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### The Role of New Testament Examples as Related to Biblical Authority

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The Role of  
**New Testament Examples**  
as related to  
**Biblical Authority**

M. R. HADWIN

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*The role of  
New Testament Examples  
as related to  
Biblical Authority*

by

*Milo Richard Hadwin*

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#### DEDICATION

*To my parents who trained me in the way I  
should go, my brother who inspired me and my  
wife who helped me.*

## Foreword

The purpose of this study is to determine whether actions of individuals or churches recorded in the New Testament have the authority to require imitation by people today. The methodology is, first, to review and summarize what has been written previously on the subject. This material has come largely from within the Restoration Movement where the issue has been of particular concern. The second step is to examine the New Testament with reference to its examples and its teaching regarding examples. Writings of the recent past are then evaluated in the light of the New Testament and some practical implications are suggested.

Those within the Restoration Movement who have written on the subject usually have assumed that at least some of the New Testament examples are binding. In contrast, the New Testament seems to provide no basis for this conclusion. It does not speak in terms of a pattern of examples. Neither churches nor individuals in the New Testament are presented as patterns to be imitated in specific detail. There is no evidence that the New Testament writers exercised selectivity in choosing particular actions or patterns to be copied. The New Testament contains no rules for distinguishing important from unimportant examples. Rather than standing beside the teaching of the apostles as part of a divine pattern, New Testament churches seemed to stand on the same level as churches today, beneath the pattern of sound doctrine of the apostles.

The conclusion of this study is that New Testament examples have no role as related to Biblical authority. The acceptance of this conclusion would seem to require no change in the general practices of churches of Christ. On the other hand, it would have been helpful in solving controversies within the Restoration Movement over such issues as Sunday schools, located preachers, closed communion, and church cooperation.

The people who have made some contribution to this study are so numerous that a list would probably overlook some who should be included. However, I would like to acknowledge the help of Dr. Neil Lightfoot who had the courage and patience to serve as chairman of my thesis committee as I prepared the material found in this study.



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## Chapter 1

# Introduction

Those who profess to be Christians have generally attributed some measure of authority to the Bible. Thomas Campbell, in his "Declaration and Address," which has been called "the Magna Charta of the Restoration Movement,"<sup>1</sup> presented the basic concepts of Biblical authority which have generally characterized those within that movement. He said:

Our desire, therefore, for ourselves and our brethren would be, that, rejecting human opinions and the inventions of men as of any authority, or as having any place in the Church of God, we might forever cease from further contentions about such things; returning to and holding fast by the original standard; taking the Divine word alone for our rule. . .<sup>2</sup>

He not only regarded the scripture as the "Divine standard"<sup>3</sup> and as "divinely inspired,"<sup>4</sup> but he viewed the New Testament as a perfect "constitution for the worship, discipline, and government of the New Testament Church"<sup>5</sup> and as a perfect "rule for the particular duties of its members. . ."<sup>6</sup> He believed the New Testament is "a perfect model, a sufficient formula for the worship, discipline, and government of the Christian Church."<sup>7</sup> The concept of Biblical authority described here is, for the purposes of this study, assumed to be valid.

## THE PROBLEM

To view the New Testament as a constitution for the worship, discipline, and government of the church is to view it as the final authority for determining specifics related to these matters. However, if the New Testament is regarded as a constitution, it must be recognized that in form and content it differs radically from other constitutions. It is not merely a code of laws but contains, among other things, much historical data concerning the activities of Christians living in the first century. Do the examples of these

<sup>1</sup>Charles Alexander Young (ed.), *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (Chicago: The Christian Century Company, 1904), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Campbell, "Declaration and Address," *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union*, ed. Charles Alexander Young (Chicago: The Christian Century Company, 1904), p. 73.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 159.



Christians have the same authority as might be attributed to the commands of Christ and the inspired writers of the New Testament? Does the concept of the New Testament as authoritative, necessitate the concept that the church as described in its activities in the New Testament is to serve as a model or standard against which matters of worship, discipline, and government of the church must always be measured? Are New Testament examples binding on Christians today? What is the role of New Testament examples as related to Biblical authority? To answer these questions is the purpose of this study.

#### "EXAMPLE" DEFINED

At this point a definition of "example" is in order. Extensive reading of material within the Restoration Movement on the subject of New Testament examples will reveal that the term "example" generally is used to mean "action." When writers have referred to New Testament "examples," they have meant "actions" of individuals or groups within the New Testament. Thus, one definition of "New Testament example" has been given as

*any action or attitude of any New Testament individual or group or church, who might reasonably be considered as exemplary characters for our conduct or attitudes.*<sup>8</sup>

A dictionary definition of "example" is: "That which is to be followed, or imitated; a pattern."<sup>9</sup> The definition of "example" merely as "action" does not agree with this dictionary definition. In fact, it does not agree with the Greek terms translated "example" in the New Testament, as will be noted later. All this has led one writer to comment:

Literally hundreds of times the question has been asked: "When is an example binding?" This is the wrong question. If it is an example it is binding, and if it is not binding it is not an example. The question ought to be: when does the Bible account of an action constitute an example?<sup>10</sup>

The objection is legitimate, based on the dictionary definition. But the fact that "literally hundreds of times the question has been asked: 'When is an example binding?'" shows that in the context of this discussion in the Restoration Movement the term has been used merely to refer to an "action." Therefore, rather than continually redefining the term as sources are quoted, it seems expedient in the interest of clarity to state that "example" will, as it normally has been in the context of this discussion, be defined consistently as "action." The question, then: "Are New Testament examples binding on Christians today?" may be restated:

<sup>8</sup>J. D. Thomas, "We Be Brethren" (Abilene, Texas: Biblical Research Press, 1958), p. 49.

<sup>9</sup>William Allan Neilson, *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language* (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1939).

<sup>10</sup>Roy Deaver, "How to Establish Bible Authority," *The Spiritual Sword*, I (Oct., 1969), 20.

Are people today required to imitate the actions of individuals or churches recorded in the New Testament?

#### SOURCES

What sources are available for investigating this question? For those not concerned with restoring the practice of the primitive church, the question of the authority of New Testament examples is rather meaningless. However, within the Restoration Movement much has been written to provide a partial basis for examining the question of the authority of New Testament examples.

Thomas Campbell set the stage for discussion in the American Restoration in his "Declaration and Address," and his thoughts have been generally repeated by Restorationists since that time. He said:

We dare, therefore, neither do nor receive anything as of Divine obligation for which there cannot be expressly produced a "Thus saith the Lord," either in express terms or by approved precedent.<sup>11</sup>

#### IMPORTANCE OF STUDY

This and other concepts of the authority of New Testament examples have found expression, to greater or lesser degree, in several controversies that have disturbed or divided the Restoration Movement. For example, those who opposed located preachers believed there was no authority for such because there is no example in the New Testament of a preacher locating with a church that had elders, being supported for his work.<sup>12</sup> Those who advocated closed communion said:

We meet with Christians at the Lord's table who have been baptized since they believed, because we have many examples in the Scriptures for so doing, and we do not meet in fellowship with the unbaptized, because we have no such example in Scripture.<sup>13</sup>

Those who opposed Sunday schools said there is no example of a church with apostolic sanction that conducted a Sunday school and used women as teachers.<sup>14</sup>

These illustrations of controversies, that have fragmented the Restoration Movement due to confusion regarding the authority of examples, are sufficient to indicate the importance of careful study in this area. Remarkably little has been written to justify the conclusion that examples are binding. It seems that no book has ever been written on the subject. The closest thing to it is a book by James Alexander Haldane, printed in 1805, which devotes

<sup>11</sup>Thomas Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

<sup>12</sup>Bill Humble, "Cooperation of Churches," *The Arlington Meeting* (Orlando, Florida: Cogdill Foundation [n.d.]), p. 308.

<sup>13</sup>"The Old Paths," II (Nov., 1867), 274.

<sup>14</sup>Roy H. Lanier, Sr., "Cooperation Among Churches," *The Arlington Meeting* (Orlando, Florida: Cogdill Foundation, [n.d.]), p. 239.



over 100 of its 492 pages to the question. Since that time material has been limited mainly to scattered articles and essays.

#### PURPOSE AND METHOD

Whether the traditional Restoration concept of the authority of examples has been valid and whether it has produced unity or division, is a matter of concern. Thomas Campbell expressed it this way:

Let us do as we are there expressly told *they* did, say as *they* said; that is, profess and practice as therein expressly enjoined by precept and precedent, in every possible instance, after *their* approved example; and in so doing we shall realize and exhibit all that unity and uniformity that the primitive Church possessed, or that the law of Christ requires. But if, after all, our brethren can point out a better way to regain and preserve that Christian unity and charity expressly enjoined upon the Church of God, we shall thank them for the discovery, and cheerfully embrace it.<sup>15</sup>

This study arises out of a desire to seek "a better way." The method will be, first, to review and summarize what has been written previously on the matter; second, to examine the New Testament with reference to its examples and its teaching regarding examples; and, third, to attempt to draw some conclusions regarding the role of New Testament examples as related to Biblical authority.

<sup>15</sup>Thomas Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-60.

#### Chapter 2

## Representative Viewpoints on Examples in the Restoration Movement

Some expression of the restoration plea can be found in history as early as Archelaus about A.D. 262.<sup>1</sup> Since that time the practice of the primitive church has often been proposed as a pattern to be followed, and occasionally practices have been instituted on that premise. For example, in 1340 a Dutchman named Gerhard Groot founded an organization called the Brethren of the Common Lot, "conformed as far as the circumstances of the times would permit to the apostolical pattern . . . imitating the Church at Jerusalem in the sharing of earnings and property."<sup>2</sup> Since he saw the "primitive apostolical church . . . as the model of perfection . . . he desired to see, if not all, yet at least the more important, rites remodeled after its pattern."<sup>3</sup> Francis Lambert, a former Franciscan monk, suggested to a Synod at Homberg in 1526 that officeholders in the church "ought to be chosen by the congregation, and set apart by the laying on of hands according to apostolic practice."<sup>4</sup> John Calvin in 1537 proposed that the Lord's supper "ought to be dispensed every Lord's Day at least; such was the practice in the Apostolic Church, and ought to be ours. . . ." Yet, it remained for the Restoration Movement to see the practice of the New Testament church from such a point of view as to engage in lengthy discussion on such questions as these: "Can the New Testament bind upon God's people a practice or method to the exclusion of all others by example? If so, how is such exclusiveness to be determined?"<sup>5</sup> Therefore, this chapter will explore the writings of the Restoration Movement, attempting to trace the thinking that has been done on the role of New Testament examples as related to Biblical authority.

#### SCOTTISH BACKGROUND

The direct ancestry of the idea of the authority of examples as expressed in the Restoration Movement can be traced at least

<sup>1</sup>Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Restoration Principle* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1960), p. 64.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 109, citing C. Ullmann, *Reformers Before the Reformation*, pp. 70, 71.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, citing Ullmann, pp. 75, 76.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas M. Lindsay, *A History of the Reformation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), I, 416.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, II, 105.

<sup>6</sup>Roy E. Cogdill, *Walking by Faith* (Lufkin, Texas: The Gospel Guardian Co., 1957), p. 22.



as far back as John Glas of Scotland who was deposed by the Anglican Church around 1730. Because he regarded them as practices of the primitive church, Glas adopted the weekly observance of the Lord's supper, plurality of elders over each congregation, and community of goods.<sup>7</sup> These views gained greater prominence through the efforts of his son-in-law, Robert Sandeman.

In 1796, Greville Ewing, a Presbyterian preacher who was greatly influenced by the works of Glas and Sandeman, began editing *The Missionary Magazine*.<sup>8</sup> His interest in primitive Christianity as a model is seen in an early excerpt from his magazine:

Except those commandments, indeed, and the example of obedience which was paid to them by the apostles, and primitive Christians, we have no safe or warrantable rule with regard to this matter, by which we can walk. If, therefore, we shall be able to shew, what was enjoined, and actually done, for the original propagation of the Gospel, we shall ascertain at once, the method of success, and the path of duty. . . . The discourses of those who act as ministers of the gospel . . . should be formed upon the primitive model, and arranged according to the order warranted by the word of God.<sup>9</sup>

Ewing began to promote a new system of church order based on the principle that ". . . Christians are religiously bound to conform their ecclesiastical usages to the practice or customs of the apostolic Churches."<sup>10</sup>

In 1805, James Alexander Haldane wrote a book designed to support the position Ewing advocated. It apparently contains the most material ever published attempting to explain why "All Christians are Bound to Observe the Universal and Approved Practices of the First Churches Recorded in Scripture,"<sup>11</sup> as the third chapter is entitled. Consequently, it deserves special attention.

Haldane provided an interesting introduction to the matter that is at the heart of this study:

The various opinions entertained respecting the obligation under which Christians are laid to observe the approved and universal practices of the first churches, may be reduced to the following.

1st. That we are not bound by these at all, nor can they be ascertained.

<sup>7</sup>Homer Hailey, *Attitudes and Consequences in the Restoration Movement* ([n.p.]: The Old Paths Book Club, 1945), p. 48.

<sup>8</sup>Alexander Haldane, *The Lives of Robert Haldane of Airthrey, and of His Brother, James Alexander Haldane* (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., Paternoster Row, 1852), p. 355.

<sup>9</sup>Onesimus, "An Essay on the Means by which the Gospel was originally propagated in the World," *The Missionary Magazine*, I (July 18, 1796), 5, 14.

<sup>10</sup>Alexander Haldane, *op. cit.*, pp. 355-56.

<sup>11</sup>James Alexander Haldane, *A View of the Social Worship and Ordinances Observed by the First Christians* (Edinburgh: J. Ritchie, 1805), p. 36.

2nd. That we are bound in a certain degree, or by the spirit of them, but that we have the liberty of making alterations according to the circumstances.

3rd. That the approved and universal practices of the first churches are recorded in Scripture for our learning; that they constitute a complete system, adapted to every age, and to all circumstances; and that by this the churches of Christ are to be regulated.<sup>12</sup>

Haldane accepted the third proposition and believed that if churches of Christ are not regulated by the example of the early church, they are left without a guide in worship and order<sup>13</sup> and confusion would reign.<sup>14</sup> He reasoned that

. . . if we are not bound by the practices of the apostolic churches recorded in Scripture, there is no precise model whatever in the New Testament for the constitution and government of a church.<sup>15</sup>

Haldane believed that since the early church was under the guidance of the apostles and inspired men in a direct way, what those churches *did* was what these men had *required*, and, therefore, it is also required of churches today.<sup>16</sup>

John Laurence Mosheim made a statement in *An Ecclesiastical History* which Haldane quoted to support his premise, although the part deleted shows that Mosheim interpreted his own observation differently. As Haldane quoted it, the passage read:

Neither Christ nor his holy apostles have commanded any thing clearly or expressly concerning the external form of the church, and the precise method according to which it should be governed. . . . If, however, it is true, that the apostles acted by divine inspiration; and in conformity with the commands of their blessed Master, (and this no Christian can call in question) then it follows, that that form of government which the primitive churches borrowed from that of Jerusalem, the first Christian assembly established by the apostles themselves, must be esteemed as of divine institution.<sup>17</sup>

Haldane further argued the case for following apostolic practice by stating that the means that the apostles used for promoting the kingdom were the best possible. He concluded that, since hu-

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 39, 44-45, 49.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 62, citing John Laurence Mosheim, *An Ecclesiastical History*, trans. by Archibald MacLaine (Cincinnati: Applegate & Co., 1854), p. 20. According to the 1854 edition, Mosheim said: "Hence we may infer that the regulation of this was, in some measure, to be accommodated to the time, and left to the wisdom and prudence of the chief rulers, both of the state and of the church." Mosheim said following the passage Haldane quoted: "But from this it would be wrong to conclude that such a form is immutable, and ought to be invariably observed; for this a great variety of events may render impossible."



man nature has not changed, these means are still the best means and should be adopted.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, Haldane quoted a lengthy passage from a sermon of Jonathan Edwards in which he tried to reason that God's will can clearly be revealed to man apart from the medium of a command. He said:

Indeed, if God had so made our faculties, that we were not capable of receiving a revelation of his mind in any other way, then there would have been some reason to say so.<sup>19</sup>

Haldane then concluded that God did, in fact, use a different manner of revealing his will in the New Testament than had occurred in the Old Testament.<sup>20</sup>

#### THE CAMPBELL PERIOD IN AMERICA

The year before Haldane's book was published, one of the two major documents launching the American Restoration Movement indicated the importance it placed on New Testament examples. In 1804, "The Witnesses' Address," attached to "The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery," said that that organization was disbanded because Barton W. Stone and others

. . . soon found that there was neither precept nor example in the New Testament for such confederacies. . . . Hence they concluded . . . they were off the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets. . . .<sup>21</sup>

Five years later, the second of these two documents was produced by Thomas Campbell without his knowledge of the former. It placed even greater emphasis on the authority of New Testament examples. Campbell wrote in his "Declaration and Address" of 1809:

Nor ought anything to be admitted, as of Divine obligation, in their Church constitution and management, but what is expressly enjoined by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles upon the New Testament Church; either in express terms or by approved precedent.<sup>22</sup>

He considered it "a desirable purpose, both to conform to the model and adopt the practice of the primitive Church, expressly

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 60, citing Jonathan Edwards, *Pres. Edwards' Twenty Sermons* (Edinburgh: [n.n.], 1789), p. 203.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>21</sup>Barton W. Stone and others, "The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery," *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>22</sup>Thomas Campbell, "Declaration and Address," *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union*, pp. 108-09. It would seem that Campbell's thought on "approved precedent" was influenced by Haldane's writing on "approved practices." It is known that Alexander Campbell was a personal friend of Greville Ewing and the Haldanes, and Thomas Campbell was at least familiar with their ideas. See Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1956), I, 149ff. and Lester G. McAllister, *Thomas Campbell: Man of the Book* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1954), pp. 48ff.

exhibited in the New Testament."<sup>23</sup> He believed that ministers in all their administrations should "keep close by the observance of all Divine ordinances, after the example of the primitive Church, exhibited in the New Testament."<sup>24</sup> Regarding the primitive churches, he believed in "an exact conformity to their recorded and approved example. . . ."<sup>25</sup> He explained his reason for this:

For if the first Christian Churches, walking in the fear of the Lord in holy unity and unanimity, enjoyed the comforts of the Holy Spirit, and were increased and edified, we have reason to believe that walking in their footsteps will everywhere and at all times insure the same blessed privileges.<sup>26</sup>

He believed the Christian profession "is manifested by the holy consistency of the tempers and conduct of the professors with the express dictates and approved examples of the Divine word."<sup>27</sup> Of the Scriptures he said:

To say as it declares, and to do as it prescribes in all its holy precepts, its approved and imitable examples, would unite the Christian Church in a holy sameness of profession and practice throughout the world.<sup>28</sup>

In summary, he believed in

simply returning to the original standard of Christianity, the profession and practice of the primitive Church, as expressly exhibited upon the sacred page of New Testament scripture. . . .<sup>29</sup>

Although he lived about 45 years after writing this document, there is no evidence that Thomas Campbell ever later developed his concept of examples. It seems especially remarkable that

Alexander Campbell never defined his conception of the restoration plea. . . . He and other pioneers made approaches in this direction by describing certain elements of the New Testament church—but the fact remains that the number-one leader of the Disciples of Christ nowhere set down in order a catalogue of the 'express terms and approved precedents' of church organization and life in the Bible which they assumed were there.<sup>30</sup>

He did share his father's belief in the authority of examples. He said:

Whatever the disciples practiced in their meetings with the approbation of the apostles, is equivalent to an apostolic com-

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>30</sup>Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Restoration Principle* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1960), pp. 140-41.



mand to us to do the same. . . . Apostolic example is justly esteemed of equal authority with an apostolic precept.<sup>31</sup>

But, regarding which examples carried the force of commands, Bill Humble says of Alexander Campbell:

The principles that Campbell used in trying to solve this problem are to be inferred from his treatment of specific cases, for he never wrote a general discussion of the hermeneutical principles involved.<sup>32</sup>

The following is probably as close as he ever came:

And, indeed, their whole example is binding on all Christians placed in circumstances similar to those in which they lived at that time. . . . How are we to distinguish between those things which are as peculiar to them as their vicinity to the Temple, and those things which were common to them with other Christian congregations? This must be determined by a comparison of the practice of other congregations as recorded by the same historian, or as found in the letters to the churches written by the apostles.<sup>33</sup>

On another occasion, Campbell did say ". . . it is bad logic to draw a general conclusion from any particular occurrence."<sup>34</sup>

One glimpse of Campbell's attempt to apply his concept of examples to a specific issue can be seen in a comment on church cooperation. He once believed that it cannot

. . . be an argument against consultative meetings on the cooperation of churches, that we have no positive command addressed to the congregations, calling upon them to meet for such purposes, provided we have a clear and unequivocal precedent that the Christian congregations did even in the age of the Apostles cooperate.<sup>35</sup>

While other writers of the Campbell period shared his views on the authority of examples,<sup>36</sup> one searches in vain for significant elaboration of the idea.

#### POST-CAMPBELL LEADERS

In the latter half of the nineteenth century Tolbert Fanning and D. R. Dungan expressed a belief that Christians must imitate

<sup>31</sup>Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things. No. VII. On the Breaking of Bread. No. II." *The Christian Baptist*, III (Sept. 5, 1825), 29.

<sup>32</sup>Bill Humble, "The Missionary Society Controversy in the Restoration Movement (1823-1875)" (unpublished Doctor's dissertation, State University of Iowa, 1964), p. 28.

<sup>33</sup>Alexander Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>34</sup>Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration to the Ancient Order of Things," *The Christian Baptist*, III (March 6, 1826), 164.

<sup>35</sup>J. T. M'Vay and Alexander Campbell, "Report," *The Millennial Harbinger*, VI (April, 1835), 165.

<sup>36</sup>E.g., "Abuses of Christianity," *The Christian Baptist*, I (Nov. 3, 1823), 79.

the deeds of "divinely authorized men"<sup>37</sup> and the churches "under the direction of their inspiration."<sup>38</sup> Dungan said this was the "safe" course.<sup>39</sup> This quest for safety must have motivated J. W. McGarvey's conclusion: "But when we can determine, with even a good degree of probability, an apostolic custom, our own judgment should yield to it."<sup>40</sup>

During the same period some writers in the British journal, *"The Old Paths,"* expressed the view that the example of the early church must be followed because it reflected the "unerring judgment" of what the apostles regarded as "*expedient* for the church in all ages."<sup>41</sup> On this thought they based their defense of closed communion<sup>42</sup> and mutual ministry.<sup>43</sup>

A careful examination of *The Gospel Advocate*, *Firm Foundation*, *The Christian Standard*, and other periodicals and books from this time reveals frequent acknowledgment of the authority of examples. However, probably due to the idea having gained general acceptance, no more significant developments in defense of the idea than those mentioned seem to exist in writings of this period.

#### THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

During the first half of the twentieth century, nothing new seems to have been written on the subject. However, since the advent of the 1950's much has been written on examples. Most of the writing has been repetitious but some new ideas have been introduced. The occasion of the writing has been controversy over church cooperation. The way the early churches cooperated has been viewed as the way churches today must cooperate. Thus, Yater Tant said "congregational cooperation is taught, not by command, but by an approved example."<sup>44</sup>

It generally has been agreed by those who have participated in the controversy that examples have some kind of authority. Earle H. West said:

The authority of Biblical examples lies in the fact that they are inspired accounts of the actual work of the apostles or of work done under their supervision. Thus an example has all the authority of a command.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Tolbert Fanning, "The Permanent Orders of the Christian Ministry," *The Gospel Advocate*, II (February, 1856), 42.

<sup>38</sup>D. R. Dungan, "The Lord's Supper," *The Pioneers on Worship* (Kansas City, Missouri: The Old Paths Book Club, 1947), p. 109. Cf. D. R. Dungan, *Hermeneutics* (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Company, 1888), p. 95.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>J. W. McGarvey, *A Commentary on Acts of Apostles* (Nashville: B. C. Goodpasture, 1958), p. 247.

<sup>41</sup>David King, "Expediency," *The Old Paths*, XX (1885), 19.

<sup>42</sup>"Brethrenism," *The Old Paths*, II (Nov. 1867), 274.

<sup>43</sup>"The Old Paths," XX (1885), 19.

<sup>44</sup>Yater Tant, *Harper-Tant Debate*, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup>Earle H. West, "Following Bible Examples," *The Preceptor*, I (July, 1952), 15.



He even called attention to Acts 16:6, 9, 10 to show that the apostles received special guidance in their *actions*.<sup>46</sup>

On the other side of the controversy, J. D. Thomas gave a different reason for believing examples are binding. He said that "some commands need to be 'completed,' or need to be *clarified*."<sup>47</sup> Attention was called to the command, "Be ye imitators of me." Without an imitable example, the command could not be followed. It was concluded that examples which would 'complete' such commands would be binding.

Some discussion has involved the relationship of commands to examples. Some have said that an example is not binding unless there is a background command involved.<sup>48</sup> J. D. Thomas said that those who "... accepted the conclusion, that examples alone do not establish patterns ... 'cut themselves loose' from what had been a cardinal tenet of the Restoration Movement."<sup>49</sup> Others have pointed out that if a background command makes an example binding, it is the command and not the example that is actually binding.<sup>50</sup>

The major discussion of the last twenty years has concerned when examples are binding. Bill Humble said

... that after 150 years of restoration history there is still some ambiguity as to when we bind apostolic examples as absolutely mandatory and when they are left in the realm of the optional.<sup>51</sup>

However, attempts have been made to set guidelines to determine when an example is binding. A recent writer said that for an example to be proved as binding it must meet the test of the following rules: contextual limitation, uniformity, harmony, competence, limited application or logical extension, universal application and materiality or relevance.<sup>52</sup> According to these rules, an example is not binding unless it is so demonstrated by the context, it shows uniformity with other examples, it is in harmony with the rest of scripture, and it is universally imitable. Furthermore, "... the example must unquestionably exemplify that which we regard it as exemplifying."<sup>53</sup> It was stated that "... the application of the elements of an apostolic example are limited to the set of facts and circumstances characteristic of that example."<sup>54</sup>

<sup>46</sup>Earle H. West, "When is an Apostolic Example Binding?" *Florida Christian College Lecture Outlines of February, 1954*, pp. 35-37.

<sup>47</sup>J. D. Thomas, "How to Establish Bible Authority," *The Arlington Meeting*, p. 58.

<sup>48</sup>Alan E. Highers, "How to Attain and Maintain Fellowship," *The Arlington Meeting*, p. 388.

<sup>49</sup>J. D. Thomas, "We Be Brethren" (Abilene, Texas: Biblical Research Press, 1958), p. 94.

<sup>50</sup>Marshall E. Patton, "Giving the Answers for our Hope," *Searching the Scriptures*, IV (February, 1963), 9.

<sup>51</sup>Bill Humble, "Cooperation of Churches," *The Arlington Meeting*, p. 308.

<sup>52</sup>James W. Adams, "What Makes an Apostolic Example Binding?" *The Preceptor*, XVIII (July, 1969), 1, 11.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*

If all these conditions are met, an example was said to be binding if it has "... significance with reference to the will and purpose of God as expressed in his word concerning the thing involved."<sup>55</sup>

Approaching the matter negatively, Earle H. West said that anything based solely upon custom and temporary world conditions and anything involving the miraculous and living apostles cannot be binding.<sup>56</sup>

Two writers have stated their conclusions in a more general way without drawing up lists of rules. Thomas Warren expressed a way of determining that an action obligatory upon the early Christians is obligatory upon Christians today: "There is no way to decide other than the application of sound principles of logic and hermeneutics in the light of the totality of Bible teaching upon any given action."<sup>57</sup> J. D. Thomas spoke of the test an example must "unquestionably meet" to establish pattern authority,

... namely that of the application of common sense and logical inference to the context, and the clear realization that there is an implied command lying behind the example, well understood by the exemplary persons, and also easily understood by us today.<sup>58</sup>

#### SUMMARY

This chapter has noted that a form of the restoration plea has appeared as far back in history as the third century. However, lengthy discussion of the authority of New Testament examples has been found primarily within the Restoration Movement.

Scottish writers provided the ancestry for some of the American thought. James Alexander Haldane of Scotland published in 1805 the most extensive work to be found on the subject. He reasoned that the purpose of examples was to provide a guide for the church in future times. He believed without these examples the church would be in confusion as to what to do about many important matters. Furthermore, he believed the actions of the New Testament church were a reflection of those things the apostles had required, since they were under their direction. Since human nature is always the same, he reasoned the apostles' judgment regarding the affairs of the church then should be suitable for the church now. He believed not only that God can reveal his will in ways other than through commands, but that he did, in fact, reveal his will in a different way in the New Testament than he did to the Jews in the former age.

The authority of examples has been taught from the beginning of the American movement, although the Campbells never undertook to define their authority with care. In fact, it was not until

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup>Earle H. West, "Following Bible Examples," 16.

<sup>57</sup>Thomas B. Warren, "Examples and Pattern Authority," *Abilene Christian College Lectures 1960* (Abilene, Texas: Abilene Christian College Students Exchange, 1960), p. 401.

<sup>58</sup>J. D. Thomas, "We Be Brethren," p. 64.



the 1950's that much more than scattered references to the subject began to appear. The context of recent writings has been controversy over church cooperation. Participants on both sides of the controversy have agreed that some examples are binding. They have usually agreed that this authority of examples exists even in the absence of an express command. Most of the writing has sought to determine when an example is binding. A number of rules have been proposed and one writer seemed to imply that the matter could be solved simply by using common sense.

### Chapter 3

## The New Testament and Examples

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus announced to his disciples: "I will build my church." Following the "building" metaphor, those within the Restoration Movement have often viewed Jesus as an architect with blueprints for his church.<sup>1</sup> Even as the tabernacle was built by Moses according to a pattern that God gave him, so the church is supposed to be structured according to a divine pattern (Heb. 8:1-5).

#### IS THERE A PATTERN OF EXAMPLES?

What is the nature of the pattern for the church? Most of those within the Restoration Movement have believed at least part of the pattern is reflected in the examples of the New Testament. The church revealed in the New Testament is the church Jesus built. It would seem that a church today that is identical in all respects to the church of the first century would correspond to the divine pattern of the original church. Based on this concept, men within the Restoration Movement have examined the activities or examples of the church recorded in the New Testament pertaining to worship, government, discipline, and so forth, and have attempted to follow its examples. But, is the concept that Christians today must imitate the actions of the early church valid? Is the idea that at least part of the divine pattern for the church is to be discovered in the actions of the primitive church, supported by the New Testament? This chapter will attempt to bring the evidence of the New Testament itself to bear on these questions.

There are two passages in the New Testament that specifically indicate the obligation of Christians to follow a pattern. However, neither speaks in terms of a pattern of examples, a pattern to be discerned in the actions of churches or individuals. In Romans 6:17, Paul commends the Romans for their obedience to a pattern of teaching or doctrine. In 2 Timothy 1:13, Paul instructs Timothy to hold to the pattern of sound words which he had heard Paul speak. Instead of referring to examples to be imitated, it is clear that these passages speaking of patterns have reference to teachings that are to be obeyed.

#### PURPOSE OF EXAMPLES

The New Testament does not specifically speak in terms of patterns of examples. However, it does give indications of the

<sup>1</sup>E.g., Roy E. Cogdill, *Walking by Faith* (Lufkin, Texas: The Gospel Guardian Co., 1957), pp. 5, 10.



value and purpose of its material telling of the actions of churches and individuals. The actions of the churches in Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus, and Colossae motivated, encouraged, comforted, and stirred up expressions of gratitude in Paul and other Christians (2 Cor. 9:2; 1 Thess. 3:6-10; Eph. 1:15-23; Col. 1:3, 4). The actions of men of faith of the Old Testament and of Jesus were recalled to motivate Christians to continue steadfastly their running of the Christian race (Heb. 12:1-3). Some actions of people of Old Testament times were recalled as warnings to Christians (Heb. 2:25; 4:6, 11; 12:25; 1 Cor. 10:6-11; Jude 7; 2 Peter 2:6). A further value of examples may be seen as illustrated in 1 Corinthians 9:5. Paul used the example of the marital status of "the rest of the apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas" as authority for his marrying, if he chose to do so. The use he made of their married condition indicates that their example gave him the right to do as they had done; yet this did not deny him the right to do otherwise. In this case, then, Paul viewed the force of the "example" of Peter and others as permissive but not restrictive.

#### ARE THERE BINDING EXAMPLES?

The question that arises at this point is: Are there examples in the New Testament that are restrictive in nature? That is, are there actions described in the New Testament which must be followed or imitated due to some authority inherent in the examples?

#### Churches as Examples

Are there churches whose actions are presented as patterns that other churches must follow? The zeal of the church in Corinth had stirred up the church in Macedonia (2 Cor. 9:2). Macedonia was influenced by Corinth, but it is apparent that no authority is implied here.

The church of the Thessalonians imitated churches of God in Judea in suffering the same things they did (1 Thess. 2:14). Yet, there is no indication that the Judean churches had established a pattern of religious practices which the Thessalonians felt duty-bound to follow.

The church of the Thessalonians imitated Paul, Silvanus, Timothy, and Jesus and, therefore, became an example to all the Christians in Macedonia and Achaia and elsewhere (1 Thess. 1:6-8). But, in the same sense, to the extent any church or individual today would imitate Jesus, they would, likewise, become an example for others.

These are all the instances found in the New Testament of churches specifically being referred to as examples or as being imitated.

#### Individuals as Examples

Are there individuals in the New Testament whose actions are presented as patterns that others must imitate? Timothy and Titus were both instructed by Paul to be examples to others (1

Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7). Elders, likewise, were instructed by Peter to be examples to other Christians (1 Peter 5:3).

At this point attention should be called to the meaning of the word "example" as used in the New Testament. In the New Testament, the word "examples" does not mean just "action." There are four Greek words translated "example," which may have significance for this study. *Hypogrammos* occurs only once in the New Testament. This is where Peter said, "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). The meaning is "lit. model, pattern to be copied in writing or drawing . . . then example."<sup>2</sup>

*Deigma* also occurs but once in the New Testament. It is found in Jude 7 where Sodom and Gomorrah were "set forth as an example." Arndt and Gingrich express the meaning of the word as used in this passage as "stand as an example."<sup>3</sup> Thayer uses the word "pattern"<sup>4</sup> to explain the meaning here.

Sodom and Gomorrah were also referred to as "an example" in 2 Peter 2:6. However, the word used here is *Hypodeigma*, which appears in several other passages. This term is defined as "example, model, pattern, in a good sense as something that does or should spur one on to imitate it."<sup>5</sup> Here it is used in a bad sense, as it is also in Hebrews 4:11 where the Israelites were an "example of disobedience."

The disobedient Israelites were also called "our examples" in 1 Corinthians 10:6, but the term used is *typos*. Here, and in all other passages relevant to this study where the word occurs, it is defined as "pattern."<sup>6</sup>

All four of these Greek words are translated "pattern" and carry the basic idea of a model, a pattern, or that which is to be imitated. Therefore, when Timothy, Titus, and elders were told to be examples, the implication is that their lives were to be models or patterns worthy of imitation.

#### Paul as Example

In contrast to some who were encouraged to be good examples for others, one man in the New Testament referred to himself as an example that others must imitate. This was the apostle Paul. Paul told the Philippians to do the things "ye both learned and received and heard and saw in me" (Phil. 4:9). The basis of his instruction that they do what they had seen in him was not any inherent perfection. In fact, he had said in the previous chapter that he was not perfect (Phil. 3:12). Nor does it seem that he was setting himself apart as one uniquely worthy of imitation be-

<sup>2</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 851.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>4</sup>John Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Co., 1899), p. 126.

<sup>5</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, *op. cit.*, p. 851.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 837.



cause, later, when he charged his readers to imitate him, he also said that they should imitate others who lived as he did (Phil. 3:17).

A parallel in a specific matter can be seen in Acts 20:35 and 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9. In the former passage Paul said he had given the Ephesians an example in regard to laboring. In the latter, Paul included Silvanus and Timothy (2 Thess. 1:1) with himself as having made themselves examples in regard to laboring, which the Thessalonians were told to imitate.

In another setting, Paul instructed the Corinthians to imitate him (1 Cor. 4:16). Yet, this instruction was not without qualification, for the next verse limited the imitation to his "ways which are in Christ." This seems equivalent to his later instruction to the Corinthians: "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). It is perhaps in the same way that the Thessalonians became imitators of Paul, Silvanus, Timothy, "and of the Lord" (1 Thess. 1:1, 6).<sup>7</sup>

#### Christ as Example

What can be said of Jesus as an example? When Paul told his readers, "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1), he was pointing to Jesus as the ultimate standard worthy of imitation. The sinlessness of Christ (as taught in 2 Corinthians 5:21) implies that all his actions were right. Yet, the scriptures do not indicate that all his actions are to be followed as a specific pattern.

The New Testament contains only two passages where Jesus is specifically considered as an example. One of these is 1 Peter 2:21 where Jesus was said to be an example in regard to suffering. The other passage is John 13:15 where Jesus referred to a particular action of his as an example. It may be debated whether the action of Jesus was an example of washing feet or an example of humble service. Nevertheless, it is the one time that Jesus referred to something he did as an example.

#### Old Testament Examples

One other set of people are mentioned in the New Testament as examples for men to follow. These are those who lived in Old Testament times. In a negative way, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were twice mentioned as examples to "those that should live ungodly" (2 Peter 2:6; Jude 7). The disobedience of the Israelites was also said by Paul to be "our example" (1 Cor. 10:6, 11; cf. Heb. 4:6, 11).

In a positive way, Christians were told to imitate men of faith and patience such as Abraham (Heb. 6:12, 13). Christians were told to take the prophets as "an example of suffering and patience" (James 5:10).

<sup>7</sup>The implications of Paul's statements on following him will be considered in the next chapter.

#### DO EXAMPLES SUGGEST THEIR OWN AUTHORITY?

What the New Testament itself says regarding examples has been considered. Attention will now be focused on examples that stand recorded in the New Testament. Is it possible that these examples in some way suggest their own authority?

#### Thomas' Approach

J. D. Thomas in his book, "*We Be Brethren*," took the position that New Testament examples can bind in the absence of any express commands. The way this could happen was explained in his "pattern principle":

Any New Testament example that implies an underlying command, which *requires* specific action or attitudes of its exemplary characters, establishes a pattern, which *requires* the same specific action or attitudes of people today.<sup>8</sup>

Do such examples exist? Are there examples that have some inherent quality of authority, suggesting the necessity of imitation apart from any command saying that they must be imitated? Thomas cited 17 passages as illustrations of examples that bind in the absence of commands, examples of the character described in his "pattern principle." Each of the examples cited from the New Testament by Thomas will be considered here for the purpose of answering the questions raised.<sup>9</sup>

1. Acts 5:28, 29. In this passage Peter and the apostles said, "We must obey God rather than men." It was argued:

Peter and the apostles are shown in this passage to be under obligation to "obey God rather than men." But we today feel we are *required* to do the same thing, even though there is no Bible command for us to do so. Here then is an example, without a command, that we unhesitatingly accept as being pattern authority for us today.<sup>10</sup>

In response it should be noted that Peter and the apostles did not say, "We must obey God rather than men." Examination of

<sup>8</sup>J. D. Thomas, "*We Be Brethren*," p. vi.

<sup>9</sup>At this point the method of procedure will be to list the examples given by Thomas and to react to Thomas' use of these examples. In doing so, the author of the study does not wish to be presumptuous, but he feels, nevertheless, that perhaps some contribution might be made to this difficult subject by examining critically each example given. Except here, the author's other views have been reserved for the conclusion of the study.

It should be noted that some of the material presented here may not represent Thomas' present position. Ten years after writing "*We Be Brethren*" he said: "I have 17 such binding examples in my book. Some of them may be pretty thin—I would grant that. I read the New Testament through several times looking for those examples—it may be that I stretched a point here and there—I'm just as human as the next person—and maybe I was hoping to find some." J. D. Thomas, "How to Establish Bible Authority," *The Arlington Meeting*, p. 58. Thomas was pioneering a complicated area of interpretation in his book and suggested toward its conclusion: "To whatever extent, however, that this book does NOT help to improve interpretation, others should pick up the challenge at that point and head us into a correct knowledge of God's pattern will." J. D. Thomas, "*We Be Brethren*," p. 238.

<sup>10</sup>Thomas, "*We Be Brethren*," p. 64.



the Greek shows that they actually were saying, "*It is necessary* to obey God rather than men." Thus, they were not stating what *they* were obligated to do, but were expressing a universal obligation in the form of a principle. Therefore, Christians must obey God rather than men because *it is necessary* and not because the apostles had to do so.

It should also be noted that the expression, "We must obey God rather than men," is not even an example. It is a statement entailing an obligation and must be treated as a command rather than an example.

2. Acts 16:33. This is the passage in which the Philippian jailer, upon hearing the word of the Lord, took Paul and Silas the same hour of the night and washed their stripes and was baptized "immediately." It was argued:

We all accept this example as establishing a pattern requirement for "immediate baptism," even though there is no command on the point and the example is completely independent in doing this teaching.<sup>11</sup>

No reason is given as to why the immediate baptism of the jailer would require that all other people be baptized immediately. In the absence of such a reason, it would seem best to conclude that the urgency of baptism arises from the nature of baptism itself—an act in which sin is removed—rather than as an example to be duplicated.

3. Philemon 11, 12. In this passage Paul told Philemon he was returning Onesimus, his runaway slave, to him. It was argued: "We would all say that it is clearly God's will for a runaway slave who became a Christian to return to his master, but there is no command on this point, only this example."<sup>12</sup>

Is it clearly God's will that runaway slaves who become Christians must return to their masters? The incident of Onesimus seems less than sufficient basis for deciding the universal obligation of slaves. Perhaps this is why Thomas strengthened his point in conceding that the matter is covered by "... other teachings, such as, 'repentance involves restitution.'"<sup>13</sup>

4. Acts 9:26, 27. This passage says that Paul, after his conversion in Damascus, tried to join himself to the disciples in Jerusalem. When they doubted that Paul was a disciple, Barnabas brought Paul to the apostles and testified in his behalf. It was argued that Paul's example in "placing membership" is

generally recognized as a strong-teaching that it is God's will that when Christians move from one place to another they should publicly identify themselves with the new group.<sup>14</sup>

It seems only natural that when Paul became a Christian and returned to Jerusalem, he would seek the fellowship of other Chris-

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

tians. It seems unlikely that there was a command underlying Paul's action in this matter. It seems more likely that Paul's action was a natural response of his new love and zeal for Christ and his cause, not an example bound upon all Christians.

5. 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. Paul said here that the liberality of the Macedonians was because "first they gave their own selves to the Lord and to us through the will of God." It was argued that this "sets a binding pattern for Christians of all time to give their own selves to the Lord."<sup>15</sup>

The example of the Macedonians may encourage Christians to do likewise; but Christians are commanded, apart from this example, to give themselves to the Lord. Paul told the Corinthians, "The body is . . . for the Lord" (1 Cor. 6:13). He told the Romans to "present yourselves unto God" (Rom. 6:13) and "present your bodies . . . to God" (Rom. 12:1). The Christian life is to be wholly given to God (cf. Luke 9:23, 24; James 4:7).

However, in 2 Corinthians 8:8 Paul said, "I speak not by way of commandment, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity also of your love." From this it may be seriously questioned whether Paul was presenting the action of the Macedonians as "a binding pattern for Christians of all time."

6. Galatians 2:20. Here Paul said, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." This is supposed to be an example requiring Christians today to "let Christ live in us."<sup>16</sup> However, this is a statement of fact, not an example to be followed. Furthermore, Christ said he would live in any man who would keep his word (John 14:23). Christ's living in the Christian seems to be the result of obedience to Christ. Paul told the Corinthian Christians that Christ was in them unless they were reprobate (2 Cor. 13:5).

7. Acts 2:47. This passage says: "And the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved." It was argued:

The example of what happened to the Pentecostians and the early converts at Jerusalem in "being added" to the church, is preached everywhere by us today as a positive "pattern" teaching for what will happen also to today's baptized believer. The example, of itself, establishes the pattern. What was true for them, is true for us.<sup>17</sup>

While men were baptized to become Christians (Acts 2:38), the action of Acts 2:47 was something the Lord did to Christians. This was not an action Christians performed and, therefore, does not establish a pattern of action for Christians today. It may teach what will happen to a Christian, but it does not bind him to do anything.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*



8. 1 Corinthians 9:19-22. Paul summarized in this passage several illustrations of ways he conducted himself before others by saying: "I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some." On this point it was argued: "'Becoming all things to all men, that he by all means might save some,' establishes a pattern requirement for us today. . . ."<sup>18</sup>

The actual example here, what Paul did, was to "become all things to all men." It seems doubtful that Christians who have accommodated themselves to the customs and mores of other peoples have done so because they read that Paul did it and felt that this was a pattern requirement which obligated them to imitation. It seems more likely that the reason for their becoming all things to all men was the same as Paul's, that, he says, "I may by all means save some."

9. Philippians 3:7-9. After listing things he might boast about, Paul said in this passage, "I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." It was argued: "'Counting all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ,' is a binding obligation upon all Christians of every age to do the same thing."<sup>19</sup>

Why? For one who lives close to Christ, this attitude is understandable and natural. Paul was merely expressing the response of his love for Christ. Christians are commanded to love Christ; and for one who truly loves him, this will be his attitude as well. To transform this response of Paul into some kind of binding obligation of Christians of every age appears to be an unnatural way to treat the passage.

10. Philippians 4:11. Paul said here: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content." Paul's contentment is supposed to be a binding obligation and pattern for all Christians to be content. Yet, this is not an example in the absence of a command, for Christians are commanded to be content in Hebrews 13:5.

11. Acts 8:35. This passage says that Philip preached Jesus to the eunuch. Thomas said that since the response of the eunuch was to ask to be baptized, "preaching Jesus" must include the doctrine of baptism. But it would seem that whatever this passage might mention that Christians are obligated to do, is required by the commands of Matthew 28:19, 20 and Mark 16:15, 16. Both the necessity of preaching the gospel and baptism are taught in these passages.

12. Acts 8:36-38. This is the occasion when Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and he baptized him. This is supposed to obligate Christians to bury people when baptizing them and to do it in water.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 68.

Men are commanded to be baptized (Acts 2:38). Since "baptism" means "immersion," Christians are commanded to be immersed. Immersion may be described as a burial, hence the obligation of Christians to bury people when baptizing them. It is from the fact that Philip "baptized" the eunuch that it is concluded he was "buried." Both went down into the water but only the eunuch was buried. The obligation to bury people seems to come from the command to baptize them.

The commands of John 3:5 and Acts 22:16 indicate that water is the element involved in baptism (cf. Eph. 5:26 and Titus 3:5). It seems questionable that Acts 8:36-38 is an example that binds in the absence of commands.

13. Acts 2:42. This passage says that the Jerusalem Christians "continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers." Their action was said to be binding on Christians today because "they were naturally going by inspired instruction in all that they did."<sup>21</sup>

While it may be true that they did everything they were commanded to do, it would not follow that everything they did had been commanded. They were also "continuing stedfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home" (Acts 2:46). Had they been commanded to meet in the temple? Had they been commanded to break bread at home? They "sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, according as any man had need" (Acts 2:45). Had they been commanded to do this? Acts 5:4 suggests otherwise.

Some things, if not all, that the Jerusalem Christians did in Acts 2:42 are commanded elsewhere. But, examination of their actions alone seems inadequate in determining whether they were the result of divine obligation.

14. Acts 11:26. This verse says that "the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." It was argued:

The recording of the example of the disciples being called "Christians" at Antioch indicates the divine approval of this designation. We today properly quote this example as being reason enough for our being required to wear the name today. The example is adequate to establish the pattern.<sup>22</sup>

If this requires that disciples be called Christians, the requirement seems more clearly expressed in the command of 1 Peter 4:16.

15. Acts 19:3-6. According to this passage, Paul baptized some into the name of the Lord Jesus who had only received John's baptism. It was argued:

The example of Paul's baptizing again the twelve who had only John's baptism is proof positive that John's baptism is different from Christian baptism and that John's baptism had

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*



no validity after Pentecost day. Examples do establish pattern teaching.<sup>23</sup>

This passage is instructive regarding the baptism of John, and Paul's response to it. The connection as to the conduct of Christians today was not made clear. Perhaps the implication was that this example would bind Christians today to do as Paul did, if placed in similar circumstances.

In response to this, it should be noted that Thomas' definition of "example" was "action," which is being used also in this study. An analysis of Acts 19:3-6 shows that the only "action" or "example" involved in these verses pertinent to the problem under consideration is that of Paul baptizing people into the name of the Lord Jesus who had never before been baptized into his name. Yet, this is specifically commanded in Matthew 28:19, 20 and Acts 2:38. The obligation would appear to be due to the commands of Jesus rather than to the fact that Paul did it. It is taught in Acts 19:2-4, apart from any actions, in statements that are made that John's baptism is not equivalent to the baptism of Acts 2:38. The actions say nothing about this. Thus, it is not an example that leads to the knowledge that "John's baptism is different from Christian baptism and that John's baptism had no validity after Pentecost day."

Being "baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus" is the only thing imitable in the passage. It is specifically stated that it was the *statement* of Paul that prompted this *action*—"and when they heard *this*." If it could be that a situation such as that represented in this passage could exist today, and if Christians would have to do what was done here, it would seem that the necessity would be because of what was *stated* rather than what they *did*.

16. 1 Corinthians 9:27. Here Paul said, "I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage." But this is not an example that binds in the absence of commands, for it is acknowledged that "we are taught elsewhere that we should have self-control. . . ." <sup>24</sup>

17. Revelation 1:10. In this passage John said, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." It is argued:

We have always taught that this example of what John did on the Lord's day was binding upon us. Were we right? The answer is yes, when we study this example in the light of all other commands for worship and first-day of the week observance, *et cetera*.<sup>25</sup>

It was stated that it is in the light of commands, and not in their absence, that this may be seen as binding. Yet, it was not made clear what John did in this passage that Christians must imitate.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 70.

### Examples Examined

Each passage that Thomas presented as actions that Christians must imitate in the absence of commands has been considered. If all the actions of every individual and church in the New Testament were examined, what conclusions could be drawn? Would there be any indication of the intent on the part of the writers to convey the requirements of God through that medium? To list the hundreds of actions recorded in the New Testament would be to copy enormous portions of it, and it would be practically pointless. However, a sampling of these actions in the New Testament should be sufficient to indicate an answer to the questions mentioned and to call attention to some other pertinent matters.

About two hundred specific actions of Jesus are recorded in the first 24 chapters of Matthew. A dozen of these are listed here to show the diversity of actions of Jesus as recorded by Matthew: Jesus fasted (4:2), walked by the sea of Galilee (4:18), taught people while sitting down (5:1; 13:2; 24:3), healed the sick (8:16), entered into a boat (8:23), ate with publicans and sinners (9:11), taught in synagogues (9:35), drank wine (11:19), spoke in parables to the multitudes (13:34), spent some time praying alone on a mountain (14:23), rode on an ass (21:7), and destroyed a barren fig tree (21:19). The actions recorded range from the mundane to the momentous.

A sample chapter from the book of Acts will now be considered which contains actions representative of the kind of actions found throughout the rest of the New Testament. Actions recorded in the ninth chapter of Acts suggest the difficulty in trying to determine what may be authoritative in them, if anything. Notice will be made of the specific actions of Christians recorded in that chapter. Verse references are in parentheses:

1. Ananias went to the house where Paul was staying. (17)
2. Ananias laid his hands on Paul. (17)
3. Paul was baptized. (18)
4. Paul ate food. (19)
5. Paul stayed "certain days" with the disciples at Damascus. (19)
6. Paul preached in the synagogues. (20)
7. Paul confounded the Jews in Damascus, proving that this is the Christ. (22)
8. At night the disciples helped Paul escape a Jewish plot by letting him down through a wall in a basket. (25)
9. When Paul went to Jerusalem, he tried to join himself to the disciples. (26)
10. Barnabas brought Paul to the apostles. (27)
11. Paul preached boldly throughout Jerusalem. (28-29)
12. Paul disputed against the Grecian Jews. (29)
13. Christians brought Paul to Caesarea and sent him to Troas. (30)



14. The church walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. (31)
15. Peter went to the saints at Lydda. (32)
16. Peter healed Aeneas. (33-34)
17. Dorcas did good works and almsdeeds. (36)
18. The disciples at Joppa sent two men to Peter to ask him to come to Joppa. (38)
19. Peter went to Joppa. (39)
20. Peter went into an upper chamber. (39)
21. Dorcas made coats and garments. (39)
22. Widows wept when Dorcas died. (39)
23. Peter put everyone out of the room. (40)
24. Peter knelt down and prayed. (40)
25. Peter turned to the body. (40)
26. Dorcas opened her eyes. (40)
27. Dorcas sat up. (40)
28. Peter raised Dorcas up by the hand. (41)
29. Peter called the saints and widows into the room and presented Dorcas alive. (41)
30. Peter stayed many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner. (43)

Are any of these actions of binding-force on Christians today? In trying to answer this, four things Paul did may be used illustratively: he was baptized, ate food, preached in the synagogues; and, when he went to Jerusalem, he tried to join himself to the disciples. Must Christians imitate Paul in each of these actions? Must the Christian be baptized because Paul was baptized? Must the Christian eat food because Paul ate food? Must he preach in the synagogues because Paul did?

Other actions are recorded in Acts 9. Must Christians do good works and almsdeeds because Dorcas did? Must Christians kneel down when they pray as Peter did? These questions, and many others that could be raised, point up the difficulties of finding patterns in New Testament actions.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

What does the New Testament teach regarding the authority of its examples? It does not speak in terms of a pattern of examples. Its examples motivate, encourage, and comfort. Old Testament examples are said to provide warnings. New Testament examples are helpful in clarifying things a Christian may do.

Does the New Testament teach that its examples determine what a Christian or churches must do? Neither churches nor individuals of the New Testament are presented as patterns to be imitated in specific detail. The words translated "example" in the New Testament all carry the basic meaning of a model, pattern, or that which is to be imitated. Some individuals were told that they should be examples. Because of its imitation of the Lord, one New

Testament church was said to have been an example to Christians elsewhere. But, in this sense, any church could be an example to others.

Paul told others to imitate him and said he was an example in the matter of laboring. But, Paul told Christians to imitate any who lived as he did. He said he was only to be imitated as he imitated Christ. Paul, Timothy and Silvanus were to be imitated by the Thessalonians in at least one respect.

Jesus was a perfect man, yet he is specifically spoken of as an "example" only in the matters of humble service (or foot-washing) and suffering.

Some people of the Old Testament are referred to as examples of disobedience; and others are cited as examples to be imitated with respect to their faith, patience, and suffering.

A review of the specific teachings of the New Testament on examples and imitation does not seem to justify the conclusion that a pattern for the church regarding worship, government, discipline, and so forth is to be found in the actions of the primitive church. But, did the Holy Spirit in inspiring the New Testament writers exercise a kind of selectivity in choosing particular actions as patterns to be imitated? The New Testament does not say so, and an examination of all the actions of the New Testament appears not to suggest such selectivity.



## Chapter 4

## Evaluations and Implications

## EVALUATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Now, nothing in worship or discipline can be necessary to Christian communion but what Christ our legislator, or the Apostles by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have commanded in express words.<sup>1</sup>

These words of John Locke, the English philosopher, are taken from "A Letter Concerning Toleration" which was first published in English in 1689.

Thomas Campbell was so impressed by the writings of Locke that, before immigrating to America, he required Alexander to read them.<sup>2</sup> The elder Campbell considered "A Letter Concerning Toleration" of such importance that, in 1844, he printed it in its entirety over a period of months in *The Millennial Harbinger*.

Over one hundred years after Locke wrote the words quoted above, Campbell wrote in the "Declaration and Address":

Nor ought anything to be admitted, as of Divine obligation, in their Church constitution and management, but what is expressly enjoined by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles upon the New Testament church; either in express terms or by approved precedent.<sup>3</sup>

A comparison of the two statements suggests the probability that Campbell borrowed his idea from Locke. A significant difference is Campbell's addition of "approved precedent." In view of this, it is worth noting that Alexander Campbell said his reaction upon first reading his father's statement was: "While there was some ambiguity about this 'approved precedent,' there was none about 'express terms.'"<sup>4</sup>

Over 150 years later Bill Humble said:

I do not think Campbell ever solved that ambiguity, and I believe there has been a great deal of ambiguity ever since in dealing with the approved precedent of the New Testament. . . . We have not finally and fully solved the question

<sup>1</sup>John Locke, "A Letter Concerning Toleration," *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), XXXV, 22. The work was originally published in Latin.

<sup>2</sup>Lester G. McAllister, *Thomas Campbell: Man of the Book* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1954), p. 34.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Campbell, "Declaration and Address," *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union*, pp. 108-09.

<sup>4</sup>Alexander Campbell, "Anecdotes, Incidents and Facts," *The Millennial Harbinger*, Series III, Vol. V (May, 1848), p. 281.

when is a New Testament example mandatory and, therefore, binding upon us, and when is it an optional matter.<sup>5</sup>

After writing the "Declaration and Address," Thomas Campbell never elaborated on the concept of "approved precedents." About sixty volumes came from the prolific pen of his son, Alexander Campbell, yet he never wrote even an article on this subject. He did say once that an apostolic example was of equal authority with an apostolic precept.<sup>6</sup> Yet, when a controversy arose involving apostolic precedents, he apparently deviated from this position. In dealing with the cooperation of churches, he said:

It is now shown from the authoritative book that the ancient churches did, in certain districts, unite in *choosing* and appointing certain persons for religious purposes—and that those persons, *chosen by the churches* of any district, were *the messengers of the churches* of that district. All that we infer from this, is, that we have good authority, when occasion requires, to go and do likewise.<sup>7</sup>

After stating what he believed the New Testament church did, he concluded only that the church today had the right to do the same. He did not believe the church *had* to do the same thing. In fact, Campbell seemed to oppose those who saw patterns in the details of what the New Testament church *did*. Concerning how churches ought to cooperate, he wrote:

There is too much squeamishness about the *manner* of cooperation. Some are looking for a model similar to that which Moses gave for building the tabernacle. These seem not to understand that this is as impossible as it would be incompatible with the genius of the gospel. . . . A model for making types, paper, ink, and for printing the Bible, might as rationally be expected, as a model for the cooperation of churches. . . .<sup>8</sup>

These comments of Campbell were made several years after his statement equating the authority of apostolic example and apostolic precept. One might wonder if Campbell had written on the subject at a later time, if his thoughts would reveal his original skepticism of the authority of "approved precedent." Could the virtual silence of the Campbells on the authority of "approved precedent" have indicated uncertainty regarding its validity and implications?

The Campbells were not the only ones who were remarkably silent on the subject. Until the 1950's, almost nothing of signifi-

<sup>5</sup>Bill Humble, "Cooperation of Churches," *The Arlington Meeting*, p. 306.

<sup>6</sup>Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration to the Ancient Order of Things. No. VII. On the Breaking of Bread. No. II." *The Christian Baptist*, III (September 5, 1825), 29.

<sup>7</sup>Alexander Campbell, "The Cooperation of Churches—No. 1," *The Millennial Harbinger*, II (May 4, 1831), p. 238.

<sup>8</sup>Alexander Campbell, "Cooperation," *The Millennial Harbinger*, VI (March, 1835), p. 121.



cance had been written on the matter. Yet, it seems that all who were concerned with restoring the New Testament church had assumed that approved apostolic examples were binding. In debates over issues involving certain examples of the New Testament, the disputants on both sides of the issue assumed that, as a principle, approved apostolic examples were binding. For example, in a debate with Guy N. Woods, Roy E. Cogdill said that for a thing to be in harmony with the scriptures "... there must be either: first, an express command or statement; second, an approved example; or third, a necessary inference, in the word of God for it."<sup>9</sup> He illustrated the "approved example" by stating that the example of the church at Troas assembling on the first day of the week to break bread meant that the breaking of bread could be done with divine approval only on the first day of the week.<sup>10</sup> In response, Woods said: "No one calls in question these matters which he discussed regarding the authority of the scriptures. . . ."<sup>11</sup>

#### ARGUMENTS FOR AUTHORITY OF EXAMPLES

What has been the basis for this assumption? Roy Cogdill expressed the concept from which other arguments seem to have developed:

When we can find the church practicing a particular thing or method in the New Testament record with evident apostolic approval, no one with any faith would question the correctness of the same practice today under the same or similar circumstances.<sup>12</sup>

Surely, any practice that conforms to either apostolic precept or apostolic precedent would be correct. Yet, while it may be *correct* to practice everything the New Testament church practiced, is it *necessary*? This is the crucial question with which this study is concerned.

#### All Practices Commanded

An argument connected with Matthew 28:18-20 has been the basis on which many have determined the necessity of following the example of the New Testament church. In this passage, Jesus said, "All authority hath been given to me in heaven and on earth." On the basis of this, he commissioned his apostles to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I command you." Cogdill stated the argument this way:

The force of an apostolically approved example in the New Testament rests upon the fact that they were limited in teach-

ing the church to that which Jesus Christ had commanded. . . .

When they taught a thing or approved a practice engaged in by the church, it was *prima facie* evidence that Christ had commanded it.<sup>13</sup>

It is true that the apostles taught with the authority of Christ. Paul said that the things he wrote "are the commandment of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). But to command a thing and to approve a thing are not equivalent. Matters of expediency could be approved, although they were not commanded. For example, the church at Troas met in a third-story chamber with the evident approval of Paul, but it does not seem to most that this was "evidence that Christ had commanded it." That is, few would maintain that it was required that the church at Troas meet in a third-story chamber. Yet, the fact that Paul was participating in their meeting there and did not condemn it says that he approved it, that is, he accepted the arrangement as satisfactory. The following actions were recorded with approval as having been acceptable actions done by New Testament Christians or churches, yet one could not conclude that Christ had commanded them: praying at the ninth hour, daily worship of the assembled church, burial of the dead by *young* men, preaching in synagogues, selling all possessions and distributing to the needy, kneeling while praying, fasting, laying on of hands, and sailing in a ship.

#### Inherent Authority

In relation to this, J. D. Thomas said: "The restoration plea, brethren, has been that what the first century Christians had to do, we have to do!"<sup>14</sup> Yet, there is a difference in what they had to do and what they did. They did some things they did not have to do, as has just been illustrated.

But, how can one determine what they had to do? Can one determine from merely examining an example if the action was an action that was required? Thomas said that this is possible and listed seventeen examples that are supposed to be of this character. These have been examined individually in the previous chapter. However, there seems to be a fallacy in the whole approach used to show that examples are binding. Certain practices were assumed to be binding. Examples of these practices were cited from the New Testament. It was stated that the use of these examples would be the only basis for concluding that the practices are binding. Therefore, it was concluded, the practices are binding because of these examples. This seems to be arguing in a circle.

It is true that most of those within the Restoration Movement have believed in the necessity of doing the same thing done in most

<sup>9</sup>Guy N. Woods and Roy E. Cogdill, *Woods-Cogdill Debate* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1958), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup>Roy Cogdill, *Walking by Faith*, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup>Roy E. Cogdill, "How to Establish Bible Authority," *The Arlington Meeting*, pp. 23, 33-34.

<sup>14</sup>J. D. Thomas, "How to Establish Bible Authority," *The Arlington Meeting*, p. 56.



of these examples. However, it is not clear that the reason for doing these things came from a belief in the obligation to follow these particular examples. In each case where there may be a sense of obligation to do the same thing as was done in a particular example, the reason for the sense of obligation can be found elsewhere.

Continuing the theme of authority as inherent in examples, Thomas cited 1 Peter 3:1, 2 which says husbands may "be gained by the behavior of their wives." He commented:

In this case the conduct and actions and example of the wife is able to exercise an influence and cause *actions that are required, pattern obedience* on the part of the husband, which influence was impossible through words only!<sup>15</sup>

But, are actions and conduct, alone, sufficient to establish the *necessity* of imitation?

Thomas pointed out that the teaching that a father must give to his son "with words" should be reinforced with a corresponding pattern, and that the behavior may have more power to induce imitation than the words.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the son would have no certainty that his father's behavior-pattern involved an *obligation* of imitation without the *words* expressing it. It is true that examples may encourage others to imitation for good or evil (e.g., Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 8:10). Yet, while an example may authorize and stimulate imitation, there seems to be no basis for concluding it can ever, of itself, *require* imitation. A command can demand imitation. But, in the absence of an express command, there seems to be no way to know if any pattern of behavior requires imitation. Thomas suggested that implied commands can be seen in some New Testament actions—that some actions are of such a character that they imply that they are the result of having been commanded. Yet, the examples presented as evidence of that seem, at best, inconclusive.

#### New Testament Teaching

Perhaps the most obvious basis for the conclusion that the examples of the New Testament are binding, is found in certain passages of the New Testament dealing with examples and imitation. These should be considered carefully. Possibly the most frequently cited in this connection are Philippians 4:9 and 1 Corinthians 11:1. In the former, Paul said, "The things ye both learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things do." In the latter, Paul said, "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ."

In each of these passages, Paul was telling a New Testament *church* to imitate him. Therefore, it would be a misapplication to use the passages in justifying the necessity of churches today to imitate New Testament *churches*. It might be proper to say that churches today should imitate *Paul*.

<sup>15</sup>J. D. Thomas, "We Be Brethren," p. 51.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

When Philippians 4:9 is viewed against the background of its historical and Biblical context, it seems quite unnatural to view it as a principle for Biblical interpretation. A visit previous to Paul's writing of the letter to Philippi was the occasion of the beginning of the church in that city (Acts 16:11-40). His visit became an ordeal of beating and imprisonment. His conduct in the midst of this adversity, for example, his response of song and prayer rather than despair, has been an inspiration to Christians ever since. Paul's conduct then was surely vivid in their minds when he wrote to them from another imprisonment, in Rome:

Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice. . . . In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:4, 6).

It is against this background that Paul said to the Philippians: "The things which ye both learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things do: and the God of peace shall be with you."

The command of Paul that he be imitated is no more suggestive of an eternal pattern to be discerned in the actions of his life, than the command to imitate elders of the church suggests an eternal pattern to be discerned in the actions of their lives. Concerning those that have "the rule over you," Christians are told: "Considering the issue of their life, imitate their faith" (Heb. 13:7). There is no basis for concluding that the command to imitate Paul is based on anything more than a consideration of the issue of his life.

What did Paul mean in 1 Corinthians 11:1? Did he mean that others were to do everything both he and Christ had done? This certainly was not the intention. Paul not only remained unmarried as did Christ; he recommended the practice (1 Cor. 7:7-9). Yet, the same passage says this was not required of others.

Paul's injunction for others to imitate him cannot mean that others must do everything he did. This is neither possible nor necessary. Among the things Paul did are the following: Paul made a trip by ship to Rome, preached in synagogues, prayed and sang hymns about midnight, knelt when he prayed, and rode on a beast. Christians may do any of these that are possible but, certainly, they are not required to do all, if any. From this it would seem to follow that the mere examination of an action is insufficient to reveal the character of the action, whether it was something required by God or the result of other motivation. One might observe Paul's circumcising Timothy and conclude circumcision was necessary (Acts 16:3). One might observe Paul's refusal to circumcise Titus and conclude circumcision was forbidden (Gal. 2:3-5). The principle of becoming all things to all men motivated much of Paul's activities (1 Cor. 9:19-22). A Christian in the circumstances of Paul in Acts 16:3, but following the action of Paul in Galatians 2:3-5, would have refused to circumcise Timothy. But, if he followed the principle of Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, he would have circumcised Timothy.



Did Paul's injunction for others to imitate him imply that his actions were inspired by the Holy Spirit? His position as an apostle would not have guaranteed infallibility of action since Peter, another apostle, was condemned for his action (Gal. 2:11-14). If Acts 16:6-10 shows Paul's actions were infallibly guided by the Holy Spirit, Acts 21:4, 15 might well show that Paul's actions were not guided by the Holy Spirit. However, both seem to be special situations not lending themselves to general conclusions.

What was the intention of Paul's injunction for others to imitate him? Paul's inclusion of Timothy as a fellow-example and one to be imitated along with himself (2 Thess. 3:7, 9; 1:1) provides an avenue for understanding his meaning. The injunctions of Paul to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:12) and of Peter to elders (1 Peter 5:3) that they be examples imply that their becoming examples would be the result of effort on their part. Thus, it would seem that their being examples was not uniquely theirs by virtue of who or what they were. Rather, it would seem that such was the result of their personal growth and development or "progress," as Paul called it (1 Tim. 4:15). There is no indication that Timothy's being an example and his worthiness of imitation was of a different character from that of elders of the church. Paul's admonition to the Thessalonians to imitate the example of himself and Timothy was the result of their having proved themselves worthy of such imitation regarding the matter being considered. On a grander scale, the quality of Paul's life was such that he could on the same basis instruct others: "Be ye imitators of me," not in every detail as though perfect, but "even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

If Paul is to be imitated, how is he to be imitated? Of the things that Paul did, which *require* imitation? It would seem that only those things specified by a command could be understood as required. Must Christians pray because Paul prayed? Must Christians kneel when praying because Paul knelt when praying? (In the New Testament, Christians are only described as praying while kneeling, rather than standing.) If Christians feel obligated to pray but not to kneel, it would seem to be because the former is commanded and the latter is not. Both Paul and Christ preached in synagogues. If Christians felt obligated to imitate Paul and Christ in this, they would do likewise; but, in the absence of such a command, they feel no obligation to do so. Christians do, of course, feel obligated to preach, as both Paul and Christ did; but they do this because they are commanded to preach.

Paul commanded the Philippians to imitate those who lived as he did (Phil. 3:17, 18). Those who were to be imitated were placed in contrast to the bad examples of those who lived as enemies of the cross of Christ. The necessity of seeking good examples to motivate and challenge to nobler living is recognized. The need to follow good examples is also acknowledged. But, it is also realized that not every action of an exemplary individual or group requires imitation. Thus, the question still remains: Which ac-

tions require imitation? It seems the only way to know for sure would be by determining if the actions of these exemplary individuals or groups were commanded. And, even then, the requirement would not be because of the action itself, but because of the command to do it.

If Christ is to be imitated, how is he to be imitated? Which of the things he did require imitation? The same approach as has been indicated regarding Paul and the good examples among the Philippians seems necessary here. Among other things, Jesus prayed alone on a mountain, rode an ass, preached in the synagogues, spoke in parables, and walked by the sea of Galilee. Of the hundreds of things Jesus is recorded as having done, the great majority are as seemingly unnecessary to imitate as these. If, as a generous estimate, only one-fifth to one-tenth of the things Jesus is recorded as having done are things Christians must do, it seems unlikely that the purpose of their being recorded was to provide a pattern of specific things Christians must do. It would seem impossible to detect some special selectivity regarding things Christ's disciples must do in the choice of things Jesus is recorded as having done. Furthermore, no rules are given for distinguishing the important from the unimportant. How, then, could one know which actions of Jesus must be imitated? Apparently, without an express statement or command, one could not know.

What can be said of New Testament churches as examples? None of the passages where churches are referred to as examples, or as having been imitated, lends justification to the position that the activities of the churches described in the New Testament are intended to be a pattern regulating the worship, government, discipline, and so forth, of the church today. More is said in the New Testament regarding people of the Old Testament as examples and persons to be imitated than is said, in the same regard, of New Testament churches. It may be said that these churches stirred and motivated others by their actions. But, they are not presented as authoritative actions demanding duplication by other churches in any specific way.

A review of the specific teaching of the New Testament on examples does not justify the conclusion that a pattern for the church is to be found in the actions of the primitive church. John comes closer to providing a summary of its teaching: "Beloved, imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good" (3 John 11).

#### THE ROLE OF NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

What role do examples play in the interpretation of the New Testament? A look at the churches of the New Testament may be helpful. In Matthew 28:18, Jesus said, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." On the basis of this authority, he instructed his apostles to teach his disciples to "observe all things whatsoever I commanded you." Following this commission at the close of the gospels, the remainder of the New Testament is primarily a record of this instruction being followed, of



disciples being taught to observe what the Lord commanded (1 Cor. 14:37). The churches receiving this instruction seemed to be no different from churches today. Some were zealous while others were lukewarm. Some were plagued by false teachers and immoral members while others abounded in faith, love, and good works. While they received some instruction directly from inspired teachers, part of their teaching was received from letters available to churches today that were circulated among churches then. As with churches today, some of the things the churches did then were things that they had been commanded to do, some were things they should not have done, and others were things neither required nor forbidden, ranging from the allowable to the commendable. Nowhere are the actions of the New Testament churches presented as a pattern that churches of later times must follow.

The unique aspect of the churches of the New Testament was their immediate contact with the apostles. Yet, this does not imply that their actions constitute a perfect standard for imitation. On the contrary, their imperfect actions were often the occasion for apostles and prophets to teach them what God had commanded. The lawsuits, drunkenness, fornication, dissension, as well as other problems in the church at Corinth are obvious examples of this.

Rather than being normative, the churches of the New Testament seem to provide the setting within which and around which the teaching of God's way was delivered. For examples, the Galatian churches' following after false teachers (Gal. 1:6; 4:10; 5:7) was the occasion of some of Paul's teaching relative to law and liberty. The persecution of the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3:1-4) was the occasion of some of Paul's teaching concerning the hope of the resurrection. Paul's impending visit to Rome (Rom. 15:24) was the occasion of his profound teaching to the church there.

### Motivate

It seems that the epistles of the New Testament are not so much concerned with revealing what the church of the first century was like, as with teaching what the church should be like. What, then, is the value of the examples of the New Testament churches? (Here, what can be said of New Testament churches can also be said of individual Christians, apostles, and, in some cases, of prophets and great men of faith of the Old Testament.) First, their example can provide such benefits as motivation, inspiration, and comfort. Their zeal (Acts 8:4), generosity (2 Cor. 8:1-5), loyalty to Christ in the face of opposition (Rev. 2:13), concern for those in need (Acts 11:29, 30), and so forth, are encouraging to those who have seen the teaching of Christ and wonder if such a life can really be lived.

### Permit, Not Require

There is a second value in New Testament examples. They may show the acceptability of a certain practice which might otherwise be questioned. It would seem that the practice of Christians

recorded with approval, that is, with no apparent condemnation expressed, would show the acceptability of such an action. For example, apart from any commands, an approved example of married Christians would suggest the acceptability of Christians marrying. In the only case in the New Testament where a writer used the example of other Christians as authority for doing anything, Paul used the example of other Christians having wives as giving him the right to have a wife (1 Cor. 9:5). Their example did not prove the necessity of marrying, it only showed the acceptability of marrying. In fact, Paul said that his own example of being unmarried, while good and acceptable, did not require imitation on the part of others (1 Cor. 7:8, 9).

In a similar way, the fact that, as far as the record goes, all baptisms in the New Testament took place in natural bodies of water would indicate the acceptability of such a practice. Yet, there is no reason to believe that baptism in a baptistry is unscriptural. The fact that baptism in a natural body of water may be a safe course does not mean it is the only safe course. The fact that it would be unquestionably right does not mean that no other way can be unquestionably right.

To illustrate further, the fact that, as far as the record goes, the observance of the Lord's supper was always in an upper room and never in the morning would indicate the acceptability of such a practice. Yet, such artificial categories as its universality and imitability would not seem to require imitation of the practice. It would seem that while apostolic examples may indicate the correctness of an action, a practice without apostolic examples does not, by itself, assure incorrectness—unless every possible thing a Christian can do is specifically exemplified in scripture.

One passage in the New Testament contains a specific denial of the authority of examples to require imitation. To provide the setting, Christians in Jerusalem sold their possessions and gave the proceeds to the poor (Acts 2:44, 45; 4:34, 35). Some have believed their example is binding on all Christians. Perhaps Ananias and Sapphira believed this. At least, they sold a possession and brought part of the price to the apostles (Acts 5:1, 2). Peter's response to their action included the statement that they had been under no obligation to sell anything: "While it remained, did it not remain thine own?" (Acts 5:4). Here is evidence that the example of the early church, even the first church at Jerusalem under the direct guidance of the apostles, is not to be regarded as binding on others.

This example of selling of possessions serves to illustrate two principles. First, it shows the danger of drawing a general conclusion from a particular occurrence. The meaning of an isolated event is ambiguous. James D. Smart said in response to the *Heilsgeschichte* school of theologians:

The event itself is capable of receiving other interpretations. The cross to the indifferent onlooker was merely an



unfortunate miscarriage of justice. The revelation of its meaning is nowhere described as a human inference from a divine event but as a direct revelation of God to man of what he is doing.<sup>17</sup>

In discussing the same issue, J. D. Thomas said with even greater clarity:

The relation between an event and its meaning to the ordinary man is quite loose and ambiguous and must necessarily be equivocal. Very little can be known from an important deed unless it is accompanied by an explanatory word. . . . Events can have so many possible meanings that anything like certain revelation would be impossible without words also having a part in the revelation.<sup>18</sup>

It would seem that even the description of an event would leave the significance of the event ambiguous unless it were expressly stated.

This suggests a second principle that seems to be illustrated by the example of selling of possessions: That which is approved is not necessarily required. In other words, while the presence of an action recorded with obvious approval indicates the acceptability or correctness of that action, it does not prove the necessity of that action. While the apostles obviously approved of the Christians selling their possessions for distribution among those who had need, the practice was not required.

Just as an effect may have any one of several possible causes, so an action may have any one of several possible motivations or reasons. The fact that any particular action was done does not mean it had to be done. It may have been done because of love, habit, expediency, or other reasons. The fact that some people sold their goods and gave to the poor does not mean that they had to or that anyone else had to do so. The fact that Paul made tents does not mean that he or anyone else had to make tents. The fact that certain people laid their hands on other people does not mean that they had to or that anyone else had to do so. The mere fact that people believed, repented, were baptized, loved, were hospitable, were generous, and so forth, does not prove that they had to do these things nor that anyone else has to do them. The mere fact that they did those things does not say why they did those things.

#### Reveal Methods

If New Testament actions do not prescribe what must be done by Christians, why are they recorded? In some cases, because—and this is a third value of examples—they show ways Christians

<sup>17</sup>James D. Smart, *The Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. 173.

<sup>18</sup>J. D. Thomas, *Facts and Faith* (Abilene, Texas: Biblical Research Press, 1965), p. 271.

may carry out the commands of Christ. For example, the successful missionary methods of Paul are studied with profit by missionaries today. The details of Paul's methods are not regarded as binding on Christians, yet they are helpful in determining how to fulfill the command of Christ to preach the gospel. The examples of the New Testament do not show the ways the Christian *must* carry out the commands of Christ, but they do show some ways he *may* obey them.

#### Significance of Silence

The concept that New Testament examples have no binding authority has significant implications for practices not exemplified in scripture. ". . . Where there is no law, neither is there transgression" (Rom. 4:15). If New Testament examples do not have the restrictive nature of law, a particular practice could not be condemned simply on the basis that there is no example of it in scripture. In the New Testament there are no examples of the following: Sunday schools, shirts with buttons, separate communion cups, lipstick, Wednesday night meetings, youth meetings, black people worshiping with white people, ownership of church buildings, pot parties, sponsoring churches, wife-swapping, orphan homes, homes for the aged, Christian colleges, educational directors, radio and television programs, mechanical instruments of music used in the worship of the church, or witch trials. Although none of these things are mentioned in the New Testament, some of these things are right and some are wrong. However, it seems obvious that the fact that there are no examples of them mentioned in the New Testament is not the basis for determining if they are wrong. This is simply because the examples of the New Testament were never intended to include all that Christians can do. They have no exclusive authority.

#### Confusion?

It has been argued that if churches today are not regulated by the example of the early church, there would be no guide in worship and order and the churches would be left in confusion. It would seem that if churches could agree on and practice "the approved and universal practices of the first churches," to use Hal-dane's words, there would be uniformity in these things. Yet, it seems the necessity of doing this has not been established. Nor has it been pointed out in what specific ways, if any, confusion would result.

Actually, if New Testament examples are not binding, only two practices that have generally been considered binding by churches of Christ would have to be reconsidered. One pertains to the frequency of the Lord's supper and will be considered in an appendix to this study. The other involves the plurality of elders in each congregation. Titus was commanded to "appoint elders in every city" (Titus 1:5). However, only an example exists of appointing "elders in every church" (Acts 14:23). The latter establishes the *right* to have a plurality of elders in every church, but this ex-



ample alone would not establish the *necessity*. On the other hand, if there were only one church in each city, the command to appoint elders in every city might have meant to appoint elders in every church. A single church seems to have existed in Philippi where there was a plurality of bishops (Phil. 1:1; 4:15). There was apparently a single church in each city involved where Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (Acts 14:21-23). In view of this, it may be no more unreasonable to say that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every city, than to say that Titus appointed elders in every church. The two ideas seem to be the same. Regardless, the problem of establishing the necessity of elders in each church would seem to pose as great a problem to one who accepted the binding force of examples as to one who did not.

If New Testament examples are not binding, how would the concept of congregational autonomy be affected? It would mean that the autonomy of New Testament congregations would indicate the acceptability of that arrangement, but, by itself, it would not prove the necessity of autonomy. However, the New Testament does not merely reveal the way New Testament churches were governed; it contains many commands that have a bearing on the way the church must be governed (e.g., Titus 1:5-9; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1, 2). The way in which such commands are interpreted would be vital to the concept of the autonomy of the church. The manner of interpreting commands and the absence of commands in the New Testament is beyond the scope of this study. However, it seems that the issue of autonomy would be settled in that area, rather than in the area of examples.

#### *Implications for Issues*

In view of all this, it seems that the church would not be left in confusion if it is not regulated by the examples of the early church. In fact, some confusion and controversy within the Restoration Movement might have been eliminated if apostolic examples had not been considered as binding. Applying this concept to certain controversies that have disturbed the Restoration Movement might have, at least, helped to focus the issues.<sup>19</sup> To be specific, the absence of an example in the New Testament of a church, assembled on the first day of the week, dividing up into Bible classes is insufficient basis for condemning the practice.

The absence of an example in the New Testament of a preacher being hired by a church that has elders to preach to its members does not mean the practice is wrong. The absence of an example in the New Testament of Christians meeting together with unbelievers at the Lord's table does not prove that such a practice is wrong.

<sup>19</sup>It is not the purpose of this study to solve these specific controversies nor to establish the principles for solving them. It is the purpose of this study to explain the role of New Testament examples as related to Biblical authority. However, if examples do not have the authority to demand imitation, it seems of value to suggest the implications for some of the controversies that have revolved around the actions of the New Testament church.

In relation to the church cooperation controversy, the fact that churches cooperated in a certain way in the New Testament is not proof that they had to cooperate in that way; neither does it prove that churches today must cooperate in that way. Unless the New Testament churches were *required* to cooperate in the manner in which they did, there is no reason why they must be imitated. In the absence of a command or statement to that effect, one may conclude that they did it because it was the most natural, convenient, or expedient method in their particular circumstances for preaching the gospel and helping those in need. In that case, churches today would be at liberty to use what may be more expedient methods more suitable to different circumstances, as long as the methods do not violate the teaching of scripture.

The Restoration Movement has been divided by controversies over these issues involving New Testament examples. It seems that these problems must be solved by what New Testament churches and individuals were *taught*, but not by what they *did*. While it may be concluded that an action recorded in the New Testament which is not condemned may be imitated today, it might not follow that such imitation is *required*. The presence of an action of Christians in the New Testament is not sufficient to determine whether that action was required. Furthermore, the absence of an action of Christians from the New Testament is not sufficient to determine whether that action was forbidden. The pattern for Christian action is to be found in the *teaching* of the New Testament rather than in the *action* of the New Testament church. It is what the Spirit *said* to the churches, not what the churches *did*, that provides the basis for knowing the will of the Spirit (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

In January of 1968, 26 leaders from churches of Christ that had been divided over how churches should cooperate met in Arlington, Texas, to discuss these differences. Much of the discussion involved the question of the authority of New Testament examples. In the concluding speech of that meeting, Reuel Lemmons expressed the practical conclusion of this study:

These discussions have brought out the fact that the basis of all our lack of fellowship, whatever it may be, springs from differing methods of establishing Bible authority. . . . I have listened closely to the three ways of establishing authority—command, example, inference. And I am persuaded that this needs closer examination. I believe that Bible authority rests solely on the revelatory nature of the scriptures, and that dealing with necessary inference and approved examples involves the use of the human mind and, therefore, interpretation.

Since no scripture is given for private interpretation, there is actually no Biblical ground for disfellowship in differences that are centered either in necessary inference or in approved example.



Differences exist, certainly, but not *disfellowshipping differences*; because both the degree of the necessity of the inference and the degree of the bindingness of the example are things that exist in our minds.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Reuel Lemmons, "How to Attain and Maintain Fellowship," *The Arlington Meeting*, pp. 405-06.

## Chapter 5

# Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study has been to determine the role of New Testament examples as related to Biblical authority. It has been to determine whether actions of individuals or churches recorded in the New Testament have the authority to require imitation by people today. The methodology was, first, to review and summarize what has been written previously on the subject. This material has come largely from within the Restoration Movement where the issue has been of particular concern. The second step was to examine the New Testament with reference to its examples and its teaching regarding examples. Writings of the recent past were then evaluated in the light of the New Testament and some practical implications were suggested.

James Alexander Haldane of Scotland published in 1805 the most extensive work to be found on the subject. Thomas and Alexander Campbell, who were influenced by Haldane, were largely responsible for the acceptance of the authority of examples in the American Restoration Movement. However, they never undertook to define their authority with care. Much has been written on the subject during the past 25 years in relation to the church cooperation controversy. Those within the Restoration Movement who have written on the subject usually have assumed that at least some of the New Testament examples are binding. Most of the writing has sought to determine when examples are binding.

In contrast, the New Testament seems to provide no basis for concluding that its examples are binding. It does not speak in terms of a pattern of examples. Neither churches nor individuals in the New Testament are presented as patterns to be imitated in specific detail. There is no evidence that the New Testament writers exercised selectivity in choosing particular actions or patterns to be copied. The New Testament contains no rules for distinguishing important from unimportant examples. Rather than standing beside the teaching of the apostles as part of a divine pattern, New Testament churches seemed to stand on the same level as churches today, beneath the pattern of sound doctrine of the apostles.

Some individuals in the New Testament were told that they should be examples. Because of its imitation of the Lord, one New Testament church was said to have been an example to Christians elsewhere. But, in this sense, any church could be an example to others. Paul told others to imitate him and said that he was an example in the matter of laboring. But, Paul told Christians to



imitate any who lived as he did. He said he was only to be imitated as he imitated Christ. Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus were to be imitated by the Thessalonians in at least one respect. Jesus was a perfect man, yet he is specifically spoken of as an "example" only in the matters of humble service (foot-washing) and suffering. Actually, more is said in the New Testament regarding people of the Old Testament as examples and persons to be imitated than is said, in the same regard, of New Testament churches.

In the only case in the New Testament where a writer used the example of other Christians as authority for doing anything, Paul said the example of others gave him the right to do the same, but it did not require him to do the same. Paul said the fact that he was unmarried did not mean others had to remain unmarried. On one occasion, Peter said that the action of Christians in Jerusalem did not require other Christians to do the same.

It is dangerous to draw a general conclusion from a particular occurrence. Just as an effect may have any one of several causes, so an action may have any one of several motivations. Therefore, the fact that an action was done does not mean it had to be done. While the presence of an action recorded with obvious approval, without specific condemnation, would seem to indicate the acceptability or correctness of that action, it does not prove the necessity of that action. Just as the presence of an example does not require, so the absence of an example does not forbid.

While examples seem to have no binding authority, they do play a valuable role in the New Testament. Many examples inspire, motivate, encourage, and comfort. Some examples show the acceptability of practices which might otherwise be questioned. Also, examples sometimes show ways to obey God's will.

The conclusion of this study is that New Testament examples have no role as related to Biblical authority. The actions of individuals or churches recorded in the New Testament have no authority to require imitation by people today. The acceptance of this conclusion would seem to require no change in the general practices of churches of Christ. It might permit greater freedom in some areas.

The acceptance of the conclusion of this study within the Restoration Movement would have been helpful in solving controversies over such issues as Sunday schools, located preachers, closed communion, and church cooperation. Hopefully, the study might help in solving future problems that might arise over the interpretation of New Testament examples. It would seem that the Restoration Movement, splintered by disputes over whether commands can be necessarily inferred as lying behind certain approved apostolic examples, might move toward greater unity by seriously considering a question of John Locke:

But since men are so solicitous about the true church, I would only ask them here, by the way, if it be not more agree-

able to the Church of Christ to make the conditions of her communion consist in such things, and such things only, as the Holy Spirit has in the Holy Scriptures declared, in express words, to be necessary to salvation; I ask, I say, whether this be not more agreeable to the Church of Christ than for men to impose their own inventions and interpretations upon others as if they were of Divine authority, and to establish by ecclesiastical laws, as absolutely necessary to the profession of Christianity, such things as the Holy Scriptures do either not mention; or at least not expressly command?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Locke, *op. cit.*, p. 5.



## Appendix

### THE EXAMPLE OF ACTS 20:7

And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and prolonged his speech until midnight (Acts 20:7).

In the latter part of the eighteenth century, Greville Ewing changed the Scottish custom of having the Lord's supper twice a year by introducing at Glasgow the practice of observing it every first day of the week. The basis for this change was the assumption that Christians must conform their practices to those of the primitive church. An associate of Ewing, James Alexander Haldane, published a book in 1805 to prove, his son said, that this newly introduced practice was "agreeable to the apostolic order and the practice of the primitive Churches."<sup>1</sup>

The effect of these developments reached the American Restoration Movement through Alexander Campbell who, shortly before coming to America in 1809, had associated with both Ewing and Haldane. Campbell taught the necessity of having the Lord's supper on the first day of the week on the basis of apostolic example.<sup>2</sup>

Since the institution of the Lord's supper did not occur on the first day of the week, Haldane believed a church "may eat the Lord's supper every day," but it "must observe it every first day of the week."<sup>3</sup> However, within the American Restoration Movement it has generally been maintained that the Lord's supper must be observed *exclusively* on the first day of every week. The basis for this conclusion has been Acts 20:7.<sup>4</sup> This teaching has become so positive that some have been disfellowshipped for disagreeing on this matter.<sup>5</sup>

The significance of Acts 20:7 to the study of the authority of examples lies in the close association of these two items in Restoration writings. The main use of the concept of the authority of examples in these writings has been to show that the example of

Acts 20:7 teaches the necessity of observing the Lord's supper exclusively on the first day of every week. J. D. Thomas said:

... We have not been especially aware of any other important doctrinal teachings where we felt we were dependent upon an "example" as the sole medium of authority, and we therefore did not really look very deeply into the question of "when and how do examples teach?"<sup>6</sup>

While, for the most part, the teaching of the authority of examples has been applied to Acts 20:7, in the last two decades some in the churches of Christ have extended the application to the area of cooperation. It was said that

... Acts 20:7, gives us the TIME of the Lord's Supper by apostolic example just as 2 Cor. 11:8 and Phil. 4:15, 16 give us an approved example for sending DIRECTLY to the evangelist.<sup>7</sup>

On this basis it was concluded that

... it would be wrong to eat the Lord's Supper any other time, just as it would be wrong for a church to support a preacher any other way; thus making Herald of Truth and sponsoring churches unscriptural.<sup>8</sup>

Although the conclusions of this study have implications for other passages, such as those just mentioned, Acts 20:7 has been chosen for more thorough treatment to illustrate the application of these conclusions.

This study has concluded that examples have no inherent authority to require imitation. This implies that the mere *fact* that disciples at Troas came together to break bread upon the first day of the week, does not *require* Christians today to do the same. To do the same would be permissible, at least, but not required. If there were a command or an express statement to the effect that such action was necessary, then the requirement would be clear. However, no such command or express statement exists.

### ARGUMENTS ON ACTS 20:7

In the absence of an express requirement, what arguments have been presented to show that the example of Acts 20:7 is binding on Christians today? Since it has been universally recognized that Christians are not required to do everything that was done by New Testament churches and Christians, on what basis has this particular example been considered as one that must be imitated?

#### Only Day Mentioned

Generally, it has been argued that the first day of the week is the only day mentioned on which Christians had the Lord's supper.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup>Ward Hogland, "The Power of Apostolic Examples," *Searching the Scriptures*, VIII (Sept., 1967), p. 9.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>1</sup>Alexander Haldane, *The Lives of Robert Haldane of Airthrey, and of His Brother, James Alexander Haldane* (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1852), p. 356.

<sup>2</sup>Alexander Campbell, "Address to the Readers of *The Christian Baptist*, No. III," *The Christian Baptist*, I (Feb. 2, 1824), p. 131.

<sup>3</sup>James Alexander Haldane, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>4</sup>J. D. Thomas, "We Be Brethren" (Abilene, Texas: Biblical Research Press, 1958), p. 46.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 98.



It has been concluded that there is, therefore, no authority for its observance on another day.<sup>9</sup> However, this argument assumes that Jesus intended that its observance should be on one particular day of the week. Jesus said, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11:26). But Jesus did not say how often this must be done, nor if it must be on one particular day of the week to the exclusion of others. The fact that Jesus instituted the observance on a day other than Sunday would seem to challenge the idea that he intended a particular day for its observance, especially since no stipulation regarding it is expressed.

The argument has been made that the example of Acts 20:7 itself specifies the day on which the Lord's supper is to be observed. This specification is supposed to exclude any other day, just as God's specification that the ark was to be made of gopher wood is supposed to have excluded any other kind of wood.<sup>10</sup> However, these two are not parallel. God commanded Noah to build the ark of gopher wood, but there is no command to observe the Lord's supper on the first day of the week—only an example of its having been done. If it were merely recorded that Noah built the ark of gopher wood, there would be no way of knowing if it was due to a command of God, the personal preference of Noah, the abundant supply of that kind of wood, or any of a number of other possibilities. Likewise, the mere fact of Christians at Troas eating the Lord's supper on the first day of the week is insufficient to determine the reason for their having done this.

#### *Paul's Wait*

It has been argued that Paul waited seven days at Troas to partake of the Lord's supper on the first day of the week.<sup>11</sup> The implication of this would be that the church observed it only on the first day of the week. If Paul was to observe it with them, he would have to tarry at Troas until that time. While this may be an accurate reconstruction of what happened, it is not necessarily the case. Acts 20:6 says Paul tarried seven days at Troas. But, it does not say *why* he tarried seven days. It could have been for other reasons. For example, the ship on which Paul was sailing may have stopped seven days at Troas to unload its cargo. At least, this seems to be the reason for the seven-day wait at Tyre (Acts 21:3-6). Paul's travel plans were apparently contingent on shipping schedules (e.g. Acts 21:2).

It seems unlikely that Paul was unable to meet with the disciples during the first six days of his stay at Troas. He found the disciples on the first day of his week-long stay at Tyre (Acts 21:

3, 4). If Paul had been with the disciples at Troas during the week, why is attention called to the first day of the week? Possibly because what might have been the most memorable event of Paul's visit occurred then. At least the incident involving Eutychus seems to be the focal point of the description of events on that day (Acts 20:7-12). Verses 7 and 8 seem merely to provide the setting for what happened to Eutychus in verses 9 and 10. The climax to the narration of that day's events, as found in verse 12, is the result of Paul's restoring life to Eutychus. When viewed in this way, Luke may simply be saying that on the first day of the week when Paul was at Troas and the disciples were gathered together to break bread, an unusual event occurred. While the fact remains that the disciples at Troas met together on the first day of that week to break bread, it is not so clearly inferred that the disciples observed the Lord's supper exclusively on the first day of the week.

To approach the problem in a different way, suppose Luke had written: "And upon the second day of the week, when we were gathered together to sing hymns, Paul discoursed with them. . . ." Would this example necessarily imply that the disciples met exclusively on the second day of the week for this purpose? It seems that the wording of the statement would not necessarily imply that. It also seems that what Luke actually said would not necessarily imply that Sunday was the exclusive day on which the Lord's supper was observed. Yet, if this were the implication, it still would not establish that it was done because it had been required.

#### *Approval and Universality*

It has been argued that the example of observance of the Lord's supper on the first day of the week is to be imitated, because it was done with apostolic approval, and what was done in one church should be done in every church.<sup>12</sup> But, to approve an action is not to require it. It is recorded with approval that they met in a third-story chamber, that Paul preached until midnight, that he talked with the disciples until the break of day, that a young man sat in a window, and that there were many lights in the chamber. All of this is recorded with apparent approval and was done in one church. However, it surely is not required that any of these things be done in any church.

Some have seen more required in this example regarding the time of the observance of the Lord's supper than just the day of the week. A member of a church in Manchester, England in the past century said: "We attend to the Lord's supper in the afternoon, because all the examples we know of took place in the latter part of the day. . . ."<sup>13</sup> In answering those who believed it was necessary to have the Lord's supper at night, Alexander Campbell

<sup>9</sup>Roy E. Cogdill, *Woods-Cogdill Debate* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1958), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup>Charles Boshart, "Divine Authority," *The Gospel Guardian*, XVII (Feb. 10, 1966), p. 9.

<sup>11</sup>J. D. Thomas, "How to Establish Bible Authority," *The Arlington Meeting*, p. 59.

<sup>12</sup>Luther G. Roberts, "The Lord's Day," *The Gospel Guardian*, X (March 5, 1959), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>William Jackson, "A Letter from the Church in Manchester," *The Christian Baptist*, V (Feb. 5, 1828), p. 163.



once said, "... it is bad logic to draw a general conclusion from any particular occurrence."<sup>14</sup> One might wonder if too much has not been concluded from the particular occurrence at Troas regarding the time of the Lord's supper.

#### *Every First Day*

Acts 20:7 has not been used just to show that the Lord's supper must be observed exclusively on the first day of the week. It has also been used to show that it must be observed the first day of *every* week. It has been argued that the language of Exodus 20:8 is parallel to the wording of Acts 20:7. It has been said that the injunction to "remember the sabbath day" implies the necessity to keep every sabbath day. In the same way, "the first day of the week" is supposed to necessarily imply the first day of *every* week.<sup>15</sup> A parallel also has been argued in the case of 1 Corinthians 16:2 which says, "Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store. . . ." Even as the language here is supposed to imply the first day of *every* week, so Acts 20:7 has been said to imply the first day of *every* week.<sup>16</sup>

It seems that careful examination of the wording of Acts 20:7 would leave one uncertain as to whether *every* week is intended. Suppose Luke had said: "And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to eat a picnic lunch, Paul discoursed with them. . . ." It does not seem that this statement would necessarily imply that the church had a picnic lunch every Sunday.

It appears that the context of this passage does not provide a basis for concluding that a weekly observance occurred. Verse 6 says that Paul tarried seven days in Troas. Then verse 7 says, "and upon the first day of the week. . . ." One might ask: "The first day of *what* week?" It was on the first day of the week when Paul was at Troas that the events occurred. When the context is viewed from this perspective, it seems as though Luke is merely telling what happened on the first day of *that* week.

The contexts of the passages where men are told to "remember the sabbath" and contribute "upon the first day of the week" do not contain qualifications suggesting a particular week. Both the immediate and larger contexts imply a weekly activity. It is the context from which this is determined and not from the wording. The same wording in a different context could imply a single act rather than a weekly practice. A hypothetical context may serve to illustrate: "Next week I will be with you for a few days to take whatever you can afford to give to the poor saints at Jerusalem. Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in

store. . . ." In this context, a single contribution would be intended. The actual context in 1 Corinthians 16:2 reads as follows: "Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come." Paul's arrival was at some indefinite time in the future. In this context, "the first day of the week" might reasonably imply the first day of *every* week. In fact, 1 Corinthians 16:2 is frequently translated "every first day of the week" since *kata* is viewed in the distributive sense as in Luke 2:41 which is rendered "every year." While a parallel can be drawn in English translations of 1 Corinthians 16:2 and Acts 20:7, the Greek construction is different. The absence of *kata* from Acts 20:7 affects any attempt to draw a parallel.

The point of this is to indicate and illustrate that a parallel in wording does not necessarily imply a parallel in intent. To show that "the first day of the week" in one context means the first day of *every* week, does not prove the same meaning of the words in another context. The context, not the words, determines the meaning in this case. And the context of Acts 20:6, 7, as has been illustrated previously, does not necessarily imply a weekly practice.

It might be noted also that Acts 20:7 differs from Exodus 20:8 and 1 Corinthians 16:2 in that the latter two are commands of something to be done, while the former is simply an example of something that was done. Therefore, even if those at Troas broke bread weekly, it would still be necessary to determine if they did it weekly because they were required to do so or for some other reason.

#### *Command "Completed"*

In contrast to other ideas that have been presented, J. D. Thomas said that there is no information in Acts 20:7 alone that indicates they were keeping a *required* obligation.<sup>17</sup> However, it was concluded that when viewed against the background of other scriptures, the example of Acts 20:7 does show something that is required that cannot be found elsewhere.

Thomas argued that a pattern concerning Christian worship can be seen in four passages taken together.<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 10:25 was presented as a command to the church to assemble regularly. It was argued that this command is "incomplete" because no information is given regarding how this assembly is to be conducted. It was assumed that some details on the conduct of this assembly had been commanded and that the churches understood this. However, it was said that one must look elsewhere to find the requirements regarding this assembly. Part of this was supposed to be found in 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2. It was concluded from this passage that the assembly must be on the first day of the week. The pattern was supposed to be enlarged by 1 Corinthians 11:20-26. This

<sup>14</sup>Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration to the Ancient Order of Things," *The Christian Baptist*, III (March 6, 1826), p. 164.

<sup>15</sup>Forrest Darrell Moyer, "When is a New Testament Example Binding?" *The Gospel Guardian*, X (April 9, 1959), p. 9.

<sup>16</sup>Danny Brown, "The Lord's Supper," *The Preceptor*, VII (Feb., 1958), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup>J. D. Thomas, "We Be Brethren," p. 95.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 96-104.



was said to show that the Lord's supper must be observed in an assembly with some degree of frequency. The Acts 20:7 context was supposed to "complete" the pattern by showing "conclusively that the purpose of the first day of the week, required assembly is 'to partake of the Lord's supper.' . . ."<sup>19</sup>

For the purposes of this argument, it will be assumed that the church in Troas met on the first day of the week because it was required to meet on the first day of every week. Does the fact that the disciples assembled to break bread on the first day of the week when Paul was at Troas, necessarily mean that they assembled the first day of every week for the same purpose, and this was the only day of the week when they ever assembled for this purpose? As has been indicated by previous arguments, the language employed in Acts 20:7 would not preclude the possibility that the church might not have, sometimes, also met on another day for the same purpose. As has also been indicated previously, even if the church met weekly, it is not necessary to conclude from this that they always met for the purpose of breaking bread. If a weekly assembly on Sunday were *required*, this, in itself, would be sufficient reason to meet. A divine requirement would seem no more necessary as to what had to be done in the assembly, than would be necessary to justify a Wednesday meeting.

If it were required of all churches to assemble on the first day of the week, it does not seem necessary to conclude that, just because the church in Troas on at least one occasion assembled on that day to break bread, every church assembled on that day to do the same thing. It would need to be proved first that the reason they broke bread on that day was because they were *required* to break bread on that day. If they had to assemble on the first day of every week and have the Lord's supper with some degree of frequency in an assembly, this would not prove that they had to have the Lord's supper in an assembly on the first day of every week. If they assembled on the first day of every week and had the Lord's supper in an assembly every Thursday, both requirements would be fulfilled. If the first day of the week assembly were used by one church as the occasion for the Lord's supper, the mere fact of their having done so does not seem sufficient reason to conclude that every church did the same, nor that all churches today must do likewise.

#### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this discussion has not been to draw a conclusion regarding the necessity of churches observing the Lord's supper exclusively on the first day of every week. Therefore, nothing has been said concerning the possible doctrinal significance of Jesus' resurrection on the first day, nor of the practice of the second century, nor of some other matters that might be significant to this problem.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 102.

The purpose of this appendix has been simply to consider the implication of the conclusions of this study on the example of Acts 20:7 as related to this problem. The implication is that if examples have no authority in themselves to require imitation, then the example of Acts 20:7 has no authority to require the exclusive observance of the Lord's supper on the first day of the week. This does not mean that the practice is wrong. It does not, of itself, mean that the practice is not required. It only says that *this* passage alone cannot prove the *necessity* of this practice. It does not, of itself, deny the appropriateness of the practice. It does imply that if the practice is required, the requirement must be determined on some basis other than the example of Acts 20:7.



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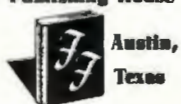
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