

How Does One Establish Bible Authority? (Part 1)

By Bob Young

Introduction

Few observers of contemporary religion would deny that the church is in a time of tremendous transition. Churches of Christ are not exempt, and many are concerned about the changes that are occurring—some are concerned because changes are happening, others are concerned because change is not coming rapidly enough.

Two questions

An important part of evaluating changing practices is to understand how to establish biblical authority. Actually there are two questions. The first has to do with respect for the authority of the Word of God, the second is the question: how biblical authority is to be derived, understood, and followed.

The first question addresses those who see little or no need to establish Bible authority for their beliefs and practices. The Bible is considered antiquated, out of date and unenlightened. Such people can hardly take the Bible seriously as a guide. For most of the last 100 years, the first question dealt almost exclusively with theological liberalism and had little application within the American Restoration Movement (ARM). Those who identify with the ARM have historically accepted Biblical inspiration, infallibility, and authority. But more recently, a shift has occurred in which some in the ARM are willing to reject (or at least jump over) biblical authority in certain matters. This is especially apparent in matters that such persons consider cultural or matters of “opinion.” The result is that those in this group see biblical authority as irrelevant with reference to certain matters. Thus, with regard to these matters they do not seek to establish biblical authority.

A principle: the need for Bible authority

A fundamental understanding in the ARM has been that “all things believed, taught, and practiced in the Christian religion must have divine authority.” The importance of establishing Biblical authority has been seen in passages such as 2 Tim. 3:17, Col. 3:17, Matt. 18:18; 1 Cor. 14:37; and 1 Thess. 2:13. In the larger religious world of Christianity, one might have to argue or defend such an understanding, but historically this was the understanding of those in the ARM. For example, the pioneers of the early 19th century rejected sprinkling as an acceptable form of baptism on the basis of the lack of New Testament (NT) authority. They never claimed that the Scripture condemned sprinkling, they simply pointed to the absence of any NT command for sprinkling and the absence of any data in Scripture or early church history that showed such as the practice of the early church. This came to be referred to as biblical “silence.”

Many of the differences that arose between different groups of the ARM were of this nature. Do we have the right to do what the Bible does not mention; that is, is the silence of Scripture to be understood as liberty to do as we see best within the general teachings of the NT? Or, is the silence of the NT to be understood as a lack of authority which excludes certain actions under certain conditions?

In the illustration of baptism and sprinkling, it should be noted that biblical “silence” about sprinkling was understood to say that baptism (immersion) alone had divine authority and that sprinkling was outside the authority of the Bible. This leads to an important question in this discussion: who has the burden of proof? Sometimes it is assumed that the ones who do what the Bible clearly authorizes must justify their exclusive practice, that is, that they must explain the things they are not doing and why. But the burden of proof always rests logically on those who engage in any practice, to establish and explain biblical authority for the practice. Because I practice baptism by immersion, my only obligation is to show Bible authority for that practice. I do not have any rational obligation to justify not using

sprinkling, nor do I have an obligation to make a case against sprinkling. Whatever I practice, my only burden of proof is to that practice. When I do something to the Lord, my only obligation is to produce authority for that practice.

Misunderstandings with regard to Bible authority

A misunderstanding sometimes voiced finds Bible authority for everything not prohibited. But clearly, one must not assume that anything not expressly forbidden in Scripture is therefore divinely authorized. This will lead to a permissiveness that ultimately allows a host of things, including immorality.

A second error is to think that silence is never concessive. Sometimes, silence allows freedom to follow a command or do God's will in the best ways according to our human understanding. A familiar example from the Great Commission is that the Bible says "go" but does not say how to go. This silence, the absence of specific instructions about how to fulfill the command, is concessive.

Another mistake is to deny any exclusionary force to silence. Scripture itself shows that in some instances what God does not say is the path to understanding exclusions. In Hebrews 1 the writer argues that God said something about Jesus that he did not say about the angels (you are my Son). In the argument of the Hebrew writer, the force of what God did not say excludes the angels from the exalted realm of Sonship, and exalts only Jesus, the one about whom and to whom God spoke. Another example from Hebrews concerns the priesthood of Jesus. In presenting the change of covenants, great emphasis is placed on an argument from silence. The point has to do with the Levitical priesthood. In the Old Testament (OT), priests came only from the tribe of Levi. There was no explicit prohibition against appointing priests from the tribe of Judah, but the OT authorized priests appointed from the tribe of Levi. It was the lack of commands or examples of non-Levitical priests that demonstrated the exclusionary force of the command to choose priests from Levi.

There are other misunderstandings that one could cite, but these three common errors show the need to understand the Bible in context. To summarize, a command, law, or other authorizing statement authorizes only what it authorizes and does not have to exclude specifically all other alternatives by means of detailed prohibitions. We understand this in the prescriptions written by doctors, customer orders for specific items, bank deposits that list a specific account, and numerous other parts of our daily lives. Why is it so difficult to understand the same truth in biblical instructions? Analyzing this point further, it is probably incorrect to speak of this as an "argument from silence." God was not silent concerning Jesus' identity, nor was he silent concerning the OT priesthood. He clearly authorized priests from Levi and his descendants. His failure to name Judah or any other tribe had the force of limiting the priesthood to the tribe of Levi. The exclusionary force of these examples is clear in the biblical context.

As a general rule, forms of authorization are both specific in some areas and general in other areas, with certain inclusive and exclusive force, and thus must be studied and analyzed contextually. When I was a youth, sometimes my mother sent me to the grocery store to buy an item without specifying the brand. Her instruction was thus specific with regard to the item and excluded other items, but was general as to brand name and included several options. When she sent me to the store to buy an item of a certain brand, that instruction was inclusive as to item and inclusive as to brand, thus exclusive relative to all other items, and exclusive to all other items of the same type but of a different brand. (The grocery list never included an extensive list of excluded items.)

Conclusion

When the pioneers of the ARM rejected sprinkling as an acceptable alternative to immersion, they did so with reasoning that follows the illustration above. In the NT, there is a specific instruction denoted by the verb *baptizein*, which verb means dip, submerge, or immerse. Thus, to talk about pouring or sprinkling as alternative "modes" is illogical and violates the definition of the word.

The question of Bible authority must be clearly understood. The primary question is not “What does the Bible forbid?” but “What does the Bible specifically authorize?” All authorizing statements, commands, and examples should be introduced and honored.

The next article will address the question of Bible authority by considering various ways in which God authorizes and restricts: the guidance provided by the will of God and biblical principles, and the importance of commands and instructions, example or precedent, and inference (implication), and incidental references.

*Some of Part I draws heavily from Shelly, *Sing His Praise!*

How Does One Establish Bible Authority? (Part 2)

By Bob Young

Introduction

Considered as a given is that we must apply sound hermeneutical and exegetical principles to understand and interpret the text, including analyzing vocabulary (words), grammar and syntax (construction and relationships between words), and studying the historical and cultural context.

A simple summary of some helpful rules of Bible study and interpretation asks who is talking, to whom, about what subject, and in what context. One should also be aware of the use of figurative or symbolic language.

In the ARM, three traditional methods of establishing biblical authority have been command, example, and inference. This essay considers the importance of using general biblical principles and the will of God to guide the discussion. Then a study of the three traditional methods of establishing Bible authority is followed by a study of incidental references.

Guided by Biblical Principles

In Part I the principle that “all things believed, taught, and practiced in the Christian religion must have divine authority” was introduced. A second principle is that “all things believed, taught, and practiced in the Christian religion must be consistent with biblical principles.” The foundation of Christian principles serves as the foundation of Christian behavior. Those principles are revealed and applied in Scripture.

The principle base informs the development of Christian values which in turn informs Christian behavior or ethics. A common problem in Christianity is a focus on behavior without an understanding of the corresponding principle. Allow me to illustrate. When my children were preschoolers we lived on a busy street. When we were in the front yard they were instructed not to go beyond the sidewalk. That was the rule. It served to protect them in their immaturity. If a ball or a toy went into the grass between the sidewalk and the street (or into the street), my wife and I retrieved it. As they grew older, they were able to make decisions and understand danger. As a principle base and value system developed, the acceptable behaviors grew out of those principles and values. Before the principle base and value system were developed, the focus was solely on behaviors.

Something similar happens in Christian maturity. To focus solely on behaviors without developing a corresponding principle base and value system is a grave error. One never understands the why, only the specific what. Such a person is incapable of identifying principles revealed and understanding principles applied. Christian maturity involves the ability to manage one’s own life in Christ with a minimum of external help. The foundation of all Christian behaviors is the foundation of biblical principles.

A practical illustration may help. Where is the authority for Bible classes? Where is the authority for youth rallies or women's conferences or men's conferences? Obviously the Bible does not speak of these things specifically. Are they excluded because of a parallel Bible command that is prohibitive? Do we have an example or precedent that is different and is sufficient to establish a pattern from which we should not vary? No, in the cases of the things mentioned, there is no specific Bible reference. How shall we proceed? We must seek biblical principles to guide us. The early Christians assembled for worship as a body. Is this concept sufficient to exclude the activities under consideration? The older women were to teach the younger women, obviously a context in which some Christians were not present. Other biblical examples could be cited. Thus, the principle is that there were weekly gatherings of all of the Christians for worship, but that there were also smaller gatherings for specific purposes.

Guided by the Will of God

A third principle is that "all things believed, taught, and practiced in the Christian religion must be consistent with the eternal will of God." That is, Christian actions must be consistent with, must not transgress, God's eternal purpose and will.

This concept provides helpful guidance in several general areas. For example, the father has responsibilities in the family, but how he is to fulfill those responsibilities is not set forth in specific actions; so also with the responsibilities of the husband to the wife. How do we determine or evaluate specific actions that are done with a desire to obey God? We must ask if those actions are in conflict with the will of God or general biblical principles. We must ask if those actions conflict with specific biblical commands or instructions.

Many such questions can be raised. How does one "elder"? How does one manage youth activities in the church? How should I manage meetings of Christian youth in my home? How and what should one preach? What type of sermon? We must recognize that there is no specific authority for any particular sermon—I should preach this sermon, in this style, of this type, on this date, on this topic. What then is the importance and value of Bible examples of sermons? How do these function?

-1- Commands or instructions

The Bible is filled with commandments and instructions. Are all instructions binding today? Are all instructions eternal? Obviously not, so we must seek to understand biblical instructions in context. The first article dealt with the application of instructions and provides foundation for this continued study.

First, instructions always have a context.

Biblical context. This includes the overall purpose of God in the world, the distinction between the two covenants (OT and NT), and the general context of parallel passages and similar word usages.

Historical context. Are some instructions limited to specific time? Such would be the case with instructions such as those in 1 Corinthians 7, related to virgins, where Paul uses the phrase "in view of present distress." Here there is a specific historical setting and the instructions are to a specific group of persons.

The Great Commission provides an interesting example in this regard. Some have affirmed that the Great Commission was only for the apostles and that it is not for every Christian today. How does one decide? It is true that the instructions were given specifically to the Eleven, but does that exclude Mathias? What was the understanding of the early church with regard to the Great Commission? Did the early church see the Commission as exclusively for the apostles? Why did the early church aggressively follow these instructions of Jesus? If we exclude every Christian from the instructions, do we also exclude every Christian from the promised presence? Good hermeneutical work and contextual applications will help us answer such questions. Such questions also carry us into the next general section where we will consider "example and precedent."

Consider also that all of Paul's letters are occasional, that is they were written with a specific purpose on a specific occasion. Thus, they have a historical context which must be studied to discern how and when the teachings should be applied today.

Cultural context. Are some instructions reflections of the culture? A good example is the instruction to greet one another with kisses (still a part of some cultures in the world today). Is this to be literally followed in cultures where it is not common? Or is the principle to be identified and applied in the contemporary cultural context?

Second, certain principles were identified in the first article.

- Absence of instruction (silence) does not necessarily authorize, that is, everything not expressly prohibited is not therefore divinely authorized.
- Absence of instruction or specific mention (silence) can in Scripture have an exclusionary force.
- Absence of instruction or specific mention (silence) in Scripture is sometimes concessive. Or said another way, absence of instruction is not necessarily exclusionary or prohibitive.
- The way to determine whether "silence" should be understood as exclusion or concession is this. Biblically, forms of authorization are both specific in some areas and general in other areas, with both inclusive and exclusive force.

We will do well to spend a little more time exploring and clarifying this last point. Consider again the example of a shopping list. Listing a specific item has exclusionary force; listing a general item has inclusionary force. A listed item usually both excludes and includes. If the list says "can of green beans," that is specific and excludes any other vegetable as an option. If the list says "can of vegetables," that is general and can be satisfied with any vegetable. But "can of vegetables" is also specific and exclusionary in that it forbids fresh vegetables or frozen vegetables. "Can of green beans" becomes even more exclusionary if it says "can of Del Monte green beans." But "can of green beans" is also general in that it allows French style, cut, and whole. We apply these principles almost without thinking in everyday life.

To summarize, commands are general and specific. Many commands or instructions are both at the same time. General commands are concessive; specific commands are exclusionary. One way of explaining the force of a specific command is to say "it excludes everything of the same category or type."

In the first article, the example of the selection of priests from tribe of Levi was presented. Although there is no specific commandment against selecting priests from other tribes, the specific command was exclusionary without listing all of the prohibitions. There were prohibitions and some males of the tribe of Levi were not allowed to serve due to personal situations or circumstances. Another example, often cited, is that Noah was specifically told to use gopher wood in building the ark. The instruction is specific with regard to type of wood, thus excluding other types of wood, but in the context obviously did not exclude tarring and sealing the ark. A good OT example comes from the sacrificial system. Instructions were given for various types of sacrifices, and those instructions were to be followed precisely, excluding for example the substitution of grain for animals. Many good examples could be cited from the sacrificial system. Understanding this concept is essential to a correct understanding of Leviticus 10. The problem with Nadab and Abihu was strange or unauthorized fire that Yahweh had never prescribed for them (10:1). The principle mentioned in the text is to distinguish the sacred and the common (10:10), since the coals for burning incense could come only from the altar of burnt offerings.

-2- Example or precedent

While New Testament examples of the practices of the early church and Christians provide helpful models, it is not always easy to define which examples should be considered binding.

One possible misunderstanding arises from the assumption that any specific action described in the NT is the result of a specific command or instruction. Without textual evidence to support the

connection, such an assumption is without foundation. Some NT actions are apparently the result of the wisdom of those involved as they respond to circumstances within biblical principles and the will of God. Another area of potential misunderstanding is failure to ask whether any specific detail related to an action is intentional or circumstantial. An example is the worship of the early church in an upper room (Acts 20). It would be a mistake to think that the upper room is a binding precedent and that the church must never assemble in a room on the ground floor.

One must take into account the possible problems, but there is a powerful suggestion in multiplied examples so that we must ask, "When do multiple repeated examples establish a pattern and thus suggest something beyond the circumstantial?"

-3- Implication and Inference

The first task in explaining this source of authority is to define the words since they are often misunderstood.

- To infer means to form an opinion based on evidence, or to reach a conclusion based on known facts; to derive a conclusion from facts or premises. "We see smoke and infer fire" is an example used in Merriam-Webster.
- To imply means to express something in an indirect way or to suggest something without saying it plainly. More to our point is this definition: to include something as a natural or necessary part or result.
- The relationship between the two words is further clarified by this additional definition: to imply means to indicate by inference or necessary consequence rather than by direct statement. For our purposes, it is helpful to make this distinction: a (biblical) statement or teaching implies something; I infer it.
- For our purposes, something must be implied in the biblical text before we can properly make inferences. Inferences originate in the biblical text when it is implied that something beyond that described in the text is involved. Without specific instructions, various possible ways of following the text are inferred.
- The phrase "necessary inference" is troublesome. A location to assemble is a necessary inference growing out of the command to assemble; the church building is not necessarily inferred (as there are other possibilities). The church building, as one option but not the only option, falls under the general category of necessary inference.

Now let us look at specific examples of implication-inference. In Titus 2:3-4, the older women are to teach the younger women. This general command does not include specifics about how, when or where. This general command implies action, and the Bible contains no specific commands in the same area to guide the action. Thus we infer that the how, when, and where are a natural and necessary part of the teaching. Absent specific instructions, I properly infer that a variety of locations and times could be used to fulfill the command, of course guided by biblical principles and within the will of God.

The Bible speaks of "elders in each church" and "elders in each city" without giving more explanation of the specific circumstances in the first century. We must seek a way to harmonize the texts, inferring those things that follow naturally or necessarily, since the Bible speaks only indirectly about the specifics. In the first century, was there only one church per city, that is, one church in each city? Remember that the first century church had smaller assemblies and house churches. We must seek to understand how they understood the idea of church in comparison to our understandings of church. What can or should we infer?

We seek Bible authority for all we do. Throughout most of the history of the church, church buildings have been inferred, although other locations were also used. The command to assemble implies a place, we infer what that place is. The plate or basket in which the communion bread is served is inferred. One could pass a large piece of bread from person to person, but the container is more

sanitary and more convenient. One does not have to look far to see that numerous things are inferred in the general practice of the contemporary church.

-4- Incidental references

In evaluating example or precedent as a source of authority, the question of whether any specific detail related to an action is intentional or circumstantial was raised. Incidental references are not a source of authority, but give a guide to help understand when certain aspects of a command or example may not be binding today. Intentional references should be considered binding commands or examples.

The Bible uses the phrase, “when you come together in a certain place...” In the context of the unity of the church (1 Corinthians), is this intentional or incidental? Is the point to prohibit multiple assemblies? Remember that the church often met in house churches (multiple assemblies). In a letter written to the church in Corinth where we know there were individual house churches, how is this reference to be understood?

A clearer example of incidental reference is in Acts 14. After Paul and his companions had traveled throughout Asia Minor establishing churches, they determined to visit those churches again. On that visit they worked with the local churches to name elders. Is this information incidental or intentional? Is this a binding example? Should we conclude that the establishing mission team must always revisit the churches established? Should we conclude that after a church is established, that on the next visit elders or leaders must be appointed?

Looking at examples of baptism in the NT, various “in the name of” phrases are used. Are these intentional so that we have a specific formula that must be spoken, or incidental? Given the variety of phrases, it seems that the only answer possible is the latter, and that we do not have a baptismal formula in Scripture.

Some cultural matters may also be included in this area. Is meeting in homes or house churches required, or is that an incidental reference? How certain biblical principles were put in practice depended on the culture. This is why some identify general biblical principles such as service and hospitality to explain that foot washing and the holy kiss are incidental references, and not intentional.

Conclusion

Because the Bible does not, and cannot be expected to, specifically address every matter that may rise, one must establish a sound method for establishing and applying Bible authority. We can find guidance in considering whether actions are consistent with biblical principles and values, and with the eternal purpose and will of God.

- Commands or instructions are both specific and general. We must do what God commands and recognize the exclusionary force of specific commands. We must give liberty in the realm of general commands.
- We must recognize the silence of the Bible is not automatic authority for all things not mentioned, that the silence of Scripture at times has an exclusionary force, and that the silence of Scripture may also at times be concessive. This is easily illustrated by numerous everyday examples. That we struggle so much in some of these applications in the church may indicate that we come to Scripture with already established ideas.
- There is a value in example or precedent, but one must consider whether certain actions are intentional, the result of commands, or incidental.
- One must be caution in using inference, for the inference should be a natural and necessary part of result of the biblical teaching. Specific inferences, while valid, may not be binding.
- Finally, one must recognize that some biblical references are incidental.

May God bless you as you seek to know his will, to act within his authority, and to bring him glory!

How Does One Establish Bible Authority? (Part 3)

By Bob Young

Introduction

To claim that a certain action is authorized by the Bible, that action must be consistent with biblical principles and values. To claim that a certain action is authorized by the Bible, that action must be consistent with the eternal purpose and will of God. These two broad categories provide the first grid through which every action must pass.

Some matters are outside the realm of biblical authority. Paul mentions some of these things in Romans 14, calling them matters of judgment and making clear that in such matters one should not judge or look down on another. Considering the context, the matters referenced could not be public matters, nor could they be matters of doctrine. They are matters of personal judgment or hesitation. One must be careful not to categorize as doctrine those things that are not; one must be careful not to exclude from doctrinal consideration things about which God has spoken, either directly or indirectly.

Four Categories

For every action to be analyzed, the Bible either speaks (directly or indirectly) or is silent. To understand when and how silence permits or forbids, review Part 1. In Part 3, the importance of using the correct category is emphasized and demonstrated.

Four different categories have been identified. First, the Bible gives specific instructions or commands. Such represent Bible authority only when it can be demonstrated that the instruction or command should be applied generally. Some commands are specific to certain individuals, certain circumstances, or certain times. When the Bible gives a command that applies generally, it is not necessary that there also be examples or inferences. The command is sufficient.

Second, the Bible teaches by example or precedent. One must carefully evaluate examples. Is the action intentional or incidental? Is the action the result of a command? Sometimes, example is misunderstood, misapplied, and given too much force. "We do not have a Bible example so a certain action is not authorized." This statement neglects the power of inference (using biblical principles and values, understanding God's will and purpose) to guide us when we do not have command or instruction, precedent or example.

Third, the Bible may imply a certain truth or action, from which we should infer the same. Necessary inference is a way of saying that the inference is limited by the implication. The Great Commission, given to the Eleven, told them they should go. That implies a method for going, but is not specific as to method. The necessary inference is a method of going, but the inference cannot be narrowed to a requirement to use a specific method such as walking, car, or airplane. Why? Note the principle: the (necessary) inference must be exactly as broad or restrictive as the implication. Various possibilities within the necessary inference are options.

Fourth, some Bible references are incidental, not providing instruction, precedent, or implication. These will become apparent by a careful analysis of the context and parallel passages.

The Problem Explained and Exemplified

Each action must be considered in the appropriate category. It is not right to decide matters of instruction or command based on the presence or absence of example or inference. (One brother wrote, "I will not accept the command unless I can also find an example or inference.") It is wrong to demand a command or example for matters that belong in the realm of implication-inference. It is

wrong to use incidental references as binding examples. One must be cautious about giving example too much authority. Many of the problems of Bible interpretation and applying Bible authority arise from putting an action in the wrong category. Allow me some examples.

EXAMPLE ONE: A supporter of the use of instrumental music in worship raises numerous questions about inference, suggesting that the use of instrumental music is also an inference. He asks, “Where are the songbooks in the Bible? Where is the church building in the Bible? Where is the physical pulpit in the Bible?” Based on these items that are allowed by inference, he seeks a parallel application to include instruments of music by inference. Such is faulty reasoning, because inference is only valid when the Bible implies something.

Consider the three inferences he mentions. Certain implications reside naturally in the biblical examples of singing, assembling, and preaching. The Bible mentions singing but does not give specific details. The singing was reciprocal, “one another.” Group singing implies some level of agreement—agreement about what to sing (so that various ones are not simultaneously singing different songs), starting at the same time, using the same words, the same tune, etc. Singing can be done without songbooks and without a leader; it can also be done with songbooks and with a leader. The existence of such details is implied by Scripture and correctly inferred by students of Scripture. What singing does not imply, thus what cannot be inferred, are actions in the same category or of the same type. One does not follow the example of singing by speaking normally, shouting, humming, da-da-da-ing, or various other “non-singing” actions. These are not singing. The actions mentioned cannot be implied or inferred because they do not inhere in the idea of singing.

That the early church assembled implies an assembly place. We know assemblies occurred in homes, in synagogues, in the temple courts, in upper rooms, on seashores, in schools, by rivers, on ships, and in prisons. To assemble, the church (assembly) needs a place to meet. Absent specific instructions, virtually all location options are open including renting or owning a regular location, within the guidelines of biblical principles and values and God’s will and purpose.

Few specifics are given in the Bible concerning the details of preaching. I have preached sitting down—with my Bible on my lap, or on the chair beside me, or on a chair in front of me. I have preached standing up, with many variations of where to place my Bible—holding my Bible the entire time, using a chair, a bench, a table, a small metal stand, a wooden stand, a wooden pulpit, and a brick pulpit. Absent specific Bible instructions, the use of such things is inferred in the examples of preaching. We have the example of Jesus sitting down to teach, but no principles require general application of this example.

As specific instructions concerning priests from the tribe of Levi excluded priests from the other tribes, as specific instructions concerning immersion and the inherent nature of the word baptism exclude alternative options, so also singing excludes “non-singing” alternatives.

EXAMPLE TWO: Someone criticizes youth meetings, women’s meetings, men’s meetings, regional seminars, and other such events, saying that such are unauthorized by Scripture because we have no example. It is true that there are no specific Bible commands or examples about such activities. Paul had a special meeting with the elders from Ephesus, beyond the regular assemblies of the church. A special assembly was held in Acts 15. Bible instructions for women to teach women (as in Titus 2) imply a place and time for doing it. It is true that there are no Bible examples, but this question properly belongs in the realm of implication-inference. The Titus 2 passage is a command which includes the implication-inference. The implication is broad and not restrictive. Therefore, the inference is equally broad, allowing various places and times.

EXAMPLE THREE: A brother raises a question about whether a woman could ever baptize someone. Another brother responds to say that there is no biblical example so the answer is no. We do err, not

knowing the Scripture. Bible authority is communicated by instruction, example, and implication. In this matter, there is instruction, but no restrictive instruction that says only men should baptize. There is no biblical example of a woman baptizing. The Bible examples of a man baptizing are few, and seem more incidental than intentional. Thus the biblical passages fall in the area of incidental references. Therefore, this question will fall either in the realm of implication-inference or Bible silence. (Observation: across 50+ years of preaching, a situation has never arisen where the only option was that a woman baptize.) This question belongs in the realm of inference. Absence of biblical example will not be enough to decide the question. The biblical commands and examples specifically include a "baptizer" from which we infer that a baptizer is necessary (one could not baptize oneself). Considering biblical principles and values, I do not see that it is prohibited that a woman baptize, only one should note that biblical principles of gender respect and protection must be applied.

EXAMPLE FOUR: A brother uses the text of 1 Corinthians, "when you come together in one place," to prove that the entire church must always assemble in only one assembly with no groups separated. In the context, Paul is condemning the church for coming together on different schedules, possibly in different house churches, for the purpose of excluding some. His point is not to demand that nursing mothers stay in the assembly for its duration. The contemporary application should not prohibit leaving the assembly for sickness, or forbid assigning certain men to guard the church property or cars. The early church assembled in multiple places (homes), probably with simultaneous meetings. The cited text may be intentional in the teaching context to make Paul's point. It could also be incidental.

There is no biblical evidence that the text should be applied generally so that older women teaching younger women can occur only in the assembly. The verse says nothing about whether the church should provide Bible classes for teaching youth, women, children, or non-Christians. The text is misapplied if it is treated as generally binding example that applies to every situation. It is teaching for a specific church in a specific place facing a specific problem.

These examples are given to help accentuate the primary point of Part 3. Establishing Bible authority demands that the proper principles and guidelines be used, and that specific actions be evaluated by valid means with valid categories.