

The Authority Of Examples

Introduction

- A. If you have been a member of the Church of Christ for any amount of time, you have probably heard the expression "command, example and necessary inference".
- B. This is the method that we have used to understand what God is telling us in His word. We look for direct commands and examples that either demand, permit or forbid a belief or activity.
- C. And then we look for logical conclusions that are demanded from such commands and examples, i.e. necessary inferences.
- D. In this lesson let us see the wisdom and simplicity of such a method, Specifically commands and examples

I. Command - Direct Statement

- A. We could make many applications at this point, but I want to focus in on one.
 - 1. Many of the direct commands or statements in the Bible greatly assist our proper interpretation of it, that is, many pitfalls in interpretation can be avoided by listening to what the Bible says about itself
 - a) The books of the Bible, including those the Apostles wrote, are Scripture not merely "personal love letters" devoid of any real authority
 - b) The commands in these letters also applied to more than just the initial Christians who received them
 - c) What is forbidden in these letters wasn't limited by time or culture
 - d) The writers realized that they were writing down truths for Christians of future generations
 - e) Jesus appealed to direct statements of Scripture when it came to answering questions, dealing with objections and combating evil
- B. Unfortunately, even for some religious people a direct statement by God isn't "good enough" any more to settle the matter

II. Examples

- A. In 1958, J.D. Thomas wrote the book entitled "We Be Brethren", on page 93 he wrote the following,

'TRADITIONALLY, WE IN THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT HAVE ACCEPTED THE TEACHING OF THE EXAMPLES OF THE CHRISTIANS AT TROAS IN THE ACTS 20:7 CONTEXT AS ESTABLISHING DEFINITELY AND UNMISTAKABLY A PATTERN-AUTHORITY TO THE EFFECT THAT THE LORD'S SUPPER WAS TO BE PARTAKEN ON EVERY FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, AND ON THAT DAY EXCLUSIVELY...WHEN BRETHREN, HOWEVER, BEGAN TO QUESTION THE PRACTICES THAT WE HAD BEEN FOLLOWING WITH REFERENCE TO COOPERATION AND ORPHAN HOMES, AND TO CLAIM THERE WAS A BIBLICAL PATTERN LIMITING HOW COOPERATION COULD SCRIPTURALLY BE ACCOMPLISHED, THIS CAUSED THE QUESTION OF THE TEACHING ON EXAMPLES TO BE PLACED UNDER THE "MICROSCOPE" FOR CAREFUL INVESTIGATION AND AS WE INDICATED EARLIER, SOME OF OUR VERY GOOD BRETHREN CAME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT EXAMPLES DO NOT TEACH BINDING MATTERS AT ALL.'

- B. In 1974, the Firm Foundation published a book by Milo Richard Hadwin, entitled "The Role Of New Testament Examples As Related To Biblical Authority".
 - 1. His conclusion was: "This study has concluded that examples have no inherent authority to require imitation."
- C. Now biblical examples can be tricky things, for example are we to inflict physical punishment on the opponents to the truth, like Paul struck Elymas blind in **Acts 13:8-11**

D. So allow me to present some observations concerning the proper use of biblical examples.

III. Examples Do Pack Authority

A. The example of the swift deaths of Ananias and Sapphira by the hand of God in Acts 5:1-10 makes a very authoritative statement about how God feels about Christians who practice hypocrisy or deception

B. It also informs us that a good "end" (money given to the church) doesn't justify an evil means (giving the impression that you gave the total purchase price, to gain the respect of your peers)

C. The examples that Paul cites in **1 Corinthians 10:1-12** are "authoritative", i.e. they express the will of God, they are still valid "precedents" concerning how God feels about such things as

1. They do teach us the lesson that God's own people can still live the type of lives that He isn't pleased with
2. Or, that even Christians can fall away

D. The New Testament is filled with examples that demand our attention

IV. Simple Suggestions To Deal With Commands And Examples

A. Make a distinction between the two

1. The reason I say this is because texts that some have looked at as examples are actually commands

B. Look For the Command Behind the Example:

1. I have found that most examples simply reflect a direct statement already given in the Scriptures
2. Example - We find people in the Book of Acts manifesting faith, repenting, confessing Christ and being baptized
3. And yet, direct commands are behind all those examples
4. Thus, even though repentance and confession are not mentioned in every conversion in the Book of Acts, we know such things were required in every case of conversion, because of the direct commands given elsewhere
5. Looking for the command behind the example enables you to tell if an example is the only way something can be done or if the example is simply one option or application of a generic command

C. Consider All Other Information On the Subject:

1. Consider the context
2. Consider the historical background
3. Consider other passages
4. Has an example been "fenced off" by other passages?
5. What is the consistent pattern?

V. Looking At Some Examples

A. The place where Christians assemble

1. The reason I am bringing up these points is that I hear many in and outside the church making arguments like, 'since we don't meet in an upper room, that means we don't have to precisely follow what the Bible says
 - a. The command concerning the "place of worship" is general - **John 4:21**
 - b. The command to assemble is also generic - **Hebrews 10:25**
 - c. In addition, all the examples of Christians meeting do not take place in upper rooms
 - d. Thus the room mentioned in **Acts 20:8** is simply an option of generic authority
 - e. The same is true concerning how many times Christians meet on the first day of the week

B. Concerning the Lord's Supper

1. Multiple cups and pieces of bread are permitted
2. The necessary conclusion from this direct statement - We are still partaking of one cup and one bread, even if we aren't drinking and eating from the same exact cup and loaf
3. The day on which Christians assembled is found in a direct command

C. The plurality of elders

1. If all we had was **Titus 1:5** we wouldn't know whether god required a plurality of elders in each congregation, or if one elder in each congregation in the city, would qualify as 'elders in every city'
2. The examples that we have all have a plurality of elders in each congregation
In addition, the commands or direct statement behind these examples also specifies a plurality of elders in a congregation - **James 5:14 - Acts 20:28**

D. Baptism

1. Every so often someone insists that when we baptize it can only be in running water
2. The reason, they say, is that not only did John the Baptist baptize in the Jordan, but also Jesus was baptized in the Jordan
3. The problem with that reasoning is just what we've been talking about - None of the statements or commands about baptism and water ever specifies water in motion, running water
4. Baptism is specified, water is specified - Whatever qualifies as "water" will do, whether running or not, whether in huge amounts or just enough to baptize, in a natural depression or man-made tank

E. Bible classes

1. Others have argued that our Bible class arrangement is unscriptural because there are not examples of our modern class arrangement in the scriptures
2. Again, people have overlooked the fact that the commands concerning teaching are generic – **Matthew 28:20**
3. As to the method of teaching used - If we can use a blackboard, pulpit, handouts, transparencies, etc – Then we can also divide up into classes

F. Many other examples could be discussed

Conclusion

- A. Examples are the result of some direct command
- B. They do not take precedence over the command
- C. They work in conjunction with the commands