

2016 Authority – Part 3

Using the New Testament To Find Out What We Must Do

INTRO.: Heb. 1:1-2 – For the Christian, authority begins and ends with Jesus Christ. That being so, authority begins and ends with what is written on the pages of the New Testament.

Heb. 8:6 – The New Covenant, like the Old, is an agreement between God and men, in which man receives God’s blessings when he obeys God’s law.

God has always demanded obedience from mankind. That has always been man’s part in every covenant (agreement) God has made – “You obey, and I will bless you.” The fact that the New Covenant Jesus initiated with His blood contains the promise of forgiveness through that blood, in no way diminishes the fact that the New Covenant is a law to be obeyed.

Heb. 5:9 – Our job: obey Jesus! How do we do that? By obeying what Jesus said, and what He lead His inspired apostles to say. Note **Heb. 2:3-5**.

- I. **And so, we open the pages of the New Testament, which contains the law of the New Covenant that God has made with man through Jesus Christ, and what do we find?**
 - A. **Four books** are the story of Jesus Christ, and describe His life from events that happened before His birth to events that happened in the days following His death and resurrection.
 - B. One **book** that is a story about what the apostles did to spread the gospel throughout the Mediterranean world in the first century.
 - C. **Eight more books** are letters to specific first-century churches, in which an apostle named Paul commends them for their good points, corrects their problems, and informs them about things they need to know about Christianity.
 - D. **Four books** are letters to individuals, informing and encouraging them about how they should conduct themselves in their particular situations and circumstances.
 - E. **And ten books** are written to either groups of churches in a particular region, or to Christians in general throughout the first-century world, again commending, correcting and informing them about how to live a faithful life in the first-century world.
 - F. And so we ask, how do we get from all that what we are to obey in the twenty-first century?
 1. **Here’s the key:** What made someone a faithful Christian in the first century will make someone a faithful Christian in the twenty-first century, and what made a faithful church in the first century will make a faithful church in the twenty-first century. That, I believe, is the foundational

principle that guides us in using the New Testament scriptures.

2. Note **Col. 4:16** – What does that tell us? It tells us that what Paul wrote to the Colossian church was never intended to be used exclusively by the Colossian church. What would make the Colossian church faithful would also make the Laodicean church faithful. And what would make the Colossian and Laodicean churches faithful will make the West Allen church faithful. And that is true of every New Testament book. Understand that, and everything else in the sermon will make sense.
 3. Some, even in the religious world, see the New Testament as nothing more than an ancient document that is out of touch with modern man, and wholly incapable of guiding modern men and modern churches.
 4. But I affirm that the New Testament is a universal and timeless document.
 - a. **Acts 2:39** - “To you, and to your children, and to all who are afar off.” The gospel spans the generations; it was as applicable to the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the men and women who heard it on Pentecost as it was to those men and women who heard Peter speak. And it is just as applicable today.
 - b. **Jude 3** - “Once for all.” Not “some,” not “most,” but “all!”
- G. ***Our challenge:*** To open the pages of the New Testament, and figure out – from these stories about people’s lives, and the commendations and corrections, and the doctrinal truths presented – what we need to do to be faithful Christians and a faithful church now.
1. We open the book, we study it, and we look for two things:
 - a. Universal and timeless commands.
 - b. Universal and timeless examples.
 2. I stress “universal and timeless” because some commands and examples in the New Testament are obviously neither universal nor timeless, but are limited to a situation unique to either the first-century culture or to a specific first-century situation.
 3. How can we tell with commands and examples are universal and timeless, and which are not?
 - a. **Look at the context** – Who is being spoken to or about? Are there any special circumstances that must be considered?

- b. **Consider other passages** – What, if anything, do other passages say about the subject?
 - c. **Use common sense** – We do *not* pick and choose what we will obey based on whether it does or does not make sense to us, but that doesn't mean we throw common sense out the window when we read the New Testament. What I call using common sense others have called “necessary inference.”
4. Let's look at a passage: **Luke 24:49**.
- a. *Who is being spoken to?* The apostles.
 - b. *Any special circumstances?* Absolutely! Jesus is talking to them about a promise made to them that is not made to anyone else – that they would be endued with power from on high. And that would happen in just a few days in the city of Jerusalem.
 - c. *Any other passages that shed light?* **Acts 2 and 3**, that record the fulfilment of the promise.
 - d. *Using common sense, what can we necessarily infer from this?* We do not need to immediately book a flight to Jerusalem!
 - e. That is a simple example, but it illustrates the point.

II. **Let's look first at the *commands* of the New Testament. They come in two forms:**

- A. ***Imperatives*** – *The direct expression of the will.* **Acts 2:38** is a good example of an imperative:
 - 1. *Who is being spoken to?* Sinners, who have come to understand their sin and the need for salvation in Jesus Christ.
 - 2. *Any special circumstances?* Well, Peter accuses them of crucifying Jesus. Is that significant to what he tells them to do? (I had a fellow tell me one time that he thought it was.)
 - 3. *What about other passages?* Quite a few: **Mat. 28:19; 1 Pet. 3:21; Gal. 3:27**. Just the next verse (**Acts 2:39**) indicates that it is not limited to this particular group of men and women.
 - 4. *What does common sense tell us?* It's a universal and timeless command. Are you a sinner in need of salvation? Repent and be baptized!
- B. ***Statements*** – *The indirect expression of a fact.* Let's consider **John 3:16**.

1. *Who is being spoken to?* Nicodemus, a Jewish religious and political leader.
2. *Who is being spoken about?* “The world.”; “Whoever.” As general as you can get!
3. *Any special circumstances?* Nicodemus and Jesus are having a discussion about what anyone must do to see the kingdom of God. Nothing to indicate that what Jesus says is restricted by place and time.
4. *Other passages?* We could spend an entire lesson just reading them, but here are two: **Mark 16:16; Heb. 11:6.**
5. *What does common sense tell us?* We can necessarily infer that belief in Jesus is a universal and timeless command, a prerequisite to salvation.

III. **And then the examples in the New Testament. Are they really authoritative? Note 1 Pet. 2:21 and Phil. 2:5 – Christ. Also 1 Cor. 11:1 – Paul. And 1 Thes. 1:6-7 – The church at Thessalonica.**

- A. There is something called a “rule of precedent.” In legal issues, when someone does something that is upheld by a court of law, it becomes a precedent for cases that follow.
 1. Go back to **Phil. 2:5** – Jesus set a legal precedent. What kind of mind did He have? He was humble, self-sacrificing, a servant to others. What about us, then? **Vs. 3-4.**
 2. Note **Acts 5:27-29** – Is there an example there for us?
 3. How about **1 Cor. 9:26-27** – Any precedent for us there?
 4. **Acts 20:7** – The church at Troas met on the first day of the week to “break bread.” If that does not set a precedent for when the Lord’s Supper is to be taken, then we don’t have one.
- B. With examples, ask again:
 1. *Who is being spoken about?* **Acts 20:7** – The church at Troas.
 2. *Any special circumstances?* Not anything that I can see. The argument might be made that Paul stayed for seven days so that he could meet with the church, which I believe is strong indication that this was the church’s established pattern.
 3. *Other passages?* A number that indicate the partaking of the Lord’s

Supper was intended to be, as was, a regular, ongoing practice in first-century churches. **Mat. 28:26-29; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 11:20f.** No other passage says anything specifically about which particular day, although I believe there is a hint of it in **1 Cor. 16:1-2.**

4. *What does our common sense tell us?* At the very least, that we are safely inside the confines of New Testament precedent when we partake of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week.

CONCL: This is the way to determine from first-century inspired writings what is our responsibility today.

Remember **1 John 3:24** – “Now he who keeps (Jesus’) commandments, abides in (Jesus), and (Jesus) in him.”

And in **Rev. 22:14** we find this blessing: “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.”