

*Institutionalism --- Then and Now (2)*  
*Views of How We Should Regard the Bible*  
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**Introduction:** There is no issue more fundamental than how we view the Bible.

- A. Those who have studied church history or even worked to bring others to become Christians can see the different fruits produced by different attitudes men have toward the word of God.
  - 1. Those who have the confidence in His word will see God's fruit in their lives. **(1 Thess 2:13)**
  - 2. Those who have another mind will not be influenced by the word of God in a way to know and do God's will.
- B. Sadly there has been a difference between what some Christians confess and what they actually believe.
  - 1. I often hear the change agents speak of unwritten creeds. Indeed there are cases where brethren have done so. These men will close their Bibles!
  - 2. For years I have seen other Christians have an "unwritten creed" in how they view the Bible. While claiming the Bible is sufficient for all matters of faith, they in reality believe something else.
- C. There is no greater challenge to our generation than to know the power of God's word. **(Rom 1:16)**
  - 1. Each generation is like a relay race, it only takes one to drop the baton and end the race.
  - 2. If our generation drops the baton, it will be to our own destruction, but God's work will continue! **(Esther 4:14)**
  - 3. We must be true to God and thus our generation. **(Psa 73:15)**
  - 4. Whether we remain the church of the Lord or have our "lampstand" removed will hinge on the issues presented in our study today. **(Rev 2:8)**
- B. How do we view the Bible?
  - 1. Almost all religious division has this question at its heart!
  - 2. We must understand the revelation of God is essential to the completion of God's plan of redemption. **(John 16:12-15)**
  - 3. Sadly a large number of brethren within "Institutionalism" are strongly pushing to discard the view of the scriptures as authoritative for every religious practice. What does the Bible teach?

***I. How should we view the Bible?***

**A. As a product of a perfect God.**

- 1. God's power and wisdom is infinite. **(Psalms 139)**
- 2. Anything that God provides man is sufficient for the task it is intended!
  - a. A sufficient creation. **(Gen 1:31)**
  - b. A sufficient law. **(Rom 7:12; Heb 8:6-8; Gal 3:19, 24-25)**
  - c. A sufficient Saviour. **(Heb 7:25)**

**B. As a complete revelation of the will of God.**

1. Notice how often “all” is used to describe the scope of God’s written revelation. It is a perfect revelation.

- a. **John 14:26** - “all things”.
- b. **John 16:13** - “all truth”.
- c. **John 17:6-8** - “all things”.
- d. **Jude 3** - “once for all delivered”.
- e. **2 Peter 1:2-4** - “all things that pertain to life and godliness”.
- f. **James 1:25** - “the perfect law of liberty”.

2. The real test between what we say and what we really believe is: “Are we willing to believe all good works are found in the scriptures?”  
(**2 Tim 3:16-17**) - “thoroughly equipped for every good work”.

**C. As a revelation that must be respected.**

1. The attitude one has toward Christ is shown by the attitude towards God’s word. (**Jn 12:48**)
2. The strongest condemnation I know of in the scriptures is directed towards those who disregard God’s word by changing or substituting what God has revealed. (**Gal 1:6-9; 2 Jn 9-11; Rev 22:18-19**)

**II. Views of brethren --- Then and Now**

A. In the 50’s and 60’s these things were universally preached by brethren. However I believe there were serious inconsistencies in their application. Today the basic principles are being challenged.

B. The real test of where a brother stands on the above points is to hear their view of “how the bible is complete”!

1. “While the Bible is inspired, **it is not all we need** to know God’s will.”  
(Ex. The Holy Spirit must directly guide us)
2. “The Bible is our guide only as it specifically commands or prohibits things. **Where the Bible is silent we are free to act**, with the only limit being our conscience.”
3. “The Bible is a complete and sufficient guide. **We must have Bible authority, i.e. Book, Chapter and Verse, for all that we do.**”

**C. The Bible is a revelation whose silence must not be assumed upon.**

1. What does perfect mean? What does “every good work” mean? If the silence of the Bible means that we can do what we think, then I do not know of a single doctrine of the Bible that is not compromised and made meaningless.
2. God showed in the Old Testament that the silence of the scriptures is restrictive! (**Lev 10:1-2**)
3. The New Testament recognizes this point and expects men to have the same view. (**Heb 7:12-14; 2 Jn 9-11**)
  - a. When men say “there is no God-given way to read the Bible (Hermeneutics)” they are wrong!
  - b. Maybe Nadab and Abihu have an argument at the judgment!
4. From a positive standpoint we can understand the proper view of the silence of

the scriptures. (1 Pt 4:11; Col 3:17)

- D. There are some fundamental conclusions that every Christian must draw.
1. We must know if a teaching or practice is **authorized by God's word!**
  2. Every Christian must be willing to give "Book, Chapter, and Verse" for any practice or teaching they engage in. (Col. 3:17).
  3. We must never be offended if another asks us to give scripture for what we do (I Peter 3:15)!

### III. How to Establish Authority

- A. What are the principles involved in understanding how the scriptures teach us anything? In other words how does the language of the scriptures teach us?
1. We actually will be studying common principles of communication in any language, but will in this study be specific to the scriptures.
  2. If these principles are rejected, then our basic understanding of language and logic would fail, too.
  3. I am greatly amazed when I hear those say: "'command, example, and inference' is a 'Church of Christ' tradition. I only believe in commands!" What are they really saying? They are in essence denying that God has revealed His complete message by written language.
- B. Authority may be established by **direct command**.
1. Acts 2:38 - Here is the command to be baptized.
  2. 1 Cor 11:24-25 - The Lord's supper is commanded.
- C. Authority may be established by **approved example**.
1. Acts 15:7-9 - God by example showed that the Gentiles can become Christians.
  2. Acts 20:7 - The day of the Lord's supper is shown this way.
- D. Authority may be established by **inescapable conclusion**.
1. Mark 12:24-27 - Jesus expected others to use this reasoning.
  2. Jesus by example and statement expects all men to draw conclusions!
- E. General and Specific Authority.
1. **General authority** involves all things **essential** to fulfilling a thing authorized. In other words when the Bible tells us to do something, then the things **required** to do that thing are included.
    - a. In order for a thing to be included under general authority, you must have a verse from which the authority is based.
    - b. Things that may be allowed under the principle of general authority may not go against other teachings of the scripture. For example, the command to "go preach" does not allow me to steal someone's car (Eph 4:28)!
    - c. The law of expediency limits general authority as well. (1Cor 6:12;10:23).
  2. **Specific authority** exists when a thing is specified among several possible choices. In this case only the thing stated is authorized among the possible choices.

- a. God specified gopher wood for the ark. This eliminated other kinds of wood. (**Gen 6:14**)
- b. God specified that men are to be elders. This eliminates women from the position of leadership. (**1 Tim 3:2**)

#### **IV. New Teachings by “Institutional” Brethren**

A. The primary book I will examine is called: “**The Church in Transition**” by **James S. Woodroof**. Another book we will examine is called “**Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees**” by **David Chadwell**. There are several other books advocating the same things widely circulated among brethren.

- 1. Do these men accurately teach the truth? If so, let us repent and stand with them.
- 2. If these teachings are in error, then let us expose them.
- 3. In time these teachings **will confront us!** One of these books has been widely used by churches in the area.
- 4. Consider the numerous errors advocated in these books.
- 5. Consider the following views:

#### **B. “We do not need Bible authority.”**

- 1. *“The basic premise of the movement has been that all doctrines and spiritual practices bound on believers must be based on scriptural authority. For many years it was said that scripture expresses its authority in three forms: a commandment, an example, or a necessary inference...With deeper study, it became apparent that those perceptions of scriptural authority were flawed.”* Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees **p. 99**
- 2. *“Since there is no New Testament reference to the use of the invitation songs, how can that practice be one of scriptural authority?”* Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees **p. 101**
  - a. This is a jump in reasoning. Just because we do not **have specific authority** does not mean we have **no authority!**
  - b. Sadly this book is used by liberal brethren and widely circulated among brethren. Can you see the false reasoning?
- 3. Again, the concept of using command, example and inference is fundamental to all language!
  - a. A former elder once told me “I no longer believe in examples and inferences.” He is now in liberalism.
  - b. We are drifting from these fundamentals. This is the true cause of division.

#### **C. “Since we must use reason we cannot press our conclusions.”**

- 1. What doctrine in the Bible is not based on a conclusion? (**Jn 5:39;7:17**)
- 2. “Yet human reasoning sanctions divisions among New Testament Christians. That reasoning declares (1) Congregational autonomy is sacred and must be preserved. (2) Leadership must be confined to a single congregation. (3) A congregation is a group of Christians

meeting in the same building. (4) The autonomy of that group must be preserved regardless of the cost. The conclusion: if division results from preserving autonomy, then division is right in the will of God."

Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees **p. 104**

3. This position often is taken to draw further conclusions about "unity".
  - a. *"That which destroys unity in a congregation or among congregations violates the Lord's priority concerns for His people"* Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees **p. 103-104**
  - b. What does this mean? Do we close our Bibles in the name of "unity"?
  - c. Standing upon the word of God **will produce division** from those who will not listen to God. (**I Cor. 11:19; I Jn. 2:19, 4:6**)
4. This position is a false teacher's dream!(**II Cor. 11:1-4; II Jn. 9**)
  - a. In the name of "open-mindedness" we refuse sound doctrine.
  - b. True Christians work out their problems. (**I Cor 1:10**)
  - c. A good question to ask these brethren is how the early church could identify and deal with false teachers? Also, are there any false teachers today? How would you know without reason?
5. Some try this defense to keep others from "pressing conclusions":  
"Do you have perfect knowledge?"  
**Answer:** "No, but I do know some things!"

### **C. Human needs come before the law of God.**

1. Some claim David did this. (**Matt. 12:1-7**) - but David was blameless.
2. (**Matt. 12:11-12**) - There is a time to take care of the "ox in the ditch".
  - a. These verses do not meet the issue. Brethren wish **to push the ox in the ditch and keep it there!**
  - b. Far too many think an "exception" eliminates the rule!
3. *"To build religious practices which ignore revealed divine priorities is to participate in the Pharisee's hypocrisy."* Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees **p. 104**
4. (**Rom. 3:8; Jas. 4:11-12**) - Man's situation ethics are no substitute for God's law.
5. The pride of these men is seen here. They view themselves as being so spiritual that they just know what God wants without testing it by the word of God.  
(Example: How to justify "Homosexuality")

### **V. Fruits of This Position**

(Consider the following quotes from: "The Church in Transition" by James S. Woodroof. I have added the boldface type for emphasis. LWR)

- A. **"The only things necessary for salvation are the steps to becoming a Christian."**
  1. The response provided by this Christ-centered message in the non-Jewish believers was baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. **The transaction was complete; nothing further was required for**

**their salvation.** These people, though different in externals from their Jewish brothers, were now full-fledged members of the same family; with identical access to the Father through the Spirit (Eph. 2:18).....

But there is a sad note. There was a segment of the Jewish Christians which could never accept this universal mandate. They felt betrayed, their distinctiveness compromised, the traditions of their fathers abandoned.... There is a sadder note: Those Judaizing Christians were not the last to resist the transition inherent in the spread of Christianity. **There have been believers in every generation, especially among restorationists, who so revered their own traditions that they felt justified in excluding all other believers who did not totally share their beliefs.** This is purely and simply sectarianism, and all who practice such exclusive theology are guilty of fragmenting the body of Christ. We see clearly that the Judaisers were wrong; we do not see so clearly that, if we do the same thing, we also are equally wrong. It matters not what the amendments are which we would add to the basic message, nor how pure the motives of those who would do the amending. Those who add requirements beyond the fundamental message of God are preaching "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6-9). All who do so are fragmenting the body of Christ in this 20th century as certainly as those who did it in the 1st century .

**All who want to transmit the good news of God's salvation to a lost world are forced to answer one unsettling question in regard to what is required to "stand approved before God." And that question is: Once we have preached God's message (the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, his identity as Savior and Judge, his ministry, death and resurrection), and called on all who believe in him to be baptized in his name and receive his Spirit as a gift, will we let that be enough? Or will we insist on tacking on additional requirements which others must meet in order to stand right before God?"**

*THE CHURCH IN TRANSITION, PP. 108-110*

2. If our brother is right, then how can we harmonize the following verses? (**Gal 5:19-21; 1 Cor 11:17-34; 1 Cor 14:33-37.....**)
3. Based on the above position taken by brother Woodroof , which denominational churches would stand approved before God? What denominational doctrines would be allowed to pass unopposed?

**B. "All matters outside of Conversion are placed under Romans 14."**

1. Paul closes chapter 14 with the sobering reminder that any action which does not issue from personal conviction or faith is sin. He insists that no one should act on someone else's conviction at the expense of his own; to do so is to violate one's own conscience and thus sin. He hereby guarantees the place of diversity in the kingdom by protecting the right of the less liberated brother (or congregation) to hold differing opinions or convictions from the more liberated.

But the very fact that Paul distinguishes between the two in the church in Rome acknowledges the presence of both in the kingdom. No one has to be like everyone else (or anyone else) in order to be acceptable to Christ and to be a rightful part of the church. Weak and strong Christian, conservative and liberal brother are all guaranteed a safe place in the kingdom of God. Let us not impose our own check-list of orthodoxy that would restrict that freedom or deny that guarantee....

**He drew a circle to keep me out:  
heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But love and I had the wit to win.  
We drew a circle and took him in.”**

*THE CHURCH IN TRANSITION, P. 128*

2. What kind of subjects are the focus of this chapter according to **Rom 14:14-20**?
3. What is the mistake of the brother who adds subjects covered by **Gal 5:19-21** to the principles of Romans 14?

C. **“The Silence of the scriptures do not limit our actions in any way.”**

1. "A DREAM OF JUDGMENT"  
For **silence surely doth forbid!**  
**In silence Thy commands are hid.**" my servant wrote,"  
said Christ to me, "For freedom Christ has set us free.  
Be not ensnared in bondage yoke  
Which we as well our fathers broke.  
But **you have stood right in the way**  
**Of righteous men;** you've stood to say,  
"Touch not, taste not, and handle not.  
And by your laws have brought to nought Good works;  
and men that would be saved **Are lost still,**  
for they did not have The gospel preached to them,  
because **You made men tarry for your cause.**  
"Oh! Hellish cause, that makes men think  
The dipper's more concern than drink;  
That leaves men dying in their thirst  
While what is **least** is put as **first.**  
What matters if by plastic cup,  
Or dipper, bucket, glass, teacup?  
When men are thirsty men demand  
To drink by any means at hand.  
Why put you words into My mouth  
In places where I did not bid?  
For **silence neither gives consent,**  
**Nor yet does silence e'er forbid.”**

*THE CHURCH IN TRANSITION, P. 187*

2. Does following the instructions of **Col 3:17** leave men “dying in thirst”?  
Where is our brother’s evidence?
3. May we “do evil that good may come”? (**Rom 3:8**)
4. There are many “assumptions” in this poem. In essence, if the church has

problems then it must be a product of a belief in “patterns”. Does this poem speak for God? Where has He thus spoke?

**D. They make appeal to one’s subjective desire for escape from conflict as evidence that division comes from a careful following of God’s word.**

1. Notice the questions asked and their emphasis.(Bold added LWR)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you agree or disagree that we (in Churches of Christ) are **"a people of the Book"**?
2. How has this "people of the Book" trait manifested itself in **your experience** with the church?
3. Does the **division and fragmentation** in the Church of Christ **disturb you**?
4. If not, why does it not?
5. If it does **disturb you**, explain why it does.
6. Do you feel a **longing** for a biblical base upon which you **can accept others who differ from you**?
7. Do you, **regardless of the presence of a biblical base, presently possess a personal, subjective desire to accept others who differ from you**? Can you explain why?
8. Do you agree or disagree that the younger generation (35 and younger) **"are not interested in maintaining the denominational differences which have divided us in the past?"**
9. Do you agree or disagree that the younger generation shares with the older generation a solid respect for the Bible?
10. Have you read any of the magazines or books mentioned in this chapter?
11. Have you attended any of the **unity meetings**?
12. Have you ever been involved in dialogue with others who are not members of the Church of Christ?
13. Do you agree or disagree that the **underlying cause of our divisiveness is attitudinal**? Why do you say this?
14. Do you agree or disagree that, in years past, **we have been more interested in debate than in dialogue**? Is this good or bad?

*THE CHURCH IN TRANSITION, P. 24*

2. Should we base our study and application on what **we** desire or what **God** desires? (**Gal 1:10**)

3. Do our subjective desires make a sound foundation from which to make decisions? (**Prov 14:12; Jer 10:23; Acts 26:9**)

**E. “Preaching concerning the “One True Church” is false teaching.”**

1. We were really naive. Years later, after we returned to the States, a sister in Christ said, "Oh, brother Woodroof, what faith you had to go all that distance to live and preach the gospel." I replied, **"No Ma'am; it was sheer ignorance. If I ever go back it will be by faith! "**  
Of course, we had convictions and good intentions. I remember the first piece of printed material we prepared and placed in mail boxes in that part of the city. **It was entitled "The True Church." It had enough Bible references (no scriptures, mind you —just references) to**

**drown the most eager Bible student.** I would venture to say not one recipient read that piece. Eventually we learned to letter-box nothing that could not be read between the mail box and the wastebasket.

**"The True Church" pamphlet was just the first of several such efforts indicating that, when it came right down to it, we did not know the message we should be preaching. We knew a lot of true things, but we didn't know the message.** We knew a lot of interesting things, but not the ultimate message that melts the heart and brings sinful man back to God. **The realization that we had gone 10,000 miles to preach the good news but did not know the message was the most rude awakening I ever had."**

*THE CHURCH IN TRANSITION, PP. 24-25*

2. What is the "one true church"? (**Eph 4:4-6; 1:22-23**)
3. Does the good news of Christ include the message of his Lordship? (**Lk 6:46**)
4. There are some brethren who have gone so far as to pass out tracts that indicate belief in "the one true church" is a mark of a cult!

**Conclusion:** Each one of us must apply and stand on God's word. (**Acts 17:11**)

- A. We must return to being a people of the book (**2 Tim 3:15; Matt 28:19**).
- B. We need to learn to solve our problems on the basis of Bible authority. (**Matt 4:4, 19:4; 1 John 4:6**).
- C. We must strive for consistency in our application of the scriptures.
- D. Let us not grow weary in the stand for the truth. God's way will prevail. (**Rom 3:4; Gal 6:9; Heb 10:36-39**)

### ***Moderation in Doctrinal Stability*** ***by Bill Hall***

People who are useful in the Lord's service are balanced in their thinking. They maintain moderation of the mind. They know what they believe and why they believe it, and are not given to radical fluctuations of thought.

#### ***A Study in Contrasts***

Two men are teachers of God's word. Both are conscientious men who love truth. The first man, however, is easily swayed by whatever he reads and hears. He frequently changes positions on doctrinal issues. Wanting to be independent in his thinking, he is quick to reject traditional "Church of Christ" thinking. He adopts into his thinking anything that, on the surface, sounds reasonable to him. He loves to come across some new, exciting "gem" that will set his teaching apart from the old, stale teaching that people have heard for years. Above all, he wants his teaching to be thought provoking and challenging, different and exciting, new and fresh in its approach.

The second man wants his teaching to be challenging and thought provoking, too, but he recognizes that one does not have to reject that which is tried and proven in order to be challenging and independent. He is not surprised to find that his convictions are similar to those of others who have labored to separate error from truth, traditionalism from the pure word of God, sectarianism from the unity found in Christ. After all, he shares the same goals and studies the same book. He sees no virtue in being different from them. He has come to solid conclusions based on his study of the Scriptures and is not easily swayed from those conclusions. He finds truth challenging because it is truth.

The first man tends to be "tossed" to and fro, and "carried about with every wind of doctrine" (**Ephesians 4:14**). His hearers never know what to expect from him next. One thing they can be sure of: whatever "kick" he is on at the time will come out in his lessons, for every new concept seems to become an obsession.

The second man has his heart "established with grace" (**Hebrews 13:9**); he is "grounded and settled" (**Colossians 1:23**). He questions positions he has held, and is forced by his own personal honesty and integrity to change positions occasionally, but he acts very slowly and cautiously in doing so. He keeps many questions that arise in his mind to himself, for he recognizes that they are not vital to his own salvation or to the salvation of others.

The first man unnecessarily disturbs others with his teaching, leaving them with more questions than answers. Some of his conclusions are dangerous. And though he later recognizes their danger and discards them, he has already, in his haste, planted seeds of error in the hearts of his hearers. His influence is hurt because brethren are afraid of him - justifiably afraid. His usefulness in the kingdom is greatly affected.

### ***Questions To Be Considered***

We would suggest to our first man that before he creates trouble among God's people and hurts his own influence, he might ask the following questions.

1. Am I sure of the conclusions I have reached? Is it possible that I have overlooked some pertinent scripture or argument that would negate my conclusions?
2. Am I sure that my conclusions have not been tainted by prejudice, disillusionment, bitterness, jealousy, emotional considerations, or some other factor that can adversely affect one's thinking?
3. Even if I am sure of my conclusions, is the point I am stressing vital, of sufficient importance to justify problems?
4. Have I allowed these conclusions to become an obsession? Do I find myself talking about them frequently in Bible classes? In sermons? In private discussions? Do I find my reading of the Scriptures somewhat "colored" by these new concepts?
5. Is it possible that in my teaching I am glorying in new and deep and fresh approaches rather than in the simple message of the gospel and the Christ who is the center of that message?

We are not encouraging compromise; nor are we suggesting that one must gain brotherhood approval for his conclusions before teaching them. We are saying, however,

that caution dictates that one go slowly in adopting new concepts and be even more cautious in teaching them. "Let your moderation be known to all."