for, other Christians. For example, **Ephesians 5:19** cannot be obeyed alone. We must assemble with other Christians on a regular basis, **Hebrews 10:25**. We surely will be judged at that last day as individuals and not congregations. However, our individual accountability will be partly based on how we have worked and worshipped with others according to God's specific instructions. The only exception to this is that circumstances might make it impossible at times to do some things.

A man can have eternal life and never be an elder in any congregation. If he cannot meet the specific requirements in order to serve as an overseer, the duties of such do not apply to him. However, when that man can meet the qualifications, a whole new set of responsibilities become open for him that he never had before. **Hebrews 13:17** says:

*"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them: for they watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not with grief: for this were unprofitable for you."*

Notice the phrase "as they that shall give account." As his circumstances change, he becomes accountable to God for new and different responsibilities. **James 3:1** says:

*"Be not many of you teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment"*

Taking the role of a "teacher" makes one more responsible, hence accountable. Timothy was told, **I Timothy 4:16**:

*"Take heed to thyself, and to thy teaching. Continue in these things; for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee."*

Now, back to our native on that far distant shore. We must be aware that there were many things he was not accountable for, that did not apply to him, simply because of the circumstances. He

could not be accountable for filling the role of an elder, seeing he was the only Christian there. The arrangement of having elders requires a plurality of men who serve as such, and a congregation to oversee. The proper arrangement is as important as any other item. The duties of an elder still might not have applied to him even if he had converted a hundred people, if he could not meet the qualifications. I have known of churches that have gone on the basis of "put in the best we've got," because they didn't have anyone qualified, but just **had** to have elders. God's order, arrangements, specific instructions, must be carried out as given. **If it is not possible, at a particular time and place, to meet all of the specifics that apply, then that item must wait.** We cannot add to, take from, nor substitute for what God specifies.

Suppose that far distant native had converted ten thousand people, yet their country had no grapes. They could not substitute any other liquid for grape juice, because the scriptures specify the drink element. Nor could they just eat the bread without the drink and call it the Lord's Supper. They simply could not have the Lord's Supper until they had obtained the properly specified elements. Brethren in Africa, at times, have problems obtaining grape juice. Hundreds of Christians can't eat the Lord's Supper for months on end during such times. That doesn't mean they will be eternally lost, nor that the Lord's Supper is unimportant. Their circumstances may make it impossible to meet the specific requirements of scripture. They must try the best they can to obtain the proper elements. Lack of present accountability is not to encourage sloth in willing "to do his will." We must try to put ourselves in the position to do all God wants us to do.

Several years ago an editorial in the *Gospel Guardian* brought to our attention the plight of a sister in Texas who was deathly allergic to grapes. That meant she could have nothing that came from grapes. She could not tolerate the smallest amount without terrible consequences. She could not substitute any other liquid, nor eat just the bread without the drink, for either would violate specific scripture. For her, the proper drink element was unobtainable; she could never eat the Lord's Supper.

A Christian who is too ill to leave home, or is confined to a hospital, is not accountable to assemble with the saints as per **Hebrews 10:25**. Some have been confined to a bed for years. Someone may have laryngitis, or have throat surgery, and cannot sing, as per **Ephesians 5:19**. Notice that activities like **Ephesians 5:19** cannot be obeyed alone; they require activity with

other Christians. Being unable to sing does not mean a person can whistle or hum, any more than we can use a piano in worship. Nor can anyone "sing" **for** another, any more than one member of a family can "represent" the rest of the family at assemblies. Nor, as some think, can one person do "good deeds" that God "credits to the account of another person" who doesn't do anything. Each is responsible for himself. It's just that circumstances may mean we are not responsible at that particular time and place.

Each member of a local church is charged with giving into a common fund for necessary work of that local church, **I Corinthians 16:1-2**. Yet, it is tempered with "as you have been prospered." If a person has not been prospered at all, then he has nothing to give. **II Corinthians 8:12** puts it this way:

*"For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according as a man hath, not according as he hath not"*

We might imagine a member who has just had throat surgery, so he cannot sing. He is worse than "broke," and so has no money to contribute. He is deathly allergic to grape juice and cannot eat the Lord's Supper. Yet, he can still be present at the assemblies, lend his heart to the prayers offered, listen to the lessons from scripture, and "exhort unto love and good works" in whatever way he can, if no more than by his presence. He would be accountable for what he could do and might not, but not accountable for what he could not do. When, and if, his circumstances changed, then he would be accountable for doing more.

On the other hand, God knows if we are faking our circumstances to keep from obeying him. For example, some might feign illness just to excuse their not attending assemblies. Lame excuses will not do. We don't fool God. We will be held accountable for what we know to do, and can do, but don't, **James 4:17**:

*"To him therefore that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."*