

Appeal To Authority

Matthew 21:23-27

Introduction: The need for authority should be a concern for all Christians. Jesus as well as the Jews recognized the importance of authority in Matt. 21:23-27. Man has always questioned authority and how to establish it. Some say Biblical authority is a matter of interpretation. Others say only direct commands are binding. Can we use approved examples and necessary inferences as Biblical authority? We will examine how authority was established using Acts 15.

I. The Issue

A. The issue in Acts 15 revolved around this question: Must Gentiles be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved? (Acts 15:1,5)

B. This question was answered by a meeting of the apostles and elders of the church in Jerusalem. By what authority was this issue resolved? How was the question answered?

II. Preliminary Observations:

A. This issue was the center of great controversy.

1. Jewish brethren had evidently been confused concerning the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10 (Acts 11:1-3).

2. The establishment of the church in Antioch of Syria as well as other efforts of Paul in Acts 13-14 must have prompted this controversy (Acts 11:19-26).

B. False teachers seemingly claimed the doctrine of circumcision and obedience to the Old Law was approved by the apostles (Acts 15:24).

C. The dispute had begun...

III. Peter's Argument (Acts 15:7-11).

A. Peter's reasoning at Joppa and Caesarea:

1. He had a vision (Acts 10:9-16).

2. He did not understand it immediately (Acts 10:17-19).

3. He accompanied the messengers to Cornelius' house, still not understanding (Acts 10:20-27).

4. The messengers related the divine appearance to Cornelius (Acts 10:22, 30-33).

5. Peter says, "I came without raising objection" (Acts 10:28-29).

6. As Peter spoke, the Holy Spirit fell on them (Acts 11:15; Acts 10:34-44).

7. Peter said “I perceive...” (Acts 10:34). How did he perceive?

a. There was no direct statement from God.

b. Peter drew a necessary inference from the supernatural occurrences.

c. For this reason he asked, “Can any man...(Acts 10:47).

B. His reasoning at Jerusalem

1. Peter rehearsed what happened (Acts 11:1-16).

2. Then he asked, “who was I to withstand God?” (Acts 11:17)

3. To withstand God would be equal to rejecting the necessary implications of the Holy Spirit’s falling on Cornelius.

4. The brethren in turn necessarily inferred that “God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life” (Acts 11:18).

IV. Paul and Barnabas’s Argument (Acts 15:12).

A. Rehearsal of their preaching among the Gentiles (Acts 13-14).

1. Conversion of Sergius accompanied by the blinding of Elemas (Acts 13:7-12).

2. Sermon in Antioch of Pisidia where Paul affirms his obligation to go to the Gentiles after the rejection by the Jews (Acts 13:46-49).

3. Many believed in Iconium where God bore witness to their preaching with signs and wonders (Acts 14:1-3).

4. Their work continued at Lystra with the healing of a lame man (Acts 14:8-10).

5. They preached the Gospel in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch even appointing elders in every church (Acts 14:21-23).

6. In Antioch, they acknowledged that God “had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 14:26-27).

B. The speech in Jerusalem emphasized two things (Acts 15:12).

1. The signs and wonders God demonstrated to the Gentiles.

2. God’s approval of the Gentiles by these signs and wonders.

V. James Conclusion (Acts 15:14-21).

A. “Simon has declared...” (Acts 15:13-14).

B. To this agrees the scriptures out of Amos 9:11-12 (Acts 15:15-18).

- C. Therefore, it is my judgment... (Acts 15:19).
 - 1. Don't trouble the Gentiles as the Jews have done.
 - 2. The Gentiles must heed these certain necessary things.
- D. How did James arrive at this conclusion? By an approved apostolic example through Peter and Paul and by a necessary inference.

Conclusion:

- A. The issue was resolved by use of the same methods of approved apostolic examples and necessary inference that we use today.
- B. A letter was sent without additional revelation.
- C. This serves as a model for us in solving religious questions.

Note: This lesson was written in large part by Larry Curry.