



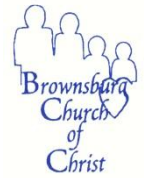
# New Testament Authority

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



## Using the Standard Properly (Part 3)

### Introduction:

**Galatians 2:16**, as we learned last week, says we are justified by faith. **Galatians 2:20** says we should live by our faith. **Romans 10:17** says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (ESV). Therefore, truly living by faith means getting into God’s Word and living based on it. Notice how important this is from **Romans 14:23**. “For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (ESV). Whatever I do that does not proceed from the full confidence that it is right with God becomes sin. If faith comes from God’s Word, then whatever I do that does not proceed from the full confidence that God’s Word approves or authorizes it is a sin for me. This corresponds with Paul’s direction in **Colossians 3:17**: “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus...” (ESV). Therefore, if we want to live and be justified by faith, God’s Book, the Bible, suddenly becomes very important to us. It becomes the guide for life. I’m not living by faith just because I’m kind of loosely spiritual or really sincere about my good works. I’m living by faith when I believe that this book came from God and let it govern how I live and how the congregation works.

But lots of people and churches claim to use the Bible as their guide and yet do all kinds of different things. So how should I read my Bible? How do I let it guide me into every good work (cf. **II Timothy 3:16-17**)?

### Discussion:

#### I. We should expect documentation for our authority.

- A. Before we examine how to read the New Testament for authority, we first need to ask should we? The reason many people come out at different points regarding biblical authority is not because they disagree with what the New Testament actually says, but because they disagree with how it should be taken altogether. Some suggest when we claim the New Testament is our authority and pattern that we are misusing the New Testament. They claim we are reading back into these books of the New Testament a concept that early Christians would never have had. We have made them an authoritative canon but neither Paul nor Peter nor any of the early Christians expected such a document. Therefore we are forcing a mindset on these books that should never have been there. This idea really calls into question the nature of Scripture itself. The question might be put this way. “Today, we demand scriptural authority for New Covenant practices. But is there actual scriptural authority for having New Covenant scriptures at all?”
- B. The nature of covenants demonstrates that early Christians would definitely have expected this kind of written documentation. We need to remember that the New Covenant was not established in a vacuum. Rather, it was the fruit of God’s plan promised in the Old Covenant. See **Jeremiah 31:31**. A new covenant was coming. “Covenant” is not a common word for us, but it was packed with meaning for our biblical counterparts. Covenants were binding agreements between two or more people. Often between a superior kingdom and a vassal kingdom. A covenant would be forged demonstrating the responsibilities of each party and the consequences of following or breaking the covenant. In fact, historically speaking, scholars have learned that in the biblical and surrounding cultures, a covenant almost universally followed a particular format. There were seven parts generally expected in covenant arrangements.
  1. *Preamble*—opening lines containing the name of the superior king and his many titles.
  2. *Historical prologue*—A history of the relationship between the parties, providing the reason for loyalty to the superior king rather than mere force.
  3. *Stipulations*—Requirements of both parties.
  4. *Sanctions*—The blessings for following the covenant and the curses for breaking it.
  5. *Documentary clause*—prescribed written record and a stipulation for repeated reading.
  6. *Witnesses*—Someone called as a witness to the covenant that would be a testimony against whoever broke it.
  7. *Ratification ceremony*—Some kind of ceremony to establish the covenant. Sometimes a signing ceremony or a spoken ceremony. Often a sacrifice and/or meal to ratify the covenant.
- C. Notice how this exact formula was used at the renewal of God’s Old Covenant with Israel in **Deuteronomy**.

1. *Preamble: Deuteronomy 1:1-5*
  2. *Historical prologue: Deuteronomy 1-3*
  3. *Stipulations: Deuteronomy 4-26*
  4. *Documentary clause: Deuteronomy 31:9-13, 24-26*
  5. *Witnesses: Deuteronomy 30:19*
  6. *Sanctions: Deuteronomy 27-28*
  7. *Ratification ceremony: Joshua 8:30-35<sup>1</sup>*
  8. Note especially the documentary clause. A main part of the covenant agreement was a written record of the agreement that was supposed to be read and reread.
  9. This is the background for the New Covenant. Inherent in the idea of covenant is a written record of it containing the stipulations and sanctions. As soon as these ancient near eastern people recognized they were entering into another covenant, they would have expected exactly what we are claiming. They would have expected documentation, writings that would provide stipulations and sanctions. May I point out that when you consider the New Testament as a whole, you actually see this same format, though loosely? The Gospels are the preamble and prologue, declaring who the Lord is and providing the reason for our loyalty. Acts continues historical prologue. The Epistles (as well as the Gospels and Acts) provide stipulations. Revelation demonstrates blessings and cursing for following or not follow the covenant. Throughout the New Testament, our spirit and God's Spirit are called as witnesses of the covenant. And Jesus' sacrifice was the ratification ceremony, which we participate in as we partake of the Lord's Supper. This is exactly what the people in the New Testament time would have expected and so should we.
- II. We should expect this documentation to provide a pattern for us as individuals and churches.
- A. Now that we recognize that we are correct to look for written documentation, we need to ask how we should look at that documentation. Some today affirm the covenantal nature of the New Testament writings but then suggest that it would be completely foreign to view these Scriptures as a pattern or model for how we should live today or how we should conduct ourselves in congregations. Should we look to the New Testament as a pattern? Should we see it as guidelines? Should we see it as a model showing us how to live and how to worship and work as a congregation? Or is it simply an explanation of what those folks did? Would those early Christians have expected a pattern in the covenantal documentation or are we adding that over the top of the New Testament today?
  - B. Once again, we need to remember that this New Testament wasn't written in a vacuum. It proceeded from the Old. Without the Old we cannot truly grasp the New. When we keep the New Testament in its greater biblical context, I think we see exactly that the early Christians would have seen them as establishing a pattern that successive generations would follow.
  - C. Part of the covenantal teaching in the New Covenant is about the nature of the temple. In the New Covenant, temple is used to describe two different relationships.
    1. In **I Corinthians 3:16-17**, Paul claims that we as individuals are the temple of God. We don't go to a particular city to visit the temple. We are temples of God. (See also **I Corinthians 6:19**.)
    2. In **Ephesians 2:19-22**, Paul explains that the church is the temple of God being built together on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. By the way, the reference to the apostles and prophets is not reference to the people but by synecdoche is a reference to the teaching and written documentation provided by them (see **Luke 16:29** for a similar use of "Moses and the Prophets").
  - D. Let's look at the Old Covenant backdrop for this temple metaphor. In **Exodus 25-30**, Moses was commanded to construct a tent of meeting, or as we call it, the tabernacle. Take some time and read these chapters sometime and notice that God had a pattern for building that tabernacle, His dwelling place. Then read **Exodus 35-40** and notice how the Israelites followed the pattern. Now read **I Chronicles 28:9-19**. When God wanted a temple built to replace the tabernacle, a place for His Spirit to dwell with His people, David gave Solomon a plan/pattern and claims, "All this he made clear to me in writing from the hand of the Lord, all the work to be done according to the plan" (**vs. 19**, ESV).
  - E. If God felt the shadow was so important to have a plan, how much more the substance? The pattern for the Old Covenant temple was given in writing from the Lord, how much more the New Covenant temple? Notice again the statement in **Ephesians 2:19-22** about the church being the temple built on the foundation

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.upper-register.com/papers/treaty\\_format.pdf](http://www.upper-register.com/papers/treaty_format.pdf)

of the apostles and prophets, that is, on their teaching and writings. We have writing that is from the hand of the Lord about the building of this temple. We need to follow this pattern as much as Moses and Solomon needed to follow the pattern that was given to them to build the tabernacle and temple. We are not making this up. These early Christians would have expected this very thing. When God wants a temple built, He provides a plan. And He even provides it in writing. Yes, we need to see the New Testament as the plan in writing for this New Covenant temple. We need to follow it as such.

### III. Let Jesus be our guide.

- A. To recap, we've recognized that we are right and in keeping with early New Covenant Christianity to expect something to be given to us as documentation of our covenant. Further, we should recognize the writing from the Lord as a plan for the temple we are and the temple we are part of. But how? How should we examine the pattern? How do we learn from the pattern what is acceptable and authorized? How do we know when we are doing something with the authority of Jesus Christ (**Colossians 3:17**)? How do we know that we really are acting in faith (**Romans 10:17; 14:23**)?
- B. Since Jesus is the chief cornerstone of our temple (**Ephesians 2:19-22**), we can look to Him as our example for determining how to behave, how to act, how to walk by faith. We don't need to make up how to look at the Bible. We don't have to develop our own way of doing this. Rather, we can simply do what Jesus did. Notice four principles built on our cornerstone Jesus Christ.
  1. **John 8:28; 5:30**—Jesus refused to do anything on His own authority. He did not seek His own will, but the will of God. Please understand the principle at work here. Jesus didn't do anything simply because He thought it was good. He did it because He could demonstrate the Father's authority. As we are studying the "writing from the hand of the Lord" we are looking for permission, not prohibition. While God specifically prohibits some things, that is not the standard for what is authorized. If we cannot go to the New Testament and find authority for something, we must stay away from it.
  2. **John 12:49**—As Jesus sought authority, He did what the Father commanded Him or told Him to do. If something is commanded, not only is it authorized, it is required. By extension, if we are specifically told we can do something, then we can.
  3. **John 5:19**—Jesus looked for an approved example. What He had seen the Father doing, He knew He could do. We also can look for approved examples. What we see those early Christians doing as recorded in the "writing from the hand of the Lord," we know we can do. That is finding authority.
  4. **John 7:14-24**—As Jesus proclaimed that He only did the Father's will and never spoke on His own authority, He addressed the authority for healing on the Sabbath. Notice that He did not appeal to a command or statement; He did not provide an example. Instead, He drew a logical conclusion. If they had scriptural authority to bless a person by circumcising him on the Sabbath, then certainly Jesus could bless a man by healing him on the Sabbath. Here was a logical conclusion or a necessary inference.
- C. Living by faith means believing what God has recorded in His covenant is good for us. It is right. It means letting it be a guide for our lives and our churches. We are not living by a God-given faith if we are doing our own thing or doing something simply because we can't find a prohibition. We are living by a God-given faith when we do what He has authorized either through the commands and statements in the New Testament, the approved examples in the New Testament, and logical necessary conclusions drawn from the covenantal writings of the New Testament. Anything else breaks the covenant and isn't really from faith.

### Conclusion:

As we talked about the format of a covenant, we learned that one of the major aspects of a covenant is the historical prologue. The purpose of that was to explain the relationship between the superior king and the vassal or subjects. Specifically, it explained why the vassal should be loyal to the superior king. It recognizes that the superior king could simply force submission, but explains why loyalty is deserved beyond mere fear and subjugation. We've spent all this time talking about the covenant, seeing the New Testament as a pattern and writing from the hand of the Lord, and then how to read it. The final question we need to answer is why? Why would we want to let the New Testament be our covenant and live by it no matter what it asks of us? The why is in that historical prologue. The gospel accounts of **Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John** provide thorough explanation. But **Romans 5:6-8** summarizes the prologue. You are a sinner. You rebelled against the Superior King. But instead of wiping you out and destroying you, Jesus died for you. He not only offered the sacrifice to save your soul from your sins, He was the sacrifice. That love deserves our love and loyalty. Will you be loyal to Him? Will you submit to His covenant?