

What Does the Bible Teach About Denominationalism?

**Part Three, Lesson One:
Set for the Defense of the Faith**

There Is Only One Truth

- There is a single body of truth. "The" (singular article) "faith" (singular noun) means that there is one faith authorized by God. The New Testament does not speak of many acceptable "faiths." (Eph. 4:5 - "one faith"; 2Tim. 1:13 - "the pattern of sound words"; 1Tim. 3:13 - "the faith which is in Christ Jesus")
- This one body of truth is apprehendable by all. God never gave a command beyond the ability of humankind to obey. Since God ordered the called to fight to maintain the purity of the single body of truth, it follows that they can discern the untainted faith from corrupted versions of it in order to contend for it. (Rom. 1:16-17, 10:17; Eph. 3:3-4)

There Is Only One Truth

- This one body of truth is complete. Jude wrote: "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (v 3, NKJV). All subsequent revelations in conflict with it are false doctrines. (Gal. 1:6-9)
- This one body of truth is authoritative; it was "delivered" to them. Inspired scripture came from the mind of God through the Holy Spirit to the apostles and prophets who wrote it word for word for posterity. (2Tim. 3:16-17; 2Peter 1:16-21, 3:1-2)
- This one body of truth is exacting. It was delivered to the saints with no exemptions given to anyone for anything. All Christians must acknowledge this single body of truth, understand it alike, accept it in its fullness, recognize its authority, and contend for it earnestly against all false doctrines. Professed believers and followers of Jesus Christ need to develop the strength of character and moral courage to stand for sound doctrine. There are no neutral positions in the war on apostasy. (1Cor. 16:13)

There Is Only One Truth

- There is a body of truth on any Bible matter. That body of truth is called THE (singular definitive article) faith. There is a means by which I apprehend the faith. It is called MY (personal possessive pronoun) faith. THE faith is objective, and cannot be less; MY faith is subjective, and cannot be more. THE faith is not modified by the strength or weakness of MY faith. Thus, MY faith must conform to THE faith.
- It must be understood that there is difference between my faith and my opinion. My faith is what I believe about what God has said. My opinion is what I think about what God has said. My obedience to God is motivated by my faith, and my faith is merely informed by my reasoning. Both personal faith and opinions can be mistaken; however, in terms of my salvation my faith is more critical than my opinions, as my opinions are more mutable and transient.

The Standard Of Authority

- The New Testament is how Christ speaks to us today.
 - Heb. 1:1-2 - “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.”
- The apostles’ doctrine is the standard of authority in matters of religion.
 - Acts 2:42 - “They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

Unauthorized, External, Objective Standards Of Authority

- The Old Testament / Law of Moses
 - Given because of transgression until Christ came in the flesh.
 - Gal. 3:19 - “What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made.”

Unauthorized, External, Objective Standards Of Authority

- The Old Testament / Law of Moses
 - It was a tutor designed to lead them to Christ.
 - Gal. 3:24 - “Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”
 - It was a tutor that has been taken away.
 - Gal. 3:25 - “But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”

Unauthorized, External, Objective Standards Of Authority

- The Old Testament / Law of Moses
 - When those who were under the Law came to Christ, they became dead to the Law.
 - Rom. 7:4 - “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another--to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.”
 - When those who were under the Law came to Christ, they were delivered from the Law.
 - Rom. 7:6 - “But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.”

Unauthorized, External, Objective Standards Of Authority

- The Old Testament / Law of Moses
- God made a new covenant to replace the first covenant, which is now obsolete.
 - Heb. 8:7-9, 13 - “For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. 8 Because finding fault with them, He says: ‘Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- 9 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt...’ 13 In that He says, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”

Unauthorized, External, Objective Standards Of Authority

- The Old Testament / Law of Moses
- One cannot use the O.T. / Law of Moses to teach something which the apostles did not command.
 - Acts 15:1, 6, 24 - “And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’ 6 Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. 24 ‘Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law’ --to whom we gave no such commandment.””

Unauthorized, External, Objective Standards Of Authority

- The Old Testament is valuable to Christians.
 - Rom. 15:4 - “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”
 - 1Cor. 10:6, 11 - “Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. 11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”
- However, one cannot use it to enjoin religious practices on others which the apostles themselves did not teach.

Unauthorized, External, Objective Standards Of Authority

- Majority Rule

- Jesus on majorities:

- Matt. 7:13-14 - “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

Unauthorized, External, Objective Standards Of Authority

- Majority Rule

- Joshua on minorities:

- Joshua 24:14-15 - “Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! 15 And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

Unauthorized, External, Objective Standards Of Authority

- Parents
 - Matt. 10:37 - “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

Unauthorized, External, Objective Standards Of Authority

- Preachers

- 2Cor. 11:13-15 - “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”

Unauthorized, External, Objective Standards Of Authority

■ Preachers

- Matt. 15:12-14 - “Then His disciples came and said to Him, ‘Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?’ 13 But He answered and said, ‘Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. 14 Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.’”
- Acts 17:11 - “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”

Unauthorized, External, Objective Standards Of Authority

- Creeds and traditions of men
 - Adherence to the creeds of men is what produces denominations.
 - Accept the Bible only, and one becomes a Christian only.

Unauthorized, External, Objective Standards Of Authority

- The Bible and the Book of Mormon makes Mormons.
- The Bible and Catechism makes Roman Catholics.
- The Bible and Lutheran Catechism make Lutherans.
- The Bible and Methodist Disciplines make Methodists.
- The Bible and 39 Articles of Faith make Episcopalians.
- The Bible and Westminster Confession of Faith make Presbyterians.
- The Bible and Watchtower make Jehovah's Witnesses.
- The Bible and the Baptist Manual makes Baptists.
- In every case, it is not the Bible that gives denominational identity; it is the creed.
- **The Bible alone makes Christians only.**

Unauthorized, External, Objective Standards Of Authority

- Creeds are not even necessary.
 - If they say more than what the Bible says, they say too much.
 - If they say less than what the Bible says, they say too little.
 - If they say exactly what the Bible says, then what purpose do creeds serve?

Unauthorized, External, Objective Standards Of Authority

- Creeds are filled with the traditions, doctrines, and commandments of men, which conflict and displace the commands of God.
 - Mark 7:6-9 - “He answered and said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: “This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 7 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” 8 For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men--the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do. 9 He said to them, All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.””

Unqualified, Internal, Subjective Standards Of Authority

- Conscience

- Acts 23:1 - “Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, ‘Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.’”
- Acts 26:9-11 - “Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. 11 And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”

Unqualified, Internal, Subjective Standards Of Authority

- One's conscience is like a clock, which is accurate only if set according to a correct standard. Once the conscience has been set by apostles' doctrine, it can be trusted as a good guide, but not a final authority.

Unqualified, Internal, Subjective Standards Of Authority

- Human Wisdom

- Isa. 55:8-9 - “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD. 9 ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.’”

1Cor. 1:18-21,25-29 - “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.’ 20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.”

1Cor. 2:9-12 - “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ 10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.”

Eph. 3:1-5 - “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles-- 2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.”

Unqualified, Internal, Subjective Standards Of Authority

- Feelings

- Prov. 14:12 - “There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”
- Prov. 28:26 - “He who trusts in his own heart is a fool.”
- Jer. 10:23 - “O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.”

Man needs an authorized, qualified, objective standard for authority in religion.

- One can depend only in the doctrine of Christ as given through His apostles and prophets in the New Testament.
 - They were personally selected to be Christ's ambassadors.
 - They were inspired by the Holy Spirit who guided them in all truth.
 - They were inspired to write all Christ would have us to know and to do.

The Only Authorized, Qualified, Objective Source Of Religious Authority: The New Testament

- One must not change its message.
 - Gal. 1:8-9 - “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”

The Only Authorized, Qualified, Objective Source Of Religious Authority: The New Testament

- One must not add to or take away from it.
 - Deut. 4:2 - “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it...”
 - Prov. 30:5-6 - “...Do not add to His words...”
 - Rev. 22:18-19 - “...If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life...”

The Only Authorized, Qualified, Objective Source Of Religious Authority: The New Testament

- One must abide in the doctrine of Christ.
 - 2John 9 - “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.”

The Only Authorized, Qualified, Objective Source Of Religious Authority: The New Testament

- It is fundamental to the faith to hold to the proper views about Christ.
 - 2John 7 - “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”
- It is fundamental to the faith to obey the commandments of Christ.
 - 1John 3:24 - “Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him.”

The Only Authorized, Qualified, Objective Source Of Religious Authority: The New Testament

- One must not allow traditions of men to trump commands of God.
 - Mark 7:5-13 - "...In vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men..."

The Only Authorized, Qualified, Objective Source Of Religious Authority: The New Testament

- Evaluate ones' own religious practices:
 - Are they based on traditions of men or commandments of God?
 - If it is a tradition of men, does keeping it render the commands of God of no effect?
 - By keeping the man-made tradition of sprinkling for baptism, one renders the command of God for immersion (baptizo) of no effect.
 - Is the tradition based on expediency? Then there is no point in changing it unless it ceases to be expedient.

The Only Authorized, Qualified, Objective Source Of Religious Authority: The New Testament

- One must not abuse liberty in Christ.
 - In Christ is wonderful freedom, but one must be careful in using it - Gal. 5:1, 13
 - One must be considerate of his brother's conscience - Rom. 14:14 - 15:3.
 - One should be willing to forego his liberty rather than let it destroy a brother - 1Cor. 8:9-13.
 - Not only ask "Is it lawful," but also "Does it edify?" - 1Cor. 10:23-24, 31-33

The Only Authorized, Qualified, Objective Source Of Religious Authority: The New Testament

- One may not rule over his stronger brethren with his weak conscience.
 - He may not require another to practice his scruple
 - He may not judge another who does not practice his scruple
 - He may not bind his scruple as a test of fellowship. Romans 14 governs the weaker brother, too.
 - He is expected to grow in faith and understanding by objectively listening to stronger brethren as they teach about liberty.

Agreeing On The Same Standard Will Not Guarantee Unity

- Challenges
- Which commands are binding today?
 - Some commands are limited in application (local, cultural, problem specific, time linked, and individual specific).
 - Determine whether a command is limited or universal in application.
- Which approved examples are for the church today?
 - Much of what is learned about the church relative to its work and organization is by example, not precept.
 - Is the example a binding principle that must be observed universally?

Agreeing On The Same Standard Will Not Guarantee Unity

- Challenges
- When are Divine implications really necessary implications?
 - People often infer things from the Bible and call their conclusions necessary implications.
 - But it may only be a possible implication, not necessarily inferred.
- Is a practice and expediency or an addition?
 - Whose judgment determines expediency? Should it be practiced after it ceases to be expedient? Should a local church forgo an expediency to ease the conscience of a few weak brethren?
 - What about obstinate brethren?

Agreeing On The Same Standard Will Not Guarantee Unity

“As Christians seek for unity and harmony, they will need more than just the same standard of authority. Barton W. Stone, an effective promoter of Christian unity through the written word of God in the early 1800's, wrote an article entitled “Christian Union” published in *The Christian Messenger* (1828): “On no other foundation can the parties ever meet, than on the Bible alone, without note or comment; and in no other name will they ever unite, but in that given to the disciples at Antioch--CHRISTIAN. But should all the professors of Christianity reject all their various creeds and names, and agree to receive the Bible alone, and be called by no other name than Christian, will this unite them? No, we are fully convinced that unless they all possess the spirit of that book and name they are far, very far, from Christian union.” (As quoted by J. M. Powell, *The Cause We Plead: A Story Of The Restoration Movement*, 20th Century Christian, 1987, p. 56)

