

# Sound in the Faith

by Bob Pulliam

## Lesson 8

### Establishing Authority From the Scriptures



Memory Verses: John 8:31; II Timothy 2:15 (KJV); Ephesians 1:22f;  
Ephesians 5:19

Up to this point in our study, we have looked at a lot of Bible scripture. In so doing, we have been consulting the Bible for authority. Most people professing Christ take this aspect of the Bible for granted. They believe that you have to follow the Bible, but don't really know how to consult it for authority.

When we talk about "authority", we are talking about the power, or right, that is given to us to act in a certain way. Our lives are filled with this principle; but we rarely ever give it a thought. To drive a car, you must have authority from the state in which you live. They provide a license after you give evidence of being fit to drive a motor vehicle. That license is your authority to drive. If you are caught driving without authority, you will get into trouble. In a high school, college, or professional basketball game, there are rules. There may be subtle differences in the rules, between the various conferences; but each player must abide by the rules. There are officials on the court to see that the rules of play are followed. It is alright for a football player to run with the ball; but in basketball, the official will stop play and give the ball to the opposing team.

Authority is an important aspect of our everyday lives, and most people will readily agree on how important it is. When it comes to the Bible, some don't like the idea of requiring authority from the start. Many would readily agree with needing authority in religion; but change their minds when it begins to step on their toes (or the toes of their religion). Since some do not think we need authority in religion, and others change their minds to accommodate their practices; we need to see what the Bible says on this subject.

*Do We Really Need Bible Authority?...*

From the earliest periods of Bible history, God has insisted that mankind do things His way. He commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of

a particular tree in the garden (Gen 2:16f). Everyone quickly sees that eating of that tree would be wrong. God said not to, and doing so would violate the command. It is no surprise, when they do eat, that God punishes them (Gen 3).

Cain and Abel were commanded to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. We know that God told them what He wanted, because Abel offered his sacrifice “by faith” (Heb 11:4). Since “*faith comes by hearing*” the word of God (Rom 10:17), we know that Abel was obeying what God had already specified. When these men offered their sacrifices (Gen 4), Cain did not offer as God had commanded. We are not told how Cain disobeyed, but we do know that God was displeased (Gen 4:5).

Nadab and Abihu are an example of priests disobeying God’s command. These were sons of Aaron (the high priest), and were going about their regular service in the tabernacle. The priest was commanded to take a censer, put coals of fire from the altar in it, and place incense upon it. But Nadab and Abihu used “strange fire” (Lev 10:1f). The Lord destroyed them as a result of their disobedience. God told Moses, “*By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy*” (Lev 10:3). The only way we can regard God as holy is to obey all of His commands as He gave them.

Now, all of these examples are in the Old Testament. And we are not calling them forth for any other reason than to understand how God views His word. In previous periods of time, He obviously viewed His word as authoritative. But some would tell us that it is different under Jesus Christ.

One incident in the work of Jesus will clearly tell us that nothing has changed about the way we should view God’s word...

*“Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, ‘By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?’ But Jesus answered and said to them, ‘I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John; where was it from? From heaven or from men?’ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘If we say, “From heaven,” He will say to us, “Why then did you not believe him?” But if we say, “From men,” we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet.’ So they answered Jesus and said, ‘We do not know.’ And He said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.’ “*

(Matthew 21:23-27)

Notice first of all that the chief priests and the elders thought Jesus needed authority for what He did, and that His authority would have to

come from the correct source. Perhaps they were wrong. But if they had been, wouldn't Jesus have quickly corrected them? And then there is the question Jesus asks concerning the authority of John. Jesus not only upholds the need for authority, but also lists the only possible sources. There are only two: heaven and men. There can be no doubt that Jesus saw the need for authority

If you need further evidence of this, consider a statement in the sermon on the mount, where Jesus tells His hearers that calling out to Him is not enough — one must do the will of the Father (Mt 7:21). Those who will be rejected in the judgment will have been “*workers of iniquity*”. In other words, they will have been *lawless*. Law is authority to act, or refrain from action. Jesus taught law to be an essential element of judgment.

It becomes clear that we must abide by the law of the Lord. We must seek authority for what we believe and practice. Without authority, we act in a lawless manner.

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### *Question Set Number One*

- 1) What is meant by “authority”?
  - 2) What must you have to drive a car?
  - 3) In a basketball game, what are needed?
  - 4) Why are officials present?
  - 5) What is right in football, but not basketball?
  - 6) Why is it right in one game, and not in the other?
  - 7) What has God insisted on from the beginning?
  - 8) Reading Lev 10:1, what did Nadab and Abihu do wrong?
  - 9) What is the only way that we can regard God as holy?
  - 10) What two questions was Jesus asked about his work?
    - a)
    - b)
  - 11) When Jesus asked about the authority of John, what two possibilities did he give?
  - 12) Calling out to Jesus is not enough. We must do what?
  - 13) Those rejected in the judgment are called...
  - 14) What is “iniquity”?
  - 15) What is an essential element of judgment?
  - 16) Without authority, we act how?
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### *Three Ways of Establishing Authority...*

Whether we talk about the Bible, or everyday life; there are three ways of communicating authority. They are: *command (or direct statement)*, *divinely approved example*, and *necessary implication*. All three are very basic, and simple to understand (although the last one does sound complicated on the surface).

The command, or direct statement, explicitly spells out the action to be undertaken. We must be careful that we not mistake the commandments of men for God's commands. When we do so, our worship becomes vain (Mt 15:9). Also, a command doesn't always apply to us today. Jesus commanded His disciples not to depart from Jerusalem, because the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon them there (Acts 1:4). That command was not meant for us to obey. On the other hand, when Jesus gave the disciples the great commission, He said that whoever "*believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*" (Mk 16:16) This explicit statement tells us that one must believe and be baptized to be saved. Peter, an inspired apostle, said to a multitude, "*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" (Acts 2:38) Peter has explicitly told these people to repent and be baptized. Why? For the remission of sins. Commands, or direct statements, should be examined carefully. If they should be applied to our lives, then we cannot excuse ourselves from obedience.

The second way of establishing authority is a divinely approved example. Not every example in scripture is worthy of our imitation. Judas hanged himself (Mt 27:5). Even though he was an apostle, we are not to follow in his steps. After all, he also betrayed Jesus (Mt 26:47ff). Examples may give needed detail. The Lord's Supper was commanded of disciples, and it is the examples that offer details about obedience. It consisted of unleavened bread, and the fruit of the vine (Lk 22:7; Mt 26:26-29; I Cor 5:8). It was practiced on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). But not everything in details given are binding. It was commonly taken in an upper room, and yet that was not because obedience demanded it. It was simply a matter of the architecture of that day. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, but that does not mean we must use running water to baptize, anymore than it means we have to use the Jordan River. These are known as incidentals. But then there are the examples which bind a pattern for us to follow. Baptism took place in water, so we read of cases where people went down into water to be baptized (*e.g.* Acts 8:38).

The third way of establishing authority is the necessary implication. You will hear some call it "necessary inference". An implication is a

detail not specified in a statement, but readily understood to be there. An inference is the conclusion drawn by the hearer (or reader), as a result of the implication. For example, if I tell Jack to close the door, I have implied that the door is open. When Jack hears me, he infers (draws the conclusion) from my statement that the door is open, and closes it. When Jesus was baptized by John, we are never told that He went down into the water. But we know that He did, because we are told that He came up out of the water (Mt 3:16). You cannot come up out of the water if you have never gone down into the water. While we can easily draw conclusions from passages in scripture, we must beware that we not do so unnecessarily. This is why we look for the *necessary* implication. A good example of implying something from scripture that isn't necessarily so may be found in how some people treat Acts 16:33. Here we are told that the Philippian Jailor and his household (family) were all baptized. Some would tell us that families include babies and infants, and that this authorizes infant baptism. Do you know any families that do not have infants? Yes. So, the inference is drawn from an unnecessary assumption.

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### *Question Set Number Two*

- 1) What are the three ways of establishing authority?
  - a)
  - b)
  - c)
- 2) What must we be careful not to do?
- 3) What happens if we do?
- 4) We are to obey every command in the New Testament    T    F
- 5) We should follow every example in the New Testament    T    F
- 6) We should follow all of the examples of the apostles    T    F
- 7) Examples that do not demand obedience are called....
- 8) What is being implied in the following statements?
  - a) Close the door.
  - b) Turn off the TV.
  - c) Feed the dog.
  - d) He came up out of the water.
- 9) What can easily be drawn from scriptures?
- 10) We must beware that we not do so....
- 11) Since all were baptized in the Jailor's family, some conclude what?
- 12) That inference is drawn from...

### *An Illustration...*

Let's put all of these ways together, and see just how they work. We're going to use the incidents surrounding God's revelation that the Gentiles could be saved without circumcision.

An express statement from the Old Testament prophets was quoted by James to declare God's will on the matter (Acts 15:16f). Peter used the incident with Cornelius' household, where the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as an example of God's approval of the Gentiles without circumcision (Acts 15:8). Paul and Barnabas also provided examples (Acts 15:12). And as we look back to the incident of Cornelius' conversion, we find Peter drawing an inference from a vision he had seen. The vision was of a circumstance where Peter was told to kill and eat some animals placed before him (Acts 10:10-16). There must have been unclean animals (Lev 11:2-31) in the number, for Peter refused to do so, saying he had never eaten anything unclean (v14). Although that was all there was to the vision, Peter later discerned that the Lord was referring to the Gentiles. When he came into the house of Cornelius, he said, "*You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.*" (Acts 10:28) Later, Peter said, "*In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.*" (v34) How did Peter perceive this? It was by the vision. But the vision did not say it. So, Peter inferred from the vision that Gentiles are not common or unclean.

On the subject of necessary implications in scripture, we learned in lesson five about the frequency of observing the Lord's Supper (p36). Acts 20:7 tell us that Paul and the disciples gathered together on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord's Supper. If we were told that it was the second Lord's day of the month, then it would be a monthly observance (every second Sunday of the month). If we were told that it was the first Lord's day of the fourth month, then it would be a yearly observance. Just as the Sabbath was observed each time it came up on the calendar, so we also partake of the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week. Incidentally, early history tells us that this was the practice of disciples in the second century.

### *Two Kinds of Authority...*

We have learned that there are three **ways** of establishing authority. But we must also understand that there are two **kinds** of authority. These kinds are *general* and *specific*. You can think of this as the **ways** of establishing the authority for something, and the **kinds** being categories

into which a *way* falls. If authority is established, and is *general* in nature, then there may be any number of ways to carry out what is authorized. *General* authority is characterized by wording that is general, allowing options to be determined by us. If the the authority established is *specific* in nature, then God has left us without option. He has specified what He wants, and we must obey as He has dictated.

This should not be difficult for us. We do this in everyday situations of life. If a mother sends her son to the store, saying, “Get a loaf of bread.”, we understand that choices have been left open. The brand which the son chooses has been left up to him. Whether he buys white or wheat is his decision to make. As long as he buys a loaf of bread, he will have obeyed his mother. Now, if she tells him to buy a loaf of Sunbeam white bread, his selection has been narrowed considerably. If there is more than one size available, he could choose between them. But he must get what his mother has specified. What if he buys some strawberry jelly? After all, everyone knows that jelly goes on bread. However, we know that she did not authorize that purchase. Nor did she tell him to get butter, honey, or a toaster.

As we apply this to the scriptures, we find some very important conclusions to draw. Noah was commanded to build an ark out of Gopher wood (Gen 6:14). Gopher wood was the building material. Think of this as the category of what God specified. Noah could use nothing but Gopher wood for his building material. He could use saws and planes, for these are not building materials. These are tools, and God did not specify anything regarding tools to be used. Now, if God had commanded him, “Build an ark of wood.”, Noah could have chosen the building material he wanted. But since God specified, he had no choice.

We usually associate general and specific authority with commands, or direct statements. But examples and implications can become specific in nature when they provide an exclusive pattern for obedience. As mentioned earlier, we observe the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week. Acts 20:7 is the only example to indicate timing, and it’s implication gives us the frequency for observance. Baptism is mentioned many times in scripture as a command for becoming a disciple of Christ. There is a baptism of the Holy Spirit, and a baptism in water. Which are we commanded to be baptized into when we do so to become a disciple? The exclusive pattern found is water baptism. Baptism in the Holy Spirit had another reason associated with it; and not everyone received that baptism.

*Beware of Seeking Authority Elsewhere...*

Before we finish this lesson, it would be wise for you to be aware of

the reasoning that some people do to get around seeking Bible authority. The most common of these is *emotional reasoning*. Sometimes it is based on strong family traditions. Sometimes it is based on personal preferences, or the practices enjoyed too much to give up and follow the Bible. You will find people who use their feelings as their source of authority. They might say something like, “I just feel that God would want us to do this.” Never forget, “*There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.*” (Prov 14:12)

Other people will rely on what they perceive to be successful. If it seems to be getting results, then God must be pleased with it. Never forget, “*to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.*” (I Sam 15:22f)

And then some hold religious leaders in such high esteem that they hang on their every word. If they say it is so, then it must be. Their degrees and doctorates impress and intimidate. Never forget, “*But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise*” (I Cor 1:27).

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### ***Question Set Number Three***

- 1) How did James establish authority?
- 2) How did Peter do so?
- 3) In what way did God imply to Peter that Gentiles were not unclean?
  
- 4) What are the two kinds of authority?
- 5) If authority is specific in nature, how many ways can we obey?
- 6) Noah was to build an ark using what building material?
- 7) What category of God’s specification was this?
- 8) What category would a hammer or saw be in?
- 9) What could Noah use if God had simply said, “build an ark of wood”?
  
- 10) Many people leave Bible authority for what kind of reasoning?
- 11) The way that seems right has what end?
- 12) What is better than sacrifice?