

General and Specific Authority; Aids (Expedients) and Alterations

By John R. Gibson

[Editor's note: The following is an accompaniment to tonight's lesson on better understanding how God communicates His will to us (Matt. 7:21). My hope is that by putting this in print, everyone will be better able to understand these vital principles. JRG]

Imagine being given \$75 and the following list:

Grits
Heinz® Ketchup
Clorox® Lemon Scented Bleach (1 gal.)
Pillsbury® Hungry Jack Biscuits (10)
Instant Banana Pudding (6 serving box)
Cereal (3 boxes)
Apples (1 doz.) Boneless Chicken Breasts
Le Sueur® English Peas (2 cans) Skim Milk (1 gal.)

- Which of the actions below follow the instructions given for the shop-ping list?
 - Purchased Martha White® “instant” grits?
 - Purchased Jim Dandy® “quick” grits?
 - Substituted chicken thighs since they were on sale?
 - Used a calculator to keep up with your total?
 - Bought Rocky Road ice cream?
 - Purchased 6 Rome apples and 6 Red Delicious apples?
 - Purchased 12 yellow apples and 1 watermelon?
 - Purchased 6 apples and 6 oranges (adds up to 12 pieces of fruit)?
 - Purchased 3 boxes of Cap'n Crunch® cereal?
 - Bought Heinz 57® sauce?
 - Carried your groceries around the store in a plastic basket?
 - Pushed a shopping cart through the store?
 - Carried the groceries home in plastic bags? Paper bags? Reusable bags?
- Though we don't use the terminology of general and specific commands in everyday life, we understand and apply the concepts on a regular basis and if we can see this in our daily activities, we should be able to see how they are used in Scripture.
 - Heinz® Ketchup is specific as to product and brand, while the size is optional (within the \$75 constraints)?
 - Some brands were specified and others were left in the generic category. Even the specific instructions left certain choices to our discretion.
- In discussions of Bible authority (i.e. what God authorizes, commands, expresses in His will) we sometimes speak of something unspecified as merely an expedient or aid. Again, we don't think of the words aids and expedients in our day to day

communications, but we utilize them and recognize the difference between that which is an aid and that which leads to an alteration in the instructions given.

- In the example above we recognize that an orange changes the list, while a shopping cart only expedites the purchase and is an expedient or aid.
 - We would understand that one might keep up with his money spent in his head or use the calculator, since both aid the process of carrying out the expressed will of the grocery list without altering it in anyway.
 - We recognize that bags are not specifically mentioned in the list but are necessary to getting the groceries home.
- While I don't want to oversimplify things and pretend there are no difficulties in the application of Bible authority, I am confident that anyone who truly "wills to do His will" (John 7:17) will find the answers. Let's read with the desire to know and do.