

...Set For the Defence of the Gospel. (Phil 1:17)

# DEFENDER OF TRUTH

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THEME:

*Authority*  
*in* CHRISTIANITY

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# Editorial

## The Need for Authority in Christianity

The first edition of Defender of Truth (2021 relaunch) examined the most important book in the world and showed conclusively that the Bible is God's revelation to man. Christianity is said to be the world's largest religion with the number of followers estimated to be about 2.4 billion<sup>1</sup>. These adherents and followers do not have the same doctrine and practice although they all claim belief in one God and Jesus Christ as His Son. The theme of this edition; **Authority in Christianity** sheds light on the reasons for these varying doctrines and practices.

It is fairly easy for all men to understand the need and importance of authority in human life. All democratic nations have constitutions from which all the arms of government derive their authority to govern. All agencies of government derive their authority either directly from the constitution or authority is delegated to them by persons who have been given authority by the constitution. All citizens respect the laws made by these agencies because they realize that there would be chaos if everyone acts as he or she deems fit. We can imagine what would happen if motorists in a city ignore traffic light rules and each person follows his idea of when to stop or move! Citizens obey traffic laws, respect the police and other law enforcement agencies because all have agreed to be subject to the constitution of the country. To ensure obedience, there is a punishment imposed on citizens who disobey constituted authority.

It is then surprising that most people including religious leaders do not bat an eyelid when the practice of Christianity by millions over the world is characterized by confusion. Most religious leaders claim that this is how God planned it. The Holy Scriptures however reveal that God is not the author of confusion. 1 Corinthians 14:33. You have denominations and sects wear different names, teach different doctrines and practices. While some denominations teach that baptism is necessary for salvation, some claim it is not. Some teach and practice sprinkling of water as baptism and baptize infants, some practice immersion. Some believe that wearing a white garment is necessary for worship and also go barefooted in worship, many do not practice these things.

Authority is defined as “legal or rightful power; a right to command or to act; power exercised by a person in virtue of his office or trust; dominion; jurisdiction; authorization, as the authority of a prince over subjects, and of parents over children; the authority of a court”<sup>2</sup>.

Men need to realize that authority is needed in Christianity just as it is needed in all spheres of life. The Jews knew this hence their questions to Jesus in Mathew 21:23-27 – “Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, **“By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?”**

But Jesus answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?”

And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’”<sup>26</sup>

But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet.”<sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus and said, “We do not

know.” And He said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”<sup>3</sup> Two things are evident from the questions the chief priests and elders asked Jesus. The first is that the questioners recognized that Jesus needed authority for His teaching and the second is that the authority must be from the right source – one who has the right to give such authority. All men need to ask themselves: **Do I have authority for the things I teach and practice in Christianity? And Is that authority from the right source?**

Jesus identified the two possible sources of authority; from heaven or men; from God or man. The right source of authority in Christianity is from God and all authority from man results in vain worship. Mathew 15:9. Nadab and Abihu acted without authority from God and they suffered the punishment thereof. Leviticus 10:1-2.

### God has delegated His authority to Jesus Christ.

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, **has in these last days spoken to us by His Son**, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;”<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 1:1-2

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, **“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”** Matthew 28:18

Jesus said to him, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”** John 14:6

Jesus does not speak directly to us today. He promised His apostles the Holy Spirit who would guide them into all truth. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, **He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come** John 16:13

The apostles are thus referred to as ambassadors 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. An ambassador is a representative; one who has the authority to speak on behalf of another.

The apostles wrote the truth revealed to them by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. We can read this truth and understand it today. Ephesians 3:1-5. The church in Thessalonica was commended for receiving the word of God which they heard from the Apostles. 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

The New Testament thus reveals the will of Christ to mankind today. Jesus speaks to us through the New Testament. We are thus enjoined to **“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”** 2 Timothy 1:13.

All sincere people should ask themselves; **Is my teaching and practice following the doctrine of Christ as revealed in the New Testament?** Failing to abide in the doctrine of Christ has dire consequences. **“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son”** 2 John 1:9

The authority of the New Testament is needed for any teaching or practice in Christianity to be acceptable to God and all sincere people need to examine themselves in the light of the Holy Scriptures and adhere to its teachings for acceptable worship to the Almighty God.

<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia.org- Christianity

<sup>2</sup> WordNet 3.0 Online Dictionary

<sup>3</sup> New King James Version of the Holy Bible

<sup>4</sup> Ibid



# Can We All Understand The Bible Alike?

by Oladapo Olawale

Many unscriptural teachings and practices rest on the false idea that 'We all cannot understand the Bible alike. By this erroneous claim, men have either deliberately or unwittingly indicted God as inept and inconsistent in revealing His will to Mankind. Indeed, the logical implication of this false assertion is that God is incapable of expressing His will in a way that is sufficiently clear enough for all men to understand it.

As humans, we strive to understand concepts, principles, and patterns uniformly to avoid confusion and commotion to make our day-to-day living meaningful. For instance: we understand mathematically that  $2+2=4$ ; Pharmacists understand doctors' prescriptions alike; Chefs follow the same recipes to prepare the same meals; Engineers/Builders interpret architectural drawings/designs alike. If as God's creatures, we operate daily on the presumption that we can make ourselves understood to one another, there can be no doubt that God, the all-knowing, Omnipotent Supreme Being intended and can make His divine revelation to be understood by all.

## ***Is it Possible for all Believers to have the Same Understanding of the Bible?***

God commands us to be wise by understanding what His will is (Ephesians 5:17). God has not demanded of us that which is impossible for man to do – to understand His will. Furthermore, God's will cannot be understood differently. It is either we understand the will of God or we simply misunderstand what the Lord's will is. Whilst it is therefore possible to have *different misunderstanding* of God's will, we cannot have *different understanding* of the Holy scriptures!

The Bible contains many passages that show undoubtedly that all believers can have a uniform understanding of the will of God as revealed in the Bible. We shall consider some of them below:

- (a) The Prophet Isaiah spoke of The High Way of Holiness which the unclean shall not pass over it, and it will be unmistakably clear for those who walk on it (Isaiah 35:8). This reveals to us that God's way is unequivocal and plain.
- (b) In Nehemiah 8: 7 -12, the Lord commanded Nehemiah to read His word to the people: *So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense so that the people understood the reading* (Nehemiah 8:8). Further on in the passage, we read: *And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them* (v. 12). The Jews here understood the revelation of God uniformly.

(c) The scriptures are called a 'revelation' (Ephesians 3:2-4). Thayer defined revelation (apokalupsis) to mean 'prop, a laying bare, making naked..... a disclosure of truth, instruction concerning divine things before unknown'. For something to be called a 'revelation', it must be something that can be known, once it is revealed. If the Bible cannot be understood by men, then it is not a revelation. In fact, Paul said it could be understood by reading same. He stated thus: *if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)* (Ephesians 3:2-4).

(d) The Holy Scriptures are said to be profitable “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). If we cannot understand the Scriptures, how can the holy writings profit us in the manner stated above?

(e) Again, Timothy was commanded to hold on to the pattern of sound words in 2 Timothy 1:13. Knowing the difference between sound and unsound words requires certain understanding of the *Pattern* they follow. In 2 Timothy 2:15 Timothy was advised to be diligent before he can correctly handle the word of truth. These diligent efforts bring about understanding.

(f) In Matthew 22: 29, Jesus reproved the Sadducees for their ignorance which resulted from their misunderstanding of the scriptures and the power of God. Had they diligently studied the scriptures, they could have understood that a resurrection of the body was possible.

(g) The Bereans were considered to be *more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily* to confirm the truth of what they were being taught (see Acts 17:11). This implies that these Bereans were able to draw uniform conclusions about the word of God. Indeed, our salvation depends on our understanding of the will of God. See John 8:32 and Romans 10:17.

(h) New Testament writings enjoin Christians to “speak the same thing,” to be free from divisions, and to “be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 2:2). It is practically impossible to follow this instruction if we are incapable of understanding the Bible alike. In the same vein, the Christians in Rome were commanded to watch out for those who caused divisions and occasions of stumbling “contrary to the doctrine which ye



learned” (Romans 16:17). If we cannot understand the Bible alike, how could anyone ever be disciplined for walking contrary to sound doctrine? That would make no sense whatsoever.

### ***What about Human Creeds, Catcheism, Manuals, Constitutions?***

Denominational creeds, manuals, and constitutions are rules of practice or statement of faith (aside from the Bible) of each denomination stating and interpreting the beliefs they adhere to. The Bible is the only creed given by God – it is the pattern of God for all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). It is the faith that has been once and for all delivered unto the saints (Jude 3). No other creed written by men could therefore stipulate the statement of faith.

Over the years, various creeds and manuals of men have achieved nothing but promote misunderstanding of the Bible, thereby causing widespread divisions and undermining bible authority. Each denomination subscribes to its creed without any meeting point. A Baptist creed produces Baptists; a Methodist creed produces Methodists, But the New Testament produces Christians! Creeds or teachings of men as we see from the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees lead to vain worship (Matthew 15:9).

The apostle Paul explained this better in 1 Cor. 1:11-14. Paul condemned divisions among the brethren at Corinth who found it difficult to have the same understanding of the gospel because rather than focus on Jesus as their only creed, they esteemed some of the apostles above the word of God (1 Cors. 4:6).

Therefore, because men tend to see the Bible through the lens of their denominational creeds it becomes hard for them to understand the bible harmoniously.

### ***Why Men hold Divergent Beliefs and Practices***

The problem of seeing and understanding the Bible differently is not a new one. In the first century, some men thought that the scriptures affirmed that Jesus was Christ and others disagreed. Some men taught that the resurrection was already past (2 Timothy 2:17 – 18) and others felt otherwise. Some men taught that men could have fellowship with Christ and walk in darkness (1 John 1:6) and others disagreed. These differences were based on a misunderstanding of God's will.

Some of the reasons men see the Bible differently are:

(a) *Prejudice*: It is usually the case that men fail to see the bible alike based on pre-conceived ideas and practices which might be false Acts 17:32. Many are biased by their denominational doctrines and teachings which prevent them from having a proper understanding of the Bible.

(b) *Pride*: Men will only admit their errors when they are

humble enough. Due to pride, many will not embrace the truth. Matthew 5:3-6. A stubborn refusal to submit to God will not make men see the Bible alike. Matthew 13:15; Acts 7:51.

(c) *Lack of Study*: This is perhaps the major reason many understand the bible differently Matthew 22: 29 – 32. Men cannot come to the right understanding when they fail to read the bible 2 Timothy 2:15.

(d) *People*: Another reason is that many esteem men (people) above the word of God. 1cors. 4:6. Some consider their religious leaders incapable of error; others have been deeply influenced by their parental upbringing to see the bible differently so much so that they think if this teaching worked well for their parents, then it cannot be wrong Matthew 10:34 -37; 19:29. Others are swayed by the multitude in their religious affiliations or groups who cling to their erroneous ways Matthew 7: 13 – 21.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Bible being God's inerrant truth can be known and understood by men John 8:32. If men do not understand the Bible alike, God cannot be at fault. When men remove every hindrance from their ways, they can understand the bible alike. The idea of different interpretations of the scriptures is not only a logical contradiction but also negates the orderly nature of God (Ephesians 4: 4- 6; 1 Corinthians 14:33).



<sup>i</sup> This discussion focuses on doctrinal matters which have been explicitly settled or legislated upon by God such as matters of faith which must necessarily be understood uniformly - Ephesians 4: This discussion, therefore does not relate to matters of opinion as espoused in Romans 14.

<sup>ii</sup> Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (1889) Harper & Brothers. Page 62.

<sup>iii</sup> Whereas sound doctrine follows after the wisdom of God, unsound doctrine is patterned after the wisdom of men. See 1Corinthians 1: 8 -31; 2: 1 – 13.

<sup>iv</sup> See Jackson, Wayne. "Can We Understand the Bible Alike?" *ChristianCourier.com*. Access date: February 15, 2021. <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/225-can-we-understand-the-bible-alike>

# How To Determine What God Requires Of Man

by Jobalo Oshikanlu

*“Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2).*

God reveals to all men that they are transgressors of law and in need of forgiveness. Men who are conscious of their separation from God want to do what God wants them to do to gain or restore fellowship with God. Men who want to do what God wants them to do are concerned about such questions as “**How do we determine what God requires from us?**” or “**How do we establish what is right for us in religious practice?**”

Basic to all religious differences is the issue of authority and how to establish it. Both ourselves and our denominational friends must be impressed with the fact that we must have divine authorization for all that we do and teach in our religious activities and that this authority must come from the word of God.

By right of creation and ownership, all authority inheres in God in whom we derive our existence (Acts 17:28). “*The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein*” (Psalm 24:1; 1 Corinthians 10:26). However, God has given “*all authority in heaven and on earth*” to Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18). Jesus Christ, in turn, has delegated all authority to His apostles to whom He gave the Holy Spirit to teach and guide in the great task of revelation and transmission of His word (John 17:18; 14:26; 16:13-14).

The Apostles of Christ completed their work and committed the words which Christ gave them into writing (John 17:8; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13; 4:6; 14:37; Ephesians 3:3-5). These writings are encapsulated in the New Testament scriptures and are referred to as the **doctrine of Christ** or the **law of Christ** (Hebrews 10:5-9; 1 Corinthians 9:21). The completeness and finality of these scriptures are underscored in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and Jude verse 3. “*Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son*” (2 John 9). It does not matter whether the transgressor is in a denomination of men or he claims to be a member of the church of Christ. It is the same result – **he does not have God!** This underlines the imperativeness that we have New Testament authority for all that

we teach and practice (1 Peter 4:11). **But how do we determine authority from the New Testament scriptures?**

Divine authority is established and understood from the New Testament by the following three legitimate ways only:

1. By **divine** precept;
2. By **approved** examples; and
3. By **necessary** inferences or **necessary** implications.

## 1. DIVINE PRECEPT

By "divine precept", we mean direct statements or commands or entreaties or exhortations from God, Jesus Christ, or the Apostles. In other words, there are broadly four forms that divine precepts would take in the New Testament:

- a) Direct statements or declarations – Students of the Bible know, for example, the purpose of scriptural baptism. Jesus made a direct statement, “*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*” (Mark 16:16). That is easy to understand, isn't it! Baptism is thus a commandment to be obeyed for one to be saved. It follows that when a man or woman says that baptism is not essential to one's salvation but is only an outward sign of inward grace, such a man or woman is denying the authority of Christ. Our Lord stated in words that cannot be misunderstood: “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*”! (KJV – Mark 16:16). A further example of direct statements can be found in Galatians 5:18-21. In this context, there is no command such as “do these things” or “do not do these things”; however, it is understood by the statements of fact, that whilst one category of conduct is wrong and prohibited, the other category is enjoined for observance or to be exhibited by Christians.
- b) Positive commands – such as in Acts 2:38 where commands were issued under the new covenant to sinners, which commands, therefore, apply equally to all sinners for all time.



A further example of commands is in the Lord's Supper. Jesus taught that *"This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me"* (1 Corinthians 11:25). When a man obeys this command of the Lord, he will observe the supper "in remembrance" of Christ. As one eats the bread and drinks the cup, he is doing what has been commanded by the Lord.

- c) Prohibitions – such as in 1 John 2:15-17. Prohibitions are negative commands. In this instance, it is understood that the nature of man has always been the same and that there are three basic avenues through which men can be tempted. This is the "world" the apostle John commands us not to love.
- d) Entreaties and exhortations – these take the form of a solemn or tender appeal. Examples can be found in Romans 12:1-2; 1 Peter 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 1:10.

## 2. APPROVED EXAMPLES

By an approved example, we mean an example that is recorded in the New Testament that is in no place condemned. Indeed, not all examples are to be followed, for there are negative, bad examples also recorded in the scriptures so we may learn lessons from them. For instance, the conduct of Ananias and Sapphira is not to be emulated by us but is an example of wrong conduct (Acts 5:1-5). Furthermore, when Peter withdrew himself from eating with the Gentile brethren, his conduct amounted to hypocrisy and sin. He acted contrary to what he knew to be the truth – as men are inclined to do at times – and his behavior is not to be copied by us (Galatians 2:11-14).

For an example to be a revelation of God's will for us today, it must be a divinely **approved** example. The entire life of Jesus Christ constitutes an approved example for us. *"For to this, you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps"* (1 Peter 2:21). The only exception arising in the scriptures is that Christ was born, lived, and died under the laws of Moses (Galatians 4:4-5). But we are under the law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:19-21). Hence, we are to refrain from following his Mosaical law activities such as circumcision on the eighth day, observing days of purification, and offering animal sacrifices, amongst others (Luke 2:21-24).

Divinely approved examples include those learnt or received from the apostles of Christ. *"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ"* (1 Corinthians 11:1). *"Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern*

*... The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you"* (Philippians 3:17; 4:9; see also 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9).

Approved examples set limitations on religious conduct. An instance of this is Acts 20:7 regarding the day the Lord's Supper should be observed. The Lord commanded that we observe the Lord's Supper in His remembrance (Luke 22:19-20). But Acts 20:7 is the only passage in the New Testament that tells us when we are to partake of the Lord's Supper. Here is an approved example of the disciples coming together on the first day of the week and observing the Lord's Supper. The first day of the week thus has the approval of the lawgiver, Jesus Christ, as to the time for observing the supper in His remembrance, in that there is no example, precept nor necessary inference authorizing the observance of the Lord's Supper on any other day. Therefore, taking the "holy communion" on Thursday or Friday or any other day than Sunday amounts to lawlessness or acting without divine authority (see Matthew 7:21-23).

It is important to understand that approved examples are no less binding than divine precept, in that one revealed truth is not more binding than another. It is also important to understand that it is not necessary to have an example for something to be authorized – some things authorized by direct statements are not exemplified by recorded action of disciples in the first century – for instance, there is no example of teaching via radio, television or internet. But these are legitimate because they would be included in the general statements requiring us to preach the gospel, though there is no specific example of them. Finally, some rules can be applied to examples, and which would assist by telling us when examples are approved examples setting limitations on conduct and choice. These include:

- a) The rule of **universal application** – implying that I must not make a statement, example, or inference requiring something that cannot be accomplished universally;
- b) The rule of **harmony** – a rule that can be learnt from the account of Jesus' temptation in Matthew 4:1-7, in that believing the Bible to be the unity of truth demands such interpretation as is consistent with all plain teaching of the scriptures on that or related subjects;
- c) The rule of **uniformity** – which means an approach or action must be without variation in all instances it is observed, but where the Bible gives choices, none of the several choices is binding nor should be imposed by anyone; and



- d) The rule of **materiality** – which is the matter of determining if an action described is merely incidental or one that is essential in its immediate context.

A divinely approved example must satisfy all the above rules, in that these rules are founded in explicit principles or general knowledge taught in the scriptures. The rule of **universal application** means that there is not one law in Europe and another Asia or another in Africa; it is consistent with our universal oneness in Christ and *unity of the Spirit*: “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:28). “*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father*” (Ephesians 4:4-6). The rule of **uniformity** flows from the same source in that “*One law and one manner shall be for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth with you*” (KJV - Numbers 15:16), and hence, variations necessarily imply that this is not the law of God. The rule of **harmony** is only sensible and Jesus demonstrated it well in Matthew 4:1-7. *For He who said “Do not commit adultery” is the same one that said “Do not murder” ...* (James 2:11). The rule of **materiality** is often considered the more difficult rule to apply, but not so if it is understood that the rule is closely linked to the principle of the immediate context (2 Peter 1:20) as well as the principle of harmony in that other scriptures assist in determining what is material and what is not, for example, the washing of one another's feet in John 13 where both the context and other scriptures show that the Lord was using an existing social custom to bind a lesson in humility, with the physical “foot-washing” itself being immaterial.

Questions are raised from time to time, for example, about the Lord's Supper as described in Acts 20. Why is it that Christians believe that the first day of the week is required, but the upper room meeting place is not? First, the “upper room” advocacy makes the **place** essential, thus offending the rule of **harmony**. Jesus already taught in John 4:20-24 that the **place** where men and women worship is not essential. Also, the immediate context shows that the upper room was mentioned in connection with the fall of a young man and had no significance as far as the Lord's Supper is concerned. In essence, neither does the “upper room advocacy” satisfy the rule of **materiality**. Conversely, an examination of the first-day-of-the-week requirement for the Lord's Supper would easily show that the example in Acts 20:7 satisfies the four rules of *universal application, harmony, uniformity, and materiality*.

### 3. NECESSARY INFERENCES OR NECESSARY IMPLICATIONS

A necessary inference is that which, though neither expressly stated nor specifically exemplified, is necessarily implied by the clear import and meaning of the language used. There cannot be a necessary inference unless it is based on information from a divine precept or divinely approved example. Note that for an inference to be accepted as divine authority, it must be a **necessary** conclusion. There is a world of difference between an inference and a **necessary** inference.

A necessary inference is one that is logically unavoidable. For instance, Abraham went down into Egypt (Genesis 12:10-20) but no mention is made of Lot going with him; however, Genesis 13:1 says that Abraham left Egypt and took Lot with him. It is necessarily inferred that Lot went down with him at some point in time. In the New Testament, Matthew 3:16 states that “*When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water.*” If we were to paraphrase that as “Jesus went into the water, was baptized and immediately came out of the water”, it would be no perversion of scripture that we included “Jesus went into the water” although that is not expressly stated in the quoted scripture. Jesus having gone into the water in the first place, is a logically unavoidable inference.

Another illustration of necessary implication is found in the context of Matthew 26:17-29. It was during the days of unleavened bread that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. Verse 26 says Jesus took bread. What kind of bread was it He took? It is necessarily inferred that that was “unleavened” bread.

### CONCLUSION:

It is God's desire that we understand and apply His word (Isaiah 1:18-20; John 5:39; 1 Timothy 2:3-4). What God requires of men and women for them to reunite with Him is understood through New Testament direct statements, approved examples, and necessary inferences, as shown above. We appeal to all to come and reason together with a desire to understand and do the will of God. “*If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God*” (1 Peter 4:11).

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<sup>i</sup> Except where otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James' version (NKJV).



# The Nature of Biblical Authority (Generic and Specific)

by Kayode Adekunle

## Introduction

Authority is given a couple of definitions in the Advanced Learner Dictionary. However, the definition that is appropriate for our study in this article is the one that considers authority as **“the right or power given to someone to do or say something”**. Authority is usually given by superior or higher beings to subordinates to do or say something on their behalf. In this case, we are considering the authority that comes from God Almighty to mankind in order to be able to carry out His will. Two biblical examples could be seen in the cases of Moses and Jesus Christ. In Exodus 25:22, God says this to Moses **“There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel”** and in Matthew 28:18; Christ says that **“all authority has been given to Him both in heaven and on earth”**. To remove any doubt about who gave Him this authority, when Christ was praying to God in John 17, He made this statement in verse 8 **“For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.”** We could see that the chain of authority is established here. The ultimate authority came from God and was passed on to Christ who in turn passed it on His Apostles. The Apostles themselves through the help of the Holy Spirit passed it down to the Christians whom we are told in Acts 2:42 **“continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine”** when Christianity started.

## Nature of Authority (Specific and Generic)

A close look at the Bible reveals that some things may be authorized but not specified. This takes us to the principle of the Specific and Generic nature of authority. The generic and specific nature of authority refers to a concept that applies to how all of God's instructions can be carried out. Whenever anything is authorized in the Bible, it usually contains some *generic* and some *specific* instructions. Sometimes God gives very specific instructions, and sometimes He gives instructions that are not specific, leaving the details and particularly, the execution of such instructions to human judgment and discretion, which is also referred to as expediency. Having the understanding of these concepts and the difference between them helps a lot to successfully determining authority for carrying out God's will and ultimately pleasing Him.

## Specific Authority

This simply applies to situations when precepts and commands are given in such a way that the method or means of doing what is told to be done, is expressly specified. Therefore, specific authority or instruction is devoid of human discretion or choice because any means or method contrary to the specified becomes an addition and aberration. A couple of examples come to mind in this regard.

1. When God told Noah to build an ark, He, not only specified the wood to use, He also gave him specific instructions on how the ark should be built **“Make yourself an ark of gopher wood, make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and cover it inside and out. And this is how you shall make it ...”** Gen 6:14-15. No room is given for any form of human judgment and discretion here. If Noah had gone ahead to do anything contrary to God's instructions, He would have been displeased with him. However, Noah did all God commanded him to do and God was pleased with him Gen 6:22; 8:20-21
2. Our Lord Jesus Christ commanded that Lord Supper should be taken **“in His remembrance”** Luke 22:19. The elements of this supper are specified **“unleavened bread and fruit of the vine”** Luke 22:17, 18. Also, the day of observance is specified as “the first day of the week” Using any other thing aside these items or doing it any other day apart from the **“first day of the week”** will contravene the will of our Lord.
3. Christ told His disciples to **“go into the world and preach the gospel”** Mk 16:15. What to be preached **“the gospel”** is specified and it is to be **“preached”** not dramatized. Paul's statement to the Romans in Romans 10:13-14 **“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear**



without a preacher? Also complemented Christ's instruction that the gospel must be "preached"

4. Christians in Ephesus and Colossae are enjoined to **"teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" they are to sing with grace in their hearts to the Lord** Col 3:16. **"singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord"** Eph5:19. What they are to do as far as singing is concerned is specified, they are to sing, which signifies **"the fruit of their lips"** Heb 13:15. No form of instrument is mentioned here, any use of instruments will be an addition and this contravenes the instruction specified.
5. **"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so, do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come"**. 1Cor16:1-2. By apostolic example, Paul's instruction is very clear as to the day collection is to be done **"the first day of the week"**. No form of human judgment or discretion is permitted here, for whatever reason if contribution is done any other day, God's instruction has been flouted.

**"go into all the world and preach the gospel"** Mark16:15. Here, how to go is not specified, therefore, we can walk, ride a camel, fly in a plane, or sail in a boat, and all of these would be permissible. Hence, whichever way one decides to go is to aid the actualization of the command not add to it.

2. Christ commanded observance of Lord Supper. Luke22:19; the **"first day of the week"** is shown by apostolic example as the day to observe it. It is, however, generic to do it at any hour within the first day of the week since the specific hour is not specified.

3. Baptism is commanded as one of the major prerequisites for salvation Mark16:15-16; Matthew 28:20-21, a baptistery, river, lake or creek can be used to actualize this as much as there is enough water there for immersion (burial) John 3:23; Rom 6:4; Col2:12.

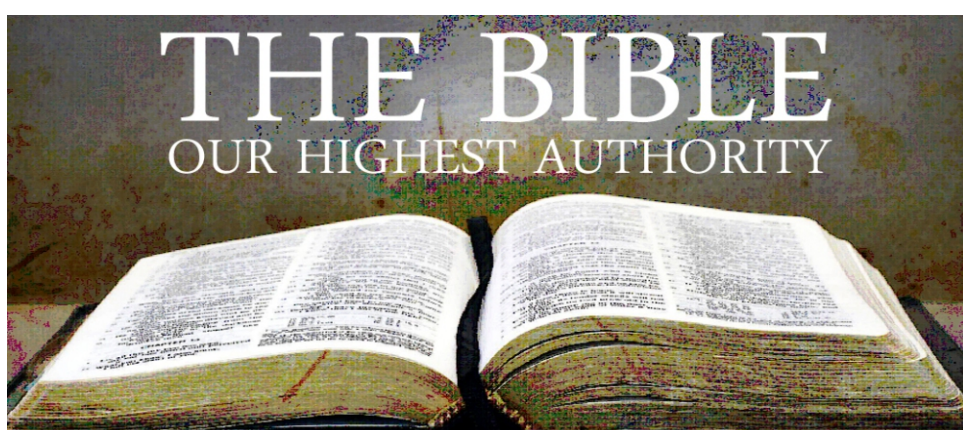
## The Concepts of Aiding and Adding

We must have the understanding that "aids" do not change or alter God's instruction. They only complement carrying out the instructions. For example, brethren gathering in a building, under a shed, in a school premise, or a brother's house only aid the instruction of "fellowship" Acts 2:42, Hebrews 10:25. Also when we use a microphone to aid our "singing" God's law has not been flouted in any way.

However, additions make a change and contravene that which has been commanded or specified through inference or apostolic examples. For example, observing the Lord's Supper or doing contribution any other day apart from the **"first day of the week"** or using musical instruments in **"singing"** will be an addition, and this amount to flouting the will of God.

## Conclusion

The issue of authority is not underplayed in the Scriptures. God's supremacy is underscored in all ramifications when authority is sought from Him for any deed done to please Him. Where contrary actions had been taken place, they have all come with attendant grievous consequences. Seeking authority from God through His words and seeking it the right way, is the only way man can go in his attempt to please God, after all, **"faith only comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God"** Rom 10:17.



## Generic Authority

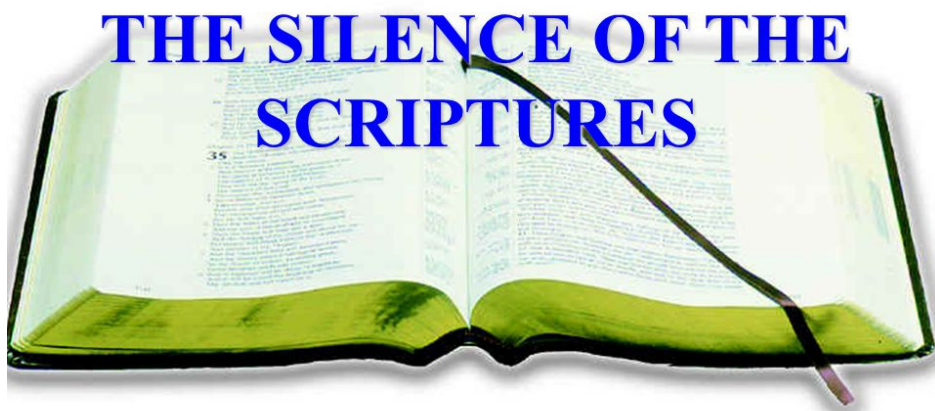
This is a situation where an act is commanded but the means and method to actualize the act are not stipulated or expressly specified. It must be noted, however, that generic circumstances can only be created where a direct command, an approved apostolic example, or necessary inference is already established. For example:

1. Christ commanded His disciples and in extension Christians to



# The Silence of the Scriptures

by Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba



Suppose you sent someone to get you some fruits and he comes back with some apples, has he obeyed your instruction? Definitely yes! But suppose you sent him to get you some bananas and he comes back with some oranges, would that be obedience to what you have sent him? Not at all for you have specified what he needed to buy. In the first instance, "fruits" is generic and gives the messenger the choice to get anything under the umbrella of what is called fruits but in the second example, orange is specific in the instruction and excludes every other kind of fruit. But then again, suppose he comes back with the oranges and you asked him why he decided to get oranges instead of bananas that you have sent him, how would you feel when he responds "Sir, you didn't tell me not to buy oranges!"

A lot of people are like this man in the second example. They give credence to God's silence which is an attempt to scoff at God's direct commands. Oftentimes, you hear people say "show me in the scripture where God says WE MUST NOT do this or that." But has God specified what you must do? If yes, then that excludes what He did not mention. Silence of the scripture refers to the absence of Divine revelation or instruction on other related subject matters when there have been specific instructions of God. Let us take a few examples from the scriptures:

The man of God was specific about the river (Jordan) and the number of times (7) that Naaman should dip himself (II Kings 5:10). But he was silent about other rivers. Naaman even desired other "better" rivers (vs.12), but he could not have been healed if he chose any other river than the one specified. Suppose Naaman had said, "Well, the man of God didn't ask me not to go to River Abana or River Pharpar in Damascus, let me try out those rivers." Do you think he will be justified? What if he went to the Jordan River and he dipped himself six times, instead of seven, and said "the man of God didn't say I should not dip myself 6 times, so I can do so." Will that make any sense? Obviously not!

Jesus was specific about the pool the blind man should wash (John 9:7). The man went and washed and came seeing. Notice Jesus mentioned the pool of Siloam but was silent about other pools. The blind man could not have been healed if he desired other pools and went there. But in the command of Baptism, we find that there is no specific instruction on the location of baptism (John 3:23; Matthew 3:6; Mark 16:16; Matthew 28:18-20). That is why a man could be baptized anywhere provided there is much water there.

God specified that the priests should come from the tribe of Levi. But notice He was silent about priests coming from other tribes such as Judah, Benjamin, etc. (Hebrews 7:14). Can we conclude that since God was silent about it, then it would be acceptable to have priests from other tribes? No. if it were so, Jesus could have been a priest on earth for He was of the tribe of Judah. But Jesus could not be a priest on earth (Hebrews 8:4) and so since God specifically mentioned Levi as the priestly tribe and said nothing about other tribes, they were prohibited from being priests.

Noah was told to build an ark of gopher wood with certain specifications (Genesis 6:14-22). God was silent about the use of other kinds of wood. Noah could not have been justified if he used another kind but he was faithful to do "according to all that God commanded him." (vs. 22)

## Does the Silence of the Scriptures Authorize?

The Bible, which is the complete and final revelation of God to man is silent about many things. For example, we find that in the New Testament, the Bible says nothing about the use of instruments of music in the Christian worship but specified singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). The Bible says nothing about Missionary Societies but the church (Eph. 4:15), infant baptism but alien sinner baptism (Acts 17:30), etc. But does the silence of the Scriptures on these things authorize their practice in Christianity? If we answer "yes" to the question, the only way to



get out of such a predicament is to ask a follow-up question; "Where in God's word are we told not to use or practice them?" The conclusion will then be that since God never explicitly says we must not do these things, then they are right for us to practice them. This is the same question and response we will frown at when a child is sent to get bananas but comes back with oranges and say "Sir, you didn't tell me not to buy oranges!" This same unintelligent response now becomes the defense mechanism for some folks when it comes to the things of God and when they are trapped in their errors.

The truth is this: we cannot know the mind of God except He has spoken. We know God's mind by looking at what is revealed. He spoke in time past to the fathers through the prophets and has in these last days spoken to us through His son (Hebrews 1:1). His word is with us now to guide us in all things (II Timothy 3:16-17; II Peter 1:3). We are warned not to think of men beyond what is written (I Corinthians 4:6). We must do all things by the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17).

## What About Matters Of Liberty?

If we say the silence of the scriptures does not authorize, what about matters of liberty or expediency? Can we say it is wrong to use microphones, church buildings, baptisteries, etc.? Is the Scripture not silent about these as well? Indeed, those who infringe the silence of the scriptures and try to practice every single thing they consider good, often point to these things to seek justification for their practice. This problem is solved when we understand that there is a big difference between "aid" and "addition." Aid is usually incidental but addition is not. Microphones, baptisteries, church buildings, etc. are not sinful and are permissible because they are aids used to fulfill a generic (and not specific) instruction. The silence of the scriptures is violated when a man replaces his opinion for what God has specified. It would not be sinful if Naaman had ridden on a donkey or he trekked to River Jordan because he was not given specific

instructions on how to go but he had a specific instruction on where to go and what to do. If he had ridden on a donkey; that is an aid to fulfill the command given to him. For someone to argue and say that it was wrong to have used a donkey because God was silent about it is simply begging the question for how to go is not specified.

The church building is an aid to fulfill the command of "not forsaking the assembling" (Hebrews 10:25). The baptistery is an aid to fulfill the command of "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" and we know that "much water" is what is needed (John 3:23). A microphone is an aid that increases the audibility of one's voice. Nothing is added to what is said and it merely serves in the capacity of magnifying the voice. We should not misconstrue or conflate aid and addition simply because we want to justify our practices by all means.

## Conclusion

God's silence on an issue does not authorize such a thing. We must always check to see if our practices are authorized in God's word. This is because there is a way that seems right to a man but the end is destruction (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). Indeed, nothing is scripturally good if it has no approval from God. We must not repeat the mistakes of the Israelites who failed to seek counsel at the mouth of the Lord (Joshua 9:14).





# The Consequences Of Disregarding Bible Authority

by Opemipo Olushola

**T**he rebellious attitude of man against divine authority has found its root in the Garden of Eden. In the beginning, man disregarded the authority of God, believing the devil's lies by eating the forbidden fruits! Gen 3:6.

Till today man is still suffering from the consequences of Adam's disrespect for divine instruction, Gen 3:16-17 e.g Physical death, old age pains, sicknesses, hard labour, child-birth troubles' etc.

## 1. BIBLE AUTHORITY

- a. Bible is made up of inspired scriptures which are written by God's spokesmen 2 Tim 3:16-17, 2 Pet 1:20-21
- b. The Bible alone is sufficient to make man perfect! 2 Tim 3:17, 2 Pet 1:3, Rev. 22:18-19
- c. God of the bible has spoken to man through Christ, the mediator of better (New) covenant! Heb. 1:1-2, 12:24.
- d. The writers of the New Testament were guided by the spirit of truth, (i.e. the spirit of God); John 14:26, 16:13-14, Eph 3:3-5, Gal 1:12
- e. All the bible authority is centered upon the authority of Christ as recorded by His Apostles.
- I) All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus Christ.....Matt. 28:8-20, John 5:22-23
- ii) In fulfillment of Moses' prophecies in the wilderness, Jesus was testified to by God the Father as the great prophet who will give all nations new law as Moses did; Deut. 18:15, Matt. 17:5, Jam. 4:12
- iii) Jesus Christ came as the seed of Abraham to bless all the families of the earth through the forgiveness of their sin – Gen 22:18, Gal 3:16-19, Acts 3:19-26. Christ also delegated His authority to His apostles – John 13:20
- iv) It is sad to declare that not all the worshippers of the true God would take heed nor submit absolutely to the authority of Christ in the bible! I Tim 4:1, Gal. 1:6-9, I John 2:18-19, 2 John 1:9

## EXAMPLE OF REBELLION AGAINST GOD UNDER THE THREE DISPENSATIONS OF THE BIBLE

From the scriptures, we learned that there are three dispensations of God's dealing with men.

1. **PATRIARCH'S DISPENSATION:** - These are periods before the birth of Moses. This time began from Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden till Moses went up to Mount Sinai
  - I) Adam and Eve lost the comfort of Eden when they

disregarded God's authority (Gen.3:22-24)

- ii) Cain's offering was rejected by God for despising God's word Gen 4:1-5, Heb. 11:4
  - iii) The builders of the tower of Babel were scattered abroad for their conspiracy to disobey God's law – Gen. 11
  - iv) The rebellious world of Noah perished through the flood. – Gen. 6
  - v) The sons-in-law of Lot thought "the word of the Lord was a joke and they were destroyed along with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. – Gen. 19:12-14, 24-25.
  - vi) Lot's wife looked back while fleeing the cities of Sodom which is contrary to divine instruction and she became a pillar of salt – Gen 19:17,26
2. **MOSAIC DISPENSATION:** - This was a period when a national covenant was established between God and Israel, with Moses as the mediator. Exo. 34:27, Deut. 5:1-5. During this dispensation, all worships were regulated by the laws given to the Israelite nation through the hands of Moses; Aaron and his sons, as the head of Levites tribes were ordained as God's high priest – Exo. 28:1, 29:44. Temple worship with some regulations was mandated for acceptable offerings and services, Deut 2:5-13, Exo. 29 & 30, Heb. 9:1-12. Nevertheless not all the Jews obeyed the provisions of this old covenant, all these worship activities under mosaic dispensation (i.e Old Testament) were meant to serve as shadows for the true Tabernacle, ( The new testament church) and our Great high priest (the Lord Jesus Christ). Hebrew chapters 8 and 9 explain this truth clearly. Read also Col. 2:14-17.
- Yet, we have many examples of those who rejected God's law through Moses and were not spared!

## EXAMPLES

- I) Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire before the Lord and both were consumed by fire from the Lord's presence- Lev. 10:1-2, 16:12-13
- ii) Uzzah was struck dead for touching the Ark of Covenant in disobedience to God's authority - 2 Sam 6:6
- iii) The kingdom of king Saul was torn away from him because of his stubborn attitude to God's instruction on the Amalekites' mission. I Sam 15:17-28
- iv) King Zedekiah rejected the divine counsel that was sent to him through Jeremiah, to surrender to the king of

Babylon (Jeremiah 38:17-23) then he faced a horrible consequence; his two eyes were plucked out after using them to watch the execution of his sons (Jer. 39:6-8).

- v) Jehoiakim, the king of Judah burnt the scroll containing the word of God because he was not pleased with the content. Consequently, his obituary and the destruction of his descendants and kingdom were announced in the second scroll written by Jeremiah (Jer.36: 23-32).
- vi) Jeroboam, the king of Israel, in his quest for power, wealth, and fame, despised the law of God; he established two idolatrous temples of golden bull calves, one at Bethel and the other at Dan to replace the true worship at Jerusalem temple (I King 12:26 -33, 13:33-34). As a result of this God promised to bring disaster on Jeroboam's dynasty and all his male descendants shall be wiped off without any burial (I kings 14:7-11,16).

Those Israelites kings cited above despised the authority of the holy scriptures and suffered the corresponding disaster that awaits the rebellious souls. May we learn not to imitate their lives but choose to be meek and humble like our Lord Jesus Christ who did the will of His heavenly father throughout his earthly ministries, Matt. 11:28-29, John 6:38.

- 3. CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION:** - This is also called the dispensation of the grace of God by Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:2). This is the period of messianic universal rulership through the teachings of Christ. It began from Jerusalem on the Pentecost day after His Ascension to heaven – Luke 24:47, Acts 1:6,8; 2:36-42,47. Though the New Testament laws do not come with immediate punishment for its violators, yet there are abundant warnings that are plain enough to restrain any-would-be rebel.

**EXAMPLE:**

- i) The wise and foolish builders in Matt.7:24-28
- ii) Those on the left sides are condemned to everlasting fire Matt. 25:46
- iii) All divisive and heretic persons shall not inherit heaven – Gal.5:20-21, Titus 3:10-11

- iv) If the violators of Mosaic laws received due punishment for their disobedience, the Hebrew writer revealed that there is no escape for us if we neglect the authority of our Lord as confirmed in the New Testament. Heb 2:2-3,12:24-25. The Lord will destroy all His enemies with eternal fire at His return 2 Thessa 1:7-9
- v) John, the apostle of love declared that anyone who abides not in the doctrine of Christ has no fellowship with God! 2 John 1:9. Therefore in all we say or do (i.e in faith and practices), we should do all by the name (authority) of Christ. Col. 3:17.  
“Thus saith the Lord” must be established for all our religious activities to be acceptable to God and to enjoy the bliss of the golden city in Heaven! Rev.21:27.

We are equally guilty of the same error of despising Divine authority when we act or say anything that cannot be established under our Lord's direct command, under the Approved Apostolic examples and necessary inference from the New Testament scriptures!

## REASONS WHY BIBLE AUTHORITY ARE NOT RESPECTED

- 1. IGNORANCE:** - A large percentage of so-called bible believers are ignorant of the bible truths and commands (most of which are willful /deliberate ignorance) because they have been hypnotized by the fantasies or restrictions set forth by their religious leader(s) e.g. I don't know how to open the bible, don't study with anyone or any book outside your denominational publications, ignorance of the difference between the Old Testament and New Testament, etc. Hosea 4:6, Matt.22:39, Rom 10:1-3, 2 Cor 3:14, 2Pet.3:5.



**2. HARDNESS OF HEART:-**

The heart of man is deceitful above all things! It becomes hardened through the deceitfulness of sin –



Jer.17:9, Heb. 3. In the days of Jeremiah, the Jews deliberately hardened their heart against the word of God which came to them. Jer. 44:4-5,15-16. So modern worshippers often harden their hearts against the gospel truths today -2 Tim3:1. Thus making oneself "a small god" like the prince of Tyrus Ezekiel 28:1-10.

**3. PLEASANT RESULTS:-** Men are more tempted to continue to despise bible authority as they enjoy more material gains and more earthly comfort while in that sinful state. Just as the Jews confessed to Jeremiah, the weeping prophet that they lived in prosperity and peace along with their whole families and nation during those times that they offered drink offering and incenses to the queen of heaven (i.e. pagan goddess).

Therefore, they answered Jeremiah that they are not going to yield to the word of the Lord spoken by him Jer.44:17-19, Eccl 8:11-12. When such worshippers encounter life troubles, their minds often get easily attracted to their failure of yielding to some prophetic statement or family idols or rituals, instead of evaluating their lifestyles and identify that sinful or rebellious aspect of one's life to seek divine forgiveness! Dan.9:8-12



**4. FALSE PROPHETS:-** Based on our Lord's prediction in Matt.24:24-25, many false prophets have established several false religions where their heretic teachings are exalted. Thus, denying Christ and the authority of the

Bible; making the multitudes believe their lies: 2 Pet 2:1-3. These false prophets are easily identified through church founding activities, writing of church manuals, wearing of unscriptural titles, garments, caps; permitting polygamy, money-making activities, etc. their destiny is sealed with the devil in hellfire! Rev. 10:10, Philp 3:19

**5. POPULAR OPINION:-** God knows that men can be deceived to rebel against His laws through the influence of the multitudes, so He warned "You shall not follow the multitude to do evil" – Exo. 23:2. Just as Pilate succumb to the pressure of the Jewish multitude to crucify our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt.27:17-26). So, the religious men of modern times often bow to the pressure of popular opinions. Jesus declared "Enter ye by the narrow way for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction- Matt. 7:13.

King Saul bowed to the pressure of the people and he was rejected by God I Sam. 15:24. Since the world began, multitudes are always on the wrong side while the few are saved! E.g. Noah's world, Lot's days, and the Israelites from Egyptian bondage to the promised land! So, never trust the popular view about denominationalism, Christianized Judaism, idolatry, and Islamism, etc.

**6. WORLDLY ALLUREMENTS:-** Devil tempted our Lord with earthly treasures and all its glories, but he was defeated- Matt 4. Sadly, many souls are bowing to Satan to enjoy all this earthly wealth and fame which will soon pass away 2 Pet.3:10-13.

Finally, every act of disregarding the biblical authority is the root cause of apostasy which often ends in the destruction of the soul, Matt.10:28. Repent today to have life!