

PRECEPTS,
APPROVED
APOSTOLIC
EXAMPLES,
AND NECESSARY
INFERENCES
FROM SCRIPTURE

Determining What Pleases God

- ▶ **Precept** - divinely given principle, whether explicit command, prohibition, declaration, prophecy, even rhetorical question (e.g. 1 Corinthians 11:22)
- ▶ **Approved Apostolic Example**
 - ▶ **Example** – a case or event
 - ▶ **Apostolic** – authorized by Jesus in the gospel dispensation, as opposed to being part of the Law of Moses
 - ▶ **Approved** – approved of God; as opposed to, for example, Gal 2:11
- ▶ **Necessary Inference**
 - ▶ **Inference** – arriving at a decision, a conclusion, by reasoning from known facts and evidence
 - ▶ We only infer it because it was implied the speaker
 - ▶ **Necessary** – it must be, can be no other way; as opposed to, for example, what some do with Acts 16:15

The Issue to be Settled

- ▶ The issue to be settled was whether this is right: “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1)
- ▶ For whom? Not the apostles – they knew the answer. For the un-inspired.
- ▶ When we have a religious question to be resolved, we are the un-inspired. We need to go to the inspired for the answer.
- ▶ Already settled by God. Whether a question is settled for you and me is irrelevant as to its settlement in heaven. Psalm 119:89
- ▶ Seriousness of this issue? Galatians 1:6-9. Acts 15:24. Serious because it is a change to the will of God. Disturbs and divides.

Verses 6-11. Peter's speech: an argument based on **necessary inference**.

- ▶ **Inference** – arriving at a decision by reasoning from known facts and evidence
 - ▶ **Necessary** – it must be, can be no other way
- ▶ Peter's speech is an argument based on necessary implication
- ▶ Peter preached the gospel to the Gentiles – referring to Cornelius
 - ▶ Not because God directly told him to preach the gospel to them.
 - ▶ But God did choose him to do this
 - ▶ Peter did not circumcise them
- ▶ God acknowledged (bore witness) to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us (apostles).
 - ▶ This meant God “made no distinction between us and them”

Verses 6-11. Peter's speech: an argument based on **necessary inference**.

- ▶ Peter necessarily implies in order for the church to necessarily infer: Peter was sent to preach the gospel to the uncircumcised Gentiles without binding circumcision, and God put His stamp of approval on this through the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, circumcision is not required for salvation.
- ▶ Besides that, it would be making trial of God to bind on the Gentiles the Law of Moses which no Jew was able to bear
- ▶ Therefore:
 - ▶ We (Jews) shall be saved in the same manner as they (Gentiles), that is, without circumcision
- ▶ By necessary implication, the church in Jerusalem was led by Peter to conclude that Gentiles are saved without circumcision
 - ▶ No other conclusion about circumcision could be reached

Verse 12. Barnabas' & Paul's speech: an argument based on **apostolic approved example**.

- ▶ **Example** – a case or event
 - ▶ **Apostolic** – authorized by Jesus in the gospel dispensation, as opposed to being part of the Law of Moses
 - ▶ **Approved** – approved of God; as opposed to, for example, Gal 2:11
- ▶ The apostles' action of preaching to the uncircumcised Gentiles, without the requirement of circumcision, was without doubt approved by God because God was with them, confirming their preaching through miracles and wonders
- ▶ From this, Paul & Barnabas expected the church to conclude that circumcision is not required
- ▶ It is an approved example not because it was Paul and Barnabas who spoke about the events
 - ▶ It is an approved example because God showed his approval of their work among the Gentiles

Verses 13-17. James' speech: an argument based on **precept**, in this case a direct statement of prophecy.

- ▶ **Precept** - divinely-given principle, whether explicit command, prohibition, declaration, prophecy, even rhetorical question
- ▶ James points to Old Testament Scripture, citing a statement of God – prophecy – that the Gentiles would be called by His name
- ▶ God made a direct statement regarding this issue
- ▶ James showed that an inspired prophecy of God harmonizes with the necessary inference of Peter's speech and the approved example in Paul's and Barnabas' speech

Three methods used in determining God's will in the matter

1. What God had already necessarily implied (and men needed to necessarily infer)
 - ▶ **NECESSARY INFERENCE**
 2. What God had already approved
 - ▶ **APPROVED APOSTOLIC EXAMPLE**
 3. What God had already stated
 - ▶ **PRECEPT**
- ▶ No new revelation was needed in Acts 15 in order to determine the truth of the matter
 - ▶ There was an appeal to precept stated in existing inspired Scripture
 - ▶ There was an appeal to an approved apostolic example and what it proved
 - ▶ There was an appeal to the necessary conclusion that follows from God-approved events
 - ▶ How relevant to us then, because we have all of God's revelation!

Three methods used in determining God's will in the matter

- ▶ They harmonized – truth harmonizes with truth
- ▶ The church in Jerusalem was led through these methods
- ▶ Thus we have in Acts 15 an example of the methods that we, the un-inspired, must use to determine the truth on a subject
- ▶ It is a blueprint not only for the church in Jerusalem but for all who would please God

Consider the Lord's Supper

- ▶ Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 10, 11
 - ▶ By **precept**, we learn of its elements, its purpose
- ▶ Us too?
 - ▶ Yes. 1 Corinthians 4:17, 7:17
- ▶ Acts 2:42; Corinth; Troas (Acts 20:7)
 - ▶ By **approved apostolic example** we learn the day we should eat and drink the Lord's table: the first day of the week.
 - ▶ By **necessary inference** we can know the frequency to eat and drink the Lord's Supper
 - ▶ How often is there a first day of the week? Every week. So we partake every week.
 - ▶ Human reasoning? Hardly.
 - ▶ Exodus 20:8 – Sabbath. How often? Unstated, but every week had a Sabbath day. Thus weekly.
 - ▶ Numbers 21:16 – Passover on 14th day of 1st month. How often? Unstated, but every year had a 14th day of the 1st month. Thus yearly.

Consider Music in Worship to God

- ▶ In the New Testament, ten Scriptures about singing.
- ▶ Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16
 - ▶ By **precept**, we learn to sing, what to sing, the purpose and benefit of singing
 - ▶ This is enough!
- ▶ 1 Corinthians 14:15
 - ▶ We even see an **approved apostolic example** of singing when the church comes together in one place
- ▶ There is no precept, approved apostolic example, or necessary inference in the Scriptures for any music in worship other than singing
- ▶ We follow not only the precepts taught in the Scriptures, and the approved apostolic examples in the Scriptures, and the necessary inferences that are necessarily implied, but we respect the silence of the Scriptures

Is the use of precept, approved apostolic example, and necessary inference a way to determine the truth of a matter today?

- ▶ It is not just a way, it is THE way
- ▶ The apostles taught us this way
- ▶ We have all the confirmed word of God and the confirmed events in order to make necessary inferences to know truth
- ▶ We have all the God-approved examples that we need to learn truth and follow it
- ▶ We have all the God-breathed Scriptures with precepts that we need to know and follow
- ▶ Following precepts, approved apostolic examples, and necessary inferences is the divinely prescribed blueprint for determining what pleases God