

How can we know what is binding?

When it comes to figuring out what authorizes us to do things from Scripture, we must first realize that nothing is authorized or binding based on our likes and dislikes or what is popular. It is not based on man's traditions or our ability to determine if the thing we are doing will cause harm or not. Just because something has been done forever by man does not mean that it is acceptable to God.

The silence of Scripture does not authorize anything either. For example, nothing is said about counting beads as part of our worship to God, but this does not mean that we are authorized to use them. If we say that the silence of Scriptures authorize us do those things that are not specifically mentioned, then not only would counting beads be authorized, so would anything not specifically mentioned in Scripture. I do not know of anyone who would be willing to make such a broad statement that all things not specifically mentioned are authorized to use.

Since all things not specifically mentioned in Scripture do not authorize us to do them, then this means that we cannot and should not use the silence of Scripture to add things to what God has authorized in His Word.

I am going to assume you agree that we can know the truth and have a faith that is pleasing to God. The following Scriptures bear this out:

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him
Romans 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Everything we need to know about being pleasing to God comes from the Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). God's Word is understandable and we can know the truth (Jn. 8:32; 20:30-31; Eph. 3:3-4; 1 Jn. 5:13). If we cannot understand the truth, then we cannot have a faith that is pleasing to God, which would mean that God has set us up to fail and has made it impossible for us to ever really know if we are doing what He wants us to.

If we cannot know what pleases God, then Paul was delusional when he stated with confidence that heaven would be his home (2 Tim. 4:7-8). How could it be fair to be judged by the Word of God if we cannot know for sure what God approves of (Jn. 12:48)? How can we do everything in word and deed by the authority of Jesus (Col. 3:17) if we cannot know for sure what is authorized? All of these thoughts show that we can know the truth from God's Word, and we can know if something is right or wrong. We can all have the same confidence that Paul did.

While there is much for us to learn from the Old Testament (Rom. 15:4), it is not our authority because the new covenant is (Eph. 2:14-15; Col. 2:14). So, as we strive to please God and do those things that are authorized, we can know that we must look to the New Testament for our authorization. However, we must use wisdom to discern what applies to us and what does not. Some may think that all commands apply to us today, but there are plenty of commands in the Bible that do not apply to us. For example:

Genesis 2:16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

This was a command, but it was to Adam and does not apply to us today. Many more commands could be given from the Old Testament, such as how the Jews were supposed to keep the Sabbath and to make three trips to Jerusalem every year to keep different feasts such as the Passover, but none of these are commands for us.

However, we can certainly learn from the principles which are taught in the Old Testament about what God expects from His people when He commands something, which shows repeatedly that man is supposed to follow God's instructions without moving to the left or to the right (Josh.1:7). When man added something or took away from God's commands, we read over and over again how man would face the consequences because God meant what He said (Lev. 26:14ff).

When you read the New Testament, you will see many references to the Old Testament that emphasizes what we are supposed to do. We are taught to learn from the mistakes and from the good things that God's people did in the Old Testament. For example, we are given multiple Old Testament examples in Hebrew 11 about what kind of faith we are to have. So, there is much for us to learn from the Old Testament even though it is not our authority.

Now you might think that every command in the New Testament applies to us today, but this is not true because there are commands and examples that only applied to the first century Christians. For example:

1 Corinthians 14:39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.

Now I know that some folks in the religious world will disagree with what I am about to say, but Scripture plainly teaches that the miraculous ended in the first century because it was temporary in nature and was used to confirm the Word (Mk. 16:20). Once the Word was confirmed, there was no need for the miraculous gifts (1 Cor. 13:8-10; Eph. 4:8-13). Other than the two recorded events of the Holy Spirit being poured out directly on the apostles and then on Cornelius's household (Acts 2, 10), which was done for a specific purpose, the only way that Christians could receive the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit was through the hands of the apostles (Acts 8:13-17; Rom. 1:11). Since there are no more apostles living, there are no more miraculous gifts.

More could be said about this, but I am going to assume you agree with this. Since it is the case that miraculous gifts were limited to the first century, it becomes quite clear that 1 Cor. 14:39 was a command that only applied to them and not to us since it is not possible for us to have miraculous gifts.

I have even heard some argue that nothing really applies to us today because the commands that were written were written either to the apostles or to those living when the letters were penned. Of course, this would mean that the New Testament is not relevant to us today if this were true. Not only would the commands and examples have no meaning for us, neither would the promise

of heaven. However, we know that the Word of God is relevant and does apply to us today. In fact, the Word of God is supposed to be passed down from generation to generation. As Paul told Timothy:

2 Timothy 2:2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Now let's apply our logic to the Great Commission.

Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Mark 16:15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

Who was Jesus telling these things to? Well, if we back up and look at the previous verses, we will find that Jesus is speaking directly to the 11 apostles because Judas was dead. If we take the view of some, we could say that the Great Commission has nothing to do with us because Jesus did not give that command to us directly. However, this is not true and shows why inferences in Scripture are binding.

So, there is no confusion, let me explain what an inference is. It means that you are drawing a logical conclusion based on the information in front of you. For example, if I go outside and see the water is frozen solid in my dog's bowl, then I can infer that the temperature outside had to be below 32 degrees for several hours in order to freeze the water.

Sometimes people will use the term necessary inference, but this is really a redundant term because if something is truly an inference, then it is already necessary. If the inference is not necessary, then it is just an assumption. For example, some have assumed that since Acts 16:15 says that Lydia and her household was baptized that she was married and had children and some of those children might have been infants. Therefore, infant baptism is authorized. However, nothing in that text can be used to prove who made up Lydia's household, so any conclusion made about her household would be an assumption and not an inference.

Now when we consider our text in the Great Commission, we can see that the while this command was initially given to the apostles, we also see that they were to teach those who became Christians to observe all the things Jesus has commanded them, which would include carrying out the Great commission. So, every Christian is to do his or her part to convert the lost to Christ. This also shows how the New Testament is just as relevant to us today as it was with those in the first century.

Just to make sure you fully understand how an inference can be used to determine when something is binding, consider the following example from Wayne Jackson:

Since the New Testament teaches that valid baptism requires both belief and repentance (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38), and inasmuch as babies cannot believe, nor do they need to repent (seeing they have no sin), it follows *necessarily* that infants are not amenable to baptism. The logical use of necessary inference eliminates the sectarian practice of “infant baptism.” (<https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/609-what-is-a-necessary-inference>)

So far, I have shown how a command can be binding or not binding. I have also shown how an inference can be binding. Just as some commands are not binding, neither are all inferences binding. We have to determine if an inference is binding in the same manner that I describe on how to figure out if a command is binding.

Now, some will say that only commands authorize, which means that grammatically there better be an imperative mood within the verse. Now do not let the term imperative mood confuse you, it simply expresses that a word is a command in the Greek. For example, in the Great Commission “make disciples” is in the imperative mood, which means we are commanded to make disciples.

However, there are also declarative statements within Scripture, which are words that are found in the indicative mood. All this means is that the verse is not commanding something, but it is making a statement about something. The best way to show you what I am talking about is to give you an example.

Mark 16:16 "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

We are all familiar with this verse, but it is not a command, and none of the words in this verse are in the imperative mood, but you do not even need to know the Greek to see this because it is obviously making a statement. It states that if a person believes and is baptized, he will be saved.

Now if we say that only commands authorize or bind something, then this verse cannot be used to prove that a person must believe or be baptized to be saved, but that would be a silly thing to teach because it is quite clear from this declaration that one must believe and be baptized to be saved. So, this shows that one does not have to have a command for something to be binding.

The New Testament is full of declarations, but let’s look at one more:

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Once again, there are no imperatives in this verse because it is not a command, but a declaration. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life and no one can come to the Father except through Him. Since this is a true statement, we can say with confidence that the only way anyone can come to the Father is through Jesus. This is binding on everyone because there is no other way to gain access to the Father.

So, I have proven that commands, declaratives, and even inferences can be binding to us today, but we must examine the context to determine if they apply to us.

Even questions in the New Testament can be used to bind or authorize something. For example, notice what we read in:

1 Corinthians 1:10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. ¹¹ For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's *household*, that there are contentions among you. ¹² Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

This is a powerful text that teaches against division and having groups of people calling themselves after men, which we call denominations. For the purpose of this study, I want you to focus on verse 13, where Paul asked some important questions to show that division was wrong and that following after another man was wrong because Jesus is the one who was crucified for us. When Paul asked, Is Christ divided? He was not waiting for an answer to a question he did not know the answer to. No, he was making the point that Christ is not divided. The remaining two questions are the same. Paul was not crucified for you, Jesus was, and you certainly were not baptized in the name of Paul, but you were baptized in the name of Jesus.

So questions like these also bind or authorize things as well. These questions make it clear that Jesus died for us and that we are to be baptized in His name. It also teaches that we must not divide ourselves into denominations and call ourselves after other men's names because Jesus is the one we should follow.

Even conditional statements can be binding on us today. A good example of this is Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus.

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

We should all be familiar with this famous text. Jesus sets up the condition. Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom. Of course, Nicodemus was confused and he asked his question, but Jesus answered again with a conditional statement. He said unless one is born of water and spirit, which is referring to water baptism, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. While it is true that we could go to Acts 2:38 and show that baptism is commanded, this conditional statement Jesus makes stands on its own and shows that one must be water baptized to be saved.

Examples in the New Testament can also be binding and they authorize certain actions. We are told to follow Jesus' example in:

1 Peter 2:21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

Paul wrote:

Philippians 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

1 Corinthians 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Again, we have to consider the context, when it comes to examples. For instance, if we tried to follow the example of the apostles and early Christians prior to Acts 10, then we would leave the Gentiles out of the picture. In fact, that would leave most of us out the picture because for the first 8 to 10 years from Pentecost, the Jews were the main focus of the gospel despite it being stated that the gospel was for all in Acts 2:39. It took a vision from God to prove to Peter that God's plan of salvation was for everyone, so he went to Cornelius's household and proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles. This opened the door from that point forward making the gospel available for everyone.

We also cannot follow the example of those using miraculous gifts, as I discussed earlier. So, we have to see if an example is relevant to us.

While an example can be used to authorize or bind something it does not exclude. Let me give you several examples to make this clearer. In the Great commission, the apostles and all disciples are to go into the world. We have an example of the apostles going by land, which means they either walked or possibly went by horse. We also see them traveling by boat. These are certainly ways that we go into the world, but these examples do not limit us to traveling in only those ways because we can go by plane, car, or even by using the internet. The whole point is to go.

Notice our next text:

2 Corinthians 9:7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

The fact that we are to give what we purpose in our hearts teaches against tithing, which as an Old Testament practice, but notice a few examples of how some gave.

Notice what Paul says about the Macedonians.

2 Corinthians 8:3 For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they were* freely willing, ⁴ imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

Notice what some did early on at the beginning of the church:

Acts 4:34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵ and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

These examples show us that if a Christian or an entire church wants to give beyond their ability, then they can do it. If one wants to sell his land and his house for the cause of Christ, he can, but these examples do not mean that we are obligated to do these things because we are to give what we purpose in our hearts. So, it is entirely up to you to give what you want, but as Paul said:

2 Corinthians 9:6 But this *I say*: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

The last example I want to look at has to do with the Lord's Supper. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper on a Thursday during the Passover. Here is what Jesus said:

Matthew 26:26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." ²⁷ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. ²⁹ "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

Jesus is commanding His disciples to partake the unleavened bread and the wine in remembrance of His body and His blood. The fact, that He commanded the bread and the wine excludes us from substituting anything in place of the bread and wine or adding to it. In fact, we could say that the bread and wine are the only items needed to fulfill the command that Jesus has made, but the question becomes, when did His disciples partake of the Lord's Supper? The answer is:

Acts 20:6 But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days. ⁷ Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. ⁸ There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together.

This is the only example we have that specifically states when the first century Christians came together to partake of the Lord's Supper. So, should this one example bind us to partaking the Lord's Supper on Sunday only, or have we bound something that should not be bound? The answer is, yes. One example is enough to show that Sunday is the day that we are to partake of the Lord's Supper, and no other day is authorized in Scripture.

However, this example does not bind us to partake of the Lord's Supper in an upper room, in the evening, or where there are many lamps. No, the focus is on the day that the Lord's Supper was taken and not where. Also, the focus is on the bread and the wine and not whether we drink it out of one literal cup or break one literal piece of bread.

Since there are many today, especially in denominations, who do not think the Lord's Supper has to be taken every week, let's dig in a little bit deeper to show why this example is binding. Even though Paul was in a hurry to make his way back to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost (Acts 20:16), he and his men waited for 7 days at Troas. Why did they wait? Were they just resting up, or maybe a ship would not be ready until then? While it is possible there may have been things that could have delayed their departure, it is also possible that Paul wanted to wait so he could meet with the Christians at Troas when they gathered on the first day of the week to break bread. Even if someone wanted to say that Paul only stayed due to other things, it still would not change the fact that the church at Troas broke bread on the first day of the week.

One reason we can know that break bread in our verse refers to the Lord's Supper, is because this is the main reason they came together, which emphasize the importance of it, which would not have been done for a common meal.

If there was nothing special about the first day of the week, then Paul could have certainly met with the church at Troas on any other day, but he did not because the first day of the week was important.

I want you to consider the church at Corinth. It is true that they were not partaking of the Lord's Supper as they were supposed to as Paul points out in 1 Cor. 11:17. But notice verse:

1 Corinthians 11:18 For first of all, when you come together as a church,

This teaches that the church of Corinth would come together as a church. One of the things they would do was partake of the Lord's Supper, but as you continue reading, we see Paul rebuking them for changing the Lord's Supper into something it was not, and he tells them how to do it and what its purpose is.

The question becomes, can we discover when they came together to partake of the Lord's Supper? Yes, we can by noticing what Paul says a few chapters later.

1 Corinthians 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: ² On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

Paul is telling the Corinthians and the churches of Galatia to give of their means on the first day of every week. The Greek behind this text clearly shows that we are talking about every first day of the week. This tells us that the Corinthians were coming together as a church with their money they had set aside on the first day of every week, which infers this is also when they came together to break bread just as the church at Troas did.

It makes perfect sense that Sunday is the day that giving and partaking of the Lord's Supper would happen because Sunday is the day that Jesus was raised from the dead (Mt. 28:1), we also see the disciples being together and Jesus appearing to them after His death on the first day of the week (Jn. 20:19, 26). The church was established on a Sunday (Acts 2:1). The term "the Lord's

day” as used in Rev. 1:10 was used in reference to Sunday as can be seen in this 1st or 2nd century writing:

Didache 14:1 But every Lord's day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread,

Also, Pliny the younger writing around 112 A.D. wrote a letter to the Emperor Tragan telling him information he extracted from Christians by torture. “They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light when they **sang an anthem to Christ as God**, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to commit any wicked deeds.”

Justin Martyr (100 – 165 AD) wrote: **But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead.** <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.viii.ii.lxvii.html>

Also, within that same text, Justin talks about how partook of the Lord’s Supper on that day. Though history written by man is not inspired, there is no early historical evidence from the first or second century that Christians partook of the Lord’s Supper on any other day than the Lord’s Day, which is Sunday.

When we consider the evidence behind our one example in Acts 20:7, It becomes clear that the church at Troas was not some lone church who decided to meet and partake of the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week, but that it shows that all churches are authorized and bound to partake of it on the first day of every week. Since, no other day is authorized, we should not partake of it on any other day. Just as a quick reminder, our example does not bind the time of day on Sunday that we partake of it, nor does it bind a specific location because Jesus taught that we can worship God in any place (Jn. 4:21). Again, the emphasis is on the day we partake and not where or when on that day.

While much more could be said about how we determine what is binding to us today, I hope this lesson has answered this question at least in part. I hope you have learned that while commands, inferences, declarations, questions, conditional statements, and examples can be binding on us today, there are also some that do not bind because they do not apply to us. The best thing we can do is to determine what is being emphasized and to study the context closely to see if the text applies to us or not. Finally, we should never use the silence of Scripture to authorize anything, instead we should always use what the Scriptures teach to determine if a thing is binding or not.

I found the following two books helpful in preparing this lesson:
When is an “example” binding? Thomas B. Warren
Ascertaining Bible Authority Roy C. Deaver