

The Authority of Examples

by Maurice Barnett

There are numerous descriptions of the life and actions of disciples in the New Testament. In most instances, what we see them doing is approved by God. Some of the things they did, though approved at the time, cannot be duplicated today even if we wanted to do so. Some things were limited to specific individuals then and were not for disciples generally. Our task is to determine what applies and what does not apply to us today.

The English Dictionary says that an *example* refers to an instance or description of something that encourages imitation, or it warns *against* imitation, or it *illustrates* some action or problem. Turning to Bible terms, we find several that are either translated by the word *example* or by a word with a related idea.

TUPOS: This word primarily means to strike a blow that makes an impression. In John 20:25, Thomas insisted that he would have to “*see in his hands the print (tupos) of the nails.*” Acts 7:43 uses it to refer to idols, the “*figures (tupos) which ye made to worship them,*” Moloch and Raphan. Acts 7:44 says that Moses made the tabernacle according to the “*figure (tupos) that he had seen.*” So also in Hebrews 8:5 where the word “*pattern*” translates from *tupos*.

Directly relating *tupos* to our subject, I Corinthians 10:6-11 details several instances of sinful conduct by Old Testament people with the punishment that came upon them as a result—

“Now these things were our examples (*tupos*), to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us make trial of the Lord, as some of them made trial, and perished by the serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them murmured, and perished by the destroyer. Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come.”

The noun, *tupoi*, is found in verse 6 and the adverb form, *tupikos*, in verse 11. God made an “*example*” of the Israelites, punishing them for their sins, specifically stated. What God did to them was written as an example to us that we not do what they did or we will suffer punishment also. In several places in both Old and New Testaments, these sins are listed so we have specific instruction not to commit fornication, nor to serve idols, etc. Paul’s statements to Corinth illustrate the point – sin, and you will be punished; do not follow their example!

MIMEOMAI: Paul uses this term to tell the Philippians, 3:16-19, about how they should walk in their lives—

“...only, whereunto we have attained, by that same *rule* let us walk. Brethren, be ye imitators together of me, and mark them that so walk

even as ye have us for an ensample. For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is perdition, whose god is the belly, and *whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.*"

Paul emphasizes his point by first saying "be ye immitators together of me," translated from one word, *summimetai*, found only here in the New Testament. It is a compound of *sun*, "with or together," and *mimeomai*, the verb form of *mimetes*, meaning to follow or copy. We can recognize the word in our outdated duplicating machines, the *memeograph*. *Mimeomai* is used in such places as hebre4ws 13:7 that admonishes others concerning elders, "whose faith follow," KJV, or *imitate* in ASV. A negative statement is found in III John 11, "follow not that which is evil," KJV or *imitate not* in the ASV.

Paul then follows *summimetai* in Philippians 3:17 with "even as ye have us for an example (*tupos*)." The esample for them to follow is for them to walk according to truth and stand firmly against worldly mindedness. Note the context. The same interplay of terms is in I Thessalonians 1:6-7—

"And ye became imitators of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit; so that ye became an ensample to all that believe in Macedonia and in Achaia."

The conversion, faith and works of the Thessalonians also served as an encouragement to other brethren to be the same kind of people. They learned that from the Lord and from what they saw in Paul. They were to mitate the pattern set before them. II Thessalonians 3:7-9 is another place Paul uses this interplay of words—

"For yourselves know how ye ought to imitate us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat bread for nought at any man's hand, but in labor and travail, working night and day, that we might not burden any of you: not because we have not the right, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you, that ye should imitate us."

In this instance, the example was how Paul and his companions had acted among the Thessalonians. Paul had labored with his own hands to support himself, though he had the right to receive support from the church. He taught them a lesson in being industrious, taking responsibility for their own needs and not living off of others. So he goes on to tell them, "*If any will not work, neither let them eat.*"

Timothy and Titus are told to be examples to others, Timothy in "*word, manner of life, love, faith and purity,*" I Timothy 4:12, Titus in "*good works,*" Titus 2:7. In I Peter 5:1, elders are not to Lord it over their charge but be "*ensamples to the flock.*"

We must conclude that the example set by Paul in these matters must be imitated. Such righteous examples are "binding" on us just as we are equally "bound" to reject the evil examples. But, what is contained in the examples of Paul is told to us so that we understand what action binds us. In addition, the faith of the Thesslonians had gone out to others so that they were also examples to others brethren.

This did not mean that the particular kind of work that Paul did was to be imitated, tent making, etc., but rather it refers to our being industrious, working at

whatever job we decide upon. The rule was binding but the options were not. We will discuss this more thoroughly a little later.

HUPOTUPOSIS: This term refers to a pattern or form. I Timothy 1:16 says—
“...howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me as chief might Jesus Christ show forth all his longsuffering, for an ensample of them that should thereafter believe on him unto eternal life.”

The longsuffering of Christ is the focus for all who would thereafter believe. They will be treated as Jesus was and must follow His example in longsuffering. II Timothy 1:13 says—

“Hold the *pattern* of sound words which thou hast heard from me in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”

Revelation from God, as proclaimed by Paul, provides the pattern to be followed. This presents a little different viewpoint from I Timothy 1:16 in the application of *hupotuposis*.

DEIGMA: This term means a model, an example, a pattern. The noun, *deigma*, is found only in Jude 7—

“Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, having in like manner with these given themselves over to fornication and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the punishment of eternal fire.”

In a footnote, the ASV translates it to say, “*as an example of eternal fire, suffering punishment.*” This emphasizes that the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah illustrates the eternal fire of condemnation that will punish evil doers. II Peter 2:6 makes the same point as Jude 7, using *hupodeigma* as the word for example.

HUPODEIGMA: This is a strengthened form of *deigma*. Jesus said in John 13:15—

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

Some misunderstand the nature of example at times, placing meanings that are not present. In verses 6-7 it says— “*So he cometh to Simon Peter. He saith unto him, Lord, does thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter.*”

Yet, Peter knew full well that Jesus was going to wash his feet. The point Jesus was making was not about washing feet. Jesus later asks the disciples, “*Know ye what I have done to you.*” Why would he ask such a question? Surely they knew He had just washed their feet. And, they already knew how to wash feet! But Jesus is not teaching them the proper way to wash feet nor is he making a ritual out of foot washing. He is teaching them about the humility required in serving others. Look at His following statements, verses 16-17—

“*Verily, verily, I say unto you, a servant is not greater than his lord; neither one that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them.*”

The last sentence clarifies what Jesus meant when He before asked them if they knew what he had done to them. Though it is a good expression of humility and service to wash someone’s feet, the lesson of Jesus was not centered on, nor limited to, washing someone’s feet. Some religious people make a ritual of foot washing as though it was an end in itself. That is a mistake.

An example may only illustrate a principle that should be followed. The foot-washing episode emphasizes again the distinction between the rule that must be followed and what is just a choice in following that rule. It is the difference between specific and generic. Humility is required, foot washing is but one way of showing it.

Taking note of the sins of Israel, as Paul does in I Corinthians 10, Hebrews 4:11 says—

“Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, that no man fall after the same *example* of disobedience.”

The “example” is found in disobedience that brings alienation from God. We are to do as they did.

In Hebrews 8:5, 9:23, the translated word in English is “copy” the earthly tabernacle was a copy of the heavenly, a shadow of the reality. James 5:10 puts it this way—

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

Enduring suffering, having patience in persecution, while proclaiming God’s will is the lesson to be learned by what the Prophets did. We are to emulate them.

HUPODEIKNUMI: This means to show by *tracing out*. It is used in this way in Matthew 3:7 translated “who hath warned you to flee...” Luke 6:47 says—

“Every one that cometh unto me, and heareth my words, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like...”

Jesus then presents His illustration of the man building a house on a solid foundation. In this sense there is an example presented, not about the construction of a house, but concerning laying a proper foundation in whatever we do. Then in Acts 9:15-16—

“But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name’s sake.”

Just how these things would be shown to him is not clear but they would be “shown” to him nonetheless. Notice—

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

The manner of laboring for Christ and helping the weak furnished the nature of this example. Notice that it was something first taught and then shown by conduct.

DEIGMATIZO: This is a verb, found only once in the New Testament, Colossians 2:15, simply to indicate an exposure, illustrating the extent of what was accomplished—

“...having despoiled the principalities and powers, he *made a show* of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”

A compound of *deigmatizo* with the preposition *para*, *paradeigmatizo*, is used in only two passages, Matthew 1:19, “*make her a public example*,” and Hebrews 6:6, “*put to an open shame*.”

HUPOGRAMMOS: This refers to tracing letters, making a copy of a document and so, figuratively, an example. It is found in only one place in the New Testament, I Peter 2:21, beginning with verse 20—

“who was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, but was manifested at the end of times for your sake, who through him are

believers in God, that raised him from the dead, and gave him glory; so that your faith and hope might be in God."

The nature of the example involved suffering for what is righteous. Jesus did and that is an example for us. Note that there is first teaching on the subject, then an "example" of what is meant.

What Is An Example?

Let's return to the question asked at the beginning of this section: What is an example? Well, what we will mean by an "example" in this investigation will be—

"A description of the conduct or activity of people in the Bible, primarily new Testament disciples and churches that furnish a pattern of conduct that we may or must imitate or avoid."

We should also recognize that there are lengthy descriptions of what someone did that contain specific statements or commands within the description itself; the place and circumstances are described where the specific instruction took place. The account of Paul's giving personal instruction to the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20:17-36 contains many statements and commands interwoven with Luke's description of the occasion. See also, Paul at Philippi in Acts 16:19-34 and many other instances of the same thing.

Further, there are many things disciples did in the first century about which we have no record at all. Notice the bare mention by Paul of some things he experienced, which he wrote about in II Corinthians 11:23-27. It's like John stating that there were many things Jesus said and did that were not written in his book, John 20:30-31. Certainly, just what we find in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John could not be a complete day by day record of the life of Jesus. But everything that is essential for us to know has been recorded.

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, admitting that with many other words Peter testified and exhorted them, though all that he said related to salvation. Some have attempted to capitalize on this silence, especially on the subject of divorce and remarriage, by insisting "Peter didn't tell those Jews they had to get out of adulterous marriages!" But no one can make such a claim in view of the fact that Peter said much more about what was necessary for them to know regarding their salvation than what is recorded, along with the obvious fact that he commanded them to repent of their sins!

Every bit of information necessary for God's purposes that He wants us to know can be found in the Bible. Here is II Peter 1:3—

"...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."

We must dig out the information by our own study and effort. God expects us to do this and we are able to do it or God would not expect it of us. We can and must understand the message of the record.

The number of the descriptions of conduct that *are* recorded in the Bible is immense. By this fact alone, God must have intended to teach us something by examples in view of the amount and variety of them. Such descriptions and illustrations are written in the Bible for our learning.

As we have seen, some examples describe evil conduct to be avoided. Other instances than what we have already looked at may be that 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.” Whether good or bad conduct, the details of the descriptions are factual; they happened. Such examples are part of God’s revelation to us; they are important or they wouldn’t be in the Bible. The question here is, what does any particular example teach us?

Approved Examples

What we call an approved example refers to a description of the conduct of people in the Bible that 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. Paul said in Philippians 4:9—

“The things which ye both learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things do: and the God of peace shall be with you.”

Paul was not saying that others were to dress like him, look like him, talk like him, do the same manual labor, or choose the same options Paul would choose. In short, they were not to become clones of the apostle Paul. They were to follow 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 because of the nature of God’s instructions, specific commands that contained different options. Paul did things as an apostle that others could not do. As long as the disciples did what was specifically taught for disciples, they might choose other options than Paul would. This is seen clearly in I Corinthians 7:7-9—

“Yet I would that all men were even as I myself. Howbeit each man hath his own gift from God, one after this manner, and another after that. But I say to the unmarried and to widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they have not continency, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.”

His bachelorhood was readily seen by all and was a good choice for Paul. However, that did not obligate others to do what Paul did just because celibacy was certainly not commanded by God, I Timothy 4:1-4. He continues in I Corinthians 7 to say that if they marry they have not sinned and in most instances should marry to keep from fornication.

The applicability of some examples is based on who is involved, what is occurring, where it takes place and the period of time of its occurrence. For instance, in Acts 19, there is a 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 others carrying handkerchiefs or aprons from his body to the sick who were healed thereby;

evil spirits were cast out of those who were 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 in this area and suffered for their presumption.

The facts are that not even all disciples could work miracles in the first century, I Corinthians 12:29. further, such miracles were limited to that period of time, I Corinthians 13:8-13, Ephesians 4:11-13. So, there is no way anyone "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. 19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God. 20 Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called."

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

"And 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. 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 is proper to do so. This was Paul's attitude and approach to every culture he was in. He said in I Corinthians 9:10ff that to the Jews he became a Jew and to the Greeks he became a Greek, he became all things to all men that he might win all. Whatever Paul did at Jerusalem in Acts 21 it allowed him later to defend his actions before the Jews in Rome, 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. Consequently, I take Paul's actions in Acts 21 to reflect his own judgment that he was following customs and not doing it as obedience to the Law. Neither did he consider that it was conduct that would lead others to try to be justified by the Law.

Looking at examples another way, descriptions of conduct furnish illustrations for teaching 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.”

This does not mean that we understand this as a command and thus we are to maneuver situations that will force others to persecute us for our faith. But, if such persecutions do come, we are to face them patiently as others have done. See also, I Peter 2:19ff, 4:14-16, for direct instruction on this matter.

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 of those in need. He closes his story with, “Go, and do thou likewise.” We are to show compassion and helpfulness for those in need like this man did.

Hebrews 11 records 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. We are not obligated to do what each of the individuals did, nor obey the same instructions given to each of them, but we are to have the same kind of faith they had in doing what they did.

Immediate context or other passages guide us to what details the principles apply. Abel, in Hebrews 11:4, is an example of the right kind of faith, but we are not to follow him in offering animal sacrifices any more than we are to build an ark like Noah in verse 7, or offer our children like Abraham in verse 17, or march around Jericho, as in verse 30. But our devotion to God must be the same as with these examples.

When we watch the apostles spreading out from Jerusalem to preach the gospel, we are reading descriptions of their carrying out the specific instructions of Jesus to do this— “Go teach all nations,” Matthew 28:18-20, “go preach the gospel to every creature,” Mark 16:15-16. In such instances, even the choices they make from their own judgment are approved.

Examples And Generic Authority

There is no area of our general subject that has caused more confusion than the role of examples in setting rules for our conduct and authorizing church action. The positions swing from “no example is binding” to “if it is an example of approved conduct, all details in the example obligate us to do exactly the same things.” Of course, neither position is true. M.R. Hadwin, in his booklet, *The Role of New Testament Examples as Related to Biblical Authority*, page 44, says—

“The conclusion of this study is that New Testament examples have no role as related to biblical authority. The actions of individuals or churches recorded in the New Testament have no authority to require imitation by people today. The acceptance of this conclusion would seem to require no change in the general practice of churches of Christ. It

might permit greater freedom in some areas. . . The acceptance of the conclusion of this study within the Restoration Movement would have been helpful in solving controversies over such issues as Sunday schools, located preachers, closed communion, and church cooperation."

I'm afraid that Hadwin has overstated his conclusion while understating the value of examples in establishing an understanding of Bible authority. We have already seen that his position here is not true; we are obligated to follow some examples as we are not to follow others. At the same time, I will grant that there has been much misunderstanding and even perversions based on the use of Bible examples that cannot be tolerated. The fault is not with examples nor what is authorized by them, but rather with a misuse of them.

As we have looked at "approved examples," we must consider the area of "binding examples." The position was taken, especially in the pre-Restoration period, that if it was an approved example, it was binding on us today. This entered the Restoration movement in its original form though it was not consistently applied because it couldn't be. It is still asserted by some today that if the Bible record shows the conduct of disciples at any point is approved by apostolic authority, then the same conduction in every detail must therefore be binding on the conduct of all Christians of all time! However, very few people apply that consistently.

Recently, a brother argued in opposition to cremation. Whatever conviction one has about cremation, the argument he used was faulty. He said that cremation was sinful because Jesus was not cremated but buried whole bodied and we are taught in scripture to follow the example of Jesus. No. First, it was the custom of the Jews to bury their dead in the manner that was done with Jesus. Second, Jesus' burial was fulfilling the promise and prophecy of God and so God had a hand in what was done. The Bible specifically says that there would be no corruption of his body. Third, to follow what Jesus did, we could do no embalming except for washing the body and rubbing it with special spices. Fourth, the body would have to be wrapped in a particular manner and laid in a rock hewn tomb. Now, that would fit what was done with Jesus.

But someone says, "those other items were just *incidentals*." Such a claim is usually the first refuge of the person who knows little of what he is saying. Something cannot be an "incidental" just because someone doesn't want to "bind" that particular detail of an example. There are reasons why an item is incidental to the action described. An incidental is an option, a choice of generic authority and it must be determined from scripture that this is the case! But, more of that later.

Many times I have heard someone reply to an argument by saying, "well show me an example of that in the Bible and I will accept it." This reveals one, or both, of two things about that person. First, he doesn't have a valid reply to what has been presented; he can't answer the argument and must hide behind a diversion. And, or second, to that person an example is a more important source of authorized action than a specific command; he insists on an example as his authority. That turns the process of authority backward. In the first place, there are many things we are taught to do in scripture for which there is no example, yet we still have specific instruction to do them.

The first thing that must be done, when beginning to seek an understanding of a Bible subject is to look at the passages dealing with the subject and noting what specific details are given in the instruction and consider the place of ALL the details. Next, if it is instruction *to do something*, what choices must we make on our own, or are allowed to make, in order to carry out that instruction. Then, fit any examples into that evidence. Robert H. Farish correctly said in a Special issue of the *Gospel Guardian* in 1956, page 31—

“The teaching of expressed statements takes precedence over all other evidence.”

“Approved, exclusive, binding examples” is the common expression emphasizing the “binding” nature of some examples. Properly defined, we have no problem with the aim of that statement, but it is ambiguous and to some extent misleading. The word “approved” means that the conduct of disciples being described was acceptable with God. “Exclusive” means there is nothing else said in scripture on that particular item; it is the only instance of information we have on that subject. “Binding” means that the exclusive, approved, example obligates us to do *exactly* what the disciples were doing.

Take special note of the fact that approved activities of first century disciples had to have *specific authority* behind them. What we must keep firmly in mind is that all approved conduct points to both specific instruction and the disciples’ own choices of *generic authority*. But, remember, *there can be no generic choices without specific instruction*; the choices are *contained in the specific instruction*. That specific authority may not be spelled out in the Bible, but we must determine in some way what the specific authority is, such as by necessary inference. We must separate what first century disciples were *specifically* told to do from what choices they made for themselves in carrying out what they were told to do; otherwise, we cannot “bind” anything. We are bound by the same specific instruction as they were, but we are not bound by the choices they made in carrying out what they were specifically told to do. Thus, we may choose other options for our time and place in order to carry out the same specific instruction from God as was given to them.

Examples Do Not Limit Generic Authority

One of the things we absolutely must understand is that examples of options being chosen and used by New Testament disciples will not alter, modify, nor limit the list of possible choices found in specific statements or commands. Or, more simply put, *examples do not limit generic authority*. This may seem like a minor item, but we will see just how important it really is. It deals directly with binding authority, what there may be about a specific example that binds us to the same action or activity.

First century disciples were given specific instruction about things they were to do. Where allowed, they made their own choices, suited to their time, place and circumstances about how to best carry out that specific instruction. Their choices were certainly approved conduct. But while being bound by the specifically inspired instruction, we are not bound by these disciples own choices in carrying it

out the specific instruction. We have seen this in the command to the Apostles to “go” teach all nations. Their choice of the means of locomotion, their way of transportation, does not limit us to their choices when we “go.”

After making several statements regarding marital responsibilities in I Corinthians 7:2-5, Paul says in verse 6— *“But this I say by way of concession, not of commandment.”* A “concession” is something that is *permitted* contrasted with something *specifically commanded*. Commentators have been divided on the meaning of the word “this” in the passage. In the preceding verses, there is a series of imperatives yet they are in Greek grammar, *permissive imperatives*. “Concession” certainly refers to verses 7-8—

“Yet I would that all men were even as I myself. Howbeit each man hath his own gift from God, one after this manner, and another after that. But I say to the unmarried and to widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.

Everything Paul did was not binding on others. Some things were matters of choice. As in I Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23, some things may be lawful but neither are expedient nor necessary. Clear distinctions must be made in examples as to what is an option and what is law. One is binding while the other is not, even though it may be an approved, exclusive example.

In II Thessalonians 3:7-10, Paul emphasizes his role as an example for others to imitate—

“For yourselves know how ye ought to imitate us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat bread for nought at any man’s hand, but in labor and travail, working night and day, that we might not burden any of you: not because we have not the right, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you, that ye should imitate us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, If any will not work, neither let him eat.”

Paul “made tents” on several occasions, not receiving support from churches. It was commanded that if any would not work, they were not to be given help. He set for them an example of industry in labor, earning his own way. Some have supposed that church support of preachers is unscriptural because of Paul’s working with his hands. However, note that Paul said to them that he had the right to be a “burden” to them. This is repeated extensively in I Corinthians 9. He says that he had the right to forbear working, meaning common labor, and be supported by the church. Even the Law said they were not to muzzle the ox that treaded out the corn and the laborer was worthy of his hire. This was God’s instruction. Yet, this is not a mandatory matter. He refused support from Corinth as an expediency to remove criticism from his enemies in Corinth who were claiming that he was just preaching for what he could get from them. See also, II Corinthians 12:14-19. In II Corinthians 11:8, he says that he robbed other churches, “taking wages of them,” in order to do work at Corinth. He also commended the Philippian church for its continued support from the beginning of their existence as a church, Philippians 1:3-5, 2:19-30, 4:10-18.

It is right for churches to support gospel preachers so that they can give their full time to the work. Even elders are included, I Timothy 5:17-18. However, this does not mean that every church is commanded to support every preacher at all

times. there is a matter of choices made according to circumstances involved and so there is no sin involved. Paul's "example" is both of church support and non-church support. Thus, Paul's "example" of laboring for his own support as an example for others must be taken as an expedience and not commandment. Further, the examples of churches supporting Paul and others had guidelines and exceptions.

Nearly five decades ago, I heard a preacher say, publicly, that the small congregation where he was preaching received funds from several churches. They in turn sent funds to churches overseas. He said that they could not be a New Testament church without doing so! he never explained where the New Testament taught such a thing by command, statement, example of necessary inference.

Perhaps the clearest instance regarding the nature of examples and generic authority is found in the relief sent to Jerusalem. Paul said in I Corinthians 16:2—

"Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come."

I hasten to point out that contrary to common assertions, this is not an example of anyone doing anything but rather is a specific commandment from God for churches to make up a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. The churches had taken no action up to that point. Later on, we do have descriptions showing churches obeying these instructions, such as Romans 15:25-28. II Corinthians 8:1-3 says—

"Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God which hath been given in the churches of Macedonia; how that in much proof of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For according to their power, I bear witness, yea and beyond their power, *they gave of their own accord.*"

The churches of Macedonia sacrificed; they did without things for themselves, in order to give to the poor at Jerusalem. In I Corinthians 16, Paul does not say what *amount or percentage they were to give*; it was just to be according as they had been prospered, leaving the decision of amount to them. Paul must have had in mind some idea of what was proper but no revelation as to the exact amount. It would be a matter of choice, opinion, general authority. Macedonia exceeded even what Paul thought was equitable. Paul commends the action of the Macedonians and urges other churches to follow their example and be liberal in giving. However, he adds in II Corinthians 8:8—

"I speak not by way of commandment, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity also of your love."

Giving sacrificially, beyond what was expected of them, furnished an approved, "exclusive" example for others. But the choice of Macedonia did not obligate other churches to do the same as Macedonia; it was not "binding."

So, are all approved examples binding? We have already seen that the answer to this question is no. Just because we see a description of something that the disciples did in the first century that was approved by God, and even be exclusive, does not mean it is binding on us now. let's look at some of the instances that have been used to claim that examples do limit generic authority.

PLURALITY OF ELDERS—Some insist that we must determine by example alone that there is to be a plurality of elders in every church that has qualified men.

This contention is based on Acts 14:23, Paul *appointed elders in every church*. This example, it is said, being a descriptive statement of what was done rather than in the form of a command, is our only source of information on the subject. No, that is not true.

First, in Titus 1:5, Paul instructs him to “appoint elders in every city, as I gave thee charge.” Titus was charged with doing the very thing Paul did. As far as any concrete evidence is concerned, in most instances, there was only one church in a city mentioned in the new Testament. Rome was perhaps an exception, Romans 16:14-15. Most cities were small and converts were few. Seven miles is a minor distance for us now, but was considerable in the first century. Cenchrea was the port city of Corinth, seven miles distance. There was a congregation in both places, Romans 16:1. We have specific reference to churches connected with specific cities, such as Philippi, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Corinth, etc. There were elders at Ephesus, Acts 20:28, Philippi, Philippians 1:1, Jerusalem, Acts 15 and other places. We thus conclude that the command to appoint elders in every city was the same as ordering Paul to appoint elders in every church.

Second, James 5:14 says—

“Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”

This order could only be followed on a local church basis where the sick person lived. Note that it refers to plural elders and singular church. It considers no other circumstance.

Third, passages such as I Thessalonians 5:12-13, “*know them who are over you in the Lord*,” and Hebrews 13:7, 17, “*obey them that have the rule over you*,” can only be understood on a local basis of close relationship between elders and a congregation. Again, it is plural elders.

Fourth, I Peter 5:1-3 most clearly presents the facts. It gives instructions to the *elders* (plural) are to tend the *flock* (singular) *among you* (plural) *disciples*. This detailed instruction can only be obeyed by understanding a plurality of elders in the churches where men were qualified to serve. Peter does not consider any other circumstance. And, he wrote this letter to Christians over a wide area that would involve numerous churches, I Peter 1:1.

All examples, such as Acts 14:23, of a plurality of elders in each church are in keeping with the instructions for such a practice. The qualifications of I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are for each individual man who would serve as an elder. But the scriptures require more than one elder to serve with any single congregation. The example is in keeping with specific instruction.

INDEPENDENT LOCAL CHURCHES—Continuing with the material in the last section, we note that disciples forming independent local churches is the pattern of Bible teaching from several viewpoints.

First, I Corinthians 12:14-27 views the local church as a body. The term “body” is used to describe both the universal church, Ephesians 1:22-23, and the local church, but they mean different things in each instance. “Body” in Ephesians 1 is an organ-

ism that has a head, which is Christ. We receive our directions from the head. This image portrays nothing more than that. All individual Christians together make up this body, joined to Christ the head. But there is no organization to this body, no universal physical structure.

By contrast, the head of the body in I Corinthians 12 is made up of humans. It views a local congregation that functions having different parts that are likened to a human body. Verse 21 says—

“And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee: or again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.”

The members of a local church have different functions depending on their qualifications and opportunities. There is to be no schism in the body, the members are to have the same care toward one another. They feel the pain or joy of one another and are to see to one another’s needs. There are even “uncomely” parts that need special attention. These passages describe function on a local scale where people physically live and interact with one another. That’s why verse 27 says, speaking of the church at Corinth, “Now ye are the body of Christ, and severally members thereof.”

When verse 24 says that “*God tempered the body together,*” we know it is speaking of the local church and that God planned and instructed its existence, organization and function. The word, *tempered*, means “to cause the several parts to unite into an organic structure, which is the body.” In verse 18, he says, “*But now hath God set the members each one of them in the body, even as it pleased him.*” God ordained local churches. Every local church is alike and is to function exactly the same way, according to the same instructions.

Second, the local church is referred to as a “flock” that has multiple “shepherds,” elders, I Peter 5:1-3. The universal flock has the “chief Shepherd,” Jesus, I Peter 5:4. Paul said in Acts 20:28-29—

“Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock.”

These same instructions apply to every group of elders regarding every local flock (church) anywhere in the world. God is the one who ordered this arrangement. He made these men overseers of the local church. God ordained local elders, bishops, pastors (all referring to the same men) and that means absolutely nothing without local churches. God ordained one as well as the other; they go together. Just these passages alone emphasize the existence and independence of local churches.

ACTS 20:7—Undoubtedly, this is the most often referred to passage relating to our subject of examples. It is the center of a great amount of dispute and discussion. Hal Houghey devotes a full chapter to it and M.R. Hadwin takes special notice in an Appendix. Both authors devote their efforts to establishing that one cannot determine on the basis of Acts 20 that we are required to observe the Lord’s Supper every first day of the week. Of course, that removes any valid evidence about time and frequency for the Lord’s supper they assert. This means we can observe the Supper

any day or night of the week. However, Acts 20 has a pivotal part in establishing our practice, though it is not the way that's been most familiar to brethren. Here is what Acts 20 says—

“And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and prolonged his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber where we were gathered together.”

Everyone agrees, whether they realize it or not, that this account contains both specific instruction being obeyed along with generic options being chosen. Everyone agrees that their eating the Lord's supper was because they were commanded to do so. Everything Troas did was a result of specific instruction. Even those acts that were choices of generic authority which they performed had to be based on specific instructions. So, whether some recognize it or not, they do agree that just because Acts 20 show approved conduct, examples do not limit nor alter generic authority.

Thus, to understand what the example of Acts 20 means for us, we must make a clear distinction between what details were specifically commanded by God and what acts were only the choices of Troas. We are obligated to follow the one, but not the other. We can also understand from these passages the fact that what is “approved” and “exclusive” may not, necessarily, be bound on us. Let's begin with items found in the example.

One Assembly. Not only was there but one assembly in Acts 20:7-8 but it was also an assembly held at night. There is no doubt that it was approved because of its acceptance in the language of the text. It is not the only instance of an assembly, but it is exclusive in the fact that there was only one assembly and that held at night. Here is an exclusive approved example. Does that bind us to the same practice? No.

Passages such as Hebrews 10:25 furnish specific instruction that requires regular assemblies by a congregation. We can determine this also by necessary conclusion relying on such passages as I Corinthians 11:17-34, 14:23, where instructions are given regulating what is done and how things are to be done, in assemblies. But nowhere is the number or time of day for such assemblies specified. We can determine from instruction that there is to be at least one assembly on the first day of the week, but the time, number and location of the assemblies are not specified. That means the number, time of day and location are matters of the most expedient choice, generic options.

The choice of Troas of only one, night time, assembly in an upper room of a building does not obligate us to do the same because *examples do not limit generic authority*. We can certainly do just what Troas did and some churches today have only one assembly on Sunday. They are criticized for this by some brethren as being *nontraditional*, but they are perfectly within their rights to do just what Troas did.

Bible classes. The assembly at Troas was just a general assembly of disciples. Some churches who oppose having Bible classes point to this example to insist we cannot have Bible classes today because none are mentioned in this example. Are we limited to just what Troas did? No. The commands to teach and edify must be obeyed but the *means* and *methods* are no more specified and binding than the

means of locomotion in the first century. What Troas did was that church's choice. We may do just what Troas did; we are not obligated to have Bible classes. But neither are we obligated *not* to have Bible classes.

To just dismiss with a wave of the hand, one assembly, no Bible classes and the upper room as of no consequence in the discussion because they are "just incidentals" does not say anything. An *incidental* is just another term for generic authority, an option, a choice under specific instruction. There must be some authority even for "incidentals."

The same is true with the word *expediency*. that word only identifies an item of generic authority. It is said that *one* assembly and *no* Bible classes were just "expediences." True, but having more than one assembly and Bible classes are also "expediences" found in the commands to *teach* and *edify*.

But how do we know that the first day of the week for the Lord's Supper was not just the choice of days that Troas had decided upon, just like the other items in the example? Why would not Wednesday night be just as acceptable for some other congregation if that was a "more expedient" time. Just because the first day Lord's Supper is exclusive and approved in Acts 20:7 does not *of itself alone* prove it is binding today.

First Day Lord's Supper—Our search for information begins with what Jesus first taught concerning this supper in the night he was betrayed. In I Corinthians 11:17-34, Paul repeats what had been revealed to Him and what he had already taught the Corinthians about the Lord's Supper. He uses that information to correct some errors at Corinth about it. He insists that they were to come together to eat the supper, a point we will notice in more detail shortly. But nowhere in I Corinthians 11 is the day and time of day of the Lord's supper given. We are commanded to do it, but how are we informed of the time? This is the same situation we face in determining the time of assemblies, Hebrews 10:25, when not specifically told. We are commanded to teach and edify, but are not informed of the means and methods, though some means and methods are exemplified in scriptures. I believe we are limited to eating the Supper every first day of the week. However, some of the evidence *traditionally* argued I do not believe to be valid.

There are several arguments that have been usually presented to establish an exclusive first day Lord's supper. However, proper conclusions cannot be reached from incorrect premises.

(1) Exodus 20:8 said "*Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.*" Center on "THE Sabbath day." It is rightly said that this *necessarily implies* every Sabbath day. The next two verses in Exodus 20 continue by saying that they were to work six days of the week and rest on the seventh. However, in the usual way of reasoning, Exodus 20:8 is then "transferred" to "the first day of the week" in acts 20:7 so that "the first day" means every first day just as "the Sabbath" means every Sabbath. Emphasis is on the definite article "the." Supposedly, this establishes an every first day Lord's Supper. However, that is not a proper comparison.

Although the Bible is verbally inspired, we make a mistake when we unduly isolate words and phrases from their context. "Remember the Sabbath" is a com-

mand, repeat, *specific command*, that has within the statement the necessary implications of every Sabbath; no particular Sabbath is specified. The context further shows this.

The statement that Troas “*came together on the first day of the week*” is a description, repeat, *description*, of what the disciples did on a particular first day of a particular week. Of itself, it only indicates that on that particular first day the disciples came together to break bread and says nothing about what they might repeat on the next first day or what any other congregation might be doing. Exodus 20:8 and Acts 20:7 are not parallel statements.

There is more likely a parallel of Exodus 20:8 with I Corinthians 16:2, “upon the first day of the week.” Both are commands that do not specify a particular, individual, Sabbath or first day but rather every Sabbath and every first day as they come around. In fact, the distributive, *kata*, that begins I Corinthians 16:2 means “from Sunday to Sunday,” or “every first day of the week.”

(2) It is also supposed that Acts 20:6 says that they tarried seven days after arriving at Troas, knowing that the first day of the week was the regular weekly meeting of the church, so they could assemble with the church. This is true, but without some other evidence we cannot determine from the passage *alone* just what their reasons were for waiting. It could have been that the ship was not leaving port for that length of time. The context doesn't say. And, it may have been that this was just the regular practice of the Troas church and Paul had been told that after he had landed. How do we determine the matter? Let's see.

[1] Matthew 26:29 says—

“But I say unto you, I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.”

God had a particular day already in mind upon which the Lord's Supper would be eaten. The communion is a communion between disciples as well as a communion between the Lord and His disciples, I Corinthians 10:16-17, 11:27-33. It is an action that is to be repeated at some frequent interval. *Keep that fact in mind.*

The word “drink” in the statement of Jesus, “when I drink it new with you,” is a Greek *present subjective*. Winer's *Greek Grammar*, page 297, says—

“....the same construction is used, when the particle of time indicates a *duration or future repetition (hotan, hosakis an)*, or a point of time till which something is to continue (*heos an*)...”

The construction Winer refers to, *hotan pino*, is what appears in Matthew 26:29. Of itself, it is indefinite as to time and repetition except that the action prescribed is *frequent* and *repetitious*. This same fact is emphasized by Paul in I Corinthians 11:25 in the phrase, “as often as ye drink it.” “As often as” specifies repetition at some interval, without of itself identifying what that interval is.

In the phrase in Matthew 26, “in that day,” the word “day” is emphasized and identified by the definite article that precedes it, literally “the day that,” *tes hemeras ekeines*. *Every instance of this phrase in the New Testament refers to a twentyfour hour period!* It is not some indefinite period of time as the noun, *hemera* (day), alone sometimes indicates. It is not “the day of the kingdom” which would indicate

a period spread out over the length of the kingdom. It was some particular day IN the kingdom that would furnish a *frequent* and *repetitious* time when the Lord's Supper would be eaten.

Acts 2:42, 46, say—

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers....And day by day, continuing stedfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart"

The two appearances of "breaking bread" in these verses does not refer to the same thing, though the phrase does mean to eat food. In verse 42, it means the Lord's Supper, a symbolic meal composed of ingesting small amounts of bread and fruit of the vine. In verse 46, it refers to every day common eaten by everyone, "at home." In I Corinthians 11:23-25, Paul reminds them of what he had previously taught them, based on what Jesus had said at the last Passover with His disciples. Paul's subject in verses 17-34 is "breaking bread" referring to the Lord's supper versus breaking bread, meaning a common meal. Both of the events, and the circumstances surrounding these meanings, were to be handled differently.

This is readily seen from the contrast drawn. He says in verse 20 that when they assembled together it was not possible to eat the Lord's Supper. It was because they had substituted a common meal and were even eating that in division. They were to eat their common meals at home—

"What, have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?...If any man is hungry, let him eat at home..." verses 22, 34.

This is contrasted with what they were to do regarding the Lord's Supper. They were to do that as a local assembly, along with other rules of proper procedure in the assembly—

"Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, wait one for another. If any man is hungry, let him eat at home; that your coming together be not unto judgment. And the rest will I set in order whensoever I come." verses 33-34.

Returning to Acts 2, the day of Pentecost fell on the first day of the week by Mosaic Law. The disciples continued stedfastly in the Apostles teaching, fellowship and prayers as well as *breaking bread*. All of these are items of service to God and common daily meals are not in the category listed. Continuing stedfastly in breaking bread does not mean that they never missed a meal, that they were habitually on time at the dinner table. They continued stedfastly in eating the Lord's Supper, a *frequently repeated act*. Acts 2:46 says they met daily in the temple, which would include the first day of the week. This contrasted with the specific mention that they ate their common meals at home. This was the Apostle's teaching that was stedfastly followed.

Twenty-six years later, Paul wrote what we just looked at in I Corinthians 11. He reminded them of what he had already taught them on the subject. Paul draws a clear distinction between what they did at home and what they were to do together in an assembly. One year after Paul wrote I Corinthians 11, he met with the church at Troas when the disciples came together on the first day of the week.

This was the consistent practice for twenty-seven years for all congregations. It

was taught by the Apostles from the very beginning. It was practiced by disciples and they were reprimanded when they deviated from it. The examples fit perfectly with the specific teaching.

On the first day of the week when disciples at Troas came together to break bread, Acts 20:7, they were following a specific directive to eat the Lord's Supper. Matthew 26 reveals the fact that God had a day already in mind when they would eat the Supper at frequent intervals. Acts 20:7 is an example that tells us what "that day" of Matthew 26 is—the first day of the week—and is thus an example of specific instruction regarding *when* the Lord's Supper was to be eaten. Recall that the exact phrase in Matthew 26:29 is "that the day" with a definite article. The word, "that," places even more emphasis on its being a particular day. Now, with this in mind, we can use "remember THE Sabbath day," meaning every Sabbath, in understanding the day and frequency of the Lord's Supper, every first day. This fits with several other facts.

First—in Revelation 1:10, John says "*I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day.*" There is only one day of significance in the New Testament that could be referred to as "the Lord's day," the first day of the week. There is no yearly day of significance, nor any other day of the week indicated in scripture. Further, THE Lord's day implies that it wasn't a one of a kind day forever, never to be repeated. It is so stated that we understand it was a regular occurrence as a day that was especially connected with the Lord.

Was it the day of the week on which He was crucified? No, because just His death accomplished nothing without his resurrection and ascension. I Corinthians 15:17 says—

"...and if Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins."

The "gospel" is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, I Corinthians 15:1-4. *There* is the full meaning given to baptism, Romans 6:1-6. See also I Peter 3:21. The day of His resurrection is the only day of significance that could be referred to as *the Lord's day*.

Second—Paul gives commandment in I Corinthians 16:1-2 for the church to make up a collection for the saints in Jerusalem. He says—

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I gave order to the churches of Galatia, so also do ye. Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come."

Though it is not translated in the ASV, the Greek text has the word for "each, every," *eskatos*, which should be understood, as some translations render it, "every first day of the week." He says the collection was to be made then because he didn't want any collections to be made when he came. That would involve an assembly of Christians on the first day of each week where such a collection was made. Why would that be chosen unless there was an assembly of Christians every Sunday? Paul was not setting a new practice just for Corinth to assemble on Sunday when they never had before. Assembling was already taking place and that was the best time for them to take up a collection. Also note that the same orders went out to the churches of Galatia regarding a collection on the first day of every week.

Third—Acts 20:7 shows the disciples assembling on the first day of the week for the Lord's Supper. *There was a major meaning for a first day assembly.* I Corinthians 11:26 says—

“For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come.”

The phrase, “as often as,” (*hosakis an*), means a *repetition of something at a regular interval*. Thus, as often as they ate the Supper, they *proclaimed the Lord's death till He would come*. On the first day of the week, they commemorated the death and resurrection of Christ by eating the Supper, body and blood, on the day that celebrated His resurrection from the dead. There is the gospel being openly declared by what the disciples did. Further, to “proclaim” means an open, public proclamation. The Lord's Supper was to be eaten BY a local body of Christ. See all of I Corinthians 11:17-34. That requires an assembly.

Those are the specifics behind the meeting at Troas and, consequently, for our practice as well. There are expediencies, incidentals, choices, options we can make in several areas as long as we observe the specifics. Seeing that Hebrews 10:25 specifies repeated assemblies at unspecified intervals, we can meet as many times as we want, first day of the week or any day or we can do just what Troas did. But, we must assemble for the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week.

Summation

Specific instruction must be determined first in our pursuit of understanding the authority of Scripture. This may be in the form of commands or statements, specifically given or by necessary inference. Even parables contain instruction concerning truth. And examples may contain outright statements or implications of specific instruction.

Further, there are examples of specific instruction being obeyed and there are examples of choices that were made by disciples in carrying out specific instruction. One of the things we absolutely must understand is that examples of options being chosen and used by New Testament disciples will not alter, modify, or limit the list of possible choices found in specific statements or commands. This may seem like a minor item but it is not. We are not limited to the choices from a list of options made by first century Christians in carrying out specific instruction but we are limited, as were they, to the specific instruction.