

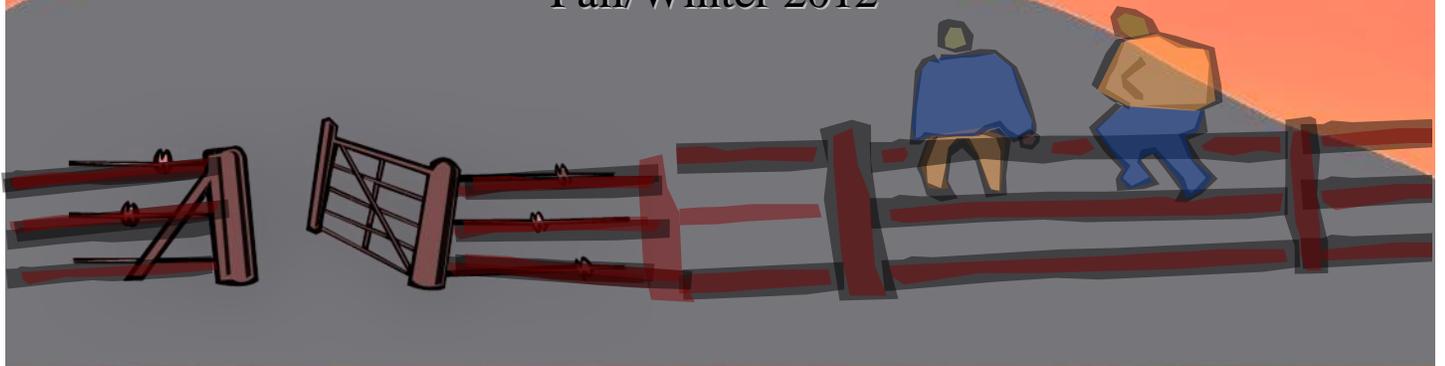
Camp Hill Church of Christ

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

Drawing Personal Lines of Conviction
Following Biblical Guidelines of Freedom
Avoiding Division

A study by the Camp Hill Church of Christ elders

Fall/Winter 2012



Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

Written by Timothy L. Williams

Acknowledgment

The elders of the Camp Hill Church of Christ and many of its members have helped to refine this study: I received a great deal of help from Charlie Dove & Darren Crowden, with whom I taught prior versions of this material. Brian Dowler and Larry Mackey provided additional help as the eldership taught this class in 2012. The entire course was inspired by Jack Exum, an excellent teacher and writer. Many of the thoughts, as well as the title, were gleaned from his work. His seminar and books have had a profound impact on my life and the Camp Hill congregation. While others have helped and influenced this study, I take full responsibility for its content and any errors it may contain.

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ CONTENTS

Chapter	Class	Page
1	Introduction	1
2	God on Division	5
3	The Greatest Commands	9
4	Freedom & Fences	13
5	My Fence, Your Freedom	17
6	Judging	21
7	Holy Days & Food	25
8	Hermeneutics: Introduction	27
9	Types of Hermeneutics Compared	31
10	Biblical Hermeneutics Part 1: Examples	37
11	Biblical Hermeneutics Part 2: Commands	41
12	Biblical Hermeneutics Part 3: Law of Silence & Exclusion	45
13	Where Do We Go From Here?	49

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Jack Exum came and did his “Three Unusual Days” Seminar at the Camp Hill Church of Christ in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania in March 1997. It was a fantastic seminar that had a powerful affect on this congregation. As a result, a class was formed to teach from Jack Exum’s 3 books on unity:

- Fences, Freedom and Following Christ
- Church Issues – Can We Survive? Must We Divide?
- Division and Divorce

The study began with the three books and was expanded beyond them. The class was taught in 1998 and again in 2004. The elders decided that this would be a good class to review again with the entire congregation and preparation for that class conducted in 2012 resulted in the development of this study.

Course Outline

- Why This study: The List & God on Division
- The Greatest Commands vs. Doctrine
- Freedom and Fence Building
- Romans 14
 - H.A.R.M.O.N.Y.
 - Judging; Right & Wrong
 - Mercy and Days & Foods
- Interpretation (Old, New, & Biblical Hermeneutics)
- Where Do We Stand?
- Where Do We Go From Here?
- Application

Additional Studies

- Each student should do their own study of key scriptures,
- Word studies of:
 - Freedom
 - Obey/Obedience
 - Command
 - Example
 - Love
 - Doctrine
 - Etc.

It is strongly encouraged that everyone do their own study on these topics to enhance this class for yourself and for everyone else. It is also requested that you read the key scriptures during the week.

Key Scriptures for Class

- Romans 13:8-15:7 - Freedom & Fences
- I Corinthians 8 - Food Sacrificed to Idols
- I Corinthians 10:14-33 - The Believer's Freedom
- John 17:20-23 - Jesus prays for unity
- Ephesians 4:1-7 - The bond of peace
- Colossians 3:12-15 - Called to peace
- I Timothy 6:3-5 - Quarrels about words
- II Timothy 2:14-24 - Stupid arguments

Killing the Wounded

Where do we draw lines on doctrine and traditions? Where do we divide? How? How do we maintain unity? How far do we go to maintain unity? How do we deal with differences and error? How far do we go to address other people's error?

Over the years a great deal of fighting has been done in the name of Christ and in the name of truth. Terrible things are said and put in print about various brethren who hold some point in error. Every so often a subject surfaces, sides are chosen and people, congregations, magazines, and colleges are asked to choose sides.

It was said by an outsider and quoted in Jack's books: "The church is the only army that kills it's own wounded." This is harsh. But it can and has been true.

I have heard unbelievable things about those who don't believe in a literal 24 hour days of creation but do believe that Genesis 1 is literal: "They are evil, servants of Satan, wolves in sheep's clothing, they must be drummed out of the church!" How very sad and ungodly.

Why This Class? - Goals

- All scripture is "God breathed" II Timothy 3:16,
- Rightly divide the truth,
- Needed to "division proof" the Church,
- Best defense against Satan,
- Important for growth and health of the church,
- Provide Godly and Biblical balance, order, & priority,
- Develop proper unity - so important that Christ prayed for it in the garden,

Our goal is keeping the proper perspective, putting everything in a Godly order of priority, and giving everything the emphasis God wants. This includes the proper inclusion and exclusion of doctrines and opinions, and keeping the Devil at bay within our congregation.

Jesus Prays for Believers John 17:20-23

²⁰"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Spirit of Unity Romans 15:1-7

1We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." [1] 4For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Questions

1. Why are you engaged in this study?
2. What do you hope to achieve?
3. Do you consider yourself open to change if the Bible would lead you to change?
4. Discuss the issues in our lives that might hinder our ability to see the Bible clearly?
5. How does past experience and how we were taught affect our view of the Bible?

Next: The List

In the next chapter is a list of issues that have arisen in some churches in the past. It contains all different types of issues from serious questions to the ridiculous; that is, ridiculous to us. There has been division of some type over each of these issues!

Read Romans 13:8 - 15:7

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

Chapter 2: God on Division

The List

- Taking oaths
- Going to war
- Capital Punishment
- Using force for defense
- Government service
- Playing cards
- Unbaptized sons to read
- Joining ministry alliance
- Indwelling of Holy Spirit
- Praying over/anointing
- The Trinity
- Special Providence
- Prayers of lost
- Fasting is for today
- Translations in error
- Thee/thou in prayer
- Elders authority limits
- Elders appointed by evangelist
- Elder when only 1 child
- Deaconesses
- Support of widows
- Hair length at Lord's Table
- Give only on Sunday
- Dim lights during Supper
- No songs during Supper
- Humming
- No Boy Scouts
- Name must be CofC
- Coat and tie for Supper
- Know others in heaven
- Degrees of punishment
- Bodily resurrection
- Bus program
- Children's church
- Women's careers
- Abortion
- Support of orphanage
- Contraceptives
- Using "God" casually
- Existence of Demons
- Refreshments for VBS
- Girls pray at youth devo
- Women wearing pants
- Dancing
- Drunkenness
- NT condemned slavery
- Thee/thou in prayer
- Taking legal action
- No baptismal formula
- Benevolence for all
- Giving pledge cards
 - Church staff
- Awards in services
- Christian hospitals
- Bible class materials
- Youth camps
- Debates
- Participate in United Fund
- Growing tobacco
- Fraternal orders
- Kindergarten schools
- Supper offered at night
- Supper taken to shut-ins
- Church chorus
- Re-baptism
- Who can baptize
- Biblical divorce
- Steeples/stained glass
- Physical cross
- Lighting candles
- Pictures of Jesus
- Kitchens
- Fellowship halls
- Christian colleges
- Budgets
- 5 items of public worship
- \$ in basket is worship
- Shorts are immodest
- Mixed swimming

ADDITIONAL ITEMS

- TV
- Water fountains
- Baptistry
- PG, PG-13 or R movies
- Soap operas
- Golf on Sunday
- Cut church grass Sunday
- Coffee and soda
- Head covering
- Home churches
- Community church
- Praise teams
- ?

About THE LIST

- Note how few can be answered by a simple command,
- All can be stumbling blocks,
- All can be a source of division,
- All have been divided over somewhere!

Is it proper to divide over these issues? There are many arguments for not being a part of error and not participating in such things. Well, what does God say...

God On Division

- Expel sexually immoral - I Cor 5:1-13,
- Keep away from idle - II Thess 3:6-14,
- Keep away from those who cause division! Rom 16:17,
- Don't welcome those who run ahead, 2 John 1:8-10,
 - Say Christ didn't come in flesh,
- Don't argue over words (false doctrine), I Tim 6:3-5
 - warn and separate from those who do,
- Don't have anything to do with foolish & stupid arguments or quarrels, II Tim 2:14-18, 22-24; Titus 3:1-11

Separate from those who:

- Are in open sin
- Teach false doctrine about Christ
- Argue about words
- Cause division
- Run ahead of the Word in teaching

Note:

- Holding a particular belief or doctrine is not reason for division
- Sinful action is cause for division/discipline on an individual basis
- Error pushed or taught to cause division is to be separated from

Avoid

- Teaching of false doctrines,
 - Against Jesus/Godly teaching,
- Unhealthy interest in controversies,
- Quarrels about words & in general,
- Godless chatter,
- Foolish & stupid arguments,
- Foolish controversies,
- Genealogies,
- Arguments & quarrels about law,
- Myths,
- Meaningless talk,

Church at Corinth I & II Corinthians

- Sectarianism – I Cor 1:11-13
- Carnality – I Cor 3:1ff
- Open Fornication - Incest – I Cor 5
- Using Heathen Judges – I Cor 6:1
- Marital Problems – I Cor 7
- Meat Eating Problems – I Cor 8
- Problems Paying Evangelists – I Cor 9
- Women Dishonoring Husbands – I Cor 11
- Problems with Lord's Supper including drunkenness – I Cor 11:20-21
- Wrong Use of Spiritual Gifts I Cor 14
- Some teaching no Resurrection I Cor 15

The church at Corinth was a mess! It included all kinds of problems in both individuals and groups. It got not one long letter, but two to give it some positive encouragement, but also to address error. Yet no portion of the congregation was instructed in any way to divide from another portion of the

congregation!

What about Corinth?

- Body is unit with many parts, I Corinthians 12:12
- Still a congregation of the church! Part of the body,
- Division and error without separation!
- Paul speaks of their unity,
- Paul corrects them but does not tell them to divide,
- Paul considers them Christians,

While addressing individuals in error and working with the weaknesses of others, we are called to unity!

Called to Unity & Peace

- Called to Unity - Jesus Prays for Believers, John 17:20-23
- Called to Peace, Colossians 3:12-15
- Bond of Peace, Ephesians 4:1-7
- Spirit of Unity, Romans 15:1-7

Excluding someone who is right is always worse than including someone who is wrong.

Matt. 13:24-30; 36-43; Mark 9:38-41; Rom. 14:9-13

DON'T PULL WEEDS!!

- No weed pulling or you will pull wheat! Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43
- Not Against Us Then For Us, Mark 9:38-41

Romans 14:9-14

⁹For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹It is written: " 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.' "¹²So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

¹³Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

Why Stay Together?

- Because division is sin!
- We are called to peace and unity
- So that others will know we are of Christ!
- Because our judgment might be wrong
- For the benefit of all
- So that we can grow up together –
 - NO PAIN-NO GAIN! “As iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another.” Prov 27:17
 - This implies that one alone will remain dull.

How Can Staying Together Be Beneficial? Practical examples...

Those that believe differently sharpen us by challenging us to examine where we stand and why. They challenge us to defend our position on various subjects. This strengthens Biblical positions and exposes non-Biblical positions. Challenging Biblical teaching should build our faith, expand our understanding and make us better able to “give an answer in season and out of season.” Correct, rebuke, teach, etc. without dividing.

When we have had differences on head covering, alcohol consumption, hand clapping, religious music outside services, and a number of other issues, both sides have grown and been sharpened. Yet both still do what they think is right.

Practical Limitations

There are practical limitations to what we can achieve. As with anything else in life we only have control of ourselves, not others:

Romans 12:17-19 Practical Limitations

¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸If it is possible, **as far as it depends on you**, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"^[1] says the Lord. I am so glad the inspired writer Paul included the phrase, “as far as it depends on you,” because that is all any of us can do. We cannot control or force others and we should not try. We must do our best to live at peace with everyone, but peace with others also depends upon them.

What We Should Be - The Opposite of Divisive

- Workmen Unashamed
- Correctly handling word of truth
- **MUST NOT QUARREL**
- Kind to everyone
- Able to teach
- Not resentful
- Pursue Righteousness, faith, love, peace
- Correct w/ great patience 2 Tim. 4:2
- & careful instruction 2 Tim 4:2
- Carrying others burdens, Gal 6:2

If we are going to give everything in the Bible its proper place, its proper emphasis as God gave it emphasis in his word, than being peaceful, kind, loving, patient, and avoiding quarrels and arguing is very important.

We will talk more in the next chapter about the importance of giving things the same priority and emphasis that God gives in his Word.

Questions

1. Why does God not want us to remove the “weeds?” Matt.13, Mk. 9, Rom. 14:9-14, Prov 27:17
2. Why should Christians remain together?
3. How can we disagree without being divisive, and remain together?

Chapter 3: The Greatest Commands

If God gives things different levels of importance, or different priorities, than we should strive to achieve the same balance, as best we can. As in the list below, man often gets God's priorities wrong.

PRIORITIES

God	Man
1	1
2	2
3	6
4	4
5	5
6	3

God gives us this guidance in many ways: He talks about some issues far more than others; therefore, we should pay more attention to those issues. Many passages carry statements calling attention to the importance of a particular passage or instruction, and we should carefully consider these admonitions. But, God also gave us an absolutely clear hierarchy of what is most important and what is less important.

He gave us instructions to generally prioritize His Word. This can be found in several important passages:

- *Greatest Commands*, Mark 12:28-34 (Deut 6:4-5)
- *Greatest Commandment*, Matthew 22:36-40
- 3 remain: faith, hope & love; greatest is love, I Corinthians 13:13
- Gospel is of 1st importance in our teaching, I Cor 15:1-11
- Watch YOUR life & doctrine closely, I Timothy 4:16

We see a clear priority given by God on what is important and the list does not have law or doctrine at the top. Does this nullify doctrine? By no means! Love demands obedience! But it does put doctrine or law in its PROPER PERSPECTIVE.

See the chart on next page.

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

	What Remains & Greatest of What Remains I Corinthians 13:13	Greatest Ranking Mark 12:28-34, Matthew 22:36-40	
1	Love	1a	Love God
		1b	Love Neighbor
2	Faith		
3	Hope		
4	Gospel (First Importance) I Cor 15:1-11		
5	Everything Else Life & Doctrine I Tim 4:16 Summed up by Love Matt 22:40		

Love is primary - above everything else - because God is primary above everything else. God is love. Love is the key attribute of God. We should love God first and then love others second. These two things are the basis for the Bible & its laws.

Faith and Hope are next. Faith and Hope are not attributes of God for he needs neither. Faith & hope are the two next most important things because we must have faith in the God we love and we must trust and hope in Him.

The Gospel, which is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, is of first importance in what we “pass on” or in our teaching. It is of first importance because the Gospel is about God’s love and is what gives power to our faith. It is the Gospel in which we place our hope. The connection between our belief in a God, love of God, faith in God, and Hope in Christ is all based on the Gospel.

Love, faith, hope, and the gospel are followed by everything else which is Life & Doctrine (I Tim 4:16) and is summed up by the two parts of the Greatest commandment, love, as noted in Matthew 22:40.

By the way, note that we are to love others but watch OUR OWN life and doctrine closely!

Love is primary; however, love is tied very closely to obedience through numerous scriptures, which essentially say, as John 14:15 does, that if you love God you will obey what he commands.

Scriptures on love and obedience:

- If you love you will obey commands, John 14:15
- If you love you will obey teaching & God will live with you, John 14:23
- If you don't love you won't obey teaching, John 14:24
- If you obey commands you remain in my love, John 15:10
- This is love for God: to obey his commands, 1 John 5:3

Note that obedience, perfection in understanding, and law keeping, are different things. A child who sincerely attempts to do what he is commanded but misunderstands some of the commands is still considered obedient.

Difference between commands and doctrine: Not much; doctrines are important teachings/principles, commands are direct instructions from God or his inspired writers. We need to teach the principles of God and his commands. We must be very careful to hold fast to principles, teach commands clearly, but we cannot teach our own conclusions based on principles as doctrine.

Commands & Doctrine

Command: Function: *noun* **1a:** an order given,

Doctrine: Function: noun, From doctor, Latin doctrina

1 archaic : Teaching, Instruction

2 a : something taught **b :** a position or principle or the body of principles in a division of knowledge or system of belief : DOGMA

Scriptures on Doctrine

- Command not to teach false doctrine, 1 Timothy 1:3
- Law for lawless, evil, & contrary to sound doctrine, 1 Timothy 1:8-10
- Watch your life & doctrine to save self & others 1 Timothy 4:16
- False doctrine not sound instruction of Christ/Godly teaching, 1 Timothy 6:3
- Will not put up with sound doctrine but please itching ears, 2 Timothy 4:3
- Encourage others by sound doctrine, Titus 1:9
- Teach what is in accord with sound doctrine, Titus 2:1

What Exactly is Doctrine?

Something we teach as an instruction from God found in the Bible. It must be sound and of significance. We will examine this more closely in a later class.

Doctrine After Love, Faith, Hope

Doctrine is important but still secondary to Love, Faith, and Hope. Doctrine - what we teach - should stick to God's Word and we should give our various teachings the same level of priority as the Bible.

Most Important Teaching: The Gospel

The most important thing as far as teaching goes is THE GOSPEL which is of "first importance" I Cor 15:1-11

The New Testament is crystal clear on what THE GOSPEL is and it is very narrow in definition:

Gospel

- Gospel, Romans 15:19-20
- Gospel is Jesus, Romans 1:1-4
- The Gospel is *Resurrection of Christ*, 1 Corinthians 15:3
 - *of first importance*
- Gospel of glory of Christ, 2 Corinthians 4:4
- Confession of Gospel of Christ, 2 Corinthians 9:13
- Gospel of Christ, 2 Corinthians 10:14
- Different Jesus and Different Gospel, 2 Corinthians 11:4
- Turning to another gospel – no gospel at all really, Galatians 1:6
- Gospel announced to Abraham, Galatians 3:8
- Contending as one man for the faith of the gospel, Philippians 1:27
- Immortality through gospel, pattern of sound teaching, 1 Thess. 3:10-13
- Jesus raised from dead is my gospel, 2 Timothy 2:8

We need to keep in mind God's priorities and the level of importance of the things we teach. Is what I am standing on a solid teaching of God? Is it of first importance? Second? Third? Is it a command or my interpretation of a principle? Is it important in God's reckoning or only in mine? All these things must be given appropriate thought in order to ensure proper unity while still teaching correctly and building up the body of Christ.

Questions

1. Why is it difficult for man to have the exact same priorities and to see the Bible and all it contains the same way God does?
2. Why did God call some things, "greatest?"
3. Why is love greater than faith and hope?
4. If you love God, the greatest command, what will you do according to John?
5. If love is greater and something else is lesser, what does this mean?
6. Discuss the gospel and why this is our most important teaching.

Chapter 4: Freedom & Fences

Freedom From What?

Freedom is important. It is important in our culture, it is important spiritually, and it is important Biblically. But if we are free, what are we free from? I think this question is not addressed properly in our society and it often is not addressed properly in Christianity. Freedom is important and in Christ we are free from:

Free From Sin!

- Free from PRINCIPLE of sin, Rom 5:8
- Free from POWER of sin, Rom 6:12-14
- Free from PUNISHMENT of sin, Rom 6:23

Freedom is often contrasted with what binds us or keeps us in slavery. We, as Christians, were all slaves at one point in our lives but are now free from the bondage of slavery; that is the bondage of sin and the death it brings.

Free Not to Sin or Do Evil!

While we have Grace, and are free from sin and it's punishment because of Christ's sacrifice, this does not give us freedom to sin. That would be the opposite of loving God if we understand sin.

- Don't use freedom to indulge sinful nature, Galatians 5:13;
- Don't use freedom as a cover-up for evil, I Peter 2:16

Freedom From:

- Law,
- Tyranny,
- Shackles,
- Men's rules,
- Salvation by works,

We are no longer condemned by either the Law (the Old Testament) or law in general. We are free from the rule of law as the means of either our salvation or judgment because Christ's blood has freed us from the shackles of a legal system. We are also free, in a spiritual sense, from any laws that men make. While we must obey the laws of the land, the laws of the land do not determine either our justification or condemnation before God. And in the Church, men cannot make rules and bind them on others as the Pharisees tried to do.

Therefore, we are free from trying to "earn" our salvation through obedience to law, which was proven impossible by the institution of the old law.

Freedom from law

- Free from LAW, Galatians 5:1; 4-6
 - But not to sin, Romans 6:15-18

Freedom in Law

- Perfect law GIVES Freedom, James 1:25
 - Look into it intently,
 - Continue to look into it intently,
 - Don't just look but do it,
 - And you will be blessed,
- You will be judged by law that gives freedom, James 2:12-13
 - Freedom is tied to mercy,

How can we be free from law, yet at the same time find freedom in law?

How can we be judged by a law that gives us freedom?

It is the law of the New Testament that instructs us in Galatians 5 that we are free from law! This very law frees us from legalism and law!

There is a fine line here that the Bible is very clear about. We are not under law in any sense and we should not be legalists. We cannot earn our salvation in any way, we can only obediently accept our salvation. Yet we also clearly cannot continue in sin. We are required to turn from sin and do our best to obey God's commands and this obedience is love. In fact, obeying itself is part of our freedom. We are free from sin! We are free to love and follow Christ!

We find freedom in the law of God's Word in that his teachings help us overcome sin, grow closer to God, help others, and live a better life, and in this sense it is the law of freedom from sin and judgment!

Yet at the same time, if we choose not to follow God & Christ, this same law of love and freedom will be used to judge us.

Freedom To Follow Christ, I Peter 2:21; I Corinthians 1:11

- The whole point is to follow Christ!
 - ALL else subordinate,
- What does it mean to follow someone?
 - To walk in ones footsteps,
 - To do what they do,
 - To take on their characteristics,
 - To take their teachings to heart,
 - To obey,

Things NOT to follow

- Cleverly invented stories, 2 Peter 1:16 (Eyewitnesses prove Christ was not)
- Our shameful ways, 2 Peter 2:2
- Corrupt desires of sinful nature, 2 Pet 2:10
- Those who love wages of wickedness, 2 Peter 2:15
- Own evil desires, 2 Peter 3:3; Jude 1:16
- Own ungodly desires, Jude 1:18
- Natural Instincts, Jude 1:19

This clearly illustrates that although we are not under law we are to do everything in our power to turn away from, avoid, and fight against sin in our lives. No condemnation, no complications, no separation

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

from God! We are now free to give ourselves wholly to Christ and serve him without fear of judgment. We are free to commit 100% to leave sin and pursue righteousness.

Freedom to:

- Not to be judged by another, I Corinthians 10:28-31
- Work Out YOUR Salvation, Philippians 2:12-13
- Watch YOUR Life, I Timothy 4:16
- Be Fully Convinced in YOUR mind, Romans 14:1-2, 5,14
- Build YOUR own fences,

FENCES

Building Fences Defined:

Drawing Biblical conclusions on Spiritual/Biblical matters for ourselves in areas where God has not clearly spoken. Deciding personal right and wrong.

YOU Have Freedom: The Right/Responsibility to...

- Determine boundaries of behavior/belief to best serve God
- Build fences for self - not others!
- Seek the good of others and do everything with others in mind
 - Avoid what could lead others to sin, Luke 17:1-5
 - Permissible is not always beneficial, I Corinthians 10:23-24

Fence building is a required part of each Christian's life. We each must make determinations and evaluate the principles God teaches and then draw lines and define proper behaviors according to these principles. However, many see things differently. Each interprets principles differently and then draws lines for proper conduct that will be different. This, itself, is not the problem. The problems arise when we see our own fences as required for others. When others have no or poorly placed fences in our judgment.

We are not talking about the clear commands of God. It is another issue when people take liberties where God did not allow them or when they treat God's commands as movable fences. We are talking about the interpretation of principles - the judgments that we are required to make to follow God's principles and commands. In any place where God has not set clear boundaries we can draw our own conclusions, but we cannot bind these conclusions on others.

Discuss this freedom to set your own boundaries

1. What kind of boundaries should I set for myself?
2. How should a married couple set boundaries?
3. How and where should parents set boundaries for children?
4. What do we do when our boundaries conflict with other's freedom?
5. What do we do when our freedoms conflict with other's boundaries?

Chapter 5: My Fence & Your Freedom

ROMANS 14; The Difference Between My Fence & Your Freedom

A detailed review of Romans 13:8 through 15:7

Part 1: Love Romans 13:8-11 (Look at PRIORITIES Chart in chapter 3)

- Knowledge puffs, Love builds, I Cor. 8:1-3
- Love Fulfills Law and is our one debt, Rom. 13:8-11
- Apply Definition of Love to Differences with others, I Cor. 13:4-8

We are given a clear contrast between knowledge and love. This does not make knowledge in and of itself wrong, but shows that knowledge by itself will be wrong. Knowledge must be accompanied by love. This fits with the perspective as laid out in the priorities in chapter 3 where love is of first importance.

If we are not exhibiting the I Corinthians 13 characteristics of love in our interactions with each other (such as patience, kindness, and not easily angered) even when the other person is wrong, then we are not obeying God!

Part 2: Clothe with Christ Romans 13:11-14

- Put on armor of light, Rom. 13:12
- clothe w/ Jesus, Rom. 13:14
- don't gratify sinful nature, Rom. 13:13-14
- Standing firm? Don't fall! I Cor. 10:1-13

We are called to focus - understanding the present time, the sinful world that surrounds us, and the ticking clock - on completely immersing ourselves in serving Jesus, to clothe ourselves with Christ, to turn from evil and worldly desires and focus on serving him. So if love is primary and we next focus on serving Christ, this requires turning from sin and worldly/fleshly desires.

Be careful you don't fall! It is extremely important that we keep a watchful eye on ourselves to make sure we don't get distracted and fall into sin. Temptations will come, no matter how mature we are, so we must be watchful and prepare for them and focus on Christ. This is where we can use each other's help. We need to encourage one another and help each other keep our focus right. And we need to address sin in each other's lives.

Part 3: Accepting Romans 14:1-4 (Read in several versions)

- Accept him whose faith is weak,
- Don't judge disputable matters,
 - Disputable means anything that is not clearly spelled out in Bible,
 - This will be covered in more detail later in section on Hermeneutics,
- Don't look down on or judge,
- God will MAKE him stand!

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

As we work together to focus on Christ, prepare to resist temptation, and fight sin, we must accept others who are weak and we must be careful to avoid any problems over disputable matters. There is enough difficulty and work as we deal with sin and encourage each other, we don't need to put stumbling blocks in the way of others. In fact, judging and fighting over disputable matters IS one of the temptations to sin we must work to avoid!

Leave each other to God on all these matters. Note that not only will that person we disagree with be able to stand before God, but he will stand because God will MAKE him stand!

Two Groups

- **Group 1 had three hang-ups;**
 - Eating meat sacrificed to idols,
 - Holy days,
 - Drinking wine,
- **Group 2 had one hang-up;**
 - Group 1

There are two groups detailed in Romans 14 that represent the two sides of any issue; those that see freedom and those that see restriction. Note that the **conflict between these two groups is not about essentials**: Paul says both groups are wrong!

Seven Steps to H.A.R.M.O.N.Y. in Romans 14

Hold back judgment on disputable matters, 14:1

Avoid looking down on those who don't share your convictions, 14:2-4

Realize that you must live for the Lord alone, 14:5-12

Make sure you don't put obstacles in the way of others, 14:13-18

Only do what leads to peace and mutual edification, 14:19-21

Never publicize your personal convictions, 14:22-23

Yield personal preferences for the common good, 15:1-7

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

Questions

1. How should love as defined in I Cor. 13 affect our interactions with other Christians, even when we disagree?
2. What does it mean to be clothed with Christ?
3. Why should we accept the weak in faith who do not agree with us?
4. How do you think God will “make him stand” as stated in Rom. 14:1-4?
5. How do differences make harmony hard?
6. How can we strive for harmony even when we differ?

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

Chapter 6: Judging

Judging is a difficult and very misunderstood subject. Judging is both commanded and forbidden, depending on what type of judging we are talking about. Some people want to avoid judging of any kind such as the Corinthians who wanted to ignore a man living with his father's wife in their midst. Others want to judge harshly and in the wrong ways and God calls this sin. How do we differentiate? The Bible addresses the difference. Let's look at Romans 14 and several other passages that outline correct and incorrect judging:

Do Not Judge

- Someone else's servant whom they will make stand, Rom. 14:4,7-13
- Pass judgment on others or you will condemn yourself, Rom. 2:1-5
- Judging others judges the law; there is 1 lawgiver & judge, James 4:11-12
- Judge nothing before its time; God will judge, I Cor. 4:1-5
- Don't judge or you will be judged in the same way, Don't condemn, Matt. 7:1-5; Luke 6:37-42
- Don't judge anyone outside the church, I Cor. 5:12-13
- Judging by appearance is evil, James 2:1-4

We are all human and we all sin. If we pass judgment on others, if we say, "That is a lesser person because I would never do THAT!" we condemn ourselves for in reality sin is sin and we all sin; therefore, we all do the same things! None is better than another. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Therefore, passing judgment on others is one of the worst things we can do. What we need to do is address sin in other's lives with humility, love, and patience, and with the understanding that I am no different than the person I am helping at the moment.

God is the only one who can pass judgment on souls, who can determine if a person is good or bad. All we can do is judge the facts of sin and address it directly without judging the heart. And this judging is to be done only within the church.

Who Does Judge?

- Jesus doesn't judge, John 12:47
 - Jesus mediates, 1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 9:15
- Jesus doesn't judge but stands with God, John 8:15-18
- The words God gave to Christ judge, John 12:48-50
- The Word of God judges, Hebrews 4:12
 - Thoughts & attitudes,
 - We do not,

It is important to realize that judgment & condemnation will not happen in this world at all. It will happen in the next as discussed in Chapter two about the instruction to not pull weeds from the field in Matthew 13. Yet at the same time we are called to judge.

Christians Called to Judge

- Judge what is right, issues, logically, Luke 12:57; Acts 4:19; I Cor. 10:15
- Judge yourself so as not to come under judgment, I Cor. 11:28-32
- Judge matters between Christians (legal or otherwise), I Cor. 6:1-5
- Judge those inside the church in open sin, I Cor. 5:12-13; 1-5
- Judge by removing other’s speck after your own, Matt. 7:1-2; Luke 6:37-42

We, as Christians, are to judge in the sense of using clear thinking and logic to judge teachings. Even Paul called us to judge the things he said, knowing that what he said was true and right and would be clear to those that are open to truth. Then we are called to judge ourselves as clearly as possible, to judge and resolve issues between each other, judge open sin in each other, and we are instructed to carefully help others with specks in their eye only after we remove the speck in our own. We must address sin in our own lives before addressing anyone else’s sin for a myriad of reasons.

Proper & Improper Judgment Contrasted

JUDGE and EVALUATE	DON’T JUDGE or CONDEMN
Ourselves	Others
Biblical Subjects	Myths, stories, anything else
Within the Church	The world
Disputes among yourselves	Motives, thoughts, intentions
Sin - clear facts	Opinion, inference, human logic
Without speck (sin in your life)	With speck (sin in your life)
The here and now	Finally: determine lost or saved
Spiritually	By appearances or worldly judgments
Important things	Worldly rules that appear wise
When it will do no harm	When it will place stumbling blocks
With mercy, care, patience	Harshly & impatiently

Proper Judgment

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ourselves first, • Other Christians when necessary, • Only on clear sin, • Only on clear facts, | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With great care w/o doing harm, • When we don’t have same sin, • Never condemn or judge hearts, • With much mercy, |
|--|---|

Mercy is one of the keys to Christian judgment. It is the loving mercy of God that allows all of us to be saved and in return it is required by God that we exhibit mercy ourselves.

Mercy Definition

1 a : forbearance or compassion shown especially to an offender or to one subject to one's power; *also* : lenient or compassionate treatment <begged for *mercy*> 2 a : a blessing that is an act of divine favor or compassion

Mercy implies compassion that forbears punishing, even when justice demands it.

Mercy Characteristics

- The unmerciful servant, Matt 18:26-35
- Mercy shown to merciful, Matt 5:7
- God wants mercy not sacrifice, Hosea 6
- God wants you to act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God, Micah 6:8
- God merciful to all, Matt 5:32
- Mercy triumphs over judgment! James 2:12-13

Mercy should be in the forefront of our thoughts as we interact with others. We must, in humility, see ourselves as the one who had the greater debt forgiven in Matthew 18. And this view should change our attitude and behavior completely to someone who is patient, careful, kind, loving, and merciful in our interactions with others that are struggling. If we are not, we are not mature and humble and may fall into sin ourselves. We must be merciful as God was merciful to us!

Discuss Judging

1. What is the difference between correct and incorrect judging?
2. How can we be merciful as Christians toward others outside the church?
3. How can we be merciful toward others inside the church?
4. How should we apply mercy when others sin?
5. How would mercy relate to church discipline?
6. Does being merciful mean we will withdraw the need for punishment?

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

Chapter 7: Holy Days & Food

Is holding a particular day holy, such as Christmas or Passover, right or wrong? Is eating meat sacrificed to idols right or wrong? That is the subject we will examine this week looking at scriptures that discuss the subjects including Romans 14.

Scriptures on Holy or Special Days

Holy days, months, seasons, and even years were an important issue in this day, celebrated by many cultures and particularly by the Jews as outlined in the law.

- Galatians 4:9-11
- Romans 14:5-8
- Colossians 2:16-23

In Galatians 4 the reference to observing days, months, seasons, and years is decidedly negative. They are described as returning to slavery and Paul expresses worry that his efforts converting and teaching them were wasted! Some Galatians were binding themselves to the old law including the requirements to observe certain days, months, seasons, and years, and this was wrong!

However, in both Romans 14 and Colossians 2, while discussing broader principles, there is a clear statement that holding a day holy, religious festivals, New Moon celebrations, or Sabbath day are not of any consequence one way or the other. No one should be judged regarding them one way or the other.

What is the difference between Galatians compared to Romans 14 and Colossians 2? The difference is in the heart. In Galatians they were requiring the days as a part of the law and as an overall attempt to follow the law to earn their own righteousness. Romans 14 and Colossians 2 make it clear the problem is not the days or their celebration for God, but the error of turning to the law instead of Christ.

Scriptures on Food

- Romans 14:13-15, 20-22
- I Corinthians 8:1-13
- Mark 7:18-20
- Acts 15:28-30
- I Timothy 4:1-5
- Hebrews 13:8-10
- I Corinthians 10:23-33

These passages make the following clear:

- Freedom to eat or drink anything, even sacrificed food.
- Freedom to hold or not hold a day to the Lord,
- Nothing that enters body from outside can defile! Mark 7:18-20
- Everything God created is good!
- NOTHING to be rejected if received with thanksgiving! I Tim 4:1-5
- Eating ceremonial foods is of no benefit. Hebrews 13:8-10
- Only evil forbids marriage, food, drink - what goes in body. I Tim. 4:1-5
- Only limitation is on how our actions affect others
- If you believe it is unclean, it is, don't defile conscience
- Don't do anything that would cause the weak, uneducated to sin/fall away
- None of this is about disagreements between mature Christians

Having a special day as a holy day versus treating every day alike, or abstaining from certain foods or drink versus eating anything and everything; both of these issues are of no real importance in and of themselves. Eat what you want and do what you want with any day you choose! Two things do matter; that you do not add your views on days or food to the Bible by telling others that either of these issues is important to God, and don't ignore the weak in faith who do not understand and will fall away if you exercise your freedom indiscriminately.

Do It All For the Lord

Colossians 3:17 "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus"

The one requirement we have when exercising our freedom to choose is that we do everything for God. There should be only two choices to the Christian.

- Hold a day holy for God
- Treat every day the same for God
- No third choice to remove God

I have difficulty with the idea that keeping some cultural or worldly practice is made acceptable to the Christian by removing God or by not mentioning or referencing Him! Especially when Christ is a major part of the practice to begin with, as with Christmas. We are to do everything in the name of Jesus. If I cannot do it in the name of Jesus, I cannot do it.

Disputable

The principles we have examined apply to more than just holidays and food. They apply everywhere in our Christian walk. To bring our study full circle and introduce the final section lets return to the first verse of Romans 14:

Romans 14:1 ¹Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

What does disputable mean to you?

We come back to the question we had at the beginning: What is disputable? This is the crux of the problem; determining what is disputable, opinion, a matter of judgment. In some ways the problem is simple. If the Bible is clear, there should be nothing to dispute. If the Bible doesn't cover the subject, it is disputable and everyone should allow freedom for others to make their own judgments. If only it were that simple.

The problem is that there are many subjects that one person says are indisputable and another person says are disputable. It is so easy to confuse our logic and what appear to be clear conclusions with the Bible. How do we deal with subjects when two people disagree on disputable? We must look to the Bible to determine the answer.

The key to finding an answer relates to how one interprets the Bible. The next several lessons will deal with the subject of interpretation, hermeneutics, and exegesis: How we determine what the Bible says to us today.

Chapter 8: Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is one of those theological words that make people's eyes glaze over. Why use the word and why study hermeneutics in a course on Fences and Freedom?

Hermeneutics is an important word used by theologians and Biblical writers to define and understand how we look at and interpret the Bible. Whether you realize it or not, you use a hermeneutic you have been taught to interpret everything you read, including the Bible.

In order to examine how we approach the Bible to ensure we do so properly in the context of this study, it is important to use the correct words to answer what has already been written. There is much about hermeneutics, exegesis, and interpretation that has been used to reach theological conclusions that are not actually Biblical. Bear with this study as we examine hermeneutics and then take a practical approach anyone can use to examine what the Bible says.

Hermeneutics

The theory and methodology of interpretation, especially of scriptural text.

Exegesis

Critical explanation or analysis, especially of a religious text. This includes grammatical features, literary genre, cultural and historical setting of text and author, etc.

To interpret

Exposition

1 : a setting forth of the meaning or purpose (as of a writing)

2 a : discourse or an example of it designed to convey information or explain what is difficult to understand.

“Basically: ‘Exegesis’ is the art/science of applying grammatical, lexicographical, and structural tools to “discover” the author’s original intended meaning in a given passage.

‘Interpretations’ is the task of taking that original meaning and faithfully drawing out the timeless meaning and making application of that meaning to my life and the life of those I am instructing.

‘Hermeneutics’ is the science (or rules) one applies when going from ‘exegesis’ to ‘interpretation.’ Therefore if I have a ‘normal,’ ‘literary’ hermeneutic I will approach the text I have exegeted with a certain set of hermeneutical rules in order to develop a faithful interpretation.

It has become very common to see ‘hermeneutics’ and ‘interpretation’ used synonymously, however they are not synonyms.” Joe Fleener

"Hermeneutics . . . stands in the same relationship to exegesis that a rule-book stands to a game. . . . The rules are not the game, and the game is meaningless without the rules. Hermeneutics proper is not exegesis, but exegesis is applied hermeneutics." Bernard Ramm

History of Hermeneutics and Biblical Interpretation

- Greeks first to formalize analysis of text
 - Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)
- Jewish Scholars used Talmudic Hermeneutics prior to New Testament times
- Catholicism – Only clergy can interpret
- Protestant Reformation – all can interpret
- Growth of hermeneutics and exegesis after reformation
- Considered a science and/or art
- Expanded to include all ancient texts
- Many different methods of interpretation

Talmudic Hermeneutics

Hermeneutical rules for interpretation were used by Jewish scholars and were based on the Old Testament. One of the most well-known and highly regarded are the Seven Rules of Hillel. Hillel the Elder lived from 110 B.C. to 10 A.D. and died in Jerusalem. Hillel recorded but did not invent his seven rules. As Hillel was a great Jewish leader just prior to Jesus time, both Jesus and Paul would have been familiar with his teaching. In fact Hillel's grandson Gamaliel taught Paul! His seven rules are considered a basic explanation of logical hermeneutics as used by the Jews. For example, the first rule; Kal Vahomer (Light & heavy) says that what applies in less important cases also applies in more important cases. Often but not always signaled by the phrase, "how much more..." Prov. 11:31, John 7:23, Matt. 12:11-12, Rom. 5:8-9 etc.. Also, the seventh rule; "Davar hilmad me'animo (Explanation obtained from context) the idea that all writings should be examined in context, is an axiom agreed to by all scholars in all areas of study.

Hermeneutical Forms

- Spiritual - Inspired and historical Word of God
- Worldly – Bible is non-inspired and non-historical
- Focus on text - authors meaning - scientific analysis
- Focus on reader - what I want – existential (rather than what God wants)

The Quadriga

(From Medieval Times) 4 Levels of Spiritual, text-based Hermeneutics

- **Literal:** Text interpretation based on examining the grammatical structure and historical context of the text, (Historical, scientific; points to past)
- **Moral:** (Tropological - figurative) Text interpretation examining ethical lessons the reader can draw from the text (Points down to man)
- **Allegorical:** Interpretation based on examining how, using symbolism of ideas and concepts, stories stand for abstract ideas, principles, or forces with profound meaning (Points up to God)
- **Anagogical:** (To climb) Interpretation based on explaining events as they relate to, or foreshadow, events and times in the future. (Points to future)

A text can have multiple levels of interpretation; it could be literal, moral, allegorical, and anagogical all at the same time. The problem with multiple levels is they are all not always intended and sometimes one would REPLACE another. Therefore, we as readers must be very careful how we approach scripture. It is important to not force a hermeneutic on a passage that is inappropriate.

An Example: A Reference to the city of Jerusalem

- Literal – The city of Jerusalem
- Moral – Could represent the human Soul
- Allegorical – Could represent the Church of Christ
- Anagogical – Could represent prophecies about heaven

Taking different meanings other than the literal can be good, if done with care, and may even be intended by the writer. However, we must not change the Word of God or alter His meaning. We need to look at each passage and try to interpret it as the inspired author intended his audience to understand that same passage. Then we should apply it to today and our lives. We cannot interpret by any of these approaches alone without error in some Biblical instances such as the city of Jerusalem.

Literary Genre

- Narrative – stories
- Poetry
- Song lyrics
- Proverbs
- Parables
- Analogies
- Etc

Literary genre looks at the author's intent and style of writing. The author may choose, as in Psalms, to use poetry or song lyrics. Christ used parables, and in various places analogies were used to convey a meaning other than the literal. The literary style is usually evident by reading the context.

Is Hermeneutics Necessary?

Yes and no... Yes, it is beneficial if used to determine the underlying intent of God in His Word. No, God does not require us to be philosophers or exegesis scholars to understand the Bible.

Pros and Cons of Human Interpretation

- Cannot understand God's Word without
- Simple and inescapable
- Prone to human wisdom and logic leading to wrong conclusions
- Prone to preconceptions
- Wisdom of the world is foolish, I Corinthians 3:18-21. Is human philosophy of any value? Not if it conflicts with God in any way!

We must read and understand the scriptures so interpretation is impossible to avoid. However, we must be careful. One does not need to be a theologian to understand the Bible. We don't need to know the words hermeneutics or exegesis. We need only to have an open heart and mind submitting to God's will and asking Him for wisdom and understanding while we read, study, and/or listen to His Word.

When we face terrible times we turn to God, but when it comes to understanding His Word, do we also trust in God as much as we should?

Our Spiritual Foundation for Understanding the Bible

- God is in control
- The Bible is his word
- God inspired the writers
- The Bible has one meaning for all time
- God helps those who seek him

Passages On Scripture and Wisdom

- Scripture God Breathed and Useful 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- Men Spoke from God Carried Along by Holy Spirit 2 Peter 1:19-21
- God's vs. World's Wisdom: Cross Foolish to World, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31
- Wisdom From Spirit, I Cor 2:1-16
- Wisdom of God in Letters of Paul, II Peter 3:15-16, but some can be difficult
- Bible is understandable, 2 Corinthians 1:12-13
- God Gives Wisdom, James 1:4-6
- Hidden from the Wise, Luke 10:21-22
 - Calloused Hearts, Acts 28:26-28
- Seek and You Will Find, Matthew 7:7-8
- You must listen and DO what the Bible says to understand, James 1:22-25

Hermeneutics, exegesis, and interpretation are means by which we work to understand God's Word as we submit to Him and act upon it, to his glory.

Questions

1. Do we have to understand the entire Bible?
2. How much understanding is required for salvation?
3. Why did God put so little in the text on some subjects?
4. Is knowing the definition of hermeneutics required to have a proper hermeneutic when studying the Bible?
5. How do use a hermeneutic in every day reading?
6. What must be our approach to God and the Bible in James 1:22-25?

Chapter 9: Types of Hermeneutics

In the prior chapter we defined and examined the terms interpret, exegesis, and particularly hermeneutics. In this chapter we want to examine some hermeneutical approaches debated today within the church. Among those that follow the Bible as God's inspired word, there are a number of different approaches to the Bible, but we will look at 4 types of hermeneutics.

Types

- Natural Hermeneutics
- Traditional "Old" literal Hermeneutics
- New Hermeneutics
- Biblical Hermeneutics

Natural hermeneutics is a simple approach using common sense rules that almost everyone would agree with and may be used in either old or new hermeneutics. Traditional hermeneutics, as its name implies, is the older more traditional approach within the churches of Christ and the restoration movement. New hermeneutics is more recently developed and different from traditional hermeneutics, often challenging some of the points found in traditional hermeneutics as Biblically improper; however, there are many different approaches that can be called "new." Finally, we will finish with Biblical hermeneutics, the rules and guidelines within the Bible itself on how to interpret the Bible. The use of these terms and their definition varies greatly among members of the church. However, we will look at typical usage.

Natural Hermeneutics

- Language - word meaning and grammar
- Context: Word to sentence to paragraph to book...
- Let Scripture Interpret Scripture
- Knowledge of writer, history and culture
- The simple meaning is generally the correct meaning
- Simple communication: What do the words say?

Natural hermeneutics is based on using common sense and practical rules of interpretation. Obviously, when you read a passage in any language, you must use the definitions and grammatical rules of that language. Any passage must be interpreted in the context of the larger body of writing; from word, to sentence, to paragraph, to book. If scripture explains the same subject elsewhere, let scripture interpret scripture. Take into account the writer, his education, his culture, and the history of the writing. The simple meaning of a scripture should usually be the correct meaning. Therefore, look at scripture as simply as possible: Take what is written for what it says.

These rules are agreed to and used by almost everyone in every field. They are taught us when we first learned to read about seeing Dick and Jane run in elementary school. It would hopefully be obvious that they are necessary to interpret any written word including the Bible. Therefore, natural hermeneutics are generally used in other hermeneutics such as traditional and new.

Traditional "Old" Hermeneutics

Traditional or old hermeneutics is an approach to hermeneutics developed over 100 years ago that uses natural hermeneutics coupled with other hermeneutic rules to interpret scripture. Among these are two that we will examine; CENI (Command, Example, & Necessary Inference) and the Law of Silence & Exclusion

CENI

- Command
- Example
- Necessary Inference

“CENI, short for Command, Example, and Necessary Inference, is a part of the traditional hermeneutic that states we can find out what God requires of us by looking at commands, approved examples, and necessary inferences. However, these terms are defined and used differently by various authors and schools. Let’s examine the three parts of CENI:

Commands

There are instructions from God that can take a number of forms, but regardless of form, they make it clear God is instructing us to do something. These command forms include:

Types of Commands

- Direct Mandate, Acts 2:38; 3:19; 16:31
- Expressing a Desire, Romans 6:1-2; II Thess. 3:5
- Conditional Statement, Colossians 3:1
- Exhortation, Hebrews 4:15-16
- Question, Romans 6:1-2; James 2:14-24
- Declarative Statement, Mark 16:15-16
- Prohibition, Romans 13:9

Old Versus New Laws

- Old Law completed – set aside, Romans 7:6, Hebrews 7:19, 8:13
- No longer needs to be obeyed
- We follow the New Testament

It is important to remember that while we must follow the commands of God there is a difference between commands in the Old Testament and commands in the New Testament. The old law has been completed. It is not flawed, but it is inferior to the new law and was designed to prepare the way for the new. We are now under Christ and the new law; therefore, we are no longer required to follow old law commands.

Commands Limited

- Specific people – Titus 2:3 older women
- Specific time – Acts 6:1-7 7 men
- Cannot be obeyed – mentally impaired, mute, etc.

Commands Both General and Specific

- “Go to the store and buy canned broccoli.”
- General – car or walk, \$ or credit, etc.
- Specific – not frozen, cauliflower, stolen

There are limitations to commands. A command may be in some way limited by being addressed to certain people, or by the fact that it cannot be obeyed by everyone. Also every command is in some way specific and general. We must follow any clear direction in the command as specifically as stated, but have the freedom to do what we choose to meet the command.

Examples

Examples are a key way we can understand how to follow the commands of God and the Bible addresses examples and their use.

Approved Example

- Bad Example – Acts 5:1-11 Ananias
- Good Examples – Matt 16:13-20 Peters Confession

Value of Recorded Action - Examples

- Help clarify command
- Illustrate carrying out a command
- Provide specifics about a general command
- Can be a pattern for our lives
- Related to commands

Necessary Inference

A fact that can be established as true even though it is not stated.

Necessary Inference Example 1

- Fact 1: The geometric shape is a square
- Fact 2: One side is 2 feet in length
- Conclusion: Although not stated, we know other sides are 2 feet in length
- Note: Only true when no other conclusion is possible

Necessary Inference Example 2

- Fact 1: Lot went up out of Egypt, Gen 13:1
- Non-factual conclusion: Lot went down to Egypt
- Add fact 2: Lot was not born in Egypt, Gen 11:27ff
- Can necessarily infer Lot went down to Egypt - there is no other option

There are two common problems with CENI: First, there is a great deal of confusion about its use. CENI is a good way to make decisions for ourselves and for our congregation about our own “fences”, but we must not make commands out of things that God did not command. Second, necessary inference is often improperly defined so broadly that any conclusion drawn is treated as “necessary” and therefore law. We will see later, when examining the Bible, how both of these assumptions are incorrect.

Another rule in traditional old hermeneutics is the Law of Silence and exclusion. This states that we cannot add anything or do anything without authorization of scripture. This is a rule created that says we must only do what has been authorized by scripture and cannot add anything new that is not authorized. Anything stated excludes anything else, except that we can add expedients; things that help us obey a command.

Law of Silence and Exclusion

- Do only what has been authorized
- Do not add anything new
- Anything stated excludes anything else
- Can do expedients or helps

In summary, the Traditional or old hermeneutic contains the following items:

Traditional “Old” Hermeneutics

- Natural hermeneutics
- Command – Limited & General vs. Specific
- Example – Good and Bad
- Necessary Inference – logical conclusion
- Law of Silence and Exclusion

New Hermeneutics

- The literary approach that says everything is relative to the reader
 - Nothing absolute
- The approach that only absolute clear commands are binding
- The approach that old hermeneutics & CENI are not Biblical, a revision is necessary

New hermeneutics is a term used freely to describe anything other than the traditional hermeneutic. This can cover anything from the very liberal approach that everything is relative and open to any interpretation a reader may choose, to a way of redefining and limiting the traditional old hermeneutic based on an examination of the Bible.

I hope it would be apparent that the view that everything is relative, is illogical and unbiblical, so we will not even spend time to argue against it in this class. However we will in other ways examine how new hermeneutics is challenging the old. In this study we will examine the definition of new hermeneutics as contained in the second two bullets above.

New Versus Old Hermeneutics

Command

New and Old Hermeneutics generally agree that commands are binding.

Examples

- New Hermeneutics agrees on value
- NOT a “thus sayeth the Lord” nor binding
- Human judgment determines which examples to follow

Necessary Inference

- Correct
- Very rare and obvious
- ONLY when there is no other possible conclusion

Inference – Human Reason

A probable conclusion toward which known facts, statements, or admissions point, but which they do not absolutely establish.

Inference is “reading between the lines.” When you read between the lines... you are reading your own writing, not God’s!

Law of Silence and Exclusion

New Hermeneutics says it’s not Biblical nor logically applied

We see that even within the church there are disagreements about what is binding or disputable and what is not. People choose different hermeneutics and do exegesis differently. This results in strong disagreement about disputable, and division results.

While many do not know the words exegesis and hermeneutics, everyone who reads the Bible and makes decisions about what they will believe and do, is using some hermeneutic and is doing exegesis.

How do we know we are interpreting passages correctly? How do we determine the right way to proceed? Do we just pick a hermeneutic that seems right? Do we just use the good old logic that has always worked? Do we accept the shiny new ideas just because they are new and attractive?

What we need to do is look to God’s word about everything, including how to read and follow the Bible. The next chapter will examine Bible passages about how to read, interpret, and follow the Bible.

Questions

1. How do we each use natural hermeneutics in everyday life?
2. Can CENI (Command, Example, Necessary Inference) be found in the Bible?
3. How can every command be both specific and general?
4. Why is necessary inference very rare?
5. What are the dangers of relying on inference or human reasoning?

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

Chapter 10: Biblical Hermeneutics - Part 1
Examples

What Does the Bible Say?

In the next several chapters we will examine scriptures that relate to the prior weeks discussions on hermeneutics and exegesis. The Bible never uses the word hermeneutics, but God does tell us what we should do with his Word. There is no discussion of natural hermeneutics, either, but it is obvious from both the old and new Testaments that we are to approach reading the Bible with logic and common sense. If the Bible doesn't talk directly about hermeneutics, what does the Bible say on how to follow God? There are many scriptures!

Follow Examples

Ezek 14:8	1 Tim 1:16	Titus 2:7
1 Cor 10:11	1 Peter 2:21	James 5:10
2 Peter 2:6	John 13:15	1 Tim 4:12
Heb 4:11	2 Thess 3:7, 9	I Peter 5:3
Jude 1:7	I Cor 11:1	Phil 3:17

First, we will examine the clear instructions in God's Word on following examples including what examples to follow and how to follow them, then we will look at what is the basis for following those examples.

Note negative examples - warnings, Eze 14:8; I Cor 10:11; 2 Pet 2:6; Heb 4:11; Jude 1:7

There are plenty of examples in the Bible; many positive, some negative, and some of indeterminate value. However, there are a number of negative examples that are clearly indicated as exactly that: An example we are called to recognize and not follow. The scriptures examined are only a few of the many. Some negative examples are indicated as such, while others can be identified because they clearly communicate that the action displeased God, resulted in punishment, or is against a command of God.

Set example for others, Titus 2:7; James 5:10; I Tim 4:12; I Pet 5:3

We are and always will be an example. In the body of Christ, our example is even more important both for those outside and those inside the church. Are we providing a good example for those around us, or a bad one?

We look to examples to understand truth

1 Timothy 1:16

But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an **example** for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

Follow example of Christ, I Peter 2:21 John 13:15

Christ is, of course, our ultimate example. When looking at the commands of God we should, wherever possible, look to Christ's life for our pattern. This does not possible for every subject. We can look at Christ's statements about marriage, but we cannot look to his example on the subject because he was never married.

Follow example of Apostles, II Thess 3:7,9

The Apostles are the next examples to follow after Christ and we are instructed here to look at not only their teachings, but also their behavior and follow their example.

Follow example of Apostles following Christ, I Corinthians 11:1

Of course, one of key aspects of following the Apostles is to look at how they followed Christ.

Follow example of others following Christ, Phil 3:17

“Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.”

How do I follow examples of others?

By watching HOW other people follow the pattern of God's word. This pattern is the, “form of teaching” or “sound words of teaching.”

2 Timothy 1:13

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:17

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.

The pattern is the very teachings we have been discussing. The pattern of teaching is the Bible, including the scriptures we have read on dealing with differences in Romans 14, and the scriptures on examples. In the next chapter we will look at the pattern regarding commands.

Exactly how should you follow each example and to what degree and in what way? This is up to you. Each of us must make our own decisions on following the examples we see. We are each commanded to follow them, and each must do so as best we see fit. We cannot make others follow an example the same way we do, because the following itself is a matter of judgment. We can encourage and challenge one another about following examples, but cannot turn an example into a command.

For example: We must follow the commands on modesty. We should look for examples of modesty both in scripture and in those around us. However, when we discover an example of modesty that we find proper and good to follow, can we bind this on others? The, hopefully, obvious answer, is no!

Group Decisions

There are actions that are not done as an individual, but are done as a group. If we as a congregation are going to choose a time and place to meet, and certain actions to do while we meet - all based on God's commands and examples - we cannot each individually make those decisions. The group must make decisions on how to follow the commands of God in the best way possible. This will require wisdom, love, and each of us not putting ourselves first, but rather looking to the good of others.

Philippians 2:3-4

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to interests of the others.

The Treacherous Trail

In a thick fog on a treacherous mountain trail, hikers have been known to place one hand on the shoulder of the person in front of them and follow in each other's footsteps. Only the guide in front knows the way, and most following cannot see him. However, if they follow the person in front of them, as they follow the guide, all will traverse the dangerous trail safely. This is very true of the Christian life. However, we must always make sure we are following Christ and those following Him. We should look to the guide, the apostles, and other Christians to ensure our path is correct.

Value of Examples

- Help clarify commands
- Illustrate carrying out a command
- Provide possible specifics about a general command
- Can help us make decisions
- Related to commands

When you read the passages about examples, it becomes clear that God wants us to follow good examples in the context of his commands. We need to look to examples in both the Bible and in those around us and weigh the value this example has in helping us obey God's commands. Therefore, examples do not stand on their own, but rather point us back to the commands of God!

Questions

6. How can we tell whether an example is negative or positive, important or of no consequence?
7. When you examine the behavior of others, how do you know which examples to follow?
8. Who is our ultimate example and how do we follow him?
9. What are some Biblical examples you have seen in those around you?

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

Chapter 11: Biblical Hermeneutics - Part 2 Commands & Traditions

In the last chapter, we began looking at what the Bible says about how to follow God by examining examples. It was clearly indicated that the examples we are to follow are tied to the commands of God. Let's look at what the Bible says about commands.

SCRIPTURES ON Commands

Num. 15:37-40	I Kings 6:11-13	John 14:15
Deut. 6:24-25	I Kings 8:61	John 14:20-24
Deut. 11:1	Jer. 7:22-23	John 15:9-14, 19-21
Deut. 11:27-28	Psalms 103:17-18	Rom. 2:26-27
Deut. 13:4	Psalms 119	II Thess. 3:13-15
Deut. 15:5	Ecc. 8:5	I John 2:1-5
Deut. 26:14	Matt. 19:16-17	I John 3:21-24
Deut. 28:1,15	Matt. 28:19-20	I John 5:1-4
Deut.30:1-3,9-10	Luke 11:27-28	

Obey the commands of God, Num 15:40; Deut 6:24-25; Deut 11:1, 26-28; Deut 13:4

We are instructed clearly and repeatedly to obey God by obeying his commands.

Obedience is...

Deut 15:5

if only you fully obey the LORD your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today.

Deut 26:16-18

¹⁶Today the LORD your God commands you to obey all these rules and laws; be careful to obey them with your whole being. ¹⁷Today you have said that the LORD is your God, and you have promised to do what he wants you to do—to keep his rules, commands, and laws. You have said you will obey him.

¹⁸And today the LORD has said that you are his very own people, as he has promised you. But you must obey his commands.

Deut 28:1,15;

If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.

However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees...

Deut 30:1-3, 9-10; I Kings 6:12; Jer 7:23; Ps 103:17-18; Ps 119:1-20; Ecc 8:5

We are commanded to obey God; to obey his teaching, his Word, his law. This is clearly and fully defined as obeying his commands. If you obey God's commands you have obeyed God.

Full Commitment is... obeying commands

I Kings 8:61

But your hearts must be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time.“

To Receive Eternal Life... obey commands!

- Matt 19:16-17

Go into all world and teach... commands!

- Matthew 28:19-20

What we should teach others is the following of God's commands, not anything else.

Blessed are those who obey.

- Luke 11:28

If you love Christ you will obey commands.

- John 14:15
- John 14:21

Remain in God's Love and be Christ's friend if we obey commands

John 15:10, 14 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command.

It's all about obeying and obeying is all about commands! John 15:20; Rom 2:27

Inspired Writings must be obeyed

- II Thess 3:14

What is instructed in God's Word is the obeying of the commands of God, Christ, and God through the inspired writers.

We Know Christ and God's Love is made complete if we obey commands

- I John 2:3-5

If we want to know Christ we must obey his commands and anyone who does is walking as Jesus did.

What pleases God? Obeying his commands!

- I John 3:21-22
- I John 3:24
- I John 5:1-4

Obeying God's commands shows that our hearts are right before God, and that we live in Him and are born of God. This is love: To obey His commands. Can anything be clearer in scripture? Commands are what we are instructed to follow. Commands are everything and God's commands are not burdensome.

What is burdensome? Well both in the Bible and in the centuries since, we see that what is burdensome are the changes men make to God's Word or the rules they add to it. This is what we must avoid.

Obeying Commands Results in:

- Consecrated to God, Nu. 15:40
- Righteous, Deut. 6:24-25
- Blessed, Deut. 11:27; 15:4; Luke 11:28
- Receive God's Compassion, Deut. 30:3
- God is our God, we are God's people, Jer. 7:23
- It will go well with you, Jer. 7:23
- Receive Eternal Life, Matt. 19:16-17
- Come to no harm, Ecc. 8:5
- Means you love Jesus, John 14:21,23
- You will remain in Jesus love, John 15:10
- We have come to know him, I John 2:3
- God's love made complete in you, I John 2:5
- Have confidence before God, I John 3:21
- Receive anything we ask, I John 3:22
- Live in him and he in us, I John 3:24
- Overcome the world, I John 5:4

Obeying commands is everything and in those same scriptures we see all that we get by obeying God's commands. Therefore Biblical hermeneutics is:

Biblical Hermeneutics

- Following commands is full obedience
- Follow examples of those following commands
- Inference is disputable and, therefore, up to you (Romans 14:1)

The scriptures are crystal clear that God requires us to obey his commands. Period: End of story. This is the full requirement of God! There is no instruction to bind inferences or logic. God does not command us to read between the lines. Therefore we cannot treat anything other than clear commands as commands. We cannot bind what is not commanded. We cannot hold others to, or withdraw from others over, anything but clear commands. We must not divide over anything other than clear commands! How then does this apply to the Law of Silence & Exclusion?

The only problem with this Biblical approach is if we try to follow the principles of patternism; the idea that the Bible is a perfect pattern for everything we do so that every Biblical church would be identical. The Bible doesn't work that way. In order to create a specific detailed pattern for all churches, we must go beyond the Bible. The Bible is a book about relationship with God. Part of that relationship is our love of God and submission and our obedience to God. However, our salvation is not based on law anymore. It is based on the blood of Christ!

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

Questions

1. How is full obedience described in Deut. 15:5, 26:16-18, and 28:1-15?
2. How does full commitment relate to obedience in I Kings 8:61?
3. How is love related to commands?
4. What pleases God in I John 3:21-24 and I John 5:1-4?
5. How can the Bible contain the pattern for our Christian lives, yet not define exactly how everything should be done in our lives or in the local congregation?

Chapter 12: Biblical Hermeneutics - Part 3
Law of Silence & Exclusion & Specifics of Commands

Is the Law of Silence & Exclusion biblically accurate?

The Law of Silence & Exclusion basically says that we cannot do anything in addition to stated commands in the Bible unless authorized by the scriptures.

- Do only what has been authorized
- Do not add anything new
- Anything stated excludes anything else
- Can do expedients or helps

There are two scriptures typically used to make the argument for the law of silence and exclusion; Genesis 6 regarding Noah, and Leviticus 10 regarding Nadab & Abihu bringing strange or unauthorized fire before the Lord. What do these scriptures say?

Noah and the Ark Genesis 6:13-16

- What if Noah had used oak?
- What if Noah used tool boxes of oak?
- Tools of oak?
- Sheds of oak?

We need to follow the commands of God as specifically as he made them. God clearly commanded that Noah use gopher wood. There is no special rule here, only the requirement that Noah follow a command as specifically as God gave it to him, while leaving the general details up to his discretion.

Nadab and Abihu Leviticus 10:1-2

- Aaron's sons took censers and put fire in them and added incense
- Offered unauthorized fire before the Lord
- Contrary to God's command, Exodus 30:7-9, 34-38; Lev 2:1-3
- Fire consumed them

Leviticus 10 uses the statement in some versions, "strange fire" or "unauthorized fire," however this does not mean Nadab & Abihu added something new, the strange/unauthorized fire was actually contrary to a clear command of God on how specifically to make, and keep, fire. Therefore, Leviticus 10 is in perfect alignment with the scriptures we read that stated God is satisfied when we love and submit to him by obeying his commands.

Silence and Exclusion? NO! Actually just obey Commands!

- If Noah used oak he BROKE a command of God.
- Nadab & Abihu BROKE at least one if not several commands of God.
- Read any command and don't BREAK it.

Expedients

The issue has been further complicated by the idea of expedients. There are a great many things not authorized in the New Testament including buildings, kitchens, Bible classes, song books, congregational cooperation on missionary work, etc. The explanation of why some things are appropriate to add was that they were an expedient to following a command. However, determining when something is an expedient and when it is an incorrect addition is confusing and completely a matter of opinion.

The end result of the man made rule of silence and exclusion was the further splintering of the church by those who correctly followed its logic and wanted to forbid classes, multiple cups, and many other things. The only thing we need to follow is God and his commands as specifically as he stated them:

Commands - Both General and Specific

“Go to the store and buy canned broccoli.”

- General – car or walk, \$ or credit, etc.
- Specific – not frozen, cauliflower, stolen
- Can you buy something else? YES! It isn’t forbidden.
- We MUST be careful not to make a command more specific than God did!

My mother was wise enough not give me large sums of money and send me out without specific instructions. If my mother gave me money with no specific limitation on buying anything else, and I found some canned cauliflower on sale, I could purchase it without breaking her command, unless she said, “Don’t buy anything else.” We are only bound by the instructions God gave us, according to how specific those instructions are, no more – no less. If God did not bind it, we cannot!

We have reached the Biblical conclusion that what God requires is that we obey his commands and there are no other requirements. At this point it would be good to examine the subject of scriptural, un-scriptural, and non-scriptural and how these terms are used. It can be very confusing. Someone will say, “That is non-scriptural, you can’t do it!” or “That is un-scriptural.” What does that mean?

Scriptural, Non Scriptural, and Anti Scriptural

- Scriptural- Clearly spoken commands in God’s Word
- Anti-scriptural- Against clearly spoken commands in God’s Word
- Non-scriptural- Not Clearly Spoken - disputable
- Un-scriptural- unclear, can be either anti- or non-

Scriptural is what the Bible clearly states. Anti-scriptural is anything that is against what the Bible clearly states. Non-scriptural is simply what is not clearly spoken or not in scripture, and is, therefore, disputable. Un-scriptural is a confusing term and can be either anti-scriptural and wrong or simply non-scriptural and an area of freedom. Automobiles are non-scriptural or un-scriptural! So are song books and buildings! What matters is what is scriptural that we need to follow and what is against scripture - that which must be avoided.

Do It To Understand It

If you want to understand God's requirements you must learn them, remember them, and DO them! If you read a set of instructions you may understand them to a certain degree, but if you follow them you will understand them better. God specifically instructed us that doing his word was a requirement of understanding. God actually hides understanding from those who refuse to do his will. James 1:22-25

Biblical Hermeneutics

- Following commands is full obedience
- Follow examples of those following commands
- Necessary Inference is extremely rare & obvious
- Inference is disputable and, therefore, up to you, Romans 14:1
- The Law of Silence & Exclusion is not Biblical
- Must follow commands only as specifically as stated

Change Not Required

Coming from the position that many things restrict us, to the conclusion that God only requires we follow his commands, can be very unsettling. Remember that although there are less scriptural restrictions than some would like, this does not mean what we do is wrong. The lack of a specific command about something we do does not mean the logic & reasoning we used to arrive at that conclusion is improper. It just means we cannot treat those conclusions the same as the commands of God and bind them on others. It may mean the thing we once saw as absolute in now an area of freedom that could be changed, but it does not mean we are required to change. Change should come when we see some benefit to our service to God and the body of Christ.

Questions

1. How does the importance of looking at how specific is a command relate to the example of Noah's ark?
2. Would it have been a sin for Noah to build a tool shed of oak instead of gopher wood? A tool box? A tool? The ark?
3. Did Nadab and Abihu break a command from God?
4. How is the definition of an expedient open to each individual's interpretation?
5. Why is the specificity of a command important?
6. What is the difference between, anti-, non-, and un-scriptural?

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

Chapter 13: Where Do We Go From Here?

Where do we stand and where do we go from here?

At this point in our study we have looked at how scripture clearly indicates God’s requirement that we obey his commands and how this is all that he requires. Now we want to examine where we stand as individuals, what we require of others, and what we do as a congregation with all that is beyond commands.

The following illustration shows how we should approach this subject:

STAND FIRM & REQUIRE?

<u>CLEARLY SPOKEN</u>
Not Example
Not Inference
Not Conscience
Not Expedience
Not Tradition
Not Opinion

ALLOW DIFFERENCE?

Not Clearly spoken
<u>EXAMPLE</u>
<u>INFERENCE</u>
<u>CONSCIENCE</u>
<u>EXPEDIENCE</u>
<u>TRADITION</u>
<u>OPINION</u>

For each of us as individuals scripture is clear: We must follow God’s clear instructions. We must obey his commands. Examples are open to our interpretation and are to be used to assist us in following God’s commands. Inference, conscience, expedience, tradition, and opinion can all shape our decision and actions and help us build our own fences, but cannot be used to make laws or fences for others.

When we look at other’s views, how must we approach differences? We must teach, encourage, and require the following of God’s commands with great patience and mercy. To the point where scripture is clear regarding a command we may need to withdraw fellowship from someone inside the church who insists on continuing in open sin. However, on example, inference, conscience, expedience, tradition, and opinion, we cannot require others obedience. We must respect freedom.

It is OK to patiently and kindly share with each other our concerns and our reasoning for reaching a certain conclusion, but in the final analysis, if someone disagrees in these areas we must not judge them or withdraw from them. There must be no divisions over examples, inference, conscience, expedience, tradition, or opinion, whether or not our conclusion “wins the day.”

Don’t Add or Take Away from God’s Word, Rev. 22:18-19

- Remove something from Bible
- Refuse to teach it
- Change it
- Say God didn’t say or mean that

- Loose something God bound

Don't Add to God's Word,

- Bind something God did not
- Forbid anything other than what the New Testament forbids
- Add requirements, laws, or rules not in the Bible
- Make traditions or opinions into law
- Hold others to, or judge others by, our opinions & conclusions

While the admonition found in Revelations 22:18-19 is specifically about the book of Revelations, it is clearly a principle that applies to all of God's Word. It is extremely important that we rightly divide the truth and only stand on the commands of God. To treat something as a requirement of God that isn't, is adding to God's Word! Requiring anything other than the clear commands of God is also not rightly dividing the truth.

DOING something is not adding!

- When we say GOD SAYS, it is adding
- When we say the BIBLE SAYS, it is adding
- When we say YOU MUST, it is adding
- When we BIND something God didn't, it is adding!

Let us look at an example of four people who each take a different approach regarding praying with a lit candle:

- One who lights a candle while he prays
- One who doesn't light a candle and thinks it is wrong
- One who says you must light a candle
- One who says you cannot light a candle.

First two are right, the second two are both adding to God's word. There is nothing in and of itself wrong or right about using a candle when you pray. There is nothing wrong with any tradition regarding candles in church gatherings. There is only a problem when either using or not using a candle is required as if commanded by God or forbidden as if forbidden by God. The same is true of praying using beads, what those who preach or serve wear, the order, time, and length of services, and many other things. These things may, in our opinions, be good or not good things to do, but they are not established one way or the other in God's word.

This brings us to the famous quote by Alexander Campbell that in one form or another is still used in the church today:

“Speak where the Bible speaks and be Silent where the Bible is silent.”

Or in its original form:

“Where scriptures are silent we are silent.”

This quote was spoken in 1809 by Alexander Campbell, one of the leaders of the restoration movement. As originally defined it was good, but it has been redefined, misinterpreted, and misused. The original

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

meaning intended by Alexander Campbell was simply that, in order to be unified, Christians should come out of all the denominations and come together in a simplified Christianity where we let go all of the traditions and non-Biblical requirements that separate us. He called on those in all Christian denominations to join them in doing their best to practice simple Christianity holding only to things we can all agree on because they are in scripture.

In later years the quote was re-interpreted in conjunction with the Law of Silence & Exclusion to mean that everything is forbidden that is not clearly authorized in scripture. The Bible is silent and does not authorize Bible classes, missionary societies, multiple cups, and many other subjects. This was the law of silence and exclusion that was shown to be not found in scripture in chapter 12. Over the years the logical application of these man made rules has resulted in the fracturing of the restoration movement over many of these subjects.

One way to restate Mr. Campbell's quote to be clear about what God wants is as follows:

- Speak where the Bible speaks (scriptural)
- Be silent where the Bible says be silent (anti-scriptural)
- Where the Bible is silent (non-scriptural) be convinced in your own mind and allow the same for others, Romans 14:1ff

What do we do? Make absolutes where they do not exist? Scripture forbids us to make our own laws and require them of others. Do we then throw out "old hermeneutics," CENI, inference, conscience, expedience, opinion, and tradition? Not at all! There is a place for each, a proper application.

We must correctly use all of these things to help us make individual decisions - to build our personal fences of behavior. We must also use them to make decisions as a group. However, we cannot bind them on others.

SELF	OTHERS	CHURCH
CLEARLY SPOKEN Commands of God	CLEARLY SPOKEN Commands of God	CLEARLY SPOKEN Commands of God
Example	NO!	Example
Inference		Inference
Conscience		Conscience
Expedient		Expedient
Opinion		Opinion?
Tradition		Tradition?

As the body of Christ we must walk a fine line: We must allow individual freedom and conscience while at the same time making decisions about what we as a group will do in areas that are not covered by clear commands.

If someone knows something to be right and does not do it they have sinned.

James 4:17

“If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.”

If someone believes something to be sinful, even if it isn’t, and does it anyway, that is sin.

Romans 14:14

“I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.”

Romans 14:23

“But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.”

This statement is made immediately after the passage on boasting about tomorrow when we don’t even know if we’ll be alive!

We must not cause someone to commit a sin either way. Paul spoke about this when he said he would rather never eat meat than cause someone to fall away.

This subject is limited to only those who believe that something is actually a sin against God, and does not apply to anyone who just doesn’t like something or thinks it is improper, but not sin. In some cases this is simply a matter of allowing people to follow their own conscience such as with the head covering, but in other areas it can be a very difficult subject. Some beliefs are about what the group does and therefore cannot be left to the individual conscience.

What would you do if a large number of people where you worship believed it was wrong to use multiple cups?

Change Not Required

It is important to realize that even though a subject is not defined by a clear command this does not mean we are automatically going to change something. Many of the things we do are traditions or just expedient choices that are wise. Many are conclusions made from our study of scripture that we have concluded are the best way to follow God’s Word.

Although there are less scriptural restrictions than some would like, this does not mean our conclusions are wrong. The fact that there is no specific command about something, does not mean the logic & hermeneutics we used to arrive at that conclusion are wrong. It just means we cannot treat those conclusions the same as the commands of God and bind them on others. Will there be no changes whatsoever? I do not know what tomorrow may bring. I cannot promise that. Once it is established that something is a matter of opinion and not a requirement of God, than the subject can, at any time it is deemed appropriate, be revisited to evaluate if it is the best practice for a congregation. The eldership of any congregation, along with the entire congregation, should prayerfully and wisely consider what is best and this may require change at times.

Fences, Freedom, and Following Christ

As each of us continues to examine scripture, as individuals and as congregations, it is worthwhile to consider the question: Why didn't God give clear commands for many things? Is it possible the details of this item are not as important to God as they are to us? Does this change the way we should approach these subjects?

There are additional studies that would be useful after this book to apply what the Bible says with subjects that have been or are now important within some churches. Here are some suggestions:

- Bible Classes
- One Cup
- Missionary societies
- Buildings, kitchens, eating
- Lord's Supper
- Weekly contribution
- Sunday Nights
- Christmas & Easter
- Head covering
- 5 Acts of worship
- 5 steps to salvation
- Role of women/Lord's supper
- Name of the Church
- Leadership & autonomy
- End Times

Questions

1. Why can we use example, inference, conscience, expedience, opinion, and tradition, but we cannot make these things law?
2. How can we add or subtract from God's word?
3. How can a Christian sin by either commanding or forbidding the use of candles?
4. Why must we be careful when someone thinks something to be sin when we know it is not?
5. Do we need a clear command to make every decision about how we will conduct services in each congregation?
6. What subjects would be beneficial to examine using this study?
7. Why is submitting to and humbling ourselves before God the most important characteristic we need when approaching the Bible?

