

Sunday, October 27, 2024 am

## COMMUNICATING WITH GOD (34)

### Authority (7)

#### Do We Have Authority for a Water Fountain?

We are continuing our study of authority as a subcategory of Bible study – how God communicates TO us today. In this lesson, I want to conclude our brief study of authority by noting some other aspects we need to consider – namely, additions vs. expediencies. Let's set this up and make some observations. Then at the conclusion of this lesson, I will answer where our authority for a water fountain is. And I hope that with the information I will present, YOU will be able to reach that conclusion even before I answer it.

#### I. **But you do not have authority for a water fountain**

- a. A brief review of what we have established.
  - i. Authority means what we have permission to do. It applies to the command and HOW it is carried out.
  - ii. We have emphasized that all we are doing is following proper rules of communication that we use every day. We find them in everyday conversations dealing with authority.
  - iii. There are 3 proper ways we communicate instructions – we say it, show it and imply it (expecting people to think and use common sense reasoning).
  - iv. Within instructions (almost always), some things are specified and others details are more generic, leaving discretion as to how it is to be done. When something is specified, it limits our options. But details that are not specified, we can choose how to do something, provided we RESPECT the specified boundaries.
  - v. Also, silence is NOT a valid way to determine if something is authorized. Saying, “Well, he didn't say we could not do this (or do it this way)” does not give one clear permission. At best it is a gamble.
- b. “But where is your authority for...?”
  - i. One might say, “While such things are not specified in the language, we all do many things that are not specified. Where does the Bible mention a church building? **Where is the authority for the water fountain?**”
  - ii. FIRST, my answer would be: If we do not have authority for a building or a water fountain in the building, then the answer is NOT that what you are doing is acceptable. If there is no authority, then we are wrong for having them. Then we need to get rid of the building AND the water fountain. “Two wrongs do not make one right.”
  - iii. But, there IS authority for both the building and the water fountain! It is found in the difference between an addition and an expedient (or aid).

#### II. **Examining expediencies**

- a. What is an expedient? Something that assists or helps us to carry out a given task. Biblically, it is something that facilitates or aids us in carrying out God's will (His instructions). The Bible and expediency:
  - i. John 11:49-50, 18:14 – Caiaphas declares “*that it is **expedient** for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.*” The word is defined as “to be advantageous.” Certainly, a dark illustration, but it drives home the point.

- ii. John 16:7 – Jesus told His apostles, “*it is to your **advantage** that I go away...*”, so that the Holy Spirit could come
  - iii. 1 Corinthians 6:12, 10:23 – all things are lawful, but not all things are **helpful**.
- b. What is an addition? Means to add to or join to something else. Think of an addition to a house – you are adding a room(s) and typically you JOIN it to the house that already exists.
  - i. 2 Samuel 6:3, 6-7 – David transported the ark on a new cart. Uzzah died! He added (actually substituted – which still added to God’s instructions) to what God had instructed about transporting the ark.
  - ii. Mark 7:1-13 – Jesus noted that they transgressed God’s laws by their traditions. They ADDED an exception to God’s command for children to honor their parents. In so doing, they CHANGED the command of God and Jesus said they nullified it by their traditions. Mark 7:13 adds to the account, “And many such things you do.” NOTE: Often when one ADDs to what is specified, it is not an isolated thing. In time, it becomes a standard that is repeated over and over.
- c. What is the difference?
  - i. From an authoritative standpoint, an addition adds to what is already in place. By its definition, it is MORE than what was there before. It goes OUTSIDE of God’s established boundaries – 1 Corinthians 4:6. Some Biblical examples:
  - ii. An aid (expedient) is something that helps you carry out instructions. The instruction to “go get some bread” is aided by the car you get in to drive to the store AND the money you take with you to buy it. You are NOT going beyond the instructions, but “filling in the blanks”, while respecting the limitations of what was communicated to you.
  - iii. Again, I appeal to logic and communication – with thought and reasoning we KNOW the difference! If you THINK something through you will get it.
- d. Making Biblical application:
  - i. **Singing** – Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, 1 Corinthians 14:15 all specify singing (a specific category (type) of music – which does not include playing instruments OR “vocal play” [imitating instruments with the voice]) and I might add to that – congregational singing (implied in the expression – “speaking to one another”, “teaching and admonishing one another”, etc.), which would exclude choirs and praise groups. But the type of songs is nowhere specified – so we can sing unison, 4-part harmony, responsive, chants, etc. Also the number of songs and order within a worship service is left to our discretion (generic).  
There are several things necessary to sing together. We need something to help us know what song we are singing and to keep us together – such as a song book, projection, or memorization. A pitch pipe can help set the song in a range that is comfortable for most. The number of songs is also expedient – helping us keep time we have designated for our services. Also, songs suitable for their purpose – e.g., opening, Lord’s Supper, invitation, closing, etc. All of this falls within the parameter of singing. To include instrumental music is an ADDITION to the command to sing. It is MORE than what God specified.
  - ii. **The Lord’s Supper** – 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 (Luke 22:19-20, Matthew 26:26-28), Acts 20:7 – specifics based on these texts include the elements (unleavened bread and fruit of the vine) and the day we are to partake (Sunday). What is not specified is the time of day, when in our assembly we partake, what is said to prepare our minds, if we are to

sing a “Lord’s supper song” before we partake, etc. These are generic decisions but ALL fit within the instructions we have as to how we partake.

Expedients - How and when do we distribute the emblems? Do we use “one cup” or multiple containers? When during our Sunday assembly we partake is based upon expediency. With these we are still partaking within the prescribed parameters. To substitute other foods for the emblems, to partake outside of an assembly, to partake on another day of the week are ADDING to the instructions we are given within scripture.

- iii. **The work of the church** – is limited. As you study the church, we find a pattern for what her work involves (worship, edification, benevolence and evangelism). In each of these works, we have instructions and examples that limit what we can do and how we do them. But, we also find aspects where we have discretion.

For example: 1 Corinthians 14:12, *Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel. The church is to edify.* But how? EVERYTHING in scripture points to it being spiritual – building us up in Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:11-16) – it is for members of the body of Christ.

Expedients - We can provide a place to teach, we can set aside times when we teach and worship, we can provide Bibles, class materials, etc. These are AIDS (expedients) to building us up. Edification is NOT about providing recreation and entertainment to the members. Nor is it about providing recreation and entertainment for the community. Yet the term “edification” is used to justify these actions. Such are ADDING to what we learn about edification in scripture. (NOTE: This is a lesson within itself).

- iv. **Baptism** – we know the instructions to be baptized – Acts 2:38, 22:16, etc. Expedients - Providing a place, such as a baptistery (along with a circulating pump and heater), is an expedient. Providing modest clothing and towels for the baptism is an expedient. To change the mode of baptism to sprinkling or pouring is ADDING to the boundaries God has set in place.
- v. **Assembling** – 1 Corinthians 11:18, 20; Acts 20:7 – we have a statement and an example showing they assembled on Sunday. Hebrews 10:24-25 is a command that we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Specified is that we OUGHT to assemble. Implied is we do this EVERY Sunday. But where we assemble is left up to our discretion – in a house, a church building, a rented facility, etc.

Expedients - When we assemble, and how often (but we MUST assemble at least once on Sunday) is based upon what is expedient. To assemble, we need a place! And in scripture there are many examples: Acts 5:12 – at Solomon’s porch (a compartment of the temple); Acts 19:9-10 – at the school of Tyrannus; Acts 20:7-8 – they came together “to break bread” (What about the “upper room”? Some contend we need to do this – but look at the context. Why is the detail included? To explain what happens next – vs. 9-10); 1 Corinthians 11:22, 34 – note that they came together implying a place, other than a home. Thus, by the generic command to assemble, we have authority to provide a place. Keep this in mind as we answer our question for this lesson.

III. **So what about the water fountain?**

- a. I ask you, based on what we have discussed, is there authority for a water fountain and what is it?
- b. The answer: It is authorized because we are commanded to assemble which requires a place. If that place is a building, then all the amenities associated with that building are expedients –

pews, electricity, restrooms, doors and windows, AND a water fountain (which is not about adding a meal to our worship, but rather an aid to help us be comfortable as we worship).

- c. Be honest, is a water fountain the same thing as adding a piano/organ/praise band to our singing or a “fellowship hall” to provide meals? You know the difference!

#### **IV. Some rules for expediencies.**

- a. FIRST, an expediency must be lawful – 1 Corinthians 6:12, 10:23. NOTE: These texts are not saying you are free to do anything. The point is, among those things that are lawful (within the bounds of authority).
- b. Expediencies involve options or choices – they deal with what is unspecified and non-essential. IOW, it is a CHOICE based on whatever options are available. Example: You do not have to build a building to assemble (but you can). You can meet in a home or rent a place or even meet in a park (but that might not be very expedient). Expediencies are about choosing the BEST option.
- c. Expediencies must edify – that is our point. 1 Corinthians 10:23-24, 14:26 – “Let all things be done for edification.”
- d. Expediencies CANNOT change the force or effect of what is commanded or authorized. This is simply saying there is a difference between an aid and an addition. To ADD changes the effect of the command. Instrumental music CHANGES the force of the command to sing.
- e. Expediencies should not be self-serving – 1 Corinthians 10:25-30, Philippians 2:3-4. Never forget that we need each other. There are some who make doing anything difficult because they demand everything be done their way. If an option is scriptural, are we willing to yield? (James 3:17). We should think about the conscience of a brother as we decide how to do something - Romans 14:19 – in such matter, *Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.*

And thus we conclude our of authority. It is my hope with these thought in mind, as we study the Bible, we will do so with the desire to glean from His word, what He intended to communicate to us. In our next lesson (2 weeks), we will begin to address helpful principles and tools of Bible study.

As you study His word, will you respect the boundaries He has put in place? Think about it!