
UNDERSTAND WHAT THE WILL OF THE LORD IS



HOW TO STUDY SCRIPTURE AS GOD INTENDED

Bryan Matthew Dockens

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Quotations of Scripture are from the New King James Version unless otherwise indicated. *“Jehovah”* replaces *“the LORD”* in Old Testament texts where relevant.

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“UNDERSTAND WHAT THE WILL OF THE LORD IS”

We are under command to “*not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is*” (Ephesians 5:17). The Lord’s will, therefore, is not a mystery beyond our comprehension. It can be grasped by the human mind, and it can be obeyed. To suggest otherwise is to prove a lack of wisdom.

UNDERSTANDING IS DIFFERENT FOR US THAN IT WAS FOR THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS. Paul the apostle explained, “*That by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets*” (Ephesians 3:3-5). They got their information directly from the Holy Spirit, but ordinary people need to read what those inspired men wrote in order to gain understanding.

Context shows that Jesus was speaking, specifically, to His apostles as He said, “*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*” (John 16:13). To apply those words to ourselves would be dangerously presumptuous.

Because the apostles were so guided by direct inspiration, they were required to not prepare their defense of the gospel aforetime. Christ told them, “*When they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say*”

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(Luke 12:11-12). They were forbidden from mixing their own ideas with those of the Holy Spirit.

Contrariwise, the apostles themselves have instructed the rest of us, explicitly, to anticipate conversations with unbelievers and to prepare, through study, to respond. The apostle Peter commanded, *“Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you”* (1st Peter 3:15). Similarly, the apostle Paul instructed his readers to *“know how you ought to answer each one”* (Colossians 4:6).

UNDERSTANDING REQUIRES EFFORT. While the will of the Lord can be understood, that does not imply it comes without hard work. Paul said, *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2nd Timothy 2:15). To gain approval from God, rather than shame, one needs diligence! In particular, that diligence must be applied to *“rightly dividing”* or *“accurately handling”* (NASB) the Word. Chapter Four provides some guidance in this regard.

Even Solomon wrote that *“much study is wearisome to the flesh”* (Ecclesiastes 12:12), so be prepared to wear yourself out in the pursuit of spiritual understanding.



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Despite how exhausting it can be, it is altogether worthwhile. The people of Berea were described as *“more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily”* (Acts 17:11), and other translations say they were *“more noble”* (KJV, ASV, ESV). Searching the Scriptures is honorable.

UNDERSTANDING REQUIRES SOME ASSISTANCE. Although it takes hard work, we are not expected to go it alone. Referring to *“the Scriptures”*, especially the *“epistles”* of *“our beloved brother Paul”*, Peter said, *“some things [are] hard to understand”* (2nd Peter 3:14-16). What a relief it is to know that even apostles acknowledged the challenge of comprehending what other inspired writers put on paper! While it may not always be easy, with some help, it can be understood!

When Philip the evangelist was sent to teach the gospel to the treasurer of Ethiopia, he *“heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘How can I, unless*



someone guides me?’ And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him” (Acts 8:30-31). Guidance is appropriate and asking for it is nothing to be embarrassed about. That’s what this book is for.

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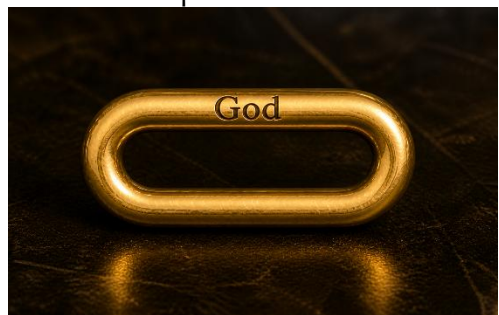
1. Is it possible to understand the will of the Lord (Ephesians 5:17)?
 2. Can ordinary Christians receive understanding in the same way the apostles and prophets got theirs (Ephesians 3:1-5)?
 3. What must one do to understand (Ephesians 3:4)?
 4. How can one be approved, rather than ashamed, before God (2nd Timothy 2:15)?
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1. What effect does lots of study have on the body (Ecclesiastes 12:12)?
 2. Is it always easy to understand (2nd Peter 3:14-16)?
 3. Is it okay to get help with understanding (Acts 8:30-31)?

“BY WHAT AUTHORITY ARE YOU DOING THESE THINGS?”

Jesus was once asked, *“By what authority are you doing these things?”* (Matthew 21:23-27). The inquiry came from dishonest hearts, but His reply acknowledged the validity of the question by turning it back on the inquisitors, indicating that religious authority comes either *“from heaven or from men”*. Any concern at all for truth will compel the honest heart to seek heavenly authority for all that is believed, said, and done.

It is written, *“Diverse weights and diverse measures, they are both alike, an abomination to Jehovah”* (Proverbs 20:10), which is to say that it is dishonest to use varying standards of measurement in the marketplace. In every transaction, buyer and seller must have the same notion of what a gallon, pound, or acre are; otherwise, someone is getting cheated. It is even more dishonest to use varying standards of measure in religion. It would be unprofitable for two parties to initiate a study of the scriptures without first agreeing on a single objective standard of truth. This lesson sets forth God’s standard for religious measure.

GOD EXISTS. It is innate within man to connect with his Maker and yearn for the hereafter, as it is said, *“He has put eternity in their hearts”* (Ecclesiastes 3:11). That God-shaped hole within each of us must be filled, which is why Paul preached to the Athenians, *“They should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each*



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one of us” (Acts 17:27). Throughout time, all over the world, every culture has worshipped. The majority worship the wrong god or the right God in the wrong way, but that instinct to find Him is normal. Atheism is the outlier.

Nothing can exist without having been built. God is the answer to the existence of the universe. *“Every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God”* (Hebrews 3:4). Whether a single-wide trailer or a castle, it is understood that every house had a builder. The names of the men who poured the foundation, framed the structure, lay the pipe, or ran the wires might be unknown to the occupants, but they know there was a builder. Similarly, the existence of the universe does not identify **whom** God is, but it certainly proves **that** God is. *“Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse”* (Romans 1:20). Proof of God’s power and existence is obvious in creation.

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). When we behold the beauty of the skies, we are moved to the conclusion that there is a Creator. Evolution cannot explain man’s appreciation for beauty other than for the purpose of attracting a mate for sexual reproduction. Being awestruck by a rainbow, a colorful sunset, or the shapes of the clouds is inexplicable to evolutionary theory. It only makes sense to admire beauty if we were made beautiful by a beautiful God, in His image.

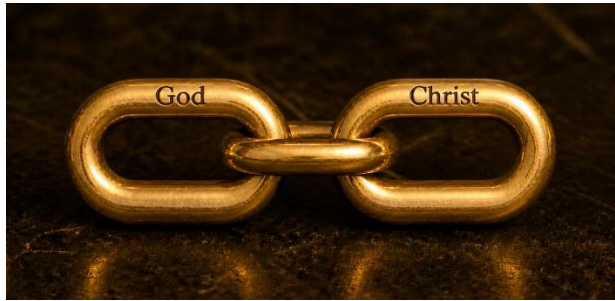
GOD GAVE ALL AUTHORITY TO CHRIST. That the one who created everything has all the authority is axiomatic, so it is relevant to determine what He is doing with it, and the answer is that He

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placed all authority in His Son. Jesus of Nazareth claimed, *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”* (Matthew 28:18). His authority is *“all”* and it was *“given”* Him.

The totality of His authority notwithstanding, Jesus humbly acknowledged a source beyond Himself, saying, *“I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak”* (John 12:49). This fact was powerfully illustrated at the transfiguration.

Jesus, standing in the company of long-dead heroes of faith Moses and



Elijah, was radiating light when the apostle Peter blurted out that tents should be pitched for the three of them, but he was interrupted by heaven. *“Suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!’”* (Matthew 17:5). Jesus’ credentials come directly from God.

The authority bestowed on Jesus from the Father is universal in its scope. He asserted, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”* (John 14:6). He is not merely a way to God, but is *“the way”* – the **only** way. He claims exceptionalism, doing what no other is capable of in providing access to the Father. Concerning *“Jesus Christ of Nazareth”*, Peter preached, *“Nor is there salvation in any other,*

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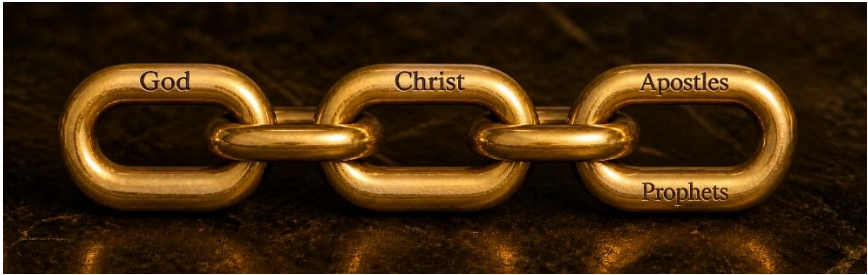
for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:10, 12). Jesus does what Buddha, Mohammed, the Pope, Joseph Smith, or anyone else, could never do – He saves!

That He endowed His Son with all authority in no way implies God abdicated His own authority. *“He has put all things under His feet.’ But when He says ‘all things are put under Him,’ it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted” (1st Corinthians 15:27). When parents head out for the night and put the oldest child in charge of the others, they retain their superiority over that child. Likewise, God is no less supreme for communicating to mankind through Jesus. A powerful testament to the universal authority of Jesus Christ is that the only exception to His authority is God the Father!*

The absolute authority of Jesus Christ is so important because all souls are accountable to what He has said, as He declared, *“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). None can rightly claim a different lord or other god, excusing themselves from submission to Jesus. Indeed, He specified that those **rejecting** Him will answer to His judgment.*

CHRIST AUTHORIZED HIS APOSTLES. He spoke to the apostles, *“Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high”*

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(Luke 24:46-49). They would be His witnesses and preach remission of sins after receiving heavenly power in Jerusalem. Specifically, that power would come from the Holy Spirit – *“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”* (Acts 1:8). What He foretold did come to pass on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit filled the apostles and they spoke in tongues (Acts 2:1-4).

Having been delegated with power by Christ in the Spirit, apostles hold a unique position. One of them, Paul, wrote, *“we are ambassadors for Christ”* (2nd Corinthians 5:20). That is a fitting comparison. In the political realm, the Head of State tasks an ambassador with representing policy in foreign lands, and that is exactly what the apostles did. Jesus is the Head (Colossians 2:10) who appointed the apostles (Luke 6:13) to represent His policy abroad (Acts 1:8). While other diplomats serving under ambassadors also represent the policy of their homeland to foreign States, but only the ambassador has power to broker treaties, so all Christians represent Jesus and His gospel in the world, but apostles, as His ambassadors, retain certain special authority.

What the apostles had to say is tantamount to what Christ had to

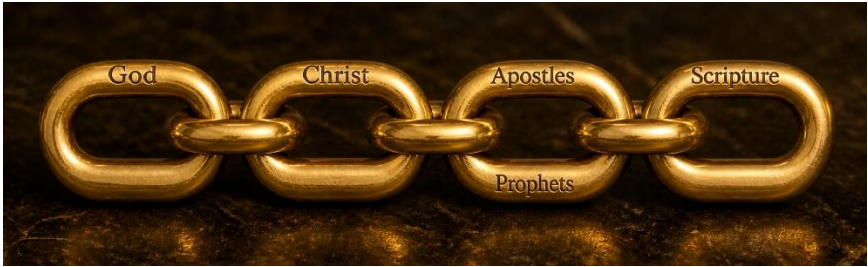
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say. Paul commended those of Thessalonica because they received his preaching *“not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God”* (1st Thessalonians 2:13). There is nothing wrong with a red-letter edition of the Bible, but some readers treat those red words as if they carry greater weight than the black words do, as if the words of the apostles and prophets were merely their opinions and commentary, as if the words specifically spoken by Jesus matter more. Not so. Consider what the red text says about the black text. Jesus stated, *“He who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me”* (John 13:20). Access to God is through Christ, and access to Christ is through those whom He sent. The literal meaning of the word apostle is *“one sent forth”*, so this statement pertains to the apostles most of all. The converse is equally true. Jesus said to the apostles, *“He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me”* (Luke 10:16). To dismiss the words of the apostles is to ignore Jesus and reject God.

THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS RECORDED GOD’S WORD IN SCRIPTURE. Apostles and prophets are no longer present on earth, but their writings are still with us. Paul penned, *“If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord”* (1st Corinthians 14:37). No one is truly *“spiritual”* without admitting that what Paul and his fellow apostles and prophets wrote are the Lord’s commands. Those who wrote the Scriptures were not recording their ideas, but God’s, as the apostle Peter said, *“No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they*

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were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2nd Peter 1:20-21).



“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2nd Timothy 3:16). That word *“inspired”* does not mean *“motivated”*, the way it is often used today, as in your fifth-grade teacher inspired you to be a writer or your grandpa inspired you to be a farmer. In the Greek from which it is translated, it literally means *“breathed out by God”* (ESV). Considering that God breathed the Scriptures into being, it is worth pondering what else His breath has done. *“God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being”* (Genesis 2:7). God’s breath is a creative power, a life-giving force; that is what brought the Scriptures into being. Therefore, Scriptures merit serious attention.

Jesus told the 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”* (John 16:13). Just as God sent Jesus, so Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit guided the apostles into *“all truth”*. They did not squander the inspiration they received, but shared it as broadly as possible. Paul told the elders of Ephesus,

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“I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house” and “I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:20, 27). Not only was it spoken, but the apostles and prophets wrote down the words of the Spirit so that future generations could benefit. “When you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 3:4-5).

THE SCRIPTURES ARE SUFFICIENT. Jude wrote about *“the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”* (Jude 3). *“The faith”*, not subjective faith as in what I believe or you believe, but objective faith as in the system of belief set forth by the Lord, is final – *“once for all”* – having no need of addition or correction. Since *“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”* (2nd Peter 1:3), we will never need anything more than Scripture.

Paul expressed thorough disappointment in those who would accept anything beyond the original gospel, saying, *“Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed”* (Galatians 1:8). All revelations past the Bible are untrustworthy. There is no need of the Koran, the Book of Mormon, a personal visit from an angel, or anything else.

God did not inspire forty-some men in three languages on three continents to write sixty-six books over the course of many centuries just for it to be lost to corruption. The Holy Spirit continues to preserve the word perfectly. *“The word of the Lord*

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endures forever.’ Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you” (1st Peter 1:25). Jesus insisted, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Luke 21:33).

Scripture is true and remains permanently reliable. God, who made the universe, placed all authority in His Son Jesus Christ, who sent His apostles and prophets, under the power of the Holy Spirit, to record the will of the Lord in writing. Count on it.

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1. Is it honest to use varying standards of authority in the marketplace (Proverbs 20:10)?
2. From what source should religious authority be derived (Matthew 21:23-27)?
3. How do you know that God exists (Hebrews 3:4; Romans 1:20; Psalm 19:1)?
4. Who has all authority (Matthew 28:18)?
5. Does the Lord share his power (Matthew 6:24; Acts 4:12)?
6. Where does Christ’s authority come from (John 12:49)?
7. Who did Jesus authorize to be his witnesses to the world (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8)?
8. What is the result of rejecting the apostles (John 13:20)?

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9. Are the words of the apostles any less important than the words Christ spoke personally (1st Corinthians 14:37)?
10. Did the writers of scripture record their own ideas or God's (2nd Peter 1:20-21)?
11. Is the faith God delivered in the New Testament sufficient for all men of all times (Jude 3; 2nd Peter 1:2-3)?
12. How much of the truth did the Holy Spirit guide the apostles into (John 16:13)?
13. How much of the apostles' knowledge did they withhold (Acts 20:20, 27)?
14. How can the knowledge of the apostles be gained by others (Ephesians 3:4)?
15. How many revelations beyond the original gospel are trustworthy (Galatians 1:6-9)?

“FROM HEAVEN OR FROM MEN?”

Replying to the question “*By what authority are you doing these things?*”, Christ acknowledged that religious authority comes either “*from heaven or from men*” (Matthew 21:23-27). This lesson identifies false standards of religious authority that come from men.

Merely being aware that counterfeits exist is insufficient. Examining the counterfeits helps us to recognize them when they are used.

INTELLECTUALISM IS A HUMAN STANDARD OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY. It is not unusual to rely on what a particular preacher, philosopher, psychologist, or scientist – a so-called expert – has said, rather than on the word of God.

Paul warned, “*Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge – by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith*” (1st Timothy 6:20-21). What some incorrectly identify as knowledge, or “*science falsely so called*” (KJV) is what leads them away from God, rather than toward Him. It is not that **science** is wrong because the scientific method is an honorable pursuit, but that



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scientists are often wrong.

To gain heavenly approval, one must expect the world's disdain while the intelligentsia looks on discipleship as folly. *“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.’ Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men”* (1st Corinthians 1:18-25). There is nothing about God that is remotely foolish, but even what might be so regarded far excels all the wisdom of all the great thinkers of every age. Still, the Lord contends with human pride by saving humanity with His humble Servant.

The apostle Paul was writing to the church in Corinth, located in ancient Greece, whose people held philosophers in high regard. He told them, *“I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should*

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not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing” (1st Corinthians 2:1-6). It is not that this man lacked education or eloquence. He was instructed “*at the feet of Gamaliel*” (Acts 22:3), “*a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people*” (Acts 5:34). He could readily quote the poets from any given culture (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12). He had to beg idolaters not to offer him sacrifice when they mistook him for the god of speech (Acts 14:11-18)! Reading his sermons throughout the book of Acts demonstrates he was a very capable orator. Nevertheless, he abstained from exercising his talent as a speaker when he was among those who placed a premium on that talent because he preferred they be persuaded by God’s awesome power.

All who would submit to the Almighty must likewise shed any claim of academic greatness, recognizing that no one is smarter than God. “*Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise*” (1st Corinthians 3:18-19).

CONSCIENCE IS A HUMAN STANDARD OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY. The adage “Let your conscience be your guide” is a dangerous approach to things spiritual because it is far from a perfect standard. Paul said of some that “*even their mind and conscience are defiled*” (Titus 1:15). If the conscience is subject to defilement, then it is not at all reliable.

The apostle proved the danger of depending on conscience when he declared, “*I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day*” (Acts 23:1) and “*I myself always strive to have a*

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*conscience without offense toward God and men” (Acts 24:16). The man who spoke those words was an apostle of Christ who risked his life all over the world in order to proclaim the gospel, but who had previously unleashed homicidal violence against the faithful. His motive for persecuting Christians was: “Indeed, I myself **thought** I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9). What he thought and what was right were two different things. Paul never violated his conscience, even when he shed blood to oppose Christ. That does not mean the conscience is useless, but it does show it to be a subjective measure of right, not an objective measure.*

Overreliance on conscience creates a conflict of interest, making oneself both judge and defendant, as Paul acknowledged: *“I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord” (1st Corinthians 4:4). Self is a lousy yardstick. “For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (2nd Corinthians 10:12).*

Let God be the navigator of life because *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12). Every soul who ignores heavenly direction is sure to find a Dead End. Just as a small child must hold the hand of a parent when crossing the street, so man needs God to lead him to eternity. “The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23).*

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Because emotions are fickle and often misguided, “Follow your heart” will always be poor advice. *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”* (Jeremiah 17:9). Do not follow your heart; **Lead your heart**, as Solomon counseled, *“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life”* (Proverbs 4:23).



Spiritual self-reliance is not possible while letting God lead because trusting God and trusting self are mutually exclusive notions. *“Trust in Jehovah with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths”* (Proverbs 3:5-6).

There is a simple reason for letting God lead – His thinking is always superior. *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says Jehovah. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts”* (Isaiah 55:8-9).

THE MAJORITY IS A HUMAN STANDARD OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY. Often, people are drawn to a certain persuasion because it is popular and shy away from another because of how few practice it, but following the crowd is unwise.

The way of salvation has always been the way of the minority, as

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when the whole earth perished in the flood except for Noah’s household and “a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water” (1st Peter 3:18). Calculating the genealogy recorded immediately prior to the flood narrative (Genesis 5:1-32; 7:6) reveals that 1,656 years transpired between creation and the deluge. In that time, the earth would have been heavily populated. Using current population growth trends, which are likely considerably lower than what they would have been in the pre-flood world, the most conservative estimates suggest a world population of over 240 million people when Noah built the ark. More probable estimates range in the tens of billions, but to avoid any appearance of exaggeration, the lower number will suffice. Supposing a global population of only 240 million people means that for every person God spared, 30 million perished.

Jesus was asked, “*Lord, are there few who are saved?*” (Luke 13:23). Without even considering His reply, the question itself is quite revealing. No one would have asked that unless the teaching was disagreeable to the wider populace. The Lord answered, “*Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able*” (Luke 13:24).



“FROM HEAVEN OR FROM MEN?”

PARENTS ARE A HUMAN STANDARD OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY. Many believe as they do, not because of personal conviction, but because their parents taught them that either by word or example.

It is true that children are commanded to obey parents, but that command is conditional. *“Children, obey your parents **in the Lord**, for this is right”* (Ephesians 6:1). Children are required by God to do as their parents tell them insofar as what their parents say does not conflict with what the Lord has said. Similarly, the same apostle who taught, *“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man”* (1st Peter 2:13), also told the authorities who tried to stop him from preaching, *“We ought to obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:29). In that same vein, children need to obey their parents unless their parents teach them to disobey God.

Jesus taught, quite directly, that allegiance to family must never take priority over devotion to Him. *“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against*

her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who



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loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:34-37). Family, including parents, should be loved, but not more than Christ is loved.

One reason Saul of Tarsus so adamantly opposed the gospel at first was his commitment to the family religion. *“You have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers”* (Galatians 1:13-14). To be fair to Saul’s forebears, their steadfastness as Jews is not to be blamed because Jesus had not fulfilled the Law and the Prophets in their generations; in their days, devotion to the Law of Moses was not opposition to the gospel of Christ. However, by the time Jesus died, the Old Law was no more and those who love truth should have realized that. Saul did not. His zeal was for what the family had always done.

Even when parents serve God faithfully, children do not inherit their righteousness. *“The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself”* (Ezekiel 18:20). Doing right is a matter of personal accountability, as it is written, *“He who practices righteousness is righteous”* (1st John 3:7).

TRADITION IS A HUMAN STANDARD OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY. Many worship as they do because, as they see it, it has always been done that way.

Reliance on tradition actually negates worship. *“Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying,*

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‘Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.’ He answered and said to them, ‘Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, “Honor your father and your mother”; and, “He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.” But you say, “Whoever says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God’ — then he need not honor his father or mother.” Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”’ (Matthew 15:1-9). That which is “vain” is empty, useless. Thus, vain worship does not accomplish what the worshiper intends, and service meant for God but rendered according to tradition has that effect. In this specific instance, Jesus was contending with an element who excused themselves and their adherents from God’s real commands so long as their own made-up rules were followed. Meanwhile, harmless behavior offended them because it violated their tradition.

Traditionalism’s biggest problem is that it cheats those who are taken in by it. *“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8). Practicing tradition lets those involved feel like they have honored the Lord when nothing of the sort has occurred.*

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Traditions of men cannot redeem the soul; only Christ does that. *“You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”* (1st Peter 1:18-19).

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1. What effect can so-called knowledge have on the faith of some (1st Timothy 6:20-21)?
2. How does God’s wisdom compare to man’s (1st Corinthians 1:18-25; Isaiah 55:8-9)?
3. Is it possible to have a clear conscience while doing wrong (Acts 23:1; 24:16; 26:9)?
4. Is it wise to use oneself as the standard of judgment (2nd Corinthians 10:12)?
5. What is the result of doing what feels right (Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12)?
6. Does the fact that everyone else is doing something make it right (Matthew 7:13-14)?
7. How many were saved in the days of Noah (1st Peter 3:20; 2nd Peter 2:5)?

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8. How should love for family compare to love for God (Matthew 10:37)?

9. Does God accept worship based on tradition (Matthew 15:1-9; Colossians 2:8)?

“RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH”

Settling on God’s word in Scripture and only God’s word in Scripture as the standard by which man ought to live and worship is essential, but it will not suffice if that word of His is not applied correctly. *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2nd Timothy 2:15). *“Rightly dividing”* means knowing what fits where and how to put it to use. This requires real effort, but it makes the difference between being approved before God or ashamed in His presence.

Paul said, *“we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully”* (1st Timothy 1:8), necessarily implying that even God’s law can be used in a lawless way. Used any way other than as He intended, even God’s word becomes bad.

FIGURES OF SPEECH MUST BE DIVIDED FROM LITERAL LANGUAGE. There is a difference between plain language and metaphor as Jesus said, *“I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father”* (John 16:25). It is incorrect to interpret figurative words as literal and just as wrong to reduce literal words to figures.

In certain instances, symbols are immediately presented as such, reducing the likelihood of misunderstanding, as when Paul wrote, *“Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are **symbolic**. For*

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these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar — for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children — but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all” (Galatians 4:21-26). Before his readers could twist his meaning, the apostle set down the fact that Ishmael and Isaac, the sons of Abraham, represented two covenants.

Some symbolism can be grasped by simply reading further. While in his vision on Patmos, the apostle John said, *“I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven golden lampstands One like the Son of Man... He had in His right hand seven stars”* (Revelation 1:12-13, 16). This imagery is not analyzed immediately, but **almost** immediately! *“The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches”* (Revelation 1:20). There are cases in God’s word in which a modicum of patience will provide answers to obvious questions. Most of the Revelation goes without such explanatory statements, however, which proves the reader must deduce the meaning.

Symbolism is usually not identified straightaway. Doing so can minimize the impact, so, more often, the speaker will let the hearer puzzle it out. Indeed, Jesus is exasperated when His disciples fail at this. *“When His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.’ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘It is because we have taken no bread.’ But Jesus, being aware of it,*

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said to them, ‘O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up? How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? — but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’ Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matthew 16:5-12). He lay down a simple metaphor which they did not pick up, and it irritated Him! Scripture is not terribly difficult to comprehend, but it is written for grown-ups, such that not every comparison needs to be spelled out.

A common form of figurative speech employed by Jesus was the parable, which is simply a story in which two things – one physical and one spiritual – are made **comparable**. The Lord was rather fond of this method: *“Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them”* (Matthew 13:34). While dozens of His parables are recorded in Scripture, one in particular is definitive. After telling the parable of the Sower, Jesus asked the disciples, *“Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?”* (Mark 4:13), implying this one is the key to comprehending the rest. Then, He presented a point-by-point analysis of that parable, relating the seed to the word of God and the four types of soil to the various hearts of men (Mark 4:14-20). Aside from the parable of the Tares of the Field (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43), this, the parable of the Sower, is the only one explained by Jesus. The remainder are left to be understood in the light of how this was explained.

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The existence of figurative language is not an excuse to dismiss the plain words of Scripture by treating facts as analogies. The six days of creation were literal, twenty-four-hour days and saying otherwise undermines the wonder of creation. The flood of Noah’s time was an actual, global catastrophe, and no good purpose is served denying it. In order to correctly perceive a passage as metaphorical, the context cannot make literal sense.

FULFILLED PROMISES MUST BE DIVIDED FROM UNFULFILLED ONES. Accurate handling of the word of truth demands respect for what God has already accomplished.

Since Jesus taught disciples to pray, *“Your kingdom come”* (Luke 11:2), it is fitting to consider whether that prayer has been answered. Far too many continue praying those exact words without ever wondering if it has happened yet. Christ did tell His contemporaries, *“There are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power”* (Mark 9:1), a straightforward statement that what He told His people to pray for would be fulfilled in that generation. By the time Paul was preaching, the apostle was telling fellow Christians, *“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love”* (Colossians 1:13). Entrance into the prayed-for kingdom was already happening during the first century.

Similarly, not enough Bible readers are aware of what the *“last days”* or *“ends of the ages”* are, with the common assumption being these phrases refer to some period yet future that will immediately precede the final judgment. Paul cited certain Old Testament examples of sin being punished by God and summarized, *“Now all these things happened to them as*

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examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1st Corinthians 10:11). The apostle contrasted “them” who were under the Law of Moses with “our” who were already experiencing “the ends of the ages” almost two thousand years ago. The ages of religious history are: First, the Patriarchal Age, from Adam until Moses, when there was no written law, but God spoke to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Second, the Mosaic Age or Old Covenant, when the children of Israel were beholden to the Law of Moses, from Moses until Jesus; and, Third, the Gospel Age, when all people everywhere are amenable to Jesus Christ in the New Testament. This present age of the gospel of Christ is the final age of all. None will follow it, save eternity in the hereafter. “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son” (Hebrews 1:1-2). The last days are defined as the period during which God communicates to man through His own Son. That is now! These days have been going on for a long time and will persist until the final judgment.

It is important, as well, to understand that what was once mysterious has been revealed. *“By revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 3:3-5). To treat God’s word as unknowable is defiant. It was mysterious in the past, but all who have lived since Christ came are blessed in ways those who came before never were! “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would*

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come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things which angels desire to look into” (1st Peter 1:10-12).

If a waitress serves a customer the exact steak he ordered, cooked the way he ordered it, sizzling hot, and seasoned to perfection, with the side dishes he wanted, and his glass kept full, it would be rude to keep asking if his food is coming. How much worse is it to demand of God what He has long ago fulfilled? To continue praying for the kingdom to come or to anticipate the last days or to regard as mysterious that which has been revealed is to express terrible dissatisfaction with the blessings God has heaped upon us.

While many divine promises have come to pass, some remain to be fulfilled.

Paul warned about false teachers like Hymenaeus and Philetus *“who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some”* (2nd Timothy 2:18). No one will miss the resurrection. That promise abides.

Concurrent with the resurrection will be the rest that is rewarded to those who enter the *“resurrection of life”* (John 5:29). The New Testament includes the promise that *“There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has*

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himself also ceased from his works as God did from His” (Hebrews 4:9-10). Until all work ceases, the promise of rest continues.

UNLIKE PASSAGES MUST BE DIVIDED FROM ONE ANOTHER. While no two passages of the inspired text will ever contradict one another, every verse must be received in its own relevant context. That *“Judas went and hanged himself”* is true (Matthew 27:5) and that Jesus said, *“Go and do likewise”* (Luke 10:37) is also true, but the one verse has nothing to do with the other, and to attempt to join them would be absurd.

A common misconception is to conflate *“the Beast”* (Revelation 13:1-4) with the *“Antichrist”* (1st John 2:18, 22) and *“the man of sin”* (2nd Thessalonians 2:3). However, nothing contextually links these and doing so confuses the real warnings intended by the Holy Spirit.

Jigsaw puzzles are often cut from the same pattern, so it is possible to fit the pieces of a horse puzzle into a locomotive puzzle. Just because they can be put together does not mean they ought to be. So it is with the truths of Scripture. Not everything that can be put together belongs that way.



CONTRADICTIONS MUST BE DIVIDED FROM ALL OF SCRIPTURE. Because *“it is impossible for God to lie”* (Hebrews 6:18), nothing in His word should be perceived in such a way that anything else He said would be rendered false.

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Consider how Satan tempted Christ. *“The devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: “He shall give His angels charge over you,” and, “In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.”’ Jesus said to him, ‘It is written again, “You shall not tempt the Lord your God”’”* (Matthew 4:5-7). Jesus reproved the devil for interpreting the 91st Psalm so that Deuteronomy 6:16 would be invalid.

There are some who present the first account of creation (Genesis 1:26-28) as a distinct event from the second account (Genesis 2:7, 18-25). In truth, there was one creation mentioned twice. This is common practice in narration wherein the introduction mentions the occurrence briefly before the details are expounded upon. Scripture does not contradict Scripture; it complements itself.

Skeptics allege a discrepancy between two narratives about Judas’s suicide. In one place, it is said, *“He threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself”* (Matthew 27:5), and in another, we are told, *“This man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out”* (Acts 1:18). Each record includes detail the other does not have. Judas hanged himself and either the rope frayed or the branch snapped or something else happened to cause the body to fall face first thereby bursting the intestines. Rather than opposing each other, these two versions simply fill the picture in.

“The entirety of [God’s] word is truth” (Psalm 119:160).

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RIGHTLY DIVIDING IMPLIES THAT IT CAN BE WRONGLY DIVIDED. The apostle Peter wrote, *“Consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation — as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures”* (2nd Peter 3:16). Peter said the writings of his fellow apostle, indeed all Scripture, can be **twisted** and the result of such abuse is self-destruction.

Remember that the wicked one is well versed in Scripture, capable of quoting it better than most Christians (Matthew 4:1-11), so it is essential to know it well enough to understand when it is being misapplied.

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1. Is it possible to use scripture improperly (2nd Timothy 2:15; 1st Timothy 1:8)?
2. Must every verse be understood literally (Galatians 4:24; Revelation 1:1)?
3. Is the gospel a mystery now (Colossians 1:26; Ephesians 3:5)?
4. Do we wait for the kingdom to come or has it already been established (Mark 9:1; Colossians 1:13)?
5. Are the last days present or yet to come (Hebrews 1:1-2; Acts 2:17)?
6. Is it correct to join passages of differing contexts?
7. Can two passages of scripture ever contradict one another (Matthew 4:5-7; Psalm 119:160)?

“THE END OF THE LAW”

“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4).

THE LAW WAS INTENDED FOR ONE PEOPLE. Speaking to *“Israel”*, Moses asked, *“For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as Jehovah our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?”* (Deuteronomy 4:1, 7-8). The answer is in the asking. Israel was unique among all the nations under the sun because it had these commands as its heritage. *“Moses commanded a law for us, a heritage of the congregation of Jacob”* (Deuteronomy 33:4). Just as Americans are not subject to the laws of Liechtenstein, so no people but the Israelites were ever



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accountable to the Law of Moses. To presume otherwise is to ignore the special status afforded that nation by God. *“He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation; and as for His judgments, they have not known them”* (Psalm 147:19-20).

Dealing with the termination of the Old Law, Paul anticipated certain objections: *“What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God”* (Romans 3:1-2). Being the people to whom and through whom God communicated almost exclusively for fifteen centuries, the Jews held a great privilege! They knew the prophecies. They descended from the ones to whom God had made promises of great blessings and they held the records of those promises. The apostle went on about the Israelites, saying of them, *“to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises”* (Romans 9:3). None of these remarks make any sense if God expected all nations to answer to the regulations He gave to Israel.

When the Almighty sent a prophet to a gentile people while the Old Testament was in force, it was not to persuade them to convert to the Law of Moses, but to simply repent. Jehovah said to Jonah, *“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you”* (Jonah 3:2), and the message was, *“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown”* (4). In response, *“the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them”* (5). They were not circumcised. Nor did they begin to keep Sabbath. Neither did they offer animals in sacrifice. They did not remove

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unclean animals from their diets, either. They simply *“turned from their evil way”* (10). Even when He sent them prophets with a specific message, God never subjected gentiles to the commands imposed upon Israel.

During the New Testament, when an attempt was made to bind circumcision upon gentile Christians, James, a Christian of Jewish descent, asked, *“Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”* (Acts 15:10). In view of how hard it was for the Hebrews to keep the Law God had given them, it was simply unreasonable to expect outsiders to keep it, too.

THE LAW HAD A PURPOSE. Learning the difference between covenants, it may seem that it would have been better to simply skip the Old Covenant and start with the New, but the Lord knew what He was doing! Paul anticipated the question *“What purpose then does the law serve?”* and he provided an immediate answer: *“It was added because of transgressions”* (Galatians 3:19).

Before the apostle even reached *“because”*, consider that word *“added”*. *“Added”* means the Law did not exist from the beginning. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and many others all lived and died before God issued the Law to Israel through Moses. Indeed, the time from creation until Moses received that Law at Sinai lasted about a thousand years longer than the period from Sinai until the Cross. Since the Law was not from the very beginning, it would be presumptuous to think it will last until the very end. *“It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come”* with the word *“till”* implying eventual expiration. Since the *“Seed”* is *“Christ”* (16), clearly Christ’s advent marked the end of the Law.

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Consider the Law’s reason for being: *“because of transgressions”*. As the apostle put it in another text, *“the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane”* (1st Timothy 1:9). The law was made to police the moral conduct of Israel. It identified and codified sin, so that it could be seen for what it is and, therefore, avoided. *“By the law is the knowledge of sin”* (Romans 3:20) and *“I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet’”* (7:7). This is not to say that sin did not exist until God gave Israel the Law of Moses, *“For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law”* (5:13). Any command God had ever issued prior to Sinai was generally relevant to all souls, but God handed down a voluminous code of regulations for His people, the descendants of Jacob, to keep. In doing so, He made them deeply aware of their guilt and need for grace.

“The law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 5:20-21). Had the Lord skipped the Law of Moses and immediately offered grace to forgive sins, there could be no appreciation for that grace because there would be no conviction about guilt. *“For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”* (John 1:17).

“But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for

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the faith which would afterward be revealed.

Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come,



we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:22-25). Inspiration likens the Law to a tutor whose job was to prepare a student to pass the grade. In this case, the tutor was confining all under sin, but when faith came, the tutor’s job was done.

The difference between the Law and the Gospel is the difference between shadow and substance. This comparison is made repeatedly in Scripture (Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 8:4-5). *“For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect” (Hebrews 10:1).* While foreshadowing lets the viewer know something more is coming, remaining focused on the shadow while the substance casting that shadow is in sight, causes the viewer to miss the point.

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THE LAW HAS BEEN FULFILLED. Jesus brought the Law to its finish, not by destruction, but through fulfillment. He said, *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled”* (Matthew 5:17-18). A contract can be terminated by breaching it, failing to keep what is written into it, but a contract can, and ought to, be concluded when everything written in it is done. The Covenant God gave Israel was fulfilled in and through Jesus, so it is over.

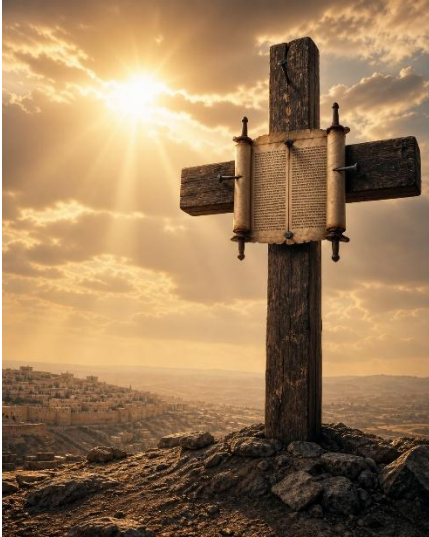


That *“Christ is the end of the law”* (Romans 10:4) means He is its terminus, but also its goal. In the same way that *“the end of the commandment is charity”* (1st Timothy 1:5 KJV) or *“the end of your faith”* is *“the salvation of your souls”* (1st Peter 1:9), so is Jesus the end of the old Law. He brought it to its conclusion because it was always pointing to Him, as He said, *“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me”* (John 5:39).

THE LAW HAS BEEN DONE AWAY. To be clear, the Law has been abolished. *“Remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh — who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands — that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers*

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from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, **having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances**, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.



For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:11-16).

“Abolished” is a strong word, but it is the term supplied by the Holy Spirit to the apostle Paul to communicate that the ordinances of the former covenant are null and void. They apply to no one any longer, not even the Jews who were separated from the gentiles by this law. When Christ offered His body on the

cross, that offering broke down the wall that made any difference between peoples.

“You, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of

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requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14). While it is not inaccurate to say that sins have been nailed to the cross, that specific phrase appears in inspiration to describe *“the handwriting of requirements that was against us”* which refers to the *“tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God”* (Exodus 31:18). It is precisely that Testament which has been nailed to the cross. Whereas Christ Himself rose from the dead after His ordeal of crucifixion, the requirements of the law are still there, still nailed to the wood at Calvary, never to rise again.

The transition from the Old Covenant to the New occurred when Jesus Christ died on the tree. *“Where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives”* (Hebrews 9:16-17). One’s last will and testament is not meant to be effective until the testator dies; therefore, just as the Law of Moses ceased to be valid when it was nailed to the cross, so the Law of Christ was ushered into force upon His death. Granted, there was some overlap, a time when the gospel of Christ was being presented before the Law of Moses was done. *“The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it”* (Luke 16:16), but the transition was not complete until the cross, at which point everything changed.

The Old Testament anticipated its own demise, as the prophet foretold, *“Behold, the days are coming, says Jehovah, when **I will make a new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — not according to the covenant that I made with their*

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fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says Jehovah. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Jehovah: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know Jehovah,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says Jehovah. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:31-34). This prophecy by Jeremiah is the lengthiest of all Old Testament Scriptures quoted in the New Testament (Hebrews 8:8-12), with the writer to the Hebrews following the citation with this explanation: *“In that He says, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away”* (13). *“Old”* is not merely a convenient label scholars have placed on the previous covenant – it is how the Scripture refers to it. More than *“old”*, it is *“obsolete”*.

Obsolescence is the result of faultiness. *“If that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second”* (Hebrews 8:7). The fault, though, was not in the covenant itself nor in the God who issued it, but the fault lay in those who were under it: *“finding fault with them”* (8). *“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh”* (Romans 8:3). The weakness of the Law was the humans it applied to. Christ accomplished what the Law could not. *“Through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who*

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believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-39).

That no one is now subject to the former Law is evident in the fact that the priesthood has changed. The book of Hebrews focuses on how much better the New Covenant is over the Old and it spends several chapters addressing the superiority of Christ’s priesthood over the priesthood of the sons of Aaron from the tribe of Levi. *“If perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, **of necessity there is also a change of the law**” (Hebrews 7:11-12).* That Jesus is the great High Priest of the present Testament proves the Law of Moses is no more because *“if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law” (8:4).* Jesus descended from the wrong tribe to be a priest in Israel, *“For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood” (7:14).* It took a change of Law for Christ to be eligible for the priesthood.

THE LAW IS SINGULAR. Since *“God is not the author of confusion but of peace” (1st Corinthians 14:33),* there can only be one Law at a time. Therefore, *“He takes away the first that He may establish the second” (Hebrews 10:9).* Mankind is only subject to one spiritual Law, a point illustrated with marital fidelity. *“Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from*

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the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another — to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God” (Romans 7:1-4). Attempting to live simultaneously under both the Old and New Testaments amounts to spiritual adultery.

THE LAW IS NOT USELESS. While the Law of Moses ceased to be valid at the cross, it remains useful for learning. With the Declaration of Independence, the American people threw off the chains of British tyranny, but legislators and lawyers still found relevance in English Common Law. For instance, the phrase “high Crimes and Misdemeanors” in the U.S. Constitution is not defined in that document, but legal experts know where it came from. Likewise, the present Covenant cannot be fully grasped without being familiar with what preceded it.

Because he was writing the New Testament when he said this, Paul clearly had reference to the Old Testament as he penned, *“Whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope”* (Romans 15:4). Without the Old Covenant, the fulfillment of prophecies in the New would be incomprehensible, so hope is made sure in reading the old Scriptures, knowing that what is promised in the current Testament will certainly come to pass.

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The Old Testament also teaches those under the New that God is serious about punishing sin. *“Brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. **Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.** And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.’ Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. **Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come**”* (1st Corinthians 10:1-11). The Old Covenant, therefore, remains useful for understanding how severely the Lord punishes disobedience.

Let the Old Testament continue to teach, but do not rely on it for Law.

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1. To whom did God issue the Law (Deuteronomy 4:1, 7-8; 33:4; Psalm 78:5; 147:19-20; Romans 3:1-2; 9:3-4)?
2. What was the Old Law’s purpose (Galatians 3:19-25)?
3. What is the difference between the past and present covenants (Colossians 2:16-17)?
4. In what sense is Christ the end of the law (Romans 10:4)?
5. Has the old Law been destroyed (Matthew 5:17-18)?
6. When was the old Law abolished (Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-14)?
7. Whose was the “*fault*” of the Old Covenant (Hebrews 8:7; 7:18-19; 10:1-4; Acts 13:38-39; Romans 8:3)?
8. What is the status of the Old Covenant now (Hebrews

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8:13; 10:9)?

9. Can someone effectively serve God under both Covenants (Romans 7:1-4)?

10. Is there any value to the Old Testament now (Romans 15:4; 1st Corinthians 10:11)?

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It was always God’s plan for spiritual gifts to end. Even while they were available, Paul wrote, *“Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away”* (1st Corinthians 13:8-10). According to the apostle, such things as prophecy and tongue-speaking were not permanent because they were imperfect, that is lacking completion.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS HAD A PURPOSE. The explicitly stated purpose of miracles, signs, and wonders was to confirm that the word spoken came from God. During the Great Commission, when Jesus sent His apostles out to preach, He told them about the gifts they would be endowed with and the narrative explains why those gifts were utilized. *“He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.’ So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and **confirming the word through the accompanying signs.** Amen”* (Mark 16:15-20). Exorcisms, tongue-speaking, venom immunity, poison immunity, and gifts of healing all had a single purpose: that those who exercised these

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gifts might demonstrate the heavenly authority whereby they spoke. The **signs** were not the focus of gospel preaching, but merely accompanied the **word** and thereby **confirmed** it. In fulfillment of this Great Commission, at Iconium, Paul and Barnabas were *“speaking boldly in the Lord, who was **bearing witness to the word** of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands”* (Acts 14:3).

Peter ascribed the same purpose to the works of Christ, preaching on Pentecost, *“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man **attested** by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know”* (Acts 2:22). Miracles, wonders, and signs wrought by the hands of Jesus amounted to God’s testimony of Him. *“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also **bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit**, according to His own will?”* (Hebrews 2:1-4).

Signs accomplished what they were intended for. *“Truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name”* (John 20:30-31). The signs are meant to stir up life-giving faith in Jesus Christ when they are read. No one needs to personally witness the signs, wonders, and miracles Jesus worked to believe in Him; that is why they were written down!

Those who reject God’s written word would not be saved even if they witnessed a miracle. Jesus told of a rich man tormented in the flames of hades who begged that his brothers on earth could

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be visited by dead Lazarus in order to warn them of their impending doom. *“Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead’”* (Luke 16:29-31). God’s word as contained in Scripture is enough. The miracles contained in Scripture are intended by the Lord to confirm that writing as the permanently valid record of divine will.

Comprehending the “when” of spiritual gifts is possible by comprehending the “why” of spiritual gifts. If they served a specific purpose, namely verification that the words of Christ, His apostles, and His prophets were from God, and that goal has been satisfied, then they are no longer needed.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS WERE IMPARTED IN A PARTICULAR WAY. Peter the apostle was dispatched by direct action of the Holy Spirit to the house of Cornelius the Centurion in the city of Caesarea. He was reluctant to go because his destination was a gentile home and theretofore the gospel was exclusively for Jews, but with some persuasion, he found himself preaching salvation in Christ to a house full of gentiles. *“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God”* (Acts 10:44-46). When his fellow apostles got word that Peter had been mingling with gentiles, they asked for an explanation, which he dutifully presented, saying, in

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part, *“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning”* (Acts 11:15). When the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius’s friends and family, Peter had nothing to compare it to but what he and the other apostles experienced *“at the beginning”*. This was not an occurrence accompanying every instance of conversion, but an event with only one other precedent. That precedent happened the day the church was established. *“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”* (Acts 2:1-4). Before this transpired, Jesus had instructed the apostles *“to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’”* (Acts 1:4-5). The baptism of the Holy Spirit was a ***“promise”*** to the apostles and no others. That it was received by the first gentiles who would obey the gospel was a surprise even to the apostles; thus, it would be inappropriate to expect the Spirit to fall upon any others. That it is a promise rather than a command indicates it cannot be obeyed under any circumstances. It is the Lord’s doing alone.

Besides the baptism of the Holy Spirit, shown to have happened twice, the only way the Holy Spirit was imparted in the New Testament was by physical contact with the apostles. *“Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who,*

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when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:14-17). The Samaritans had been converted by Philip the evangelist, “hearing and seeing the miracles which he did” (Acts 8:6), but Philip did not convey spiritual gifts unto them. It took the arrival of apostles from Jerusalem to accomplish that. “Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given” (Acts 8:18).

Subsequent examples show that others were able to exercise spiritual gifts after the apostle Paul laid his hands upon certain people (Acts 19:6; 2nd Timothy 1:6). The only way gifts of the Holy Spirit could be imparted to a Christian was by apostolic contact.



It is no longer possible to receive touch from an apostle. The qualifications of an apostle included being “a witness... of His resurrection” (Acts 1:22) and Paul claimed to be the final witness, writing, “last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time” (1st Corinthians 15:8). Not one person has qualified to be an apostle since Paul, so there have been no apostles since him, and, therefore, no laying on of the apostles’ hands.

Grasping the “when” of spiritual gifts can be done by grasping the

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“how” of spiritual gifts. If Holy Spirit baptism was unique to two very specific occasions, then it is incorrect to expect it otherwise, and if the only other means of receiving the Holy Spirit was by contact with the apostles, all of whom have died, then it is not possible for spiritual gifts to continue.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS CEASED. Paul promised to “*show... a more excellent way*” than spiritual gifts (1st Corinthians 12:31) and he immediately asserted that love is superior to such things (1st Corinthians 13:1-7)! Love will never fail, but spiritual gifts would “*fail,*” “*cease,*” and “*vanish away*” (1st Corinthians 13:8). Spiritual gifts would end when that which is “*perfect*” would replace that which had been in “*part*” (1st Corinthians 13:9-12).

Identifying what is meant by the word “*perfect*” is necessary to understanding when it had come. Many have assumed that the perfect must be Jesus Himself, returning in glory, but that does not figure. Outlasting spiritual gifts, along with love, is “*faith*” and “*hope*”. These “*abide*” (1st Corinthians 13:13) even after the “*perfect*” has come, yet, by their very nature, faith and hope will cease at the last advent!

“*Hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?*” (Romans 8:20-25). Hope, meaning confident expectation, is focused on what cannot be seen, so there can be no hope when Jesus appears again, only fulfillment. Hope will not be abiding then.

Similar to hope, “*faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1). It makes no more sense for faith to continue after Jesus returns than for hope to do so. “*The end of your faith [is] the salvation of your souls*” (1st Peter

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1:9). Because eternal salvation is the goal of faith, it must also be its terminus. *“Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation”* (Hebrews 9:28). Since faith has its end in salvation, and salvation is the goal of Christ’s coming, it can be safely concluded that faith, being fulfilled, will terminate at the Second Coming!

The *“perfect”* Paul was referring to was not Christ’s coming. Instead, it must refer to something more relevant to the context. Paul was saying, *“For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away”* (1st Corinthians 13:9-10). *“Perfect”* is set in contrast to that which was *“in part”* and that fits the meaning of the word, which is *“complete”* (Strong) or *“lacking nothing”* (Thayer). One must consider that spiritual gifts were lacking compared to the finished product of inspiration. Inasmuch as the Scriptures were still being revealed to the apostles and prophets, spiritual gifts were still needed in the first century. However, with the completion of the written New Testament, Christians were in possession of all that is needed to bring about a full knowledge of God’s will for man. *“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”* (2nd Timothy 3:16-17).

The foregoing understanding of completeness as the intended meaning of *“perfect”* fits well with what Paul wrote in the context: *“When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish*

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things” (1st Corinthians 13:11). The theme is growing up. When the church was in its infancy, it depended upon spiritual gifts, but those things were no longer needed when the church reached maturity, having the full New Testament in writing.

SO-CALLED SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN THE PRESENT ARE THE DEVIL’S DECEPTION. Paul warned of *“false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works”* (2nd Corinthians 11:13-15). Specifically, the apostle said that *“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved”* (2nd Thessalonians 2:9-10). Anyone now claiming spiritual gifts or private revelations of any kind is deceived by Satan.

BEING FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT NEED NOT BE A MIRACULOUS EVENT. Unlike the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which was a promise – not a command, or the laying on of the hands of the apostles, which was done at the discretion of the apostles, Christians are under **command** to *“be filled with the Spirit”* (Ephesians 5:18). To grasp the meaning of this directive, it helps to consider it in parallel to a passage from Paul’s epistle to the church in Colosse.

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| Ephesians 5:18-20 | Colossians 3:16-17 |
|--|---|
| <i>And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,</i> | <i>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom,</i> |
| <i>speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,</i> | <i>teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.</i> |
| <i>giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,</i> | <i>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.</i> |

The comparison is revealing. One is filled with the Spirit when he “let[s] the word of Christ dwell in” him.

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1. What purpose was served by miracles, signs, and wonders (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:1-4)?
2. Does someone need to witness miracles to be convinced by them (John 20:30-31)?
3. Could miracles persuade those who refuse to believe scripture (Luke 16:30-31)?
4. Would spiritual gifts always be available (1st Corinthians 12:28-13:13)?
5. How many times in the New Testament has the Holy Spirit fallen on people without apostolic mediation (Acts 11:15)?
6. Who had the ability to impart spiritual gifts (Acts 8:14-17)?
7. How does Satan work against us (2nd Corinthians 11:14-15; 2nd Thessalonians 2:9-10)?

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8. Will faith or hope abide after Christ comes (Romans 8:20-25; Hebrews 11:1)?

9. Is it possible to be filled with the Spirit now (Ephesians 5:18-20; Colossians 3:16-17)?

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“Deuteronomy” means “second law”. Whereas God through Moses gave His Law to Israel at first in the book of Exodus when the children of Israel first departed Egyptian bondage, an entire generation grew to maturity wandering in the wilderness. When it was that second generation’s time to finally enter the Promised Land, the Almighty commanded Moses to present the Law again so that the recipients of the Promise would be fully informed as to God’s expectations of them. Throughout this book, strict adherence to the commandments is constantly emphasized. *“You shall be careful to do as Jehovah your God has commanded you; **you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left**”* (Deuteronomy 5:32).

Any variation from the will of the Lord is condemned. Not only must God’s will be obeyed, but nothing less and nothing more will do.



“You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of Jehovah your God which I command you” (Deuteronomy 4:2). The theme is not limited to Deuteronomy, but persists into the very end of the written New Testament. *“If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book”* (Revelation 22:18-19). Deviation from

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God's word triggers eternal repercussions.

Once again, it is worth noting that the Scriptures are altogether sufficient without alteration. *"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"* (2nd Timothy 3:16-17).

It is theft to move a property boundary, as Jehovah told Israel, *"Cursed is the one who moves his neighbor's landmark"* (Deuteronomy 27:17). In the same way, it is sinful to change the boundaries God has established in His Word.

THE WORD OF GOD MUST NOT BE DIMINISHED. In a time of spiritual backsliding, God gave Jeremiah the prophet a message which he wrote on a scroll, and which was eventually read aloud to the king. *"It happened, when Jehudi had read three or four columns, that the king cut it with the scribe's knife and cast it into the fire*

that was on the hearth, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth" (Jeremiah 36:23). To slash and burn the Scripture like Jehoiakim did would be a flagrant display of defiance against



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the Almighty. Yet, many who would be shocked by such open rebellion are guilty of the same whenever they choose to disregard unpleasant truths. If the word of God is treated with contempt in the heart, then Bibles may as well be shredded and burned.

Christ preached, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone"* (Matthew 23:23). This text's reference to *"weightier matters of the law"* leaves some readers the impression that the lesser things may be dismissed. However, Jesus said, *"these you ought to have done without leaving the others undone"*. The problem was in emphasizing the lesser to the exclusion of the greater when the Lord expects attention to the greater things to motivate fulfillment of His will completely, including the lesser parts.

Jesus was asked, *"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"* Jesus said to him, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets"* (Matthew 22:36-40). Again, it is presumed that because there is a *"first and great commandment"* (38) and a *"second like it"* (39) that other commands may go unheeded. Christ explained, though, that these two commandments are the greatest because they represent the categories into which all other commandments may be classified (40). Every commandment God ever decreed fits

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into either or both of those categories. When one truly loves God and man, he is compelled to do everything God has said.

Nothing said by God should ever be disregarded since all of it is true (Psalm 119:160). Accountability is not limited to those portions one agrees with. *“Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all”* (James 2:10). The shoplifter who has never kidnapped or murdered is still a criminal.

Perhaps the most egregious example of diminishing God’s word is ignoring the obvious fact that baptism is required for a sinner to be saved in Christ (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3-6; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12; 1st Peter 3:21).

Because nothing should be removed from God’s will, He has little tolerance for disobedience. Jehovah told Adam, *“Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”* (Genesis 2:17). That is a steep penalty for eating fruit! After Adam broke the only rule issued by the Creator, *“Jehovah God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life”* (Genesis 3:23-24). The man and his wife were permanently expelled from the garden of God over a piece of fruit. That may seem harsh by human reckoning, but the fruit, the tree it grew on, the garden it was planted in, and the man and woman who ate all belonged to God who made them.

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Another example of God expecting dutiful obedience is that of Moses at Meribah. *"Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.'* So Moses took the rod from before Jehovah as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, *'Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?'* Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then Jehovah spoke to Moses and Aaron, *'Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them'"* (Numbers 20:7-12). Moses, who led Israel out of Egypt through the Red Sea, who saw the face of God atop Mount Sinai, and delivered the Law to Israel, was ultimately denied entrance to the promised land for this reason: he did not believe nor hallow Jehovah. He was told to talk to a rock, but he hit it with a stick instead. God's



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demand for obedience is not to be trifled with.

THE WORD OF GOD MUST NOT BE ENHANCED. Just as wrong as it is to leave out any portion of the divine will, so is adding to it. *"Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar"* (Proverbs 30:6). If God is true, and He is (Romans 3:4), then His word must be truth, and it is (John 17:7); therefore, anything beyond that must be a lie.

This principle is understood in the secular realm with regard to contract law. As Paul wrote, *"I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it"* (Galatians 3:15). Once a contract is signed, it is too late for either party to negotiate changes. Likewise, when Christ sealed the Covenant with His blood, it was done once for all. It cannot be altered.

One need not write additional books to include in the Bible to be guilty of this. Adding to God's word happens by practicing more than He has authorized. *"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"* (2nd John 9). The word *"transgress"* means to go beyond. To exceed the teaching of Christ is to be without God.

"If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1st Peter 4:11). We should have nothing to say if God has not already said it. This does not only apply to speech, but even to thought. We must learn *"not to think beyond what is written"* (1st Corinthians 4:6). Just be satisfied with God's word as He inspired it; it needs no improvement!

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One example of attempting to enhance God’s word is to add instruments of music to worship despite the fact that all New Testament instruction relative to music for praise and admonition is singing (1st Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; James 5:13).

Scoffers often push back against this principle that nothing should be added to Scripture by citing examples of things done without explicit authority. For instance, mocking objection will be made to the use of hymnals under the assumption that songbooks go beyond biblical authority. As will become clear in the next chapter, though, God does authorize **implicitly**. Twice, Paul said, *“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful”* (1st Corinthians 6:12; 10:23). Within the realm of what is *“lawful”* is that which is *“helpful”* or *“expedient”* (KJV, ASV). Not everything that is authorized is authorized specifically; some things are authorized generically. A hymnal is conducive to Christians singing to one another. It allows what is authorized, singing, to be *“done decently and in order”* (1st Corinthians 14:40). The command to sing to one another generically authorizes the expedients, such as songbooks or PowerPoint, which allow the command to be fulfilled, whereas drums, guitars, and pianos are additions. Similarly, the need for the church to *“come together in one place”* (1st Corinthians 11:20; 14:23) for edification necessarily implies that a *“place”* is needed for the gathering; thus, a church is authorized to gather in a home (Romans 16:5), in a school (Acts 19:9), in an upper room (Acts 20:8), the temple (Acts 2:46), or anywhere conducive to a dignified assembly.

GOD IS NOT BEHOLDEN TO MAN TO ACCEPT DEVIATIONS FROM HIS

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WILL. Too often, people think they can worship however they please, teach whatever they want, and live however suits them while expecting God to simply apply mercy to their willful disregard of Scripture. However, Jesus taught, *"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And **in vain they worship Me**, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men'"* (Matthew 15:7-9). To act *"in vain"* is to do so fruitlessly (Thayer), that is, to no purpose (Vine). Worship offered on human terms rather than divine is not accepted as worship at all.

This fact has been exemplified since the very first recorded instance of worship. *"In the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to Jehovah. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And Jehovah respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell"* (Genesis 4:3-5). In the first written example of mankind worshiping the Almighty, He rejected half the worshipers. This was no trivial matter; Cain's *"works were evil"* (1st John 3:12).

"Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before Jehovah, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from Jehovah and devoured them, and they died before Jehovah. And Moses said to Aaron, 'This is what Jehovah 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" (Leviticus 10:1-3). As *"sons of Aaron"*, Nadab and Abihu were the

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legitimate priests in ancient Israel. They were authorized to use the censers and incense in worship. Nonetheless, they were killed for using fire "*which He had not commanded them*". Their father Aaron was not permitted to grieve his sons because of their irreverence.

What God says must be taken seriously, as is, without alteration.

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1. Is it appropriate to diverge from God’s will to any degree (Deuteronomy 5:32)?

2. What are the consequences for tampering with God’s word (Revelation 22:18-19)?

3. Are the Scriptures sufficient as they are (2nd Timothy 3:16-17)?

4. Since there are “*weightier matters of the law*” may supposed lesser things be neglected with the Lord’s approval (Matthew 23:23)?

5. What did Jesus mean when He said, “*On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets*” (Matthew 22:36-40)?

6. For what transgression were Adam and Eve expelled from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-24)? Is there severity with God?

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7. How was Moses penalized for hitting a rock God told Him to talk to (Numbers 20:7-12)? Is God strict?

8. What is someone who adds to God’s word (Proverbs 30:6)?

9. In what condition is the one who goes beyond Christ’s doctrine (2nd John 9)?

10. Does the silence of the Almighty amount to license or restriction on the part of man (2nd Samuel 7:1-7; Hebrews 1:1-13; Hebrews 8:4; 7:14)?

11. Can God be worshiped in vain (Matthew 15:7-9)?

12. In the first recorded instance of worship, how many of the worshippers were accepted and how many rejected (Genesis 4:3-5)?

“ABOUT THIS QUESTION”

When confusion arises over a religious subject, it is helpful to see how Christians resolved disputes in the first century. Such a case arose when disciples from Jerusalem went to the church in Antioch and tried imposing circumcision (Acts 15:1-5). Brethren from Antioch, including Barnabas and the apostle Paul went to the church in Jerusalem, where the instigators had come from, to speak to their elders and to the rest of the apostles.

THEY APPEALED TO DIRECT STATEMENT. *“James answered, saying, ‘Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: “After! this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things.” Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath”* (Acts 15:13-21). The Lord’s brother quoted the prophecy of Amos (Amos 9:11-12) wherein God’s inclusion of the Gentiles, as Gentiles and uncircumcised, is directly stated.

Direct statements, including commands, are the simplest presentations of truth to be grasped. Jesus plainly asserted that

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His commands must be obeyed. He said, *“If you love Me, keep My commandments”* (John 14:15), *“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him”* (21), *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words”* (23-24), and *“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you”* (15:14). In short order, the Savior proclaimed four times that friendship with Him and love for Him are proven by keeping His commands.

What Christ told the apostles about obeying Him, the apostle John reiterated: *“This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome”* (1st John 5:3). If a person puts time and money into a hobby or volunteer work for no gain other than the pleasure of doing it, that is called a “labor of love”. How much more so should diligent obedience to Christ be commended?! This is similar to the dowry paid by Jacob to marry Rachel. *“Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her”* (Genesis 29:20). Love is a tremendous motivator.

Furthermore, the apostle declared, *“By this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him”* (1st John 2:3-5). It is wildly inconsistent to claim to be a Christian, one who knows Christ, but decline to actually do as Christ taught.

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Not only must the Lord Himself be obeyed, but so must His apostles. Peter wrote, *“Be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior”* (2nd Peter 3:2).

THEY APPEALED TO EXAMPLE. *“Peter rose up and said to them: ‘Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they’”* (Acts 15:7-11). The apostle reminded them all of his example in having earlier preached the gospel to the Gentiles, who received the Holy Spirit, and were baptized, being saved, while Gentiles and uncircumcised (Acts 10:17-11:18).

Since direct statements, inclusive of commands, are authoritative, it should be simple to accept that examples are also authoritative insomuch as there are commands to follow examples. John wrote, *“He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked”* (1st John 2:6). The example of Christ must be followed – that is a command.

Likewise, all are under command to observe the example of the apostles, as Paul told the brethren in Corinth, *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you”* (1st Corinthians 11:1-2; cf. 4:16). He

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instructed the brethren at Philippi, *“Join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern”* (Philippians 3:17) and *“The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you”* (4:9). What Christians are recorded in Scripture doing with divine approval constitutes a pattern to be followed thereafter.

THEY APPEALED TO INFERENCE. *“All the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles”* (Acts 15:12). Paul and Barnabas implied God’s willingness to save the Gentiles as Gentiles, not Jewish proselytes, insomuch as He had been working miracles among them by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:4-12; 14:8-10).

To imply is to communicate indirectly and to infer is to receive such unexpressed communication. Just as commands teach that examples are authoritative, so examples show that implications are authoritative.

Jesus told the Sadducees, *“Even Moses **showed** in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’. For He is not the God of the dead but of the living”* (Luke 20:37-38). The youngest of those three men, Jacob, had died more than four centuries (Genesis 49:33) before Jehovah told Moses that He is Jacob’s God (Exodus 3:6). The Almighty, therefore, **implied** the resurrection, that is life after death, when He identified Himself in this way.

After an angel instructed Cornelius the centurion to summon

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Peter from Simon the tanner's house and before the Holy Spirit told Peter to accompany Cornelius's messengers back to Caesarea, Peter *“fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.’ And a voice spoke to him again the second time, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common’”* (Acts 10:10-15). When the apostle arrived at the centurion's house, he told him, *“God has **shown** me that I should not call any man common or unclean”* (28). Peter correctly **inferred** that God did not consider any man common or unclean, even though the specific vision he beheld was about food. If one aspect of the Old Testament was repealed, then all of it was.

Describing Christ's reign, Paul explained, *“For ‘He has put all things under His feet.’ But when He says ‘all things are put under Him,’ it is **evident** that He who put all things under Him is excepted”* (1st Corinthians 15:27). It is axiomatic that God who gave total authority to Christ is excepted from that authority. That which is self-evident is **implied**.

It is difficult to comprehend how Abraham could follow through on God's instruction to offer Isaac as a burnt sacrifice (Genesis 22:1-14), but the New Testament gives insight into Abraham's mindset. *“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ **concluding** that God was able to raise him up, even from*

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the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense” (Hebrews 11:17-19). Abraham correctly **inferred** that if God would fulfill His promises in Isaac (Genesis 21:12; 22:1-3), but Isaac must die, then God is able to resurrect Isaac.

THEY APPEALED TO SILENCE. The apostles of Christ and the elders of the church in Jerusalem, along with all the brethren there, wrote to the brethren in Antioch and beyond, *“We have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law’ — **to whom we gave no such commandment”*** (Acts 15:24). The troublemakers were described as people *“to whom we gave no such commandment”*. **Silence** relative to these men amounted to **prohibition** of their behavior.

Whereas authority from God can be established through direct statements – including commands, approved examples, and necessary inferences, silence is the absence of authority.

David had the good intention to build a Temple for the Jehovah, but was informed it was not divinely authorized. *“**Have I ever spoken a word to anyone** from the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?’”* (2nd Samuel 7:7). That God had not requested it meant it was forbidden.

Hebrews is a book teaching the supremacy of Christ and His Covenant over all else. The first chapter opens with the fact that Jesus is *“better than the angels”* (Hebrews 1:4) and it stresses this point, more than once, with arguments from silence. *“For to which of the angels did He ever say: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You’? And again: ‘I will be to Him a Father, and*

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He shall be to Me a Son’?” (Hebrews 1:5) and *“But to which of the angels has He ever said: ‘Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool’”* (13). The great things God said of Jesus (Psalm 2:7; 2nd Samuel 7:14; Psalm 110:1), He did not say of the angels. Therefore, by silence, God communicated the superiority of Christ.

The silence of God is such a potent negative that it even disqualified Jesus from the priesthood until His ascension. *“For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law”* (Hebrews 8:4). He did not meet the requirements of the Law of Moses to be a priest, *“For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses **spoke nothing** concerning priesthood”* (Hebrews 7:14). When God specified that the priests of the Old Testament would be from the tribe of Levi (Exodus 28:1), that was sufficient information to exclude all others from the role. He did not need to explicitly prohibit the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin from priesthood because authorizing Levi implicitly excluded the remainder.

If a mother sends her child into the store to purchase milk, the fact he buys milk will not keep him from being disciplined if he also buys Coke, Doritos and Red Vines. Mom does not need to write a list of every item in the store the child is not allowed to get. Specifying what is needed will suffice.

Disrespecting God’s silence is the same as adding to His word, which was addressed in the previous chapter.

THEIR SOLUTION APPLIED TO THE WHOLE BROTHERHOOD. The

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apostles did not limit application of their admonition to the church at Antioch alone. Even though Antioch (Acts 14:26; 15:1-2) is where the disturbance occurred, the letter was sent to a wider audience. *“They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings”* (Acts 15:23). Although the problem confronted one church, its solution was addressed further. From Antioch, Paul *“went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem”* (Acts 15:41-16:4). Churches in Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium also needed to be taught what churches in Syria and Cilicia were taught based on what had occurred in Antioch. This *“seemed good to the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 15:28).

All churches everywhere ought to be consistent in doctrine. Paul told the brethren in Corinth, *“For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, **as I teach everywhere in every church**”* (1st Corinthians 4:17). He echoed himself a few chapters later: *“So I ordain in all the churches”* (7:17). In the same letter, he told the Corinthians, *“As I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also”* (16:1).

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Inspired content addressed to particular churches was intended for immediate and broad circulation. Paul sent an epistle *“To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse”* (Colossians 1:2) and told them, *“When this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea”* (Colossians 4:16).

Truth does not change from place to place. It is universal.

“ABOUT THIS QUESTION”

1. What does one prove by keeping the commands of Christ (John 14:15, 21, 23-24; 15:14; 1st John 2:3-5; 3:22; 5:3)?
2. Is a person required to obey the commands of the apostles (2nd Thessalonians 2:15; 2nd Peter 3:1-2)?
3. Should the examples set by Christ and His apostles be followed for a pattern (1st John 2:6; Philippians 3:17; 4:9)?
4. Is all the information we need directly stated or is some implied (Matthew 22:23-33; Acts 10:9-29; 1st Corinthians 15:24-28; Hebrews 11:17-19)?
5. Is silence permissive or prohibitive (2nd Samuel 7:1-7; Hebrews 1:5, 13; 7:14; 8:4)?
6. Do the letters contained in the New Testament have application only to those they were first addressed to or are they still relevant (1st Corinthians 4:17; 7:17; Colossians 4:16)?