

Sunday, October 13, 2024 am

COMMUNICATING WITH GOD (34)
Bible Study (6)
The Nature of Authority: General or Specific

As we continue to address Bible study, we have begun a brief examination of authority. Understanding authority is key to “rightly dividing the word of truth.” We have addressed what authority is, why we need authority, and the 3 ways we establish authority – we look at what God tells us, shows us and expects us to understand (implication). Today, we want to notice another aspect of authority – the nature of authority. There are 2 different types of authority – general and specific. We want to notice these.

In determining what we are to do and not do, there are always boundaries in place that we must respect (1 Corinthians 4:6). Virtually every command limits us in some way, but there is also details left to our discretion (we have freedoms to choose HOW we carry out some aspect of that command). These boundaries are just as important as the commands they are based upon. How do we determine the difference? That is the focus of this lesson.

I. The Nature of our communication – specifics and generalities

- a. One of the points I have tried to establish in this study is that we are not inventing some special formula so that we can justify what we want and condemn everything else (or some formula that declares “anything goes”). We are looking at principles of communication and logic that we use in our conversations.
- b. When something is specified, it limits our options. When something is NOT specified, we usually have more general discretion as to what we do or how we do it. NOTE: Most instructions have varying degrees of both.
- c. Consider the construction of a building.
 - i. When plans are made for a building or even a renovation the first step is to produce a blueprint of what is wanted. When that blueprint is completed and approved, it becomes the standard that will be used to complete the project. Whatever is specified HAS TO BE followed or the finished product is not going to be the original standard. That is why, in construction, standards are very exact.
 - ii. When something is specified that means there is no room for deviation. By its nature it excludes that which has not been specified. For example: In the blueprint we just mentioned, suppose it was for a house with 10 rooms in it, including 3 bedrooms. If, as the contractor you decide that 4 bedrooms would be better OR that the house only needs 2 bedrooms, you have rejected the blueprint. 3 bedrooms excludes either 2 (1 less) or 4 (1 more) bedroom. Specifics LIMIT your choices!
 - iii. Generic - While a blueprint is specific in its instructions, there are often details that are left to the discretion of the builder (or buyer) – for example the color of the house might not be specified, or the type of carpeting or flooring. (NOTE: Some of these things MAY BE specified – if so then the generic choice is not there). Furthermore, in building the house which tools are to be used may not be specified so the construction worker is at liberty to use whatever tools he wishes, so long as it gets the job done right (while respecting the details of the blueprint).
- d. “Go get some bread”

- i. You are preparing lunch and realize you need some bread. You give your child a credit card or cash and tell them, “Go get some bread”.
- ii. The child KNOWS what you want. He goes to the store and brings back a loaf of bread. He has carried out your request.
- iii. Generic - But what type of bread did he get? That was up to him (unless it is implied from past instructions and/or examples – a specific type/brand was mentioned). How did he go to the store? Did he walk, ride his bike or drive? WHERE did he go and get the bread? NOTE: As an aside, if he comes back with bread, candy, chips and soda – did he really follow your instructions or did he ADD to it?
- iv. Specific – Same scenario, but you give him keys (to your Nissan Altima) and tell him, “Go to Walmart and get one loaf of wheat, Nature’s Own, sandwich bread.” You have greatly limited his options. He still has some choices – which direction to go, which Walmart to go to, etc., but he must respect EVERY specific you have given him.

II. Specific Authority

- a. In scripture we are told to respect specific authority –
 - i. Joshua 1:7-8, *“Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; **do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left**, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”*
 - ii. 1 Corinthians 4:6, *“that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written.”*
 - iii. Deuteronomy 12:32, *“Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.”*
 - iv. Revelation 22:18-19 – Do not add to or take away from what is written.
- b. Biblical examples:
 - i. When given instructions concerning the tabernacle and priestly garments (Ex. 25-28), God was very specific and continually warned Moses and the builders to follow the pattern (Ex. 25:40, 26:30, 27:8, etc.).
 - ii. Noah was told to build an ark of gopher wood (Gen. 6:14-16) and given specific dimensions. To be pleasing to God, Noah needed to follow those instructions. The boat needed to be an “ark” which would exclude any other type of boat. It needed to be gopher wood (whatever that is) which would exclude cypress, pine, cedar, oak, (unless gopher wood is actually one of those- TT), etc. The dimensions were specific (450 ft by 75 ft, as was the 3 decks).
 - iii. Moses was told by God on one occasion to strike a rock and water came forth (Ex. 17:5-6). But on another occasion, the Lord told him to speak to the rock (Num. 20:7-11). But on this occasion Moses struck the rock twice and water came forth. As a result of his disobedience (not following God’s specific instructions) he was forbidden to enter the land of Canaan.
 - iv. Naaman, a leper, was told to dip into the Jordan River 7 times to be cleansed of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:10). He could not choose any other river, nor could he choose the number of times to dip. In fact, he protested (11-12). But when his servants reminded him of the benefit of obeying, he complied and was healed.

- v. In John 9 Jesus sees a man born blind from birth. He spits on the ground and makes a clay and applies it to the eyes of the blind man. The man is then told to go and wash in the pool of Siloam (Jn. 9:7). The blind man obeyed and came back seeing.
- c. Some examples of specific authority –
 - i. Matt. 28:19 – Go and make disciples of all nations – the command to “go” specifies our need to take action – namely to make disciples.
Also, they were told to make disciples of “all nations” meaning the whole world – it was not exclusive to certain parts of the world (though there was a plan that was set – Acts 1:8)
 - ii. Ephesians 5:19, we are commanded to sing. Singing is a specific type of music. That is why we do not use musical instruments in our worship – God specified SING! And this concurs with every other passage in the New Testament dealing with our music in worship (Colossians 3:16, 1 Corinthians 14:15, etc.) WE are also told that our singing is to be “to one another” (excluding choirs and entertainment) and in our songs we are to be teaching one another. We are also told the types of songs to sing - psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.
 - iii. 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 – we use unleavened “bread” and “fruit of the vine” for the Lord’s Supper – by example, it is specified (cf. Matthew 26:26-29).
 - iv. Acts 2:38, 1 Peter 3:21 – baptism saves us. We need to be baptized and a STUDY of that subject tells, shows and implies that it is immersion.
 - v. Acts 20:7 – we partake “on the first day of the week”.

III. **Generic Authority**

- a. As noted, something generic in nature it means we have discretion as to how we carry something out. Generic authority by its definition is INCLUSIVE. It is based upon specific commands and addresses the choices we have in obeying the command.
- b. The Bible gives examples of general authority
 - i. When Noah was instructed to build the ark, he was not told what tools to use in building the ark. He was at liberty to use whatever resources he had as long as they did not disregard the pattern.
 - ii. When the disciples were told to “go” and make disciples, how they were to go was not specified. They could utilize whatever means were available– by foot, by ship, by chariot, by animal, etc.
 - iii. When they were told to “make disciples” of all nations – the method of teaching was not specified – they could do it in public assemblies, or house to house, orally or in writing. All of these different methods were still “teaching”. NOTE: A study of HOW they carried out this command does place some limits on what we can do as the church (but those are based on specifics).
- c. Some examples of generic authority –
 - i. We are commanded to sing, but what types of songs is not specified – we can use unison, four-part harmony, responsive, fast or slow pitched, etc. As long as our singing complies with all the specific details, the other aspects are our discretion.
Furthermore, the number of songs we sing, the order of songs in our assemblies is left to our discretion. How the songs are presented – in a book, by memory, projected, are left to the discretion of a congregation. With ALL of these, we are still fulfilling the command to “sing” WITHOUT violating any passage or instructions.

- ii. Matthew 28:19 - The command to “go” would authorize us to use a car, airplane, train or walk. Any of those methods is still “going”
 - iii. There are also many ways that we can “teach” or “make disciples” today – we can write, teach publicly or privately, use a website, correspondence courses, newspapers, television, YouTube & Facebook, etc. We can teach in classes and in public assemblies. We can have gospel meetings, etc. Each of these could be utilized while still respecting the command to teach.
NOTE: There is some limitations as to what the church can do based upon various passages and examples. BUT these are BASED upon what we have discussed dealing with authority.
 - iv. Baptism – while necessary, WHERE we baptize is left to our discretion – a baptistery, a pool, a river or even the ocean.
 - v. Hebrews 10:25 commands us to assemble. But where we assemble is left to our discretion. WE can provide a place (such as this building) to fulfill the command, meet in a home, rent a store front, or find some other place to assemble. But we MUST assemble (and that includes at least once on Sunday to fulfill other commands). How many times we assemble, as well as the time of day is left to our discretion.
- d. Observations:
- i. Generic authority is always based upon a specified command and deals only with those aspects of the command that are not specified. IF something in its proper context is specified, then that excludes all other options.
 - ii. Generic authority is NOT a blank check to do whatever we want to do provided something is not specified. We must still respect the boundaries of scripture.
 - iii. Silence is NOT generic authority. We will address this soon.

With this we have established that the boundaries God sets within scripture are important. We MUST respect what God says and does not say. And, I hope you can see that what we have discussed is not a man-made tradition or creed, but rather it is simply applying the communication sense God has given us. Communication standards that ENSURE that what we are doing is authorized (done with permission).

If we truly desire to please God as we serve Him, we are going to respect Him and His will. We are not going to be making up our own rules and hope He accepts them. Hebrews 12:28-29 says, *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.*

This is about truly listening to Him. What about you? Will you respect His boundaries? Think about it!