

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

The Bible Doctrine of Expediency

By Micky Galloway

Men have sought to justify a multitude of things by saying, “they can be practiced as expediencies.” The common concept seems to be that the end justifies the means, so anything that will accomplish what we think seems good, whether or not it is authorized, is therefore permissible. Please note that “results accomplished” does not eliminate the need for authority.

In order for a thing to be scripturally expedient, it must facilitate accomplishment of God’s will, and it must harmonize with His word. Expediency in human wisdom involves the right to choose, within the realm of those things included in what God has authorized.

I. FOR A THING TO BE A SCRIPTURAL EXPEDIENT, IT MUST FIRST BE LAWFUL (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23). Lawful authority may be established by direct statement, approved example, or necessary inference. That which is unauthorized is unlawful – excluded by divine authority, and therefore sinful; 2 John 9-11 forbids going beyond that which is written. We have no assurance that a thing pleases God unless the Holy Spirit has testified that it does (Cf. 1 Cor. 2:10-13). Unlawful things cannot be expedients, even if WE THINK they facilitate accomplishment of the Lord’s will. No doubt, David thought the ox cart would make it easier to move the ark of the covenant, but it did not make it right (See 1 Chron.13:7-10; 15:2, 13-15). Perhaps Nadab and Abihu thought the fire they used would expedite their efforts to burn incense (Lev. 10:1-2), but God had not authorized that fire. An addition to God’s word, or a substitution for His way, cannot be claimed as an expedient. Such is not a matter of expediency; it is a transgression of God’s will.

II. FOR A THING TO BE EXPEDIENT, IT CANNOT BE SPECIFIED. When God specified, man has no choice but to obey or disobey. In matters specified, faith demands obedience to the Lord. God specified “*gopher wood*” for the ark (Gen. 6:14). By faith, Noah did all that God commanded (vs. 22; Cf. Heb. 11:7). God specified sacrifice of a blemish-free male lamb, of the first year (Ex. 12:5). Expediency in human wisdom involves the right of choice, within the realm of those things included in what God has authorized. Noah could choose which gopher wood to use, whether to use large or small logs, etc., but to obey God, he had to use gopher wood. The Israelites could choose which blemish-free male lamb, of the first year, should be offered; but in order to obey God, they had to offer such an animal. To go beyond what is specified, or offer a substitute, is to ADD to what God said rather than AIDING obedience to His word.

Other examples include God’s command to “*sing*” (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Instrumental music is not an aid to “singing;” it is an “addition” to God’s commandment. It is not included in the scope of the command to sing, but is another kind, or class, of music. God commands us to dip, submerge, bury in baptism (Rom. 6:3, 4). Since God has not specified the place to baptize, a baptistery may expedite accomplishment of God’s will; thus, a baptistery is an expedient. Sprinkling for baptism is not expedient, for it is not lawful. It does not aid accomplishment of God’s will. It involves another kind, or class, of action. Therefore, it is a substitution for that which God commanded, and thus, unlawful and sinful. God specified that the elders’ oversight and functions be restricted to the local church (Acts 14:23; 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). For the elders of one church to oversee the members, monies, or work (or any part thereof) of another church is not expedient. It is unlawful. It does not fall within the realm of what the Lord authorized elders to do; thus, it is unlawful and sinful. Such represents another kind, or class, of organizational structure and therefore, cannot be a scriptural expediency. The church is the organization God authorized to preach the gospel (1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 4:12).

A Missionary Society is not an aid, for it is not within the scope of that which is authorized. The Missionary

Society is an addition (another kind or class) to the organization established by God. It is an organization built by men, to do the work God gave the church to do. Therefore, it is unlawful and sinful.

III. FOR A THING TO BE EXPEDIENT, IT MUST EDIFY (1 Cor. 10:23-33; 14:26). If a thing is a matter of choice, or expediency – falling into the realm of human wisdom or judgment – and its practice causes division in the body of Christ, it is sinful and wrong. When God commands, we must obey in spite of consequences, even if it divides people. If doing God’s will requires it, men have no choice but to obey. This is seen in the action of the apostles (Acts 4:18-20; 5:29). But if the action is a nonessential – God having left the choice to human wisdom – and we demand or enforce that which destroys unity and peace among God’s children, we sin.

IV. FOR A THING TO BE EXPEDIENT, IT MUST NOT OFFEND MY BROTHER’S CONSCIENCE (1 Cor. 10:32; Rom. 14:13-23). This rule governs only in matters of expediency, where God has not specified, where the divine will permits the liberty of a choice according to human wisdom or judgment. We are to forego and sacrifice our personal liberty rather than to lead a brother to sin by violating his conscience when he participates in that which he believes to be wrong (1 Cor. 8:7-13).

Remember: expediency involves the right of choice, within the realm of that which is authorized in the New Testament, and is not itself a source of authority. Any practice that changes the kind, or class, of thing authorized cannot be claimed as expediency; rather, it is an addition and therefore sinful.

(NOTE: Much of this material is taken from WALKING BY FAITH, by Roy Cogdill, pg. 18, and also used in A STUDY OF AUTHORITY, by Billy Moore, pg. 42). — This article and chart below are from the *Knollwood Church of Christ Bulletin*, February, 2001. ■

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Essentials and Expediencies

By Keith Greer (edited)

Commandment	Essentials	Expediencies
Teach — Matthew 28:18, 19	Gospel of Christ	Class (Public or private)
Baptize — Mark 16:15, 16	Immersion in Water	Running water (river, lake, ocean) Artificial (pool, baptistery, bathtub)
Lord’s Supper — Matthew 26:26-29	Elements: Unleavened bread & fruit of the vine	Table, Containers, Trays
Assemble — Hebrews 10:25	First Day of The Week	Length of service, Time to assemble, Place to assemble (own/rent), Order of Worship
Giving — 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2	First Day of the Week, Every one of you, Free will offering, Proper attitude	Metal plates, Baskets, Check or Cash

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“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth. Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: For the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof” (1 Cor. 10:23-26).

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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