

RESPECTING SPIRITUAL JETTIES

How Biblical Authority Preserves Safe Passage

Mark Mayberry

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Synopsis: God's revealed authority functions as a system of spiritual jetties. Through direct command, approved apostolic example, necessary inference, and proper respect for biblical silence, God marks a safe channel that protects His people from error, innovation, and moral drift while guiding them toward faithful service and eternal life.

Introduction: A Safe Channel Through Dangerous Waters

The mouth of the Columbia River is both impressive and dangerous. The river enters the Pacific Ocean between Cape Disappointment, Washington, and Point Adams near Fort Stevens, Oregon. At this broad opening, a massive river current meets Pacific swells, tides, winds, and shifting sand. The result is the Columbia River Bar, long known as the “Graveyard of the Pacific.” Hundreds of vessels have been lost in that region over the centuries.

The jetties at the river's mouth do not remove the ocean's influence, calm every storm, or eliminate every current. They do something more focused. They stabilize and mark the channel so that ships can pass through dangerous waters. Their strength creates guidance. Their boundaries make navigation possible. Their continued usefulness depends upon constant inspection and repair.

That picture offers a powerful spiritual lesson. God has not removed temptation, false teaching, human pride, cultural pressure, or religious innovation from the world. Instead, He has revealed truth by which His people may recognize the safe channel. His Word establishes boundaries for the individual disciple, the home, and the church. These boundaries are not arbitrary restrictions. They are safeguards that make faithful passage possible as we journey through life.

The governing truth of this lesson is simple: God's revealed authority functions as spiritual jetties. Direct commands, approved apostolic examples, necessary inferences, and the limiting effect of biblical silence preserve the channel marked out by Christ and His apostles. When we respect those boundaries, they protect the church's work, worship, organization, terms of membership, and moral purity. When we disregard them, we expose ourselves and others to destructive currents.

1. Strong Boundaries Preserve Safe Passage

Sound doctrine guides believers through confusing spiritual waters. Paul told Titus that an overseer must hold fast the faithful word so that he can exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict it (Titus 1:7-9). An elder cannot guard the flock by personal charm, managerial skill, or good intentions alone. He must know, love, teach, and defend the revealed Word.

The same principle applies in the home. Parents must bring their children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Loving parents do not leave children to discover every danger by collision. They teach truth, correct error, establish proper limits, and model faithful conduct.

Without jetties, shifting sands and competing currents make the entrance into the Columbia River uncertain. Without biblical boundaries, people are easily carried about by every wind of doctrine. Paul describes spiritual immaturity as being tossed by waves and manipulated by deceitful schemes. The remedy is not harshness or isolation, but speaking the truth in love and growing into Christ, the head of the body (Eph. 4:14-16). Truth and love are not rival principles. Love speaks truth because souls are at stake.

These boundaries are especially important at points of transition, where different forces converge. Young people leave home for college or work. Christians move to a new community. Congregations face changes in leadership. Disciples encounter disappointment, grief, trial, or a major decision. Members of the church come into contact with the claims and practices of broader Christendom. At such moments, people need more than instinct. They need a settled habit of asking, “What has God revealed?”

2. Biblical Authority Does Not Create the Channel; It Preserves It

Jetties do not create the river’s proper channel. They preserve it. In the same way, our method of identifying biblical authority does not create God’s pattern. God has already revealed His will. Direct command, approved apostolic example, and necessary inference are the means by which we recognize and apply that revelation. Respect for biblical silence keeps us from going beyond it.

These are not artificial rules imposed upon Scripture. They are ordinary means of communication. A speaker may tell us what to do, show us what to do, or give facts from which a conclusion must follow. Scripture communicates in these same ways. The issue is not whether commands, examples, and inferences exist, but whether we handle them accurately, honestly, and in their context.

Paul states the controlling principle in Colossians 3:17: “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” To act in the Lord’s name is to act under His authority. Jesus possesses all authority in heaven and on earth, and He commanded the apostles to teach disciples to observe all that He commanded (Matt. 28:18-20). Therefore, faithful disciples regularly ask: Where has God authorized this? Is there a divine command? Is there an approved apostolic example? Is there a conclusion required by inspired teaching? Does the proposed practice harmonize with the revealed pattern?

3. Jesus Reasoned from Command, Example, and Necessary Inference

Jesus’s discussion of marriage and divorce demonstrates His method of handling Scripture (Matt. 19:3-9). When the Pharisees tested Him, He did not answer by appealing to changing custom or popular sentiment. He returned to the beginning. He cited the creation of male and female as the divinely approved arrangement (Matt. 19:4; Gen. 1:27). He quoted God’s command that a man leave father and mother, cleave to his wife, and become one flesh (Matt. 19:5; Gen. 2:24). Then He drew the necessary conclusion: “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matt. 19:6).

Jesus did not treat the Sacred Scripture as a collection of inspirational suggestions. He treated its wording, examples, and necessary conclusions as authoritative. His reasoning established what was lawful. If we wish to follow Christ, we must respect the way Christ respected divine revelation.

Jesus also established the legitimacy of necessary inference in His answer to the Sadducees (Matt. 22:31-32). God had said, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” From the continuing relationship expressed in that statement, Jesus drew a conclusion about the continuing existence of the patriarchs and the reality of resurrection. The conclusion was not an imaginative possibility. It was required by the inspired evidence. A necessary inference binds because God’s words require it, not because human ingenuity invents it.

4. The Apostles Used the Same Method

The Question at Jerusalem

Acts 15 records a serious controversy. Some taught that Gentile believers had to be circumcised according to the custom of Moses in order to be saved (Acts 15:1). The gathering at Jerusalem did not create a new doctrine by ecclesiastical vote. The apostles and elders examined evidence showing what God had already revealed concerning salvation of the Gentiles.

Peter appealed to God's acceptance of Cornelius and his household. God gave the Holy Spirit to Gentiles just as He had to Jews, purified their hearts by faith, and made no distinction between the two groups (Acts 15:7-9; cf. Acts 10:44-48). Paul and Barnabas reported the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles (Acts 15:12; cf. Acts 14:3). God's actions confirmed the preaching of the gospel among them.

James then appealed to direct scriptural testimony. The prophets agreed with these events. Amos foretold a restored kingdom in which the rest of mankind, including the Gentiles called by God's name, would seek the Lord (Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:13-18). Inspired prophecy and witnessed events spoke with one voice.

From that evidence James drew the required conclusion: Gentile believers should not be burdened with circumcision as a condition of salvation (Acts 15:19). Peter, Paul, Barnabas, the apostles, the elders, and the church reached the same conclusion because the evidence demanded it (Acts 15:22). The apostles did not merely announce a ruling. They showed the basis for it so that believers could understand and rejoice in the truth (Acts 15:30-31).

Other Apostolic Inferences

This pattern appears elsewhere. After receiving divine instruction and witnessing God's work, Peter concluded that God is not one to show partiality but accepts those who fear Him and do what is right (Acts 10:34-35). When the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles, Peter inferred that no one could withhold water for their baptism (Acts 10:44-48). When Paul saw the vision of the man from Macedonia, his company concluded that God had called them to preach the gospel there (Acts 16:9-10). Inspired evidence was given, and faithful hearers were expected to draw the conclusion it required.

5. Handle Divine Commands According to Their Scope

Respect for authority requires more than locating an imperative sentence. We must ask who received the command, under what circumstances, for what purpose, and for how long. Not every biblical command has universal application.

Jesus temporarily restricted the twelve's mission to Israel, but later commanded that the gospel be carried to all nations (Matt. 10:5; 28:19). His early instructions against taking money or extra provisions were later modified in changed circumstances (Matt. 10:9-10; Luke 22:35-36). Commands to sell possessions, secure a donkey, wash in the pool of Siloam, come out of a tomb, or remain in Jerusalem addressed particular persons and situations (Matt. 19:21; 21:2; John 9:7; 11:43; Luke 24:49). Paul's requests that Timothy remain at Ephesus, bring Mark, and retrieve a cloak and parchments were authoritative, but personal and situational (1 Tim. 1:3; 2 Tim. 4:11, 13).

Other commands clearly express continuing obligations. They are addressed broadly to disciples, repeated across the New Testament, or grounded in enduring spiritual principles. People must believe in Christ, repent of sin, confess faith, be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, and continue faithfully (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 22:16; Rev. 2:10). Christians must assemble, sing, pray, partake of the Lord's Supper, give as prospered, and hold fast the faithful message (Heb. 10:24-25; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; 16:1-2; 2 Thess. 2:15). They must love, forgive, walk humbly, live holy lives, give thanks, rejoice, resist anxiety, flee evil, reject idolatry, refuse theft and falsehood, flee fornication, lay aside malice and wrath, and walk by the Spirit (Matt. 22:37-39; Eph. 4:25, 28, 31-32; Phil. 2:3-5; 4:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; 1 Cor. 6:18; 10:14; Gal. 5:16).

Context distinguishes a permanent obligation from a temporary instruction. Careful interpretation neither dismisses what God binds nor binds what God limited.

6. Follow Approved Examples, Not Every Recorded Action

Christians are called to practice what they learned, received, heard, and saw in faithful apostolic teaching (Phil. 4:9). Paul could urge imitation because his conduct imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). Approved examples therefore help reveal continuing patterns.

The book of Acts records believers being baptized promptly after hearing and accepting the gospel (Acts 8:35-39; 16:30-34). Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23). Disciples assembled on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7). Paul instructed Christians to lay by in store on the first day of every week (1 Cor. 16:1-2). The congregation at Philippi sent support directly to Paul in his gospel work (Phil. 4:15-16). These examples are significant because they harmonize with apostolic teaching and show approved forms of obedience.

Yet not every action performed by an apostle or recorded in an apostolic church is a pattern to imitate. Peter's withdrawal from Gentile Christians was condemned because it contradicted the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:11-14). Corinthian abuses of the Lord's Supper were recorded for correction, not imitation (1 Cor. 11:17-22). An example establishes authority only when Scripture approves it and it harmonizes with the whole counsel of God. Incidental circumstances must not be elevated into law, and condemned conduct must not be disguised as precedent.

7. Require Inferences to Be Genuinely Necessary

A necessary inference is a conclusion that may not be stated in a single sentence but is required by the inspired evidence. The word necessary matters. A possible inference, a preferred inference, or a convenient inference cannot bear the weight of divine obligation.

The Lord's Supper illustrates how command, example, and inference work together. Direct teaching commands its observance in remembrance of Christ (1 Cor. 11:23-26). Approved example shows disciples assembling on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7). Because every week has a first day, the pattern identifies a recurring observance. The command must be obeyed in the circumstances revealed by the approved practice.

Weekly giving follows a similar pattern. Paul instructed each Christian to set aside an offering on the first day of every week (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Since every week has a first day, a recurring weekly practice necessarily follows.

The action described in baptism supports immersion. Jesus came up out of the water after His baptism (Mark 1:9-10). Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch went down into the water and came up from it (Acts 8:38-39). The act described corresponds to burial and rising, not sprinkling or pouring.

The proper subjects of baptism can also be identified from the inspired conditions attached to it. Gospel baptism is connected with hearing, believing, and repenting (Mark 16:16; Rom. 10:17; Acts 2:38; 18:8). Because infants cannot meet those conditions, they are not scriptural candidates for baptism.

The conversion accounts also locate baptism within gospel obedience rather than after salvation is complete. The Ethiopian heard the gospel, asked to be baptized, was immersed, and then went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:35-39). Saul encountered Christ, believed, prayed, fasted, and showed penitence, yet Ananias still told him, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins” (Acts 9:3-11, 18; 22:10, 16). The sequence does not permit us to treat baptism as a mere symbol of forgiveness already received. It is part of the obedient response in which the promised blessing is received.

8. Biblical Silence Protects the Revealed Pattern

One of the most important spiritual jetties is proper respect for biblical silence. Silence is not a blank check. When God has established a pattern or spoken specifically, His silence does not authorize us to replace what He specified with something different.

The distinction between specific and generic authority is essential. When God speaks specifically, other kinds within the same class are excluded. When God speaks generically, lawful expedients may assist obedience, provided they do not alter the commanded action. An aid helps us do what God authorized. An addition changes the thing authorized.

The channel marks where the ship may safely travel. The jetties mark its boundaries. The absence of channel markers elsewhere is not permission to sail wherever one wishes. In the same way, the absence of a prohibition against every imaginable practice does not authorize new forms of worship, new ecclesiastical organizations, new missions for the church, or new terms of fellowship. The governing question is not, “Where has God forbidden this by name?” but, “Where has God authorized it?”

9. The Jetties Protect the Church’s God-Given Identity

The Work of the Church

The New Testament reveals a mission for the local church: evangelism, edification, and benevolence toward needy saints. Biblical authority prevents mission drift. It keeps social, recreational, political, and entertainment priorities from displacing the work God assigned. A congregation may be busy, visible, and popular while being carried away from its appointed purpose. Activity is not the same as authority.

The Worship of the Church

Religious innovation often begins with the question, “What do we enjoy?” Faith begins with the question, “What has God authorized?” When God specifies a practice, we may not substitute a different practice merely because it is attractive, efficient, or familiar in the religious world. Respect

for authority preserves the worship revealed in the New Testament and distinguishes genuine aids from alterations.

The Organization of the Church

The New Testament describes local congregations overseen by elders and served by deacons. Biblical authority tests any additional structure by asking whether it replaces local oversight, transfers authority elsewhere, or creates an arrangement foreign to apostolic teaching. The spiritual jetty preserves the simplicity and autonomy of the local congregation.

The Terms of Membership

Christ and His apostles revealed identifiable conditions of salvation and membership in His body. Popular theology, emotional appeal, and denominational tradition cannot revise those conditions. The enduring question is, “What did Christ and the inspired apostles require?” Faithfulness preserves God’s terms rather than replacing them with a human system.

Moral Purity

When moral standards are detached from divine authority, the boundaries of right and wrong soon move with the culture. Scripture provides a stable standard for personal holiness, Christian conduct, sexual morality, marriage, divorce and remarriage, and church discipline. The church cannot preserve doctrinal identity while surrendering moral authority. The same Lord governs belief and conduct.

Unity

Some claim that an emphasis on authority causes division. Human pride and inconsistent application can certainly divide. Yet apostolic reasoning called believers away from personal preference and toward a common revealed standard. Ships pass safely because navigators respect the same channel markers. Christians enjoy genuine unity when they submit belief and practice to the same Lord.

10. Protection Requires Constant Maintenance

Jetties require continual maintenance. Waves strike them, currents move flotsam and jetsam around them, and storms expose weaknesses. Spiritual protection is also an ongoing work. Paul told the Ephesian elders to guard themselves and all the flock because savage wolves would enter and men would arise from among them speaking perverse things (Acts 20:28-32). The danger would not disappear after one sermon, one debate, or one generation. Continual vigilance is required.

Parents must teach God’s Word diligently in the ordinary rhythms of life: sitting at home, walking by the way, lying down, and rising up (Deut. 6:6-9). Individual disciples must examine themselves to see whether they are in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). Evangelists must preach the Word in season and out of season, reproving, rebuking, and exhorting with patience because some will turn from truth to myths (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

Neglected doctrine and discipline allow error and worldliness to gain entrance. Timothy was to be constantly nourished on the words of faith and sound doctrine (1 Tim. 4:6). He was to remain sober, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, and fulfill his ministry even when people preferred teachers who would satisfy their sinful desires (2 Tim. 4:3-5). Faithfulness is not inherited automatically. Every generation must know the channel, honor its boundaries, and maintain the structures that protect safe passage.

11. Warnings Exist Because Dangers Are Real

Jetties and warning markers are not signs of panic. They are evidence of wisdom. They acknowledge conditions that an experienced navigator must respect. Biblical warnings against false doctrine, immorality, worldly influence, and corrupt companionship are likewise expressions of loving protection.

Christians must watch those who cause divisions and hindrances contrary to apostolic teaching, because smooth and flattering speech can deceive the unsuspecting (Rom. 16:17-18). They must refuse the illusion that companions have no moral influence, for “bad company corrupts good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33-34). They must remain sober and alert because the devil prowls like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

Disciples must test spiritual claims rather than accepting every confident voice. The Bereans received the word eagerly and examined the Scriptures daily to see whether the message was true (Acts 17:11). Peter warned that false teachers would secretly introduce destructive heresies and exploit people with false words (2 Pet. 2:1-3). John therefore commanded, “Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1).

A careless navigator may resent restrictions until disaster comes. A disciple may likewise resent biblical boundaries until the consequences of ignoring them become painfully clear. God warns us because the danger is real and because His purpose is to save.

12. The Danger of the Inexperienced and Overconfident Guide

The mouth of the Columbia is especially dangerous to those who do not understand the shifting sandbars, the force of the currents, or the effect of weather and tide. A reckless captain can endanger passengers, crew, cargo, and rescuers. The problem is not merely lack of experience. Pride can keep an inexperienced person from recognizing the need for guidance.

The spiritual parallel is sobering. A person who sees himself as a guide while remaining inattentive to Scriptural boundaries can place many souls in jeopardy. Confidence is not competence. Sincerity is not authority. Influence increases responsibility, and poor judgment may harm not only the one who makes the decision but also those who trust him and those who must respond to the resulting crisis.

Wise navigators respect those who know the channel. In the church, wise guides hold fast the faithful Word. They do not rely on novelty, force of personality, or preening self-assurance. They recognize danger, study the inspired chart, and lead others within the boundaries God has marked.

13. The Cost of Protection Is Less Than the Cost of Disaster

The Columbia River jetties were costly to build and remain costly to maintain, but that cost must be weighed against the lives and commerce they protect. Spiritual protection also requires sustained investment. Elders give hours to teaching, counseling, correcting, and guarding. Parents give years to prayer, instruction, discipline, patience, and example. Evangelists labor to explain truth clearly and refute error fairly. Mature Christians quietly strengthen others through persistent effort.

Such work may be overlooked precisely because it succeeds. Many who pass safely through a protected channel never think about the engineers and workers who built and maintained it. Many

Christians and children avoid spiritual harm because faithful shepherds and godly parents performed their duties without applause. Their work may be unnoticed by men, but its fruit is immeasurable.

The cost of vigilance is far less than the cost of a soul led astray. The purpose of authority is not to produce a cold system or a contentious spirit. It is to protect people so that they can worship, serve, grow, and reach their eternal home.

Conclusion: Honor the Channel God Has Marked

The Columbia River jetties stand against destructive forces and guide ships toward safe passage. In the same way, God's revealed authority protects His people from the currents of human wisdom, denominational innovation, cultural pressure, moral compromise, and religious experimentation.

Direct commands tell us what God requires. Approved apostolic examples show faithful practice. Necessary inferences identify conclusions demanded by inspired evidence. Proper respect for biblical silence keeps us from changing what God has specified or moving beyond the pattern He revealed. Used carefully and contextually, these principles preserve the church's work, worship, organization, terms of membership, moral purity, and unity.

Strong biblical boundaries are not obstacles to freedom. They are safeguards that make faithful navigation possible. They do not eliminate every storm, but they keep us in the channel. They do not excuse us from judgment, study, courage, or love, but they direct all four toward God's revealed will.

Examine the spiritual boundaries in your life. Are you guarding your heart against false teaching, sinful influence, and careless pride? If you are an elder, strengthen your watch over the flock. If you are a deacon, remember Stephen and Philip, who were servants and courageous defenders of truth (Acts 6-8). If you are an evangelist, preach the word! If you are a parent, renew your commitment to teach and guide your children. If you are a Christian, test what you hear by Scripture and remain steadfast in the faith.

The jetties protect ships only when they are maintained and respected. God's safeguards guide us only when we honor and follow them. Make the needed correction today. Hold fast the faithful Word. Walk within the authority of Christ. Help others navigate the dangerous waters of error, temptation, and sin toward the eternal home God has promised.