

Using The Standard Properly: Establishing Biblical Authority

Franklin Church of Christ
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AM Worship

Introduction:

Here we are, the Franklin Church of Christ. We have joined together claiming we want to serve God. My question is, "Now what?" If we look at all the churches around us, we might believe the possibilities for all the things we can do as worship are endless. We can have somber, liturgical services in foreign languages. We can have laidback, hand-clapping, arm-raising, spur of the moment services. We can conduct plays, watch movies, have meals, dance and play sports, all in the name of Jesus. But wait...in the midst of this cacophony the world calls worship, we remember we are not here to be like the churches around us. We are here to glorify God (**Ephesians 3:20-21**). With that in mind, the story of Nadab and Abihu looms large (**Leviticus 10:1-3**). We are not glorifying God when we do anything we want. We glorify God only when we do things His way. The only way we will know how to do things God's way, is by reading what He has said. As **II Timothy 2:15** commands, we must diligently apply ourselves as workers, rightly dividing God's Word. We have learned that the Bible is the proper standard and now we are learning how to use the standard properly. It is one thing to claim the Bible is our standard for authority. It is altogether different to ask how we establish what is authorized by the scripture. If we are going to glorify God, we need to learn how to establish authority from His word.

Discussion:

- I. We must look for authority, not for condemnation.
 - A. According to **II Timothy 3:16-17**, the word of God will equip us for every good work. This is the overarching principle of using God's standard properly. The question we most often ask is, "What is wrong with such and such?" That is not the proper question. Rather, we must ask, "What is right with such and such?" Certainly, God has condemned things. But we are not free to do whatever we choose so long as it was not explicitly condemned. Rather, we are looking for what God equips us to do through His word. If we cannot go to the word and find equipping for what we are doing, then what we are doing is not a good work.
 - B. Go back again to **Leviticus 10:1-3**. What did they do incorrectly? The text does not say they offered fire which God had condemned. Instead, it says they offered fire that God had not commanded. Some translations say, unauthorized fire. They should have established authority for what they were doing and so must we.
- II. The scripture authorizes activity in three ways.
 - A. Authorization #1: **Direct Statement**
 1. If the Bible commands us to do something or states that we are allowed to do something. Then clearly, we are equipped to do it. Jesus demonstrated this in **Luke 6:46**. If He is our Lord, then we will do what He says. If He says it in His word, we are authorized to do it.
 2. For example: In **Acts 2:38**, Peter commanded people to be baptized for the remission of their sins. Are we allowed to baptize for the remission of our sins? Beyond doubt we are.
 - B. Authorization #2: **Approved Example**
 1. Notice the *Direct Statement* found in **Philippians 4:9**. We are to do the things we see Paul do. If we see the New Testament Christians approved by God in a particular activity or behavior, then we are also authorized to perform the same activity.
 2. For example: In **Acts 20:7**, we read that the disciples gathered together on the first day of the week to participate in the Lord's Supper. Are we authorized to do such? Absolutely. In fact, considering all that the scripture says about the Lord's Supper, the first day of the week is the only day for which we find authorization to participate in the Lord's Supper.
 - C. Authorization #3: **Necessary Inference**
 1. We have a *Direct Statement* to follow the *Approved Examples* in scripture. Take note then of Paul's example in **Romans 10:13-15**. Paul began with a very simple statement, "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." But from this statement he ends with a command for churches to send out people preaching the Gospel. How did he accomplish that? He used a series of *Necessary Inferences*. If people have to call on the name of the Lord to be saved, we can necessarily infer that they must believe in Him. If they must

believe in Him, then they must first hear about Him. In order to hear about Him, someone must talk about Him. No one will talk about Him, unless we send people out do so. Brethren we can infer a lot of things from any statement. But that is not what we are talking about here. Rather, we are talking about *Necessary Inferences*. Is the activity we are considering a necessary step to performing something that is authorized? If so, then it is also authorized. If not, then we are not equipped to do it.

2. For example: **Hebrews 10:25** commands churches to assemble. Obviously congregational assemblies are authorized, in fact, demanded. But for this to happen, we must have a place to assemble and we must have times of assembling. The Bible never explicitly says anything about either of these issues. However, we are certain we are allowed both to have a place to assemble and a time of assembly because we cannot assemble without them.

III. We must recognize the difference between Generic and Specific Authority.

- A. In every *Direct Statement*, *Approved Example* and *Necessary Inference*, God authorizes some things specifically and some classes of things generically. Please, do not be frightened by these labels of distinction. This is plain common sense.
- B. Consider the mother who told her son, "Go buy me a loaf of bread from Wal-Mart with this \$5." She specified some things and left some things up to the son to decide. She specified buying a loaf of bread. Can he buy hamburger buns? No, a loaf of bread was specified, ruling out all other kinds of bread. That is *Specific Authority*. When a particular activity is specified, that rules out every other thing in that class.
- C. However, what brand of bread could the son buy? Assuming the mother had not already by consistent example specified a loaf of bread, the son was free to choose. That is *Generic Authority*. When a class of activities is authorized, then everything in that class is authorized.
- D. The Old Testament, while not our standard of authority, was written for our learning (**Romans 15:4**). We can illustrate these principles by looking at some Old Testament examples.
 1. Consider **Genesis 6:14**. What kind of wood was Noah to use? Gopherwood. What if he used some other kind of wood? That would be unauthorized. However, God did not tell him the particular ways in which to cut the wood, connect the wood or form the wood. Those things were all left up to Noah and were generically authorized.
 2. Consider **Numbers 19:2**. Could the people bring a black, brown or white heifer for this purification sacrifice? No, God specified the color red. All other colors were thereby ruled out. But what about the age? How old could the heifer be? God did not specify. The heifer could be any age, so long as it was without defect and had never bore a yoke. However, look at the Passover offering of **Exodus 12:5**. How old could the Passover offering be? It had to be of the first year. God specified the age and thereby ruled out all other ages. But what about the color? It could be any color, so long as it was without blemish. Some things were specified and some given general authority.
- E. As we consider our situation today, we can go back to **Hebrews 10:25**. We cannot dispense with the congregational assembly. We must have a place to assemble. However, God never specifies where the assembly is to take place. That is left up to our judgment. We could use someone's home. We could rent a facility. We could set up a tent in a big field. We could meet in a cave. We could build an assembly hall. The choice is ours because God generically authorized all of these options by not specifying any one of them. Each church has the freedom to choose how it will fulfill this command and none of us is allowed to condemn another church for making a different choice among these options. Thus, we see the difference between *Specific Authority* and *Generic Authority*.

IV. In our work, we must distinguish between true aids and actual additions.

- A. Are we allowed to use things that help us accomplish what is authorized? Certainly. However, we are not allowed to wave our magic "it helps us" wand to allow anything and everything we want. While we are allowed to use aids to help us fulfill what God has authorized, we must be careful that we have not added to what God has authorized (**Proverbs 30:6**).
 1. An Aid is something that helps accomplish an authorized activity, but when done, nothing more than the authorized activity has been accomplished.

2. An **Addition** is something that may or may not help accomplish an authorized activity, but when done, something else has been done in addition to the authorized activity.
- B. Let us use our mother and son illustration again. The mother told the son, "Go buy me a loaf of bread from Wal-Mart with this \$5." She specified Wal-Mart. How must he get to Wal-Mart? All other things being equal, he has been given generic authority to get there however he deems best. He may walk, drive, bike, etc. When he is done doing any of these things, he has not added to the command. He has simply done what was necessary to accomplish what he was told to do. However, the son was very tired, so he decided that some caffeine would pump him up and help him on his way to Wal-Mart. He stopped at the gas station, bought a coke and then proceeded to Wal-Mart to buy bread with what was left of the \$5. Was that truly an aid? No, it was actually an addition. Maybe he was tired. Maybe the caffeine did spruce him up. But, when he bought the coke he did something in addition to what was authorized.
- C. Consider some Old Testament examples.
1. Based on **Genesis 6:14**, could Noah use hammers and saws to build the ark? Certainly, when he was done all he did was what was commanded. He built an ark. But could he build a life boat to help in the ark's journey? Absolutely not. When done with that, he would have done something in addition to what was commanded.
 2. Based on **Numbers 19:2**, could the Israelites use a rope to lead the red heifer to the place of sacrifice? Of course, assuming it did not leave a rope burn as a blemish. When done, the Israelite had only done what was commanded of him. But what if he decided a nice side of bacon would help the sacrifice go down better when they were eating it and brought a pig along to kill also? That would be an addition.
- D. As we consider our situation today, we can go to **Ephesians 5:19**. Singing is specified. That rules out all other classes of music in worship to God. But what about books, leaders and pitch pipes. Do we have authority for those? Certainly. When we have used those tools we have done nothing more than what was commanded and what was necessary to fulfill God's command. But when we bring in a guitar, a piano and drums, we have added to what God has authorized and done something in addition to what He commanded. We not only sang; we played.

Conclusion:

Using the standard properly is not a difficult thing. I hope you noticed that we learned nothing in this lesson that is any different from any other walk of life. For some reason, when it comes to God's word, His proper standard, people often decide they can do whatever they want. But remember, if Jesus is our Lord, we will do what He says, not whatever we want (**Luke 6:46**). We must use the standard properly, glorifying God in all that we do.