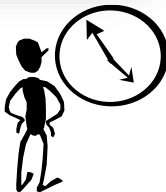


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.
(every other week)

Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p.m.

How to Establish Biblical Authority

By Heath Rogers

God is the proper source of authority in religious matters. Our authority must come from heaven and not from men (Matthew 21:25). God has given authority to His Son, Who gave the Holy Spirit to the apostles. These and other inspired men have written the New Testament. Consider, then, the proper way to understand how God is speaking to us today through the New Testament.

Communication from God

God reveals His wisdom and power through His creation (Psalms 19:1; Romans 1:20), but He has revealed His mind and will to us through the Scriptures. Some people have the idea that the Bible can't be understood by ordinary people. They mistakenly believe one must be gifted or specially trained to properly understand the Bible.

God created man and He created communication. He knows how we learn and comprehend, so He understands perfectly how to communicate His will to us. God's word is meant to be understood (Ephesians 3:4). We can understand the New Testament by following the rules we use to communicate with one another: we listen to what others say and watch what others do.

Direct Statements and Commands

God's word speaks to us through direct statements of truth to be believed and commands to be obeyed. When the New Testament says Jesus is the Son of God (John 20:31), we are to believe this truth. When it commands us to repent and be baptized for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38), we know we must meet these conditions to receive this great blessing.

Approved Examples

Sometimes God's will can be understood by following the examples of those who were acting with His authority.

The apostle Paul told the Philippians, "*Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern*" (Philippians 3:17). The apostles taught believers to observe all things commanded by the Lord (Matthew 28:20). Their obedient actions are a pattern for us to safely follow today.

Necessary Inference

Sometimes we communicate with one another by "filling in the gaps." An inference is when we aren't told something specifically but understand it must be true from what we are told. For example, if I told you that I attended the funeral of a friend, you would probably offer condolences for the passing of my friend. I didn't specifically say that my friend died, but you correctly understood this to be true from what I told you. God's word does this as well.

An Illustration: The Lord's Supper

All of these methods are used regarding the Lord's Supper. The observance of this memorial is a command "*received from the Lord*" (I Corinthians 11:23). He commands us to "*do this in remembrance of Me*" (I Corinthians 11:24-25). Through direct statements, we know the elements of the Supper are bread and fruit of the vine (Matthew 26:26-29). Following the approved example of the church in Troas, we assemble to partake of the Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Using necessary inference, we know the bread must be unleavened because this was the only bread available as Jesus was instituting the Supper (Matthew 26:17, 26). The frequency of this memorial is also established using necessary inference. Every week has a first day (Sunday), so it is necessary for us to infer that the church in Troas assembled to partake of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

These basic rules of communication are how we can properly understand God's will from the New Testament.

General and Specific Authority

By Heath Rogers

Previous articles in this series have set forth the need for authority in religious matters, the proper source of authority, and how to establish what God has authorized. This article will consider an important distinction that must be made in understanding what has been authorized by God. We will study the difference between general and specific authority.

The meaning of these words clarifies what we are studying. General is defined as "of, for, or from the whole or all; not particular; not specific; not precise." General authority includes any method, thing, or means that would fulfill a command or approved example. Specific means "limiting or limited; precisely formulated or restricted;

definite; explicit." Specific authority excludes every method, thing, or means that is not specified in a command or approved example. In short, general authority includes while specific authority excludes.

We reason this way about things in our everyday lives. For instance, if you take your car to a mechanic and say, "fix my car," you have authorized him to do anything he has to do to get your car running. If you say to him, "fix the starter," you have specified what he must do. He is not authorized to do anything else. We shouldn't be surprised to find that God has communicated His will to us in the same way.

Examples of General Authority

When Jesus commissioned His apostles, He told them to "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:15). The command to "go" was a general command that could be obeyed any number of ways. The apostles could walk, ride an animal, ride a chariot, or sail in a boat. Any manner they chose would be approved by God.

The wisdom of God's use of general authority is seen in the fact that it accommodates improvements in technology. Today, we can "go" by riding in a car, bus, train, or plane. If Jesus had said His disciples were to walk in their efforts to take the gospel to the world, we would be limited to only that mode of transportation today.

Jesus told His apostles to teach the disciples to observe all things He had commanded them (Matthew 28:20). This teaching was done in various ways. Paul taught publicly and privately (Acts 20:20). He engaged opponents in public debate (Acts 15:1-2) and sent handwritten letters to churches and individuals. Today, the Lord's church can utilize technology such as the internet, radio, television, newspapers, or mass mailings. We can hand out Bible tracts to neighbors, share audio CDs of sermons with relatives, or conduct a live Bible study online with someone in another country. Since the Lord did not specify the exact teaching method, we are free to utilize the most effective method at our disposal.

Examples of Specific Authority

The Great Commission also gives us an example of specific authority. The apostles were told to "*preach the gospel*" (Mark 16:15). They were not allowed to go and make political speeches, share the popular philosophies of the day, or entertain the masses with stories and folklore. They were to preach the gospel. That command automatically excluded every other message they could share.

Today, the Lord's church is free to utilize many of the teaching methods or formats available, but we must use them to only teach the word of God.

The church is only authorized to take up a collection on Sunday. This is the day that was specified with Paul's instruction to the church in Corinth. "*Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must*

do also: on the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come" (I Corinthians 16:1-2). We do not take up a collection on any other day of the week because God has specified Sunday.

We do not use instrumental music in our worship because we are only authorized to sing. "*Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*" (Ephesians 5:19, see also I Corinthians 14:15; Colossians 3:16). When the New Testament specifies singing (vocal or a cappella music) that excludes any other kind of music.

Common sense allows us to understand when someone is being specific with us. We must use this same common sense to understand when the Bible is using general authority or specific authority.

Expediency

By Heath Rogers

In the previous article, we discussed the difference between general and specific authority. When God specifies something, everything else is automatically excluded. However, when God gives us a general command, we are free to choose how to fulfill that command. This is where the study of expediency must be applied.

Expediency is something that we use to help us carry out God's commands. The word **expedient** is defined as something "characterized by suitability, practicality, and efficiency in achieving a particular end: fit, proper, or advantageous under the circumstances." God gives us general commands to assemble, worship by singing, partake of the Lord's Supper, teach the gospel, baptize believers, help needy saints, etc. The things we use to help us carry out these commands are authorized as expedients.

People have sought to justify a multitude of unauthorized things as expedients in the practice of religion. For some, the good that is done authorizes their use and there is no need to consider the matter any further. However, God has not given us a blank check with "expediency" written on it. General authority does not mean "do whatever you want." General commands must be fulfilled within the boundaries set forth in God's word. There are rules to using something as an expedient.

It must be lawful

"All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (I Corinthians 6:12, KJV). The matter of authority must be settled before expediency can be considered. We can't go beyond what is written in Scripture (I Corinthians 4:6; II John 9-11).

The Lord commands us to baptize believers for the remission of their sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). The use of a baptistry helps us to lawfully fulfill this command. Sub-

stituting sprinkling for immersion may be convenient, but it completely changes the action of baptism (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12) and is an unlawful practice, not an expedient.

It can't be specified

Expediency involves the right of choice within what God has authorized. When God has specified there is no choice.

God told Noah to build an ark. He was free to use whatever tools he had available, but he was not free to choose the materials. God specified gopher wood, which excluded any other kind of wood (Genesis 6:14).

God has specified vocal singing in our worship (I Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Hymnals and pitch pipes can be used to help us carry out the command to sing. Using instrumental accompaniment completely changes the type of music that is being offered to God. A piano or organ can't be used as an expedient because God has specified singing.

It must edify

"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not" (I Corinthians 10:23, KJV). To edify means to strengthen or build up. We are not allowed to do anything that will tear down and destroy one another's faith.

Peace and unity in the local church are important and must be maintained (Ephesians 4:1-6), but never at the expense of God's will. When God has given a specific command, it must be obeyed, regardless of what brethren think. However, when God has given a general command, we are free to choose how to best fulfill that command, but we are not free to choose ways that will threaten or destroy the unity of the local church.

It can't offend the conscience of a brother

"Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (I Corinthians 10:32, KJV; see also Romans 14:13-23). This is a rule that governs the exercise of our personal liberties, but it also applies to congregational use of expediency. A method or practice becomes unlawful when it causes a weak brother to violate his conscience and believe he has sinned.

Conclusion:

Matters regarding specific authority are easy to understand. The choices granted with general authority can pose problems. There are rules to follow in properly fulfilling God's commands. Sin and division in the body of Christ occur when unlawful practices are justified as expedients. It is important that we understand how to employ expediencies in lawfully carrying out matters in general authority.