

Binding Commands and Examples

God's word is authoritative because it contains both commands and examples. **A primary challenge in understanding the Bible is knowing which apply to us and which do not.**

Binding or not? --Not all commands --Some examples Three criteria
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Not all commands are binding. There are many commands given in Scripture which are either not part of the New Covenant (e.g., "Make yourself an ark of gopherwood," Genesis 6:14) and/or which are not intended for all Christians (e.g., "Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus," 2 Timothy 4:13).

Some examples are binding. The Scriptures never encourage us to follow "tradition for tradition's sake," but some ways of carrying out religious practices *must* be followed. The apostle Paul commanded the church in Thessalonica, "Stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle" (2 Thessalonians 2:15; also 3:6). The teachings and practices handed down from the apostles constitute divinely authorized traditions.

How do we determine **which commands and examples are binding and which are not?**

In addition to the command or example being part of the New Covenant and being intended for all Christians, those that are binding on us have at least three other characteristics:

- 1) There is only a **single example** of how to act,
- 2) The action has **spiritual significance**, and
- 3) The action in question is not tied to, that is **transcends, culture**.

With those criteria in mind, we can list **some things that are binding** on us. For instance, we see that taking the Lord's Supper clearly has spiritual significance (1 Cor. 11:23-29) and transcends culture, so is binding on us. Taking the Lord's Supper *only on Sunday* is also binding because the only example we have of *when* the church partook is "on the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7), and Sunday has great significance, being the day the Lord Jesus rose from the grave (John 20:1) and the day the Holy Spirit was first given and the gospel was first preached (Acts 2; Pentecost always fell on Sunday, Lev. 23:16). Similarly, we only have examples of taking the Lord's Supper when we "come together as a church" "in one place" "to eat" (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:17, 18, 20, 33). The nature of it being *communion* (1 Cor. 10:16) gives it spiritual significance, so these aspects are binding.

With those same three criteria before us, we can consider **things that are not binding**. In the case of *going* to preach, the means for going (e.g., riding on animals, walking, and sailing) have no spiritual significance and will vary by culture, so are not binding as the only ways to go. Regarding *where* to assemble (and we can infer that the disciples took the Lord's Supper wherever they regularly met), we again have multiple examples (i.e., the temple [Acts 2:46 and 5:12], a school [Acts 19:9], a third-story room [Acts 20:9], a house [Romans 16:5]), and there is no spiritual significance to where we meet (John 4:21, 23), so we do not bind, for example, meeting in an upper room. In another case, we read, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." *Greeting* each other clearly has spiritual significance for our fellowship, while the kiss itself is culturally based (that is, tied to specific cultures), so "greeting" each other is binding on us, while the kiss itself is not.