

Sunday, December 4, 2022 am

CONCERNING FIRST PRINCIPLES

How To Establish Authority

In many of my sermons I make reference to the importance of authority for everything that we do. When we read the expression, "In the name of the Lord" it is a call for authority or permission for what we do. Simply stated, if we desire to be pleasing to God, we need to do what He tells us to do and follow the pattern He has given us. But how do we establish that pattern? It has been a few years since I presented a lesson specifically addressing HOW we establish authority, so today I would like to remind us of these things. This is a "first principles" lesson.

I. There are 3 legitimate ways to establish authority.

- a. Direct command or statement. – this is a statement that either instructs us as to what to do or what NOT to do. Much of what the Bible teaches is direct. You read a text and you understand what you can and cannot do.
 - i. **Acts 2:38** - Peter commanded them to "repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins". A clear answer explaining what they needed to do (cf. Acts 2:37). **1 Peter 3:21** says, "Baptism now saves us" – this is a statement with the force of a command. In essence Peter is saying, "You need to be baptized." Acts 10:48 – Peter "commanded" Cornelius and his household to be baptized.
 - ii. **Hebrews 10:24-25** – exhort one another daily, not forsaking the assembling of yourselves...
 - iii. **2 Thessalonians 3:6** – the church is commanded to withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly.
 - iv. **Ephesians 4:25- 32** – we are told how we are to treat one another as brethren. This includes being truthful, working with our hands (being productive), being an encouragement to each other, being kind and tenderhearted, and forgiving each other even as Christ forgave us. This text also contains several directly stated prohibitions – do not lie, do not be sinfully angry, do not steal, do not let corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth.
 - v. **1 Thessalonians 5:17** – "pray without ceasing" – as Christians we are commanded to pray!
 - vi. **1 Thessalonians 5:21-22** – *Test all things; hold fast to what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.*
 - vii. **MOST of what we are called upon to do is based on direct statements.** NOTE: This does not mean that we do not need to contextualize the commands properly. IF we desire to be pleasing to God, we will do this.
- b. Approved example – this is an example that clearly implies it is something God desires to be done, AND the way it is to be done. Approved examples typically deal with HOW a direct command is to be carried out.
 - i. First, we consider that we are COMMANDED to follow examples:
 1. **Matthew 16:24** – Jesus said, "deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me."
 2. **Philippians 2:5** – follow the example of Jesus in humility
 3. **1 Corinthians 11:1** – Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ.
 4. **Philippians 4:9** – the things you have learned, received, heard and saw – these do
 - ii. Some examples of approved examples
 1. There are BAD examples that we should NOT follow – **Luke 17:32** – remember Lot's wife (don't look back); **1 Corinthians 10:5-10** – examples we are COMMANDED to not follow; **2 Peter 2:6** – the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is an example to those who afterward would live ungodly.

2. **Luke 10:30-36** – when Jesus was asked, “Who is my neighbor” by the lawyer, He replied with the parable of the good Samaritan. Jesus gave an EXAMPLE of how we are to treat our neighbors and WHO is our neighbor – anyone we have opportunity to help.
 3. **Hebrews 12:1**- the great cloud of witnesses of **Hebrews 11**. From these we can learn what true faith looks like.
 4. **James 5:16-18** – We are commanded to confess trespasses and pray for one another. Elijah is given as an example of prayer
 5. **2 Corinthians 8:1** – we find churches in Macedonia preparing a financial gift for struggling brethren in Judea. Paul uses them as an example for what the Corinthian brethren needed to do based upon previous commitments. This is consistent with other examples of churches helping needy saints (*cf. Acts 11:27-30*). WE learn from their examples how what we can do as the church is limited (there is a pattern we ought to respect).
- c. Necessary inference – also called unavoidable conclusion or necessary implication. This is an obvious conclusion that is reached by reading the text.
- i. **1 Peter 3:21** – going back to the statement with the force of a command, why is that the case? Because the ONLY valid inference you can make from that statement is that you need to be baptized.
 - ii. **Acts 17:1-4** – in Thessalonica, Paul went into a synagogue and “*reasoned from the scriptures*” explaining that Jesus was the Christ and had to suffer. The point here is that Paul expected them to reach the ONLY real conclusion about Jesus. Many did not, but some were persuaded.
 - iii. **Matthew 19:3-6** – when Jesus was asked about divorce for any cause, Jesus addressed what Moses (directed by YHWH) taught about this. Jesus reached a conclusion based on Genesis 2:23-24 – that “*what God has joined together, do not let man separate.*” Marriage is intended to be for life. Of course, this leads to a direct statement that we must consider today in vs. 9, *And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.*”
 - iv. **Acts 8:35-36** – concerning baptism. As Philip joined the eunuch in the chariot, beginning with Isaiah 53 he “preached Jesus to him.” We can necessarily conclude that preaching Jesus included baptism, because in vs. 36 we read, “*Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?”*”
- d. NOTE: These 3 ways were not arbitrarily invented by “the restoration movement” to establish a pattern among churches of Christ. In reality, they are the legitimate ways you establish authority for ANYTHING you do. This is best illustrated when one is hired for a job. Consider that he learns what his responsibilities will be by: 1) Direct instructions – he is TOLD what he needs to do; 2) Approved example – typically someone is appointed to SHOW what needs to be done and how to do it. The one showing what is to be done already knows and has AUTHORITY to show it. He likely also has EXPERIENCE with the job; 3) As one reads and observes, he may notice certain things that were not expressly told and demonstrated. Therefore, he INFERS what is acceptable and not acceptable (assuming they are doing their jobs) and implements this into doing his job. 4) A DANGEROUS practice would be to assume that if something is not specifically forbidden then it must be acceptable to do this (i.e. SILENCE). When confronted for acting OUTSIDE of what he was authorized, he will not say, “Well, you didn’t say I could not do this so I ASSUMED it was acceptable.”

II. Examples of how to establish authority

- a. **John 13:34-35** uses all 3. *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*"
- i. Love one another – the command
 - ii. As I have loved you – the example
 - iii. By this all will know that you are My disciples – necessary inference. People KNOW what a Christian is supposed to act like.
- b. **Acts 10** – Peter and Cornelius
- i. We have in this account, Cornelius being told by an angel in a vision to send for Peter who would tell him what he needed to do (10:1-8). We also find Peter has a vision (10:16) where he is told that what God has made clean, do not call it unclean. The 2 groups meet and Peter goes and Cornelius and his house are converted. Let's consider the vision of Peter.
 - ii. Direct command – within the vision Peter is told by the Lord, "What I have made clean, do not call it unclean." God has given a command that is about to be applied. Further he is told in vs. 20 to go with the men from Cornelius' household "doubting nothing".
 - iii. Approved example – Peter has a vision. He observes what is happening.
 - iv. Necessary conclusion – Peter is not told directly that he is about to go preach to the first Gentile, but when he speaks to the men sent by Cornelius, he figures it out – he reaches the necessary conclusion. He goes, and as he teaches, Cornelius and his household are baptized with the Holy Spirit (10:44-45) – another approved example so that Peter prompts those with him, "Do you want to forbid them water to be baptized?"
 - v. He then **COMMANDS** them to be baptized. Peter's conclusion was based on how we establish authority.
- c. **Acts 15** – the Jerusalem meeting
- i. Acts 15 records a debate in Jerusalem about whether or not Gentiles needed to be circumcised. Judaizing teachers came to Antioch of Syria demanding that Gentiles be circumcised and keep parts of the LOM. Paul and Barnabas would have none of that. They went to Jerusalem (where the false teachers came from) to resolve the issue. We have a meeting take place that included the apostles, as well as men from both Jerusalem and Antioch. After the meeting their conclusion was, Gentiles to NOT need to be circumcised. How did they reach that conclusion?
 - ii. Approved example – **Acts 15:4, 12** – Paul and Barnabas report miracles they were able to perform among the Gentiles. IF God had not approved, they would not have been able to do such. Also **Acts 15:7-10** – Peter recounts the conversion of Cornelius and his family – an example of a Gentile being converted. He concludes from this that Gentiles should not be burdened with the LOM, which even they (the Jews) were not able to keep.
 - iii. Direct command – After the problem is discussed, James bringing matters together observes not only the examples, but also quotes from the Old Testament (**Acts 15:13-17, Amos 9:11-12**) that God intended for Gentiles to eventually be called by the name of the LORD. Here we have another example of a statement with the force of a command. It was going to happen.
 - iv. Necessary conclusion – found throughout the discussion. Both the examples of Peter and Paul & Barnabas implied Gentiles did NOT need to proselyte to Judaism to be saved. **Acts 15:19-20, Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.**
 - v. THERE was agreement. The point here is that they came together and put ALL the facts of scripture together and reached an unavoidable conclusion. They then wrote a letter that explicitly (not implicitly) declared Gentiles do NOT need to be circumcised. They were to be

accepted as Gentiles. Paul would continue to teach this. **Galatians 3:27-28** teaches this - *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

III. Making application in practice today

- a. Time will not permit a detailed application of these principles in this study, but I do want to mention 2 examples as we bring this study to its conclusion.
- b. Concerning the Lord's supper – Why do we partake of the Lord's supper as we do?
 - i. We are COMMANEDED to do so – **Matthew 26:26-29, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26**
 - ii. We have an APPROVED EXAMPLE – **Acts 20:7** – on the first day of the week. This tells us that we are APPROVED to partake of the Lord's Supper on Sunday. And this is the ONLY day for which we find approval.
 - iii. We NECESSARILY IMPLY according to **Acts 20:7** that this is to be done EVERY Sunday. Because every week has a Sunday. And there is implication that they met every week on Sunday. You can also add to this WHY we use unleavened bread and "fruit of the vine".
 - iv. This is why we partake of the Lord's Supper as we do.
- c. Concerning baptism –
 - i. Command – many passages directly command baptism – Acts 22:16, 2:38, Mark 16:16
 - ii. Examples – the book of Acts is filled with examples of those who were baptized and why – Acts 2:41 – Pentecost, Acts 8:12-13 – the Samaritans; Acts 8:38-39 – the Ethiopian eunuch; Acts 9:17-18 (also 22:16) - Paul; Acts 10:47-48 – Cornelius, etc. Furthermore, we find HOW one is to be baptized – immersion – Acts 8:38-39, cf. Romans 6:3-4, etc. You might add to this that the word for *baptism* in Greek literally means to be immersed.
 - iii. Necessary inference – It is an act of faith - Also 1 Peter 3:21 – "baptism now saves us" is a statement that implies we need to be baptized. Preaching Jesus INCLUDES the need to be baptized – Acts 8:35 – the eunuch; Acts 16:30-33 – the Philippians jailer. Putting everything scripture says about baptism and salvation, we can also necessarily conclude that often the word faith or believe is a collective word for EVERYTHING one needs to do to be saved, and just a mental acknowledgment of Jesus (e.g. Ephesians 2:8, John 3:16, etc.).
- d. The relevance of this will affect not only what we do as individuals, but it will impact:
 - i. HOW we approach scripture – will we respect its boundaries? (i.e., 1 Corinthians 4:6 – not to go beyond what is written)
 - ii. How we worship God, as we have seen – this will include every act of worship, and what IS an acceptable act of worship
 - iii. The purity of our doctrine (teachings, beliefs), including salvation, as we have seen, as well as our moral stand on various issues.
 - iv. What we do as a church and how we do it – including our organizational structure, our activities, our work and even our fellowship. (i.e., what will we tolerate?)

And thus we have established the three ways to establish authority for what we do. This is NOT something we made up (as is now being claimed) to establish our way of thinking. We have seen that these are the ONLY logical ways authority is established. Some today mock these as the only ways authority is established. They might use the term CENI in a sarcastic way. Some want to appeal to what scripture doesn't say or fill in details with subjective standards (I think, etc.) – NOTE: I am not saying here that we do not have matters of liberty, but many stretch and twist scripture to reach conclusions that are not there.

If there is another way, let me know so that I can repent and amend my teaching. BUT I have one request: Please do so without telling me, showing me or reaching a necessary conclusion when we put all the facts together! Think about it!