

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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A Defense of the “Old Hermeneutic”

By Gene Burgett

The phrase “new hermeneutic” has become, for me, like an over-played song on the radio: I am tired of hearing it! One should not, however, allow frustration with the ubiquitous nature of the topic create blindness to its importance, or to the possibility that one more article on the subject is justified.

This article will address three areas that are key to the hermeneutic discussion. First, it will be shown via Bible precedent that one must have authority from Scripture in order for actions and beliefs to be pleasing to God. Second, the so-called “classical hermeneutic” will be set forth. Third, the reasonableness of the classical hermeneutic will be shown.

It must be clear that this article is not primarily a critique of any “new hermeneutic.” One reason for this is because there is so little to criticize. For all of the complaints that the churches of Christ need a new hermeneutic, as of this date, one has not been offered. To be sure, a few vague phrases claiming to be a new hermeneutic have been let fly. “We need a Christ-centered hermeneutic,” some say. A catch phrase or two hardly constitute a new hermeneutic. Besides, as the purpose of the classical hermeneutic is to discern those things that may be done “in the name of the Lord” (Col. 3:17), it is hard to imagine something more Christ-centered than the method of interpretation we have practiced all along. For the most part, the new hermeneutic appears to be nothing more than a rejection of the “old hermeneutic,” with nothing new to offer.

The Need For Authority

In this article the term “classical hermeneutic” will be used to reference the method of establishing Bible authority that has been commonly accepted in the churches

of Christ. The classical hermeneutic begins with the fact that the Bible teaches one must have authority for all one does in order to please God. This authority requirement is not an invention of men, rather the Bible itself teaches the need for authority. Paul taught that “whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Col. 3:17). It should be noted that this is also the very point where proponents of the new hermeneutic begin their objections. They refer to those who believe one must have authority for all words and actions as “patternists.” “Patternism,” we are told, is wrong. Let us follow the Biblical information for transporting the ark of the covenant from beginning to end, noting that it teaches one must have authority for all beliefs and practices.

And they shall make an ark of acacia wood; two and a half cubits shall be its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height. ¹¹And you shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and shall make on it a molding of gold all around. ¹²You shall cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in its four corners; two rings shall be on one side, and two rings on the other side. ¹³And you shall make poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. ¹⁴You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, that the ark may be carried by them. ¹⁵The poles shall be in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. (Ex. 25:10-15, NKJ)

The above passage provides many different examples of specific and generic authority. It is specified in verse 10 that the ark is to be made of “acacia [gopher, KJV] wood.” It would be wrong to use any other material but acacia wood to build the ark. The reason it would be wrong is not because there are any specific prohibitions against using other materials, but because God specifically authorizes acacia wood.

Verses 12-15 specify that acacia wood poles be placed through rings placed on the four corners of the ark, "that the ark may be carried." God specifies that the ark is to be carried by the acacia wood poles. In the face of what God has specifically authorized, no other method of transporting the ark can be used, unless one can find additional information in the Bible on the subject that authorizes other methods of ark transportation.

We also find in the passage an example of generic authority. God has specified that the ark must be moved by means of the acacia wood poles, however, nothing is said regarding who is to carry it. Without further information, Moses' words authorize moving the ark via being carried by the acacia wood poles, but does not limit who may move it.

And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These are the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry. (Num. 4:15)

Numbers 4 contains additional information about moving the ark. It has already been specified that the ark is to be moved by use of the acacia wood poles placed through rings attached to the four corners of the ark. Moses now specifies who may carry the ark by the acacia wood poles. God authorizes the descendants of Kohath, a son of Levi, to carry the ark. The question, "Who may carry the ark?" is no longer generic and subject to human judgment. The ark must be carried by descendants of Kohath. We also learn that in order to know the will of God, it is necessary

to gather all pertinent information on the subject under consideration.

There is, however, still a realm of human judgment regarding carrying the ark. One must be a son of Kohath, but no specific sons of Kohath are mentioned. It is a matter of expediency which sons of Kohath carry the ark.

Then David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader. ²And David said to all the assembly of Israel, "If it seems good to you, and if it is of the LORD our God, let us send out to our brethren everywhere who are left in all the land of Israel, and with them to the priests and Levites who are in their cities and their common-lands, that they may gather together to us; ³and let us bring the ark of our God back to us, for we have not inquired at it since the days of Saul." ⁴Then all the assembly said that they would do so, for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people....⁷So they carried the ark of God on a new cart from the house of Abinadab, and Uzza and Ahio drove the cart....⁹And when they came to Chidon's threshing floor, Uzza put out his hand to hold the ark, for the oxen stumbled. ¹⁰Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzza, and He struck him because he put his hand to the ark; and he died there before God. (1 Chr. 13:1-4, 7, 9-10).

First Chronicles 13 is the final step in our study of authority using the transportation of the ark as our case study. David attempts to transport the ark by placing it on a new ox cart. The ox cart was new, indicating David's sincerity, reverence, and good intentions. Despite David's good intentions, Uzzah, one of the drivers of the cart, is struck dead when he attempts to steady the ark after the oxen stumble, and "he died there before God" (1 Chr. 13:10). It is interesting that in the passage before us, David violated no specific prohibition in moving the ark. However, it is apparent that when God authorized the ark to be carried with acacia wood poles by sons of Kohath, then it was sinful to transport it any way other than the one specified. David later recognizes his sin was not in doing what was prohibited, but, rather, he sinned by going beyond what was authorized, when he states that they failed "because we did not consult Him about the proper order" (1 Chr. 15:13).

Classical Hermeneutic Explained

What is the classical hermeneutic against which so many lodge complaints? It is sometimes described as something so difficult to understand that, surely, God would not hold men accountable for failure to understand conclusions drawn by using it. Here it is in the proverbial nutshell: we must have authority for all we say and do (Col. 3:16), and that authority may be generic in nature (leaving room for human judgment) or specific, in which case it is sinful to perform the authorized act any other way!

Classical Hermeneutic Defended

With all of the complaining done about the classical hermeneutic, one would think it is a form of reasoning created only when interpreting the Bible. Just the opposite

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is true. We use and understand the authority concept on a daily basis. For the most part our laws regarding driving are based on authority, not prohibition. In the State of Florida, it is legal to turn right while a traffic signal is red, provided one first comes to a complete stop. This is the general rule. However, from time to time one might come to an intersection where turning right on red is prohibited. In the real world generic authority is used to create the rules for motor vehicle operation, while prohibition is used for the exceptions to the rule. We operate on the concept of authority in many ways everyday. When we buy groceries, most of us make a list of what we want rather than what we do not want. When a house is built, a blueprint is created that specifies how the house is to be built; no one builds a house based on a list of prohibitions.!

Conclusion

It is often said that our goal in the churches of Christ is to be just like the first century church described in the pages of the New Testament. This is not a completely accurate statement. Our goal is not to emulate the first century church, our goal is to have authority for all we say and do. There were many things the early churches had authority to do that they did not practice. The early church did not own its places of assembly, but they had authority to own their meetinghouses. The early church did not contribute to preaching schools, but they had authority to do so. The early church did not have songbooks, but they had authority to own and use them.

Sarcastic jeers about "patternism" do not constitute an argument. Furthermore, in this article we have shown the need for Bible authority in every conceivable way. A direct statement showing the need for authority has been given (Col. 3:17). An example revealing the consequences of acting without authority has been revealed (transportation of the ark). Finally, we have noted that the authority principle is something we regularly use, showing the reasonability of the idea. 🙏



Ladies Class first Tuesday of the month. Joyce Stearsman is the teacher. All ladies are invited!

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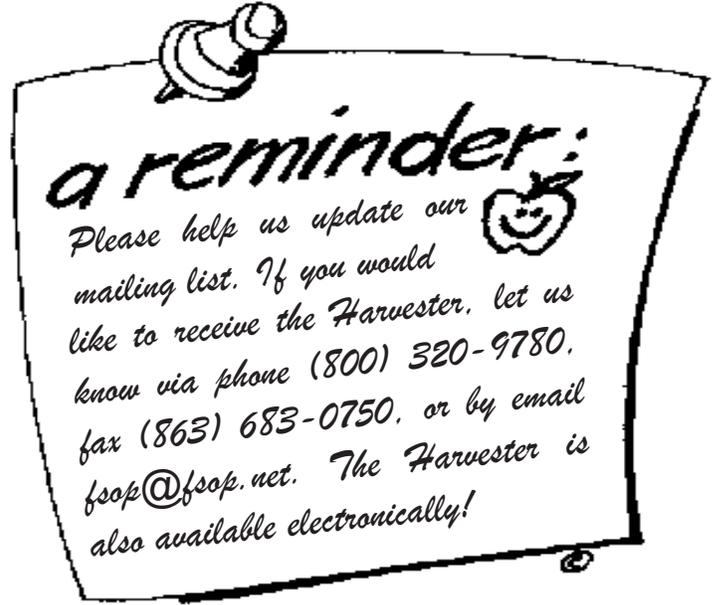
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*Our final deposit for the month is usually made on the last Wednesday of the month. All contributions received after that time are reported on the next month's financial statement.

Special Thanks

to all who financially contributed to the school, especially over these last few months. We are very grateful to the Orange Street church of Christ, Auburndale, for their contribution that allowed the school to purchase our 2011 lectureship book, *Do You Understand the Biblical Value of Women?* There will be a book review in next month's *Harvester*. However, there is no need to wait until then to purchase a book. It is already a classic! How many quality brotherhood books do you know that focus on the positive value of women? Speaking of the positive value of women, I personally thank all who contributed to the school in memory of Amber! It was one year ago this month that she was diagnosed with the dreaded disease. I still miss her, but where she is, she still does not miss me (or anything else associated with this world) one single bit! I am overwhelmed at the gifts motivated by love that you sent the school! Speaking of gifts motivated by love, we also thank all who contributed to our lectureship. Your free-will offerings once again kept us from having to "pass the hat"! The school must continue adjusting our budget, realizing these last few months involved many out of the ordinary contributions that we cannot expect all the time. Your help, however, continues to allow us to train preachers and prepare souls to better serve the Lord. Thanks! —*Brian*



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