

# Specifics and Silence in Authority

(by Bob Pulliam)

Our previous lesson showed us three ways of authorizing (command, example, necessary implication). In this lesson we will learn of two *kinds* of authority. These determine the amount of latitude one has in obeying the commands of God. Not recognizing these has been the downfall of many in following God.

## **Two Kinds of Authority...**

Do not confuse this with the *three ways* of establishing authority. There are *two kinds* of authority: general and specific. General Authority is characterized by a general wording. Such allows for many ways of carrying out what must be done. Specific Authority is characterized by a specific wording (the specifics of obedience are laid out). Such pins down the details of what is to be done. When specific authority is used, options within that class are excluded from use.

Let's use an example from everyday life to illustrate. Let's say an employer tells a worker to go and buy a car to be used by the company. The company card is provided for the purchase. The employer specifies: A Ford Windstar; w/ AC; power steering; power brakes; power windows/locks; 3.5 liter fuel injected engine; AM/FM cassette stereo; and rear doors on both sides. Here is what the employee faces at the dealership:

Specified:	Options at Dealer:	Permissible:	Not Permissible:
Ford Windstar; w/ AC; power steering; power brakes; tilt wheel; power windows/locks; 3.5 liter fuel injected engine; AM/FM cassette stereo; and power rear doors on both sides	Color; tires; detailing; leather seats; full feature audio entertainment system; 3.8 liter engine; single sliding door on right; cellular phone	Color (paint necessary, but not specified); Tires (must roll to move, but not specified)	Choice on door, engine, and entertainment were all specified, excluding the options. Detailing, leather, and cellular phone are luxury features not necessary in this purchase.

Let's imagine that our employee thought the cellular phone would be an important addition to a business vehicle. While such sounds logical, how might his second guessing an employer's specifics be foolish? Now let's imagine that the employee buys a blue Windstar with the options specified. Did he do well? The employer didn't say to get a blue one. True, but the employer didn't specify a color either. The color was left to the employees discretion. Now let's imagine that the employee buys a Windstar with only one rear side door on it. Did he do well? No, because the rear doors were specified. Everything having to do with rear doors (the class) was spelled out

## **The Bible...**

In the spiritual realm God has given several commands that are either general or specific (or containing elements of both). The following chart illustrates with two Old Testament commands:

Scripture and Command:	Specific Aspect of Command	General Aspect of Command:	Wording Necessary to Make General:
(Gen 6:14) make ark of Gopher wood covered with pitch.	Must use Gopher wood; not pine, oak, etc... pitch; not milk, sap	May hire help, use necessary tools (see Ex 20:25)	Make an ark of wood and waterproof it.
(Ex 12:5) Slay spotless male lamb of first year; sheep or goat	sheep or goat; not cow or pigeon... of first year; not 2 or 3 year old...	Not too much left open here...	Slay an animal

God specified what He wanted with regard to the ark, and left some things to Noah's discretion. The construction material is specified. Where wood (the class) was concerned, Noah did not have a choice. If God had simply said, "Make an ark of wood and waterproof it", then Noah could have built it out of pine. At the same time, tools are not excluded. Why? Because they are not in the same class as the wood. Wood is the construction material, whereas the tools only put those materials together. The same can be seen with regard to the Passover lamb. God not only specified the animal to use (the class), but also several aspects concerning the choice of subjects within that class. Now if God had just said, "Slay an animal", the Israelites could have chosen a convenient animal.

**Now, let's consider a few New Testament examples:**

Scripture and Command:	Specific Aspect of Command:	General Aspect of Command:	Wording Necessary to Make General:
(Mt 28:20) Go into all the world... teach them to observe all that I have commanded you	teach them what Jesus commanded; not philosophy or language skills	go by way of walking, mule, camel, boat...	If Jesus had simply said, "Go teach all nations", what would we naturally conclude?...
(Eph 5:19) Sing and make melody in the heart	sing, not play an instrument	specific wording of songs; harmony; attaining pitch...	Make music to worship the Lord.

In Ephesians 5, singing pins down everything in the class of music. The only music to be rendered is singing (the only other type is instrumental). If God had simply said, "Make music", then we would be at liberty to choose what we liked best. Although most people "see nothing wrong with it", God's word has given us the specifics of what He wants.

### ***The Power of Silence in God's Word...***

We must always beware of the danger of mistaking silence for permission. The Bible does not "list" everything we can and cannot do. The Bible does utilize a very logical means of

expressing these to us, both by what it does and does not say. Silence in the Bible can be just as prohibitive as a direct command.

Hebrews 7:14 is a pertinent Bible example of this. Moses specified the tribe of Levi for the priesthood in Israel. He said nothing concerning the tribe of Judah and priests (and he certainly did not say "Do not take them from Judah."). Since God did not prohibit them from being taken from Judah, couldn't they do so? God did not prohibit instrumental music in the church... The author of Hebrews perceived the silence of God as prohibitive where this specific had been made. Since God told them what He wanted, the alternatives were prohibited. Such is a very logical and powerful way of giving a concise pattern for service.

### ***Conclusion...***

God has given a logical guide for determining our course, rather than a book of simple dos and don'ts. General and specific instructions allow us to determine how much latitude we have in doing God's will. Specifics bind us to an exact element or procedure. General authority provides room for decisions as to expedients (considered in the next lesson). The silence of God becomes a powerful voice when these aspects are applied properly.