

Lesson Outline

I Precepts

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- A. **The Definition of a Biblical Principle**
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IV Summary

Precepts, Principles, and Preferences

This study follows an excellent outline first developed by Pastor Gary S. Prisk. It examines a key consideration for applying the Word of God in a practical way, particularly in church related matters. Confusions (and extremes) will result from a failure to distinguish between precepts [**a general rule intended to regulate behavior or thought**], principles, and preferences. Too often, someone's preferences have risen to the stature of a precept – or a Bible principle has been relegated to the level of a preference.

Some things in the Bible are clearly “black or white” issues, while others seem less clear. This lesson seeks to make the distinction and the appropriate application.

I Precepts

The word precept is found predominately in Psalm 119 (the “Word of God chapter”), where occurs 21 times. Some examples shown below:

⁴Thou hast commanded us to keep thy **precepts** diligently. ⁵O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! ¹⁵ I will meditate in thy **precepts**, and have respect unto thy ways. ¹⁶ I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word. ²⁶ I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes. ²⁷ Make me to understand the way of thy **precepts**: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.

A. The Definition of a Biblical Precept

1. The word is translated from a Hebrew word meaning “appointed”, a “mandate.”
2. Another Hebrew word “mitzvah” is translated as ‘precept’ and ‘commandment.’

3. The dictionary defines PRECEPT as “an authoritarian rule” prescribing a particular kind of conduct or action; a standard or guide to morals; a maxim (that having greatest authority).
4. Read Palm 119:4 *4Thou hast commanded us to keep thy **precepts** diligently.*

B. Examples of Biblical Precepts

1. Read Deuteronomy 4:13 *13And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone.*
2. That which was given through Moses:
 - a. Hebrews 9:19(a) *19For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people,*
 - b. Nehemiah 9:14 *14And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant:*
3. They are clearly defined directives (“thou shall”) or prohibitions (“thou shalt not”).
4. They carry a penalty for disobedience.
 - a. Exodus 21:12 *12He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.*
 - b. Exodus 21:16-17 *16And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death. 17And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.*

c. *Leviticus 20:10-15 ¹⁰And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. ¹¹And the man that lieth with his father's wife hath uncovered his father's nakedness: both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them. ¹²And if a man lie with his daughter in law, both of them shall surely be put to death: they have wrought confusion; their blood shall be upon them. ¹³If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them. ¹⁴And if a man take a wife and her mother, it is wickedness: they shall be burnt with fire, both he and they; that there be no wickedness among you. ¹⁵And if a man lie with a beast, he shall surely be put to death: and ye shall slay the beast.*

5. [Jesus and the Old Testament LAW] Downloaded from: http://www.christianbiblereference.org/faq_OldTestamentLaw.htm
6. The teachings of Jesus, the Council of Jerusalem, and other New Testament teachings ([John 1:16-17](#), [Acts 13:39](#), [Romans 2:25-29](#), [8:1-4](#), [1 Corinthians 9:19-21](#), [Galatians 2:15-16](#), [Ephesians 2:15](#)) make it clear that Christians are not required to follow the Old Testament rules about crimes and punishments, warfare, slavery, diet, circumcision, animal sacrifices, feast days, Sabbath observance, ritual cleanness, etc.
7. Christians still look to the Old Testament scripture for moral and spiritual guidance ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)). But when there seems to be a conflict between Old Testament laws and New Testament principles, we must follow the New Testament because it represents the most recent and most perfect revelation from God ([Hebrews 8:13](#), [2 Corinthians 3:1-18](#), [Galatians 2:15-20](#)).
8. However, freedom from the Old Testament Law is not a license for Christians to relax their moral standards. The moral and ethical teachings of Jesus and His apostles call for even greater self-discipline than those of the Old Testament ([Matthew 5:21-22](#), [27-28](#), [31-32](#), [33-34](#), [38-42](#), [43-48](#), [7:1-5](#), [15:18-19](#), [25:37-40](#), [Mark 7:21-23](#), [12:28-31](#), [Luke 12:15](#), [1 Corinthians 13:1-13](#), [Galatians 5:19-21](#), [James 1:27](#), [2:15-16](#), [1 John 3:17-19](#)).

C. The Application of Biblical Precepts

1. Read Psalm 119:63 ⁶³ *I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.* They are a basis of companionship (fellowship).
2. Read Psalm 119:100 ¹⁰⁰ *I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.* They are the means of getting understanding and true discernment.
3. In the Church:
 - a. They are Proclaimed. Read Isaiah 58:1 ¹ *Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.*
 - b. Disobedience requires discipline. Read I Corinthians 5:1-13 ¹*It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. ²And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. ³For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, ⁴In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁵To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. ⁶Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? ⁷**Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.** For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: ⁸Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and*

wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. ⁹I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: ¹⁰Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. ¹¹But now I have written unto you **not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an dolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.** ¹²For what have I to do to judge them also that are without [the Church]? do not ye judge them that are within [the Church]? ¹³But them that are without God judgeth. **Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.**

Note: Failure to take action will destroy a church.

II Principles

A. The Definition of a Biblical Principle

1. The dictionary defines a principle as “a general rule or truth basic to the other truths; a rule of personal conduct; a primary source or fundamental cause.”
2. A principle is a means by which we can **discern both good and evil.**
Read Hebrews 5:12-14 ¹²For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. ¹³For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. ¹⁴But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

3. Whereas a **precept** decrees a definite action or prohibition, a **principle** delivers a guiding policy which can then be applied to non-specific situations.

B. Examples of Biblical Principle:

There are numerous principles given throughout the Word of God. The Lord has not given us specific instructions for every single circumstance and possible situation man may encounter in life. We deal with most of these things through application of principles. For example:

1. Read I Corinthians 6:19-20 ¹⁹*What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?* ²⁰*For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. **The believer's body is the temple of the Holy Ghost.*** This principle guides in areas of physical health (smoking, drugs, etc.) and temperance. Read:
 - a. Proverbs 23:2 ²*And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.*
 - b. I Timothy 4:8 ⁸*For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*
2. Read II Corinthians 6:14-17 ¹⁴*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?* ¹⁵*And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?* ¹⁶*And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in*

them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ¹⁷Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

You are NOT to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. This principle speaks to matters of marriage, business partnerships, church associations.

3. Read Romans 14:1 *1Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.* We are to receive those who are weak in the faith but NOT when it would cause doubtful disputations.
4. Christian women are to wear modest apparel. Read I Timothy 2:9-10 *⁹In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; ¹⁰But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.* This scripture does not list specific items of clothing which are acceptable or unacceptable. There is no “Baptist uniform!” It is left to other scripture for us to discern what is acceptable / unacceptable. Read:
 - a. I Peter 3:3-5 *³Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; ⁴But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. ⁵For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands:*
 - b. Proverbs 7:9-10 and more *⁹In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: ¹⁰And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire*

of an harlot, and subtil [various definitions] of heart. ¹¹(She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: ¹²Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.)

- c. *Isiah 47:1-3 ¹Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon, sit on the ground: there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate.²Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover thy locks, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers. ³Thy nakedness shall be uncovered, yea, thy shame shall be seen: I will take vengeance, and I will not meet thee as a man.*

5. Read I Thessalonians 5:22 ²²*Abstain from all appearance of evil.*
We are to abstain from all appearance of evil... not just what IS wrong, but what LOOKS wrong or may give a wrong message.
6. Read I Corinthians 10:31-32 ³¹*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. ³²Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:*
This principle (voiced by Paul), when turned into a question, will guide the child of God as to where he should go and what he should do.
7. Read Romans 15:20 ²⁰*Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation:* [It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.]
This verse gives a sound evangelistic (church planting) principle.

C. The Application of Biblical Principle:

1. They are to be TAUGHT. A believer must understand the general rule (principle) in order to identify the specific applications.
2. They are to be APPLIED. Christians are to grow toward “perfection” (maturity). This maturity comes about through assimilation and application of the principles of God’s word. Read Hebrews 5:11 – 6:3.
 - a. Hebrews 5:11-14 *¹¹Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. ¹²For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. ¹³For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. ¹⁴But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*
 - b. Hebrews 6:1-3 *¹Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, ²Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. ³And this will we do, if God permit.*
3. With maturity comes MINISTRY.
4. Read Hebrews 6:9-10 *⁹But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. ¹⁰For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. [Another explanation: Dear friends, even though we are*

talking this way, we really don't believe it applies to you. We are confident that you are meant for better things, things that come with salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people (MINISTRY) and continue to help them.]

5. With Ministry comes RESPONSIBILITY

- a. Read Luke 12:48 ⁴⁸ **But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.**

- b. The greater the responsibility, the greater the qualifications required. Read II Timothy 2:20-21 ²⁰*But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. ²¹If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.*

- c. Disobedience results in DISQUALIFICATION from ministry.

Note: A church member who happens to smoke cigarettes, frequent movie theaters, or wear inappropriate clothing, etc. is NOT a candidate for church discipline. Neither is he or she ready to serve in a ministry, but should be afforded every opportunity to grow in grace toward that end.

III Preferences

A. The Definition of a Biblical Preferences

1. This term is not found in the Word of God per se.
2. A preference is defined as “the choosing of one person or thing over another or others; also the “privilege of choosing.”

B. Examples of Biblical Preferences

The apostle Paul expresses his personal preference concerning marriage.

Read I Corinthians 7:6-9 *⁶But I speak this by permission [concession - a thing that is granted, especially in response to demands; a thing conceded], and not of commandment. ⁷For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. ⁸I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. ⁹But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.*

His reasoning was:

1. “Because of the present distress” Verse 26 *²⁶I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be.*
2. From his desire: Verses 32-35 *³²But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: ³³But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. ³⁴There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit:*

*but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. ³⁵And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and **that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.***

3. The fact that this was not obligatory is seen in the words “but” as read in verse 37 *³⁷Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well.*

C. The Application of Biblical Preferences

1. We may shall them, or suggest them. That is all.
2. They are NOT precepts or principles – they are not to be set forth authoritatively.
3. In the church, if someone disagrees with our preference they are NOT disciplined or disqualified – and ought never be disliked!
4. When one preference clashes with another preference (in the Church, the home, in the school, etc.), for the sake of good order the one in a position of authority (pastor, parent, teacher, etc.) must prevail.

IV Summary

PRECEPTS – A matter of obedience.

PRINCIPLES – A matter of maturity.

PREFERENCES – A matter of taste.

Perhaps the biggest problem lies at the “**borders.**” – where principles end and precepts begin. For example, read:

I Corinthians 8:7-9 *⁷Howbeit **there is not in every man that knowledge:** for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. ⁸But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. ⁹But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.*

Sometimes precepts, principles, and preferences are separated by degree. For example, when it comes to the issue of clothing:

- Precept – Read Deuteronomy 22:5 *⁵The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God.*
- Principle – Unambiguous distinction between the sexes...
Read Genesis 1:27b *²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*
- Preferences – color or style of clothing does not matter.

Perhaps the greatest danger comes when our preferences border on violating a principle and / or when a failure to follow principles leads directly into violating a precept! Read some examples:

- Preferences leading to error:

II Samuel 11:1 ¹And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.

This PREFERENCE while not wrong, lead to David's affair with Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.

- Principles not being followed:

Psalm 101: 1-4 ¹ I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O Lord, will I sing. ²I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. ³I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. ⁴A froward [difficult to deal with; contrary.] heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person.

Romans 13:14 (FROM VERSE 13) ¹³Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. ¹⁴But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

- Precepts being violated: Exodus 20:12-17 ¹²*Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.* ¹³*Thou shalt not kill.* ¹⁴*Thou shalt not commit adultery.* ¹⁵*Thou shalt not steal.* ¹⁶*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.* ¹⁷*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.*
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Here is discernment: Sin is progressive.

Read James 1:12-15 ¹²*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.* ¹³*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:* ¹⁴*But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.* ¹⁵*Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

Here is wisdom: Err on the side of caution... stay away from the borders.

Read Proverbs 4:14-15 ¹⁴*Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.* ¹⁵*Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.*