

A Simple Bible Picture of God's Authority and Man's Response

The place to begin is not with “What does the church of Christ teach?” but with a more fundamental question:

What has God said?

1. The Bible Is the Word of God

The Scriptures claim to be the revealed word of God, not merely the religious reflections of men.

- **2 Timothy 3:16–17** — “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God...” It is sufficient to make the man of God “complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”
- **2 Peter 1:20–21** — Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.
- **1 Corinthians 2:10–13** — The apostles received, spoke, and wrote what the Spirit revealed.
- **1 Thessalonians 2:13** — The apostolic message was received “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.”
- **John 17:17** — Jesus said, “Your word is truth.”

Thus, faith must rest upon what God has revealed rather than human wisdom, tradition, feelings, or religious custom.

If God has spoken, our task is not to improve His message but to hear it.

2. The Big Picture of the Bible

The Bible contains many books, but it tells one unfolding story of redemption.

Creation → Sin → Promise → Christ → Redemption → Judgment/Eternity

- **Creation:** God made man upright and in His image — Genesis 1:26–27.
- **Sin:** Man rebelled against God, bringing sin and death into the world — Genesis 3; Romans 5:12.
- **Promise:** God promised that through Abraham's Seed all nations would be blessed — Genesis 12:1–3; Galatians 3:16.
- **Preparation:** The Law of Moses prepared the way for Christ — Galatians 3:23–25.
- **Christ:** Jesus came as the promised Savior — Matthew 1:21; John 3:16.
- **Redemption:** His blood provides forgiveness — Ephesians 1:7.
- **The Gospel:** His death, burial, and resurrection are at the heart of the saving message — 1 Corinthians 15:1–4.
- **Judgment:** All mankind will finally stand before Christ — Acts 17:30–31; 2 Corinthians 5:10.

The Bible is not a collection of unrelated religious ideas. It is the record of God working out His purpose to redeem sinful man through Jesus Christ.

3. The Bible Alone Is Our Standard of Authority

Jesus possesses all authority.

- **Matthew 28:18** — “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”

- **Colossians 3:17** — Whatever we do in word or deed must be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus.”
- **2 John 9** — We must abide in the doctrine of Christ.
- **Galatians 1:6–9** — Even an angel from heaven cannot alter the gospel.
- **Revelation 22:18–19** — God warns against adding to or taking away from His revelation.

Human traditions cannot replace divine authority.

- **Matthew 15:7–9** — Worship becomes vain when doctrines are based upon “the commandments of men.”
- **Colossians 2:20–23** — Humanly devised religion may appear wise, but it is still “self-imposed religion.”

The proper question is therefore not:

“Where does the Bible say I cannot do this?”

but:

“Where does Christ authorize me to do this?”

4. How Does the Bible Authorize?

Acts 15 is an especially helpful chapter because several forms of establishing divine authority appear in one discussion.

A. Direct statement or command

The apostles appealed to what God had explicitly required.

- **Acts 15:13–20, 28–29** — Specific instructions were given concerning what Gentile Christians were to observe.

After the truth had been established from God’s actions and revealed word, James stated the conclusion, and the apostles issued specific instructions to the Gentile Christians.

B. Approved apostolic example

- **Acts 15:12** — Paul and Barnabas reported what God had done among the Gentiles through their preaching.
- Compare **Acts 10:44–48; 11:15–18** — God’s acceptance of Gentiles was demonstrated in an inspired historical example.

Elsewhere:

- **Acts 20:7** — The disciples assembled on the first day of the week to break bread.
- **Philippians 4:9** — Paul told Christians to practice what they had learned, received, heard, and seen in him.
- **1 Corinthians 11:1** — “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”

Not every incidental detail of an example is binding, but an apostolically approved practice can reveal what Christ authorized His church to do.

C. Necessary implication

Peter reasoned from what God had done to what necessarily followed.

- **Acts 15:7–11** — Since God gave the Holy Spirit to believing Gentiles and purified their hearts by faith, it necessarily followed that circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses could not be required for their salvation.
- **Acts 15:13–18** — James showed that the prophets themselves necessarily supported the inclusion of the Gentiles.

Jesus also reasoned this way.

- **Matthew 22:31–32** — From God’s statement, “I am the God of Abraham...,” Jesus necessarily concluded that the dead will rise.

God’s word teaches not only through explicit statements but also through conclusions that His statements necessarily demand.

Acts 15 shows that **different forms of revelation may establish authority, but once the conclusion is established, men are obligated to respect it.**

SUCCINCT SUMMARY:

- **Necessary inference:** Peter reasons from God’s acceptance of the Gentiles that circumcision cannot be imposed upon them (Acts 15:7–11).
- **Approved example/divine action:** Paul and Barnabas recount God’s work among the Gentiles (Acts 15:12).
- **Scriptural statement:** James quotes Amos to show that Gentile inclusion agrees with prophecy (Acts 15:13–18).
- **Authoritative statement/directive:** James concludes, “Therefore I judge...” and specifies what should be written to them (Acts 15:19–20).
- **Binding apostolic instruction:** The letter states, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us...” and gives the requirements (Acts 15:28–29).

5. Silence Is Not Authority

God does not have to list everything that is forbidden after He has specified what He wants.

A clear example is **Hebrews 7:12–14**.

Jesus could not serve as a priest under the Law of Moses because He came from Judah:

“For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, **of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood**” — Hebrews 7:14.

Moses did not say, “No man from Judah may be a priest.” God simply specified Levi. The specification excluded the alternatives.

The same principle appears in:

- **Leviticus 10:1–3** — Nadab and Abihu offered fire “which He had not commanded them.”

- **2 Samuel 6:3–7; 1 Chronicles 15:13–15** — Uzzah’s death resulted from Israel failing to transport the ark “according to the proper order.”
 - **2 Chronicles 26:16–20** — King Uzziah acted in an area God had assigned to the priests.
- God’s silence is not a blank check. When God specifies, man must respect what He specified.**

6. The Danger of Changing Revealed Instruction

From beginning to end, Scripture warns against tampering with God’s word.

- **Deuteronomy 4:2** — “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it.”
- **1 Samuel 15:22–23** — Saul substituted his judgment for God’s command and called it worship; God called it rebellion.
- **Proverbs 30:5–6** — “Do not add to His words.”
- **Matthew 7:21–23** — Saying “Lord, Lord” and performing religious works do not substitute for doing the Father’s will.
- **2 John 9** — Going beyond Christ’s doctrine separates a person from God.

Religious sincerity does not turn unauthorized action into obedience.

7. Why We Are Not Under the Old Testament Today

The Old Testament is inspired and remains tremendously valuable for our learning.

- **Romans 15:4** — Things written before were written for our learning.
- **1 Corinthians 10:6, 11** — Old Testament events provide warnings and examples.

But Christians are not under the Law of Moses as the covenant governing us today.

- **Jeremiah 31:31–34** — God promised a **new covenant**, “not according to” the covenant made when Israel came out of Egypt.
- **Hebrews 8:6–13** — Jesus is Mediator of that better covenant; the first covenant became obsolete.
- **Colossians 2:14** — The handwriting of requirements was taken out of the way and nailed to the cross.
- **Ephesians 2:14–16** — Christ abolished the law of commandments contained in ordinances.
- **Romans 7:1–7** — Christians became dead to the law so that they might belong to Christ.
- **Galatians 3:23–25** — The law served as a tutor to bring men to Christ, but “after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”

The dividing point is the cross.

- **Hebrews 9:15–17** — A testament comes into force through the death of the testator.

Therefore, we learn from Genesis through Malachi, but we look to **Jesus Christ and His New Testament for the covenant under which we live.**

8. God’s Simple Plan of Redemption

Sin separates man from God.

- **Romans 3:23** — “All have sinned.”
- **Romans 6:23** — The wages of sin is death.

Jesus provided the sacrifice we could never provide for ourselves.

- **Romans 5:8–9**
- **1 Peter 2:24**
- **Hebrews 9:26–28**

The gospel calls sinners to respond in obedient faith.

Hear the gospel

- Romans 10:17 — Faith comes by hearing the word of God.

Believe in Christ

- John 8:24 — “If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”
- Mark 16:16 — “He who believes and is baptized will be saved.”

Repent of sins

- Luke 13:3
- Acts 2:38
- Acts 17:30

Confess Christ

- Romans 10:9–10
- Acts 8:36–37

Be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins

- Acts 2:38
- Acts 22:16
- Romans 6:3–4
- Galatians 3:27
- 1 Peter 3:21

The Lord then adds the saved to His people.

- **Acts 2:41, 47**

And Christians must remain faithful.

- **Revelation 2:10**
- **Hebrews 3:12–14**

Salvation is by God’s grace, made possible through Christ’s blood, received through the obedient faith God Himself requires.

9. Worship Must Be According to Truth

Jesus said:

“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” — John 4:24

Spirit involves the heart of the worshiper.

Truth involves worship according to what God has revealed.

- **John 17:17** — “Your word is truth.”
- **Matthew 15:8–9** — Worship based upon human commandments is vain.
- **Colossians 3:16–17** — The word of Christ is to dwell richly in Christians, and everything must be done in Christ’s name.
- **Acts 2:42** — The early church continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers.
- **Acts 20:7** — Christians assembled on the first day of the week to break bread. NOTE: This was not a common meal, as the apostle Paul would not permit such (1 Cor. 11:22, 33–34; Rom. 14:17)
- **1 Corinthians 16:1–2** — They gave on the first day of the week.
- **Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16** — Christians sang, making melody in the heart to the Lord.
- **1 Timothy 2:1–8** — The assembled saints prayed.
- **Acts 20:7; 2 Timothy 4:2** — God’s word was preached.

Worship is not ours to redesign.

Nadab and Abihu demonstrate the danger of offering God something He did not authorize (Leviticus 10:1–3). Jesus demonstrates the same principle when He condemned worship corrupted by human tradition (Matthew 15:9).

The question in worship is not, “Do we like it?” but, “Did God authorize it?”

Conclusion

The issue behind all of these subjects is **authority**.

God has spoken through His Son.

- **Hebrews 1:1–2**

Christ possesses all authority.

- **Matthew 28:18**

His apostles revealed His will through the Holy Spirit.

- **John 16:13**
- **1 Corinthians 14:37**

That revealed word is sufficient.

- **2 Timothy 3:16–17**

Therefore, our responsibility is simple:

Believe what God has revealed.

Do what God has commanded.

Respect what God has specified.

Do not add what God has not authorized.

“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” — **Colossians 3:17.**