

How God Communicates His Will

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INTRODUCTION

Jude 11: “Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.”

These three situations share in common a rebellion against the authority of God. The way of Cain is a path to envy and hatred due to a failure to follow God’s instructions by faith. The error of Balaam seeks to place worldly value and personal gain above doing the will of God. The rebellion of Korah was an effort to question the plan and order set up by God for leading His people. But at the heart of them all is an attitude that allows people to think that their way is better than God’s, that their thoughts are higher than His, that their needs outweigh what God knows and plans for. And these all paid the price for such a spirit of rebellion.

Do we need authority in our practice and worship toward God? It seems almost trite to ask the question, as the answer is so obvious (see **Articles 1 and 2**). Yet, rebellion against the concept of authority is an old problem. History is filled with revolutions and rebellions against what is perceived as “bad authority.” As Ramm wrote in his work on authority, “Protestation against authority is really against authority which is not authority in its own right, or authority which has become officious or excessive” (The Pattern of Authority, p. 16).

The question of authority has touched all groups. Fundamentalist J.I. Packer noted, “The problem of authority is the most fundamental problem that the Christian Church ever faces. This is because Christianity is built on truth: that is to say, on the content of a divine revelation” (42). He further argues the importance of having “the right criterion of truth, by which we may tell the word of God from human error.... We must expect to find error constantly assailing the truth; Christendom will always be a theological battlefield” (43). He argues that the “deepest cleavages in Christendom are doctrinal; and the deepest doctrinal cleavages are those which result from disagreement about authority. Radical divergences are only to be expected when there is no agreement as to the proper grounds for believing anything” (Fundamentalism and the Word of God, p. 44). You see, even the denominations have their problems when it comes to authority. It is not just “our” issue.

Thus the subject of authority is 1) fundamental, 2) at the core of recognizing truth from error, and 3) a point of continual contention. We must, therefore, reaffirm our faith and trust in God and His authority, and seek to teach future generations who will, in turn, face further issues relating to authority. The question of authority will never just go away, nor should it.

I. What do we mean by “authority”? See **Article 3**. I am focusing on two aspects of authority:

A. The power to enforce laws, exact obedience, command, determine, or judge. It involves one who is invested with this power, especially a government or government officials.

1. This is power based upon position. If one occupies a position invested with authority, then he has the right to command expect obedience (e.g., a General in the army).

2. This is the ultimate authority that God possesses, and it is based upon His position as the Creator of this universe. He has inherent authority, and the Bible establishes this from the first verse (Gen. 1:1).

B. Delegated authority is that which is given from someone who has the right to give it. This is permission and license to act in a particular way. A child receives authority from parents. Workers receive authority from their employers. And ultimately, we receive our authority to act from God. The one who receives the authority is to be in submission to the one who gives authority.

1. Concerning our service to God, when we say that we have authority, we are saying that we have the permission from God to do it. How that permission is discerned is an important study, but we should always start with the understanding that God is the ultimate source of authority and we need to be looking to Him as the One who determines the boundaries of permission. When we can safely know that God has authorized an action, then we can confidently say that we have the authority to do it.

2. It is because of who God is (our Creator) that we must recognize that any understanding of authority must flow from Him and His nature. He is the source of our authority. We add to this Jesus Christ as Head and King and His word given by the Holy Spirit as the final written standard of our faith and practice (John 12:48).

II. Basic Premises in Understanding How God Communicates His Authority:

A. Communication is vital to any understanding, and this includes our understanding of how God communicates His will. To speak of God communicating His will is to speak of His communicating authority.

B. God Communicates His will in the same ways we communicate our wills. There is no magic formula here. By understanding how we communicate at the most basic levels, we will understand how God communicates, also. There is no special way of looking at communication when we study Scripture.

C. People may buck against the idea of “establishing” authority, but the issue here is the same: How does God communicate His will? When we answer that, we’ve answered how His authority is made known.

III. How is anyone’s will communicated? (for a visual of this process, see the **chart at the end)**

A. We start by asking this basic question because it gets right to the heart of the issue. How do you communicate your will to someone else? If you want to communicate your desire that someone do or consider something, how would you go about it?

B. I have searched long and hard. I have studied works in interpretation and communication, and I’m trying to boil this down to its most basic elements. I can only think of the following ways to communicate anything:

1. You **tell** someone what you want. This is direct and can be an order or statement.
2. You **show** someone what you want and how to do it.
3. You **imply** what you expect others to get by what you say or show. This can even be done through gestures and silence.

C. Can you think of any other way than to tell, show, or imply what you want? This is logic at the most fundamental level, and the principles we are discussing here are what we would call self-evident. Something is self-evident when it is true in itself; it needs no further proof than itself. Such is the case with tell, show, and imply. How can we prove it?

1. It is obvious from the standpoint that any attempt at communication will utilize one or more of these ways of communication. Try to communicate without it!

2. I would issue this challenge if you disagree with what I'm saying: go ahead and disagree, but don't tell me anything about it, don't show me anything about it, and don't imply your disagreement. To do so would be self-defeating, for you will utilize the very process you are denying.

3. As you can see, such cannot be done, and we would be logically collapsing on ourselves by thinking otherwise. Tell, show, and imply are logically self-evident. No further proof is needed, and none can logically object without using them. Objections to this are self-defeating and logically incoherent.

4. Does this come from God? Since our ability to 1) think logically, and 2) communicate comes from God, then yes it does. It is, again, so fundamental that we cannot communicate without it. God made us creatures with the need and ability to communicate, and this is how it is done. To help alleviate this as a problem for future generations, we need to start with the logical premises and show that there is no way around how communication works. For further explanation, see **Article 4: Does CENI Come from God or Man?**

5. At this point, I've had people say something like this: well if it is that obvious, then why do we even need to talk about it? Because, while it is obvious, it is also obvious from the way people talk about authority that they don't always get it. So we are reminding people of the fundamental logic that underlies all communication, including God's.

IV. The CENI Connection:

A. Most of us are familiar with the terminology, "Command, Example, and Necessary Inference." These are the very concepts that are often challenged. In fact the acronym CENI has been the object of much ridicule and is often used pejoratively.

B. Years ago I was teaching a Bible class on authority and using this very terminology. Someone raised his hand and asked, "Where do you get this in the Bible?" The implication (yes, implication) was that this was a man-made hermeneutic. It was at this very moment that it hit me and I simply asked him the question, "How do you communicate with someone?" Through discussion, we all agreed: you tell, you show, and you imply. They didn't have a problem with it after that.

C. Command, Example, and Necessary Inference are simply the formal, specific ways of saying "tell, show, and imply" – they appeal to that very process. Therefore, when people complain about CENI as if there is something fundamentally flawed about it, they really are showing that the fundamental logic has not been thought through. And this is exactly why we need to talk about it. (Note: I prefer TSI, as I'll refer to it, to CENI for the simple reason that it is more encompassing of the communication process – "tell" includes more than just commands; however, the point remains that CENI is just a specified way of speaking about TSI).

D. The problem is not with CENI itself. I would suggest that if we do a better job explaining the foundational logic of communication, there wouldn't be such a backlash later against CENI as some alleged man-made construct. It's not a man-made construct at all; it's the fancy talk for how communication works at the most basic of levels. God tells us what He wants; He shows us what He wants, and He implies what He expects us to get. It's up to us to think it out and think it through.

E. Consequently, I have, a few times, challenged those who don't like CENI. When challenged, they have typically backed up admitted something like this: "Well, I agree that God communicates that way, but I don't like how it is applied." Now you might disagree over some

of the applications, but don't attack the principles themselves, for that is attacking the communication process, and it is self-defeating to do so. Start with a solid foundation.

V. Is CENI a Hermeneutic?

A. But is CENI or TSI a hermeneutical method? I sometimes see the criticism of it as a failed hermeneutic (method of interpretation), but I believe this misses the point of it.

B. TSI is foundational to any form of communication. It is inherent in any spoken or written communication (not just in studying the Bible). It is not, in itself, a hermeneutic, but is rather foundational to any hermeneutic. Any hermeneutic will assume the self-evident reality of TSI.

C. Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. It is what we as the recipients (readers, hearers) bring to the communication process. TSI, on the other hand, is inherent in what the communicator gives. That is, we, the readers or listeners, do not provide TSI; we take the TSI that is given to us and try to understand what that means. TSI, then, is not a method of interpretation; it is the material that we interpret. We might misinterpret it. We might fail to get out of it what is intended. But it is nevertheless the raw material that we use in order to understand what the author or speaker intends. There is no getting around this. No one interprets anything that is not first told, shown, or implied.

D. So, CENI (or TSI) is not a hermeneutic. It is the bare bones of what we work with when we do interpret. Criticizing it as a failed hermeneutic is to misunderstand it at the most basic level. Instead of criticizing it, let's recognize it for what it is (inherent in the communication process) and then deal with how we should properly understand the statements, examples, and implications.

VI. General and Specific Communication

A. Basic principle: the more specific something is, the more exclusive it is; the more general something is, the more inclusive it is. Once again, this is an issue grounded in basic logic.

B. Sometimes we see a reaction like this: where does the Bible say you can have building? Where does the Bible say you can have songbooks? These types of questions reflect a misunderstanding of the nature of general and specific orders. No one is saying that everything must be specified in the Bible for it to be authorized. A general order, by its very nature, must include options for carrying it out, or else we would be completely paralyzed. And specified orders, to be taken seriously, are exclusive, particularly when the One giving the specifics forbids going further.

C. Once again we find that this is the way communication works in all fields, not just religion. Here is an old illustration. If I send my son to the store with 10 bucks and tell him to buy bread, milk, and a candy bar, but nothing else, I have been both specific and general. I've been specific in the types of things I want him to buy, but general in the particulars within those types. He could buy all types of bread – white, wheat, rye, sourdough, etc. – all kinds of milk, like 2%, whole, and even chocolate, and whatever candy bar pleases him. But what if I said, "Go buy San Luis Sourdough Cracked Wheat bread, 1 gallon of the 2% Cowman's brand milk, and a king size Snickers bar, and nothing else"? Now I have disambiguated my order and there is little choice involved. This principle is pretty clear.

D. So it is with the way God communicates with us. The more specific He is, the more exclusive the order, and the more general, the more choice we have. It works this way in all communication. Specificity in the meaning of terms is exclusive. If you don't agree, try to apply

the concept to your own communication. When you are specific, let's just all agree to take you very generally, and vice versa. Such would make a mess of communication, would it not?

E. But does God ever indicate, "go no further"? Indeed, He does. In fact, this principle is pretty clear throughout Scripture. Cf. Lev 10; Prov 30:5-6; 1 Cor 4:6; 2 John 9; Heb 7:14; Deut 29:29; Rev 22:18-19, etc. I know there are specific contexts to these, but I'm aiming at the fact that there is an underlying principle at work -- that assuming something about which God has not spoken is indeed putting us in danger. This is a principle that is stated in several different contexts and throughout Scripture, so I would conclude it is a viable and important principle God wants us to know. God does not want us presuming upon His will.

VII. More On the Power of an Implication

A. What about those "necessary inferences"? Some readily accept commands and statements as binding, but will argue that inferences are never necessary and are not binding. How can we further establish this principle?

B. Every Christian believes in the binding power of an implication, including those who deny that implications have any binding power. How so?

1. First, anyone who is a Christian today is one because of the acceptance of the implication that people of all places and all times ought to be Christians. After all, where is there a direct statement telling us that 21st century Americans should be Christians? We infer that Christianity was intended to be taken beyond the boundaries of the first century time-frame. If you are a Christian, do you believe this inference is necessary? If you don't believe any inferences are necessary, then on what basis are you a Christian?

2. Second, when we follow particular commands in Scripture, we do so because we have inferred that those commands are viable and vital for those beyond the original audience who first heard them. That these commands are viable and vital is evident, but if we believe we should be following particular commands that were given to the Roman, Corinthian, or Colossian Christians, then we do so on the basis of what is implied by Scripture and what we infer as interpreters. Are these inferences necessary? Are any inferences necessary? If no inferences are necessary, then on what basis do you follow any command at all?

3. Now let's look at a case in point. Take the statement by Jesus that the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind (Matt 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34). Would anyone deny that this is still the greatest commandment? I surely wouldn't. But if you believe it is still the greatest commandment, then on what basis do you believe it? Why ask this? Because it illustrates the power of an implication.

a. In context (and context is vital), Jesus was speaking about the Law and the Prophets. He said nothing, in that context, about the New Covenant. So if it is to be understood beyond the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Covenant), then we are inferring its necessity beyond the original context and the original audience.

b. This command is not stated this way anywhere else in the New Covenant Scriptures. There are plenty of passages telling us to love one another. There are plenty of passages telling us to love God. But that loving God with all the heart, soul, strength, and mind is the greatest commandment? Where is that? The only place that is found is in a passage that contextually is speaking of the Law and the Prophets.

c. Where, even in the Hebrew Scriptures, does it say that loving God with all the heart, soul, strength, and mind is the greatest of the commandments? Yes, the command is there (Deut 6:4). But it doesn't say it is the greatest commandment there. How were they to know this?

If they were expected to know it, then they knew it by what is implied in the command. Interestingly enough, some did get it. For example, that lawyer who asked Jesus about inheriting eternal life answered the question correctly (Luke 10:25-29). How did he know that inheriting eternal life was so connected to loving God with all the heart? That is not stated in Deuteronomy 6. Where does that passage say anything about “eternal life”? Yet, Jesus said that the lawyer answered his own question correctly. That must have been a pretty significant inference. Was it a necessary one? Was it a binding one? If not, it was a superfluous discussion.

d. The question is not whether implications and inferences (even necessary ones) are an important part of our understanding of the Scriptures. What we need to make sure of is that what we infer is reasonable, not forced.

B. See **Articles 5 and 6** for more examples.

VIII. On Simplifying Examples

A. How important are examples to us? Here is the foundational principle: love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind (pulling from the previous point; see Mark 12:30).

1. When we look into the New Covenant Scriptures and find God’s people doing what pleases Him, should we not want to follow their examples?

2. If we ask, “But is that example binding?” are we really asking the right question? Such is like asking, “Do I have to?” Wouldn’t those who love God with all their heart rather want to follow an example that God saw fit to show us? Shall we not ask, why is this here?

B. Think about it. By God’s grace we have an example of something given that He likes. The Scriptures aren’t all that large, considering what all might have been included. So when an example is given that shows God’s approval, wouldn’t His people who love Him with all their heart want to take special notice of this example? If we are able, and if our circumstances are comparable, wouldn’t we want to follow the example that God, in His grace, found important enough to include in His message? Following such examples is part of loving Him.

C. Further, what example of God’s people acting in a way that pleases Him is something that we would not want to follow? Is there a specific case of His disciples acting with His approval that we would look at today and say, “No, we don’t want to do that”? If we are able, why would we look at something that pleases Him, argue it is not necessary, then ignore it? What kind of attitude is this? Is it one that demonstrates a total commitment and love for God?

D. But aren’t there details in some examples that really are not necessary? Of course there are. Not every detail is as significant as another might be. We need common sense, keeping matters in context and recognizing the difference between an incidental of telling what happened and core issues that led to the disciples acting as they did in the first place. Are we capable of drawing reasonable conclusions about these? God gave us minds to use. Let’s use them.

E. The point is that God chose to include examples of His people acting for a reason. Those who love Him would, I believe, look at those examples and, as much as within their abilities, and where the circumstances compare, follow them. “Do I have to?” (I.e., “Is it binding?”) Why are we asking that question unless we are wanting some way around following what we see?

F. When God has, in His wisdom, provided a look into the actions that He likes, those who love Him should want to do the same. Why would we even debate that? And we don’t even need to go through a list of rules to get this point.

IX. Regarding Silence

A. On the Silence of an Author: Silence is silence. It neither approves nor disapproves in itself. It is nothing. However, we cannot honestly quote an author on something he never said.

1. If we cite an author as promoting and approving something, we better be able to show where and how he promotes or approves it. Otherwise, we have misrepresented the author.

2. Therefore, when an author has said nothing about a subject, we have no warrant to say that he promotes or approves of anything regarding that subject.

3. In other words, an author “authorizes” his views by what he says, not by his silence.

B. But if the author has not said anything about that subject, does that necessarily mean he disapproves? That really depends on the context, but we cannot simply assume approval.

1. The only way to know this would if he breaks his silence on the matter. He might not necessarily disapprove, but how would we know? Yet once he breaks his silence, then this point is no longer at issue.

2. On the other hand, what if the author said something like this: “the only thing I’m approving of or promoting are matters that I have spoken about. I do not approve or promote anything else. Do not presume so.” The question is, has God said anything like that? Cf. Lev 10; Prov 30:5-6; 1 Cor 4:6; 2 John 9; Heb 7:14; Deut 29:29; Rev 22:18-19, etc. (I know there are specific contexts, but I’m aiming at the fact that there is an underlying principle at work -- that assuming something about which God has not spoken is indeed putting us in danger. This is a principle that is stated in several different contexts and throughout Scripture — I would conclude it is a viable and significant principle now.)

3. Then, when he is silent about a matter, what should we assume his feelings to be about it? We surely cannot assume that he approves of something he has not spoken about.

4. If, however, we are concerned about what the author in question really thinks, we will not presume to say he approves of something when he has said nothing about it. We will simply let it rest in silence.

C. Regarding the logic of this issue: the principle is an application of the “appeal to ignorance” fallacy in logic. This fallacy “consists in arguing that an idea must be true because we do not know that it is not. It is a fallacy because ignorance can never be a premise or reason. Premises must express knowledge-claims. Nothing logically follows from nothing, i.e., from no knowledge” (Kreeft, *Socratic Logic*, 86). When there is silence, there is nothing, and no knowledge claims can be made.

CONCLUSION

Authority in the primary sense is first grounded in God. Authority in the secondary sense (permission) is rooted in fundamentals of logic and communication. The way God communicates His will is the same way any communication takes place – through the telling, showing, and implying processes. Once we recognize that something is being told, shown, or implied, then we can interpret these to see what the meaning is and what the application would be for us. Inferences are drawn through the reasoning process, and following examples are built on loving God and wanting to do what He has shown us pleases Him.

From our standpoint, respect is vital. We do not want to presume upon God’s will. We simply want to deny ourselves and follow what He has given for us. In some ways this barely scratches the surface. See **Article 7** for thoughts on God and Patterns.

Article 1: Authority: Someone Needs to be in Charge

"If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psalm 11:3).

The foundations of right and wrong are continually threatened. The Psalmist speaks of the wicked bending the bow to shoot in darkness at the upright of heart. Sometimes that threat feels so heavy and harsh that it appears the wicked will win the battle. The psalmist knows the answer to the problem though. "In the Lord I take refuge" (vs. 1). "The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men" (vs. 4). In other words, the answer is God Himself. With God as the one in whom we take refuge, the foundations will never be destroyed. Why then do we so often feel like those foundations are not so secure?

With God comes a concept that many seem to shy away from: authority. Authority? Isn't that just something that old, conservative traditionalists harp on? We are free, aren't we? Yet authority is so intertwined with who God is that we cannot separate the concept and implications of authority from God and the word that comes from Him. God is authoritative precisely because He is God. As the Creator, He has the inherent right to speak, command, and expect obedience from His creation. Every "Thus says the Lord," every "I say to you" uttered by Jesus, and every imperative given by God in Scripture is founded upon the authority that belongs only to God because of who He is. And He is very clear about this: "I am the LORD, that is MY name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images" (Isa. 42:8). No one shares God's glory or authority.

God, in His infinite wisdom and knowledge, created mankind--male and female--with free will. We all have the ability to make choices, to decide whether or not we will choose to love our Creator. This means we have a basic choice to make between accepting and submitting to the authority of God or becoming our own authority.

Genesis 3 records the downfall of mankind. Satan presented the temptation, appealing to the desire that seems to be in all of us, a desire to be our own authority: "...you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (vs. 5). We may paraphrase it like this: "you don't need God telling you what to do. You can decide for yourself what is right and wrong. You can be your own god." The temptation thus presented the choice of continuing to submit to God's authority or going their own way. They went their own way, and we know what happened.

The problem of the wicked in Psalm 11 is the problem of all mankind when they fight the authority of God. Psalm 2 also highlights the same basic problem. The people were devising "vain things" (vs. 2) because they wanted to cast off the fetters of God's rule. They didn't want God's authority getting in their way. They had their own agendas and plans. How dare God tell them what to do!

God's answer was threefold: 1) He would scoff at them (vs. 5, an irony that connects back to Psalm 1:1); 2) He would speak to them in His anger (vs. 5); and 3) He would show them His King (vv. 6-7), a prophecy that finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Doesn't all of that have to do with the Gentile, pagan nations? Initially, yes. But we should note

the fact that Psalm 2:1 is quoted in the New Testament with reference to the Jewish leaders who were initiating persecution against the apostles (Acts 4:25). In other words, those leaders were acting just like the pagan nations acted when they rejected God and His chosen leaders in the Old Testament. The scary part is this: these leaders thought that they were doing God's will, much like Paul thought when he was so intensely persecuting Christians. In reality, they rejected God's authority in Jesus Christ for their own, and in so doing were fighting against the God they thought they were serving. Railing against God and His authority is no light matter.

Someone needs to be in charge. In reality, God is always in charge. From our perspective, sometimes we think we are in charge, and this creates the conflict that makes our foundations feel so questionable. When we raise our flag of autonomous freedom, when we press on thinking that we have some say in how God ought to be glorified, then we, like Adam and Eve, choose to become our own authority and wind up making a mess out of all that is good and right.

But God is in control. He is sovereign over the heavens and earth. He resides over His own worship and work. He resides over His body, His people. Shame on us for trying to take over what is not ours to take. May God help us to keep a proper perspective on who is in charge.

Article 2: The Logic of Authority

Someone has to be in charge. It only makes sense. While we may dream of a society where there are few laws, just imagine having no laws. Take away all speed limits, all road rules, all laws dealing with lanes and directions, and where do you think that will get us? Without rules, authority, and the ability to back it up, society cannot long survive in any civilized fashion. Even Utopia had its rules that were punished upon violation. Read the book.

The same is true of other areas of life: school, business, and the home all require authority. Acting like no one is ever in charge is not a situation anyone can long stand. "Isn't anyone in charge here?" bellows the customer who can't seem to find answers to the most basic questions. "Can I talk to someone in authority? Can I see your manager?" There is always an expectation that someone is in charge, and we often recognize that going "to the top" is the only way to get something done. Again, it only makes sense. And we know it does. No further proof is needed.

So why should morality and religion be any different? Suddenly we can become our own authority, acting like we are the ones in charge of how to serve and glorify God. We want to be Christians. We want to give God all the glory. We want to praise God with all our hearts. But we want to do it our way, defining Christianity by our own terms, expecting God to accept our "humble" service. After all, what kind of a God would refuse to accept the praise of those who so lovingly and whole-heartedly gave it? He is the passive audience isn't He? We get to perform however we wish and God will just curtsy to us and tell us how great we've done. That's what any parent will do for a little child just doing his best.

A bit overstated? Perhaps, but I don't think by much. Have we not read? "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your

name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'
(Matthew 7:21-23, NASU)

Not that verse! Let's face it. Calling Jesus "Lord" doesn't always work. What does work is the direct link between calling Jesus "Lord" and actually doing what He says. Those who do what He says from the heart are the ones who take His Lordship seriously. They are the ones who have built upon the foundation of Jesus and His Lordship. Read Matthew 7:24-29. Jesus taught with authority. Since the Lordship of Jesus is all about authority His (Matthew 28:18), then accepting His Lordship necessarily entails submitting to His authority. How can it be any other way? It's not a choice between the heart and obedience. It's obedience with heart. Let's stop trying to turn this into some kind of false dichotomy.

Something else about Matthew 7:21-23 screams authority: what do we want to enter but the "kingdom" of heaven? When we see the word "kingdom," we ought to think of God's rule. It is "of heaven," entirely within God's control and power. Since God is in charge of heaven, He is not obliged to accept just anyone who utters the words that pay lip service to Him. No. We really must take His authority seriously. Calling Jesus, "Lord," then minimizing His authority through our actions is hypocritical. "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46) We may feel offended by the idea. We may wish to buck against it. But there it is. Fight it if you wish. Jesus and authority are forever linked. And accepting His Lordship means we accept that all the authority belongs to Him and none to us. That's right: "None of self and all of Thee."

Suppose, though, that people wish to reject the idea of authority altogether. Then where exactly will they turn? Themselves? Others? Are we really to believe that they will reject all authority? It's not even possible. The logic of authority is that there is no escaping it. Authority is basic because no one can avoid it. It is logically self-evident. Even if people try to avoid God's authority, they will still rely on another source for the authority by which they do anything--their own or another's. To contradict the point is self-defeating. Try refuting it without thinking yourself or someone else to be the authority somehow who is "in the know" with the power to do anything about it.

But once we reject God as the ultimate authority, then we are left with people. Really? Like atheist Jean-Paul Sartre once said, without God somebody has to invent values and it might as well be "me." But do we really want people to be our ultimate source of authority? Yet this is the very choice Jesus put to the chief priests and elders of His day (Matthew 7:23-27). They wanted to know by what authority Jesus did what He did. After all Jesus was pretty brash. He was healing and teaching in the Temple, paying no real regard to the position held by the chief priests. And of all things He had the audacity to turn the tables of the moneychangers over. What an embarrassment for them! Who does Jesus think He is? Where did He get the authority to act that way? It was a good question. But Jesus "turned the tables" again, this time on their question. What was the authority for John's baptism? "From heaven or from men?" What other options are there? If not from God, then who or what? If we reject God's authority, then the only authority left is from men. Fallible, selfish men. They knew they couldn't answer the question without trapping themselves. Once again, Jesus was the Master of the situation.

People want to reject God's authority and only accept the authority of men. Here then is an interesting dilemma for them. Suppose the response is, "The Bible is just a book from men." The ones who argue this are now relying on their own authority. For the sake of argument, let's just say the Bible comes only from men, the same fundamental source that the skeptics have. Then what makes the Bible's authority any less or worse than the authority relied upon by its doubters? If it is only from men, and the doubter's authority is only from men, then who's to say that either is better or worse? Why can't I use the Bible while they use other human authority? Why should they even care? And why should I care what they think?

Authority is logical. It is self-evident. It is necessary. Why not accept that and then make sure that our source for authority is greater and better than we can provide all by ourselves?

Article 3: Just What Do We Mean by "Authority"?

"Authority" seems to be somewhat of a loaded term, so we need to define it.

Generally speaking, authority refers to the power to make and enforce laws. It is the power to command, determine, judge, or exact obedience. But there is more to it.

Authority has at least two sides. First, there is the one who has authority based upon position. For example, a police officer has authority to enforce the law in a special way based upon the position held. A Judge has the right, because of the position, to make decisions pronounce judgments consistent with law. A king would have the right to rule since that's what his position entails. This is the power people have because they occupy special roles.

Second is the delegated authority or permission that is given to another by someone who has the power to grant it. We might think of this more in line with having a license to act because we have been granted that power by a greater authority. It is the warrant we have to act. We might have a license to drive, a license to carry a weapon, or permission to enter a guarded facility. Our permission, our license, is our authority.

There is the one who has authority based on position, and there is the one who has permission based upon a granted license. Of course, even the roles mentioned (judge, police officer) are positions that the people must be placed in by others. We must go deeper.

In the absolute sense, there is only One who would have the ultimate right to rule, govern, command, and expect obedience. God, because of who He is, has the ultimate power and authority. There is no deeper foundation, no one else on whom God must rely for His authority. He could rest upon none greater. He is the first and the last; there is no other God besides Him (Isa. 42:8). The position He occupies needs no further foundation.

Only God has that ultimate authority. This means that all other authority is delegated by Him. This includes the authority He gives to government (Rom. 13), to the home (Eph. 5), and to His church (Col. 1:18). No human individual or group of people has inherent authority in any

ultimate sense. They only have it in the sense that they have been given permission by God to act in whatever capacity they work.

God, therefore, is the foundation for all authority. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" is the fundamental statement expressing why this is so (Gen. 1:1). He is the giver of life and all good things (Acts 17:24-25; James 1:17), and so has the right to tell us what to do, how to act, how to live, and how we should be worshiping Him. We are God's creation, made in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). We have been given dominion over all other created things, but we ourselves are still solidly under the power of God. As His creation, we have no right to question or ignore His authority. Read Psalm 89:5-18. Who indeed is comparable to the Lord? He rules over the nations. He rules over all. Doesn't the potter have the right to form the clay however He wishes? (Romans 9:21; See also Psalm 113 and Daniel 4.)

Since Jesus is God, then He, too, must be part of this foundation of authority. He has inherent authority because He is God (John 1:1). Though He came in the flesh and willingly took on a submissive role to the Father, He nevertheless now has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). Jesus has been seated "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion" with "all things in subjection under His feet," and He is "head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:21-23; see also Col. 1:15-18 and Heb. 1:3).

Because Jesus has all authority, then whatever He says is also invested with His authority. "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:48). But Jesus also invested His own apostles and prophets with authority to proclaim the words delivered to them through the Holy Spirit (John 16:12-13).

What makes Scripture so special? The nature of Scripture is that it is breathed out by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). (Note that the issue here is not the canon of Scripture, the list of books that belong in the Bible, but simply the nature of Scripture.) While 2 Timothy 3 is speaking directly of the Old Testament Scriptures, the principle for the New Testament is the same since Jesus anticipated it through His apostles. Further, Paul here speaks of an inspired text--Scripture--not just inspired men who wrote something down. The Holy Spirit moved men to speak (2 Peter 1:20-21), and the product of what they said or wrote is considered to come from God. So the Holy Spirit is also part of this foundation.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 teaches that, because Scripture comes from God, it has the power to correct and train in righteousness. This is an authoritative text. This is a standard, for only a standard can serve as a corrective. Only an authoritative standard can serve to make someone complete. And only God's standard can make a "man of God" completely able to accomplish good works--those very works desired by God. Without the authority of God invested in Scripture, none of that would make sense.

Due to its nature, Scripture serves as an objective standard, meaning that it lies outside of us. Scripture did not originate with us, nor is it merely up to our whims as to how it should read. While we must use our reasoning abilities in order to properly understand and interpret, our methods of interpretation should not be based upon mere emotional desires. Only an objective

standard will give us the proper foundation. Without such a foundation, there will be no final say as to what we should do or why we should do it. All arguments will be over preferences and opinions. And what would be the point of that?

God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit-inspired Scriptures. This is what authority rests upon. Our authority is delegated, founded only upon the authority that inherently rests in God.

Article 4: Does CENI Come from God or Man?

One of the criticisms we hear of CENI (Command, Example, Necessary inference or implication) is that it is just a man-made hermeneutic. We have already challenged this point on two grounds:

1. It is simply the formal, specific expression of how all communication works — what we have termed “Tell, Show, and Imply” (TSI). This is logically self-evident, for any time anyone, anywhere, for whatever reason will try to communicate will, it will be done in one of those ways. There is no way around it, and anyone who wishes to object should try to do so without telling, showing, or implying anything. It simply cannot be done.
2. Because it is foundational to all communication, it is not really a hermeneutic as much as it is the material that is interpreted. Without something being told or shown, for example, what exactly is there to interpret? One might argue that inferring something is interpretation, and this is true. However, often, our interpretation simply builds on what is inferred to begin with (whether some inferences are justified is another discussion).

So, that reiterated, some still may think that all of this is just the product of human reason, and therefore is still suspect as a binding principle. Let’s examine that for a moment.

1. While human reason alone can be filled with problems (logical fallacies abound), we need to remember that God is the one who gave us the ability to reason. If human reason is never to be trusted, then what are we saying about the God who so equipped us? Just because some human reasoning is flawed does not therefore mean we cannot trust any human reasoning (that would be fallacious reasoning, for the very argument that concludes human reason can never be trusted would have itself been reached by flawed human reasoning, and therefore should not be trusted as a conclusion).
2. Some principles are so fundamental to the process of reason, logic, and communication that to deny them is to be self-contradictory. For example, what is often termed the “law of non-contradiction” recognizes that anything cannot be both what it is and what it isn’t at the very same time and sense. This would be logically contradictory. It’s also just plain common sense. The point we are making about “Tell, show, and imply” is that these are so fundamental to the communication process that to deny them is to be self-contradictory. Most people just take them for granted and do not need to spell them out. The reason we are spelling them out is because of the continual debates over CENI, most of which seem to miss this fundamental point.

3. Since self-contradiction does not come from God, then we should recognize that anything that is logically self-evident (and thus cannot be denied without being self-contradictory) does, in fact, come from God, who is the epitome of all logic and reason. Not everything is self-evident, of course, and this is why we make arguments and offer further proofs. Something that is self-evident is true in itself; it really needs no further justification because of how basic it is.

4. Since it is logically self-evident that the communication of will involves some form of telling, showing, or implying (which may be derived through what is told or shown), then this communication process comes from God. It really needs no further proof.

5. Scripture itself, which is God's communication, is given through the same process of communication. God tells (through direct statements and commands), God shows (through both positive and negative examples), and God implies (by leading us to conclude the necessity of various principles). This cannot be reasonably denied. Every page of Scripture verifies this.

Will people differ over the applications that may come from this? Yes. But at least we should be agreeing on the fundamental communication process — a process that is rooted in the divine.

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Article 5: Reasoning from Scripture

No reasoning takes place without drawing conclusions from implications. Just try it. Statements and examples often come with the expectation that we draw further conclusions. The point of reasoning and discerning is that we are capable of taking what is explicitly given, then reasoning to conclusions that are, in fact, necessary. For example:

1. The list of sins given in Galatians 5:19-21 concludes with “things like these.” What things? How do we know what is “like these”? How can God expect us to figure that out without explicitly stating it?

2. The Hebrew writer speaks of the mature, who “because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil” (5:12-14). If something is explicitly stated, then what discerning is needed? We just take it at face value and do it or not. To discern, however, is to apply reason, to think it out and through, to draw conclusions based upon principle. Discerning “good and evil” is, of course, vital to one's spiritual growth and maturity. To do it, however, requires drawing conclusions that are not explicitly stated. Does anyone seriously want to argue that “necessary inferences” are not vital for understanding God's will? If so, they'll need a good explanation (based on inference, mind you) for Galatians 5 and Hebrews 5, both of which require drawing conclusions about good and evil beyond what the text explicitly states. We may debate the particulars of the conclusions, but the principle here is absolute, and it requires reasoning from implications.

3. Jesus expected the people to know and believe certain things based on what the Law said, even though not specifically stated. “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” conveyed more than what the Sadducees were discerning (Matt 22:32). Jesus expected them to know and believe

certain things based on this passage, even though not specifically stated here.

4. Jesus chastised the Pharisees for their failing to properly apply the concept of honoring father and mother, a principle they sacrificed to their view of “Corban” (Mark 7 — “Corban” is a transliteration of a Hebrew term that means a gift or offering dedicated to God; it was considered an irrevocable vow). But how were they to know that such an application to parents was necessary? Should they have drawn a conclusion about this that was, in the end, binding upon their actions and attitudes?

5. Since there was no specific statement against those from Judah serving as priests (Heb 7:14), how were they supposed to know such was forbidden? Were they expected to reason to the necessary principle, or should they have waited for a specific statement? And was that principle binding or not? Did God’s silence on the issue of other tribes matter at all?

6. How did the people know to keep every Sabbath holy? Where, in the giving of the Law, do we find God specifically stating that “every single Sabbath” is to be kept holy? All God said was to keep the Sabbath holy. But which one? Every one? Every third one? Once a month? Once a year? “Every one” (every time the Sabbath rolls around) is gathered by inference, and God expected them to get it. One may find this painfully obvious, but such is the nature of many implications and inferences. Many are so self-evident that they need no further argument and we hardly think about it. Even so, the children of Israel failed to obey this.

The list can go on. The point is that understanding God’s will requires the reasoning process. If this is the case, is it not significant that we develop our reasoning abilities — to love God with all the mind — so that we draw proper conclusions? It is not easy because we all make mistakes in our reasoning. Yet, this should not stop us from striving to develop our thinking, becoming more mature, training our senses to discern good and evil. God gave us minds to think His thoughts after Him. May God help us do so. DM

Article 6: On Principle and Inference

If you believe in principle, then you accept implication and inference.

A principle is a fundamental truth from which other laws or behaviors are derived. Upon understanding a principle, we recognize a variety of applications that derive from it. Yet the applications themselves might be unstated and we must figure out the specifics. Hebrews 5:14 speaks of the mature who have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Discernment is the ability to see a principle for what it is and make the proper applications from it. Mature people don’t need everything spelled out. They can grasp a principle and make applications appropriately. That is, they are able to draw conclusions from the principles about what’s right or wrong. To do such requires the ability to infer from what the principles imply.

It is not uncommon, in discussions about authority, to see the concept of “necessary inference” taken to task. Yet the same ones who will take it to task may also speak of principles guiding their behavior. They don’t realize that they are sawing off the legs upon which they wish to walk.

There is no living by principle if inferences have no binding power at all, for proper applications of any principle will necessarily involve those pesky inferences. Try stating a principle without making any specific, implied applications and see how that goes over. The principle would just be an empty idea with no real world application.

Many precepts are stated in a way that leaves us to work through the proper applications. For example, we are told, “love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:35-36). Yet how is all of this to be carried out? We can define love and mercy the way we wish (subjective and self-willed), or we can dig further into Scripture and see exactly how God showed love and mercy. Then, we can see how to make applications in our own age. All of this requires inferring from then to now and from God’s actions to ours. Without inference, there is no application.

Once again we see the inescapable principles of authority. What God has told us, shown us, and implied are on every page. We cannot rightly say, “Only commands are binding,” for even then we will have crippled our abilities to make modern applications of those commands (again, try applying an ancient command to a modern context without inferring anything about how that command should be contextualized).

Without a doubt, inferences can be unnecessary and result in an abuse of a text. However, the fact that an abuse can take place does not invalidate the point. Such just drives home the need to be careful in drawing conclusions and making applications. The interpretation of Scripture needs to be attended by good reason and a great care for context. That is why this particular subject is important. If we care about principle, we’ll care about proper reasoning from the principle to the applications. DM

Article 7: God and Patterns

The nature of typology shows that God is a God of patterns. Without even going through a process of trying to “establish” authority, we can see how God shows through His overall record that He is a God of patterns. This is evident right from the beginning when God made a pattern for creation that He later replicated in the work week of Israel. The Sabbath was a pattern that they were to follow (Ex 20:11).

The Law was clear enough. God’s people were to follow it, not turn from it to the right or left, and diligently obey it (Joshua 1). Passage after passage shows this.

Deuteronomy 6 makes it clear that the people were to diligently keep the commands “that it may be well with you.” They were to “listen and be careful” (see vv 1-3). Yet, notice that it is in this very same context where the greatest commandment of all is given: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart...” (vv. 5-6).

Obviously, then, there is no inherent problem between loving God with all the heart and

diligently being careful to obey. In fact, the two are so intertwined that one cannot love God without being careful to obey. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Those who find a problem in this have misunderstood either what obedience to God is about, or what it means to love Him, or both.

Some may try to pit careful adherence to obedience over against loving God. Arguing as if the Old Covenant was about strict obedience while loving God with the all the heart is what living for Jesus is all about, some might fail to connect the fact that such strict obedience under the Old Covenant was closely tied to their need to love God. Never has there been a time when God did not want or expect His people to love Him with all their hearts. Never has God accepted cold, rote ritual in lieu of loving Him. God has always wanted people to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with Him (Micah 6:8), and never has any of this contradicted the need to be careful in diligently obeying Him. Christ did not come to free us from patterns of obedience. He came to free us from the patterns of sin. He didn’t change the context or the concepts inherently involved in loving God with all the heart. He strengthened them.

When Israel was at Sinai, God was explicit about their need to follow patterns, particularly in building the tabernacle. “According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it” (Ex 25:9). “See that you make them after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain” (Ex 25:40; see Heb 5:8). “...according to the pattern which the Lord had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand” (Num 8:4).

Stephen pointed this out in his recounting of their history: “Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen” (Acts 7:44). The Hebrew writer also pointed to these patterns (Heb 5:8).

But weren’t these patterns just part of that old system? Aren’t we free in Christ? Hasn’t He freed us from legal codes, so that now we are just need to show love, kindness, and mercy? Such strict “patternism” has been done away with, hasn’t it? God is no longer concerned with following patterns, is He?

Where, in the New Covenant Scriptures, does the idea that we are free from patterns ever get floated? Not by Jesus. Not by Paul or Peter. Where does God ever hint at the idea that He is no longer a God of patterns who expects the duality of love and obedience?

We must ask, why do we have these Old Covenant Scriptures in the first place? God did not intend for these passages to disappear under Christ. He came to fulfill, not destroy (Matt 5:17). Fulfillment did not mean that now, suddenly, this God of patterns is no longer such a God or that now He wants everyone to define love for themselves and pretty much do what they feel is good for serving and worshipping Him. God has not changed. He defines love for us, and He wants our faithfulness no less than He did from those under the Old Covenant. The Hebrew writer even makes an *a fortiori* argument (argument from a stronger reason — if A, then how much more B?). If God expected faithfulness under Moses, how much more under Christ?

“Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Heb 10:28-29)

To disregard what God commands under Christ is to insult Christ and the “Spirit of grace.” The very fact that Jesus is the fulfillment of the old strengthens the case for patterns. He is the fulfillment of God’s patterns. Those patterns don’t unravel in Christ; they are a vital part of who He is. It was in the tabernacle that God was so specific about His patterns. Jesus is that tabernacle; He is the very presence of God, dwelling (tenting) among His people (John 1:1, 14).

The Old Covenant Scriptures were given for our benefit. We may not be under its stipulations (and such is not the argument we are making), but we are under its advisement.

“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, 11 seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven —things into which angels long to look” (1 Peter 1:10-12).

“For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom 15:4).

Those things that were written, whether through narrative, prophecy, poetry, or implicit typology are still given for our benefit. God establishes patterns throughout. To see how particular and meticulous God was about patterns in the Old, then to come to the New Covenant Scriptures and argue that there are no patterns at all, is to completely jump the fence. God established patterns for a reason — not to give them up and destroy them under Christ. Patterns show us a God who is concerned about details. He is a God who is orderly, not chaotic (cf. 1 Cor 14:33). Patterns are an undeniable, integral part of the story.

Rather than decry “patternism,” I would rather think that those who wish to love God with all their heart would seek out the patterns that we find in Scripture. Are they there? Why not look?
DM

