**BIBLE TALK**

**On KTTR (99.7 FM) Every Sunday at 8:30 a.m.**

**Rolla, Missouri**

**How To Interpret the Bible (Pt. 3)**

**8/9/2020**

The Bible is the complete revelation of God’s will to man. If we want to know what God wants of us, we must read and study the Bible. But how do we go about interpreting the word of God, the Bible? This is the question we have been considering for the past several weeks on this program.

We have shown that since God has chosen human language to communicate His will to us, it seems evident that the rules that we normally use in interpreting the words of others will then be the rules God intends for us to use to interpret His word. And we have also demonstrated that the communication process involves, in the most fundamental way, express statements, examples, and necessary conclusions. If we are trying to communicate something to someone else by means of words, it will be in these three ways. We tell someone what we want. This is direct and can be a command or statement. We show someone what we want by giving examples or illustrations. Or we imply what we want others to know by the express statements and the examples we give. This is how God has communicated His will to us, by express statements, examples and necessary conclusions.

We have emphasized the fact that God does not want us to add to or take from His word, or to modify it in any way, but to abide in it (2 John 9). This was Jesus’ attitude toward the will of His Father. He said in John 5:19, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.”* He also said in verse 30 of this same chapter, *“I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”* Notice, Jesus did nothing on His own authority, because He was seeking the Father’s will and not His own. This should be our attitude toward the will of God. In our service to God we must do nothing of ourselves, but only that which is authorized by God in His word, the Bible.

But someone might be thinking, “If we are to do nothing on our own authority, but have authority from God in His word for what we do in service to Him, then where is Bible authority for church buildings, built and purchased by the church? Where is Bible authority for preaching the gospel on radio? There is no express statement, or example of churches in the Bible having a church building or preaching the gospel on radio.” These are good questions and they deserve an answer. This is the focus of our lesson today.

The question that we need to ask is, “Must everything we do be specified in order to be authorized?” The answer is “no.” But on what basis can we argue that we must have authority on the one hand, but we don’t always need specified statements on the other hand? How can something be authorized if it is not specified?

In establishing authority, whether it is parental authority, government authority, or Bible authority, we need to understand that there are two kinds of authority—there is specific authority and there is generic authority. Now, what I am talking about here is grounded in the actual communication process that functions logically everywhere. We use this all the time. In other words, this is not just some biblical rule we are making up, but rather it is how communication works in all areas and we are simply recognizing its function in biblical application. The beauty of this is that we already know how it works. For example, if I say to my son, “Go to the Country Mart in St. James and buy some bread.” In this command there are both specific and general indicators. I specify where he is to go—Country Mart in St. James. And I specify that bread is the item he is to buy. In specifying Country Mart in St. James, that excludes any other store. In specifying bread, that would exclude all other items other than bread. But there are also some generics. I instructed him to go, but I did not tell him how to go. He may “go” any number of ways: walk, ride a bike, drive a car, etc. He might buy any number of types of bread: wheat, white, sourdough, rye, etc. And since I didn’t specify the brand name, he is free to pick up whatever brand he wishes. The unspecified options I leave for him to decide are what we call generic authority. Now, even though riding a bike or driving a car are not specified, those means of going are still authorized by the generic command to go. Even though wheat bread or white bread were not specified, they are still authorized by the term “bread.” Generic authority gives one choices in carrying out the command. And so you see the difference between specific authority and generic authority.

The nature of specific authority is that it restricts one to that which is precisely formulated, or specified. The specific EXCLUDES everything save that which is precisely stated or revealed. This is called the law of exclusion. Black’s Law Dictionary defines it as, “The inclusion of one is the exclusion of another. The certain designation of one person is an absolute exclusion of all others.” For example, a will specifies those who are to receive the inheritance, not those who are not to receive it. It does not have to list all those who are not to receive it because the ones specified excludes everyone else. The physician’s prescription will list only the medication you may receive. It does not have to list all the medication you may not receive since the medication specified excludes all other medication. The deed to property specifies the property owned. It does not have to list all the property one does not own since the property specified in the deed excludes all other property. Look with me at some Biblical examples. God commanded Noah, “Make yourself an ark of gopherwood.” (Gen. 6:14) Since God specified gopherwood, that would exclude any other kind of wood in the building of the ark. When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper He was eating the Passover with his disciples and He took bread and said, *“Take, eat; this is My body.”* We know this was unleavened bread because there was no leavened bread at the eating of the Passover. Jesus took the cup, the fruit of the vine (which is the fruit of grapes) and He said, *“this is My blood of the new covenant…”*  (Matt. 26:26-29) Jesus specifies the elements that are to be used in eating the Lord’s Supper, unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. Specifying these elements excludes all other elements.

The apostle Peter instructs elders in 1 Peter 5, and he says to them, *“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers…”* (1 Peter 5:2) Notice, the oversight of elders is limited to the church “which is among you,” Peter says. Specifying the church which they are to shepherd and oversee (the local church of which they are a part) excludes all other churches. An eldership must only oversee one church, the church which is among them.

General Authority includes each and all of the class, kind, or order under consideration, though not precisely stated nor revealed. For example, the doctor’s prescription specifies the medication I must take, and the Law of the land specifies that it must be obtained from a certified pharmacist. But there are choices I have concerning which pharmacy I will use. Whatever choice of pharmacy I choose to use is still authorized even though not specified in the instructions given me. The unspecified options are what we call generic authority. Now, we need to understand that we only find generic authority in something specific. When God gives specific instructions, whether stated or implied, 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 to carry out what God specifies. For example, Jesus commanded the apostles to *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”* (Mark 16:15) This command is specific in regard to what and where. They are to preach the gospel to the whole creation. The command to “go” specifies locomotion, transport from one place to another. There was no choice but to carry out the specific instruction. However, Jesus did not give the how of “going.” The apostles were left to decide the best way to transport themselves to do what Jesus specifically commanded. That makes the how of “going” generic: any means of locomotion would do. They could take any available means in the first century; a boat, chariot, a donkey, or walking would all do. Today we “go” by automobile, airplane, train, bus, bicycle, walking, or any other means. And whatever means we choose is authorized under the generic command to “go.”

The Lord also did not specify the method of preaching the gospel, such as one on one, or in a public gathering, or in writing, etc. Such methods were a matter of choice, as long as they did what was specified. Today we may use public gatherings, written media, but we also may use radio or television, or the social media. The methods we use are authorized under the generic command to preach.

We mentioned last week that Christians were instructed to assemble on the first day of every week. This specific instruction requires some place to assemble. The Lord did not specify the place, therefore, we have choices. We may assemble in someone’s home, under the shade of a tree if the weather permitted, in a rented facility, or in a building we built and purchased for that specific purpose. Whatever choice we make is authorized under the generic command to “assemble.”

General authority does not equate to “whatever we want.” If the command is general, we must still obey the command within the boundaries that have been set by the specifics. Going back to the illustration of sending my son to the store for bread, I might be general in asking him to buy bread, but he must still buy bread instead of whatever else he might want. A general order allows for more variety in carrying it out, but variety does not mean fundamentally changing the order that was given.

In Acts 2:38, the Jews were commanded to repent and each of them be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. Last week on our program we showed from scripture that baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is water baptism (read Acts 10:47-48). These people needed to be immersed in water for the remission of sins. Immersion in water is specified. But the Lord did not specify the body of water in which they were to be baptized. Now, there had to be enough water for an immersion, but the exact body of water in which to be immersed was left up to them. It could be in a river, a lake, a manmade pool, etc. The choice was theirs. But we do not have the right to choose whatever meaning we want to give to baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. It is what it is.

What we have learned from the communication process is that the more specific something is, the less freedom we have; the more general something is, the more freedom we have. Again, this is not an arbitrary rule for Bible authority, but it is a principle of the communication process. And God has chosen to use this process in making known His will to us.

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