

HOME BIBLE STUDY

~ Lesson 5 ~

HOW CAN I UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE PROPERLY?

The last two lessons we have examined who Jesus is and how we may enter into a saving relationship with Him. Now, let us look more closely at how we can correctly understand God's word, the revelation of His mind and will for us, the Bible.

ALL AUTHORITY, MIGHT & POWER

God, being Eternal and Almighty, naturally has all authority. It was at God's word that the physical universe came into being (Gen. 1). He is the Source of all that exists, the Maker of all things, whether it be things visible or invisible. He is the Source of all authority, whether they be thrones, rulers, governments, or other powers. They exist because of God and for Him, He precedes them all and it is by His power they continue to exist. (Col. 1:15-17)

Therefore, God has every right to issue commands, give directions, and require obedience, honor and respect. Man's very life, breath and being are owed to God (Acts 17:26-28). Who can say that God owes anyone anything? As it is written: "Who has ever known the mind of the Lord, or shared His counsels? Who has first given God anything, so as to receive payment in return? For the universe owes its origin to Him, was created by Him, and has its aim and purpose in Him. To Him be the glory throughout the Ages! Amen." (Rom. 11:34-36 WNT) Indeed, God is the embodiment of Authority and Power.

Now, in the Bible we read of how God communicates with mankind. We see that He has revealed Himself to mankind with the obvious purpose of man understanding and learning something. As it is written: "No man can come to me, except **the Father** that sent me **draw him**: and I will raise him up in the last day. It is **written in the prophets**, And they shall all be **taught of God**. Every one that hath **heard from the Father, and hath learned**, cometh unto me." (John 6:4-5)

In the above passage, note the highlighted points. The Father draws people to Jesus. How so? By what is written in the prophets, this is how God teaches. Those who hear His teaching and learn from it, come to Jesus. We saw this in lesson number 3 which gives a few examples of how all the prophets foretold the coming of the Christ.

Also, when we look at the role Jesus came to fulfill, we see that Jesus was in perfect submission to the will of the Father (John 5:19-21). Notice also, "For neither doth the Father judge any man, but he hath given all judgment unto the Son; that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father that sent him." (John 5:22-23) The Son is to be honored even as the Father is. And to demonstrate this, the Father committed all judgment to Jesus Christ. In fact, in the final day, it is Jesus Himself that will sit upon the throne to judge all (2 Cor. 5:10).

It is also written, "And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." (Matt. 28:18) And, "And he [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; **that in all things he might have the preeminence**. For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fullness dwell;" (Col. 1:18-19). God has so planned and arranged things that Jesus, the Son of

God, is to take the prominent role in all things.

With this in mind, we are better prepared to understand the truth of 1 John 5:9-13, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for the witness of God is this, that **he hath borne witness concerning his Son.** He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning his Son. And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life. These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God."

We must accept Jesus. We do this by believing in His name. "Name" in this context, is like in Eph. 1:21 and it means "rule, authority, power". Therefore, in order to accept Jesus we must accept His rule and authority.

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: **no one cometh unto the Father, but by me.**" (John 14:6) And, "He that **rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings,** hath one that judgeth him: **the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day.**

For I spake not from myself; but the Father that sent me, he hath given me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life eternal: the things therefore which I speak, even as the Father hath said unto me, so I speak." (John 12:48-50) Clearly, we must listen to and obey Jesus if we desire to be pleasing to the Father.

COMMANDS, APPROVED EXAMPLES AND NECESSARY INFERENCES

Having very clearly established the authority of God and His right to command, and having clearly shown that He expresses this authority in and through the Son; let us now look at the words of God's Son. How can we properly understand the words of Jesus?

Turn again to Matthew 28. After declaring that He has all authority, Jesus directed His apostles to make disciples of all by baptizing them into His authority. He then adds in verse 20: "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I **commanded** you..." Very simply, Jesus here admits in plain language that He expressed His will in commands.

A command is a direct statement or order to do something. For example, in verse 19 he told his apostles to "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them..." This was not a suggestion. This was not just some "good idea". This was a directive, a command, an order. The apostles must, therefore, do this in order to be pleasing to Jesus. We see also that the apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit (John 16:12-13; Acts 1:2), used commands (1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Thess. 3:4, 6, 12; 1 Tim. 4:11). Thus, commands are one way that the Bible expresses God's will.

A second way that Jesus taught was by approved example. He demonstrated things which were approved and acceptable for us to imitate and learn from. In John 13 he washed the feet of the apostles. After doing this he asked, "Know ye what I have done to you?" (John 13:12) Of course the apostles knew that He washed their feet – but He was not talking about that. This example was an illustration of the principle of humility and service. As Jesus says, "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet;

ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you **an example**, that ye should do as I have done to you." (John 13:13-15) Jesus' example was of humble service, though He is Lord of all. If he, being Master, can wash their feet – how much more should they in humility be of service to one another. But you see the point, Jesus used examples to teach.

In like manner, the apostles used examples to teach (1 Tim. 4:12; James 5:10; 1 Pet. 2:21). Just like the parent who shows his son how to tie his shoes, God's word shows us things to do and to imitate.

A third way that Jesus taught was by **necessary inference**. A necessary inference is a necessary deduction or conclusion. A necessary conclusion is not just a "possible" conclusion, it is the only proper and reasonable conclusion demanded by the evidence. Let us look at an example of how Jesus used necessary inference.

In Matthew 22:23-33, the Sadducees came to Jesus and tested Him. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. Their challenge to Jesus, therefore, was rooted in their unbelief. They gave an illustration of how a man married and later died, leaving no children. The man's brothers, each in turn, married this woman and then died without children. Last of all she died. To their minds, they could not see how Jesus would escape the confusion and chaos a resurrection would cause in this instance. After all, she had all seven men as husbands... But Jesus answered, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God" (v. 29). He challenged their knowledge of the scriptures concerning a resurrection and their understanding of God's power to resurrect.

Jesus continued, "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels

of God in heaven" (v. 30). The resurrection will not result in a continuation of earthly relationships. Instead, the resurrection is preparation for dwelling in heaven, like the angels of God.

Now watch how Jesus uses necessary inference: "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I **am** the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." (v. 31-32)

Jesus quotes from Exodus 3:6. Way back there, God was speaking to Moses. Note carefully that Moses lived some 400 years after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob died physically. Yet, God speaks of being (present tense) their God still. God thereby asserts definitively that they still existed even after leaving their mortal bodies behind. And from this draws the necessary conclusion that if they still exist apart from the body, then God is going to also raise them up again. God is indeed the "God of the living", not the dead.

From that small, often overlooked statement "I **am** the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" – Jesus affirms the resurrection as the necessary and proper conclusion we are to accept and believe. How deep and profound is the word of God, that even in such passing statements are contained precious Truths.

"And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine." (v. 33) Indeed, people even today are astonished when they learn of the depth of wisdom God has placed in His word, the Bible.

While these three ways of expressing authority may seem "new"; they are actually quite common and normal. In fact, we all use them every day of our lives. When you deposit your check in your bank account by writing

your account number on the back, that is a direct statement or command to the teller. The only thing that authorizes them to do is to deposit it in your account. And we frequently give examples to others on how to do some task or work. And we draw necessary inferences from many occasions in life. If someone asks an aged grandmother how many children she has, she may reply, "I had four." The past tense unavoidably means that she no longer has four. We understand such statements in everyday life, so we should really not find it strange that God expresses His word and will in ways that we can understand it. After all, if God is able to communicate successfully with a sea animal (Jonah 2:10), surely he can properly communicate with mankind, who is made in God's image (Gen. 1:27).

GENERAL AND SPECIFIC AUTHORITY

There is another aspect of authority that we need to understand properly. This is that all authority can be expressed in general or specific terms.

General authority is when, for example, a command is broad, leaving room for personal judgment in how it will be fulfilled. When the Lord told the apostles to "go" into all the world (Mark 16:15), the command to go is a broad statement. In other words, they could go by foot, by boat, by donkey, by cart, (or if they had it) by bicycle, by car, by bus, by plane, etc. As long as they went, the particulars of the going were left up to their discretion. General authority is, therefore, inclusive of things in the category described.

In contrast, authority can be expressed in a **specific** or narrow way. For example, the apostles were told to "preach the gospel" (Mark. 16:15). Thus they are expressly told what they are to preach. They were not to give "motivational speeches" or pep rallies.

They were not to preach on car maintenance or hold job fairs. They were specifically told to preach the gospel, so that is exactly what they must preach. Specific authority is exclusive and narrower in nature than general authority.

Again, this is something we use in every day life, whether we realize it or not. If you take your car to have the oil changed, you specify what you want done (usually by choosing, for example a "15 point" plan). If you did this and they changed your tires, overhauled your muffler system, and installed a new radio... would you be very pleased when they handed you the bill? Did they do what you specified? No. But if you told the mechanic "fix whatever is broken" then you are leaving him a lot of liberty to find and fix things.

GOD'S SILENCE

If you give your son \$20 and tell him to buy milk, bread and one piece of candy for himself; he is therefore specifically authorized by you to buy only milk, bread and one piece of candy. Within the instructions given to buy one piece of candy, he is left at liberty to purchase whatever kind of candy he prefers. He could buy a mint, a piece of chocolate, or a piece of bubble gum, etc. – as long as he only buys one piece. But what about two pieces of candy? What about buying ice cream? What about buying a bag of cookies and some chips? Would we consider this son obedient if he decided to add to the command you gave? No. Even though you did not mention anything about chips, ice cream, cookies, etc. - there is a rule which applies which **prohibits** him from getting these things. Your **silence** is **not** permission.

Of course, as human beings, our silence can at times be forgetful. Perhaps the son realized you forgot to instruct him

to buy much needed lunchmeat and cheese. And sometimes, as human beings, we may even see him bring home cookies and ice cream and change our minds. But God **never forgets** and God is **not fickle** in His decisions. God's silence is absolute.

In Hebrews 7 we read about the silence of God. Under the Old Testament God had authorized those of the tribe of Levi to be priests. Jesus Christ was born of the tribe of Judah, "as to which tribe Moses **spoke nothing** concerning priests" (Heb. 7:14). Notice that God, through Moses, spoke nothing (was silent) concerning priests being taken from other tribes. Therefore, in order for Jesus could not be a priest under the Old Law. In order for Jesus to be a priest, the Old Law had to be removed and a New Law instituted (Heb. 7:12). Clearly, God's silence prohibits.

We also read of a very clear statement in 1 Pet. 4:11, "If any man speaketh, speaking as it were oracles of God". In other words, when God says to do something, we are to imitate God and say it is to be done. When God is silent, then we are to imitate God and be silent. This is how we are to speak as God's oracles (word). Perhaps you have heard this principle summarized as, "We speak where the Bible speaks, and are silent where the Bible is silent". This is exactly the point. God, being all knowing, never forgets and is not whimsical in His decisions. So what God says is exactly what He means to say. If He is silent, then we should respect His silence by not assuming we have permission when we do not.

CAN WE UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE ALIKE?

If I asked you what one plus one is, you would easily answer that it is two. And you would be correct. Someone may answer that is three, but they would

be wrong. This shows that we can understand things correctly, and when we do we will also understand them alike. For more difficult mathematics we will have to be more diligent and careful in our study, but you see the point.

In like manner we can read and understand God's word (Eph. 3:3). There are many easier principles and teachings of the Lord that, like one plus one, are foundational for more mature understanding (Luke 7:43; 10:28; Heb. 6:1-2). As for more difficult points, it takes more effort and study to understand, but we can (2 Pet. 3:16-18). And in understanding correctly, we will again find agreement and unity with others who accept God's word. The more we understand, the better we will be able to see the difference between those who are truly submitting to Christ and those who are not. And we will be better able to help those who are honestly trying to get into Christ. But of course, we must start first with ourselves. We must make sure we are in Christ in order to properly be able to help others.

"And why do you call me 'Lord, Lord', **and do not do** the things which I say?"
(Luke 6:46)

"What thing soever I command you, that shall ye observe to do: **thou shalt not add** thereto, **nor diminish** from it." (Dt. 12:32)

"Every word of God is tried: He is a shield unto them that take refuge in him. **Add thou not** unto his words, Lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."
(Prov. 30:5-6)

"Now these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes; that in us ye might learn **not to go beyond the things which are written**; that no one of you be puffed up for the one against the other." (1 Cor. 4:6)

"I am surprised that you are being so quickly turned away from him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel; Which is not another gospel: only there are some who give you trouble, **desiring to make changes in the gospel of Christ.** But even if we, or an angel from heaven, were to preach to you **any gospel other than** that which we have given you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so say I now again, If anyone preaches **any other gospel** to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:6-9)

"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. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds."
(2 John 9-11)

"I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall **add** unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall **take away** from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book."
(Rev. 22:18-19)

Please complete the Home Bible Study questions page for lesson #5, then send it in to be checked. After checking it, we will return it with the next lesson in the series. Also, if you have any questions please write them down and let us know. We are here to serve you and will point to the Bible for the answer to all things.

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