

# P Precepts, Principles, & Preferences

Lesson Commenced: \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson Checked: \_\_\_\_\_

This study examines a key consideration when applying the Word of God in a practical way, particularly in church-related matters. Confusion (and extremes) will result from a failure to distinguish precepts, 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 and white” issues, while others seem less clear. This lesson seeks to make the distinction and the appropriate application.

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## PRECEPTS

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

### A. THE DEFINITION OF A BIBLICAL PRECEPT:

1. The word is translated from a Hebrew word (“*piq-qûd*”) meaning “appointed” — in the sense of a mandate.
2. Another Hebrew word (“*mitzvâh*”) is translated both as “precept” and “commandment.”
3. The dictionary defines a precept as “an **authoritative rule** prescribing a particular kind of conduct or action; a standard or guide to morals; a maxim (that having greatest authority).”
4. “Thou hast \_\_\_\_\_ us to \_\_\_\_\_ thy precepts  
\_\_\_\_\_” — *Psalm 119:4*.

### B. EXAMPLES OF BIBLICAL PRECEPTS:

1. The T\_\_ C\_\_\_\_\_ — *Deuteronomy 4:13<sup>c</sup>*.
2. That which was given by the LORD through \_\_\_\_\_ — *Hebrews 9:19<sup>a</sup>; Nehemiah 9:14*.
3. They are clearly defined directives (“*thou shalt*”) or prohibitions (“*thou shalt not*”).

4. Precepts carry a penalty for their disobedience. E.g. *Exodus 21:12,16-17; 22:19; Leviticus 20:10,13,15.*

### C. THE APPLICATION OF BIBLICAL PRECEPTS:

1. They are a basis for C\_\_\_\_\_SHIP (fellowship) — *Psalm 119:63.*
2. They are the means of getting true U\_\_\_\_\_ING and the discerning of every \_\_\_\_\_ way — *Psalm 119:100,104.*
3. In the Lord’s churches:
  - a. They are to be PROCLAIMED — see: *Isaiah 58:1; Galatians 5:19-21.*
  - b. DISOBEDIENCE requires DISCIPLINE — e.g. *I Corinthians 5:1-13.*

According to *I Corinthians 5:13*, a Baptist church is to “put \_\_\_\_\_” from its membership any brother who violates God’s holy precepts by committing the sins of:

- F\_\_\_\_\_ATION — *I Corinthians 5:1,9,11.*
  - C\_\_\_\_\_NESS
  - I\_\_\_\_\_ATRY
  - R\_\_\_\_\_ING
  - D\_\_\_\_\_NESS
  - E\_\_\_\_\_ION
- *I Corinthians 5:11*

**Note:** Failure to take action will end up destroying a church (*I Corinthians 5:6*).

## PRINCIPLES

### A. THE DEFINITION OF A BIBLE PRINCIPLE:

1. The dictionary defines a principle as “a **general rule** or truth basic to other truths; a rule of personal conduct; a primary source or fundamental cause.”
2. According to *Hebrews 5:12-14*, a Biblical principle is a means whereby we can “discern both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.”
3. Whereas a precept decrees a definite action or prohibition, a principle delivers a guiding policy which can then be applied to non-specified situations.

## **B. EXAMPLES OF BIBLE PRINCIPLES:**

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 we may encounter in life. We deal with most of these things through the application of Biblical principles. For example:

1. The believer's \_\_\_\_\_ is the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Holy Ghost (*I Corinthians 6:19-20*).
  - This principle guides us in areas of physical health (e.g. smoking, drugs, markings, etc.) and temperance (e.g. *Proverbs 23:2*; *I Timothy 4:8*; etc.).
2. A believer is not to be \_\_\_\_\_ yoked together with \_\_\_\_\_ (*II Corinthians 6:14-17*).
  - This principle speaks to matters of marriage, business partnerships, church associations, etc.
3. We are to receive those who are \_\_\_\_\_ in the faith, but not when it would cause doubtful \_\_\_\_\_ (*Romans 14:1*).
  - This principle applies to the requirements a church may place on receiving a prospective member.
4. Christian women are to wear \_\_\_\_\_ (*I Timothy 2:9-10*).
  - This scripture does not list specific items of clothing that are acceptable or unacceptable. There is no "Baptist uniform!" It is left to a study of other scriptures to discern what is acceptable (e.g. *I Peter 3:3-5*) and unacceptable to the Lord (e.g. *Proverbs 7:10*; *Isaiah 47:2-3*; *Deuteronomy 22:5*).
5. We are to \_\_\_\_\_ from all \_\_\_\_\_ of evil (*I Thessalonians 5:22*).
  - It is not a matter of avoiding what is CLEARLY wrong, but also taking into consideration what LOOKS wrong — or that may give others a wrong message.
6. We are to do \_\_\_\_\_ to the \_\_\_\_\_ of God (*I Corinthians 10:31*).
  - This principle, when turned into a question, will guide the child of God as to where he should go and what he should do.
7. Passages such as *Romans 15:20* and *II Corinthians 4:5* give sound principles for evangelism (church-planting).

### C. THE APPLICATION OF BIBLE PRINCIPLES:

1. They are to be TAUGHT:

A believer must understand the general rule in order to identify the specific applications. See: Hebrews 5:12.

2. They are to be APPLIED:

The thrust of *Hebrews 5:11–6:3* is that Christians are to **grow** toward “perfection” (maturity). This comes about through assimilation and application of the principles of God’s Word.

3. In the Lord’s churches:

a. With maturity comes MINISTRY — *Hebrews 6:9-10.*

b. With ministry comes RESPONSIBILITY.

- *Luke 12:48* — “For unto whomsoever much is \_\_\_\_\_, of him shall be much \_\_\_\_\_.”
- The greater the responsibility, the greater the qualifications that are required! See: I Timothy 3:1-12; II Timothy 2:20-21.
- 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. However, neither is he or she ready to serve in a ministry. Nonetheless, such a believer should be afforded *every* opportunity to grow in grace toward that end.

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## PREFERENCES

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### A. THE DEFINITION OF A PREFERENCE:

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

### B. EXAMPLES OF PREFERENCES:

In *I Corinthians 7:6-9*, the apostle Paul expressed his personal preference concerning marriage (that unmarried brethren remain unmarried).

His reasoning came:

1. Because of the “present \_\_\_\_\_” — *I Corinthians 7:26*. Difficult times had come upon the church and believers.

2. From his personal desire to “A\_\_\_\_\_ upon the Lord without \_\_\_\_\_ I O N” — *I Corinthians 7:32-35 (verse 35<sup>d</sup>)*.
3. The fact that this was not obligatory or binding is understood by the words “but” (*verse 36*) and “nevertheless” (*verse 37*).

**C. THE APPLICATION OF PREFERENCES:**

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

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## SUMMARY

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PRECEPTS	—	a matter of <u>obedience</u> .
PRINCIPLES	—	a matter of <u>maturity</u> .
PREFERENCES	—	a matter of <u>taste</u> .

★ The greatest difficulty with these distinctions usually lies at the “borders” — the place where principles end and precepts begin. For example:

- *I Corinthians 8:4-7* relates to a P \_\_\_\_\_ (idolatry).
- *I Corinthians 8:8* refers to a P \_\_\_\_\_ (to eat? or not to eat?).
- *I Corinthians 8:9* gives a P \_\_\_\_\_ (no stumbling blocks).

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

- *Deuteronomy 22:5* is a PRECEPT (unambiguous distinction in clothing).
- *Genesis 1:27<sup>b</sup>* is a PRINCIPLE (unambiguous distinction of the sexes).
- Red dress/blue dress; striped shirt/white shirt — are all PREFERENCES!

★ Perhaps the greatest danger comes when our preferences border on violating a principle, and when failure to follow principles leads directly into violating a precept! For example:

- *II Samuel 11:1* — David remained in Jerusalem — a PREFERENCE.  
... while not wrong, it opened the way for ...
- *Psalms 101:2-4; Romans 13:14* — a PRINCIPLE not being followed.  
... which led to ...
- *Exodus 20:14* — a PRECEPT being violated.

— **HERE IS DISCERNMENT** —

Sin develops progressively — *James 1:14-15; Psalm 1:1* (“walk,” “stand,” “sit!”).

— **HERE IS WISDOM** —

Err on the side of caution, stay away from the borders — *Proverbs 4:14-15*.

**MEMORY VERSE:** Try and commit to memory *Ephesians 5:15*.