

ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY—PART 3

I would like to continue our look at generic and specific authority by using a simple example to illustrate the principle. You may have heard similar examples before.

Suppose that you are my employee, and I ask you to purchase 500 ball point pens. Very simple. Specifically, I asked for 500 pens. 499 or 501 would be incorrect. Also, specifically I asked for ball point pens. Felt tip or quill pens would not be correct, either. I did not specify either the color of the pens or the size of the pens. Here is where the generic authority kicks in. You would be ok if you purchased black, blue, red, or any other color pen. You would also be ok with medium or fine sizes. I also did not specify where to purchase them from, so you might go to Office Depot, Wal-Mart, or order them on-line. No problems. You can easily tell what is allowed and what is not.

Now, let's add a little more complexity. Everyone in the office uses only black pens. By example then, you would know to only purchase black pens, not red or blue. This is only known through the example of the staff, there is no written rule. It is easy to tell that red would be unacceptable in this case.

Let's add another little wrinkle. Because I told you to purchase the pens, it is necessarily inferred that money will be needed, and that it is a company purchase. So, do you grab the company credit card, or ask for cash? It may depend on where you are going to make the purchase, or what would be more expedient. If you are purchasing on-line, you need the credit card, if going to Wal-Mart, either would do. See how simple it is?

Now let us apply this to scripture. Look at Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Here is one of the passages that relate to our singing in worship. Two things immediately stand out: We are told the type of songs to use (psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs) and we are told how to perform them (singing). The specific nature of authority excludes any other type of song and any other type of performance. Therefore, any of our favorite songs by Tony Bennett, The Beatles, John Denver, or any other performer probably do not fall into this category. Similarly, any type of performance that includes anything other than vocal music will miss the mark as well. We basically have four choices: sing, play an instrument, sing AND play an instrument, or do nothing. Which one is right with God? Very clearly, singing is.

Generically speaking, we can sing any number of songs in our worship service. We can use whatever we need to aid us in the singing of these kinds of songs (songbooks, pitch pipes, song leaders, projecting the words onto a screen, memorizing songs, etc.) because they do not change the specifics of singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. The use of a guitar or piano would actually change the command, not aid it.

Don't allow yourself to get lost in what you think would be nice, but rather use your time to study and discern what God wants! Remember, we are commanded to "understand what the will of the Lord is" Ephesians 5:17.

MJW