

Understanding Principles of Bible Authority

- What Saith the Scripture?
- Authority Must Be From Heaven, Not Men
- Scripture Establishes Authority:
by What It Says, Shows, and Necessarily Implies
- Applying Bible Authority:
by Respecting God's Limits and Distinguishing
Lawful Aids from Unauthorized Additions

Last week, we studied the Authority of God's Word.
We saw that God's Word is truth, complete, sufficient, and authoritative.

Now we move to the next question:

- **How do we understand and apply Bible authority?**

It is possible for someone to say,

- "I believe the Bible is God's Word," but then still practice things, God has Not authorized.

So, this lesson is not mainly asking, "Does God's Word have authority?" We have already studied that.

This lesson asks:

- How do we know, what God authorizes?
- How does Scripture, teach us?
- How do we tell the difference, between an authorized Aid and a forbidden Addition?
- How do we know, whether something is from Heaven or from men?

A simple way, to remember the lesson, is this:

- When God speaks, faith **listens**.
- When God commands, faith **obeys**.
- When God shows an approved example, faith **follows**.
- When God's Word necessarily implies something, faith **accepts** it.
- When God specifies, faith **respects the limit**.
- When God is silent, faith **does not presume**.
- And When God gives generic authority, faith **may use lawful aids**.

Before we can apply Bible authority correctly, we must learn to ask the right question.

Many religious discussions, begin with the wrong question.

- Some ask, "What do I like?"
- "What have we always done?"
- "What do other churches do?"
- And Some ask, "What seems harmless?"

But the faithful question is:

I. What Saith the Scripture?

A. Scripture Must Give the Answer

Paul appealed to Scripture as the answer, when discussing Abraham.

- He said, "**For what saith the scripture?**
Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." ([Rom.4:3](#))

Explanation:

- "**What saith the scripture?**" means — Scripture must answer the question.
- Paul did not ask, "What does man think?" or "What does tradition say?"
- The point is simple — Bible authority begins by letting the Bible speak.

God through Peter wrote,

- "If any man **Speak**, let him **Speak as the oracles of God**;
if any man **Minister**, let him **Do it as of the ability which God giveth**:
that **God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ**,
to Whom be praise and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen." ([1Pet.4:11](#))

The Bereans were praised, because they tested teaching, by Scripture.

- The Bible says, “**These were more noble, than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word, with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.**” ([Acts 17:11](#))

Explanation:

- “**Readiness of mind**” means — they were willing to hear.
- “**Searched**” means — they examined carefully.
- “**Whether those things were so**” means — they checked the teaching, by Scripture.

The Bereans did Not reject teaching carelessly, and they did Not accept teaching blindly.
They Searched the Scriptures.

If someone gives you directions, you do not reach the right place, by guessing — You follow the directions. In spiritual matters, God has given the directions — Our duty is to read, search, believe, and obey.

The first principle of Bible authority is this — ask, “what does the Bible say?”
We must Not begin with opinion, preference, emotion, or tradition.

The faithful student asks, “**What saith the Scripture?**”
Like the Bereans, we must search the Scriptures, to see whether things are so.

Once we ask, what Scripture says, we must also ask, where authority comes from.

II. Authority Must Be From Heaven, Not Men

Authority means — the right to command, teach, or act.

In religion, every teaching or practice must be traced to one of two sources:

- from heaven, or from men — Only what is from heaven carries divine authority.

If a teaching or practice is from heaven, we must obey it.

If it is merely from men, it cannot bind the conscience before God.

A. We Must Ask, “By What Authority?”

The chief priests and elders, asked Jesus a question, about authority.

Though their motives were wrong, the question itself is important.

- Scripture says, “**the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto Him, as He was teaching, and said, By what authority, doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?**”

And Jesus answered and said unto them,
I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me,
I in like wise, will tell you, **by what authority** I do these things.

The baptism of John, whence was it? **from heaven, or of men?**

And they reasoned with themselves, saying,

If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?” ([Matt.21:23-25](#))

Explanation:

- “**By what authority**” means — “Who gave the right?”
- “**From heaven, or of men**” — shows the only two possible origins of a religious teaching or practice: Either it is authorized by God, or it comes from man, which is Not authorized.

The question of Jesus, teaches a powerful principle.

Every religious teaching and practice, must be tested by this question:

- **Is it from heaven, or is it from men?**

Paul warned Christians, Not to think beyond what is written.

- He said, “brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us, **Not to think** of men **above that which is written**, that no one of you, be **puffed up**, for one against another.” ([1Cor.4:6](#))

Explanation:

- “**Not to think...above that which is written**” — teaches respect, for the limits of God’s revealed Word.
- “**Puffed up**” means — lifted up with pride.
- When men go beyond Scripture, pride often follows — Faith, stays within what God has written.

If a teacher assigns chapter three,

a student is not free to turn in work from chapter seven and say, “You never said, Not to.”

- The assignment gives authority.
- The assignment also gives a boundary.
- Likewise, Scripture gives authority and boundaries.

Authority must be from heaven, Not men.

- The question is not, “Do we like it?”
- The question is, “Has God authorized it?”

Bible authority must be established, Not assumed.

- We must ask, “By what authority?” and “Is it from heaven, or from men?”
- We must Not think above, what is written.

Now we need to see how Scripture establishes authority.

III. Scripture Establishes Authority: by What It Says, Shows, and Necessarily Implies

God’s Word teaches, in more than one way.

- Sometimes God gives, a direct command.
- Sometimes God gives, an approved example.
- And Sometimes God gives words, that necessarily lead to a conclusion.

These are not man-made methods — These are ways, Scripture itself teaches.

A. Direct Commands Must Be Obeyed

Jesus connects love for Him with obedience.

- He said, “**If ye love Me, keep My commandments.**” ([Jn.14:15](#))

Explanation:

- “**Love**” — is not merely emotion.
- “**Keep**” means — to obey, guard, and observe.
- “**Commandments**” — are instructions given by authority.
- True love for Christ, obeys what Christ commands.

A command does Not need improvement — It needs obedience.

- When God commands, faith does not ask, “Can I change this?”
- Faith asks, “How may I obey this?”

Direct commands establish Bible authority — If God commands it, we must obey it.

But God also teaches through approved examples and...

B. Approved Examples Must Be Followed, When They Reveal Approved Apostolic Practice

Paul told brethren,

- “Those things, which ye have both **learned**, and **received**, and **heard**, and **seen** in me, **DO**: and the God of peace shall be with you.” ([Phil.4:9](#))

Explanation

- “**Learned**” and “**received**” — points to apostolic **teaching**.
- “**Heard**” and “**seen**” — include apostolic **example**.
- “**Do**” means — **practice it**.

Approved apostolic example, matters.

- God did not preserve, apostolic teaching and practice, for us to ignore it.

Children learn by instruction, but they also learn by example.

- In Scripture, God gives both instruction and approved examples — **Faith honors both**.

Approved examples, help establish Bible authority, When they show apostolic teaching and practice, approved by God.

Scripture also teaches, through necessary implication.

C. Necessary Implications Must Be Accepted

Jesus proved the resurrection, by reasoning from the exact words, God had spoken.

- He said, “**But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read** that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, **I am the God of Abraham**, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? **God is Not the God of the dead, but of the Living.**” ([Matt.22:31-32](#))

Explanation:

- “**Have ye not read**” — shows Jesus appealed to Scripture.
- Jesus reasoned from God’s statement — “**I am the God of Abraham.**”
- Since God spoke of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as still related to Him, Jesus showed, that they were still “**Living**”.

This is a Bible example of necessary implication.

- A necessary implication is not a guess — It is a conclusion, that must follow from what God has said.

If a man walks into a room with a wet umbrella, wet shoes, and rain dripping from his coat, we may necessarily conclude, it has been raining.

The man may not have said, “It is raining,” but the evidence requires the conclusion.

In Bible study, necessary implication, must come from the text, Not imagination.

Scripture establishes authority, by direct commands, approved examples, and necessary implications.

God teaches, by what He **says**, what He **shows**, and what His Word necessarily **implies**.

- When God commands, **faith obeys**.
- When God gives an approved example, **faith follows**.
- When God’s Word necessarily implies a conclusion, **faith accepts it**.

Now we must apply these principles **carefully**.

IV. Applying Bible Authority: by Respecting God's Limits and Distinguishing Lawful Aids from Unauthorized Additions

Many practices are defended, by saying:

- "The Bible does not say, Not to."
- "It seems helpful, to me."
- "It is just, an aid."
- "It is outside the worship hour, so it doesn't matter."
- "It is harmless."

But Bible authority is Not established, by what God did Not say.

Bible authority is established, by what God has revealed.

A. God's Silence Does Not Authorize

Nadab and Abihu offered something, God had Not commanded.

- The Bible says, "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**. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD." ([Lev.10:1-2](#))

Explanation:

- "Strange fire" means — unauthorized fire.
- "Which He commanded them not" — shows the problem.
They offered what God had Not commanded — God's Silence, did Not give permission.

The Hebrew writer shows, that silence mattered, concerning the priesthood.

- The Bible says, "For it is evident, that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe, **Moses spake nothing**, concerning priesthood." ([Heb.7:14](#))

Explanation:

- "Moses spake nothing" means — there was No authority from the Law, for Judah to serve in the Levitical priesthood.
- God did Not need to name every tribe, that could Not serve.
- By giving the priestly arrangement, other tribes were automatically excluded.

If a mother gives her child money and says, "**Buy milk**," the child is authorized to **buy milk**.

The child is **Not authorized** to buy candy, toys, and games, just because it was not specifically forbidden.

- The instruction, **gives authority**.
- The instruction, also **limits the action**.

God's Silence, does Not authorize.

Faith does Not presume permission, where God has Not given authority.

Closely connected with silence, is the principle of specific authority.

B. Specific Authority Limits the Action

God told Noah, what kind of wood to use, in building the ark.

- He said, **“Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without, with pitch.”** ([Gen.6:14](#))

Explanation:

- **“Make thee an ark”** — authorized Noah to build the ark — which is generic authority.
- **“Gopher wood”** — specified the kind of wood to be used — which is specific authority.
- Because God specified gopher wood — Noah had No authority, to use another kind of wood.

Noah could use tools to build the ark, because tools helped him do, what God commanded.

- But Noah could Not use another kind of wood, and call it an aid.
- **Another wood, would Not be an Aid — it **would be an Addition.****

When **God specifies**, faith respects the limitation.

Specific authority, excludes other kinds of action.

Now we must distinguish, between a lawful Aid and an unauthorized Addition.

C. Expedients Must First Be Lawful and Must Edify

Paul teaches, that not everything lawful, is expedient.

- He said, **“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are Not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”** ([1Cor.6:12](#))

Explanation:

- **“Lawful”** means — permitted. Paul is not saying that everything imaginable is permitted. He is teaching, that even among things lawful, Not all things are expedient
- **“Expedient”** means — useful, helpful, or profitable, toward a lawful end.
- A thing cannot be a biblical expedient, unless it first helps accomplish, something God has authorized.

Paul also teaches, that an expedient, must edify.

- He said, **“All things are lawful for me, but all things are Not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify Not.”** ([1Cor.10:23](#))

Explanation:

- **“Edify”** means — to build up spiritually.
- An **“expedient”** — must not merely be convenient. It must aid or help accomplish, authorized spiritual work, in a way that builds up.

An Aid or Expedient, helps do what God authorized.

An Addition, changes the action, or adds another kind of action.

- A songbook, may help christians sing.
- A microphone, may help people hear the gospel.
- A baptistry, may help accomplish baptism.
- A building, may help saints assemble and study.

But an Aid or Expedient, cannot create or establish authority.

- It can only help carry out authority, that already exists.
- An Expedient must be lawful, helpful, and edifying.
- It must Aid what God authorized, NOT add another work, worship, or practice.

One more Biblical principle, will prepare us for next week's lesson:

D. Individual Action Is Not Always Church Action

Paul makes a clear distinction, between individual responsibility and church responsibility.

- He said, "If any man or woman that believeth, have widows, **let them relieve them, and let NOT the church be charged**; that it may relieve them, that are widows indeed." ([1Tim.5:16](#))

Explanation:

- "Let them relieve them" — places responsibility, upon individual believers or family members.
- "Let NOT the church be charged" shows that — some responsibilities belong to individuals, and Not to the collective church.
- This passage proves, that a thing may be right for an individual Christian, and still Not be authorized, as the work of the local church.

In addition to 1 Timothy 5:16, two other passages help us understand the difference, between individual action and church action.

In [Acts 5:1-4](#), Peter told Ananias, that the land was his own before it was sold, and even after it was sold, the money was still in his own power. His sin was not keeping part of the money; his sin was lying to God. This shows that individual property and resources, do not automatically become church property or church action.

In [Matthew 18:15-17](#), Jesus taught that a brother's trespass was first to be handled privately: one brother going to another. If that failed, one or two more were involved. Only after those steps, did Jesus say to tell it to the church. This shows that, not every private trespass, or individual responsibility, immediately becomes church action.

A Christian, may **own a business**,

- but the church is **Not authorized**, to become a business.

A Christian, may eat a **common meal**,

- but that does **Not authorize** common meals, as a work of the church.

A Christian, may enjoy **recreation**,

- but that does **Not authorize** recreation, as a work of the church.

We must not transfer individual liberty, into church authority, without Scripture.

Before the local church acts as a body, using its treasury, resources, building, or organized function, we must ask: **Has God authorized the church to do this?**

- God's Silence, does Not authorize.
- Specific authority, limits the action.
- An Expedient, must first be lawful.
- An Expedient or Aid, must edify.
- An Aid, helps carry out what God authorized.
- An Addition, goes beyond what God authorized.
- Individual action and church action, must Not be confused.

Let's now draw these thoughts into a,

V. Closing Summary

These principles are simple enough, for a young person to understand, but serious enough, to guide the whole church.

The faithful heart does NOT ask: “What does tradition say?” OR “What do other churches do?”

The faithful heart asks: “What has God said?” — “What has God authorized?”

Lessons Learned

- We must ask, “What saith the Scripture?”
- We must search the Scriptures, to see whether things are so.
- Authority must be from heaven, Not men.
- We must Not think, above what is written.
- Direct Commands, must be Obeyed.
- Approved Examples, must be Followed.
- Necessary Implications, must be Accepted.
- God’s Silence, does Not authorize.
- Specific Authority, excludes any other kinds of action.
- An Expedient, must first be Lawful.
- An Expedient or Aid, must Edify.
- An Aid or Expedient, helps carry out what God authorized.
- An Addition, changes or adds to what God authorized.
- Individual Christian action and collective church action, are Not always the same.

As an illustration, think again about the Biblical record of Noah.

- God told Noah to build an ark — God specified gopher wood.
- Noah could use tools to obey God’s command.
- But Noah could Not change the wood and call it an aid.

That simple example, helps us understand Bible authority.

- Aids, help obedience — Additions, change obedience.

Notice the chart below, emphasizing these principles:

GENERIC Authority	SPECIFIC Authority	AID / Expedience	ADDITION / No Bible Authority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Make thee an ark” (Gen.6:14) <p>Would be, generic authority.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “of gopher wood” (Gen.6:14) <p>Would be, Specific authority.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Axe, hammer, or saw <p>Would all be an aid to carry out the specific command given.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pine, Oak, Cherry Wood, Or any other kind of wood <p>However, would be an addition, To what God had commanded.</p>

Faith does Not improve, God’s instruction — Faith Obeys, God’s instruction.

The Lesson is yours!

It is the Lord, Who invites, and we await to assist.

Won’t you come without delay...

- **Hearing** the gospel ([Rom.10:17](#)), **Believing** in Christ ([Heb.11:6](#); [Jn.8:24](#)), **Repenting** of sins ([Lk.13:3](#)),
- **Confessing** your belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God ([Acts 8:37](#); [Rom.10:9-10](#)),
- And being **baptized** for the forgiveness of sins ([Acts 22:16](#); [Mk.16:16](#); [Acts 2:38](#); [1Pet.3:21](#); [Gal.3:26-27](#)).

...While we stand and while we sing.