

## **We Can All Understand Alike**

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Post modernism is the ideology that many people in the world live under. They believe that there is no absolute truth, and therefore there cannot be an agreement on the nature of truth. We who are in Christ believe this to be false. We believe that (1) there is an absolute truth (John 17:17) and (2) that we can all understand it alike. How is this possible? There are several important truths to consider in order to be able to know how to understand something in a similar way. We already understand many things alike; when we see a speed limit sign, we all understand that alike. This is because LAW does not permit personal interpretations; it can only be interpreted in agreement when it is understood that it is the author/authority that matters.

### **The Interpretation of Law**

All law requires interpretation. This is an absolute that to deny rejects the idea that it can be understood, and that 3500 years of divine communication is wasted. Fundamental to a successful method of obedience is the heart's desire to be obedient. This is the key to accurate *hermeneutics* (the method of interpreting divine law) - the desire of the heart to please God.

It is presumed we all understand that the authority of law has changed. When Adam violated the first covenant with God, the plan of salvation set into motion a series of subsequent, inferior covenants meant to prepare us for that second, divine covenant. This includes the covenant of Moses, which Paul described as a "tutor" to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24-25). The authority of law moved from heaven (Adam) to the fathers (Patriarchs) to Moses' written law (Old Testament) to the blood of Christ (New Testament). This is important because we are told that the understanding of the New Covenant is founded on the patterns of the Old Covenant(s) (I Corinthians 10:11, Romans 15:4, II Timothy 3:15-17).

Meaning: the PURPOSE of the Old Law was to create an understanding of the CONCEPTS of law (Romans 3:20, etc.), so that those who desire to have the mind of Christ know the way to please God, which is the very **Mind of Christ** (Philippians 2:6-8). Thus while the New Law is the rule of Law, the Old Testament(s) is the method of legal interpretation. The method of collecting the pertinent information for the interpretation of law in the Scriptures is exclusive: commands, examples, and (absolute/necessary) inferences. Why is this?

### **Commands, Examples, and Necessary Inferences**

Command, Example and Necessary Inference (**CENI**) are three ways that authoritative information is seen. It is not an invention of the church. It is the natural method of determining law that is invoked by any society that claims to have a rule of law. Our own legal system is based on determination in the same manner. We conceive of a document that is the authoritative rule of law (in the US, the Constitution). Then we conceive of an authority to make code (commandments), which is either the legislative or executive branches of government. We then make interpretations based on previous rulings (examples), or if absent a logical conclusion is drawn based on a collection of data related to the subject (necessary inferences). This is not a

method unique to the US; anywhere a rule of law is applied, this same three principles are applied. In England, the constitution they refer to is in fact the traditional interpretation of law (called Common Law) that constitutes a core of legal doctrine. When one researches the idea of "legal hermeneutics" the result is not to find many different methods of interpretation, but one consistent pattern. This is the pattern we ought to apply to the Bible.

### **1. It is the divinely ordained method of interpretation by previous examples:**

If the Old Testament establishes the pattern of the Bible, then the pattern of interpretation found there is the method and mind of God in legal view. God issued direct commandments that He expected an obedience towards; this is evidenced in many ways, from the righteousness of Abraham (God charged Abraham righteous for obeying commandments, statutes and laws - Genesis 26:5) to the failures of Israel (2 Kings 17:19, etc.). God expected approved examples to be honored (I Kings 11:6). If God did not hold necessary inference as part of His theory of law, what law could Cain have broken in his sacrifice? If we consider the first three sins of the Old Testament, we see that Adam & Eve did not follow a COMMAND; Cain did not follow the EXAMPLE of the proper sacrifices given in Genesis 3:21; Cain's act of murder did not follow the NECESSARY INFERENCE that murder was a sin.

Negative examples in the Old Testament are perhaps even more telling. Josiah was a man who sought God, and turned to God. But when he discovered the commandment, he realized his error. While God accorded to him some mercy for his tender heart, it was his obedience that God truly honored.

New Testament authors CONSTANTLY refer to Old Testament judgments as the pattern of divine action. Jesus, Peter and Paul all refer to Noah and the flood; the failures of Israel are a common theme in the New Testament. Jesus and Peter both said that Sodom and Gomorrah were judged to teach us about divine judgment rules. To accept the idea that God has changed the method of legal interpretation invalidates these examples, and renders the teachings of the New Testament impotent.

Ultimately, the Old Testament teaches us that very point that Paul desired to communicate: someone who loves God desires to be in righteous obedience to the law. CENI is the natural method to find the heart of the law.

### **2. It is the referenced method of legal interpretation in the New Testament**

Perhaps more important to understanding hermeneutic is the method which the law giver and law bringers themselves make known. Jesus made it clear to keep his commandments (John 14:15), follow His examples (John 13:15), and draw logical conclusions of obedience from His doctrines (Matthew 25:26-27). Paul made it clear that we were to observe his commands in Christ (2 Thessalonians 3:14), his examples in Christ (2 Thessalonians 3:9), and to draw logical conclusions of obedience (1 Corinthians 6:7, II Timothy 2:15). He established three types of information dissemination.

### **3. There is no other method that removes personal interpretation**

The case for CENI being the natural and exclusive interpretation of law is most clearly reflected in the idea that the law of Christ is not meant to be personally interpreted. Peter's well known admonition is key to this idea: "*knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

In this point, there are several things to consider. If Scripture is not open to being interpreted, then we must conclude there is only one way to understand it. This follows the thematic pattern given to us in Ephesians 4:3-6; it keeps the unity of the Spirit intact to remove variable interpretations. Since we know God is not the author of confusion, the variety of interpretations to law is our error, not His.

Typically, we can see that interpretive variation comes in two ways: First, there is the influence of traditions and doctrines of men (outside influences). Second, there is the interpretive flaws of personal interpretations.

Outside influences to interpretation are wholly condemned in hermeneutics in both the Old Testament (Isaiah 29:13) and the New Testament (Matthew 15:9). Yet they still draw a great number away by the power of peer pressure. An example would be "*if everyone believes that we are saved by faith only, it must be true*". Another example would be in an authoritative church such as the Mormon church or the Catholic church, where doctrinal interpretation is exclusive to a clergy system.

Personal interpretations in hermeneutics are also wholly condemned both in the Old Testament (Jeremiahs 10:23) and the New Testament (II Peter 1:20). The great fault in personal interpretation as a hermeneutic is that our heart is far too easily deceived (Jeremiah 17:9). Yet how many use this as their means of understanding God's will? Men make their own lists of hermeneutic methods that ultimately they fail to realize is simply their list. The real value of CENI is that it removes from our hands the ability to manipulate Scripture.

### **The Meaning of Silence**

One of the hardest things to understand in regards to collecting the pertinent information of the bible is to understand the significance of the absence of information. Yet our concept of the Old Testament as the interpretive structure of the New Testament established exactly how we are to deal with the absence of comment. Where God has not spoken, we are not to presume an authority to act. This is established in a number of scenarios. First, Moses instructed Israel not to add to nor take away from the law (Deuteronomy 4:2); this principle is also the last command of the New Testament (Revelation 22:18-19). We see that when Nadab and Abihu brought out another unauthorized fire before God, they were struck down (Leviticus 10). Even when men had good intentions, acting beyond the scope of God's command was not permitted (Uzzah in 2 Samuel 6, David in 2 Samuel 7). God often characterized evil behavior as being unauthorized (Jeremiah 19:5), such as worship in high places (2 Chronicles 33:17).

Again, we are called to the mindset necessary in being a Christian. Paul stated that the purpose of his writing in 1 Corinthians 4:6 was so that the brethren would learn not to think beyond what was written. In Acts 15, the brethren learned God's desires by His silence. The heart that seeks to please God will look at Scripture from the perspective of the desire to please and to be approved of God (2 Timothy 2:15).