

**Introduction:**

Imagine we are going on safari. What would we do first? Go to an outfitter to equip us with all our needs, to equip us with the knowledge, skills, tools and directions to complete our trip. No more imagining. We are on a journey to heaven. We need to be outfitted, fully equipped, but how? **II Timothy 3:16-17** says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." According to Rienecker and Rogers' *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, the term translated *equipped* "was used of documents which were completely outfitted or of a wagon which was completely outfitted or of a completely outfitted rescue boat." The Scriptures provide the knowledge, the skills, the tools and the directions for accomplishing our journey. Yet, it is not a manual in the sense of being a list of directives. It certainly isn't in the form of a legal code with detailed references for every legal or illegal activity. So how does it equip us for every good work? How do we know if what we are doing is a good work? A great place to see how God wants us to use the Holy Spirit inspired Scriptures is **Acts 15**. In that chapter, we see Christians divided. One group said we are not equipped to baptize Gentiles into Christ unless they first become Jews through circumcision. The other said we are equipped to baptize Gentiles. Amazingly, by **Acts 15:22, 25**, both sides agreed. They had not received any new revelation, but had examined the revelation already granted. We need to understand what a big deal this was. Until **Acts 10**, Christianity was a Jewish religion. This was no small matter even for the men who claimed there is equipping for baptizing Gentiles. Consider how much convincing Peter had needed in **Acts 10**. Instead of dividing, these Christians came together, discussed and debated what was lawful and what the Holy Spirit had equipped them to do. Examine how these Christians found equipping for the baptism of Gentiles and learn how we may find equipping for the good works.

**Discussion:**

- I. First, notice what they did not do to establish equipping.
  - A. *They did not apply Old Testament law.* The Pharisees had said in **Acts 15:5**, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses." As Peter, Paul, Barnabas and James explained how they were equipped to baptize Gentiles, they did not examine the statutes, requirements and authorizations of the Old Law. Yes, James spoke of an Old Testament prophecy of the kingdom age as authority for kingdom action. However, they knew they were not under the Old Law (cf. **Hebrews 7:12**). They saw a distinction. We must as well.
  - B. *They did not say, "We don't need authority."* Here would have been a great opportunity for the Spirit to reveal that establishing authority doesn't matter. But what did the Spirit demonstrate instead? These men sought for authority and equipping to act.
  - C. *They did not say, "We are under a law of liberty."* Many turn to **James 1:25**, which describes the law of Christ as a law of liberty, and claim we are free from law and need for authority. Yet, neither Peter, Paul, Barnabas nor James (the author of **James 1:25**) said that. They knew Christ's law liberates us from sin, not from responsibility to follow His equipping or authority.
  - D. *They did not say, "All that matters is love."* The goal of our instruction is love (**I Timothy 1:5**). God is love (**I John 4:8**). Jesus died because He loves (**I John 4:9-10**). However, none of the men in **Acts 15** thought love nullified the need for Holy Spirit equipping. Here was a perfect opportunity to talk about how Jesus died because He loved all men and surely love demands letting Gentiles become Christians without being circumcised. Here was the perfect opportunity to say, "Come on you Pharisees, it doesn't matter whether or not they were circumcised, all that matters is if they love Jesus." But no one said that.
  - E. *They did not say, "Show me where God says we can't baptize Gentiles."* Many believe we are free to act as long as we cannot find a direct "Thou shalt not" in the New Testament. Peter or Paul or James could have said, "Look, you Pharisees, who are you to restrict what God has not specifically condemned? He hasn't given us a law on this matter, you shouldn't make one up." But they didn't. Instead they sought for authorization.
  - F. Notice how seriously Peter, Paul, Barnabas and James took the dissent of the Pharisees. They did not blow them off. They didn't just run off and start their own churches. They faced the issues and showed the authority and equipping from the Holy Spirit. We need to do the same.

- II. Second, notice what they did do to establish authority. We will work backwards through the three approaches the men took in **Acts 15**.
- A. **Acts 15:13-19**—*Direct Statement*
1. James recounted a prophecy about the kingdom from **Amos 9:11-12**. In the days of the rebuilt and restored tabernacle of David, that is, during the kingdom of Christ, which had then been established, the Gentiles would also be allowed to seek the Lord. Gentiles were equipped by the *Direct Statement* of scripture to be baptized for the remission of their sins without first becoming Jews. And the congregations were equipped to baptize them.
  2. We know we are equipped for a good work through the Scripture if it directly states we must or may do something.
- B. **Acts 15:12**—*Approved Example*
1. Paul and Barnabas demonstrated that Gentiles must be allowed to be baptized without first becoming Jews because they had seen it happen. First, remember what the signs and wonders God had worked through them really meant. According to **Hebrews 2:3-4**, the signs and wonders were God's testimony that what was being taught was in accordance with His will. When Paul and Barnabas baptized Gentiles without circumcising them and God performed signs through them, He was testifying that Paul and Barnabas were right. Paul and Barnabas were saying they had seen *Approved Examples* of Gentiles baptized for the remission of their sins. Thus they were equipped to baptize the Gentiles.
  2. We know we are equipped for a good work through the Scripture if we see approved examples of that work accomplished by Christians.
- C. **Acts 15:7-11**—*Necessary Inference*
1. Peter reminded everyone of what happened in **Acts 10**. While he and other Jews were teaching the Gentiles, the Gentiles were baptized in the Holy Spirit. Notice Peter's conclusion in **Acts 10:44-48**. "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" Then when he recounted what happened to the critical Jews in Jerusalem in **Acts 11:15-18**, they quieted their complaints and said God had equipped the Gentiles for the repentance that leads to life. Do you see what happened here? Peter had not heard God specifically say the Gentiles could be baptized in water for the remission of their sins. Neither had he seen an example of it. Rather, Peter saw something that *Necessarily Inferred* the Gentiles could be baptized. No one could draw any other conclusion, not even those most opposed to Gentile baptism. If the Gentiles could be baptized in the Holy Spirit without first being circumcised and obeying the law of Moses, then they could be baptized in water for the remission of their sins as well. Please, carefully note this is not just any old inference. We can often infer a lot of things depending on our own backgrounds and prejudices. I am not talking about those inferences. I am talking about inferences that are necessary. I am talking about inferences that everyone, no matter their background or prejudices, has to draw because they are necessary. Who could draw any other conclusion from what happened to the Gentiles in **Acts 10**? Even those completely opposed to going anywhere near the Gentiles could not draw different conclusion.
  2. Therefore, we know if the Scripture *Necessarily Infers* some action or work through a statement or example, we are equipped or authorized for the work.

### Conclusion:

What we have studied today is not new to most of us here. However, it seems this very simple approach to finding scriptural authority is coming under increasing attack. I am repeatedly hearing people say this method is man-made and therefore faulty. Yet, here we see exactly how apostles and prophets found equipping for good works. We can find it in the same way. Granted, this is not everything we need to know about scriptural equipping. We will deal with some more issues about being fully equipped in later lessons. But this provides a great foundation and firm foothold as we begin our journey. Let us carry our guide with us, being fully outfitted, furnished and equipped for every good work.