



## **God's Authority in Inference**

**By Micky Galloway**

Divine authority is the real issue at the base of all religious differences. A knowledge of how to establish divine authority, a recognition of the different kinds of divine authority, a clear conception of the nature of each, and a faithful application of this knowledge will necessarily result in our speaking the same thing, with no divisions among us. We will be perfectly joined together, in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Churches of Christ now face another authority crisis, the latest in a number that have been dividing God's people since the beginning. The very nature of Scripture, and the proper approach to its study, as set forth in the sacred text itself, are being denied and rejected. Some are calling for a "new hermeneutic," a new way of looking at Scripture and ascertaining truth. They hope that, by looking at and approaching the Scriptures differently, we will be able to find answers to many issues (i.e., marriage and divorce, women's liberation, homosexuality, abortion, instrumental music in worship, etc.) confronting us, answers that will be generally acceptable and upon which we can unite. We are told that we can no longer view the Scripture as a divinely inspired constitution, designed to regulate our every belief and practice. Nor can we approach the Scriptures as a source of authority, as expressed in commands (statements), approved examples, and necessary inferences. Some tell us that this is a man-made system of Bible interpretation, growing out of traditional views and doctrinal biases. Others tell us that authority is established by "principle." Let us be reminded that for any principle to be divine, it must first be revealed by God. The Scriptures reveal "Principles" by way of expressed statements, approved apostolic examples, or necessary inferences.

Other writers in this series are discussing God's authority in commands (statements) and examples. My assignment is to discuss "God's Authority in Inference." The Bible

does indeed teach by inference. When a command is neither expressly stated, nor specifically exemplified, it may be determined by logical deduction. However, we must observe that in order to establish scriptural authority, the inference must be NECESSARY. Herein lies the mistake made by those who practice infant baptism. In the case of Lydia's household, they reason that she MIGHT have been married, and PROBABLY had children. If so, it is POSSIBLE that one of them was an infant; and although she was away from home, in all PROBABILITY the infant was with her. Hence, they conclude that an infant was part of her household; therefore, infant baptism occurred. Their inference is based on "might," "probably," "possibly," "probability," etc. All of this amounts to a reasonable inference based only on assumption. Scriptural authority is NOT established by reasonable inferences – they must be necessary! Things that are only "probable" or "likely" cannot be binding.

Everything said is said either implicitly or explicitly. To say something explicitly is to say it plainly, in so many words. To say something implicitly is to imply it, without coming right out and saying it. Certainly, much truth is revealed by implication. This is not a man-made rule.

If I show you a square, and inform you that side A-B is 12 inches, I have explicitly told you two things: (1) The figure is a square; and (2) side A-B is 12 inches. However, in telling you that, I have also told you implicitly (necessarily inferred) that the perimeter of this figure is 48 inches, that the area is 144 square inches, and that each of the other three sides is also 12 inches.

The fact that action is authorized by necessary conclusions is illustrated by classic Bible examples. Consider the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:16). We know that, though it is not explicitly stated, Jesus went down into the water. We know this because He came up out of the water, something He could not have done without first going down into the water. This is a forced conclusion, a necessary inference.

In Matthew 22:23-33, our Lord taught, by necessary inference, the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees denied the resurrection, considering the dead to be annihilated. Jesus did not refute their teaching by making a direct statement; rather, He quoted

Exodus 3:6,16.. "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." When God spoke these words to Moses, the three patriarchs named had been dead for some 400 years. Yet, Jesus concludes (necessarily) that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." From the tense of the verb (I am), Jesus necessarily concluded that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived so as to be resurrected.

It is necessarily inferred that baptism is a part of preaching Christ (Acts 8:35-36). In the text, nothing explicitly stated instructs the Eunuch to be baptized, only that Philip "preached unto him Jesus." Yet, we know Philip taught him about baptism, for "they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch saith, Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" (vs. 35-36) How did the Eunuch know about baptism? It is necessarily inferred that Philip taught him!

By necessary inference, we learn that the church was established on the first Pentecost after Christ's resurrection (Mark 9:1; Acts 1:8; 2:4). By necessary inference, we learn the frequency of observance of the Lord's Supper. If "the Sabbath day" in Exodus 20:8: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" means EVERY Sabbath as regularly as it comes, why should not "the first day" in Acts 20:7: "The first day of the week...to break bread" mean every "first day" as often as it comes? Since every week has a "first day," it is necessarily implied that we must observe the Lord's Supper weekly, on the first day of the week.

Hebrews 10:25 necessarily infers that the church should have a meeting PLACE. The command is: "not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting (one another); and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh." The command to assemble necessarily infers a PLACE. This is a forced conclusion. It is impossible to assemble without a place. Therefore, a church building, a PLACE, is expedient and is necessarily inferred in the command to assemble.

In Acts 15, we find a classic example of God revealing His will by direct statement, approved apostolic example, and necessary inference. According to verse 1, the proposition under discussion was: "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." After considering all other evidence, James reached the

ONLY logical conclusion inferred by the evidence. James said, "Wherefore my judgment is, that we trouble not them that from among the Gentiles turn to God" (vs. 19).

Necessary inference is an effective means of establishing divine authority. If we cannot find authorization from direct statement, approved example, or necessary implication, then let us respect God's silence. Only when people appreciate divine authority revealed in the Scriptures and are determined to reproduce in their lives the faith of its message, will the unity of the Spirit be achieved and maintained.