

# *It Is Written*

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## Authority from Necessary Inference

By Al Diestelkamp

"Can necessary inference be established as a scriptural means of determining authority from the New Testament, or is it a long-standing tradition?" This question was posed by a brother who seems willing to recognize authority derived from commands and approved examples, but has difficulty seeing necessary inference as legitimate.

While I will agree that determining authority by way of necessary inference is "trickier," and should be approached with great care, I believe it is legitimate. I believe it is more than simply long-standing tradition as I will show.

First, we need to make sure we understand the word, "inference." To "infer" is "to derive as a conclusion from facts or premises" (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary). Therefore: Infer = judge, conclude, perceive.

Unlike the words, "command" and "example," this word is not used in scripture, which may be why our brother is suspicious of it as a means of authority. However, "conclude," "perceive" and "judge," synonyms of the word, can be found in scripture.

Within the definition, the dictionary advises, "see imply." That is because an inference can never stand alone. There must be an implication in order for there to be a necessary inference. There can be no necessary inference unless it is based on information from statements, commands, approved examples, or some combination thereof.

In order for an inference to be authoritative, it must be a necessary conclusion. There are many possible inferences we might make based on sketchy information, but unless we can determine that the Holy Spirit has implied something, we cannot draw a necessary inference. When one draws a conclusion without an implication he is merely surmising.

Let me cite three approved apostolic examples of the use of necessary inference:

Notice that when the time came for the gospel to be preached to the Gentiles that God never directly told Peter that salvation was available to the uncircumcised. Instead, He gave him a vision, sent messengers to where he was staying and sent the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius and his household so that they spoke in tongues. From these events Peter was able to perceive the truth that men of "every nation" could be accepted if they would work righteousness (Ac. 10:34-35). That was the only conclusion he could reach from what God had revealed. That's a necessary inference.

The apostle Paul was able to conclude that God is the God of the Gentiles as well as the Jews (Rom. 3:28ff). His conclusion was based on Abraham being justified by faith apart from the law (Rom. 4:1-3).

Perhaps the clearest example of the use of a necessary inference is provided by James during the debate over circumcision. In this situation we have the apostles recognizing the use of a statement, an example, and a necessary inference all in one context. In establishing authority for conversion of the uncircumcised, Peter makes a statement that God "chose" that "the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe" (Ac. 15:7); Paul and Barnabas then cited an example of God working signs among uncircumcised Gentiles (15:12); and finally James draws the necessary inference by saying, "Therefore, I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God" (15:19).

So, to answer our brother's question, Yes! Necessary inference has been established as a scriptural means of determining authority from the New Testament. It is not merely tradition.

"Fruit" Is Singular (Galatians 5:22)

By Andrew R. Lehmann

Paul lists the "works of the flesh" and contrasts the "fruit of the spirit" in Galatians chapter five: "Now the works of the flesh are made manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like...But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (5:19-21a, 22).

In verse 22, the word "fruit" is singular even though it encompasses multiple virtues. The singularity of this word is designed to convey a complete, well-rounded picture of the character of a child of God. It imparts the idea that the "fruit" is a single unit which consists of individual parts. Each of these parts plays a significant, unique role in creating the "fruit" as a whole. They strive in balance and harmony with each other to achieve the one product. Without every one of these parts the "fruit" is incomplete.

In contrast to this, note that in verse 19, Paul uses the word "works" (plural) rather than the word "work" (singular). Why would he use the plural word form here? Unlike the single "fruit," the many "works" are disjunctive. True, they do stem from one source but they do not content together in balance and harmony to produce a single unit.

They produce confusion and divisions, even among themselves. The "works" are unproductive and, in the end, there will be no harvest -- it matters not how much activity there has been. The only anticipated outcomes from the "works of the flesh" are death and destruction.

Like other passages, there is preciseness in this Holy Spirit inspired context. As Paul used the singular word "seed" to make an argument in Galatians 3:16, he also uses the singular word "fruit" here to make an important point. The subtleties of this exactness give us a greater appreciation of the wisdom and perfection of scripture.

To enhance your appreciation of the beauty and depth of the word, study it with the same precision as was needed to write it. Strive to be a complete, well-rounded child of God. Refrain from the unfruitful works of the flesh (Ephesians 6:11). Perfect the virtues Paul lists in Galatians 5:22, so that you will become that single, complete fruit.

## **Have Faith in God**

By Clarence Johnson

During the week of the crucifixion, Jesus and His apostles spent each day in Jerusalem. At night, they stayed in Bethany. On Tuesday morning, as they made their way into the city, they noticed that the fig tree Jesus had pronounced a curse upon had withered and dried up from the roots. "And Peter, remembering, said to Him, 'Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away.' So Jesus answered and said to them, 'Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, "Be removed and be cast into the sea," and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them'" (Mark 11:20-24).

There are two aspects to what Jesus taught in this setting about prayer. First, there is the fact that Jesus was speaking to His apostles to who He gave miraculous power through the Holy Spirit. By a special infusion of Power, they were enabled to heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, etc. Such miraculous manifestations constituted what Paul called "the signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12). Obviously, most Christians never had such miraculous powers, else there would be no way to distinguish apostles from others. Such promises as that in our text of miraculously moving mountains belong to the category of the signs of an apostle. The "whoever" of Mark 11:23 does not include Christians in general, but the specific Christians to who He was speaking, the apostles -- those to who miraculous powers were bestowed.

But the second aspect of Jesus' teaching on prayer involves a general and eternal principle. Our prayer is to be uttered in faith. "Have faith in God." "Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe...." Since faith comes by hearing God's word, Rom. 10:17, each of us can ask in faith for the things God has authorized us to pray about: our daily bread, deliverance from temptation, comfort for the bereaved, healing for the sick, etc.

The apostles could ask in faith for anything God had authorized them to pray for, and we who are not apostles can ask in faith for the kinds of things God has authorized us to pray for. God has promised to hear and answer the prayer of faith.

Finally, we remind ourselves of one additional matter. The God to who we pray knows better than we do what is best for us. When our petitions are not granted, it does not shake our faith, for our faith was not in our prayer, but in Him who answers prayer. "Have faith in God."