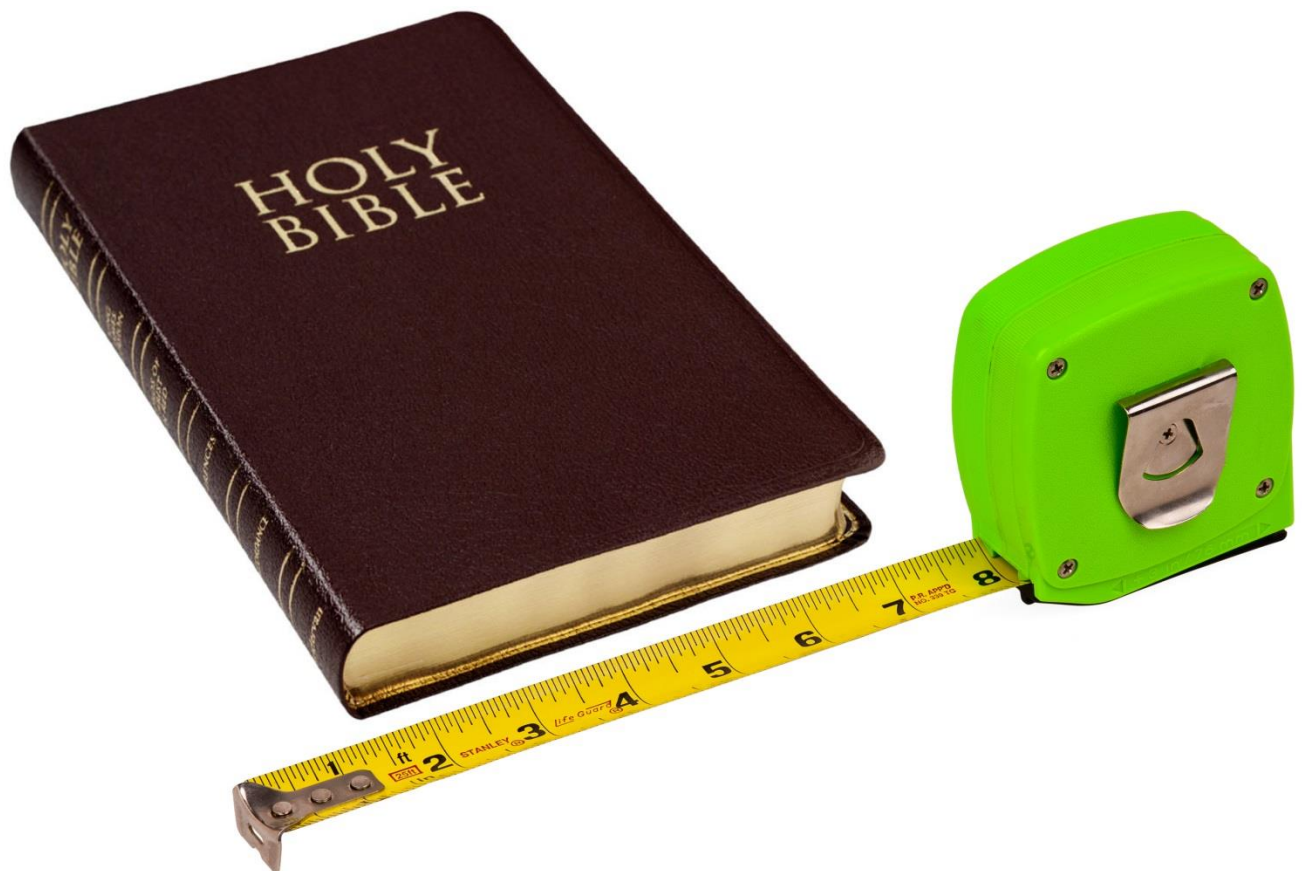


GOD-SHAPED

Respect for Authority



**Sunday Morning Adult Bible Class
January-March 2014 • Auditorium
Taught by Jason Hardin**

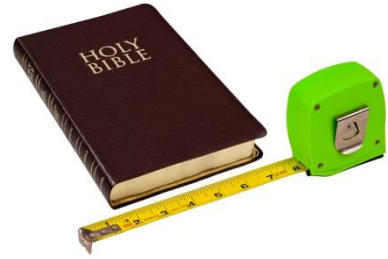
GOD-SHAPED

Respect for Authority

Week 1 (January 5 th)	What is Authority and Why Does It Matter?
Week 2 (January 12 th)	God's Authoritative Expectations in the Old Testament
Week 3 (January 19 th)	God's Authoritative Expectations in the New Testament
Week 4 (January 26 th)	The Catastrophic Consequences of Lawlessness
Week 5 (February 2 nd)	The Raw Materials of Communication
Week 6 (February 9 th)	The Nature of God's Written Revelation to Mankind
Week 7 (February 16 th)	The Intersection of Heavenly Authority and Everyday Life
Week 8 (February 23 rd)	When It's Time to Make a Judgment Call
Week 9 (March 2 nd)	When God Hasn't Said Anything About It
Week 10 (March 9 th)	Living in the Light of God's Authority as a Disciple of Jesus
Week 11 (March 16 th)	Worshiping in the Light of God's Authority as a Church
Week 12 (March 23 rd)	Working in the Light of God's Authority as a Church
Week 13 (March 30 th)	Traveling the Ancient Paths in a Postmodern Age

• SUNDAY MORNING (January 5th) •

What is Authority and Why Does It Matter?



AUTHORITY (*noun*) — the power or right to determine, control, command, judge, or prohibit the action of others; dominion; jurisdiction.

You **interact** with authority every day. You **submit** yourself to authority every day. You **depend** on authority every day. At the gas pump. In the grocery store. When you look at a clock. As you use money. When you drive. As you leave the pharmacy.

You expect the fresh fruits and vegetables you buy to meet a certain standard of cleanliness and quality. You take for granted the fact that the prescriptions your pharmacist fills have been regulated and approved by a governing authority. Every single time you cruise beside someone on the highway or fly by another car on a narrow two-way street, you assume that all involved are going to abide by the regulating standards of lawful authority.

Standards of authority have power to teach, reprove, correct, and train. When different people with differing ideas, varying histories, and conflicting agendas agree to abide under a common standard of authority, unity of mind and harmony of purpose is possible. There is potential for peaceful and constructive coexistence. Disagreements can be settled and a clear vision for collective purpose and action in the future can be established.

For instance, if you are asked how long this line is...

...what would you say? What would you do? Is there anyone who would disagree that we *can* come to a common understanding of exactly how long that line is? Is there any doubt as to how we could definitively reach an agreement? It's all possible by appealing to a common standard of measuring authority.

In the most basic of terms, how would you describe authority?

What happens when standards of authority are disregarded:

- At home?
- In school?
- At work?
- In society?

God as the Ultimate Authority

With those simple principles in mind, carefully read God's communication to the Israelites in Leviticus 18:1-5.

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD."

In Leviticus 19:1-2, he continued,

"Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy."

It is a principle that is reiterated in the New Testament.

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (1 Pet 1:13-16)

Why would God act as if he has the right to define, command, prohibit, and judge? Why should we feel compelled to be as he is? Reasons from the Bible are not hard to uncover:

- ❖ He is the Creator of all things (Gen 1-2; Psa 33:6)
- ❖ He is the Giver of all good things (James 1:17)
- ❖ He is the Owner of all things (Psa 50:10)
- ❖ He is the Upholder of all things (Heb 1:3)
- ❖ He is the Source of our spirits (Gen 1:27; Eccl 12:7)
- ❖ He is the Founder of the nations (Acts 17:26-28)
- ❖ He is the Ruler of all peoples (Psa 22:28; Jer 10:7)
- ❖ He is the Judge of every person (Rom 14:10-12)
- ❖ All things were created for him (Col 1:15-17)

When our Creator describes himself as "the LORD," what is he communicating?

Take the time to reflect on God's words in Leviticus 18:1-5 and 19:1-2. What is he saying?

"You shall be holy, for I am holy." What does this mean and how does it relate to God's authority?

"All things were created through him and for him" (Col 1:16). How do these words inherently imply ultimate authority in relation to mankind?

Therefore, we ought not be surprised that he presents himself as “above” us.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isa 55:8-9)

Which means...

My feelings and hunches and goals are not the ultimate standard of authority.

There is a way that seems right to a man,
but its end is the way to death. (Prov 14:12)

My past personal experiences are not the ultimate standard of authority.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Matt 7:21-23)

My relatives are not the ultimate standard of authority.

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” (Matt 10:37)

The majority is not the ultimate standard of authority.

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.” (Matt 7:13)

How does Proverbs 14:12 effectively establish that human feelings, hunches, and goals are an inadequate source of ultimate authority?

Why are past personal experiences a faulty standard of authority?

How could treating my relatives as the ultimate standard of authority place me in a dangerous standing with God?

Vox populi, vox dei is a famous Latin phrase that means, “The voice of the people is the voice of God.” Why is treating the majority as the ultimate standard of authority never a good idea?

Religious leaders are not the ultimate standard of authority.

And [Jesus] said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’

You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.” (Mark 7:6-8)

My own conscience is not the ultimate standard of authority.

As Paul (formerly Saul of Tarsus) confessed,

“I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” (Acts 26:9)

God—the Creator, Owner, Upholder, Ruler, and Judge of all—is the ultimate standard of authority.

And he has not left us to our own devices or imaginations.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16-17)

CLOSING THOUGHT: Why would God follow up his commandments, prohibitions, and promises of judgment with straightforward statements like those we read in Isaiah 55:8-9?

In Acts 8:30-31, Philip asked an Ethiopian eunuch who was reading Isaiah the prophet, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The eunuch responded, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” Where is the balance between the blessing of learning more about God’s will from another human being and the danger of ascribing too much authority to that same human being?

What is a conscience?

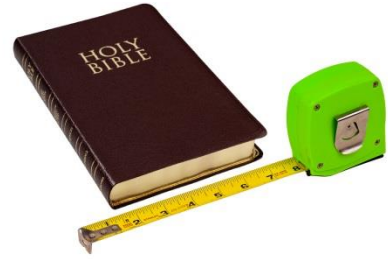
Are consciences reliable?

Can they be dangerous?

If so, how can I leverage my conscience for good and guard it from being misused?

• SUNDAY MORNING (January 12th) •

God's Authoritative Expectations in the Old Testament



A great many examples of men and women who interacted with, submitted themselves to, and faithfully depended upon God as the ultimate standard of authority have been preserved for us in the Old Testament. These accounts have been providentially preserved “for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom 15:4). For instance,

Noah, in Genesis 6:

- ❖ Was given the responsibility by God to build an ark (Gen 6:14).
- ❖ Did all that God commanded him to do (Gen 6:22).
- ❖ Was preserved by God (Gen 7:23; Heb 11:7).

Abel, in Genesis 4:

- ❖ Offered the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions as a sacrifice to God (Gen 4:4).
- ❖ Was regarded as offering “a more acceptable sacrifice” to God than Cain (Heb 11:4).
- ❖ Pleased the LORD (Gen 4:4).

Abraham, in Genesis 12:

- ❖ Was told to leave his country and go to the land that God would show him (Gen 12:1).
- ❖ Obeyed, as the LORD had told him (Gen 12:4).
- ❖ Was richly blessed and powerfully used by God (Heb 11:12).

In your own words, what is the point for Christians of Romans 15:4?

What “instruction” should be taken away from the example of Noah?

What “instruction” should be taken away from the example of Abel?

What “instruction” should be taken away from the example of Abraham?

But not everyone was willing to submit themselves to God in the Old Testament. Consider a few examples on the other side of the spectrum.

Cain, in Genesis 4:

- ❖ Brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground (Gen 4:3).
- ❖ Did not “do well” (Gen 4:7).
- ❖ Did not enjoy the regard of God for his offering and was reprov'd (Gen 4:5-7).

Nadab and Abihu, Leviticus 10:

- ❖ Were assigned the task of offering sacrifices to God with “authorized” fire (Exo 30:9).
- ❖ Offered “unauthorized fire before the LORD” (Lev 10:1).
- ❖ Were consumed with fire from the LORD (Lev 10:2).

A man gathering sticks, Numbers 15:

- ❖ Was to do no work nor kindle a fire on the Sabbath (Exo 20:10; 35:3).
- ❖ Gathered sticks on the Sabbath (Num 15:32).
- ❖ Was stoned to death by commandment of the LORD (Num 15:35).

CLOSING THOUGHT: In each case, there was some sort of **expectation** defined by God, there were **actions** on the part of the people created in his image, and there were **consequences** of those actions. When these people interacted with God, they were interacting with the ultimate standard of authority. By their actions, they either submitted to God as the ultimate standard of authority, or they did not. Either way, they enjoyed or suffered the consequences of their actions in light of God's authority.

What “instruction” should be taken away from the example of Cain?

What “instruction” should be taken away from the example of Nadab and Abihu?

What “instruction” should be taken away from the example of the man gathering sticks?

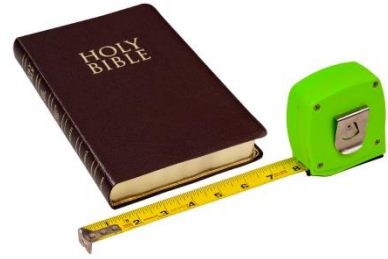
A simple pattern:

- Expectations of God
- Actions of people
- Consequences of action

What should we, as Christians, take away from this pattern that is repeated over and over again throughout the Old Testament?

• SUNDAY MORNING (January 19th) •

God's Authoritative Expectations in the New Testament



We clearly discover in Matthew 21:23-27 that the chief priests and elders of the people in Jesus' day appreciated the need for and even **expected** (at least when it suited their own purposes) a source of authority to back up human actions.

And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Jesus, as he so masterfully did on other occasions, exposed the true condition of their hearts by raising the issue of the baptism of John. "From where did it come?" John needed authority for his actions, but who was the source of that authority? "From heaven?" Did God grant John the authority to preach and do what he was doing, thereby making it legitimate and authoritative? "Or from man?"

Clearly, there can be only two ultimate sources of authority—heaven or human. If heaven, why wouldn't we respond? If human, why couldn't we take it or leave it?

"By what authority?"
What does that question mean?

If we are doing something "by authority," what is implied?

"And who gave you this authority?" What difference does this question make?

Is "from heaven or from man" still a valid gauge for modern discussions of authority? If so, why?

Throughout his ministry, Jesus **acted** as one who had authority. When he had finished his famous sermon overlooking the Sea of Galilee, “the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Matt 7:28-29). In Matthew 9:1-8,

And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Rise, pick up your bed and go home.” And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

But the clearest statement of Jesus concerning his authority was delivered after his resurrection from the dead, prior to his ascension into heaven.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:16-20)

From this point on, these appointed ambassadors of Jesus acted with an important measure of delegated authority.

Remember that Jesus had promised they would be guided by the Holy Spirit of God (John 16:7-14; 14:26; 15:26; 17:8, 14). They consistently proclaimed Jesus as their

What does it look and sound like, practically speaking, to “teach as one who has authority”?

Why did the scribes believe Jesus was guilty of blasphemy in Matthew 9?

“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” Why did Jesus highlight the authority aspect of this disagreement?

What, in your own words, is Jesus communicating in Matthew 28:16-20?

authoritative King and head over the church (Eph 1:22-23), but they also made claims like this:

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor 5:20)

Those who say we need only to give heed to the words of Jesus would do well to remember his charge to his earliest followers in Luke 10:16. “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” Conversely, in John 13:20, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.”

In John 20:19-23, Jesus commissioned these specially chosen men with an awesome responsibility.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

Jesus sent the apostles—with authority—just as his Father had sent him. He commanded them, as the source of all authority in heaven and on earth, to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that they had received from him.

In Acts 2, Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed a great multitude of Jews with authority. Jesus had promised to give “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” in Matthew 16, and those keys were

In what way were the apostles of Jesus guided by the Holy Spirit of God?

When Paul wrote, “we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us,” what did he mean?

What should we make of Jesus’ words in Luke 10:16 and John 13:20?

authoritatively used on the Day of Pentecost following Jesus' atoning sacrifice to open the doors of access to God.

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:41-42)

From this point forward, the apostles' teaching was held as authoritative. They were commissioned envoys of the risen Christ—empowered by the Holy Spirit with “the good news” of Jesus and verified by incredible miraculous signs (Mark 16:17-18). Wherever they went, they proclaimed “the doctrine of Christ” (2 John 4-9). In the words of the apostle Paul,

I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. (1 Cor 4:16-17)

If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized (1 Cor 14:37-38)

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil 4:9)

CLOSING THOUGHT: The New Testament is not simply a “love letter” from God or an interesting but outdated historical document. We are interacting with heavenly authority as we handle the New Testament. It is the means our Creator has used to communicate his authoritative expectations to us. Will we submit ourselves to him? Will we depend upon him for guidance, correction, and hope?

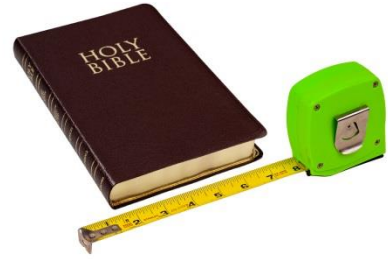
What were “the keys of the kingdom of heaven”?

“And these signs will accompany those who believe...” (Mark 16:17-18). What purpose did these miracles play in the days of the apostles?

“The things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord” (1 Cor 14:37). What right or basis did Paul possibly have to make such a claim?

• SUNDAY MORNING (January 26th) •

The Catastrophic Consequences of Lawlessness



In Matthew 7:21-23, toward the end of his famous “sermon on the mount,” Jesus made some statements that are worthy of some in-depth attention at this point in our study.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

With these words, Jesus established a straightforward distinction between “the will of my Father who is in heaven” and “lawlessness.” There are image-bearers of God who do the will of the heavenly Father, and there are image-bearers of God who are workers of lawlessness. The first will gain entrance into the kingdom of heaven, and the latter will be told to depart from God.

It is vital, therefore, that we understand the difference between the will of our Creator and lawlessness.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Eph 5:15-17)

In our last session, we determined that the apostles delivered authoritative teaching as commissioned envoys of the risen Christ (Acts 2:42). What they delivered in oral and written form is to be regarded and abided within as the God-breathed doctrine of Christ (2 John 4-9). We are

How could anyone call Jesus “Lord” and still be guilty of lawlessness?

Why would Jesus respond, “I never knew you” to anyone?

In your own words, how would you summarize:

- Look carefully how you walk –
- Not as unwise but as wise –
- Do not be foolish –
- Understand what the will of the Lord is –

called to do more than refer to Jesus as “Lord.” The one who enters the kingdom of heaven will have put the revealed will of God into practice.

On the other side of the spectrum is “lawlessness.” In Greek, the word is *anomia*. *Nomos* in Greek is translated “law” into English. Add an *a* to the front of the word and it becomes negative—similar to the way many of our English words work.

- ❖ A theist is someone who believes in God. An atheist does not.
- ❖ A gnostic is someone who knows. An agnostic is someone who does not.

Nomos is “law.” *Anomia* is “lawlessness,” or some of our English translations render the Greek word as “iniquity.” To be guilty of “lawlessness” is to live outside the boundaries of the law of God. The people Jesus referenced in Matthew 7 will claim to have done a number of noteworthy things in his name—prophesying, casting out demons, many mighty works. And yet, in spite of their claims, Jesus promised that he will declare, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” As we established in our very first session, my past personal experiences or achievements are not the ultimate standard of authority.

Our understanding of the Bible’s use of “lawlessness” is deepened even further by the writings of John.

And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we

Why would John refer to these Christians as “little children” in 1 John 2?

Practically speaking, what does it mean to “abide in” Jesus?

Why will those who have abided in Jesus have “confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming”?

In your own words, what does it mean to “practice righteousness”?

shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. (1 John 2:28-3:10)

It's important to note the significant difference between John's use of the word "lawlessness" in 1 John 3 and his use of the word "abiding" in 2 John 9.

Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

To be guilty of "lawlessness" is to live outside the boundaries of God's law, without God. To "abide in" the teaching of Christ is to live within the boundaries of God's revealed will, with God.

In our second session, we referenced an Old Testament example of "lawlessness."

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. (Lev 10:1-2)

What are the differences between "practicing sin" and "practicing righteousness"?

Why would John go so far as to declare that those who do not practice righteousness are "the children of the devil"?

In everyday terms, what does it mean to "go on ahead" and "not abide in the teaching of Christ"?

What is this "teaching of Christ" in 2 John 9?

Some of our English translations render “unauthorized” as “profane” or “strange,” and the implications are clear. The fire that was offered by these two sons of Aaron was “outside of” the boundaries of the law established by God. He had provided a pattern he expected the children of Israel to follow—specific days to remember and keep holy, specific feasts to celebrate in a specific manner, specific animals to sacrifice at specific times, specific individuals to represent the people in specific acts of worship, and service in specific ways. When Nadab and Abihu offered fire that was “outside of” the boundaries of the law established by God, it was described by God as “unauthorized,” “profane,” or “strange.”

And so, it’s not unusual to find exhortations like that of Moses in Deuteronomy 4:1-2.

“And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.”

What do God’s prohibitions against adding to or taking away from his revealed will add to our understanding of lawlessness?

Clearly, God’s people were to have reverent regard for those things which had been authorized by God and to abstain from those things which had not been authorized by God.

In the New Testament letter of 2 Thessalonians, the apostle Paul warned first-century Christians that the spirit of “lawlessness” was alive and well.

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with

all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thes 2:1-12)

When it comes to our relationship with divine authority, we will either be on the side of law or lawlessness. Passages like 2 Thessalonians 2 make clear what side we should strive to be on.

Other New Testament References to God's Standard of Authority

Take the time to carefully read and reflect on the way the inspired messengers of the New Testament describe the will of God and our responsibility as his children, beginning with the words of Jesus.

“The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.” (John 12:48-50)

But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (Rom 6:17-18)

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (1 Cor 2:12-13)

What can we learn from John 12:48-50?

What can we learn from Romans 6:17-18?

What can we learn from 1 Corinthians 2:12-13?

I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? (1 Cor 4:6-7)

Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. (1 Cor 14:36-38)

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (Gal 1:6-9)

Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you. (2 Tim 1:13-14)

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Tim 2:1-2)

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but

What can we learn from
1 Corinthians 4:6-7?

What can we learn from
1 Corinthians 14:36-38?

What can we learn from
Galatians 1:6-9?

What can we learn from
2 Timothy 1:13-14?

What can we learn from
2 Timothy 2:1-2?

a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (James 1:22-25)

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet 4:10-11)

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 3)

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. (Rev 22:18-19)

When God's people are willing to submit themselves to God's revealed will and abide within the teaching God has provided, God's people can enjoy unity of mind and action.

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. (1 Cor 1:10)

Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. (Eph 5:8-10)

Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. (Phil 3:16-17, NKJV)

What can we learn from James 1:22-25?

What can we learn from 1 Peter 4:10-11?

What can we learn from Jude 3?

What can we learn from 1 Corinthians 1:10?

What can we learn from Philippians 3:16-17?

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Col 3:16-17)

Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thess 5:20-22)

There is a Lord over all humanity. This Lord has a will. His will can be understood. To live in willful ignorance of or rebellion against the will of the Lord is lawlessness. And one day we will all give account for the way we have lived in relation to his will.

“Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.” (Matt 13:30-33)

Therefore, the words of God to Cain thousands of years ago still ring true.

“If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.” (Gen 4:7)

CLOSING THOUGHT: James assures us that “the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing” (James 1:25).

What can we learn from Colossians 3:16-17?

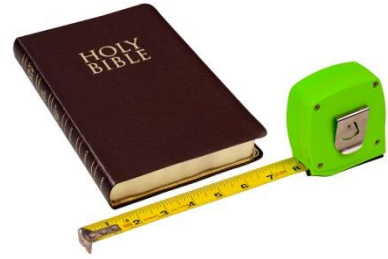
What can we learn from 1 Thessalonians 5:20-22?

In the minds of many, “law” and “liberty” are mutually exclusive. Why would James refer to “the law of liberty” as “the perfect law” (James 1:25)?

Why is the straightforward message of James 2:12 so foundational to our entire study of respect for authority?

• SUNDAY MORNING (February 2nd) •

The Raw Materials of Communication



Communication can be defined in a variety of different ways: the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing, or signs; something imparted, interchanged, or transmitted; a document or message imparting news, views, or information.

Remember the foundation we've laid to this point in our study:

- ❖ What is authority and why does it matter?
- ❖ God's authoritative expectations in the Old Testament
- ❖ God's authoritative expectations in the New Testament
- ❖ The catastrophic consequences of lawlessness

If we're to fully grasp how God's authority translates into and impacts our own lives, it's important that we take some time to focus on the raw materials of communication itself. *How* does God communicate his authoritative will to us?

What might be surprising to some is that God communicates *his* will in the same ways you communicate *your* will. Doy Moyer has done some very insightful and helpful writing on this topic¹:

There is no magic formula here. By understanding how we communicate at the most basic levels, we will understand how God communicates also. There is no special way of looking at communication when we study Scripture. People may buck against the idea of "establishing" authority, but the issue here is the same: How does God communicate His will? When we answer that, we've answered how His authority is made known.

In your own words, what is communication? When you communicate with someone, what are you doing?

Why might people be inclined to handle the raw materials of Scriptural communication differently than they would the raw materials of everyday communication?

¹ www.mindyourfaith.com/6/post/2013/12/its-how-communication-works.html

How is anyone's will communicated? How do you communicate your will to someone else? If you want to communicate your desire that someone do or consider something, how do you go about it? The possibilities are actually very narrow and straightforward:

1. You **tell** someone what you want. This is the most direct form of communication. It could take the form of a statement or even an order.
2. You **show** someone what you want. You might go so far as to show them *how* to go about doing it. Illustrations and examples are a commonly-employed tool in this vein of communication.
3. You **imply** what you expect others to get by what you say or show. Gestures could be helpful; even silence could be leveraged to make the point.

Now, here's the challenge. Can you think of any way to convey what is in your mind to the mind of someone else other than to tell, show, or imply that information?

Moyer asserts:

This is logic at the most fundamental level, and the principles we are discussing here are what we would call self-evident. Something is self-evident when it is true in itself. Such is the case with tell, show, and imply. How can we demonstrate this?

It is obvious that any attempt at communication will utilize one or more of these ways of communication. Try to communicate without it! I would issue this challenge if you disagree with what I'm saying: go ahead and disagree, but don't tell me anything about it, don't show me anything about it, and don't imply your disagreement. To do so would be self-defeating, for you will utilize the very process you are denying. Such cannot be done, and we would logically collapse on ourselves by thinking otherwise. Tell, show, and imply are logically self-evident. No further proof is needed, and objections to this are self-defeating and logically incoherent.

Let's make this personal. Pick a moment in the last week that you communicated something to someone via each of these three avenues:

- When did you **tell** someone to do something? How did you do it?

- When did you **show** someone what you wanted? How did you do it?

- When did you **imply** something to someone? How did you do it?

Does this come from God or man? Since our ability to think logically and communicate comes from God, then it *does* come from God as the way communication works. It is, again, so fundamental that we cannot communicate without it. God made us creatures with the need and ability to communicate, and this is how it is done. To help us understand God's authority, then, we need to start with the logical premises and show that there is no way around how communication works. We are simply reminding people of the fundamental logic that underlies all communication, including God's.

What About Commands, Examples, and Necessary Inferences?

Discussions of God's authority often revolve around (or at least involve) commands, examples, and necessary inferences (CENI for short). These are simply more formal, specific ways of saying "tell, show, and imply." The terms appeal to the very same process.

Again, from Moyer:

Therefore, when people complain about CENI as if there is something fundamentally flawed about it, they really are showing that the fundamental logic has not been thought through. This is exactly why we need to talk about it. (Note: I prefer TSI, as I'll refer to it, to CENI for the simple reason that it is more encompassing of the communication process – "tell" includes more than just commands; however, the point remains that CENI is just a specified way of speaking about the same process).

The problem is not with CENI itself. I would suggest that if we do a better job explaining the foundational logic of communication, there wouldn't be such a backlash later against CENI as some alleged man-made construct. It's not a man-made construct at all; it's the fancy talk for how communication works at the most basic of levels. God tells us what He wants; He shows us what He wants,

Let's think about this in relation to the Bible. Can you think of an instance where God communicated something to someone via each of these three avenues:

- When did God **tell** someone to do something? How did he do it?

- When did God **show** someone what he wanted? How did he do it?

- When did God **imply** something to someone? How did he do it?

and He implies what He expects us to get. It's up to us to think it out and think it through.

Consequently, I have, a few times, challenged those who don't like CENI. When challenged, they have typically backed up, admitting something like this: "Well, I agree that God communicates that way, but I don't like how it is applied." Now, you might disagree over some of the applications, but don't attack the principles themselves, for that is attacking the communication process, and it is self-defeating to do so. Start with a solid foundation.

Hermeneutics

The acts of telling, showing, and implying are foundational to any form of communication. In fact, they are *inherent* to any spoken or written communication, not just to studying the Bible.

Another word often invoked in discussions of authority is *hermeneutics*, the process of interpretation. Once more, from Moyer:

It is what we as the recipients (readers, hearers) bring to the communication process. TSI, on the other hand, is inherent in what the communicator gives. That is, we, the readers or listeners, do not provide TSI; we take the TSI that is given to us and try to understand what that means. TSI, then, is not a method of interpretation; it is the material that we interpret. We might misinterpret it. We might fail to get out of it what is intended. We might make more of examples and inferences than we ought to. But it is nevertheless the raw material that we use in order to understand what the author or speaker intends. There is no getting around this. No one interprets anything that is not first told, shown, or implied.

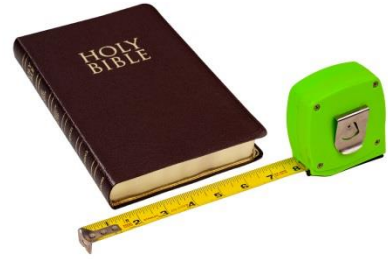
What is told, shown, and implied are the bare bones of what we work with when we interpret. Criticizing it as a failed hermeneutic is to misunderstand it at the most basic level. Instead of criticizing it, let's recognize it for what it is (inherent in the communication process) and then deal with how we should properly understand the statements, examples, and implications.

It's how communication works, and how communication works is fundamental to the process of understanding how God communicates with us. Most of the time we just communicate. We don't usually stop and think about the process. For understanding how God communicates His will to us, however, sometimes we just need to start with the basics. What has He said? What examples has He provided? What is to be inferred from the material He has provided? It's up to us to properly interpret it all.

CLOSING THOUGHT: In 1 Corinthians 4:2, Paul emphasized, "it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." Our ability to reason and communicate comes from God. In our stewardship of these good gifts, we must humbly do all that we can in order to be found faithful.

• SUNDAY MORNING (February 9th) •

The Nature of God's Written Revelation to Mankind



Having grown in our appreciation of the raw materials inherent to all communication (tell, show, imply), it's time to delve a little deeper. Practically speaking, how does the Bible direct us? In real-life terms, how do we transition from reading God-breathed words on the printed pages of our Bibles to leading God-approved lives? How can I faithfully interpret his communication to mankind that was delivered thousands of years ago and faithfully apply it to my own individual life? How does God speak to me and direct me at this point in history?

Consider six “connective paths”—within the tell, show, and imply realm of communication—between the word of God and the human heart.

Straightforward Declarations of Truth

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of straightforward, direct, to-the-point statements throughout both the Old and New Testaments. They are candidly delivered truths from divinely-appointed spokesmen, Spirit-led writers, or, at times, even from the very mouth of God himself. From the eternal mind of the infinite Creator, these matter-of-fact statements of truth are communicated to finite, temporal human beings so that we, as image-bearers of God, might believe and act upon his will for our lives. Examples of this “connective path” between the word of God and the human heart abound.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Gen 1:1)

For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil. (Eccl 12:14)

Let's take a moment to review. In your own words, how do these form the raw material of communication:

- Tell –

- Show –

- Imply –

Can you list two or three other examples of straightforward declarations of truth in the Bible?

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isa 55:8-9)

Regardless of my reaction, these are straightforward declarations of truth from the Creator of the universe to humanity. I can hear them, believe them, and act upon them or not, but my ignorance of or chafing under, or rebelling against these God-breathed truths will not change the fact that they are true. God has seen fit to define reality for all mankind in a written revelation. As a part of that revelation, he makes many straightforward declarations of truth.

Overarching Principles

A principle is a general law or basic truth from which further elements of instruction or expectation are derived. Principles provide a guiding sense of requirement and obligation. They serve as the groundwork of a system, an essential part of a whole. Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:22-24 are just a few of the many principles we find in the New Testament. Like foundational building blocks, they support the structure of Christian living.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

There’s a difference between “In the beginning, God created...” and “You cannot serve God and money.” The former is a straightforward declaration of truth; the latter is an overarching principle. It’s not a specific command or an explicit example, but it is an overarching principle. Regardless of my geographical, historical, or cultural context, the principle holds true—I cannot simultaneously serve God and money.

Why is it that we can do nothing to negate the truth behind straightforward declarations from God?

Can you think of an overarching principle you interact with (and perhaps take for granted) from everyday life?

Or, consider the admonition of Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7.

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

With these two sentences, Paul delivered so much more than a command to give. The Spirit of God, through Paul, established an overarching principle for God's people. Whether I'm a Jew or a Gentile, when I give of my resources, I'm to give from the heart. Whether I'm a man or a woman, if I adhere to the command to give but do so with a selfishly reluctant and grudging heart, I haven't met the Lord's expectations for my life. Why? Because there are overarching principles that apply to my life as a created, redeemed child of God. Regardless of the geographical, historical, or cultural context, God loves a cheerful giver.

Overarching principles with divine implications for human application are all over the New Testament. From the description of the church as a body with many members (1 Cor 12:12-31) to the more excellent way of love (1 Cor 13), from Jesus' assertion that whoever does not take up his cross and follow him is not worthy of him (Matt 10:37-42) to Paul's illustrations of soldiers, athletes, and farmers (2 Tim 2:4-7), God deepens our understanding of his will via the connective path of overarching principles.

Affirmative Commands

In Luke 6:46, Jesus asked, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" Walking with Christ involves not only avoiding that which is evil (more on that in a moment), but also actively doing and involving myself in that which is good. If the Son of God or one of his commissioned envoys tells me to do something, I must do it! I am under the jurisdiction of the One who has "all authority in heaven and on earth." His inspired messengers—whose God-directed work I have in the form of the New Testament—were authoritatively instructed to "go and make disciples of all

Can you list two or three other examples of overarching principles in the Bible?

How can our understanding of God's will be deepened by overarching principles just as surely as by declarations of truth?

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:18-20). They said things like, “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord” (1 Cor 14:37). Many of those commands were to affirmatively do something. Consider the positive commands in Romans 12:9-21.

- ❖ Let love be genuine
- ❖ Abhor what is evil
- ❖ Hold fast to what is good
- ❖ Love one another with brotherly affection
- ❖ Outdo one another in showing honor
- ❖ Be fervent in spirit
- ❖ Serve the Lord
- ❖ Rejoice in hope
- ❖ Be patient in tribulation
- ❖ Be constant in prayer
- ❖ Contribute to the needs of the saints
- ❖ Seek to show hospitality
- ❖ Bless those who persecute you
- ❖ Rejoice with those who rejoice
- ❖ Weep with those who weep
- ❖ Live in harmony with one another
- ❖ Associate with the lowly
- ❖ Give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all
- ❖ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all
- ❖ If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink
- ❖ Overcome evil with good

The very first gospel invitation was founded on an affirmative command—“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). The examples are all over the New Testament. One of the methods God uses to communicate his will for our lives is affirmative commands. “Do this!”

What right does God have to give us affirmative commands?

Can you list two or three other examples of affirmative commands in the Bible?

Negative Prohibitions

On the other hand, just as God has clearly told us to do some things, he has authoritatively prohibited us from doing other things. Returning to the same context of Romans 12:

- ❖ Do not be slothful in zeal
- ❖ Do not curse those who persecute you
- ❖ Do not be haughty
- ❖ Never be wise in your own sight
- ❖ Repay no one evil for evil
- ❖ Never avenge yourselves
- ❖ Do not be overcome by evil

As our Father in heaven who is good and does good (Psa 119:68), he is seeking to mold us and discipline us for our good.

For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:7-11)

Our responsibility, “as obedient children,” is to avoid conformity “to the passions” of our “former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet 1:14-16). Our heavenly Father defines and describes and warns against that which is unholy via the connective path of negative prohibitions. He says “Don’t do that!” many times in his revelation to mankind.

Knowing what we know of his character, why would our heavenly Father deliver negative prohibitions to his image-bearers?

Can you list two or three other examples of negative prohibitions in the Bible?

Positive and Negative Examples

Jesus Christ commissioned his apostles with authority. He drew lines in the sand when he said things like, “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16). On this basis the apostle Paul called attention to his own example.

I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. (1 Cor 4:16-17)

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil 4:9)

Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim 1:13)

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Tim 2:1-2)

Under the guidance of the specifically-commissioned apostles, the people of God in the New Testament lived and interacted and worked and worshiped together. They put into personal practice what they heard and saw in the apostles, much of which is recorded for us in the book of Acts and the various epistles. As a result, we can study historical examples of people who pleased God under the guidance of these Spirit-led ambassadors of Jesus.

- ❖ What did they do?
- ❖ How did they do it?
- ❖ How did they handle adversity and prosperity?
- ❖ How were they corrected when they got off-track?
- ❖ In what ways were they commended when they adhered to the pattern of sound words?

Do we learn from positive and negative examples in everyday life? If so, how?

How can our understanding of God’s will be deepened by positive and negative examples just as surely as by affirmative commands and negative prohibitions?

The principle behind Romans 15:4 holds true for us in this case—“Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Undoubtedly, there are many examples preserved in the Bible that did not meet with God’s approval. They are recorded—“warts and all”—for our learning and fearful avoidance.

A man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife’s knowledge, he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet. (Acts 5:1-2)

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. (Gal 2:11)

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. (1 Cor 5:1-2)

The attitudes and actions that were complimented and encouraged by the original handpicked representatives of Jesus should be imitated by modern disciples of Christ. Those attitudes and actions that were condemned and prohibited by those Spirit-guided messengers should be warned against and avoided. These ancient examples of others serve as a vital connective path between God’s will and modern discipleship.

Necessary Inferences

From an early age, we instinctively accumulate information based on instructions, examples, and circumstances. Shaped by that information, we learn to make decisions and judgments. At times, we must act in the absence of an expressed command or specific example. In such cases, we use our God-given powers of logical deduction. “Based on the data I have, what’s the most natural conclusion to be drawn? Based on what I know, what’s the wise thing to do?”

Can you list two or three other instances of positive examples in the Bible?

Can you list two or three other instances of negative examples in the Bible?

Are we impacted by necessary inferences in everyday life? If so, how?

The same holds true for our approach to the Bible.

And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. (Acts 8:38)

Who baptized whom? We naturally infer from the context of Acts 8 that Philip baptized the eunuch rather than vice versa, even though the names are not specifically given.

Or consider the same principle intentionally employed by Paul to make a specific point.

For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Rom 10:11-15)

Notice that Paul encourages his readers to remember the simple principle first established in Joel 2:32—everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. From there, he makes a series of inescapable conclusions in order to reinforce the importance of disciples preaching and supporting the preaching of the gospel.

- ❖ If people must call on the name of the Lord to be saved, we can necessarily infer that they must believe in him.
- ❖ If people are to believe in the Lord, we can necessarily infer that they must hear of him.
- ❖ If people are to hear of the Lord, someone must make a proclamation of him.
- ❖ “And how are they to preach unless they are sent?”

The writer of Hebrews relied heavily on necessary inferences to establish and repeatedly emphasize that the new covenant

Perhaps a question from last week will help sharpen our thinking. When did you **imply** something to someone in the few days? How did you do it?

Can you list two or three other examples of necessary inferences at work in the Bible?

is “better” than the old. In fact, one of the great themes of Hebrews is that the old covenant taught by necessary inference that the new would be better.

In Mark 12:26-27, Jesus used the power of necessary inference to prove that those who have died continue to exist and will, in fact, be raised from the dead.

“And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong.”

- ❖ God claimed to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when he spoke to Moses from the bush.
- ❖ At the point in history when God spoke to Moses from the bush, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead for many years.
- ❖ We can necessarily infer from his statement that he is not the God of the dead but of the living.
- ❖ Therefore, the dead will be raised, and the Sadducees were quite wrong.

Of course, we must always honestly and consistently remind ourselves that not all inferences are necessary. Not all conclusions are inescapable. For example, some have used the accounts of Lydia, the Philippian jailer, and their households in Acts 16 as Scriptural authorization for the baptism of infants. Lydia was baptized, she “and her household” (16:15). The jailer was baptized at once, “he and all his family” (16:33). But to leap from those historical examples to Scriptural precedence for infant baptism is to infer that which is not necessary. There are many households without infants.

As we connect the dots between the Scriptures and God’s authoritative will for our lives, we must make sure that our conclusions are resting on solid ground.

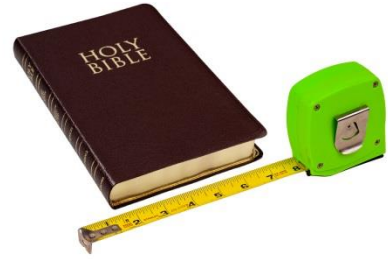
Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. (2 Tim 2:15, NASB)

To drive these points home, we could consider the Lord’s Supper as a case study. No single passage of Scripture gives us every relevant detail regarding the observance of the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week. But as we familiarize ourselves with everything God’s word has to say on the subject, a well-developed pattern begins to emerge. What can we learn about the Lord’s Supper from:

- Declarations of truth
- Overarching principles
- Affirmative commands
- Negative prohibitions
- Approved examples
- Necessary inferences

• SUNDAY MORNING (February 16th) •

The Intersection of Heavenly Authority and Everyday Life



As human beings, we understand and apply authoritative instructions using our God-given common sense every day. In fact, we learn to do so from a very early age. We may not use distinctive labels or philosophical definitions to describe what we're doing, but we comprehend and follow the fundamental principles of authority and compliance in thousands upon thousands of actions and reactions over a lifetime of interactions.

For example, a father knocks on the bedroom door of his teenage son and communicates clear instructions to him. "Take this \$25 and go to Pizza Hut on Main Street. I just called in an order for a sausage pizza, an order of breadsticks, and a Diet Coke. Go straight there, and come straight back home. We'll have the table set when you get back." That teenager is now the recipient of very specific instructions that carry the authoritative weight of his father. These instructions, by their very nature, logically rule out millions of other variables.

- ❖ Can the teenage son take his father's \$25, pick up his girlfriend, and head for the movie theater? No! Why not? His father specifically told him to go to Pizza Hut and spend the money there. Even though his father did not methodically list every possible place his son should not go, the teenager naturally understands something, doesn't he? To take that \$25 and spend it anywhere other than Pizza Hut will be to disobey his father at home. His father's specific mention of Pizza Hut on Main Street logically rules out every other pizza place, every other restaurant, every other venue, and even every other Pizza Hut other than the Pizza Hut on Main Street.
- ❖ The same principle applies to the sausage pizza, the order of breadsticks, and the Diet Coke. If the teenager comes home with a pepperoni pizza, an order of hot wings, and a Mountain Dew, he will have failed to follow his father's instructions. Why? Even though the teenager went to Pizza Hut, his father specifically ordered a sausage pizza, breadsticks, and a Diet Coke. The specific nature of his communication logically rules out every other kind of pizza, every other side item, and every other beverage.
- ❖ "Go straight there, and come straight back home" were his father's final specific instructions. Even if the teenager goes to Pizza Hut, to go anywhere beyond Pizza Hut will be to blatantly disregard his father's instructions. Why? All other stops are logically ruled out by the specific instructions of his authoritative father.

As a human being, the teenage son has freedom of will. He has received specific instructions from his father. The way he acts from the point of instruction forward depends entirely on the level of respect he has for his father.

On the other hand, suppose the same father knocks on the bedroom door of the same teenage son with similar, but more general instructions. “Your mom is in the mood for pizza. How about taking this \$25 and picking one up for all of us? And while you’re at it, grab some dessert and a soft drink or two.” That teenager has received some very generic instructions that carry the authoritative weight of his father. He is still expected to go and pick up some pizza with the money provided, but the nature of his father’s instructions logically carry a certain amount of freedom to choose how those instructions will be carried out.

- ❖ Pepperoni? Sausage? Supreme? Hawaiian? Cheese? Any one of these—including a number of other options—are available to the teenager, as long as he comes home with a pizza.
- ❖ Ice cream? Cookies? Cake? Brownies? Candy? Any of these—including a number of other options—are available to the teenager, as long as he comes home with some type of dessert. His father has no logical right to be upset with his son if the teenager comes home with vanilla ice cream instead of Milky Way candy bars. Why not? He gave his son generic instructions. “Grab some dessert.” The category of dessert was assigned, but anything within that category is a fulfillment of the father’s instructions.
- ❖ Where should he buy the dessert? Pizza Hut? Dairy Queen? A grocery store? A gas station? Any of these—including a number of other options—are available to the teenager, as long as he comes home with dessert. The source of the dessert was not limited by specific instructions from his father.
- ❖ Coke? Pepsi? Dr. Pepper? Mountain Dew? Sprite? Any of these—including a number of other options—are available to the teenager, as long as he comes home with a 2-liter ... or two. Neither the type (plastic bottles, cans, etc.) nor the size (2-liter, 16 oz., etc.) nor a specific number of containers were specified. “A soft drink or two” were the general instructions provided by his father.

The difference between specific and generic instructions from an authority figure isn’t hard to discern, is it? Specific instructions specify. By their very nature, they exclude and rule out every other option.

- ❖ Your Last Will and Testament specifies who is to receive what in your inheritance. It doesn’t list everyone who is excluded from your inheritance.
- ❖ The deed to your property specifies the owner of the property. It doesn’t list everyone without a claim to your property.

- ❖ The prescription you got from your doctor specifies the medication you can receive from your pharmacist. It doesn't list every single medication that's off-limits to you in your present condition.
- ❖ Your airline ticket specifies who can board an airplane, in which airport, and where that flight is headed. It doesn't list everyone without a right to board, every airport of origin that is excluded, and every city in the world other than your destination.

On the other hand, general instructions generalize. By their very nature, they include any number of options within a specific group, category, or class.

- ❖ Elementary teachers provide supply lists at the start of a school year. "Five folders" on the list provides general instruction with many options. The brand, color, and texture of the folders are up to the student, as long as he or she brings five folders to school.
- ❖ The college professor who assigns a biography term-paper to his students has provided generic instructions. Each student can select from millions of options, as long as he or she writes a term-paper that is biographical in nature.
- ❖ The boss who sends an intern out of the office to buy a box of 8.5" x 11" paper has provided general instructions. The intern has a choice as to where he or she purchases the paper, as long as the paper is purchased.
- ❖ The father who tells his son to fill up the gas tank of the car before bringing it back home after the Friday night date has provided general instructions. The gas station used by the son is up to the son, as long as the gas tank is full when he pulls the car into the driveway.

Specific Authority in the Bible

It is God who created human beings with the ability to understand and apply authoritative instructions using everyday common sense. He equipped us to comprehend the raw materials of communication and follow the fundamental principles of authority in thousands upon thousands of actions and reactions in everyday life. And he used the same principles in his authoritative written communication to mankind.

As created image-bearers, our heavenly Father has blessed us with freedom of will. He has given us some very specific instructions. The way we conduct ourselves during our time on the earth will depend, in large part, on the level of respect we have for our Father.

Take your time with the following chart. It illustrates—using Old and New Testament examples—the premise behind and the power of specific commands and examples. When God gave precise instructions or preserved examples that were approved under the oversight of

inspired representatives, those commands and examples logically excluded variations in thought and behavior. We can learn how to apply heavenly authority to everyday life by learning from the examples of those who came before us. How would you fill in the right-hand column in light of what we've learned about the basic principles of specific authority?

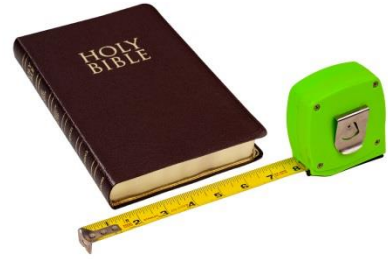
These Specific COMMANDS or EXAMPLES	Logically Exclude These VARIATIONS
Noah (Genesis 6:14) Make yourself an ark Of gopher wood	
Abraham (Genesis 22:2) Offer Isaac as a burnt offering	
Passover (Exodus 12) Sacrifice a lamb Without blemish 1 year old Male On the 14 th day of the 1 st month	

<p>Laws for Purification (Numbers 19:1-2)</p> <p>A red heifer</p> <p>Without defect</p> <p>On which a yoke has never come</p>	
<p>Proclaim (Mark 16:15-16)</p> <p>The gospel</p> <p>To the whole creation</p> <p>Belief and baptism</p>	
<p>Baptism</p> <p>A burial (Romans 6:4)</p> <p>In water (Acts 8:36; 10:47)</p> <p>For the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38)</p>	

<p>Assemblies of Christians for Worship</p> <p>The Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34)</p> <p>Prayer (Acts 2:42)</p> <p>Singing (Eph 5:18-19; Col 3:16-17)</p> <p>Teaching (Acts 20:7)</p> <p>Collection for the saints (1 Cor 16:1-2)</p>	
<p>The Lord's Supper</p> <p>On the first day of the week (Acts 20:7)</p> <p>Bread & fruit of the vine (Matt 26:26-29)</p>	
<p>The Church's Raising of Funds (2 Cor 9:6-7)</p> <p>Voluntary giving of Christians</p>	

• SUNDAY MORNING (February 23rd) •

When It's Time to Make a Judgment Call



We know what it is to make “judgment calls” in various circumstances of everyday life. In general terms, a judgment call is a decision based on personal opinion or preference.

In our last session, we noted the difference between specific and generic instructions from an authority figure:

- ❖ Specific instructions specify. By their very nature, they exclude and rule out every other option. Specific instructions don't generally leave room for judgment calls on the part of the recipient.
- ❖ On the other hand, general instructions generalize. By their very nature, they include any number of options within a specific group, category, or class. General instructions typically leave room for judgment calls on the part of the recipient.

One word that naturally arises in discussions of judgment calls is *expedient*. An expedient is an appropriate, profitable, advantageous way of accomplishing something. Expedients are helpful means to necessary ends. The word expedient is used seven times in the *King James Version* of the Bible.

- ❖ “Nor consider that it is **expedient** for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.” (John 11:50)
- ❖ “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is **expedient** for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.” (John 16:7)
- ❖ Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was **expedient** that one man should die for the people. (John 18:14)

Have you recently had to make a judgment call? Why was it necessary? How did you go about making it?

In your own words, what does “expedient” mean? Can you use an everyday example as an illustration?

Why was it “expedient” for Jesus to go away?

- ❖ All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not **expedient**: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. (1 Cor 6:12)
- ❖ All things are lawful for me, but all things are not **expedient**: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. (1 Cor 10:23)
- ❖ And herein I give my advice: for this is **expedient** for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. (2 Cor 8:10)
- ❖ It is not **expedient** for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. (2 Cor 12:1)

The *English Standard Version* variously translates *sumphero* (Greek) in the passages listed above as “better” (John 11:50), “to your advantage” (John 16:7), “expedient” (John 18:14), “helpful” (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23), “benefits” (2 Cor 8:10), and “to be gained” (2 Cor 12:1). As a noun, *sumpheros* (Greek) is also used by Paul in 1 Corinthians, and noting the context deepens our understanding of the principle behind the word.

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own **benefit**, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. (1 Cor 7:32-35)

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own **advantage**, but that of many, that they may be saved. (1 Cor 10:31-33)

Based on our study up to this point, we know that God hasn’t given mankind a blank check labeled “**EXPEDIENT.**”

When Paul writes, “all things are not expedient,” what is he communicating? Is that statement still true?

In your own words, summarize Paul’s communication in 1 Corinthians 7:32-35.

Why is Paul’s attitude in 1 Corinthians 10:31-33 still worthy of imitation?

If in all circumstances he allowed us to determine for ourselves what is right and wrong based purely on our own judgments of what is “better,” “beneficial” or “advantageous,” we would basically become a law unto ourselves and do whatever was right in our own eyes.

And yet, God *has* allowed us to choose for ourselves how a number of general commands will be carried out and general examples will be modeled in our own modern context. Some aspects of discipleship can be accurately described and faithfully fulfilled within the realm of human judgment. In such cases, we have liberty to determine what would be most appropriate, profitable, and advantageous in a given situation. We have freedom to ask, “What would be the most helpful and beneficial means of reaching this necessary end?”

“Is it lawful?” Why must we always be willing to start with and return to that question?

Constructive Questions to Ask in the Making of Expedient Judgments

Is it lawful? “‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are helpful” (1 Cor 10:23). Some of the early Christians in Corinth were arguing that all things were lawful for the Christian. There was great confusion and argument over how to regard meat that had been sacrificed to a pagan idol. Paul provides practical instruction in the larger context of 1 Corinthians 10, but establishes that things must first and foremost be “lawful.” Before we consider whether a thing is expedient, we must honestly ask, “Is it lawful?” If it’s not lawful, it can’t be expedient.

Has God been specific? If something has been specified, there is no room for expedients.

Is it helpful? In 1 Corinthians 10, the Spirit encourages us to recognize that even lawful things may not be helpful in a specific situation. Some press their opinion or insist on their “pet project” in the name of expediency, even if it causes division among God’s people. Such attitudes and actions destroy rather than edify and build up (1 Cor 14:26).

Will this cause my brother or sister to stumble? In 1 Corinthians 10:32, Paul qualifies his instructions about expediencies by saying, “Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.” In 1 Corinthians 8:7-13 he encourages careful recognition that “not all possess” mature knowledge and that the mature must act accordingly.

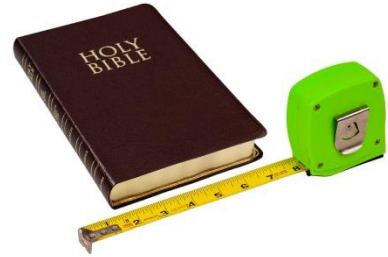
And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. (1 Cor 8:11-13)

Take your time with the following chart. How would you fill in the right-hand column in light of what we've learned about the basic principles of general authority and expedient judgments?

These General COMMANDS or EXAMPLES	Logically Encourage Questions of EXPEDIENCY
Noah (Genesis 6:14) "Make" yourself an ark	
The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) "Go" "Baptizing" "Teaching"	
Assembling with the Saints Not neglecting to meet (Hebrews 10:25)	
The Lord's Supper On the first day of the week (Acts 20:7)	
Addressing One Another in Song (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16)	

• SUNDAY MORNING (March 2nd) •

When God Hasn't Said Anything About It



Having focused extensively in previous lessons on the nature of God's specific and generic instructions, we turn our attention more fully to the other end of the spectrum. What about those innumerable instances when God hasn't said anything? How should we treat the silence of God? Is it permissive or prohibitive? When God hasn't specifically addressed something in either positive or negative terms, may we faithfully interpret his silence as license to proceed in whatever direction we choose?

- ❖ Granted, we don't read anything in God's revelation to mankind about the yearly observance of Christmas, but what's the big deal if we're remembering Jesus?
- ❖ The use of guitars, keyboards, and drums in our assemblies of worship can't be specifically authorized using the New Testament, but what's wrong with using them if our praise is enthusiastically directed toward God?
- ❖ May we build whatever we would like to build, fund whatever we would like to fund, solicit in whatever way we would like to solicit, as long as some justifiable good comes as a result of our efforts?

As human beings, we can formulate an endless amount of "good reasons." Given enough time and wiggle room, we can justify nearly anything. We can appeal to emotions and reason from past experiences and motivate with inspiring rhetoric, but we are not the ultimate standard of authority. The bedrock principles delivered in Isaiah 55:6-11 continue to resonate throughout the created order.

Words from the mouth of the Creator have been delivered to and preserved for his creation. There is divine purpose behind his revealed thoughts and demonstrated ways. He has already

Because the scope of this lesson is pretty large, most of the Scripture references aren't printed out in full within the material. It's highly recommended that you get out your Bible and read the referenced passages as you make your way through this lesson.

"Why can't we?" is an often asked question in the religious world. On what issues of authority and practice have you heard people raise the question?

What difference does Isaiah 55:6-11 make?

told us his ways and thoughts are inherently distinct from our ways and thoughts. They are higher and holier. His purposes will be accomplished; his will shall succeed. Our responsibility, as repeatedly referenced in this study, is simple and straightforward.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Eph 5:15-17)

In the end, therefore, the question is infinitely bigger than “Why can’t we?” or “What’s the big deal?” Despite our opinions, justifications, and rationalizations, the only thing that truly matters in the final analysis is this: how does God treat his silence in the Scriptures? Is it prohibitive or permissive?

The Sounds of Silence in the Old Testament

In Exodus 14, the people of Israel stood on the brink of freedom. Having been delivered from Egyptian bondage, they had been led by Moses to the shores of the Red Sea. What they didn’t realize was that Pharaoh had changed his mind about allowing them to be free (Exo 14:9-14).

What did God want them to do? Wait. Wait for further instruction. Fear not, stand firm, and wait for the salvation of the LORD. How long should they wait? Until they received the command to move. Even if Pharaoh was in sight? Even if Pharaoh was in sight. What if the command to move didn’t come? Fear not. Stand firm. Wait. God will deliver you. He knows what he’s doing (Exo 14:15-18). When God’s people wait for God’s instructions so that they might fulfill God’s purposes, God gets the glory.

In Numbers 9, the children of Israel had made their way to Mount Sinai. It had been a year since they had observed the first Passover in Egypt (9:1-8).

“Why can’t we?” is not a new question when it comes to our relationship with God. For centuries, men and women have

In your own words, what are Christians being told in Ephesians 5:15-17? What does that admonition have to do with the silence of God?

Practically speaking, what can we learn from Exodus 14:9-18?

“Why can’t we?” comes up in Numbers 9:1-14. Is there anything we can learn from the account?

faced choices of practical conduct in light of God's revelation. "Knowing what I know, what will I do?" "Having heard what I've heard, how should I proceed?" "If God hasn't addressed it, why can't I?"

These "certain men" had a choice to make. In Numbers 5:1-4, the LORD had already commanded the people of Israel to put out of the camp everyone who was unclean through contact with the dead. But it was Passover! A national celebration! And yes, this is what the LORD had specifically said, but did it really apply in this instance? Didn't this extraordinary situation overshadow what God had dictated in the law? "Why can't we?" was the question put to Moses.

Moses' response? Wait. God's silence on this specific nuance of law and conduct is significant. We shouldn't presume. We shouldn't rationalize. We should wait and seek clarification from the LORD before we act. And in Numbers 9:9-14, God provided his answer, granting special permission for the men's observance one month later. But what would have happened if these men had interpreted God's silence as license to act? Multiple Old Testament examples suggest the consequences could have been disastrous.

In Deuteronomy 28-30, Moses delivered some of his final instructions and warnings to the people of Israel. In Deuteronomy 28:1-14, he established the blessings that would naturally come as a result of faithful obedience to the voice of the LORD. In Deuteronomy 28:15-68, he extensively elaborated on the curses that would consume the people if they did not obey.

The principles behind his communication are simple and straightforward—if God said do it, do it! If God said don't do it, don't do it! Whether God had communicated something specifically or generically, the people were to respect his revelation. And as for the things he hadn't said?

"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." (Deut 29:29)

In Numbers 9:8, Moses is quoted as saying, "Wait, that I may hear what the LORD will command concerning you." Is this still a valid course of action? The best course of action? If so, why? In what ways?

What should we make of Deuteronomy 29:29?

If God revealed it, it belongs to us, and our responsibility is to act. If God didn't reveal it, the secret things belong to the LORD, and his silence is not a license for action.

“Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.” (Deut 12:32)

One of the holy vessels of the tabernacle system was the ark of the covenant. The LORD had “set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD to stand before the LORD to minister to him” (Deut 10:8). The LORD didn't say, “men from the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, Judah and Dan shall not carry the ark of the covenant.” But then again, a “thou shalt not” was unnecessary. By specifying the tribe of Levi as authorized, all other tribes of Israel were logically excluded.

Was God's silence concerning the rights of the tribes of Naphtali, Gad, and Asher to carry the ark prohibitive? Take a moment to learn from the logic of David, a man after God's own heart (1 Chron 15:1-2).

King David understood that God's silence was prohibitive. When the LORD specifically authorized the Levites to carry the ark of the covenant, all others were logically excluded. “No one but the Levites” was authorized, and God's silence was to be respected.

Further instructions had been authoritatively given by God concerning the transporting of the ark (Exo 25:12-14). Though he was a man after God's own heart, when King David failed to respectfully follow the LORD's clear commandments concerning the carrying of the ark, disaster soon followed (2 Sam 6:1-11).

God had never delivered a “thou shalt not” in respect to transporting the ark by cart. His law was silent in regard to methods other than poles on the sides of the ark. Was a deviation with good intentions accompanied by joyful praise a big deal? Listen to David's adapted perspective as he later spoke to the priests and heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites:

“You are the heads of the Levitical families; you and your fellow Levites are to consecrate yourselves and bring up

Rephrase the message of Deuteronomy 12:32 in your own words.

When God revealed that he had “set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant,” what was he communicating?

Was the logic of David in 1 Chronicles 15:1-2 sound? If so, why?

What can we learn from the disastrous account of 2 Samuel 6:1-11?

the ark of the LORD, the God of Israel, to the place I have prepared for it. It was because you, the Levites, did not bring it up the first time that the LORD our God broke out in anger against us. We did not inquire of him about how to do it in the prescribed way.” (1 Chron 15:12-13, NIV)

There was a “prescribed way” to move the ark. When human beings didn’t inquire of the LORD, but presumed for themselves, the consequences were dire. And they had no one to blame but themselves.

Years later, when the fame of King Uzziah—who was of the tribe of Judah—spread far, he overstepped the bounds of the law of God and was swiftly punished (2 Chron 26:16-21).

The point of these, and so many other Old Testament accounts that could be listed is plain. Thousands of years later, they scream out to us to be careful, to pay attention to what God has said, and to respect his silence (Jer 7:30-31).

If God revealed it, it belonged to the people. Their responsibility was to act in accordance. If God didn’t reveal it, the secret things were to be left to his prerogative. His silence was not to be regarded as a license for action (Deut 12:32).

New Testament Echoes of the Same Principles Behind God’s Silence

We are not, on this historical side of the cross, under the authoritative scope of the Old Testament. At this point in God’s eternal plan of redemption, we are not subject to the jurisdiction of the old law delivered through Moses. And yet, we shouldn’t be surprised that the principles behind healthy respect for the Giver of all instruction and the Definer of all expectations would continue to resonate as foundational to “the law of liberty” (James 2:12). Fearful reverence for the silence of God is repeatedly prescribed for those who are “of Christ.”

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one

What is a “prescribed way” of doing something? What makes it “prescribed”?

How did King Uzziah get himself into serious trouble? Is there anything we can learn from his example?

God uses very strong language against people who were doing things “which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind” (Jer 7:30-31). Can we be guilty of the same thing today?

who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet 4:10-11, NIV)

Could there be any humbler, safer, more reverent approach as created beings than to strive to speak where the Bible speaks and to remain silent where the Bible is silent? The apostle Paul made his strong appeals to the Christians in Corinth based on that foundational principle (1 Cor 4:6-7).

They were the recipients of God-breathed truth via Spirit-guided apostles. This truth didn't originate with any one saint or group of saints in Corinth. Men have boasted (and continue to boast) as if they are the originators of truth when, in fact, human beings are the recipients of truth as defined by the Creator. What then is our responsibility? To speak where God has spoken and remain silent where God is silent! Or, in the language of 1 Corinthians 4:1, "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."

In the strongest of ways, John powerfully warns against ignoring the revealed will of God (2 John 4-11). There is an objective body of truth described by a Spirit-led apostle as "the teaching of Christ." To step beyond it—either into that which is specifically forbidden, or into the unauthorized realm of silence—is to transgress the will of Almighty God. And whoever does so progresses without God.

When men of the first-century stepped beyond the teachings of the authoritative apostles, the transgression was recognized and rebuked. In Acts 15, in response to certain men from Judea who were teaching Gentiles, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved," the apostles and elders—with the whole church in Jerusalem—sent representatives to Antioch with a letter revolving around the fact that "we gave them no instructions" (Acts 15:23-26). Silence was not permissive.

The writer of Hebrews provides several illustrations which show how we ought to interact with the silence of God. In

"If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God" (1 Pet 4:11). What does this mean?

Why is 1 Corinthians 4:6-7 absolutely foundational to our relationship with God?

What should we take away from 2 John 4-11 as disciples of Christ?

these last days, by God's design, we are to listen to his Son (Heb 1:1-5). Why? One of the inspired arguments is rooted in the silence of God. In Hebrews 8:4, the writer affirms that Jesus could not function as a priest during his time on the earth. Why? He was of the tribe of Judah, not Levi (Heb 7:11-14).

In the Old Testament, it was an understood fact that no tribe other than Levi could install a priest to serve at the altar. In 1 Kings 12:31, Jeroboam "made temples on high places and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites." Notice how his unlawful actions were soundly condemned in 1 Kings 13:1-2.

Why were Jeroboam's innovations condemned? Not because Moses had delivered in the law, "Thou shalt not appoint priests from Asher, Benjamin, Dan, Ephraim, Gad, Issachar, Judah, Manasseh, Naphtali, Reuben, Simeon or Zebulun." Moses was silent on the issue of priests coming from tribes other than Levi. And yet, Jeroboam was denounced and condemned because everyone knew the law said priests were to be from Levi.

In the New Testament, the writer of Hebrews reestablishes the fact that God had said nothing regarding priests from another tribe. Therefore, priests from any other tribe were naturally and logically forbidden. But in these last days, there is a change in the priesthood and, by necessity, a change in the law as well. It is evident that Jesus, our high priest, was of the tribe of Judah. The thunderous silence of God means something and the point could not be plainer!

Why couldn't Jesus serve as a priest during his earthly ministry?

The inspired words of Hebrews 7:11-14 are extremely formative to our understanding of God's will for our lives. What should we learn from this passage of Scripture?

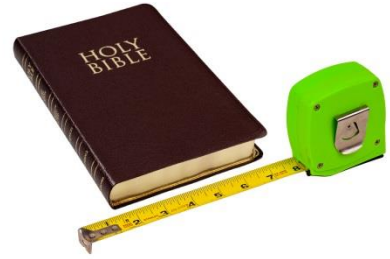
Conclusion

When God wants his will carried out in a certain way, he is very specific in his instructions, whether he is referring to individual disciples or the organization, mission, work, and methods of his church. If we truly love him with all of our hearts, then we will respect the silence of his revelation to mankind and limit ourselves to the guidance he has provided.

To speak where the Bible speaks and strive for silence where the Bible is silent is a noble goal worthy of our highest efforts and most steadfast dedication. When God's people wait for God's instructions so that they might fulfill God's purposes, God gets the glory.

• SUNDAY MORNING (March 9th) •

Living in the Light of God's Authority as a Disciple of Jesus



Having explored what the Scriptures say concerning respect for authority, it's time to make these principles personal. Take your time with the following passages. What can we learn about living in the light of God's authority as a disciple of Jesus from:

❖ Luke 17:7-10?

❖ Matthew 25:14-30?

❖ Acts 5:27-32?

❖ Romans 13:1-7?

❖ 1 Corinthians 11:1-3?

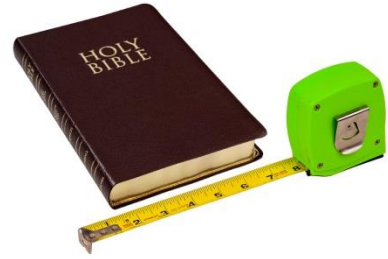
❖ 1 Timothy 2:8-15?

❖ Ephesians 5:15-33?

❖ 1 Peter 3:1-7?

• SUNDAY MORNING (March 16th) •

Worshiping in the Light of God's Authority as a Church



To *worship* is to pay homage or show reverent honor; to adore, venerate, or ascribe ultimate worth. We are all, as human beings, worshipers of something or someone. The Bible makes abundantly clear that we are to be worshipers of almighty God (Rev 19:10; 22:9).

That being said, the Bible is also clear in its exposure of the fact that not all worship is acceptable to God.

Jesus rebuked **vain worship** in Matthew 15:7-9.

“You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”

When Paul came to the city of Athens, “his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols” (Acts 17:16). In Acts 17:22-23, he began to address the shortcomings of **ignorant worship**.

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”

In Colossians 2:20-23, Paul warned Christians to avoid the pitfall of **self-made worship**.

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to

How would you describe worship in your own words?

What is “vain” worship?

Are people still guilty of “ignorant” worship? If so, in what ways?

regulations—“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion (*self-imposed worship* [NIV]; *will worship* [KJV]) and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Clearly, just because I say I believe in God doesn’t make me an acceptable worshiper of God. Just because I determine to “worship” doesn’t mean I’m worshiping in the way my heavenly Father expects. If worship really is “paying homage or showing reverent honor, adoring, venerating, or ascribing ultimate worth,” I’d better make sure I’m listening to and submitting to the one I’m claiming to worship. Remember the goal:

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:5-7)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:1-2)

Worshipping in Spirit and Truth as Disciples of Jesus

In John 4, Jesus spoke with a woman from Samaria.

The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain (Mt. Gerizim), but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman,

What’s the big deal with “self-made worship” or “self-made religion”? Why is that something to be zealously guarded against?

Can you think of some examples of “self-made worship” in the 21st century?

What is the Spirit of God calling for us to do and be in Romans 12:1-2?

believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:19-24)

Jesus commissioned his apostles in Matthew 28:18-20:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

In Acts 2:42, notice how the earliest Christians are described:

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

“The first day of the week” had taken on great significance to the earliest disciples of Christ.

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. (Acts 20:7)

Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. (1 Cor 16:1-2)

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet... (Rev 1:9-10)

In your own words, what does it mean to “worship in spirit and truth”?

What does John 17:17 contribute to our efforts to worship in spirit and truth?

In light of passages like Luke 24:1 and Acts 2:1, why do you think the first day of the week came to carry great significance for the earliest disciples of Jesus?

The epistles of the New Testament consistently reference assemblies of Christians.

When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus... (1 Cor 5:4)

But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. (1 Cor 11:17)

If, therefore, the whole church comes together... (1 Cor 14:23)

As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. (1 Cor 14:33-34)

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Heb 10:24-25)

As Christians come together, God is to be glorified (Heb 13:15) and disciples are to be built up (1 Cor 14:26). These ideals are accomplished in:

- ❖ Prayer (Acts 2:42)
- ❖ Singing (Eph 5:18-21; Col 3:16-17)
- ❖ Preaching (Acts 2:42; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 4:1-2)
- ❖ The observance of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34)

If our aim is "acceptable worship," we must submit ourselves to the authority of our heavenly King. We must listen to the words of the great Definer. We must yield ourselves as clay in the hands of the master Potter.

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. (Heb 12:28-29)

If, when Christians assemble together, the goal is to glorify God and build each other up, how do the following accomplish these ideals:

- Prayer –
- Singing –
- Preaching –
- The observance of the Lord's Supper –