

# **Establishing Bible Authority**

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## **Introduction**

Realizing that we will be judged by the Word of God (John 12:48-50), it is imperative that we respect the authority of Sacred Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Col. 3:17).

The Holy Spirit caused the inspired apostles and prophets to use three basic methods of authorizing religious actions: direct statements, divinely approved examples, and necessary inferences. The Lord calls upon us to use our minds in understanding the will of God (Col. 1:9-12; Eph. 5:15-17).

How does one understand the Bible? Exactly as one understands any other written message: by gathering information, serious contemplation, and drawing conclusions. Reasoning may be true and productive of good (2 Tim. 2:14-19, esp. vs. 15; Eph. 3:1-5) or faulty and productive of evil (Jer. 23:36; 2 Pet. 3:15-16). The outcome depends upon our attitude (John 7:17).

## **Direct Statements**

It should go without saying that we are bound to obey any direct statement regarding our obligations to God. A direct statement might take the form of a positive commandment (Acts 2:38-40), a negative prohibition (Eph. 5:3-12), or a declarative statement of fact (Gal. 5:19-23).

Greek verbs communicate authoritative statements in various forms. The indicative mood is descriptive of something that is, as opposed to something that might be. The subjunctive mood expresses a possibility, probability, exhortation, or axiomatic concept. The imperative mood is used when making a command, or when the speaker/author is encouraging or asking someone to do something. All are employed to express direct commands.

## **Approved Examples**

The Scriptures also teach by example or illustration (1 Cor. 10:6, 11). Parents know the importance of setting the right example (Eph. 6:4; Prov. 31:28-29). Christ conducted Himself so that when men saw His actions they could know how they ought to live (Matt. 16:24; 1 Pet. 2:21). So likewise, the Apostles acted under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and their example guided the early church (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9).

The New Testament records instances of divinely approved actions that illustrate God's commands. These approved examples are no less important than direct statements. In this manner the Holy Spirit illustrates those aspects of obedience, which are required, but may not be expressed in the form of a command. The story of Philip and the eunuch illustrates the New

Testament teaching on baptism (Acts 8:38-39; Rom. 6:3-4). The example of the early church demonstrates the need for a plurality of elders in each local congregation (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Phil. 1:1).

## **Necessary Inferences**

We do not know who first used the expression “necessary inference” but its equivalent can be found in the works of Aristotle and other Greek writers. Necessary inference is simply a part of the reasoning process. When evidence is collected and a conclusion is drawn, that conclusion is our inference. It is “necessary” to the extent that the evidence demands it.

The Bible teaches through necessary inference, i.e., conclusions that must be true even though they are not explicitly stated. For example, a noteworthy Messianic prophecy affirms, “The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:4). This verse necessarily infers three irrefutable facts: (1) There would be a change in the priesthood; (2) There would be a change in the law, for a change in the priesthood necessitated a change also in the law; and (3) perfection could not be attained through the Levitical priesthood, thus it was necessary that another priest should arise after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:11-17).

Jesus taught through parables or illustrative stories, and then called upon men to infer the necessary spiritual lesson and apply it to their lives: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” In like manner, the Apocalypse repeatedly says, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Sometimes we are expected to necessarily conclude points of truth from other instruction given. Necessary inference is that which must be true even though it is not explicitly stated. It is something clearly implied by that which is said. For example, Jesus condemned the Sadducees for not concluding that there is a resurrection from God’s statement to Moses in Exodus chapter three (Matt. 22:23-33). Again He used this method in reassuring John the Baptist that He was indeed the Christ (Matt. 11:2-6). This concept appears elsewhere in the New Testament (Eph. 4:9-10; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

Is a “necessary inference” binding upon the conscience? Yes! When careful study of God’s word impresses you with an inescapable conclusion, however conveyed, you must accept it or be untrue to yourself and to God.

## **Conclusion**

The confusion and division so characteristic of the religious world would not exist if men would only learn to respect the authority of Christ. Unity would be attainable if we would “speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11) and preach those “things which are fitting for sound doctrine” (Tit. 2:1).