

## Bible Authority (7): How to Establish Bible Authority: Part 2

Matthew 21:23-27

### I. INTRODUCTION: I

#### 1. 2 From our previous lessons:

##### A. Our key passage:

**Matt. 21:23-27:** “Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, ‘By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?’ 24 But Jesus answered and said to them, ‘I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: 25 The baptism of John — where was it from? From heaven or from men?’ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ 26 But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet.’ 27 So they answered Jesus and said, ‘We do not know.’ And He said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.’”

(1) \*\* Here we learn two key **general** concepts about religious authority:

Need for authority: v. 23: “By what authority are You doing these things?”

Source of authority: v. 23: “And who gave You this authority?”

(2) \*\* Jesus’ answer tells us two key concepts about the sources of religious authority:

Divine authority: “From heaven”

Human authority: “from men”

##### B. The Bible plainly tells human religious authority is fallacious (Prov. 14:12; Jer. 10:23).

(1) It’s vain (Matt. 15:9).

(2) It’s a “slippery slope” of apostasy (2 Tim. 3:13).

(3) It’s spiritual suicide (2 Jn. 9).

##### C. \*\* Jesus Christ is the source of divine authority: Matt. 28:18-20; Col. 3:17

#### 2. 3 In our last lesson we introduced the subject of hermeneutics: the science of interpreting communication (spoken or written); especially interpreting the Scriptures:

A. Some (even some brethren!) are uncomfortable with the idea of hermeneutics; they say it is a human paradigm dreamed up to support the views of conservative Christians like you and me

B. The word hermeneutics isn’t specifically found in the Bible; but, the principle is surely taught there: **Eph. 5:17:** “Therefore do not be unwise, but **understand** what the will of the Lord is.”

C. Hermeneutics is certainly a Bible principle! Acts 8:30, 34-35

**Acts 17:2-3:** “And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, 3 Opening and alleging (i.e., NASV, “explaining and giving evidence”), that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.”

#### 3. \*\* In our last lesson we studied three methods of establishing Bible authority: Acts 15

A. **Direct statement or command:** explicitly stated/commanded in Scripture (Acts 15:13-17).

(1) Repentance: Lk. 13:3; Acts 17:30

(2) Giving: 1 Cor. 16:1-2

(3) Assembling: Heb. 10:25

- (4) Stealing: Eph. 4:28
- B. **\*\* Approved example**: An example of individual Christians, or the church, acting with the obvious approval of inspired Scripture (Acts 15:12).
- (1) Day to observe the Lord's Supper: Acts 20:7
- (2) Local church benevolence responsibilities: Acts 11:27-30
- C. **\*\* Necessary inference**: only logical conclusion to be drawn from Scripture (Acts 15:7-9).
- (1) Frequency of giving: 1 Cor. 16:1-2
- (2) Frequency of observing the Lord's Supper: Acts 20:7; 2:42
- (3) Gospel for the Jews and Gentiles: Acts 10:9-16, 17, 34-35
4. The same hermeneutic is used in human communication every day (e.g., school teachers).
5. **4** We must not trifle with God's authority (even if results are "good"); we are disrespecting God!
- Lev. 10:3**: "And Moses said to Aaron, 'This is what the LORD spoke, saying:
- 'By those who come near Me  
I must be regarded as holy;  
And before all the people  
I must be glorified.'*
- So Aaron held his peace."*
- \*\*2 Jn. 9**: "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son."
6. **5** We continue our study of **Bible Authority: How to Establish Bible Authority (2)**.

## II. DISCUSSION:

### 1. **6** Generic and specific authority:

#### A. Generic authority:

- (1) Generic means something "applicable or referring to a whole class or group; general" (*Dictionary.com*).
- (2) When the Bible grants us generic authority to do something it includes all possible methods or ways of doing whatever the Bible is telling us to do.

#### B. **\*\*** Specific authority:

- (1) Specific means something that is "explicit, particular, or definite" (*Dictionary.com*).
- (2) When the Bible grants us specific authority it restricts us to the method or way of doing something which the Scriptures precisely states or prescribes.

#### C. **7** Examples:

##### (1) Noah and the ark:

**Gen. 6:13-16**: "And God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. 14 Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch. 15 And this is how you shall make it: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. 16 You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above; and set the door of the ark in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third decks.'"

- (a) **\*\* Generic authority:** God told Noah to “*Make yourself an ark,*” (v. 14) and He **specified** certain things (i.e., materials, dimensions, and layout).
- (i) The fact God told Noah to build an ark, of necessity, requires Noah to use tools to build it (e.g., saws, hammers, ropes, block & tackle, etc.).
  - (ii) Since God gave the command for Noah to build an ark and did not **specify** the tools to use, Noah was authorized to use any tools necessary.
- (b) **\*\* Specific authority:**
- (i) **Materials:** “*gopher wood...cover it inside and outside with pitch*” (v. 14); by **specifying** “gopher wood” the Lord **eliminates/excludes** all other kinds of wood (i.e., pine, maple, oak, etc.).
  - (ii) **Dimensions:** “*The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits*” (v. 15). By **specifying** these dimensions, all other dimensions are **eliminated/excluded**.
  - (iii) **Layout:** “*You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above; and set the door of the ark in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third decks.*” (v. 16). By **specifying** this layout, all other layouts are **eliminated/excluded**.

(2) **8 Preaching the gospel:**

**Mk 16:15:** “*And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’*”

- (a) **\*\* Generic authority:**
- (i) The Lord says “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*” (v. 15).
  - (ii) So, the first command in the great commission is “Go.”
  - (iii) Note the Lord simply tells us to “Go,” but He does not **specify** the method of going; therefore, we can fulfill the command to “Go” by a variety of means (e.g., walk, ride an animal, ride a bicycle, drive an automobile, fly in an airplane, etc.).
  - (iv) If we use any means of transportation we are still fulfilling the command to “Go...and preach the gospel.”
- (b) **\*\* Specific authority:**
- (i) The Lord tells us to “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*”
  - (ii) So, the second command in the great commission is “*preach the gospel.*”
  - (iii) He did not **specify** the method of going, but He did **specify** the reason for going, “*preach the gospel to every creature*” (v. 15).
  - (iv) If He had simple told us “*Go...and preach,*” we could go and teach anything we wanted to teach (e.g., reading, writing and arithmetic, or quantum mechanics).
  - (v) But, by His **specifying** the “gospel” as what we are to “preach,” every other thing to preach is automatically **eliminated/excluded**.

(3) **9 Lord’s Supper:**

**Matt. 26:26-28:** “*And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ 27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks,*

and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.’”

- (a) **\*\* Are the terms “eat” and “drink” generic or specific? **\*\*Generic****
- (b) **\*\* Did the Lord specify what the disciples were to eat and drink? **\*\*Yes!****
  - ☛ Bread: v. 26: “bread”
  - ☛ Fruit of the vine: vv. 27 & 28: “He took the cup...fruit of the vine”
- (c) If the Lord had given no **specific** food or liquid the disciples were to eat and drink, but simply commanded them to “eat and drink,” what would they have been authorized to do? **They could eat and drink whatever they wanted in observance of the Lord’s Supper.**
- (d) **\*\* Can we substitute Twinkies and Coca-Cola for the Lord’s Supper? **\*\*No! Why not? Because the Lord specified the “bread” and “fruit of the vine.”****
- (e) **\*\* Restaurant example:** We use the idea of specific authority in every day, common communication. For example, when you order a specific meal at a restaurant it automatically eliminates/excludes all other meals on the menu.

(4) **I0 Music in worship:**

**Eph. 5:19:** “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,”

- (a) **\*\* What are the two kinds of music? **\*\*Vocal and instrumental****
- (b) **\*\* Did the Lord specify which of the two kinds of music to be used in worship? **\*\*Yes! He specified “singing.”****
- (c) **\*\* Did the Lord say not to use instrumental music? **\*\*No****
- (d) **\*\* Does that mean we can play instruments and sing? **\*\*No!****
- (e) **II Why not? When the Lord specifies something it automatically eliminates/excludes all other things in the same category. Recall:**
  - (i) **\*\* “gopher wood” eliminates/excludes all other kinds of wood.**
  - (ii) **\*\* “bread” & “fruit of the vine” eliminates/excludes all other kinds of food and drink.**
  - (iii) **\*\* Therefore, “singing” eliminates/excludes all other kinds of music.**
- (f) **\*\* What kind of songs are we to sing? “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”**
- (g) **Why? Those are the kinds of songs the Lord specified, therefore, all other kinds of songs are eliminated/excluded.**

D. **\*\* Key:** When the Lord **specifies** something (e.g., “gopher wood,” “bread” & “fruit of the vine”) it eliminates/excludes all other **specifics** (i.e., kinds) in that general category:

- ☛ “gopher wood” eliminated/excluded all other woods; e.g., oak, maple, pine.
- ☛ “bread” and “fruit of the vine” eliminates/excludes all other kinds of food and drink (e.g., Twinkies and ham sandwiches, or Coca-Cola and apple juice).
- ☛ “sing” eliminates/excludes all other kinds of music (e.g., playing, electronic synthesizers).
- ☛ “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” eliminates/excludes all other kinds of songs.

## 2. **12** Expedients:

- A. The “ends justifies the means” is used by many when it comes to religion.
- (1) This brings us to the concept of **expedients** or **expediency**.
  - (2) **\*\* An expedient** is simply “a means to an end” (*Dictionary.com*); an option God permits us to choose to **aid** us in obeying His will.
- B. **\*\* Expedients** are only applicable when we already have divine authority; for example,
- (1) God gave Noah the authority to “*Make thee an ark*” (Gen. 6:14).
  - (2) Several things about the ark were **specified** (i.e., materials, dimensions, and layout); so no expedients were allowed when it comes to those **specifics**.
  - (3) But, it is obvious Noah needed tools to **aid** in building the ark, but the Lord did not **specify** which tools to use.
  - (4) So, Noah was authorized to use any tools he deemed **expedient** to **aid** him in fulfilling God’s command to “*Make thee an ark*” (e.g., saw, hammer, ropes, block & tackle, etc.).
  - (5) In this case, tools would be **expedients** to **aid** in obeying the command to build an ark.
- C. “In order for a thing to be a scriptural expedient it must facilitate in the accomplishment of God’s will and must be in harmony with His word.” (Moore, p. 49)
- D. “Expediency in human wisdom involves the right of a choice within the realm of those things included in what God has authorized.” (Moore, p. 49)

## E. **13** Expedients:

- (1) **\*\* Must be lawful**: **1 Cor. 6:12**: “*All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient*.”; cf. 1 Cor. 10:23
  - (a) An **expedient** must come within the realm of things authorized (i.e., must have authority by a direct command/statement, approved example, or necessary inference).
  - (b) If something is not authorized no **expedients** are allowed! No “ends justify the means” (2 Jn. 9-11).
  - (c) This would involve going “*above that which is written*” (1 Cor. 4:6); it would be beyond the realm of faith (Rom. 14:23).
  - (d) “We have no assurance that a thing is pleasing unto God unless it is authorized in scripture.” (Moore, p. 49)
- (2) **\*\* Cannot be specified**:
  - (a) When God **specifies** something all other choices are eliminated.
  - (b) God **specified** “*gopher wood*” (Gen. 6:14); thus, oak, pine, or maple are not **expedients**; they are **substitutions**.
  - (c) **Expediency** requires the use of human wisdom within the realm of things included in what God has already authorized.
    - (i) Noah could choose any “*gopher wood*” trees he deemed appropriate, but he must use “*gopher wood*” because that’s what God **specified**.
    - (ii) Noah could use any way of measuring the dimension of the lumber used, but he had to stay within the **specified** dimensions (**Gen. 6:15**: “*length of...three hundred cubits...breadth of...fifty cubits...height of...thirty cubits*”); a yardstick, a tape measure, etc. would be **expedients**; i.e., his choice).

- (3) **\*\* Aids: *Expedients*** are ***aids*** we can choose to help us obey God's commands; but, we must be careful not to add/subtract from God's word and claim it is an ***expedient***.
- (a) Song books and a pitch pipe are ***expedients*** that ***aid*** our singing, but a piano is not an ***expedient*** it is an ***addition*** because it is a different kind of music.
  - (b) Communion plates and cups are ***expedients*** (i.e., aids) we can use in observance of the Lord's Supper, but ham sandwiches and Coca-Cola are not ***expedients***, they are ***substitutions***.
  - (c) A baptistry is an ***expedient*** to immerse believers into Christ (Mk. 16:15-16; Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12); but sprinkling or pouring are not ***expedients***; they are not lawful because they ***substitute*** for what God ***specified*** (i.e., immersion).
- (4) **\*\* *Must edify***: I Cor. 10:23-33
- (a) Paul said "Let all things be done unto edifying." (I Cor. 14:26).
  - (b) "If a thing be a matter of choice or expediency, falling into the realm of human wisdom and judgment, and its practice causes division in the body of Christ, it is sinful and wrong." (Moore, p. 50)(e.g., choice of songs).
  - (c) However, since God commands "*singing*," we must sing!. In such cases, even if the practice divides the church, we have no choice but to do it (e.g., Acts 4:18-20; 5:29).
- (5) **\*\* *Must not wound a brother's conscience***: I Cor. 10:32; Rom. 14:13-23
- (a) This rule governs only in the realm of ***expedients***; in matters ***specified*** we have no choice, we must obey.
  - (b) Where God gives us the liberty to choose using our own wisdom, we must not insist on doing it "our way or the highway." If an expedient causes a brother to violate his/her conscience we must not do it (e.g., eating of meats; I Cor. 8:7-13).
- (6) **\*\* *Cannot add or subtract from God's Word***:
- (a) We can only use ***expedients*** to obey God's commands for which we have authority by a direct command, approved example, or necessary inference.
  - (b) But any ***additions*** or ***substitutions*** are unlawful because it is relying solely on human wisdom (Prov. 14:12; Jer. 10:23; Matt. 4:4).
  - (c) For example, pianos, Coca-Cola and Twinkies are not ***expedients***, they are ***additions/substitutions*** and, as such, are a transgression of God's will (2 Jn. 9).

### 3. **14** *Silence of the Scriptures*: I Peter 4:11

A. **\*\*** There are two views concerning the silence of the Scriptures:

- (1) ***Liberal view***: the silence of the Scriptures gives us the liberty to do what we deem best.
  - (a) "Where the Bible is silent, where God has not spoken, we are at liberty to act as we think best. Thus, silence gives freedom to act." (Moore, p. 60)
  - (b) This was Martin Luther's view of the Scriptures; he felt we have the liberty to do anything we want as long as the Scriptures do not expressly forbid it.
  - (c) This false view has led to thousands upon thousands of different denominations, because men have elevated human opinion to the level of Scripture
- (2) ***Conservative view***: the silence of the Scriptures does not give us the liberty to do what we deem best.

- (a) “Where the Bible is silent we must be silent. We can only do those things which the Lord has authorized.” (Moore, p. 60)
- (b) This was Ulrich Zwingli’s (another reformer) view; he felt that only that which is expressly authorized should be taught and practiced.
- (c) This was also the view of the great men of the Restoration Movement; for example, Thomas Campbell coined the motto: “We speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent.”
- (d) This view and expression are consistent with Scripture: “*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God*” (1 Pet. 4:11).
- (e) We follow the principle of silence forbidding in every realm of life (restaurant example).

B. \*\* These two attitudes were involved in past divisions among the churches of Christ.

(1) Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century:

- (a) Brethren were first divided over the Missionary Society (ACMS, 1849).
- (b) Later brethren divided over instrumental music.
- (c) Most in favor of those innovations knew they were not mentioned in Scripture, but justified them by claiming they were expedients.
- (d) Remember: we should forego expedients if they cause division, because expedients are simply products of human wisdom, yet the majority insisted on these innovations despite the division they caused. They agreed they weren’t an absolute requirement.
- (e) This liberal attitude toward the Scriptures opened a floodgate of apostasy and led the church into all kinds of error (e.g., fellowship halls, women preachers/elders, denial of inspiration, denial of virgin birth & the resurrection).
- (f) By the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the division was complete with the formation of the *Disciples of Christ* (i.e., Christian Church).

(2) Mid-20<sup>th</sup> century:

- (a) Brethren built and supported organizations, separate and apart from the church, to do the work of the church (e.g., missionary society via sponsoring church arrangement, orphan & old folks homes).
  - (i) They agreed such organizations were not absolutely required by God.
  - (ii) But, they insisted on them to the point of division.
- (b) Brethren involved the church deeper and deeper in the social gospel concept (“food, fun and frolic” of all imaginable kinds).

(3) Liberal vs. conservative churches of Christ.

- (a) The liberal view of the silence of the Scriptures has taken the “liberal” churches of Christ further than anyone ever imagined in the beginning (explain current state of the liberal church; **Hos. 8:7**: “*They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind...*”).
- (b) Only a very small minority (us included) continued to believe and practice: “We speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent.” (1 Pet. 4:11)

C. **15** Silence of the Scriptures:

(1) Silence of the Scriptures never permits, it always forbids!

- (a) We can only know God's will if He reveals it to us (**1 Cor. 2:11**: "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.").
- (b) So, we cannot know God's mind/will when He is silent; we would only be guessing and following our opinion.
- (c) \*\* The two views contrasted:
  - (i) Conservative view: follow the truth revealed, do not take additional liberties (Gen. 6:14; God said use "gopher wood," so let's limit ourselves to using "gopher wood.>").
  - (ii) \*\* Liberal view: "God didn't say not to use "gopher wood" **only**, or God didn't say, "Don't use pine, maple or oak"; so let's use whatever we want. Since there is no specific prohibition, silence permits.
- (d) If God is silent, how can we possibly know what He wants us to do? 1 Cor. 2:11
  - (i) Your opinion is no better than mine; in fact, opinions are a "dime a dozen."
  - (ii) Following our opinions is presumptuous and dooms us to strife and division (1 Cor. 1:10; 1 Pet. 4:11).

(2) **16** Silence is a Bible principle:

- (a) Jesus could not serve as priest under Law of Moses (read Heb. 7:11-14).
  - (i) Since the Bible is silent about priests from the tribe of Judah, the liberal view of the silence of the Scriptures would allow priests from any tribe. But, God didn't! His silence did not grant permission for priests from tribe of Judah!
  - (ii) By God **specifying** that priests came from the tribe of Levi, and saying nothing about priests from other tribes, that automatically eliminated/excluded priests from all tribes except Levi.
- (b) \*\* Examples of the silence of the Scriptures:
  - ☛ Instrumental music: Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16
  - ☛ Twinkies and Coca-Cola for the Lord's Supper: Matt. 26:26-28
  - ☛ Pouring or sprinkling for baptism: Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:4
  - ☛ Earthly church headquarters: Col. 1:18; Heb. 1:3
  - ☛ Missionary society: 1 Tim. 3:15
  - ☛ Extended oversight of elders (i.e., sponsoring church): 1 Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28

D. **17** The silence of the Scriptures always forbids, with only one exception:

- (1) When the Bible gives us authority to do something (in fact, when it commands us to do something!) we can use **expedients**.
- (2) \*\* For example, the Bible is silent about the following items:
  - Lord's Supper: plates & cups
  - Singing: song books
  - Assemble: building (own or rent), meet under a tree; water fountain, restrooms
  - Preaching/teaching: chalk board, powerpoint, sound system



- (3) **\*\*** Even though the Bible is silent on these things; they are authorized as **expedients** because we have Bible authority for the associated command, approved example, or necessary inference.

### III. CONCLUSION: 18

1. God's Word grants two types of authority for what we are to preach, teach, practice:
  - A. Generic authority: "Make thee an ark" (Gen. 6:14)
    - (1) God commanded Noah to build an ark; but He did not specify how to do it.
    - (2) Therefore, Noah had authority to use any tools he deemed appropriate to get it done.
    - (3) Such tools fall into the realm of expedients, but...
      - (a) Expedients are only allowable when we already have the authority to act.
      - (b) And, we cannot add/substitute things in God's commands and claim they are expedients (e.g., organ, missionary society, orphan's home, 'food, fun, frolic').
  - B. Specific authority: "Make thee an ark of gopher wood" (Gen. 6:14)
    - (1) When God specifies something in His Word that restricts us to the method or way of doing something He has precisely stated or prescribed.
    - (2) God specifically told Noah to build the ark out of "gopher wood"; thus, Noah was restricted to using only "gopher wood."
    - (3) By specifying "gopher wood," God did not have to tell Noah, "Don't use pine, oak, or maple." (restaurant example).
2. **\*\*** We must respect the silence of the Scriptures: Heb. 7:11-14 (v. 14: "...our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood").
  - A. "We speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent." Became the motto of the Restoration Movement.
  - B. It's a great motto, because it has a scriptural basis! 1 Pet. 4:11
  - C. The liberal view of silence is false and deadly! We cannot do things in God's name by claiming, "Well, God never said don't do that." (restaurant example)
3. **\*\*** Thus, everything we teach, preach and practice must be authorized from the pages of the New Testament by a direct command or statement, an approved example, or a necessary inference.

**Col. 3:17**: "whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

**2 Jn. 9**: "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son."
4. Invitation

Adapted from the workbook *A Study of Authority* by Billy W. Moore (pp. 45-63).