

Authority #5 – Generic and Specific Authority

I. Introduction

A. Example: “Get some bread”

1. Specifies some things
 - a) Locomotion – “Get”
 - b) Thing desired – “bread”
2. Leaves others unspecified
 - a) Where – kitchen, supermarket, neighbor, etc
 - b) How – car, bike, cab, bus, etc.
 - c) When – can assume that it is wanted in a relatively short time frame
 - d) how much – one loaf, one slice, etc
 - e) What kind – rye, whole wheat, potato, etc
 - f) What form – loaf, rolls, buns, etc

B. Definitions

1. Unspecified options are called generic authority
2. Required elements constitute specific authority
 - a) More restrictions require more specifics
 - (1) Bread example

C. Principles:

1. Generic Authority authorizes any activity that is subordinate to what was instructed
2. Specific authority excludes any activity that is coordinate to what was instructed
3. Specific authority always takes precedence over generic authority

D. Examine hierarchy of categories

1. Define subordinate
 - a) Authorized
2. Define coordinate
 - a) Excluded
3. Define superordinate

E. Example: Living Things

F. Review Principles

1. Example of specific taking precedence: Brown lizard excludes iguana (it's a lizard, but its not green)
2. Example of specific taking precedence: Lev. 11:2-8
3. Fundamental Statement: "When God gives specific instruction, stated or implied, as a statement of fact or a command. We look at the specifics to see his limitations. We then note the unspecified options that are either necessary or allowed, from which we choose in carrying out what God specifies. Authority answers to several questions: what, when, where, why, who, how, how often, how much, etc. Both specifics and generics answer to any one, or a combination, of these questions. We must understand that a passage may make the who. What, and where specific, and leave the how and when up to us to decide. God did not give specific instructions regarding all possible situations, thereby leaving us no choices to make." – Maurice Barnett, p. 21

II. Example: Great Commission (Matt. 28:19)

A. Go

1. Specifies
 - a) Locomotion

- b) Movement
- c) From one place to another
- 2. Leave unspecified
 - a) The means of transportation
 - (1) Generic authority to use any means of transportation
- 3. Excludes
 - a) Not going

B. All nations

- 1. Specifies
 - a) Where they were to go
 - b) Who they should teach
- 2. Leaves unspecified
 - a) Order/priority of nations
 - b) Initial order specified (Lk. 24:47; Acts 1:8)
- 3. Excludes
 - a) Preaching to the animal kingdom?
 - b) Plants

C. Teach

- 1. Specifies
 - a) What was to be done and done
 - b) The subject matter to be taught (v. 20)
- 2. Leaves unspecified
 - a) The method of teaching
 - (1) One-on-one
 - (2) Group
 - (3) Writing
 - (4) Email
 - b) Setting
 - (1) Home

(2) School

(3) Work

(4) Etc.

3. Excludes

a) Other activities

(1) Softball

(2) Tourism

(3) Etc.

D. The liberty of generic authority

1. Taking a plane to Germany to teach one-on-one classes in homes is just as authorized as
2. Walking into Roanoke to teach a group in a building at National College
3. Both fulfill the command of Christ to go teach all nations
4. Choosing something that is an option of generic authority is not adding to nor going beyond God's word, nor is rejecting one option in favor of another doing less than what God commands

III. Example: Singing (Eph. 5:19)

A. Specifies

1. The mode of music making - Song
2. The types of songs – psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs
3. The instrument – the heart

B. Leaves unspecified

1. Order of singing
2. Number of songs
3. Volume/Tempo
4. Lyrics and melodies
5. Song leader
6. Song book

C. Excludes

1. Mechanical instruments of music
2. Objection: Instruments are an expedient
 - a) An expedient is an option of generic authority (Choosing “car” as an expedient way of “go”)
 - b) Must be authorized to be an expedient
 - c) Make music would authorize a musical instrument as an expedient
 - d) Play an instrument would specify instrumental music as a requirement

e) Sing specifies a kind of music which EXCLUDES ALL OTHER KINDS

3. Objection: Instruments are an aid to singing

a) Aids or helps to fulfilling authorized commands are authorized (if they are not otherwise excluded)

b) Example: Song leader, pitch pipe

c) A piano helps us to do a better job singing, and so it is an authorized help

d) But, it is an item from a category that has been excluded by God's specific selection of singing. It is therefore not an acceptable help to singing.

e) Example: If commission was "walk into every nation and teach" would riding be an aid to walking?

f) Example: Oak for key components of the ark – more stability, able to handle the stresses and strains better. EXCLUDED because God's choice of gopher wood excluded it, as helpful as it might have been

4. Piano an authorized aid? If it doesn't make music in worship (Music stand? Get pitch? Learn tune?)

IV. Bad Example: Missionary Society

1. "And so here, the command is to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. The command is not attended with any specific instructions as to how this is to be done...The Savior commanded his disciples to go, and left it to the exercise of their own judgment and their own wisdom as to how they would do that; that is, as to how they would carry on the details of the work that was committed into their hands."

- J. B. Briney, "Otey-Briney Debate", p. 193 & 288, 1908.

2. Everything stated in this quote is exactly correct and is a good summary of the principle of generic authority, and yet it does not support Briney's conclusion that a Missionary Society is an authorized means of going and teaching.

3. The Missionary Society is not

a) A method of Going

- b) A Method of Teaching
 - c) Or a Setting for teaching
4. A missionary society is an organization that provides, uses and supervises
- a) provides, uses and supervises methods of going
 - b) provides, uses and supervises methods of teaching
 - c) provides, uses and supervises settings for teaching
5. But God has specified who He intends to be the source of provision and supervision of teaching
- a) Individual disciples – Matt 28:19-20
 - b) Local congregations – 1 Tim 3:15; Eph. 3:8-11
 - c) Other sources of provision and supervision are excluded
6. Same mistake is made by those who teach that the church is authorized to take of orphans or widows by supporting human institutions which do that work independently of the oversight of elders

V. Conclusion

A. “Whatever activity or responsibility a congregation has authority for, that congregation can provide or build facilities in which to do it. If we have authority to assemble together, we can build an auditorium in which to meet. If we have authority for Bible classes, we can build the class rooms in which to have the classes. What must be determined at the beginning is the authority for a congregation to engage in, or support and promote a particular activity. Then we determine what options we have to expedite that activity.” – Maurice Barnett, “Understanding Bible Authority” p. 21

B. Principles:

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C. Invitation