

By What Authority?

Introduction

One day while Jesus was teaching the gospel to the people in the temple, the chief priest, scribes and elders came to him with a question. “Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority.” ([Luke 20:1-2](#)) We know from the context and the other gospel accounts of this story, the men were trying to trip up Jesus and prove him wrong. However, in today’s world this question will often come up when we are involved in the study of the scriptures. Some common phrases today are; “How do I know this is what I should be doing?”, “Tell me how you know that I have to be baptized?” Often these questions are not backed with the same intentions of those men with Jesus, but rather, a sincere desire to know how to come to a clear answer on something. When we consider how to study the Bible, we must start with the basic concept of authority.

Authority is a concept that must be understood and adhered to by every Christian since it is the entire basis of our relationship with Christ. “Authority” means “**the right to command and enforce obedience.**” When we are baptized with into the family of Christ, it means that He is supposed to become our “boss” or “authority” over our *whole* life ([Luke 6:46](#)). We learn what he wants us to do through the Bible which becomes the source of authoritative instruction for our Christian Life ([2 Tim. 3:16](#)). The words of Jesus are the highest source of authority that we must answer to ([Matt. 28:18](#)). So let’s summarize:

Why use the bible for our source of authority?

1. ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)) “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*”
2. ([John 17:17](#)) “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”
3. ([John 8:32](#)) “and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”
4. ([John 12:48](#)) “The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.”

The Bible has everything we need to know about pleasing God. The Bible is truth, which will set us free from sin. The Bible is the book of life that will judge us all in the last day.

How do we use the bible for defining our authority?

Once we understand that our authority to act with God’s approval is found only in the words of Christ, we must then understand how to “apply” that authority in our lives. This will require us to know how God’s authority is revealed in the New Testament. The three ways of defining authority in the New Testament are:

1. Direct statements (commands).



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2. Apostolic approved examples.
3. In-escapable Conclusions (inferences).

All three of these types of authority must be applied, from time to time, to what we believe and practice ([2 Corinthians 13:5](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:21-22](#)). We should also understand while they never contradict each other, there is a hierarchy. A direct command supersedes all others. An example given by the apostles, and approved by God comes before any inferences we can make. With that in mind, let's take a look at each of these:

Types of Authority defined

It's a good idea to make sure we all understand the true meaning and intent of these types of authority before moving on. We should all be on the same page when it comes to our understanding and application of these authority types.

Direct Command

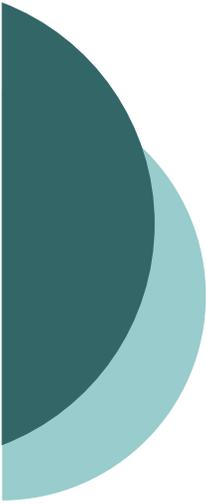
A direct command is really self defined. These are commands, given directly from God or Jesus to us. God can give us a direct command, through the Holy Spirit, who in turn gives it to a chosen Apostle, who then wither speaks the command that is recorded, or writes it in the scripture himself. God can give a command through Jesus that is recorded in the scripture or God could, and did, give commands directly to his chosen spokesperson (Moses, Abraham, Joshua). You might be thinking that these examples don't seem very "direct". The term direct indicates that the command follows the appropriate path from God to us, that is defined by God himself. Simply put, the command cannot come from just anyone or anything. As stated earlier, a direct command takes precedence over all other types of authority. When the boss says to be at work and ready to go at 7:30am, there is no room for misunderstanding and no implied exceptions. Work start time is 7:30am, period. The same is true with God. When he gives a direct command, there is no room for misunderstanding or implied exceptions. He expects us to follow the command exactly as stated.

Approved Apostolic Example

An apostle was someone chosen by Jesus to carry out the following:

1. Establish the Church.
2. Create rules, approved by Him and God surrounding the church its organization and members.
3. Take the message of salvation that Jesus gave them, and preach it to the world, as well as make specific application.

The mere fact that this person was chosen by Christ provides an unfounded form of authority. Beyond that the authority prescribed by Christ clearly shows that these men had the ability to set rules and guidelines for us to follow. Speaking to Peter, Jesus said:



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“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” ([Matt 16:19](#))

So any example provided by a chosen Apostle of Jesus is authority for following that example...well almost. You see it not just an example by an chosen Apostle, it also has to be approved. The best way to explain this is Judas. He was indeed a Apostle chosen by Jesus. However we certainly would not be authorized to follow his example of betraying our saviour for 30 pieces of silver. You see that example is one that is not approved by Jesus or God. Therefore we cannot use it as a source of authority. One last thing about this type of authority. An approved apostolic example can never take the place of, interfere with or be substituted for a direct command given by God! Ever!

In-escapable Conclusion

This third type of authority can be a little more difficult to understand and to execute accurately. You might be more familiar with the term “Necessary Inference” for this type of authority. The meaning in either case is the same. When a direct command is not in place, and we don’t have a specific approved example given to us by one of the apostles, then this is the type of authority we are required to use. The base meaning is this. When taking the context, other examples and references, from the Bible, we can correctly conclude that we are to do or not do some action. But there is one small caveat. Just like “approved” must be used in conjunction with “apostolic example”, “necessary” or “in-escapable” must also be used with “inference” or “conclusion”. When finally make that conclusion, there can be absolutely no other acceptable conclusions or it is automatically eliminated. (In-escapable) Further more the conclusion must not contradict an approved apostolic example and certainly not a direct command. In fact, this type of authority should really only be used when either one of the other two are not available.

An example of authority types

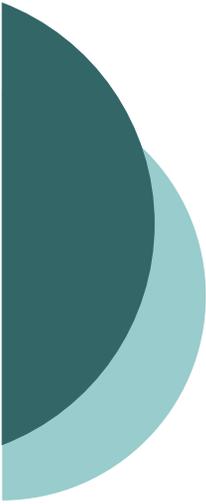
So now let’s put our learning into practice by looking at an example given in the new testament scripture.

The Lord’s Supper

In this one example we can actually see each type of authority used by God, and the proper means of following each type. Let’s start by looking at the direct commands

Direct Command

Jesus gave an example of this act of worship back in the Gospels shortly before he was betrayed and crucified. However, since the church was not established, it is not a command to us, but rather to the Apostles with him at that time. He even tells them



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that he would not eat or drink of this with them again until the church was established. However, Paul gives the command in [1 Cor 11:23-25](#). Notice the phrase “do this” is used for both emblems. This is a command to us, given directly, to partake of both emblems.

Approved, Apostolic Example

Okay so we know we must do it, but when are supposed to partake of these emblems? We have an example in [Acts 20:7](#). The early Christians gathered on “The first day of the week” and they did that to “break bread” (partake of communion). How do we know it was approved? Because the Apostle Paul was there and showed his support by his participation in the events of the day. So by an example of an apostle of God, we know that the emblems are to be partaken on the first day of the week.

In-escapable Conclusion

For some the frequency is obvious, for others the question is raised, how often should we do this? Once a month, once a year, every first day the week? Any conclusion other than “Every first day of the week”, leaves room for “escape”. In other words, if it is not every first day of the week, we have many, many different answers that could be applied and leaves room for escape. Selecting everyone leaves no other possible option and thus becomes “In-escapable”. Since there is ONE first day of the week, every week, we can conclude that each and every first day of the week is an occasion to partake of the emblems. ([Exodus 20:8](#), [1 Cor 16:2](#))

What about Expedients?

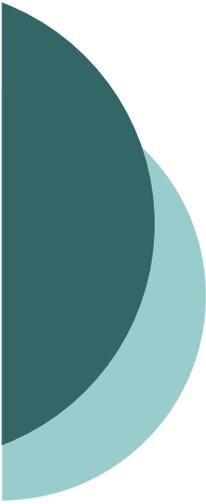
This term has been used in the religious community for many years and especially in the discussion of authority. An expedient is simply the utilization of a convenient means to obtain an end. In regards to God’s authority and instructions to us, expedients are perfectly acceptable under the following conditions:

1. The “End” of the expedient is defined and authorized by God
2. The “Convenient Means” does not conflict with any other type of authority or instruction given by God.

An example of expedient that is often used is that of a song book. The song book helps to accomplish the “end” that God has given concerning singing. In [Eph 5:19](#) God says;

“addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart”

A song book is a convenient means of accomplishing this command. The song book does not conflict with this or any other instruction given on singing in worship service so it



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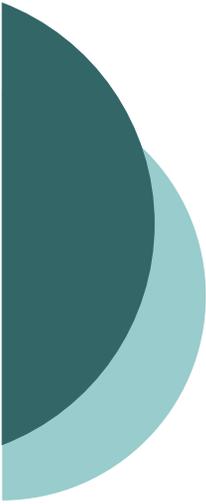
It should be considered an acceptable expedient. Using a different instrument, choir or band, all in one way or another either do not help to accomplish the command to sing or conflict with other instructions given surrounding this part of worship. Therefore, they can not be considered as acceptable expedients.

Conclusion

Our first step in understanding authority is defining the ultimate source. God, the creator of all things has the ultimate authority. Jesus, was given all authority in heaven and in earth by God. The words of God and Jesus recorded in the Bible are our ultimate source of authority for scriptural and many other matters. We have 3 ways of establishing authority from the Bible. Direct Commands, Approved examples given by the Apostles, and In-escapable Conclusions. Expedients are simply a convenient means to accomplish the commands established via the 3 different types of authority. When we step outside this type of authority, we step outside of the will of God. Be aware of statements like

1. "You mean God wants me to...?"
2. "God is too loving to ask me to do that!"
3. "I don't think God..."
4. "That's just not going to work for me..."

All of these phrases are red-flags to someone submitting to God's authority. Whether we hear someone else say them or we catch ourselves thinking them we should be very aware of the place these questions can take us...away from God's will. Let's submit to the Authority of God and his word, just like Jesus, to help us better understand how to study His word.



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Questions

Describe the Bible authority we have for each item in the following list. Make sure to give scripture to support your answers. If you cannot find the a specific type of authority is it an expedience?

- 1) Baptism as a necessary for salvation.
- 2) The role of women to in regards to preachers, elders, or leaders in worship.
- 3) The church owning a building in which to conduct services.
- 4) Adultery being the only acceptable reason for divorce.
- 5) Observing the Lord's Supper each Sunday.
- 6) Having a song leader or song book in our worship service.
- 7) Not having a predetermined amount to give (such as a 10% tithe).
- 8) Having a local, 'resident' preacher at a congregation.
- 9) Financially supporting preachers or needy saints who aren't members of your local congregation.
- 10) Having a Wednesday night Bible class.