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A Study Of  
**Authority**  
In  
**Religion**



Gene Taylor

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# Preface

Since Jesus is the author of eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:8-9) and possesses all authority (Matthew 28:18), one must look to Him and His gospel for all that is done when pursuing salvation. If a person is going to live a life which glorifies God and that will grant him salvation at the day of judgment, it is essential for him to understand the authority of Christ, its nature and how it is expressed. Yet, authority in religion is one of the most neglected and misunderstood studies, even among those who claim to be children of God.

Every digression from Truth and every sin that has ever been committed has been because of a misunderstanding of and/or a disregard for the authority of Scriptures. Nearly all of the religious world around us has neither appreciation for nor understanding of authority and its concepts. If we want to make sure we do not digress and fall prey to the deceitfulness of sin as they have, we must thoroughly understand how authority is expressed and established.

The lessons in this study have been prepared to help each one who studies them to understand how the Bible teaches and how authority is expressed and determined. While not exhaustive, they do provide a good summary of the basic principles of authority every person needs to know. They are in outline form so that both teacher and student will not be chained to the lesson but have the flexibility and freedom to explore and incorporate other sources of material.

These lessons have been taught on a number of occasions in several local churches. They have been used in middle school, high school, college age, young adult, and adult classes. They have also been used in home studies on a one-to-one basis.

Remember, neither this nor any other study has any authority inherent within it. The New Testament Scriptures, God speaking to us through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2), are our only source of authority today. This study, as any other, is just a guide to help you explore and understand the authority of Scripture.

Gene Taylor  
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# Table of Contents

Preface .....	1
Table of Contents .....	2
Lesson One: <b>Authority Defined</b> .....	3
Lesson Two: <b>The Need for Authority</b> .....	5
Lesson Three: <b>The Determination of Authority in the Spiritual Realm</b> .....	7
Lesson Four: <b>The Ultimate Source of Authority: God</b> .....	9
Lesson Five: <b>God’s Authority Expressed to Man</b> .....	12
Lesson Six: <b>The Basis of Authority</b> .....	14
Lesson Seven: <b>A Type of Authority: Generic</b> .....	17
Lesson Eight: <b>A Type of Authority: Specific</b> .....	19
Lesson Nine: <b>Improper Attitudes Toward Authority - I</b> .....	21
Lesson Ten: <b>Improper Attitudes Toward Authority - II</b> .....	24
Lesson Eleven: <b>The Concept of Pattern</b> .....	26
Lesson Twelve: <b>The Organization and Worship of the Church</b> .....	29
Lesson Thirteen: <b>The Work of the Church</b> .....	32

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# Lesson One: Authority Defined

## I. As Used In Society

- A. "The power to influence or command thought, opinion or behavior." (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 59)
- B. "Power based on right." (*Webster's New World Thesaurus*, p. 38)
  1. Power: "Possession of control, authority, or influence over others." (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 666)
  2. Right: "The power or privilege to which one is justly entitled." (*Ibid.*, 741)
- C. Summarized: The legal or rightful power to act, to command, to judge.
  1. It involves power both to command and enforce obedience.
  2. It involves a standard which must be adhered to by those under that authority.

## II. As Used In Scripture

- A. *Exousia* (Used 108 times in the New Testament).
  1. Matthew 21:23. "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?'"
    - a. "The power of authority (influence) and of right." (Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 225)
    - b. "From the meaning of leave or permission, or liberty of doing as one pleases, it passed to that of the ability or strength with which one is endued, then to that of the power of authority, the right to exercise power." (W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p.91)
  2. Matthew 28:18. "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'"
    - a. "The power of rule or government (the power of him whose will and commands must be submitted to by others and obeyed)." (Thayer, 225)
    - b. "...the power of rule or government, the power of one whose will and commands must be obeyed by others." (Vine, 91)
    - c. "Freedom of choice, right, authority, ruling power, a bearer of authority." (*New Testament Dictionary of New Testament Theology*)
- B. *Dunastes*.
  1. Acts 8:27. "So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship."
  2. "Akin to *Dunamis*, power, Eng., dynasty, signifies a potentate, a high officer." (Vine, 91)
  3. See also Luke 1:52 and 1 Timothy 6:15.
- C. *Epitage*.
  1. "An injunction...is once rendered 'authority' Tit. 2:15 (R.V., marg., 'commandment')." (Vine, 91)
  2. The corresponding verb (*epitasso*) means "to command." "Signifies to appoint over, put in charge; then, to put upon one as a duty, to enjoin, Mark 1:27; 6:27,39; 9:25; Luke 4:36; 8:25,31; Acts 23:2; Philm. 8:11." (Vine, 211)

D. *Huperdoche*.

1. 1 Timothy 2:2. "...for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."
2. "...pre-eminence, superiority, excellency." (Vine, 91)

E. *Onama*.

1. Colossians 3:17. "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."
2. "In recognition of the authority of..." (Vine, 781-782)
3. "Everything which the name covers, everything the thought or feeling of which is roused in the mind by mentioning, hearing, remembering the name, i.e., for one's rank, authority, interests, pleasure, command, excellences, deeds, etc..." (Thayer, 447-448)

## Discussion Questions

1. Define the following terms.
  - a. Power.
  - b. Right.
2. Summarize, in your own words, what authority means to you.
3. What determines who has authority:
  - a. In society?
  - b. In the spiritual realm?
4. What has "right" to do with authority?
5. Define "standard." How does it apply to authority?
6. What is the role of law in respect to authority?
7. Why does the power of authority include the right to judge?
8. Since it is said that Jesus has "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18), what does that give Him the right to do?

# Lesson Two: The Need for Authority

## I. The Need For Authority In Society

- A. There is a definite need for authority in civil and social matters.
- B. The consequences of a lack of authority are serious. Without authority:
  - 1. Chaos and anarchy would abound.
  - 2. Evil would prevail.
  - 3. Nothing worthwhile would be accomplished.
  - 4. Society, as we know it, would break down.
    - a. There would be either isolation or constant battle.
    - b. No sense of responsibility could exist on any level or in any area.

## II. The Need For Authority In The Spiritual Realm

- A. The nature of man demands it.
  - 1. Man was created as a free moral agent capable of determining good from evil and of choosing between the two.
  - 2. While man has the above capacity within him, the authority for him to make the distinction between good and evil is from without.
    - a. It is not in man "to direct his own steps." (Jeremiah 10:23)
    - b. "There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death." (Proverbs 4:12)
    - c. The world through its wisdom alone cannot know God. (1 Corinthians 1:21)
  - 3. The absence of universal conformity to a single concept of morality and religious practice indicates that the knowledge of right and wrong does not inhere within him. It must come from outside of him.
- B. The history of man when he is left to the vanity of his own reason displays his desperate need for divine authority.
  - 1. Romans 1:21-28: Without God man became foolish (v. 22), unclean (v. 24), vile in his passions (v. 26) and debased in his mind (v. 28).
  - 2. 1 Corinthians 1:18-21: The "wisdom" of man is foolishness in comparison to the wisdom of God.
  - 3. Ephesians 4:17-19: The world apart from God lives in futility with their understanding darkened because of their ignorance.
- C. Most of the serious consequences which exist when there is a lack of authority in society would likewise occur if there were no authority in the spiritual realm.
  - 1. Without authority, religion would be completely meaningless.
  - 2. The ultimate end of a lack of authority in the spiritual realm would be moral and spiritual bankruptcy.

## III. The Need To Respect Authority

- A. Respect for authority is the **exact** equivalent of respect for God.
  - 1. One cannot respect God and despise authority.
  - 2. Conversely, one cannot truly respect authority without believing in God.

- B. The effects of respecting authority include the following:
1. All laws immediately become important.
  2. Obedience becomes a way of life.
  3. Character and self-discipline are produced.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why is there a need for civil governments?
2. Define chaos. What has it to do with authority or the lack of it?
3. Why could nothing worthwhile be accomplished without authority in the social realm?
4. Why would lack of authority in society produce either isolation or constant battle? Produce evidence to show that such would be the case.
5. What has the nature of man to do with the need for authority in the spiritual realm?
6. Explain Jeremiah 10:23.
7. Why does the absence of universal conformity to a single concept of morality and religious practice demonstrate the need for divine authority?
8. Why is all religion meaningless without authority?
9. Why are respect for authority and respect for God equivalent?
10. Why does respect for authority develop character and discipline?

# Lesson Three: Authority in the Spiritual Realm - Subjective or Objective?

## I. Subjective Or Objective: The Only Alternatives

- A. Of necessity, authority must be determined either subjectively (internally, within man) or objectively (externally, outside of man).
- B. Jesus Himself views the above choices as the only possibilities to determine authority. Consider His teaching in Matthew 21:23-27.
  - 1. Jesus asked the Jews if the baptism of John had its source with heaven or men.
  - 2. One of those alternatives had to be the correct answer.
  - 3. If there had been other alternatives available, do you not think that those embarrassed Jews would have quickly forwarded one of them?

## II. Authority In The Spiritual Realm Is Not Subjective

- A. Authority in the spiritual realm is not subjective because man has neither the ability nor the right inherent within him to be his own source of authority.
  - 1. It is not in man to direct his own steps. (Jeremiah 10:23)
  - 2. "There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death." (Prov. 14:12)
  - 3. The apostle Paul, while still Saul of Tarsus, used his conscience as his guide and it caused him to do many "contrary (defiant) things." (Acts 26:9; 23:1)
  - 4. In the days of the judges of Israel much evil abounded because "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (Judges 17:6)
- B. Despite what Scripture has said, mankind, over the ages, has sought to be his own authority and establish his own standards in the spiritual realm. The "standards" of men include:
  - 1. His own thoughts or "think so's." (Isaiah 55:8-9)
  - 2. His own feelings. (Jeremiah 17:9)
  - 3. His own reasonings. (Proverbs 14:12)
  - 4. His own traditions. (Matthew 15:13)
  - 5. His own wisdom. (1 Corinthians 1:21; 2:1-13).
  - 6. The majority. (Exodus 23:2; Matt. 7:13-14)
  - 7. Pleasure. (Galatians 1:10-11)
  - 8. Opinions of family, ancestors. (Matt. 10:37-39)
  - 9. Conscience. (Acts 23:1; 22:4-5)
  - 10. Dreams and visions. (Gal. 1:6-9)
  - 11. Creeds and publications of men. (2 John 9-11)
  - 12. A partial understanding of Truth. (Acts 20:26-27)
- C. All of the standards established in religion by men are false standards.
  - 1. Since the wisdom of men is not from above, it is "earthly, sensual, demonic." (James 3:15)
  - 2. To teach as doctrine those commandments which have their origin with man is condemned because they make worship "vain." (Matt. 15:7-9)
  - 3. The wisdom of the world, that which originates with man, is foolishness in comparison to the wisdom of God. (1 Cor. 1:18-26)



### III. Authority In The Spiritual Realm Is Objective

- A. The only possible alternative to subjective authority is that authority is objectively determined.
- B. Authority in the spiritual realm must come from outside of the mind of man.
  - 1. It must come from a higher source which is not human but divine.
  - 2. It must come from a supernatural being—God.

## Discussion Questions

1. Define “subjective” in relation to authority.
2. Why is it impossible for authority in the spiritual realm to be subjective?
3. What are some consequences of following the popular philosophy of the period of the Judges in Israel that “each one does what is right in his own eyes?” (Judges 17:6; 21:25)
4. What are some of the short-comings of the following "standards" which men have attempted to establish in the spiritual realm?
  - a. Own thoughts.
  - b. Own feelings.
  - c. The majority.
  - d. Pleasure.
  - e. Opinions of family.
  - f. Conscience.
  - g. Creeds.
5. Why does the inclusion of the commandments of men make worship vain? (Matthew 15:7)
6. Why are all standards which men propose in the spiritual realm “false standards?”
7. Explain Proverbs 14:12 in relation to authority.
8. Define “objective” in relation to authority.
9. Why is it that authority in the spiritual realm must be objective? (Why is it the only alternative to subjective authority?)
10. Briefly state what you believe to be the main point of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 21:23-27?

# Lesson Four: The Ultimate Source of Authority - God

## I. The Necessity Of An Ultimate Authority

- A. There must be an ultimate, final authority.
  - 1. There has to exist a person or place beyond which there can be no higher source.
  - 2. There has to be a person or place in whom resides inherent authority.
- B. That ultimate authority is the source of all authority.

## II. The Criteria For The Ultimate Authority

- A. Bernard Ramm, in *Pattern of Authority*, suggests two sources of authority.
  - 1. Ramm's two suggested sources of authority are:
    - a. Superior position.
    - b. Truth.
  - 2. Ramm refers to them as "Imperial" and "Veracious" authority.
    - a. Imperial: a position of absolute supremacy.
    - b. Veracious: truth so pure as to be the eternal source of truth.
- B. These criteria applied to God: "...He alone is self-existent and supreme, who is what He is of His own right. If God exists, He is the ultimate criterion and power of truth and reality. All truth inheres in Him and issues from Him. The problem of authority thus becomes one with the proof and definition of God" (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. I, p. 334).

## III. The Ultimate Authority: God

- A. That God is the ultimate authority is seen in His divine being.
  - 1. He has inherent authority because He is God. (1 Corinthians 15:24-28)
  - 2. The divine names for God indicate His primary authority. (Psalm 96:8)
    - a. El Elyon: God most high. (Genesis 4:18)
    - b. El Shaddai: God Almighty. (Exodus 6:3)
    - c. Yahweh (Jehovah): His "memorial name." (Hosea 12:5-6)
      - 1) "Jehovah:" "Self-Existent or Eternal." (*Strong's Concordance Hebrew-Chaldee Dictionary*, p. 47)
      - 2) This name is related to the designation "I AM." (Ex. 3:14)
      - 3) It is significant that Jesus said of Himself, "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58), thus showing His divinity, His right to command.
- B. The authority of God is rooted in His inherent nature and character. Consider His:
  - 1. Eternal self-existence. (Deuteronomy 33:27)
  - 2. Omniscience: limitless wisdom and knowledge. (1 Samuel 2:3; 1 John 3:20)
  - 3. Omnipotence: matchless power and strength. (Revelation 19:6; Hebrews 11:3)
  - 4. Perfect holiness and righteousness. (1 Peter 1:16; Titus 1:2)
- C. God is the ultimate authority by reason of the fact that He is both creator and sustainer of the entire universe.
  - 1. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)
  - 2. God made the world and everything in it. (Acts 17:24-29)
  - 3. All things were created by Him and for Him and by Him all things consist. (Colossians 1:16-17)

#### **IV. Some Consequences Of God As Ultimate Authority**

- A. God alone has the inherent right to command.
- B. The only kind of authority man has is delegated authority.
  - 1. No human has either right or power to assume to be on an equality with God. (Isaiah 55:8-9)
  - 2. Delegated authority is restricted by stipulated purpose or intent.
- C. Earthly governments receive their right to make and enforce civil law from God. (Romans 13:1)
- D. The right to enact religious law does not reside in man.
  - 1. It never has been, nor will it ever be, within man's authority to formulate, devise, or originate spiritual law.
  - 2. Man cannot set forth his own ideas as the standard for others to follow.
  - 3. The apostles were never anything more than inspired messengers sent to deliver a divine message.
    - a. What they commanded as doctrine had already been bound in heaven. (Matt. 16:19; 18:18)
    - b. For them to command or teach anything other than that which heaven had revealed to them would cause them to be accursed. (Galatians 1:6-9)

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Why must there be some sort of ultimate authority?
  
2. Why does ultimate authority demand the following?
  - a. Absolute supremacy.
  - b. Pure truth.
  
3. Apply the two criteria found in the previous question to Jehovah, the God revealed in Scripture.
  
4. What bearing does divinity have on the ultimate authority of God?
  
5. What did God mean when He referred to Himself as "I AM?" What does such a designation reveal?
  
6. Why is it necessary for an ultimate authority to be:
  - a. Self-existent?
  - b. Eternal?
  - c. Omniscient (all-knowing)?
  - d. Omnipotent (all-powerful)?

7. Why would an ultimate authority have to be holy, pure, and just? What would be some consequences if he did not possess those attributes?
8. Why does the role of creator lend itself to the ultimate authority of God?
9. Define "delegated." Why is it the only type of authority man can possess?
10. Realizing that the apostles had no authority to originate spiritual law, what did Jesus mean when He said He was giving "the keys of the kingdom" to them? (Matt. 16:19; 18:18)

# Lesson Five: God's Authority Expressed to Man

## **I. God's Will Has Always Been Made Known Through His Speaking—His Word**

- A. His truth is a manifestation of His moral character.
  - 1. His law, statutes, commandments, etc., are holy because He is holy. (1 Peter 1:15-16)
  - 2. His law, statutes, commandments, etc., are true because He is truth. (John 17:17; Hebrews 6:18)
- B. He spoke through prophets in previous dispensations.
  - 1. Holy men of God were moved by the Holy Spirit to speak the things of God. (2 Peter 1:20-21)
  - 2. God, in times past, spoke to the fathers through the prophets. (Heb. 1:1)
    - a. God spoke for years through prophets. (Nehemiah 9:30)
    - b. Isaiah, a prophet, spoke for God. (Isaiah 48:16)
  - 3. The Spirit of the Lord spoke through David. (2 Samuel 23:2)
  - 4. God testified of Jesus Christ before His coming to the earth through the prophets. (1 Pet. 1:10-11)

## **II. In This Present Age God Speaks Exclusively Through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2)**

- A. The Father has delegated all authority to the Son. (Matt. 28:18; Ephesians 1:22-23)
- B. Jesus is that "prophet" of whom Moses spoke would be "like unto" him. (Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:22)
- C. Jesus repeatedly stated that God had "sent" Him into the world. (John 8:16,18,26,29,42; 12:44,45,49; 13:1-3)
- D. The apostles, over and over, declared the Lordship of Jesus. (Acts 2:36; 3:26; 10:36; Eph. 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18; 2:9-10)
- E. Since Jesus is God's only spokesman today and since He possesses all authority, all teaching must be "of Christ" if it is to have proper authority behind it. (2 John 9-11; 1 Timothy 6:3-5)

## **III. Jesus, Using The Holy Spirit To Guide Them, Authorized His Apostles To Use His Authority**

- A. He promised them they would receive *dunamis*, power. (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8)
- B. They were to be given *exousia*, authority. (2 Corinthians 10:8; 13:10)
- C. The Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus, endowed the apostles with their power and authority. (John 14:26; 16:7-13)
  - 1. This work began on the day of Pentecost recorded in the second chapter of the book of Acts.
  - 2. Later, when they wrote, the words were given to them by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:9-13; Galatians 1:11-12)

## Discussion Questions

- 1. Why is the word of God authoritative?

2. How has the will of God always been made known?
3. How is God's will a manifestation of His character?
4. How did God express His authority to man in previous dispensations?
5. How does God speak to man today? Is there any other way that God makes His will known to man? Explain your answer.
6. How can Jesus be compared to Moses as a "prophet?"
7. Why, do you believe, did the apostles repeatedly emphasize the Lordship of Jesus?
8. Why must all religious teachings today be "of Christ?"
9. What kind of authority did the apostles possess? Why did they have that authority? Why are their writings authoritative?
10. How does 1 Corinthians 14:37 apply to the writings of the inspired men?

# Lesson Six: The Basis of Authority

## I. The Bible Is Authoritative In The Strictest Sense

- A. The Bible and its teachings are not to be applied “loosely.”
  - 1. It is fully inspired of God. (1 Corinthians 2:9-13)
  - 2. It alone is the guide and standard in religion.
  - 3. Its teachings must be strictly followed and applied.
- B. There are divinely imposed limits or boundaries for truth.
  - 1. There is a specific realm or area where divine authority is found. That area is the word of Christ. (Matthew 28:18; Hebrews 1:1-2)
  - 2. Outside of the realm of the word of Christ, there is no authority.
    - a. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to the apostles with “all truth.” (John 16:13)
    - b. No other gospel is to be preached other than the gospel of Christ. (Galatians 1:6-9)
    - c. One is not to go beyond the doctrine, teaching, of Christ. (2 John 9)
    - d. One is not to teach any words other than the words of Christ. (1 Timothy 6:3-5)
    - e. One is not to go beyond the things which are written in the gospel. (1 Cor. 4:6)
- C. The distinction of strict versus loose comprises the difference between “liberals” and “conservatives” in religion.
  - 1. “Liberalism” is manifested when a congregation does not restrict or limit the church to what is authorized in the doctrine of Christ.
  - 2. A “liberal” stance by a congregation could involve a church in such things as:
    - a. Adding to its work or mission those things not authorized by Christ in His word.
    - b. Devising organizational changes such as enlarging the scope of elders’ authority.
    - c. Perverting the worship activities.
  - 3. In reality, it is actually a matter of obedience or disobedience to Christ rather than a matter of “strict or loose” or “conservative or liberal.”

## II. The Three Ways The Bible Authorizes A Thing To Be Believed Or Practiced

- A. Factual statements and/or clear cut commands.
  - 1. Statements of fact: “buried with him in baptism.” (Colossians 2:12)
  - 2. Commands:
    - a. Baptism for the remission of sins. (Acts 2:38)
    - b. Partaking of the Lord’s Supper. (1 Cor. 11:24-25)
    - c. Singing and making melody in the heart. (Ephesians 5:19; Col. 3:16)
- B. Apostolic examples.
  - 1. These are illustrations of what the apostles instructed men to do while under their guidance. (Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 4:9)
    - a. The Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week. (Acts 20:7)
    - b. The organizational structure of the local church, “elders in every church.” (Acts 14:23)

2. Examples which are not binding.
    - a. Bad examples.
      - 1) Examples of actions which were wrong.
      - 2) Peter's refusal to eat with the Gentiles. (Gal. 2:11-14)
    - b. Temporary examples such as miraculous spiritual gifts and manifestations of them that ended when the word of God was completely revealed. (1 Cor. 13:10)
    - c. Incidental examples.
      - 1) Examples which do not show a specific pattern of conduct but rather a choice of methods or items.
      - 2) No pattern is set forth concerning the place of worship (New Testament churches met in many places).
      - 3) Social customs: the "holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16), the head "covering." (1 Cor. 11:16)
  3. How to determine if examples are binding.
    - a. **Harmony.** There must be harmony in the action of the example and all other scriptures bearing on the same subject (truth is harmonious).
    - b. **Uniformity.** Uniformity is the way of discriminating between essential and incidental examples.
      - 1) Variation is seen in incidental examples. No variation is seen in essential examples.
      - 2) Examples of conversion contain different circumstances but uniform actions.
    - c. **Universal application.**
      - 1) No example could be thought of as reflecting the will of God that is not universal in application.
      - 2) The impartial character of God demands that His will be applied universally.
    - d. Legitimate extension or limited application.
      - 1) No action of the apostles, Christians or churches is to be considered binding beyond the proper province of that action.
      - 2) The attitudes concerning marriage in 1 Corinthians 7 and the community property of the Jerusalem church (Acts 4:34-35) are not binding beyond the circumstances of their contexts.
- C. Implications in a passage from which the Bible reader must *necessarily* infer truth which is not stated in the very words of the text.
1. Lot going down into Egypt with Abram. (Genesis 13:1)
  2. Jesus going down into the water. (Matt. 3:16)
  3. Drinking "fruit of the vine" implies the juice not the grape itself. (Matt. 26:29)
  4. The kingdom established on Pentecost. (Mark 9:1; Luke 24:49; Acts 2:1-4)
  5. Partaking of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

## Discussion Questions

1. What is meant when one says the Bible is authoritative in the strictest sense?



2. Describe the difference between “liberal” and “conservative” in religion.
3. Why is a liberal viewpoint in religion dangerous?
4. How does each of the following scriptures apply to the matter of authority?
  - a. John 16:13.
  - b. Galatians 1:6-9.
  - c. 2 John 9.
  - d. 1 Timothy 6:3-5.
5. Why are factual statements and/or clear cut commands found in Scripture authoritative?
6. Is a person today to obey every command in the Bible? Explain.
7. What is meant by the phrase “apostolic examples?” What do such examples have to do with authority?
8. When are examples not binding?
9. What are some rules to determine whether or not an example is binding?
10. What difference is there, if any, between an implication and an inference?

# Lesson Seven: A Type of Authority - Generic

## I. Generic Authority Defined

- A. Generic authority is “authority expressed in general terms where the details are incidental and not specified...” (Robert Welch, “Generic and Specific,” *Restorer*, bulletin of the Silver St. church of Christ, New Albany, IN, Vol. 8, No. 27, July 4, 1973)
- B. Generic authority is that which is “...including any thing, method, or means of execution that comes within the class or order of the precept, example or thing commanded...” (Roy Cogdill, *Walking By Faith*, p. 15)

## II. The Nature Of Generic Authority

- A. Generic authority is not specified or limited.
  - 1. General: “Not restrained or limited to a precise import or application; not specific; not entering into details or minutiae.” (*Webster’s New International Dictionary*)
  - 2. General: Pertaining to, affecting, or applicable to each and all of a class, kind, or order as a general law.
- B. Generic authority is inclusive.
  - 1. It includes any method or means of execution that comes within the class or order of that which is authorized, and which has not been executed.
  - 2. It can involve the use of expedients to aid in carrying out the command.
    - a. Expedient: an aid or method used to expedite or facilitate the accomplishing of a command.
      - 1) Expedite: “To free from hindrance or obstacle; to hurry forward.” (*Webster’s*)
      - 2) Facilitate: “To make easy; to expedite.” (*Webster’s*)
    - b. An expedient must be within the scope of authority, it must be “lawful.” (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23)
    - c. An expedient is only lawful in the realm of generic authority, never in specific authority.
      - 1) The only choice given in specific authority is to either obey or disobey.
      - 2) To go beyond that which is specified or to offer a substitute would be to add to the word of God.
    - d. An expedient must edify. (1 Cor.10:23-33; cf. 1 Cor. 14:26)

## III. Examples Of Generic Authority

- A. “Go.” (Matthew 28:18-19; Mark 16:15)
  - 1. The command to “go” is generic as to *how* to go since the method of travel is not specified.
  - 2. This command includes any method of travel one may desire to use unless it is forbidden by another passage of Scripture, e.g., traveling in a stolen automobile.
- B. “Teach.” (Matt. 28:18-19; Mark 16:15)
  - 1. Since the method of teaching is not specified, one may choose from many methods.

2. The choices could include teaching:
  - a. Publicly or privately.
  - b. To a whole assembly or in a class arrangement.
  - c. Orally or by written literature.
  - d. Using helps such as blackboards, charts, filmstrips, overheads, computers, etc.
- C. "Assemble." (Heb. 10:25; 1 Cor. 14:23,26)
  1. The place to assemble is not specified. Choices may include:
    - a. A rented hall.
    - b. A private home.
    - c. A church building.
    - d. A river bank.
  2. The command to "assemble" includes all things that would expedite its execution: seats, lights, heat, air-conditioning, restrooms, water fountain, etc.

## Discussion Questions

1. Define, in your own terms, generic authority.
2. Why is generic authority said to be inclusive?
3. What is an expedient? What is its relationship to generic authority?
4. How is an expedient lawful? Why must an expedient be lawful?
5. What is meant in I Corinthians 6:12 when it says "all things are lawful?"
6. Why must an expedient reside only within the scope of generic authority? Why is an expedient never lawful in specific authority?
7. Define edify. Why must an expedient edify?
8. How does the command of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-19 to "go" qualify as generic authority?
9. What may be some expedients included in the command to "teach" others the gospel? (Matthew 28:18-19; Mark 16:15).
10. How can such things as water fountains or restrooms in a church building be authorized even though they are not mentioned in Scripture?

# Lesson Eight: A Type of Authority - Specific

## I. The Nature Of Specific Authority

- A. Specific authority is limited or restricted.
  - 1. Specific: "Precisely formulated or restricted; specifying; definite, or making definite; explicit, of an exact or particular nature." (*Webster's New International Dictionary*)
  - 2. Specific authority excludes every thing, method or means of execution in the same order or class which is not particularly specified in the thing authorized.
- B. One can never logically or scripturally move from a specific matter to a general conclusion.
  - 1. One cannot make a broader application of a specific.
  - 2. No one should ever draw a general conclusion on any Bible subject until all passages concerning it have been collected, considered, and compared. Only the sum total of passages on a given subject will give complete understanding.
- C. The only choice one has in the area of specific authority is to either obey or disobey.
  - 1. There are no expedients within the scope of specific authority.
  - 2. To go beyond that which is specified or to offer a substitute would be to add to the word of God and that is forbidden. (Revelation 22:18)

## II. Examples Of Specific Authority

- A. By stating "gopher wood" (Genesis 6:14), God left no choice for Noah to use other kinds of wood to build the ark and still have His approval.
- B. "Take Jericho" would have been general in nature and would have allowed Joshua to use any plan to capture the city but God was specific in His instructions and the only way the Israelites could have obeyed Him was by doing specifically what He had authorized. (Joshua 6)
- C. The phrase, "first day" of the week (Acts 20:7), leaves no other choice for a day to observe the Lord's Supper.
- D. "Sing" (Ephesians 5:19) specifies the kind of music authorized for worship and leaves no choice for another kind.

## III. The Same Command Can Be Both Generic And Specific

- A. The generic or specific nature of any teaching is determined by its context.
  - 1. "Singing" is specific as to kinds of music.
  - 2. "Singing" is generic when compared to "singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." (Eph. 5:19).
- B. The generic or specific nature of any teaching is determined by that to which it is being used in reference.
  - 1. "Wood" is specific as to other types of building materials such as brick, concrete, steel, etc.
  - 2. "Wood" is generic in reference to specific kinds of wood such as oak, pine, maple, cedar, gopher, etc.

## Discussion Questions

- 1. Define specific.

2. Define, in your own terms, specific authority.
3. Why is specific authority said to be exclusive?
4. Why are there choices in generic authority but no choices in specific authority?
5. Why is it wrong to make a general application from that which is specific in nature?
6. Can you cite any examples from Scripture where God condemned people for trying to make a broad application of a specific?
7. What determines whether a command is generic or specific?
8. Why is there authority for the church to use song books in its worship?
9. When is the command “sing” specific in nature? When is the command “sing” generic in nature?
10. Discussion question: Why do you think God has been very specific in some areas yet very general in others?

# Lesson Nine: Improper Attitudes Toward Authority - I

The many differences and divisions among religious people indicate diverse attitudes toward Bible authority. One's view of the authority of Scripture decides what he believes to be authorized or unauthorized in religion. Therefore, erroneous attitudes toward authority in religion contribute to improper teachings and practices. The following are some misconceptions people have about authority.

## I. "No Authority Is Needed"

- A. This is usually expressed by saying, "We do many things for which there is no authority."
  - 1. Usually cited are such things as church buildings, seats, lights, song books, etc.
  - 2. The real purpose of this line of thought is to be accusatory in order to rationalize unauthorized practices. The implication is, "Since **you** do many things for which there is no authority, therefore, we may have or use a thing for which there is no authority."
- B. This attitude makes man a law unto himself.
  - 1. It allows him to be free to choose whether or not a thing is good or bad—whether or not it should be practiced.
  - 2. The Scriptures condemn such attitudes and actions on the part of man. (Proverbs 14:12; Jeremiah 10:23)
- C. All we do must be done by the authority of Christ.
  - 1. Do all "in the name of the Lord Jesus." (Colossians 3:17)
  - 2. "Speak as the oracles of God." (1 Peter 4:11)
  - 3. "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God." (2 John 9)
  - 4. "You may learn...not to think beyond what is written." (1 Corinthians 4:6).

## II. An Improper Regard For The Silence Of The Scriptures

- A. This is usually expressed in one of the following ways:
  - 1. "Where the Bible is silent, where God has not spoken, we are at liberty to act and do as we think best."
  - 2. "God (or the Bible) did not say not to."
- B. This concept makes what God does not say just as authoritative as what He did say.
- C. This attitude is wrong because:
  - 1. One cannot base any practice on the silence of the Scriptures.
    - a. The argument of the apostle Paul for Jesus' superiority to angels is on the basis that God did not say to any angel what He said to Jesus. (Hebrews 1:5)
    - b. The silence of Moses did not allow priests from the tribe of Judah. (Heb. 7:14)
    - c. Only the things revealed belong to man. Those things not revealed belong to God. (Deuteronomy 29:29; 1 Cor. 2:11)
  - 2. It opens the floodgate to every innovation man could ever devise.
    - a. If the principle of silence allows one thing, it allows anything and everything.
    - b. Where could one draw the line?

3. It receives into worship acts that cannot be of faith for where the word of God is silent, there can be no faith.
    - a. "Whatever is not from faith is sin." (Romans 14:23)
    - b. "For we walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:7)
    - c. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Rom. 10:17)
  4. It makes worship vain.
    - a. Hand-washing, though not wrong in and of itself, when done as a religious service, was condemned by Jesus because the law had not commanded it. (Matthew 15:9)
    - b. All precepts of men make religion vain.
    - c. Implementation of this principle would cause one to bind where God has not bound thus causing him to attempt to add to the law of God. (Revelation 22:18-19)
  5. It ignores the rule of exclusion which excludes everything from the worship and service of God except the act specified and the lawful things which would expedite its accomplishment.
  6. It is condemned in examples seen in Scripture.
    - a. Moses striking the rock and failing to sanctify God before the people. (Exodus 20:1-13)
    - b. Nadab and Abihu offering "strange fire." (Leviticus 10:1-2)
    - c. King Saul disobeying God in order to offer a sacrifice God had not commanded. (1 Samuel 15:10-15)
- D. If a doctrine or practice is not authorized by Scripture, it:
1. Is not a good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
  2. Does not pertain to life and godliness. (2 Peter 1:3)
  3. Causes one to not have God. (2 John 9)
  4. Is not authorized by Christ. (Col. 3:17)
  5. Cannot be done by faith. (2 Cor. 5:7; Rom. 10:17; 14:23)
  6. Is going beyond what is written. (1 Cor. 4:6)
  7. Is not as the oracles of God. (1 Pet. 4:11)
  8. Is not according to the pattern. (Heb. 8:5)
  9. Does not pertain to the seed of the kingdom. (Luke 8:11)
  10. Is not of righteousness. (Rom. 1:16-17; 10:1-4)
  11. Is of presumption. (Psalm 19:13)
  12. Is iniquity. (Matt. 7:23)
  13. Is of men. (Matt. 21:25; 15:9)
  14. Is not of truth. (John 17:17; 4:24)
- E. We must respect the silence of the Scriptures.
1. We must "speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where it is silent."
  2. Consider 1 Peter 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 4:6.

## Discussion Questions

1. How does man become a law unto himself when he believes one does not have to have authority for everything done in religion?

2. What do the following Scriptures teach concerning the matter of authority in religion?
  - a. Colossians 3:17.
  - b. 2 John 9.
  - c. 1 Peter 4:11.
  - d. 1 Corinthians 4:6.
3. Why can one not base any practice on the silence of the Scriptures?
4. What determines whether or not a thing is “of faith?”
5. Why were Nadab and Abihu condemned by God?
6. What are some characteristics of a religious doctrine or practice that is not contained in Scripture?
7. Reconcile the authority for expedients with the principle of respecting the silence of the Scriptures. (e.g. How can such a thing as a church building, about which the New Testament is silent, be authorized?)



# Lesson Ten: Improper Attitudes Toward Authority - II

## III. Improperly Viewing The Law Of Expediency

- A. A failure to recognize the realm of expediency.
  - 1. Such is the problem with those brethren who do not believe there is authority for Bible classes, multiple containers for the fruit of the vine on the Lord's table, etc.
  - 2. Those who fail to recognize this concept demand specific mention of all things, even incidentals.
- B. Including as expedients those things not lawful.
  - 1. Instrumental music is not an expedient in carrying out the command to "sing."
  - 2. The missionary society, orphans' homes, colleges, schools, and the sponsoring church arrangement are not expedients because they are not lawful.
- C. The proper view: Lawful expedients (1 Corinthians 6:12) are authorized to expedite commands of Scripture.

## IV. An Improper View Of Generic And Specific Authority

- A. An erroneous view: demanding specific authority when God gave generic.
  - 1. Those who oppose Bible classes demand specific authority in an area where God gave generic authority: "teach" (Mark 16:15), "assemble." (Hebrews 10:25)
  - 2. One must not bind that which God has not bound.
- B. An erroneous view: generalizing where God has specified.
  - 1. Those who advocate the use of instrumental music in worship or changes in church organization from the New Testament pattern are guilty of this.
  - 2. It is as wrong to change anything God has specified as it would be to change the elements of the Lord's Supper from the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine to cheeseburgers and soda.

## V. Miscellaneous Errors In Attitude

- A. The view that "New Testament authority is no longer binding" is an erroneous view.
  - 1. This attitude is often stated by saying such things as "Times have changed." or "We are not bound by first century patterns."
  - 2. "All truth" (John 16:13) of the New Testament is age-lasting. (cf. Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3; Jude 3)
- B. Another erroneous view is that "church officials" or "official documents of the church" are as authoritative as the Bible.
  - 1. Some examples of this would be the Pope of Roman Catholicism and the creed books of various denominations.
  - 2. This attitude ignores the Scriptures' claim to be man's complete and sufficient guide. They claim to:
    - a. Thoroughly furnish one to every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
    - b. Provide all things that pertain to life and godliness. (2 Peter 1:3)

## **VI. Proper Attitudes Toward Bible Authority**

- A. One must realize the need for authority in the religious realm.
- B. One must realize that Jesus has all authority (Matt. 28:18) and that He has expressed His authority in the New Testament Scriptures (Heb. 1:1-2) in commands and statements, apostolic examples and necessary implications (inferences).
- C. One must realize that he must adhere to that which is authorized (Colossians 3:17; 1 Cor. 4:6; 2 John 9).

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Why does failing to regard the law (concept) of expediency result in violations of Biblical authority?
2. What is a necessary condition for a thing to be an expedient?
3. What happens when one demands specific authority where God has only given generic?
4. Why can one not generalize where God has specified?
5. Is the New Testament no longer binding as authority? Explain your answer.
6. Why are neither creed books nor church officials proper sources of authority in religion?
7. What basic attitudes must one possess in his regard for authority?

# Lesson Eleven: The Concept of Pattern

## I. Definitions

- A. Pattern (noun).
  - 1. A form or model used for imitation.
  - 2. Something designed or used as a model.
  - 3. A prescribed route to be followed by a pass receiver in football.
- B. Pattern (verb).
  - 1. To make or fashion according to a pattern.
  - 2. To match.
  - 3. To imitate.
- C. In relation to things of a spiritual nature, conforming to that which is set forth in the word of God given through Jesus Christ as to the nature, purpose, and accountability of the Christian and the church.

## II. The Need For Patterns

- A. In the physical realm.
  - 1. In order to reproduce the desires or wishes of another, a pattern is needed.
  - 2. Examples.
    - a. In order to produce garments as designed, a seamstress needs a pattern to follow.
    - b. A contractor, in order to produce the house as designed, must specifically follow the pattern (blueprint for that home).
  - 3. Multiple use of the same pattern without changes or alteration causes the end results to be identical.
    - a. The seamstress can produce dresses which are alike.
    - b. The contractor can build several houses which would be identical.
- B. In the spiritual realm.
  - 1. Man does not know the will of God except as it was revealed by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:11)
    - a. Man cannot properly direct his own way. (Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 16:25)
    - b. Man must look to the will of God for all that he does. (Colossians 3:17)
  - 2. In order to reproduce the will of God in the lives of men/women in any age, the revelation of God must be employed.
    - a. Individually, people must pattern their lives after God's revelation, observing "all things" Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:20), in order to be the kind of persons God created them to be and to have fellowship with Him. (1 John 1:7; 2 John 9)
    - b. Collectively, the church is to be patterned after the will of God revealed by His Son. (Hebrews 8:4-5)
  - 3. The importance of pattern.
    - a. To alter, in any way, the pattern that God has given in Scripture is to usurp the authority of God.
    - b. To abandon or ignore the pattern of God is to act presumptuously.

- c. To change God's pattern or plan is to change His purpose. (See Heb. 8:4-5; 9:7-10; 9:12-13; 10:20).

### III. Some Divine Patterns

- A. Noah was given a pattern for building the ark. (Genesis 6)
  1. He could not deviate from it and please God.
  2. Following that pattern brought him salvation.
- B. Moses had to build the tabernacle according to the pattern. (Exodus 25:8,9,40; Heb. 8:4-5)
  1. Disobedience, failure to follow that pattern, brought tragic consequences.
  2. Examples of disobedience.
    - a. Nadab and Abihu. (Leviticus 16:12; 10:1-2)
    - b. David and Uzzah. (1 Chronicles 13:7-10; 15:11-15; Ex. 25:14; Numbers 4)
- C. Solomon had to build the temple according to pattern. (1 Chron. 28:11-19)
  1. Disobedience to the pattern brought swift judgment.
  2. Examples of disobedience.
    - a. Uzziah. (2 Chron. 26:16-20)
    - b. Manasseh. (2 Chron. 33:4-11)
- D. The church under the rule of Christ must be built according to the pattern. (Heb. 8:4-5)
  1. The point in context:
    - a. God instituted the Old Testament priesthood as a type of the true, Moses could not change or alter any of it for he was instructed to build according to the pattern.
    - b. The application: We should neither change nor alter the pattern of God for His church in the New Testament.
  2. The early Christians continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine. (Acts 2:42)
    - a. They gave constant attention to doctrine.
    - b. So they would closely follow the pattern of God.
  3. When the seed of the kingdom is planted without alteration in good and honest hearts, Christians are produced. (Luke 8:11)

### IV. What Is Our Pattern?

- A. The gospel is the pattern for all things. (Heb. 1:1-2)
  1. 2 Timothy 1:13: "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."
  2. 1 Timothy 1:3: Teach no other doctrine. (cf. Gal. 1:6-9)
  3. 1 Timothy 6:3: One must teach and consent to wholesome words, those of the Lord, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness.
- B. To properly follow the pattern of God on any subject:
  1. Take all of what New Testament Scripture reveals by command, precept, approved example, and necessary implication on that matter.
  2. Analyze the relation of each of the above to the others and abide in that teaching.
  3. Limit yourself to what God has revealed on that matter. (2 John 9; 1 Cor. 4:6; 1 Pet. 4:11)
- C. The example of Acts 15 in determining whether or not the practice of circumcision should be bound on Gentiles who obeyed the gospel.
  1. They cited examples. (vv. 7, 12)

2. They referred to commands and statements of Scripture. (vv. 15-17)
  3. They reached the only logical conclusion to be reached, drawing inferences from the necessary implications of the examples and statements of Scriptures. (v. 19)
  4. They had determined the pattern for circumcision.
- D. When one understands how Scripture teaches, he can determine heaven's pattern for any practice.
- E. Violation of God's pattern today brings tragedy. (Matt. 7:22-23; Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 22:18-19)

## Discussion Questions

1. What is a pattern? Of what relevance is it in religion?
  
2. What do patterns accomplish:
  - a. In the physical realm?
  - b. In the spiritual realm?
  
3. Why does altering God's pattern usurp His authority?
  
4. Why is either abandoning or ignoring the pattern of God presumptuous?
  
5. How does changing the plan of God change His purpose and its results?
  
6. Why do you think God brought such swift judgment on Nadab and Abihu, Uzzah, Uzziah, etc?
  
7. How can one "hold fast the pattern of sound words?" (2 Tim. 1:13)
  
8. Summarize how to determine a Scriptural pattern on a subject.
  
9. What relevance does the discussion over circumcision found in Acts 15 have to determining patterns from God?

# Lesson Twelve:

## The Organization and Worship of the Church

### I. The Organization Of The Church

- A. The only functional collective unit of the church is the local congregation.
  - 1. The congregational organization of the church represents divine wisdom, purpose, and will.
  - 2. There is no organization larger or smaller that is divinely authorized.
  - 3. Each congregation is autonomous, i.e., self-governing.
    - a. Every local church is equal in the sight of God.
    - b. There are no “missions” or “mother churches” in the New Testament.
- B. The components of scriptural church organization are elders, deacons, and saints (Philippians 1:1).
  - 1. Elders.
    - a. Elders are to oversee, pastor, tend, and rule in all matters pertaining to the local church. (Acts 20:28-31; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:11-13; 1 Peter 5:1-4; 1 Timothy 5:17-18)
    - b. It is God’s plan to have a plurality of elders in every local church. (Acts 14:23)
    - c. Their qualifications are found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.
    - d. Elders are:
      - 1) Not legislators. Christ is the only “lawgiver.” (James 4:12)
      - 2) Not “lords,” lording over the charge they have been given. (1 Pet. 5:2-3)
      - 3) Congregational. They have no authority over any other church. They are to tend the flock (church) among them. (1 Pet. 5:2)
      - 4) Not to try to control matters which are not a part of the congregation and its work.
    - e. The members are to submit to the rule of elders as long as they rule in harmony with the will of Christ. (Heb. 13:7; 1 Thes. 5:12-13; 1 Pet. 5:5; 1 Tim. 5:17-20)
  - 2. Deacons.
    - a. Deacons are special servants distinguished from the members in general.
    - b. Their qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-12.
    - c. “In general a deacon owes the same service to the Lord and bears the same responsibility as does every Christian. He, however, is one upon whom special responsibility has been laid. The Church, as is true of every institution in the world, needs leaders. Men upon whom special responsibility can be placed without being shunned or evaded and in whom there can be found to an outstanding degree the qualities of the real Christian character.” (Roy Cogdill, *The New Testament Church*, p. 51)
  - 3. Members. (Rom. 12:4; 16:1-2; I Cor. 12:27)

### II. The Worship Of The Church

- A. God commands worship (John 4:23-24).
  - 1. Worship means to make obeisance or do reverence to.

2. It suggests an action being performed indicative of the worshiper's reverence for the one being worshiped.
  3. Since it is an attitude of reverence and piety, it is a means by which the Christian can express his love and devotion to God.
- B. Man has never been left to his own thoughts as to how he should worship God.
1. God has always given him instructions as to how He wanted to be worshiped.
  2. Some examples of what happens when people disregard God's instructions as to how to worship.
    - a. Cain. (Genesis 4:1-7; Heb. 11:4; Rom. 10:17)
    - b. Nadab and Abihu. (Leviticus 10:1-3)
- C. Authorized expressions of worship.
1. The Lord's Supper.
    - a. This memorial feast commemorates the sacrifice of Jesus. (1 Cor. 11:23-26)
    - b. The authorized elements are unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine which speak of the body and blood of Christ. (Matt. 26:26-27)
    - c. Authorized participation in this supper is on the first day of the week when the saints have assembled. (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:18,20)
  2. Singing.
    - a. Vocal music is the only kind authorized by the New Testament for the worship of the church. (Ephesians 5:19)
    - b. Singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16) is authorized in order to:
      - 1) Praise and worship God.
      - 2) Teach and admonish one another.
  3. Prayer.
    - a. As seen in the New Testament, first century Christians gathered to pray. (1 Cor. 14:14-15)
    - b. Since prayer recognizes the need for God in one's life, to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thes. 5:17) shows one's never-ending need for God.
    - c. The Christian is to pray in supplications, prayers, intercessions, and the giving of thanks. (1 Tim. 2:1-8)
  4. Giving.
    - a. God authorizes giving on the first day of the week. (1 Cor. 16:1-2)
    - b. The Christian is to give cheerfully not grudgingly. (2 Cor. 9:6-7)
  5. Instruction from the word of God.
    - a. The early saints engaged in the study of God's word in their worship assemblies. (Acts 20:7)
    - b. One must speak the word of God (1 Pet. 4:11), not the doctrines of men. (Matt. 15:9)

## Discussion Questions

1. What does "autonomous" mean? How is each local church autonomous?

2. What is the scriptural organization of the local church?
3. What benefits, if any, do you see in having a plurality of elders in the local church?
4. What is the scope of elders' authority?
5. What are deacons? How do they differ from other members?
6. What is worship? What does it accomplish?
7. What are some consequences of disregarding God's guidelines for worship?
8. Briefly summarize those expressions of worship authorized for the church?
  - a. The Lord's Supper.
  - b. Singing.
  - c. Prayer.
  - d. Giving.
  - e. Instruction from the word of God.



# Lesson Thirteen: The Work of the Church

## Introduction

1. The word “church” is used in three senses in the New Testament. (The Greek word *ekklesia* literally means “to call out.”)
  - a. The church universal. All those called out of the world into God’s service, the universal body of the saved. (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22-23)
  - b. The local church. Those called out into God’s service in a definite locality, saints banded together in a particular location. (1 Corinthians 1:2; Acts 15:22; Romans 16:16)
  - c. Assemblies of people.
    - 1) The unruly mob at Ephesus (Acts 19:32), the city council at Ephesus (Acts 19:39).
    - 2) An assembly of saints for worship. (1 Cor. 11:18; 14:35)
2. God established the local church as the only collective medium through which early Christians worked. In the New Testament every good work which was done collectively was done through the local organization.
  - a. Preachers were sent out who in turn reported to the local church. (Acts 13:1-3; 14:25-28)
  - b. Charity to needy saints was accomplished. (Acts 11:29-30) Funds for poor saints in Judea were placed in the hands of the elders of the Judean churches to be administered by them.

## II. The Work Of Evangelism

- A. Since mankind is lost in sin (Rom. 3:23) and the gospel is the only power to save them (Rom. 1:16), God wants the gospel preached (Mark 16:15; 1 Cor. 1:21) and has given the obligation to the church. (Eph. 3:10-11 – “the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church”)
  1. The church’s “marching orders” to evangelize are given in the great commission. (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16)
  2. The church is to hold forth the word of life. (Philippians 2:16)
- B. First century churches were evangelistic-minded.
  1. They sent preachers out into the world to preach the gospel.
    - a. The church at Antioch sent out Paul and Barnabas. (Acts 13:1-3)
    - b. The church at Thessalonica had sounded out the gospel. (1 Thessalonians 1:8)
    - c. While Paul preached at Corinth he took wages of other churches. (2 Cor. 11:8)
    - d. The church at Philippi assisted Paul financially in preaching the gospel. (Phil. 4:15-16)
  2. In a period of about thirty years they preached the gospel to the whole world. (Colossians 1:23)

## II. The Work Of Edification

- A. The church is to develop its own spiritual strength by edification. (Eph. 4:16)
- B. In God’s divine pattern He set offices in the church for the equipping or perfecting of the saints. (Eph. 4:11-12)
  1. The apostles and prophets revealed the truth. (Eph. 3:5)
  2. The evangelists are to proclaim the truth. (2 Timothy 4:2)

3. Pastors, elders, are to see to it that the truth is taught in the church. (Acts 20:28-31)
  4. By the faithful teaching of the truth, the saints will be perfected to do the work of the ministry, service, and the building up, evangelizing, of the body of Christ.
    - a. Members of the church are to mature in Christ. (Eph. 4:13-14)
    - b. The church is to ground and stabilize itself to prevent false doctrine from leading it astray. (Col. 2:6-7).
- C. The importance of edification is seen in I Corinthians 14 where the apostle Paul said:
1. "...since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel." (v. 12)
  2. "Let all things be done unto edifying." (v. 26)
- D. Each local church must be committed to developing itself to the extent that its members can:
1. Teach others. (Heb. 5:12)
  2. Have love, knowledge and discernment. (Phil. 1:9)
  3. Have growing faith and abounding love toward each other. (2 Thes. 1:3)
  4. Resist the devil in all of his devices. (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:9; 2 Cor. 2:11)

### **III. The Work Of Benevolence**

- A. Though the local church has responsibilities in this area, as the Scriptures plainly teach, this work is limited.
1. Some have a misconception that church benevolence should be general, helping all humanity.
  2. General benevolence, benevolence to Christians and non-Christians alike, would be an impossible task, exhausting all of the churches' supplies with no resources left to do any other work God gave the church to perform.
  3. God even limits the saints whom the church may help. (1 Tim. 5:16)
    - a. God would have us take care of our own family and not burden the church so that it can relieve those saints who have no one to care for them.
    - b. If we do not provide for our own, we are worse than an infidel. (1 Tim. 5:8)
  4. The limited nature of the work: "It is no accident that the early church confined its benevolence to the saints. Benevolence is not the mission of the church except in a secondary sense. The mission of the church is to save souls. Christ, the head of the church, said that His mission was to 'seek and to save the lost' (Matt. 18:11; Luke 19:10). The mission of the church is the same as the mission of its head. It is true that he fed the hungry and healed the infirm, but that is not why he came; and that is not why the church exists. The church is a spiritual body; it has a spiritual mission;...Some benevolent work necessarily falls upon the church because of our relationship to each other as a family. Emergencies will arise as in the Jerusalem church in Acts 2, 4, and 6. This is benevolent work that ought to be done by the church." (Luther Blackmon, "Benevolence, the Brethren and the Bible," tract, Truth Magazine, pp. 11-12)
- B. First century examples of churches providing benevolence to the saints.
1. The church at Jerusalem relieved the needs of its destitute members who remained there after their conversion. (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35)
    - a. The needs of the widows were supplied by the liberality of the saints (Acts 6:1-6).
    - b. The church saw that the need was taken care of in an orderly fashion.

2. When a great famine came throughout the world and affected the saints in Judea, the church in Antioch sent relief to the brethren there, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11:27-30)
  3. At another time when saints of the Jerusalem church became destitute, churches in Macedonia, Achaia, and Galatia sent money to alleviate the need at Jerusalem. (Rom. 15:26; 1 Cor. 16:1,3)
- C. It can be seen from Scripture that when a need arose among the people of God, the church rallied to their aid.

## Discussion Questions

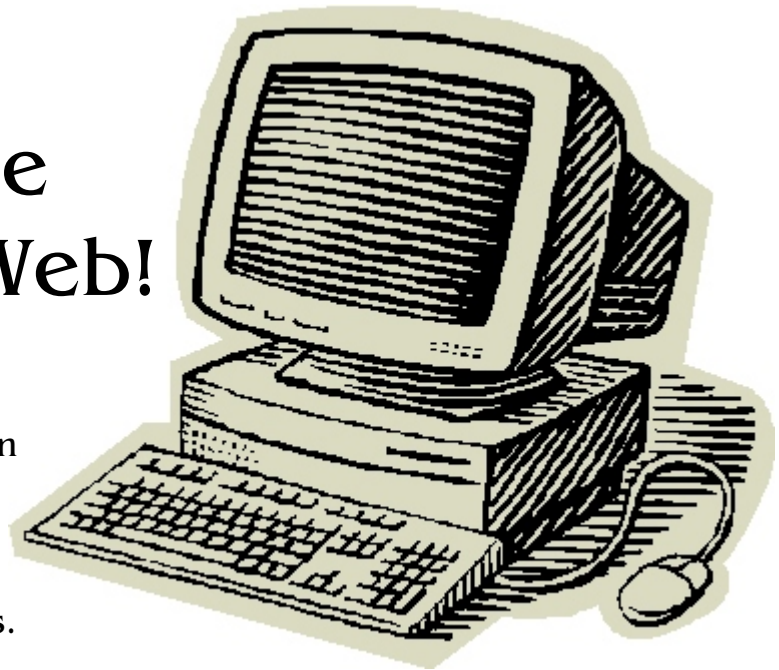
1. In what ways is the word "church" used in the New Testament?
2. Why is the local church said to be the only collective medium through which the early saints worked?
3. What is evangelism? Why does the church have the responsibility to evangelize?
4. What differences are there, if any, between the church's responsibilities in evangelism and that of the individual Christian?
5. What is edification?
6. What provisions did God make for the church to be able to edify?
7. What is benevolence? In what way(s) does it differ from the other areas of work for which the church is responsible?
8. For whom is the church responsible in the area of benevolence? Explain.
9. What differences in responsibility in benevolence exist between the individual Christian and the church?
10. Is entertainment a part of the work of the church? Explain your answer.

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