

ESTABLISHING BIBLE AUTHORITY

By George Battey

Authority is defined as "the right to command and enforce obedience or administer punishment" (American Heritage). Authority comes in two forms: (a) primary authority and (b) delegated authority. Observe the distinction between these two forms of authority.

PRIMARY AUTHORITY

Primary authority means "the right to command and enforce obedience" resides within the person issuing the command. God the Father constitutes the only true and primary authority. "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor 11:3). There is no one above God giving Him authority. He answers to no one. "All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done?"" (Dan 4:35).

DELEGATED AUTHORITY

Primary authority in a natural way suggests delegated authority. Since God possesses all authority, He can if He wants, delegate (give) some of that authority to someone else. This He did. Jesus announced He has delegated authority. "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." (Mt 28:18). "Has been given" means "has been delegated." Who gave (delegated) this authority to Him? The Father gave Him His authority. "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father" (Mt 11:27).

Since Jesus has been given all authority, He can if He wants, delegate (give) some of that authority to someone else. This He did. The apostles have delegated authority. "I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"" (Mt 16:18-19). In this passage keys symbolize authority. Jesus was giving to Peter authority. Whatever Peter and the other apostles "bind on earth" would be bound in heaven and whatever Peter and the other apostles "loose on earth" would be loosed in heaven. This does not mean the apostles were fabricating their own religious rules and regulations. The grammar is the key to correctly understanding the passage. "Will be bound" and "will be loosed" are perfect, passive participles. The English Standard Version footnote correctly expresses the significance, "shall already have been bound ... shall already have been loosed." In other words, the apostles would

be binding and loosing laws which "already have been" made in heaven. The apostles were in the revealing business – not the law-making business.

Jesus, then, was an official representative of the Father's authority (Jn 14:9). The apostles were official representatives of Jesus' authority. "Now then, we [apostles] are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). Brethren sometimes use this verse to teach that all Christians are ambassador's for Christ. This is a misuse of the passage. Notice the distinction between "we" on the one hand and "you" on the other hand. The "you" are the Corinthians. The "we" are the apostles. An ambassador is an official representative of the king. If an ordinary citizen of our country took a trip to Europe, there would be no reporters to meet him at the airport. There would be no news reports of anything he said about politics because an ordinary citizen represents no one but himself. However, if a U. S. ambassador traveled to Europe, there would be both reporters to meet him at the airport and news reports of what the ambassador said. The ambassador officially represents the President. Likewise, the apostles and the apostles only were ambassadors for Christ. "We [apostles] are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (1 Jn 4:6). Again, here are two groups – "we" and "he." The "we" are the apostles and those who hear the apostles know God; those who do not hear the teachings of the apostles do not know God.

ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY

To "establish authority" means that for everything taught or practiced men must "establish" the fact they have authority for what they are teaching or practicing. "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col 3:17). "Whatever" means "everything or anything" (American Heritage). "In word" refers to things men say or teach. "In deed" refers to things men do or practice. "Do all" reemphasizes that every single speck of teaching and every single action is under consideration. While some think only the "big" things need authorization, the apostle here emphasizes that whatever is done or taught, all of it must be authorized. The words "in the name of the Lord Jesus" are the Bible's way of saying "by the authority of Jesus." (See Acts 4:7, 10, 12 and notice how this same expression is used to refer to the authority of Jesus and the apostles.)

Hence, to have authority from Jesus means one of two things. First, if Jesus Himself authorized a teaching or practice, then it is authorized. If someone produced a passage where Jesus Himself gave authorization, this person would have "established authority" for his teaching or practice. Second, if one of the ambassadors of Jesus authorized a teaching or practice, then it is authorized. Remember an ambassador is an official representative of the king. Therefore, if someone produced a passage where one of the apostles gave authorization, this person would have "established authority" for his teaching or practice. By way of contrast, if a person produced a passage where Moses

authorized a practice (e.g. Sabbath keeping) or a passage where David authorized a practice (e.g. instrumental music), that person did not "establish authority" by the standard mentioned in Col 3:17. When the Lord died on the cross the authority of Moses and David were "nailed to the cross" (Col 2:14). A new era began with a new King who has been delegated all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18). Every speck of doctrine and every single action must be authorized by the Lord or one of His official representatives (Col 3:17).

WRITTEN AUTHORIZATION

Since neither the Lord nor His ambassadors are living on the earth, men must receive their authorization from the Lord in written form. "Get it in writing," the lawyer always warns. This is true in regard to spiritual matters as well. No one may legitimately say, "I feel the Lord is leading me to do such and such" – as though inner leadings, promptings, feelings and premonitions authorized anything. Nor may one legitimately say, "Jesus told me to do such and such" – as though Jesus were still in the revealing business today. Instead, the authorization from Jesus or His apostles must be in written form (the NT scriptures). Jesus said to His apostles, "When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come" (Jn 16:13). If the Spirit would (a) reveal "all truth" to the apostles and (b) if the apostles wrote down all which the Spirit revealed and (c) if that revelation was preserved, then there would be no further need for revelation.

Peter confirmed all truth was revealed. "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (2 Pet 1:3). The promise of the Lord in Jn 16:13 came true. The writings of the apostles contain all things which pertain to life (duties toward other humans). The apostles' writings also contain all things which pertain to godliness (duties toward God). The writings of the apostles contain revelation concerning both earthly and spiritual matters.

Paul also confirmed all truth was revealed and inscripturated. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17).

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

The phrase "all scripture" is believed by some to refer only to Old Testament scriptures only. Supposedly 2 Tim 3:16-17 does not include any reference to New Testament scriptures. The argument goes like this: (a) the scriptures of 2 Tim 3:16-17 are the same scriptures mentioned in 2 Tim 3:15 ("from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures"); (b) Timothy did not know any of the New Testament scriptures when he

was a child because no New Testament scriptures were written during Timothy's childhood; (c) therefore, the scriptures under consideration in 2 Tim 3:16-17 are the Old Testament scriptures only.

In reply to the above argument, it is agreed that the "holy scriptures" mentioned in verse 15 are the Old Testament scriptures only. However, the "scriptures" mentioned in verse 16 include more than just the Old Testament scriptures. In verse 16 Paul begins to speak about "all" scripture (the Old and New Testament both). Furthermore, notice the "all scripture" of verses 16-17 make the man of God "complete" and "thoroughly equipped for every good work." If a single "good work" can be found in the New Testament scriptures which is not contained in the Old Testament scriptures, then it will have been proven that the "all scriptures" of verses 16-17 include more than just the Old Testament scriptures alone. So the question is this: Does the New Testament contain a good work not recorded in the Old Testament? Yes it does. The Lord's supper is a good work which was not recorded in Old Testament scripture (1 Cor 11:23-26). Therefore, the "scriptures" of 2 Tim 3:16-17 include more than simply Old Testament scriptures.

Since the scriptures "thoroughly equip" the man of God "for every good work," he needs nothing else. If the man of God needs more revelation as to what constitutes "good" work, then 2 Tim 3:17 is wrong. If the man of God needs extra help from the Holy Spirit in order to perform the good work, then he is not "thoroughly equipped." Yet this passage assures the reader that the man of God is indeed thoroughly equipped for every good work through the scriptures. Furthermore, these scriptures are profitable for (a) doctrine (things taught). This corresponds with "whatever you do in word" mentioned in Col 3:17. Again, the scriptures are profitable for (b) "instruction in righteousness" (things practiced). This corresponds with "whatever you do in deed" mentioned in Col 3:17.

Not only do the scriptures thoroughly equip the man of God, they keep him on track. They are profitable for "reproof" (a harsh admonishment when one intentionally does wrong). Again, they are profitable for "correction" (a gentle admonishment when one unintentionally does wrong).

To illustrate the difference between reproof and correction, older readers may recall a common event from the early 1970s. In those days there was no caller ID on telephone lines. When the phone rang it was impossible to know ahead of time who was calling. Occasionally kids would make prank telephone calls to randomly dialed numbers. If a parent learned their child intentionally dialed the wrong phone number as a prank, that child would be rebuked. There was no excuse for such behavior. On the other hand, if a child dialed the wrong phone number accidentally, that child was merely corrected; he was supplied with the correct number and encouraged to dial again. So, the scriptures both rebuke the intentional wrong-doer and correct the unintentional wrong-doer.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Here is the bottom line: For something to be authorized there must be a scripture teaching that doctrine or practice (period). After all human logic is used there must be a scripture. After all the statistics about all the millions of people who are practicing things some certain way, there has to be a scripture. After all the warnings of how the church will isolate itself if it continues to insist on scripture, there has to be a scripture authorizing everything taught and practiced. After all the tears of emotions are shed, there has to be a scripture. After recounting all the goodness and devotion of grandparents and parents who believed and practiced differently, there has to be a scripture authorizing everything. After all the stories of great preachers of the past who endorsed certain practices, there has to be a scripture. After all the history lessons of how revered, persecuted, sincere and self-sacrificing church leaders did something, there has to be a scripture. There must be a scripture authorizing everything pertaining to "life" and "godliness" (2 Pet 1:3).

EXPLICIT – IMPLICIT

Written authorization comes in two forms: (a) explicit instructions and (b) implicit instructions. Consider the difference between these two forms.

Explicit means "fully and clearly expressed; leaving nothing implied" (American Heritage). "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim 4:1). The word "expressly" corresponds with "explicitly." When something is taught explicitly, this means a person can read a command or doctrine word for word.

Implicit means "implied or understood though not directly expressed" (American Heritage). A very powerful passage illustrating implicit teaching is found in Mk 12:26-27. Here Jesus was asked by the Sadducees about the resurrection. They did not believe the Old Testament scriptures taught a resurrection of the dead because they could not read the word "resurrection" explicitly. Since they could find no explicit mention of the word, they concluded there was no such teaching in the scriptures. They held to the explicit-only method of interpreting scripture. Jesus showed the fallacy of their interpretation. "But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken." According to Jesus, in the burning bush passage God taught two things implicitly: (a) Abraham, Isaac and Jacob still exist – though their bodies have died and (b) there will be a resurrection from the dead. God did not explicitly say any of these things in that passage. He implied them.

This story (Mk 12:26-27) illustrates a very important truth: Implication is not silence. When God implied a resurrection, He was not being silent about the subject of resurrection. This will be an important point to always remember.

To establish authority one must be able to point to a scripture (or combination of scriptures) where (a) Jesus or (b) the apostles either explicitly or implicitly authorized the doctrine or practice under consideration. For example, to establish authority for instrumental music, one must show a passage of scripture (or combination of scriptures) where either Jesus or the apostles authorized instrumental music either explicitly or implicitly. If the scriptures are silent about a particular practice or doctrine, God's people are strictly forbidden to teach or practice that thing because silence does not authorize. The following passages all teach the same lesson – namely: silence forbids.

- Gen 4:1-5
- Lev 10:1-2
- Num 14:44-45
- Num 15:30
- Dt 1:43
- Dt 4:2
- Dt 11:28
- Dt 17:3, 12-13
- Dt 18:20, 22
- Dt 29:19, 29
- 2 Sam 7:1-7
- 1 Ch 13:1-10; 1 Ch 15:1-15
- Ps 19:13
- Prov 30:6
- Isa 30:1
- Isa 65:2
- Jer 3:17
- Jer 7:21-26, 31
- Jer 9:14
- Jer 13:10
- Jer 14:14
- Jer 16:12
- Jer 18:12
- Jer 19:5
- Jer 23:17, 32
- Jer 29:23
- Jer 32:35
- Mt 15:9
- Jn 12:49
- Jn 16:13
- Acts 15:24

- 1 Cor 4:6
- Gal 1:8-9
- Rom 10:17
- 2 Cor 5:7
- Heb 1:5, 13
- Heb 7:14
- 2 Pet 2:10
- 2 Jn 9-11
- Rev 22:18-19

IMPLICATION IS NOT SILENCE

Already an important concept has been introduced: Implication is not silence. When God implied Abraham, Isaac and Jacob still existed and that they would resurrect, He was not being silent about these matters. Alexander Campbell acknowledged this point:

"... nothing can be rationally inferred from any verse in the Bible that is not in it; and whatever can be logically deduced from any sentence in the Book, is as much the revelation of God as anything clearly expressed in it." (Christianity Restored, 69)

In other words, when God implies something, whatever is implied is as much His word as anything explicitly stated. This explains why Jesus was incredulous with the Sadducees for not knowing about the resurrection in the "burning bush passage" (Mk 12).

When God commanded Noah to build an ark (Gen 6), He implied any tools necessary to carry out the command. He was not silent about measuring devices, wood-cutting tools, wood-hauling methods, nails, cement, ropes, wood dowels, brushes and any other tools necessary to carry out the command to build the ark. All of these tools were authorized within the command to build the ark. However, these tools were not authorized explicitly. They were authorized implicitly. It can be said, then, that God was not silent about tools for building the ark.

When God implies something, He is not being silent. This is an important point. Some brethren seem to be thinking like this: "The preachers say individual cups are wrong and instrumental music is wrong because the Bible is silent about them, but then they turn around and say we can have a church building and songbooks and a thousand other things which the Bible is also silent about. How can they condemn cups and instrumental music and Bible classes because of silence, but then accept church buildings, songbooks and other things?"

The important point being missed is that implication is not silence. When God commanded the church to assemble (1 Cor 11:33), within that command He implied anything necessary to assemble. He included a building if such became necessary. The

church building is authorized as a permission. Brethren are permitted to have a building or rent one if they so choose.

SIX POSSIBILITIES

Since everything the Bible teaches is taught either explicitly or implicitly, there are six possibilities:

1) Something might be explicitly required.

"Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins"" (Acts 2:38). Here is an explicit requirement. Explicit means the requirement can be read word for word. Hence, both repentance and baptism are explicitly required.

2) Something might be explicitly permitted.

"One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom 14:5). Here is an explicit permission. A man does not have to esteem one day above another, but he is permitted to do so. Again, here is word for word (explicit) authorization.

3) Something might be explicitly prohibited.

"Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church" (1 Cor 14:34-35). Here is an explicit prohibition – a word for word "Thou shalt not" command.

4) Something might be implicitly required.

This may seem incredible to some. How can something be required and not spelled out word for word? Nevertheless, there are some things required by means of implication. God said to Israel, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Ex 20:8). This passage implicitly required weekly Sabbath keeping. One man in Israel evidently held to the explicit-only method of interpretation. He did not believe every single Sabbath had to be kept holy because the command did not explicitly say remember "every" Sabbath day. He went out to pick up sticks and, when he was caught, he learned some things are implicitly required. (cf. Num 15:32-36).

In the same way, Acts 20:7 implies communion must be observed on the first day of every week. This is an implicit requirement.

5) Something might be implicitly permitted.

"Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need" (Eph 4:28). This passage implicitly permits a man to be a mechanic, a carpenter, a computer programmer or any other occupation which is considered "good." No one is required to be a mechanic. Remember, this is a permission, not a requirement.

Is there Bible authorization to program computers? Yes, there is implicit authorization (Eph 4:28). In this sense, the Bible is not being silent about computer programming because implication is not silence.

6) Something might be implicitly prohibited.

This also seems incredible to many. How can something be prohibited without the Bible explicitly forbidding it? Nevertheless, some things are indeed implicitly prohibited. Notice carefully, "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Mt 5:44).

While this passage explicitly requires certain things (love for enemies), it also implicitly prohibits other things. It implicitly prohibits anything that is hateful toward an enemy (killing him). So while there is no passage explicitly saying, "Do not join the military and kill the enemies of your country," this passage implicitly prohibits such.

THE "EXPLICIT-ONLY" DOCTRINE

As mentioned earlier, there is a false doctrine called the explicit-only doctrine. This doctrine states that only those things which are explicitly stated are required. The entire area of implicit teaching is rejected because human reasoning is involved and, the argument states, human reasoning, at its very best, is flawed.

Thomas Campbell espoused this explicit-only doctrine. He wrote the following:

"That although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore, no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the Church. Hence, it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church's confession." (Declaration, 49-50).

F. L. Lemley also held the explicit-only doctrine. His writings reveal the same line of reasoning Thomas Campbell used only in modern language.

Since all inferences are of human origin, unless we want to hold on to human patterns we should discard necessary inference as poor pattern material. (Warren, 91)

Any time a process of human reasoning or deduction has to intervene between the word and a conclusion, the conclusion is human and not divine, and therefore cannot be (even when true) a part of the New Testament pattern. (Warren, 90)

Only those examples that are objects of direct command are binding on us. (Warren, 91)

Lemley and Campbell, then, have presented the explicit-only doctrine. They are confident and sure of themselves. Implication and inferences are disallowed because human reasoning is involved and human reasoning at its very best is flawed. Yet the careful student should ask the following question: How did Lemley and Campbell reach their conclusions that implicit teachings are not binding? Did they themselves use human reasoning to reach this conclusion? Did they themselves draw inferences that inferences cannot be drawn? Are they binding a conclusion on others drawn from inferences? The inconsistency with both Lemley and Campbell is obvious enough.

If the explicit-only doctrine is true, then most of the Bible becomes irrelevant because none of the Bible's commands were explicitly directed to anyone living today. Furthermore, Jesus' rebuke of the Sadducees in Mk 12 clearly demonstrates the explicit-only doctrine is false. The implicit teachings of the scripture are just as binding as the explicit teachings.

CONCLUSION

The importance of "establishing authority" is illustrated well by an event which occurred in the days of Ezra. In those days, the building of the temple was hampered by the enemies of the Jews. Through the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, the Jews were encouraged to continue the work. "At the same time Tattenai the governor of the region beyond the River and Shethar-Boznai and their companions came to them and spoke thus to them: "Who has commanded you to build this temple and finish this wall?" (Ezra 5:3). These heathens were asking the Jews to "establish their authority" – to prove they had the right to rebuild the temple.

A letter was sent to King Darius and part of it said this: "Now therefore, if it seems good to the king, let a search be made in the king's treasure house, which is there in Babylon,

whether it is so that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send us his pleasure concerning this matter" (Ezra 5:17).

Establishing authority was such an important matter that a search was ordered to see if any command could be found which authorized the rebuilding of the temple. "Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon. And at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of Media, a scroll was found, and in it a record was written" (Ezra 6:1-2). Authority was established. King Cyrus had, long ago, given a decree to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.

Listen to the ending of Darius' new decree: "Also I issue a decree that whoever alters this edict, let a timber be pulled from his house and erected, and let him be hanged on it; and let his house be made a refuse heap because of this. And may the God who causes His name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it, or to destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem. I Darius issue a decree; let it be done diligently" (Ezra 6:11-12). Here is authority with a vengeance. No one had the right to alter the decree. Men were obligated to obey the decree. A record of the decree was on file for future reference.

Today men should handle the word of God with as much reverence as these Persians revered the edicts of King Cyrus and King Darius.

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