

Expediency

By David Phillips

An expedient is a tool, an aid, or method that is profitable for achieving a goal. Webster defines an expedient as something “useful for effecting a desired result; suited to the circumstances or the occasion; advantageous, convenient.” The biblical principles that govern the use of expediencies in the realm of religion are important for every Christian to understand. A lack of knowledge of what God teaches on this subject has been the result of much division in the church. Some have tried to label as expediencies devices and methods which are actually unlawful additions to God’s word, while others have tried to label as commands things which are actually expediencies. The result is disagreement among brethren and eventual division within the church. Nevertheless, this sort of outcome can be avoided when brethren come to a better understanding of the biblical principles of expediencies

In this lesson we are going to discuss several of these essential principles. We will learn to tell the difference between aids and methods that are expedient for fulfilling God’s commands and those that actually hinder God’s word and prevent us from fulfilling His commands as we should.

An Expedient Must Be Lawful

The first rule of expediency is that it must be lawful. Anything we use to fulfill a command of God must abide within the limitations of His word. If an aid does or includes anything that goes beyond or contradicts God’s word it is not lawful and for that reason we have no authority to use it as an expedient. “*Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God*” (2 John 9).

Some people believe that it is acceptable to lie if it helps them turn a sinner to God. They would argue that lying can be used as an expedient to fulfill the command to teach the lost. However, in Rev. 21:8 we are told that all liars will have their part in the lake which burns with fire. Since God condemns lying, it is impossible to lie and still be pleasing to God, no matter what the purpose. Since lying is condemned by God, lies are not expedient for accomplishing His will. They are not lawful.

In 1 Chron. 13:7-10 David and a large group of people were returning the Ark of the Covenant back to where it belonged. To transport the ark they decided to use a new cart pulled by oxen. In their minds, the use of the new cart may have seemed expedient for transporting the ark. However, in the Law of Moses, God specifically commanded that the ark only be carried by men from among the children of Kohath, a family within the tribe of Levi (Num. 4:15). Even though the use of a cart and oxen allowed the people to move the ark, it went against the specific command of God. Because it was not carried properly, the oxen stumbled and Uzzah reached out to stabilize the ark. Here again, Uzzah may have thought it was helpful for him to touch the ark in order to keep it from falling, but God had also stated in the law that anyone who touched the ark would die. Therefore, even though Uzzah may have thought it was expedient to touch the ark in order to keep it from falling, what he did was unlawful and he died. The people may have

reasoned that the cart and oxen were expedient for transporting the ark, but they were not expedient for fulfilling the command of God because they were not lawful.

David later came to realize that the cart and oxen were not expedient but were unlawful. Therefore, he determined do things the right way (1 Chron. 15:2). Likewise, today we must refrain from using anything that is not lawful according to the word of God. If it is not lawful, we have no authority to use it as an expedient.

An Expedient Must Not Be Specified

The very nature of an expedient implies that it is an optional tool or method that can be used to fulfill the command of God, but because it is an option it does not have to be used. Many churches use trays to serve the Lord's Supper, but Jesus did not need such trays to eat the Lord's Supper with His apostles (Luke 22:17-22). The use of trays is just one option among several for serving the Lord's Supper. We do not have to use them, and neither is it wrong to use them.

However, when God specifically commands (through direct statement, example, or necessary inference) that we do something a specific way, we have no choice but to do it the way He commanded. Though Jesus did not specify which containers we were to use in serving the Lord's Supper, He did specify the contents that the Lord's Supper was to consist of: fruit of the vine and unleavened bread. Some may say that it is expedient to use lemonade or milk if they do not have any grape juice at hand, but it is just not so. Since Jesus specified grape juice, we have no options but to do exactly as He commanded. To use something different is not expedient, it is disobedience.

In the New Testament, God commands that singing be the only kind of music we make when worshiping Him. This is a specific command. "...*speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing** and making melody in your heart to the Lord*" (Eph. 5:19). In spite of God's specific command, some people use mechanical instruments claiming that the instruments are expedients to aid in their worship. However, when God specifically commanded "singing" that command excluded every other form of music. Just as the command for the tribe of Kohath to carry the ark excluded the use of the cart and oxen, in like manner the specific command to sing excludes instrumental music. Since God specified singing, we have no other choice but to sing. The kind of music we choose to make in our worship is not an expedient, it is specified. To make a different kind of music with instruments is not expedient; it is an addition and must not be used.

An Expedient Must Edify

"*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful*" (1 Cor. 6:12). When Paul says, "*all things are lawful,*" he is not talking about sinful things, but rather all things that are lawful within the realm of generic authority. His point is that, in matters of choice or expediency, just because we have authority to do something, it does not always mean that it is helpful. An expedient is that which is helpful or profitable. The desired result is that all of God's people be built up and that the church becomes stronger. Sometimes, when we force our options in situations where it may not be appropriate, we can do more harm than good.

When something is truly an option, we can do without it if need be. To force something that is an option upon other people is wrong and condemned in the scriptures. "*And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*" (Mark 7:7). If there is a disagreement in a congregation over something that is optional, or if it is not working, then it is best to let it go

rather than force it to the harm of the whole congregation. Expedients must work to build up the church, not tear it down.

An Expedient Must Not Offend

Paul teaches us 1 Cor. 10:32 that it is good to set aside our freedoms if those freedoms offend our brethren. Eating meat is a freedom (we don't have to do it), therefore Paul said that if any person is offended at his eating meat then he would never eat meat again lest he cause them to stumble (1 Cor. 8:13). This same principle applies to our use of expediencies. Since an expedient is just an option and not a command, if it offends the conscience of a brother we must not use it.

If we force our freedoms resulting in the hurt of a brother's conscience, then using that freedom is a sin to us. Whatever we use to accomplish the commands of God must be within the guidelines of God's word. We must only use those options that are authorized, that do no harm, and that are profitable for everyone to fulfill the will of God.

Conclusion

As stated before, if we want to be pleasing to God we must abide within the limitations of His word. Before we can even consider the matter of expediency we must establish whether or not a thing is authorized. If it contradicts or goes beyond the word of God, we have no authority to use it as an expedient. If an expedient does fit within the guidelines of Bible authority, we may only use it so long as it is profitable for everyone. In fulfilling the commands of God we must also purpose to edify and strengthen one another. We must not pursue any freedom that hinders that effort. If we remember these things then we will truly be able to fulfill the commands of God which say, "*You shall love the Lord Your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: '*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*'" (Matt. 22:37-39).

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