

2016 Authority – Part 4 The Specifics and Generalities of Law

INTRO.: Want to begin by remembering what two men who understood the nature of God’s authority said. *Balaam* – “I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do more or less” (**Num. 22:18**); *Joshua* – “Therefore be very courageous to keep and do all that is written in the book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left” (**Josh. 23:6**). Both men understood the need to do just exactly what God said to do, in the way that He said to do it. That is the attitude with which we must approach the New Testament scriptures.

I. In this lesson, I want to emphasize two things about law:

- A. *Where a law specifies, we are limited to the specifics of that law.*
- B. *Where a law does not specify, we are free to improvise – as long as we do not go beyond the law.*
- C. *Those are universal principles about law, and are not limited to religion. Note two signs that have nothing to do with religion:*
 - 1. “Buses Only.” That is a specific law, and therefore limits the traffic to buses, and buses only.
 - 2. “Motor Vehicles Only.” While there is a specific aspect to that sign (only motorized vehicles, which would mean no horses, bikes, and other non-motorized forms of transportation), there is also a general aspect to it (cars, trucks, buses, motorcycles).
 - 3. Sometimes a sign with a specific law might include prohibitions for emphasis, but does it really have to?
- D. *The universal principles about law apply to how we approach God-given law as well. Two examples:*
 - 1. **Lev. 10:1-3** – Nadab and Abihu condemned for violating a specific of God’s law about the burning of incense in the tabernacle – note **Lev. 16:12**. It was fire that “He had not commanded them.” When God specified where the fire was to be gotten, that eliminated all other sources.
 - 2. **Mark 16:15** – The apostles are commanded to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel.” “Go” is very general. They could walk, ride a horse, ride in a chariot, sail on a ship – whatever best fulfilled the command to “Go.”

II. That introduces us to an important Bible concept – expediency.

- A. *An expedient is defined as “a suitable way for achieving a particular end in a given circumstance” (Merriam-Webster).*
1. That is, an expedient is simply a good way to get something done.
 2. When Paul wanted to “go and preach the gospel” on the island of Cyprus on his first missionary journey (**Acts 13**), the best way to do that was to go by boat. The boat became an expedient for Paul to obey the command to “go into all the world and preach the gospel.”
- B. *For something to be an expedient:*
1. *It must be lawful itself.* Could Paul have stolen a horse to obey **Mark 16:15** to “go and preach the gospel?” No, because stealing a horse would be a violation of another biblical law.
 2. *It must not cause one to go beyond the specifics of the law under consideration.* Could Paul have said, “I’ll go, but I’m going to teach the gospel and Oriental Mysticism?” No, that would have been going beyond the command of **Mark 16:15** to preach *the gospel*. That would have been an addition, not an expedient.
 3. *Be suitable to the circumstances.* Cyprus is about 75 miles from the coast of Syria. Could Paul have swam there? Highly doubtful. Swimming might not have violated **Mark 16:15**, but it certainly wouldn’t have been suitable, or expedient.
- C. *Paul issues two warnings about expediencies in 1 Cor.*
1. *We must not become slave to an expedient – 1 Cor. 6:12.* We are to always be slaves to God’s commands, we are never to become slaves to an expedient.
 2. *We must be sure that the expedient is something that will build up rather than tear down the faith of others – 1 Cor. 10:23.* In using an expedient, I must be conscious of its effect on others, and even though it may help me, not insist upon it to their hurt.

III. **An application for us today: The matter of making music to God – Eph. 5:18-19; Col. 3:16.**

- A. *What are the specifics behind the command?*
1. *Singing* – vocalized music that expresses what is in the heart.
 2. *Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs* – music that is biblically based, that

expresses adoration for God, and/or that tells a spiritual story.

3. We have no right to go beyond those two specifics – **Col. 3:17**.

B. *What are some expediencies we might use?*

1. *The method of the song.* Everyone can sing the same notes, or we can use four part harmony.
2. *The melody of the song.* Some songs naturally lend themselves to being sung slow, dirge-like. Other songs are best sung with more pep, a sense of celebration.
3. *Song books/songs projected onto a screen.* We could try to memorize the songs, but that would limit our repertoire. (NOTE: Sometimes I worry that we can be slaves to the book and the projector. I would recommend that if you don't need it, don't use it.)
4. The key to properly understanding what is an expedient: When we have used the expedient, we have done nothing more than what the command specifies – singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

C. *What is sometimes thought to be an expediency, but is really an addition: instrumental music.*

1. The argument is that instrumental music is simply an aide (thus an expedient) in obeying the command to sing, but is it?
2. When someone plays an instrument, are they singing? Or are they doing something entirely different? Let's ask Merriam-Webster: sing – “to utter words in musical tones and with musical inflections and modulations.”
3. Singing a song and playing a song on an instrument are two entirely different things.
4. We are committed to exact obedience to the commands of the New Testament, and that is why we sing without the aid of instruments of music.
5. But is it that big of a deal? Was Nadab and Abihu's fire that God had not commanded a big deal? Seems like a pretty minor infraction. Wasn't a big deal to them, but it sure was to God!

CONCL.: Let's be sure to study God's word seriously, and to take the commands of God's word seriously. In the words of Balaam, let's be sure to “not go beyond the word of the Lord our God, to do more or less.” In the words of Joshua, let's be sure to not “turn aside from it to the right

hand or to the left.”