

Authority of The Scriptures

AND THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH



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Introduction

Burt was a faithful member of the Lord’s Church. He attended all the services of the church. It was often the case that he would bring someone with him. He had a zeal and thirst for knowledge. Everything appeared to be going well in his spiritual walk. However, something changed. He began to miss Wednesday night classes, then he missed Sunday evening services. Eventually, he wasn’t seen at any of the services. Phone calls, text messages, and e-mails were sent out in an attempt to see what was wrong. Eventually, Burt responded and met with one of the elders. He shared with him that he no longer was going to be a part of the Lord’s church. He was now worshipping with a denomination, and felt that the church of Christ was becoming too elitist in following the Scriptures. He no longer felt that instrumental music was a big deal. He no longer viewed that baptism was necessary as part of God’s plan of salvation. Sadly, this Christian who once listened to the authoritative Scriptures had now turned his back on God and His word.

We are about to begin a series of lessons which are needed by every Christian: *The Authority of the Scriptures and the New Testament Church*. This study is important for a variety of reasons. There are Christians both young and old who recognize the Bible as their authority. However, many don’t know how to establish authority through the Scriptures. Sadly, there is a growing number of Christians like Burt who no longer feel that God’s word is our authority.

This study will consist of a series of twelve lessons over this quarter. We will cover many aspects about the authority of the Scriptures and the church. However, this will not be an exhaustive study of these topics. This study will give you a basic working knowledge of how the Scriptures authorize.

All students are asked to do the appropriate reading and lessons prior to class. This will be an interactive class and therefore it is imperative that everyone be prepared to engage in discussion and exercises. When you skim through this workbook you will notice numerous scriptural references in each lesson. While you should study all of these Scriptures, because of the restraints of class time, we may not discuss every reference listed unless the point demands it. Prior to our first study please complete lesson one.

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You will find this class not only to be enjoyable, but we believe it will answer many of the questions that Christians have about the local church—what is authorized and what is not. Let’s study together and profit from God’s word.

This material was produced by Max Dawson and Benjamin Lee.

The Authority of the Scriptures and the New Testament Church

The Inspiration of the Scriptures

Where did the Bible come from? Is it the product of man, of the devil, or of God? It is not the product of man. It strains the imagination to think man, unaided, could produce such a book. It is not the product of the devil, for it would have Satan opposing Satan. It is the product of God. The nature of the book shows this to be the only reasonable and logical conclusion.

The Bible term used to describe the process by which God gave the Bible is “inspiration,” 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The Greek word used in this text is *theopneustos*, a compound word. It is from *theos*—God, and from *pneo*—to breathe. The Scripture is “God-breathed.” God is the author of Scripture. The word “inspired” is used of God’s direction in giving the Scripture. It is not used in a light sense, as in “I was inspired by a beautiful sunset.”

Many false concepts exist regarding inspiration. Sometimes, those who profess to believe the Bible make statements that deny inspiration, or at least show they don’t understand it. If we fail to understand inspiration, then we cannot teach the Bible with confidence; we cannot live in accord with its precepts with assurance; and we may not be able to resist the devil.

I. Some Basic Facts about Inspiration

A. Both Old Testament and New Testament writers claim to be inspired. Some examples:

1. Jeremiah spoke the words of the Lord, Jeremiah 1:1-2; 25:13; 27:18-19; 30:2; 36:1-2, 8ff; Daniel 9:2.
2. The Apostle Paul wrote the commandments of God, 1 Corinthians 14:37; 4:6; 2 Peter 3:15-16; 3:1-2.
3. The Apostle John wrote what the Spirit gave him, John 16:13; 1 John 1:3-4; Revelation 1:1, 11, 19.
4. What should we conclude from this point?

B. Inspiration extends to all parts of Scripture.

1. *Plenary inspiration*. Plenary means, “full, complete, extending to every part.” See 2 Timothy 3:16. “All Scripture...” See also 1 Timothy 5:18; compare this with Deuteronomy 25:4; Luke 10:7.
2. *Verbal inspiration*. This has to do with “words.” The words are inspired. See 1 Corinthians 2:13 and Matthew 10:19. Both *how* and *what* to speak were given by the Holy Spirit. It was *not* “thought inspiration”—inspiring a thought without words.
3. What should we conclude from this point?

C. Inspiration was accomplished by the Holy Spirit, 2 Peter 1:20-21.

1. “Moved” is from the Greek word *phero*, which means to carry or bear. These men were not acting on their own will, but were carried along by the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. The writers did not give their own interpretation of events as they wrote. They wrote only what the Spirit directed them to write. This text has nothing to do with the interpretation or study of the Bible. It claims inspiration.
3. These men spoke as the Spirit moved them. What did they speak? They spoke the words of the Spirit, 1 Corinthians 2:13.
4. What should we conclude from this point?

II. Some Things Inspiration Does Not Demand

A. It does not mean that the writer must forfeit his own style and vocabulary.

1. God was able to use the “total man” in inspiration, not just “the hand to move the pen.”

2. God used the author's own background and personality.
 - a. If a man were Hebrew, he wrote in Hebrew, etc. If he was educated, he spoke as a man of culture. If uneducated, he spoke as a common man. If the mind of the writer was more analytical, the Scripture produced by inspiration would be more analytical.
 - b. God used the man's logic, emotion, culture and background in producing the Scripture.
3. When men argue against this, they make a grave error.
 - a. They bind rules on God and make inspiration what they think it should be. They would have God produce a bland, dry book, lacking emotion and character—legislation with no heart. This is the error of "mechanical inspiration." They think "God just moved the pen on the page."
 - b. That is not what happened. These theories cause men to deny some verses, claiming they are uninspired. See 2 Timothy 4:11-13, 20. Such personal references don't fit mechanical inspiration, so they claim, "These verses are uninspired."
 - c. If we say that some Scripture is inspired and some is not, how do we determine which is which?
4. What should we conclude from this point?

B. Inspiration did not give omniscience to the writer.

1. Old Testament authors wrote many things that they didn't understand, 1 Peter 1:10-12; Daniel 7:15ff.
2. Paul did not have perfect memory in regard to insignificant details, 1 Corinthians 1:16.
3. What should we conclude from this point?

C. Inspiration was limited to the purpose for which it was given.

1. Its purpose was to reveal divine truth, to record God's message of salvation for mankind, John 16:13.
2. It did not make Paul a great tentmaker; Peter did not become a world champion bass fisherman.
3. What should we conclude from this point?

D. Inspiration did not make men sinless.

1. Peter was still able to sin, Galatians 2:11-14.
2. Paul recognized he could fall away from God and be lost, 1 Corinthians 9:27.
3. What should we conclude from this point?

E. Inspiration does not say that all statements recorded are statements of truth.

1. Though all statements are truthfully recorded, all recorded statements are not statements of truth.
2. Some examples: Genesis 3:4; 1 Kings 13:18; Psalms 14:1a; Matthew 26:74. Though all these statements are accurately recorded, they are lies.
3. What should we conclude from this point?

The fact that we have an inspired book has consequences: We have a book whose message is from God. Since it is from God, we must give heed to it, Psalms 119:9. In this book, God tells us we are accountable to live our lives in accord with His will. He will judge us by His will.

The Authority of the Scriptures and the New Testament Church

How God Speaks to Us Today

How does God speak to us today? Why listen to His voice? What happens if we don't listen when God speaks?

Pharaoh was a man who had a problem listening to the voice of God. "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?" (Exodus 5:1-2). Pharaoh soon found out who the Lord was and why he should obey His voice. The thing that is unusual here is that Pharaoh never literally heard the voice of the Lord. God did not personally speak to Pharaoh, yet Pharaoh heard the voice of the Lord. Pharaoh heard the Lord through the Lord's spokesman, Moses, Exodus 7:1-2.

In the New Testament, Jesus taught that when a Jew heard the Law of Moses, he was hearing the message that came from God, Luke 16:29; John 5:46. Moses' words are equal to the Father's words. What about today? How do we hear the voice of the Lord today? To answer this, we must look at several Bible principles.

I. God Has All Power and Authority, 1 Chronicles 29:11-12

- A. God has the right to do whatever He wills. He has the right to speak unto man and to command him to do His will, Psalms 135:6.
 1. Man, being lesser than God, must recognize the supremacy of God, Daniel 4:35.
 2. Man's duty is to hear and do what God the Father has spoken, Matthew 7:21.
- B. While this is true, this does not tell us how God speaks to us today. We must look further for our answer.

II. God Speaks through Jesus, Hebrews 1:1-2

- A. God's message today is through His Son, Matthew 17:5. It is not through Moses and the prophets.
 1. All authority has been given to Jesus, Matthew 28:18.
 2. It is the word of God's Son that will judge us, John 12:48-49.
 3. God does not have a message or will for mankind apart from His Son, Jesus. All claims that God speaks through a source different from the Son are false claims, John 14:6.
- B. While God speaks to us through Jesus, this doesn't tell us how Jesus speaks to us. We must look further.

III. Jesus Speaks through Apostles and Prophets, John 20:21

- A. Jesus said that just as the Father had sent Him, He was sending the apostles.
 1. To receive the apostles' teaching is to receive Christ's teaching, Matthew 10:1-5, 40; 1 John 4:6.
 2. To reject the teaching of the apostles is to reject the teaching of Christ, John 17:8, 14.
 3. The apostles were men chosen by Christ to be His ambassadors and witnesses, Acts 10:39-41.
 4. In view of the Scriptures we have just read about the apostles, what shall we say about those who say they listen to Jesus, but not to the apostles?
- B. During His earthly ministry, the Lord had taught the apostles, John 17:8. This prepared them to speak for Him. But what happened after Jesus completed His ministry on earth? Did the Lord have a way to teach the apostles further?

IV. Jesus Guided the Apostles by the Holy Spirit, John 14:26

- A. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things and bring to their remembrance what He had spoken to them.

1. The words spoken by the Holy Spirit to the apostles were the words given to Jesus by the Father, John 16:13-15. Jesus had many things to say to the apostles that they were not prepared to receive during His earthly ministry, John 16:12. The Holy Spirit would teach these things to the apostles.
 2. The words spoken by the apostles and prophets were the words that were inspired by the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 2:9-13. If God had not revealed these things unto men, then these things would be forever unknown to men. This proves that God does not have another way that He uses to make these things known to men.
 3. Since the Holy Spirit guided the apostles in what they spoke, we must hear the apostles in order to hear the voice of God. All other claims that men make about hearing from God are false claims.
- B. But, since the apostles are not personally on earth today, how do we hear the voice of these men?

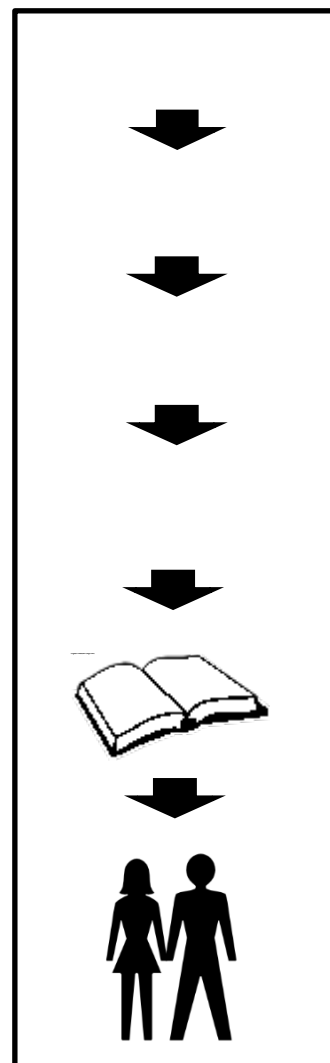
V. The Apostles Speak through the Written Word, 1 Corinthians 14:37

- A. Paul claimed that the things that he wrote were the commandments of God.
- B. The inspired Scriptures are the final product of the apostles and prophets as they were guided by the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 3:1-5. Note the following truths that are taught in this text about revelation. The process by which God’s will is made known to men is called “revelation.” God has “uncovered” or “made known” His will unto men. We are dependent on revelation in order that we may know the will of God. The facts:

1. Truth was made known by _____.
2. It is the truth about the mystery of _____.
3. The mystery of Christ was revealed by the _____.
4. It was revealed to the _____ and _____.
5. The truth was recorded in a _____ form. This written form is what we call the New Testament Scriptures.
6. When we (the sons of men) _____, we can understand.
7. Using what we have learned from Ephesians 3:1-5, write the correct words found in this text in the four blank spaces above the arrows on the chart to the right.
8. Later, in the same book of Ephesians, Paul said that the men who received these writings were “taught by Jesus,” Ephesians 4:20-21. How were the people at Ephesus taught by Jesus, when Jesus was never in that city? They were taught by the word Jesus gave to the apostles and prophets! In that same sense, we today have been taught by Jesus.

- C. John shows us that when we have received the written record, it is then that we have heard from God, 1 John 1:1-4; 4:6.
- D. The word that is given is both all-sufficient and final, 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3. The gospel anticipates no more revelation, Jude 3. The faith was “once for all” delivered. When man receives what was delivered, he has heard the voice of God!
- E. We have demonstrated that this is how God speaks to us today. Not everyone accepts this truth. What are some things that men today say about how God speaks to them?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____



If we do not hear what God has spoken, we stand in terrible danger of the judgment, Hebrews 12:25. When we hear what the written word says, we have heard from God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the apostles and prophets. We have heard heaven’s final message to mankind. We must give heed to it and respect it as though the Lord personally spoke it to us!



LESSON
3

The Authority of the Scriptures and the New Testament Church

Unbiblical Attitudes toward the Authority of the Scriptures

Many people—even some preachers—have turned away from the truth of the gospel. God has given us the truth in His word; He warns us about departing from it, [Galatians 1:6-9](#); [Deuteronomy 5:32](#).

In spite of the warnings, many Christians—sometimes whole churches—have left the way of God. That is especially true with respect to the pattern God has given for His church. Attitudes that were once found only in denominations are now being found among those who profess membership in the Lord's church. There is a rising tide of unbiblical attitudes toward the authority of the Scriptures. Note the following examples:

I. "We Do Many Things without Authority."

- A. This statement rejects a need for authority. It is often heard when someone asks for authority for a practice. "Where do you get your authority for your practice?" Answer: "We do many things without authority."
1. It argues that since we have no authority for some things, it is OK to do other things without authority.
 2. This is an illogical and absurd way to approach the word of God. It would be parallel to saying, "Since I have taken (stolen) one thing without authority, then it is OK to take other things without authority."
 3. The mistake is in thinking that it is ever acceptable for the church to do anything without authority.
- B. The answer to this sinful attitude is found in [Colossians 3:17](#) and [2 John 9](#). Additionally, when people are asked what things they think we are doing without authority, they will often say something about songbooks or meetinghouses. Their answers reveal a lack of understanding about authority of the Scriptures.
- C. At this point in our study, do you think we are authorized to have a meetinghouse? _____

II. "We Don't Want to Be Legalistic."

- A. What does it mean to be legalistic?
1. If it means to be like the Pharisees, making up your own rules, doctrines and commands, nobody should be like that, [Matthew 15:9](#). Jesus criticized the Pharisees for disobeying God, [Matthew 23:23](#).
 2. But, if someone means to give God careful and respectful obedience, we should all want that.
 3. This faulty argument about "legalism" treats the New Testament as though it contains no law, but is only about love. They argue, "It is a love letter, not a law book!" The New Testament does contain law, [Galatians 6:2](#); [James 2:12](#).
- B. The gospel truth is, we must obey Christ, [Matthew 7:21](#); [Luke 6:46](#); [James 1:25](#).
- C. Can you find a place where Jesus criticized the Pharisees for obeying God?

III. "We Can't Be Wrong because We Are Growing and Making Progress."

- A. Not all "growth and progress" is pleasing to God.
1. Some brethren argue that building gymnasiums, bowling alleys, recreation centers, and engaging the church in anything it wants to do can't be wrong because they are growing.
 2. Have you ever heard people use say something like this?
- B. How would you answer the view that "the end justifies the means"?

IV. “The Church Must Take Care of the Whole Man.”

- A. There are people who insist that the church has a mission to provide fun, food and frolic for both the church and the world, and then call it “fellowship.”
1. How is the term “fellowship” used in the Bible? Look at these verses as a starting point, 1 Corinthians 1:9; Acts 2:42; Philippians 1:5. As you study, what verses can you find that use “fellowship” in the common way it is used today?
 2. If the church must truly take care of the whole man, what kinds of things might we imagine the church could be involved in? Could it teach aerobics, arts and crafts? Could it provide workout facilities? Use your imagination to think of all the things a church could do.
- B. According to 1 Timothy 3:15, what is the most basic function of God's church?

V. “God Did Not Give Us a Pattern in All Things.”

- A. This view of Scripture generally acknowledges that God did give us a pattern in the plan of salvation, but seems to be unclear as to whether God gave a pattern for the work and organization of the church.
1. As a result, many churches find themselves in an arrangement that involves centralized control of work and funds. This pattern is much closer to Roman Catholicism than the New Testament pattern.
 2. When asked, “Where is the Scripture for having centralized control?” we may hear, “There is no pattern in this area.”
 3. Read 1 Peter 5:1-4, a text about elders and their work in overseeing the church. Can you find any statements in this text about the scope of the elders' authority? Is it limited or unlimited? Explain.
 4. The truth is, many brethren neglect the pattern found in the New Testament when it comes to the work and organization of the church. The pattern of elders taking oversight of the flock of God “which is among you” (1 Peter 5:1-4) is neglected by those who advocate centralized control.
 5. Some advocates of “no-patternism” go so far as to say there is no pattern for worship in the New Testament. Where does that argument lead? How would you answer that argument?
- B. Just as God gave a pattern for the tabernacle in the Old Testament (Hebrews 8:5), there is a pattern for the church in the New Testament. See 2 Timothy 1:13; “Hold fast the pattern of sound words...”

Regardless of how others may depart from the gospel, let us commit ourselves to God's will and contend earnestly for the biblical order for the church. Though the fires of departure may spread to the hearts of many, let us lay hold of God's word and make sure that departure does not spread to our hearts. Let us take seriously the problem of turning from God's way. The people of Israel did not take this seriously, Isaiah 42:24-25. God promises blessing to His people when they do not depart from Him, Jeremiah 32:38-40.

The Authority of the Scriptures and the New Testament Church

How to Establish Authority

In everything we do in life, we must appeal to the proper standard as a guide. It is that way in driving an automobile, in doing business (exchanging money), etc. This can be illustrated by a simple line on a whiteboard. How long is the line? We may guess at its length, but we need to appeal to the proper standard (a tape measure) if we want to get the correct answer. It is not enough to appeal to the proper standard. The standard (a tape measure) must be used in the correct way. If we use the right standard *incorrectly*, then our answer will be just as wrong as if we used the wrong standard or no standard at all!

The problem we face in religion is not just that men have no standard or the wrong standard, but that they misuse the true standard! The Bible—the New Testament—is our standard of authority (Colossians 3:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). While we recognize that God speaks through His word, the question is “How?” That is, how does God authorize or teach us by means of His word? There are many preachers who profess to follow the true standard. But if they misuse it, they will come to the wrong conclusions and will be just as much in error as if they had never gone to the Bible at all. The study before us will help us to learn how to properly use the standard.

I. How Does God Authorize a Practice?

- A. There is no chapter in the Bible where God goes into a detailed study of how He authorizes. God doesn't have to do that.
 - 1. The reason for this is that God speaks to us in such a way that is commonly understood by all men in communications.
 - 2. God does not have to give us a special set of rules to follow in studying the Bible. The same rules that apply in all areas of communication apply here also!
 - 3. God's manner of authorizing is self-evident by the very nature of the Scriptures themselves.
- B. God authorizes by ***direct statement, example*** and ***implication***.
 - 1. A father speaking to his son teaches his son in these same three ways.
 - 2. An instruction manual (for operating an automobile) speaks or authorizes in the same way.
 - 3. It is the very nature of any kind of authority to speak or authorize in this way.
- C. The rest of this lesson will explain and illustrate the three methods as they relate to the Scriptures.

II. Direct Statement

- A. This is where God has made a positive statement pertaining to the thing at issue. God may tell us to do, not to do, etc. The direct statement is sometimes referred to as a command or precept.
 - 1. Matthew 28:19 illustrates this method. Jesus told His disciples to “Go.” They now know what to do.
 - 2. 1 Corinthians 11:24, Jesus gave a command for the Lord's Supper, saying, “This do...”
- B. Can you give a case of a direct statement or command in the Scriptures?

III. Example

- A. This is where no direct statement exists, but God has shown us by the recorded actions that a certain thing is to be done (or not done). An example is no less binding than a direct statement or command. It is just another way God authorizes.
 - 1. We are commanded to follow examples, Philippians 4:9; 3:17; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 4:16-17.
 - 2. It is important to understand that we are talking about *approved examples*. Some examples are “dis-approved” and are not to be followed. A case in point is Peter's hypocrisy in Galatians 2:11-14.

3. It is also worth noting that we are talking *apostolic examples*. By this, we mean the actual practice of the church in the New Testament under the guidance of the apostles. The apostles knew the truth; they knew what to do, John 16:13.
 4. An *approved apostolic example* can be illustrated by the case of the Lord's Supper in Acts 20:7. Here we have the example of a local congregation, under the watchful eye of an apostle, taking the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week. There is no direct statement or command in Scripture to partake of it on the first day of the week, but this example is just as binding as a command.
- B. Can you give another case of an approved apostolic example in the Scriptures?

This is where God has not spoken by command or example, but where He authorizes by an implication contained in the language used. We sometimes call this "necessary inference." "Implication" is not technically the same as "necessary inference."

1. *Implication* is what God has put in the language. God implies something that may not be expressed by a direct statement or example. *Inference* is what we draw out (or conclude) from the language. The speaker implies; the hearer infers.
 2. Before there can be a legitimate inference on the part of man, there must be an implication on the part of God.
- B. Not all inferences are legitimate. That is why we must speak of "necessary inference."
1. Many inferences are not necessary and involve only man's imagination. A necessary inference is a conclusion that is demanded by the language of Scripture. A case in point is found in Matthew 3:16; though the Scripture never says Jesus went down into the water, it is implied that He did. Thus, it is by necessary inference that we know He did. We know it just as sure as if there was a direct statement that said it!
 2. We cannot infer just whatever we want from Scripture. But only what the Scripture demands.
- C. What means of authority do you find in the following cases? Look at each. Does it involve a command, example, or implication? Explain your answers.
1. Acts 20:7. Can you find authority for the Lord's Supper on the first day in this verse?
 2. Hebrews 10:25. Can you find authority for a meeting place in this verse?
 3. Acts 2:38. Can you find authority for baptism in this verse?
 4. Acts 11:29. Can you find authority for sending relief to brethren in another place?
 5. Philippians 4:15. Can you find authority for a church taking up a collection for evangelism?
 6. Acts 14:23. Can you find authority for a plurality of elders in this text?

Studies of this type are essential if we are to be good students of God's word, 2 Timothy 2:15; Colossians 3:17. Some men ridicule these principles. To do so not only rejects logic, but also neglects to hear God!

The Authority of the Scriptures and the New Testament Church

Generic and Specific Authority

Issues of generic and specific authority are matters that are essential to our understanding of the word of God. Can you state the difference between generic authority and specific authority? Whether you can express it in words or not, I am sure you recognize the difference. The difference is so simple a child can understand it!

We believe the Scriptures are inspired of God and they are our sole authority in matters of faith and practice, 2 Timothy 3:16-17. We understand the manner in which Scripture authorizes: direct statement, example, and implication. The study before us will explore the two kinds of authority: generic authority and specific authority.

I. How the Two Kinds of Authority Differ

- A. We must be careful not to confuse the two **kinds** of authority with the three **ways** to establish authority. The three ways to establish authority are: 1) direct statement or command; 2) example; 3) implication. The nature of each of these three means of authority is either generic or specific.
- B. What is **Generic authority**? This is where something is authorized by command, example or implication, but the means, method, or persons, etc. for carrying it out **have not been specified**. (Generic authority can also be called “general authority.”)
1. This is easily illustrated by the use of “Go” in Matthew 28:19. Jesus commanded His disciples to go, but did not specify a means for going. It was a matter of choice how they might go. They were at liberty to choose any lawful means of going.
 2. This can be further illustrated by “baptizing” in Matthew 28:19. Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize, but did not specify where. A lake, a river, the ocean—all would be acceptable. This was a general command with respect to where.
 3. God’s manner of authorizing is self-evident by the very nature of the Scriptures themselves.
- C. What is **Specific Authority**? This is where something is authorized by command, example, or implication, and the means, method, or persons, etc. for carrying it out **have been specified**. (Specific authority can also be called “special authority.”)
1. This is easily illustrated by the command to preach the gospel in Mark 16:15. The gospel is a specific message. God gave us no choice as to what to teach. (We cannot teach mathematics, the Koran, art, auto mechanics, etc.).
 2. Specific authority excludes any means, methods, or substance of the same order or class as the thing authorized. When Jesus authorized us to teach the gospel, we cannot teach another message.
 3. Specific authority differs from generic authority in that generic authority includes whatever is necessary to carry out the thing that is authorized; specific authority excludes anything else, for it contains what is necessary to carry out the thing authorized.

II. An Illustration of the Two Kinds of Authority

- A. Generic and specific authority do not involve some special way of thinking that applies only to Bible study. This is ordinary thinking that we use every day in all areas of life. Some examples:
1. “Would one of the young men come and help me with an illustration?” Which young man am I referring to? Since the language is general, any will do! “Would John come and help me?” Now the language is specific; any young man will not do, only the one specified!
 2. “Hand me a book, please.” Which book? The statement is general; any will do. “Hand me the red book.” Now the language is specific; I have specified which book. Only the red book will do.
- B. This principle is so basic to our manner of communication, that in all areas of life we are dependent upon recognizing the difference between general and specific language. A child that can differentiate between colors knows generic and specific authority.

III. Generic and Specific Elements Are Found in All Means of Authority

- A. Whenever something is authorized, a part of that thing will always be specific while another part may be general. All means of authority have both generic and specific elements.
1. A case for illustration: "Hand me a book, please." This statement is specific as to the kind of object. This statement rules out the pencil. But it is also generic as to which book. Any book, green, blue or red will do.
 2. The command regarding the book is both generic and specific, depending on which element is being considered.
- B. Biblical authority is of the same nature. In each of the illustrations below describe what elements are specific and which are generic.
1. Genesis 6:14, "gopher wood." In what way is the command specific and generic?
Specific:
Generic:
 2. Numbers 19:2, "red heifer." In what way is the command specific and generic?
Specific:
Generic:
 3. Exodus 12:5, "lamb, a male of the first year." In what way is the command specific and generic?
Specific:
Generic:
 4. Mark 16:15, "preach the gospel." In what way is the command specific and generic?
Specific:
Generic:
 5. Acts 20:7, "first day of the week." In what way is the example specific and generic?
Specific:
Generic:
 6. Colossians 3:16, "singing." In what way is the command specific and generic?
Specific:
Generic:
 7. Matthew 28:19, "baptize." In what way is the command specific and generic?
Specific:
Generic:
 8. Matthew 26:17, "unleavened bread." In what way is the example specific and generic?
Specific:
Generic:
- C. There are a variety of particulars to any means of authority.
1. Such things as: who, when, where, how, why, how many, etc., are all factors to be considered.
 2. Each of these particulars may be either generic or specific. It is a matter of which of these particulars God has specified, and which He has not specified. Whenever God has specified, man has no choice; no options are given. Man either obeys or disobeys God in such cases. Where God has not specified, man may use whatever means are lawful and expedient.

We must respect the authority of the Scriptures. The fact that Jesus is Lord means that He has authority, Luke 6:46. If we respect Christ, we will respect the authority He has expressed in the Scriptures.

The Authority of the Scriptures and the New Testament Church

When Is an Example Binding?

Are all examples binding? That is, are we bound to follow every example found in Scripture? What about the example of the “holy kiss” in Romans 16:16? If someone were to ask you about this, how would you answer?

In Acts 20:7-8, we have the example of the early Christians observing the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week. We understand this to be an example we are to follow. But, in this same case, we find the Lord’s Supper being taken in an upper room. Is this example also binding? Why? Or, why not?

In our study of how God authorizes, we have seen the power of an example. By “example,” we mean “approved apostolic example.” We say “approved” because if a thing is disapproved in the Scripture, it is not to be followed. (See Peter in Galatians 2:11ff.) We say “apostolic” because we are talking about the church acting under the guidance of the apostles. (See John 16:13.)

An example is where no direct statement or command exists, but God has shown us by the recorded actions that a certain thing is to be done or not done, etc. Remember, the Scripture commands us to follow examples, 1 Corinthians 11:1; 4:16-17; Philippians 4:9. The question before us is: Are all examples found in the Scriptures binding on us (as in the case of the upper room or the holy kiss)?

I. Can We Determine When an Example Is Binding?

- A. We have already established that God authorizes by example.
1. If we find the church in the New Testament practicing a certain thing with apostolic approval, no one today would question the same practice under the same or similar circumstances. (Illustration: Meeting in an upper room for the Lord’s Supper.)
 2. If there are two or more examples of methods of doing the same thing, then either is permissible under the same circumstances today. (Illustration: Going to preach by means of walking, boat, horse, etc.) It is a matter of expediency.
- B. The question we now ask is this: When there is an example of something done in the New Testament, is that example always binding on us?
1. Does every example both bind and limit? By *bind*, we mean do we have to do it? By *limit*, we mean are we *restricted* to that and can do no other? We do not believe that we are bound and limited by every example. An illustration: We do not believe we are limited to taking the Lord’s Supper in an upper room (Acts 20:7ff). Why do we not believe that?
 2. How are we to determine which examples are binding? How are we to determine what is merely incidental? *Incidental* means that which is minor and insignificant, not essential or important to the thing at hand.
- C. We can determine when an example is binding. We do it the same way we do anything else related to the authority of the Scriptures. We do it by rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). God does not leave us in the dark to grope and try to find our way. God always gives us principles to govern us. It is our job to study and learn those principles.

II. Factors to Consider in Studying Which Examples Are Binding

- A. We have listed four important Bible principles that should be helpful in learning which examples are bound upon us.
1. The **rule of harmony**. We must get all the facts in the case. It is never right to draw a conclusion based on partial evidence (see Matthew 4:6-7). If our conclusion from one passage conflicts with another

passage, then we know our conclusion is wrong. An example cannot be bound if it causes us to do something that would be in conflict with other verses. All passages must harmonize.

2. The **rule of uniformity**. The matter must be uniform (the same) in all examples for the thing to be binding. In Matthew 28:19, the Lord commanded His disciples to “go.” Someone says, “Paul’s example shows we must go by boat!” While it is true that Paul sometimes went by boat, he also traveled by foot (Acts 20:13). Other disciples traveled by chariot, and by various other means. The Scriptures show many examples of how men went. There is no uniformity as to method of going. Therefore, it cannot be said that there is a binding example of how to go.
 3. The **rule of universality**. To be binding, an example must be able to be applied in every case—universally. The saints went out from the city of Jerusalem, preaching the word (Acts 8:1, 4). Do we have to go out from Jerusalem? This cannot be a binding example to us. People live in other cities beside Jerusalem! They begin where they are, not Jerusalem.
 4. The **rule of materiality**. To be binding, an example must have a material connection or relation to the thing under consideration. Some cases contain things that are merely incidental to the matter. An illustration: We do not have to have a man fall from the third loft at our services as in Acts 20:9-10. This was insignificant and not material to (part of) the worship.
- B. These principles are self-evident from the Scriptures themselves. These same rules also characterize commands and implications. *This is not a special set of rules* made up by someone to apply merely to the area of examples. In fact, these principles exist independent from anyone making them up. They apply to any field of discipline or science.
- C. Can we apply these principles to Acts 20:7? Can we show why the first day of the week is binding with respect to the Lord’s Supper? Answer the following questions about the four principles.
1. Harmony: Is the Lord’s Supper on the first day consistent with other Scriptures? _____. It is clear that the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week violates no other Scripture.
 2. Uniformity: Are all examples of the church taking the Lord’s Supper on the first day uniform? _____. Acts 20:7 conflicts with no other example. The first day was a day of worship, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.
 3. Universality: Is the first day of the week universal; that is, is it everywhere? _____.
 4. Materiality: Is there any special significance to the first day of the week? _____. See Mark 16:9; John 20:19, 26; Acts 2:1 ff. (Consider also that Paul waited a week at Troas, while he was in a hurry, Acts 20:6, 16. Would he do this if the first day was not significant?)
 5. So, what do we conclude about the Lord’s Supper on the first day? Is it binding? _____.
- D. Let us examine the Lord’s Supper in an upper room, Acts 20:8. To be binding, it must pass on all counts.
1. Harmony: Is the Lord’s Supper in the upper room as a binding example consistent with other Scriptures? _____. See John 4:20-21. Is location essential? _____.
 2. Uniformity: Is the Lord’s Supper in an upper room consistent with other Scriptures? _____
 3. Universality: Could there be an upper room everywhere? _____
 4. Materiality: Does the upper room have any significance in observing the Lord’s Supper? _____. If you answer “no,” then can you explain why is the upper room mentioned in Acts 20:7-9?
 5. So, what do we conclude about the upper room? Is it binding on us?

It is essential that we all accept the same standard of authority. It is also essential that we learn how God authorizes. To fail to respect God’s rules in using His word gives the same result as rejecting His word!

The Authority of the Scriptures and the New Testament Church

Aids and Additions

Someone asks you, "Where do you get your authority for songbooks or a whiteboard? Why do you use those things, and yet you condemn the use of pianos to accompany your singing?" How would you answer?

These are legitimate questions and must be answered. An understanding of the authority of the Scriptures is essential, 2 Timothy 2:15, "...rightly dividing the word of truth."

As we teach on authority, we sometimes hear strange and unusual questions: "Where is your authority for electric lights, for a meetinghouse, for chairs or pews?" While these are good questions, they often turn out not to be questions at all! These are sometimes statements against the need for authority! What they often mean is this: "Since we have no authority for electric lights, it is obvious that we do many things without authority, therefore we do not need authority for all we do!"

Such a view as this cannot be right, for the Bible demands that we have authority for all we do, Colossians 3:17. If, then, we have no authority for electric lights, then we must not use them. The lack of authority for one thing (in this case, "electric lights") does not allow for something else (instrumental music) for which there is no authority.

The question is: Can we find authority for church buildings, songbooks, etc.? How are these things authorized? This leads us to a study of "expedients," things that aid us in doing what God commanded. We will not find this study difficult. It is no more difficult than the study of "generic and specific authority." We showed that matter to be simple that a child could understand it. Now we will learn that expedients are a part of generic authority.

I. The Nature of Aids (or Expedients)

- A. An expedient is an aid. In fact, "aid" may be the better term to use, for it is more easily understood.
 1. An expedient aids me in doing what God has directed me to do. It expedites the carrying out of what God has authorized.
 2. An illustration: Matthew 28:19. The Lord commanded His disciples to "Go." In carrying out this command, one might go by ship, Acts 20:38 ff. Though the ship is not specified in the command to "go," it is a means of going; it aids in going, and when one has gone by ship, he has done nothing more than that which was commanded by Jesus.
 3. Someone might ask Paul, "Where is your authority to use a ship?" Paul could answer, "It is found in the command to go—a generic command—where the Lord did not specify the means for going. Therefore, I may use any lawful and expedient means to travel in preaching the gospel." The ship aided Paul in doing what the Lord commanded him to do.
 4. There have to be means of doing the thing authorized. If expedients (or aids) were not allowed, then a command like "go" could never be obeyed. Tell me how you will go without using an aid or expedient in going? To walk, run, crawl, ride, fly, or sail all aid in doing the thing commanded.
 5. Illustration: Ask someone to write on the board. Can he do it without the use of expedients? **No.**
- B. For a thing to be expedient, it must be lawful.
 1. Scripture rejects the concept of "Let us do evil that good may come," Romans 3:8. In our common language today, we might say, "The end justifies the means." Or, "Whatever works is OK." Just because something is effective, does not mean it is allowed. Robbing banks is an effective way to raise cash, but it is not lawful.
 2. If a thing is not lawful in and of itself, it cannot be expedient, 1 Corinthians 10:23.
- C. An expedient is never specified. If it were, then it would not be an expedient.
 1. When God specifies something, man has no choice. An example: When God specified "gopher wood" (Genesis 6:14) in building the ark, was the use of gopher wood an expedient? No, it is what God

specified. Would the use of pine be an expedient? No, that would be an addition! Adding pine to the ark would not aid Noah in obeying God.

2. We must distinguish between an aid and an addition. The next section will help us in doing that.

II. Understanding Aids by Studying Bible Cases

- A. Possibly the easiest way to learn about aids is to study Bible situations where aids had to be used. Look at these cases.
 1. Look up the Scriptures in the chart below. Identify the thing authorized in the Scriptures. What would be an aid in accomplishing the thing authorized? What would be an addition?
 2. Some additional rows are also added below. Can you find some additional examples to add that we can discuss in class?

THE SCRIPTURE	THE THING AUTHORIZED	AN AID (AN EXPEDIENT)	AN ADDITION OR SUBSTITUTE
GENESIS 6:14			
NUMBERS 19:2			
ROMANS 6:4			
ACTS 20:7			
COLOSSIANS 3:16			
HEBREWS 10:25			
MATTHEW 28:19-20			
1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-2			
1 PETER 5:1-2			

- B. A good principle to remember is this: When using an aid, when you are finished, you have done nothing more than what God commanded. The addition does not help you do what God commanded; rather, it adds to (or may even substitute and take from) what God commanded.

It is essential that we respect God's authority. If there is something we are doing for which we have no authority, we must stop it! If a church is doing something without authority, that situation does not allow it to do other things without authority!

The Authority of the Scriptures and the New Testament Church

The Church: The People of God

How much do we know about the New Testament church? Most people know little, especially those people in denominations. Even in the Lord's church, though some pride themselves on knowing more than others, there is often a misunderstanding of the church.

Because there is so much misunderstanding, people really have a difficult time discussing issues and questions about the church and salvation. Most people are guided more by opinions and emotions than by the word of God. That's especially true when asking "Must a person be a member of the church in order to go to heaven?" We must certainly answer in the affirmative. Yet, most people would think that answer arrogant and presumptuous, because they understand neither the nature of the church nor the nature of the question. Let it be clear, the church does not save, but properly understood, *it is the saved!* I do not refer to those enrolled on a local church directory, but those enrolled in heaven as God's people—what we typically call the *universal church*. The very same process that makes one a child of God, one of God's people, also makes that person a member of God's church, [Acts 2:47](#).

I. The People of God

- A. In the Old Testament, Israel was regarded as a special people unto God. They were God's "peculiar" or "special" treasure, [Exodus 19:5-6](#). The fact that they were "holy" indicated they were set apart from other people of the earth, [Deuteronomy 7:6-8](#). Note that their being God's people was related to an oath God made to their fathers. What oath was that? God made an oath to Abraham (and his offspring), [Genesis 12:1-3](#). Israel was the great nation that came from Abraham. They were God's people.
- B. In the New Testament those who follow Christ are a special people unto God. They are God's "peculiar" treasure, [1 Peter 2:5-10](#). They are "holy" because they are set apart from other people. They are set apart because they've been called by the gospel, [2 Thessalonians 2:14](#); [Acts 2:39](#). Those who answer the call of the gospel are referred to as the "called-out." That, in fact, is the meaning of the word "church," (ekklesia), [Matthew 16:18](#). Ekklesia can be translated as "church, congregation or assembly." God has congregated a group of people; He has assembled a body of people for His own purposes.
- C. Notice some things about the nature of the calling. It is from darkness to light, [1 Peter 2:9](#). It is from the power of darkness to the kingdom of Christ, [Colossians 1:13](#). It is from power of Satan unto God, [Acts 26:18](#). In each case there is direction or movement—leaving one thing and coming into another. That is the idea of "called out." When one is called out, he leaves the state in which he was found and comes into a new state. The new state in which a Christian finds himself is as part of a "holy nation"—"the people of God." These are but two terms used to describe the new relationship. There are many more.

II. Figures of Speech Used to Describe Relationships

- A. Note that there is a similarity of terms used to describe those who follow Satan and those who follow Christ. When you hear "kingdom, family or synagogue," do you think of God's people? These terms apply to God's people and to Satan's people.
 1. Satan has a _____. [Matthew 12:26](#). A kingdom has a ruler and subjects. All who are ruled by Satan are in his kingdom.
 2. Satan has a _____. [John 8:41-44](#). Satan is the father; those who follow Satan are his children, [1 John 3:10](#).
 3. Satan has a _____. [Revelation 2:9](#); [3:9](#). The synagogue was a place of religious gathering (or assembly). Figuratively, Satan has his own religious gathering, his own church! Any religion that is not of God is Satan's synagogue.
 4. Each term describes a relationship, either with Satan, or with those who follow him.

B. Note the terms used to describe those who follow Christ.

1. Christ has a _____ made up of _____, Colossians 1:13; Ephesians 2:19. They are “no more strangers and foreigners.” They are in Christ’s kingdom. This emphasizes the rule or reign of Christ, and that they are subject to Him.
2. God has a _____ (house or temple) made up of _____, 1 Peter 2:5; Ephesians 2:20-22. God is present with His people.
3. Christ has a _____ made up of _____, 1 Corinthians 12:12-14. This figure emphasizes our relationship with Christ as the head, and our relationships to one another in Christ. There is an emphasis on the unity of the parts of the body.
4. God has a _____ with _____, John 15:1-6. This emphasizes God’s ownership, our relationship to Christ, and that we draw life from Him. There is further emphasis on our need to abide in Him and bear fruit for His glory.
5. God has a _____ made up of _____, Romans 8:14-16. This not only emphasizes our relationship to the Father, but our relationship one to another as kindred spirits. We are followers (imitators) together of God, Ephesians 5:1.
6. These terms describe both our fellowship with God and with one another.

III. Fellowship with God Is an Individual Relationship

- A. In each of the above figures, the *units* that make up the whole are individuals (branches on the vines, citizens in the kingdom, etc.).
1. While God’s people may act collectively—as a local church—the basic unit that makes up what is called God’s people is the individual saint. “Church” is a collective noun; it is like “flock.”
 2. When we think “church,” we should think “people.” We should not think in terms of some vague organization that exists apart from people. We should think people—the people of God!
- B. The basis of the individual’s fellowship with God is *truth—the gospel*, 1 John 1:3-7.
1. When we follow Christ, we follow the truth, John 14:6. Jesus came to witness to the truth, John 18:37. The word of God given by Christ is the truth, John 17:17.
 2. The individual’s knowledge and response to truth is the key to fellowship with God, John 8:32.

IV. Our Relationship with God Takes Precedence over Our Relationship with Saints

- A. Our relationship with God is primary, while our relationship with other saints is secondary.
1. That does not denigrate our relationship to other Christians; it just means that one relationship takes priority over another.
 2. Note in 3 John 9-10, that a local church denied a relation that God maintained. In 1 Corinthians 5:1ff, a local church maintained a relation that God denied.
- B. A local church is subject to error and human judgment.
1. This does not mean the local church is unimportant or not part of God’s plan.
 2. It does mean that my relationship to the local church is secondary to my relationship to God.

I can’t be saved just because my name is on a local church roll. I’m not necessarily lost just because a local church removes my name from its roll. While my relationship to the local church is not the basis of my salvation, my relationship in the local church can cause me to lose my salvation if the group practices what is unauthorized, 2 John 9-11. The church can’t save me, but it can cause me to be lost!

The Authority of the Scriptures and the New Testament Church

The Church: Universal And Local

“Love the brotherhood,” says 1 Peter 2:17. What is the brotherhood? Are you part of a brotherhood? If you are a Christian, you are. “Brotherhood” is a term used only by the Apostle Peter to describe God’s people (1 Peter 2:17 and 1 Peter 5:9). The brotherhood consists of my brethren in Christ, whoever and wherever they might be. This refers to those who make up the church in a “universal” sense.

What is the “universal” church? How is it distinguished from the “local” church? Most of us know there are differences, but we may have difficulty identifying them. Most Bible students would identify Matthew 16:18 as referring to the universal church; it is clear that Jesus was not establishing a local congregation. But, beyond Matthew’s text, what else does the New Testament say of the universal church? What is it comprised of? Is it made up of all the congregations that belong to Christ? Or is it made up of individual saints?

When Peter speaks of a “brotherhood,” he shows us that the universal church is composed of brothers, not local congregations. It is a brotherhood, not a churchhood. The units of a brotherhood are “brothers,” individual saints who have a common fellowship with God; they are united by a common cause—service to Christ. Yet, they have no collective functions as a brotherhood, no earthly organization or oversight, and no common treasury. That is the nature of the universal church.

I. The Universal Church and the Local Church—A Contrast

- A. There is a difference in scope.
1. The universal church is unlimited in scope, encompassing all saints, Ephesians 5:23-25; Matthew 16:18.
 2. The local church is limited, including only those who have agreed to work together in a given place, Philippians 1:1.
- B. There is a difference in how one becomes a member.
1. The Lord _____ people to the universal church as they are being saved, Acts 2:47.
 2. We _____ the local church, Acts 9:26.
- C. There is a difference in how one enters (a similar point to the last.)
1. We enter the universal church by _____, 1 Corinthians 12:13.
 2. We enter the local church by _____, Acts 9:26-28.
- D. There is a difference as to membership or make-up.
1. The universal church contains _____ the saved, Galatians 3:26-27.
 2. A local church consists of specified saints, 1 Thessalonians 1:1; Colossians 1:2.
- E. There can be a difference as to spiritual standing before God.
1. Only the _____ are added to the universal church, Acts 2:47; 2 Timothy 2:19.
 2. The local church may contain some who “are not of us,” 1 John 2:19.
- F. There is a difference as to shepherds.
1. The universal church has but _____ shepherd, John 10:16.
 2. The local church has a _____ of lesser shepherds, Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2.
- G. There is a difference in respect to assembly.
1. The universal church is assembled (grouped) only by classification; through Christ we are gathered into one fold, John 10:16.
 2. A local church literally (physically) assembles as a group, 1 Corinthians 14:23a.

- H. There is a difference with respect to Satan's power and influence.
 1. Satan cannot prevail over the universal church; it is everlasting, Daniel 2:44-45.
 2. Satan can, and sometimes does, prevail over a local church, Revelation 2:5.
- I. In summary, we can say that there is a difference in relationship.
 1. The universal church is primarily a relationship of saints with God through Christ.
 2. The local church is primarily a relationship of saints with other saints working together for God.

II. The Local Church: Saints Acting Collectively to Do the Work Given Them by God.

- A. Notice the local church at Philippi, Philippians 1:1; 4:15.
 1. When the text speaks of "saints at Philippi," it *locates*, *limits* and *defines*. It defines a local church by geographical designation; a local church always has geographical limitation. For example, it would be impractical to have a "Texas Church of Christ" as a local church. The church at Philippi encompassed only those saints in that church in that place; it included no other saints. These saints agreed to work together as a unit. They joined together to accomplish the work God intended. It included no other saints. These saints agreed to work together as a unit. They joined together to accomplish the work God wants saints to do together. This involves mutual consent. A local church doesn't include any saint who has not entered into an agreement to work with that church. Example: A saint moves to your town, but identifies with no congregation. Of which local church is he a member? Explain.
 2. The text speaks of "bishops and deacons." Because saints have agreed together, eventually (when men are qualified) the local church (saints who have agreed together) will appoint officers to serve the church. They agree as a collectivity to work under the direction and guidance of these men. When brethren come into agreement with one another to work together and be under common oversight, they become accountable to one another and responsible for one another with respect to instruction, edification, and discipline, 1 Thessalonians 5:11-14. Saints have a sense of obligation and duty to one another; that is the nature of a local church when brethren agree to work together.
 3. Philippians 4:15 says, "...the church communicated." Here, action is attributed to a single entity. Even though the local church is made up of many members, it acts as one. The local church is the God-ordained entity by which Christians do the work God says they are to engage in as a group.
- B. Collective action necessitates four things relative to the local church.
 1. **There must be a plurality (the group) of saints.** One Christian is not a local church. Even the action of a few or several may not be the local church. Note Matthew 18:15-18. Note that there are at least three steps in this text.
 - a. At what point was the local church involved? _____.
 - b. Does the independent action of one saint constitute the church acting? _____.
 2. **There must be an agreement to act as one.** That is the nature of collective action, whether a church, family, nation, etc. Every local church has its beginning by saints mutually consenting to work together.
 3. **There must be acceptance of common oversight for direction and guidance.** When a congregation is first established, this usually takes the form of men meeting to decide the church's business. In process of time, the Lord intends for qualified bishops to be appointed to oversee the flock. In either case, there must be a mutual agreement on common oversight.
 4. **There must be a pooling of means and abilities.** This involves not only a collection (1 Corinthians 16:1-2) by which the local church may operate, but also a combining of their non-material resources so they may work together.

To summarize, a local church involves a plurality of saints who agree to act as one under a common oversight and with a common treasury to do the work God intends them to do together as a body. Authority for a local church is found in direct statements, examples and implication. While the local church involves an agreement among men, it is authorized by God. It is God's intention that each saint associate himself with a local church, being accountable to it and for it.



LESSON
10

The Authority of the Scriptures and the New Testament Church

The Local Church as an Entity

False teachers sometimes argue that there is no such thing as “church” in the Bible. They argue that our English word “church” is from the Greek word *kyriakon*, meaning the Lord’s house or Lord’s domain. They further argue that the correct word in Greek is *ekklesia*. Their whole argument is an attempt to mislead people “See, there is no church in the Bible—it’s *ekklesia*, not *church*.” Without looking ahead, how would you answer this?

The logical end of this absurdity is that we could not use any words but the original Greek words to describe Bible things. A parallel argument would be to say “There is no God in the Bible.” Why not? Well, because “the word in Greek is *theos*, not *god*.” Since these false teachers do not oppose the existence of God, they do not reason that way. But they do oppose the existence of the local church. They often tell people that they do not have to be part of the local church, and do not have to be under elders in a local church, and do not have to contribute to a church treasury.

Teachers of error sometimes make claims that the New Testament does not authorize the existence of an entity called the local church. While we quickly reject their claims and brand them as foolish, can we actually identify such an entity in the New Testament as the local church? An entity is “that which has reality and distinctness of being; existence,” (Webster). Being an entity does not make “church” something apart from the saints. However, many people have such a misconception—that the church is one thing, the people are another. They view the church as an institution or organization that exists separate from the people. Too many people think the local church is something they attend, rather than something they are part of. Correctly understood, in the New Testament, the saints (the people) functioning collectively are treated as an entity. That entity is the local church. The local church is people. Local saints, as a collectivity, are treated as a functional unit. They constitute an entity. The local church is treated as an entity.

I. With Respect to the Terms Used to Describe It

- A. The terms used to describe the local church are collective nouns. A collective noun treats a plurality of persons—grouped together—as one. “Team” is but one example of a collective noun.
- B. The word *ekklesia* (from which “church” is translated) is a collective noun. When the Bible speaks of “the church of God which is at Corinth,” 1 Corinthians 1:2, it is speaking of a group—a collectivity—of saints in that place. The book of Galatians was addressed to several local churches, Galatians 1:1-2. Each congregation in Galatia constituted a separate functioning body.
- C. “Flock” is a collective noun used to describe a local church, 1 Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28. There are other collective nouns that are used to describe the local church, but these few demonstrate that local saints are treated as a unit—as a collectivity.

II. With Respect to the Various Servants It Has

- A. When a church is spoken of as having overseers, the language shows it is a functioning unit, 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 5:12-13.
- B. Local churches in the New Testament had special servants.
 - 1. Identify the special servants (offices) found in Philippians 1:1; Acts 6:1-6.
 - 2. See also Romans 16:1-2. This woman is spoken of as a _____.

Are we surprised that a church used a woman as a special servant? Why, or why not?

- C. Local churches had messengers, Philippians 2:25; 1 Corinthians 16:3. The language used in these cases authorizes saints to band together as a group and to function as one, choosing various servants to act at the direction of the group.

III. With Respect to Monetary Matters

- A. A local church may pay wages, 2 Corinthians 11:8. The group functioned as one, pooling their money and supporting Paul.
- B. The fact that a local church has dealings with money (receiving and disbursing), shows a local church may have a treasury. Saints in the New Testament acted as one through a common treasury, Acts 4:32-37. Some significant points about giving:
 - 1. The money was “laid at the _____.” Yet Peter said, “Silver and gold have I none,” Acts 3:6. The money did not belong to the _____, but to the group. It was to be used only for those purposes that were consistent with the group’s function.
 - 2. Once the money was given, it was no longer in the _____ of the giver, Acts 5:1-4.
 - 3. A church, *from its treasury*, may send funds to a _____, Philippians 4:15.
 - 4. A church was commanded to assemble a _____, 1 Corinthians 16:1; the same local church controlled those funds, 1 Corinthians 16:3. It has been argued, “This giving was for a special purpose.” *All giving is for a special purpose!* The work assigned by God to the local church regulates the purpose for our giving!
- C. The local church sends as a unit, Philippians 4:15-16.
- D. The local church receives as a unit, Acts 11:29-30. Money was sent to the elders because they would oversee distribution of the funds. The elders received the funds for the church.

IV. With Respect to Hearing and Speaking

- A. A local church can _____, Acts 11:22. Again, note that the group is spoken of as one.
- B. A local church can _____, Matthew 18:15-17. One, two, or three are not the church. The church is the group—the collectivity.

V. With Respect to Discipline

- A. The church acts as one when saints need _____, 1 Corinthians 5:4-5, 12.
- B. A local church has standards set by God; when saints violate those standards, the church is under obligation to God to act, 1 Corinthians 5:1-2. When a church does not act in such a case, then guilt accrues to the group as a whole, 2 Corinthians 2:9.

VI. With Respect to Assembling

- A. The local church exists apart from an actual or literal assembling together, because the agreement to work together still exists, Acts 5:11; 12:5. Illustration: The U.S. Congress still exists even when they are not in an actual meeting. The local church is something we are part of, not just something we attend. Otherwise, it would exist only when we are assembled together.
- B. The local church is also an entity when literally assembled, 1 Corinthians 14:23.

VII. With Respect to Christ’s Presence

- A. A local church can have its place in Christ’s presence _____, Revelation 2:4-5.
- B. A local church can so abandon God’s ways to the extent that Christ no longer recognizes them. We must be militant to maintain the New Testament pattern. A local church must work within the standards given by _____, 2 John 9-11.

These points authorize the existence of the local church and establish it as an entity. “Radicalism” and “individualism” oppose God’s way. Let us support God’s way!

The Authority of the Scriptures and the New Testament Church

Local Churches: Independent and Autonomous

Local churches are “independent” and “autonomous.” What does that mean? It certainly means there are no denominational headquarters or central offices. Is that all it means? A chief distinction of local churches of Christ from denominations is independence.

Independent means “not dependent; not subject to the control of others; not subordinate;” *autonomous* means “self-ruled; independent in government,” (Webster). These words are nearly synonymous. While these words aren’t in the Bible, they help us communicate what we mean when we speak of the local church. So, what do we mean when we say churches are autonomous and independent? We don’t mean they are independent of God, or that self-rule is without God’s law. We only mean that a church is independent of outside rule by man. The question is, what does the Bible teach concerning autonomy and independence?

I. The Scope of the Activities of a Local Church Teaches Autonomy

A. Oversight of collective activity of a church is on a local scale. God’s pattern is “**elders** in every church,” Acts 14:23, with no human oversight beyond the local church. This is what is meant by *independent* and *autonomous*.

Elders are limited in oversight to the work of “the **flock** of God **among** you,” 1 Peter 5:1-3. They cannot violate the autonomy of another church.

B. The treasury for collective activity is also on a local scale. It is accumulated and controlled locally, 1 Corinthians 16:3. Scripture authorizes no organization or oversight beyond the local church in collecting and controlling its funds.

II. No Authority Exists for Pooling Funds from Many Churches into One Treasury

A. Such a system requires either:

1. An organization larger than a local church to oversee the funds.
2. A congregation taking on a larger work than God gave it. The local church would have to oversee funds and activities of a plurality of churches.
3. God authorizes neither.

B. We do find authority for many churches sending “alms” to a *dependent* church. But, in such cases, neither of the above conditions existed. Cases in Scripture, where one church sent money to another, involved needy saints, cases where the local church could not meet their needs. Other local churches sent “alms” (Acts 24:17) to supply their condition of “want.” Notice several things about the following case found in the Scriptures.

1. The local church at Corinth planned to help the poor saints in Jerusalem, 1 Corinthians 16:1ff. Churches of Macedonia had already made up their collection for these poor saints, 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. The church at Corinth needed to follow through on the promises it had made earlier, 2 Corinthians 8:11; 9:1-5. This giving was to create an “equality,” 2 Corinthians 8:13-14. The brethren at Corinth had “abundance,” whereas the brethren at Jerusalem were in “want.” The brethren (the church) at Jerusalem were *dependent* upon other brethren (in other churches) to make up their want.
2. *While independence in government is absolute, independence with respect to want is not.* Brethren were not independent one of another to where they couldn’t help needy saints in another congregation. Saints at Corinth had abundance; the material supplies of these brethren exceeded their basic needs. But, at Jerusalem, the material supplies of the saints left them in “want.” Jerusalem saints faced starvation. God aided them through local churches at Corinth, Macedonia, etc.

3. Aid sent to saints created “equality.” This doesn’t mean everybody had the same number of apples. It meant that no one would be in “want” any longer. Satisfying the “want” is what Paul means in 2 Corinthians 8:13-14 by “equality.”
 4. Three conditions are found with respect to needs.
 - a. A church may have abundance (supplies exceed needs).
 - b. A church may have sufficiency (needs and supplies equal).
 - c. A church may be in want (need exceeds supplies). The church in “want” is dependent upon churches with abundance to make up their deficiency. It is only dependent in the sense that it can’t meet the benevolent needs of its members. Thus, another church may come to its aid.
- C. Notice what does not happen in such cases.
1. A church in need does not surrender oversight, Acts 11:29-30. It is wrong for _____ to take charge of another church.
 2. A church in need does not give up control of its _____, Acts 11:29-30. The money was placed under the elders of the receiving church. The giving church no longer has oversight of the funds. It has completed its obligation and work.
 3. No sponsoring church controlled money sent to a church in want, 1 Corinthians 16:3. The funds were sent by the hands of a _____. Centralized control of funds is not authorized.
 4. No “special organization” was needed to assist the saints, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.
- D. We conclude that when such assistance is given, the principles of church independence and autonomy—as *defined and described in the word of God*—are not violated. We also conclude that pooling of funds from many churches into one church treasury—collective action of many churches under the oversight of one—is unauthorized.

III. The Sponsoring Church System Is Wrong and Violates Principles of Independence

- A. It has one eldership planning work for other flocks. The gospel limits the _____ of elders, 1 Peter 5:2.
- B. It has supporting churches sending “their part,” not alms to supply want. Churches that claim to be “sponsoring churches” create large works and then tell other churches they ought to give “give their part.” Churches that create such works are *not in want*.
- C. It has churches yielding elements of _____ to the sponsoring church.
 1. Collective action always demands that some elements of independence be given up to work as a team. That is true of individuals; it is true of churches. When an individual Christian becomes part of a collectivity (a local church), he gives up some elements of independence:
 - a. Function (he no longer works merely as an individual, he functions as part of a team).
 - b. Oversight (he no longer makes all decisions on his own; he acts at the direction and oversight of others).
 - c. Funds (he no longer controls all his funds by himself; he surrenders funds to the group; the money now belongs to the group and supports the group’s function). God intended for saints to cooperate in such a collective. He did not intend that for churches.
 2. When local churches form a collectivity, they surrender a degree of function, oversight and funds to the collectivity. They give up elements of independence in order to work as a team.
 - a. Sponsoring churches promote a team concept of churches; it creates a collectivity where God has created none. (What is such a group called?)
 - b. Such a collectivity perverts God’s purpose for which He instituted congregational government. The independence and autonomy of the local church in doing its own work and directing its own affairs is a fundamental principle in God’s arrangement.
- D. It promotes a “churchhood” concept. It sees the universal church as made up of local churches rather than of individual saints.

There are but two uses of “church” in the Bible—universal (all saints) and local (saints in a given locale who function as one.) By what Biblical use of “church” can many churches function as one? Local churches must zealously guard their autonomy, just as they guard other elements of truth, Jude 3.



LESSON
12

The Authority of the Scriptures and the New Testament Church

The Local Church and the Christian

What distinction is there between the function of an individual Christian and the function of a local church? Some say there is none. Some argue that since the church is made up of individuals, that whatever individuals do, that constitutes the church doing the thing.

This view is not well thought out and leads to absurd conclusions. A brief examination of its consequences will show it to be faulty.

When individual saints go into business, has the local church gone into business? ____.

When a man at Corinth sinned (1 Corinthians 5:1ff), did the local church commit adultery? _____.

When a Christian man and Christian woman marry, did the local church marry? _____.

Many absurdities result from this faulty doctrine! But can we identify the distinctions between the local church and the individual?

I. The Local Church and the Christian Contrasted in Four Specific Areas

A. The domestic realm.

1. Individuals enter into marriage, bear and train children, and care for the aged, 1 Corinthians 7:2; Ephesians 6:1-4; 1 Timothy 5:8. These are all good works for the individual and are regulated by instructions in the New Testament.
2. But, the local church has a different set of instructions in this realm, 1 Timothy 5:16. A distinction exists between individual saints and the collectivity of saints (the church). In this text, what is a particular individual instructed to do that the local church is not supposed to do?

B. The economic realm.

1. It is individuals who go into business, work and make a _____, James 4:13; Ephesians 4:28. God instructs the individual in this.
2. But, a local church has different instructions. How is a local church to obtain money to do its work?
_____. See 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.

C. The social realm.

1. Individuals have feasts, banquets and parties, Luke 15:23; 1 Corinthians 10:27. These are good works for the individual and are regulated in the New Testament. Feasts are not wrong, per se, as long as God is glorified, 1 Corinthians 10:31.
2. But, the local church has different rules. The social realm is to be kept apart from the church, 1 Corinthians 11:22, 34. When the Corinthians abused the Lord's Supper, what was Paul's solution?

D. The spiritual realm.

1. While the church has responsibilities in the spiritual realm, many instructions and regulations are given to individuals—especially with regard to correcting the erring brother, Galatians 6:1-2; Matthew 18:15-16.
2. But, individuals have a work to do before the church enters into the picture, Matthew 18:17. Can you see the distinction? If what the individual does constitutes the church acting, then the church is acting all along in this case!

II. What Is the Work of the Local Church?

A. The work of the local church is what the saints do collectively, acting as one, under their common oversight and out of their common treasury. Below is a list of Scriptures that shows what the local church did *within* the local congregation. This was work done “at home.” Read the verses and identify the actions of the local church in each case.

1. Read Acts 2:42; 20:7. _____
2. Read 1 Corinthians 14:26. _____
3. Read 1 Corinthians 14:23-25. _____
4. Read 1 Corinthians 5:4-5. _____
5. Read Philippians 1:1. _____
6. Read Ephesians 4:11-12. _____
7. Read 2 Corinthians 11:8. _____
8. Read Acts 4:34-37. _____

B. What they did beyond the local congregation. This was work done “abroad.” Read the verses and identify the actions of the local church in each case.

1. Philippians 4:15. _____
2. 2 Corinthians 8:1ff. _____

Both at home and abroad they taught. They taught by means of teachers. The local church upholds the truth, 1 Timothy 3:15.

C. Can the church teach what it cannot practice? Some say that whatever the church can teach, it can do—or vice-versa. It can and does teach what it cannot practice.

1. It teaches work ethics, Ephesians 4:28. While it teaches work ethics, it is not a job training school or business college; neither is it a business.
2. It teaches civil ethics, Romans 13:1-7. While it teaches men to be good citizens, the church is not a political activist group, nor does it seek to run a government. Some individual saints in the first century were active in civil government, Romans 16:23.
3. It teaches social ethics, Ephesians 5:22-33. While it teaches people about family responsibilities, it is neither a home nor a social club with respect to its practice.
4. How we conduct ourselves in each of these areas—with respect to occupational, civil and social duties—impacts our relationship to God. God has appointed the church to teach in these areas because the church is a spiritual institution. Ultimately, each of these things is a spiritual issue, because every moral and ethical choice has spiritual implications. It is an issue of whether we are doing the will of God or not. The local church is the divinely appointed means by which saints work and worship together, assisting one another to live closer to God and preparing souls for heaven.

III. Some Final Thoughts about the Local Church

- A. It is not the standard of truth. God’s word is the truth, John 17:17.
- B. It is not the measure of acceptance (being “right with God”), 2 Corinthians 10:12-13.
- C. It cannot take the place of individual obligations to God, 2 Corinthians 12:21.
- D. It does not validate the work and worship of the individual, 1 Corinthians 11:27-29.

God brought into being His people, the one body of Jews and Gentiles who trust in Him, as He purchased the “church” with Christ’s blood. This church exists, regardless of what any man or group of men may do, according to His “eternal purpose.” God gave His saints instructions and examples as to how to function, including how to function in “team” activity (the local church).

But, it is man, following God’s instructions, who brings into being a working together relationship—the local church. From God’s side, the local church is perfect (the instructions given are flawless); from our side, the local church is subject to human error in judgment and practice. Knowing that, we must forever be diligent in seeking to learn and do God’s will. On the last day we will give account for our actions.

