



ESTABLISHING BIBLE AUTHORITY

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JUST BECAUSE GOD CAN DOES NOT MEAN HE WILL

- God's power is infinite (Eph. 3:20). However, just because God is able to do something does not automatically mean He will do that particular thing. Consider a few examples.
 - *God has the power to destroy the world however He wishes, but will He destroy the world with water (Gen. 9:11; 2 Pet. 3:6-7)?*
 - *God can work miraculously through the hands of men today, but does He (1 Cor. 13:8-10)?*
 - *God has the power to grant everything we ask of Him, but will He (Matt. 26:36-46; 2 Cor. 12:8-9)?*
 - *God has the power to save anyone He wishes, but will He save someone who has not been baptized (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21)?*
 - *God can speak directly to whomever He wishes today, but will He (1 Cor. 13:8; Heb. 1:1-3)?*
 - *God has the power to answer the prayers of anyone on the planet, but will He answer the prayers of sinners (Isa. 53:1-2; John 9:31)?*
 - *God has the power to forgive every sin, but will He forgive unrepented sin (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30)?*
- Just because God CAN do something does not always mean He will. Therefore, when one denies that God will do something, he is not denying that God can do it. Rather, the person is simply acknowledging and accepting what the Lord has said on the matter. We ought not put God in a box that He has not put Himself in, but when God clearly outlines boundaries for Himself in scriptures, even if we do not understand the reasons why He did so, we must respect those boundaries.

JUST BECAUSE MAN CAN DOES NOT MEAN HE SHOULD

- Man can do all sorts of things, but just because we can (possess the ability to) do something, does not mean that God authorizes that activity.
 - *Man can unlawfully separate, but it is a sin when he does so (Matt. 19:6).*
 - *Man can remarry after unlawfully separating, but it is a sin when he does so (Matt. 19:6, 9).*
 - *Man can cheat on his taxes, but it is a sin when he does so (Rom. 13:6-8).*
 - *Man can go outside the bounds of the doctrine of Christ, but if he does, he is to be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9; 2 John 9-11).*
 - *Man can worship God whatever way he wishes, but that does not mean he is authorized to do so (Col. 3:17).*
- Obviously, man requires Bible authority.

ESTABLISHING BIBLE AUTHORITY - JUST A TRADITION?

- It has been said by some that establishing authority is merely a "Campbellite tradition."
- Yet, demanding Bible authority is not some "Campbellite tradition" borne out of the Restoration Movement of the 19th century.
- To the contrary, establishing authority is not some condemnable man-made tradition such as what Jesus denounced in Mark 7:6-7, but is exactly what the apostles and first century Christians did when they sought to properly discern the will of God.
- For example, Acts 15 records a debate among the early church in Jerusalem about whether or not Gentiles needed to be circumcised. How did they discover the answer to this doctrinally significant question? By establishing authority via commands, examples, and necessary inferences.

ACTS 15 – APPROVED EXAMPLES

- The church looked to Paul and Barnabas's example in working among the Gentiles, leading the church to conclude that if God had not approved of what they were doing, He would not have permitted Paul and Barnabas to preach to the Gentiles.
 - *And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them (v.4).*
 - *Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles (v.12).*
- Peter recounted the conversion of Cornelius and his family, serving as another approved example of the gospel being preached and received by Gentiles.
 - *When there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: “Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”(v.7-10).*
- As a result, Peter could deduce that Gentiles were not bound to the Law of Moses.
 - *But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they (v.11).*

ACTS 15 – COMMANDS / STATEMENTS

- After considering the examples of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, James reminded everyone of previous statements from God showing that He intended for Gentiles to eventually become part of the family of God.
 - *After they had become silent, James answered, saying, “Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: ‘After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things’” (v.13-17; see also Amos 9:11-12).*
- James not only considered the example of Peter (Simon), but he also made sure to compare Peter's example with what God (the prophets) had already said on the matter (like the Bereans in Acts 17:11). These statements from God that James presented to the group further informed the church how they needed to answer the question of circumcision.

ACTS 15 – NECESSARY INFERENCES

- The examples of Peter and Paul and Barnabas did not outright state but rather implied that Gentiles did not need to keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved.
- The statements that God and His prophets had already made on this matter were not exactly "black and white," causing the church to carefully examine all the information presented and arrive at a conclusion.
- A "judgment," or inference, was made based on the approved examples and previous statements from God, leading the church to form a necessary conclusion.
 - *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.19-20).*
- Necessary inferences require people to take in all the information about a subject at their disposal and then draw necessary conclusions based on that information.
- Once the early Christians in Acts 15 arrived at the proper conclusion, there was no decision for each person to go their way and teach what they personally felt was true. Instead, the whole church with one accord determined there was no other conclusion (hence the term "necessary inference," or necessary conclusion) that could be drawn except that Gentiles were not bound to the Law of Moses (v.22-29); no other possible conclusion could be drawn.

ACTS 15 – EXAMINING ALL THE EVIDENCE

- After examining statements made by God, considering the examples God approved, and drawing necessary conclusions based on the all the evidence, the church was able to accurately determine that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised. It looks like the method of establishing Bible authority via commands, examples, and necessary inferences predates the 19th century Restoration Movement, doesn't it?

CENI ISN'T THE EXCLUSIVE METHOD FOR ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY

- There are many more ways the Bible authorizes/deauthorizes than just through (C)ommands, (E)xamples, & (N)ecessary (I)nferences. Consider a few more ways we establish authority.
 - *Conditional Statements* – Typically, conditional statements appear as "if, then" statements. In other words, if we do what God says, then He will reward us; but if we do not do what God says, then He will not reward us (e.g. Matt. 6:14-15; Rom. 7:2-3).
 - *Informative Questions* – Informative questions are questions where the speaker, in seeking information, also provides information to the reader (e.g. Acts 22:16).
 - *Rhetorical Questions* – Rhetorical questions are questions asked to make a point because the answer is supposed to be obvious (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:13, 11:22).
 - *Assumed Knowledge / Obedience* – Statements are made where the listener/reader is expected to already know/obey a command (e.g. Matt. 6:2-3, 5-7, 16-18).
 - *"Not...But..." Construction* – Statements where we are told not to do X, but do Y instead (e.g. 1 Cor. 14:34-35; Matt. 5:33-37; Eph. 5:18).
 - *Indirect Statements* – Indirect statements are statements/commands given directly to someone in the Bible but equally applies to us today (e.g. Matt. 28:18-20).
 - *Silence* – When God is silent on a matter, we must determine if His silence permits or prohibits (e.g. Heb. 7:17; Rom. 14:1-13; 1 Pet. 4:11; Col. 3:17; Rev. 22:18-19).

THE OLD TESTAMENT IS NOT OUR AUTHORITY TODAY

- The Law of Moses is not our law for today.
 - *The Law of Moses was imperfect (Heb. 8:7).*
 - *The Law of Moses served a purpose (Gal. 3:24-26).*
 - *The Law of Moses was not intended to remain forever (Heb. 10:1,9; 8:6).*
 - *The Old Covenant could not take away sin (Heb. 10:1,4).*
 - *Once the Israelites broke covenant with God, He promised a new covenant (Jer. 31:31-32).*
 - *Jesus came to fulfill the Old Covenant (Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 24:44).*
 - *When Christ died, the Law of Moses died (Col. 2:13-14; Heb. 9:15-17).*
 - *Jesus's new priesthood required a new law (Heb. 7:12).*
 - *If we seek God's approval by following any command from the law of Moses that is not also found reiterated in the New Testament, we make Christ's death for our sins worthless (Gal. 5:1-4).*
- The Old Testament was written “for our learning” (Rom. 15:4); it was not written for our law today, and this is just as true of the Psalms and Proverbs (Luke 24:44; John 10:34, 15:25).
- We must never bind the law of Moses, because we now have the "perfect law of liberty" with Jesus's New Covenant (James 1:25).
- To establish Bible authority today, we must look to the New Testament (Col. 3:17).