

The Law of Expediency

H.E. Phillips

The law of expediency has grown to be about the only law governing the modern denominations of this age. It means more than commands and examples of the New Testament. There are four ways that obedience may be required: direct commands, divine example, necessary inference, and expediency. As to direct command there is no misunderstanding. We all know a command from something else. Many commands could be cited, but one or two will do to illustrate. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16). No man can fail to do this and claim obedience to the Lord's commands. "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." (Col. 3:16). There can be no doubt that this is also a command. All commands of inspiration must be obeyed.

The second way we have of understanding the will of God is by divine example. By divine example, we mean an approved precedent of Christ and his apostles; something done by early Christians or the apostles that serve as an example to us today. We may take the same two Scriptures cited above and give a divine example of each. An example of preaching the gospel is found in Mark 16:20. "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen." The missionary work of Paul is an example of preaching the gospel to all men. An example of the command in Col. 3:16 is found in Acts 16:25. "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." By obeying the command to sing, Paul and his companion sang the praises of God without an instrument. We learn how to do what is commanded by an example.

Now by necessary inference we know what is required to obey God. Staying with the two commands already given, I want to point out the bounds of necessary inference in them. First, the preaching of the gospel. Christ said to "Go preach." The example of Paul shows how to obey this command. He only preached Christ and his doctrine. It is necessary that we do something that is not specifically stated in the passage in order to obey it. "Go" implies a method of travel. Paul gave the example of HOW to preach, but not exactly how to go. He used several methods of travel. The inference that is necessary is a means of travel. Again, we must preach the gospel as we go. The place and means are necessary. Paul wrote, spoke, and lived the gospel. The necessary inference is a means and method of transferring the gospel to all creatures. We can not obey the command without the method, so the method is a necessary inference.

The same rule will apply to singing as worship to God. The command to sing implies a method of doing so "decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). To "be of the same mind and the same judgment" and "to speak the same thing" (1 Cor. 1:10) requires something that is not specifically stated in the command. The example of Paul and Silas singing shows just how the singing is to be done, but all the things that are necessary are not stated. It is necessary to have some symbols, such as notes and words, in order to sing and speak the same thing. Singing must be teaching and admonishing. Humming is not singing; playing is not singing. The command is to SING, and in so doing we teach and admonish one another. With this point in mind, we approach a very much discussed topic: Are

not the notes an "aid" to the song service? Yes, it is a necessary aid. Song books, the music scale, notes, and such like are inferred by the command to sing, and to speak the same thing. But the song books, music scale, notes, and such like DO NOT SING. There is no music made by them. It is only for the purpose of staying together in the song. It is argued that the organ is only an "aid" in the song service. Grant that it is for just a moment. It can not obey the command to sing. Not a few chosen can worship God for the whole congregation, yet that is just what is done as worship. A choir sings many times for the whole congregation. God commanded the church to sing, every member. In as much as worship is individual, the singing must be done by each member. Again, the organ sometimes plays without singing. Is this an "aid?" An "Aid" is something that helps. The organ is used to "help" the singing. How can it help the singing when there is no singing? Such are the arguments made by the advocates of the instruments.

Let us get to the base of the matter, using good common sense. Is the organ an "aid" in the Bible sense? Remember that an "Aid" is something that is to help. The command and the example are to sing. There are two kinds of music: vocal and instrumental. God did never require mechanical music either by command or example. The command is to sing and the example is to sing without any instrument but the human heart. Necessary inference must not violate either. Only the things that are necessary to obey the command to sing are termed necessary inference. As the command must be executed in order and decently, and speaking the same thing, the notes, scale, song books, and song leader are necessary to obey God. So much for necessary inference.

We enter now into the field of expediency. The law of expediency is generally termed "Let all things be done unto edifying." This is a boundless law taking in almost anything desired. This has become the power that governs modern worship. The supporters of the instrument continually refer to "Expediency" as their rule. But what is really the limit of expediency? We have already said that some expediency is permitted in strict obedience to God. Webster defines expedient as "tending to promote the object proposed"; the noun "Means employed to accomplish an end; a device." Expediency can not employ a means to accomplish something other than the end. The end is obedience to God. Any means used that do not accomplish obedience is not the prerogative of expediency. Let us keep in mind that expediency has bounds, and they must be observed. Expediency must neither add nor subtract from the divine order.

Let us now go back to the first command cited and find where expediency rules. The command is to "Go-preach." The example is "they went and preached." The necessary inference is a method of going and preaching. It is not the purpose of expediency to tell me what to do, nor show me how to do, nor to tell me what is to be done, but, after these things are known, I may employ any means legitimate to accomplish the end - obey the command. This last is the entire scope of expediency. In obeying the command to "Go preach", expediency tells me that I may walk, ride in an automobile, or fly in a plane, just so I go. I may preach by writing, living a Christian life, or by oral preaching. Expediency will not permit me to preach anything except the gospel of Christ, but if I preach the gospel, I am permitted to choose the most effective way to preach.

Now, to the other command referred to in the beginning of this essay - the command to sing. The command says vocal music; the example is singing only; the necessary inference is notes, music

scale, a pitch, and scriptural words or thoughts. These things are necessary to execute the high command to sing praises to God. It is not the prerogative of expediency to tell me to sing, nor to tell me how to sing, not to tell me the things that are necessary to sing, but I may use expediency to tell me whether to sing bass, tenor, or alto. I can sing either without doing violence to God's word. I may choose as expedience the length of the song, or the number of songs in each service, or how loud or soft to sing, but that is as far as expediency goes. When it is taken further it ceases to abound in its place. You can immediately see that when the lines of expediency are expanded anything may be practiced as worship. Such would destroy the direct commands of God.

In case you may misunderstand, I contend that mechanical music in the worship is sinful because it enlarges the bounds of expediency beyond its natural borders and destroys God's direct commands to sing. Singing is not playing an organ; no reasoning can make it so. If instrumental music is permitted in the worship, the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, sent by Christ, from the Father, has never so instructed either by command, divine example, necessary inference, or expediency.

I am told that instrumental music is expedient because it "attracts the world." I want to make the impression that the church of the Lord is not ordained for the world's pleasure. The hour of worship is no place to carry on a concert to entertain worldly people. If the gospel plan, with good gospel singing by each member of the church, will not attract people, they will not be saved by entertainment of a worldly sort. Must we bring down the divine order of worship to the level of the theater by introducing a program of entertainment? If we use expediency in its place, there will be no trampling under foot the commands of Christ and his apostles. No man can claim innocence in obedience when he misuses expediency and makes it his only law. We must not do the things in worship that please us, but we must do that which pleases God. We worship not ourselves, but God. The only way that we can know what pleases God is by His word. God told us just what to do and we must do it.

Credit H.E. Phillips and HEPhillips.org
Preacher of the Word (Vol. 1, June 16, 1996, #25)
For copyright information see www.HEPhillips.org/copyright.