

THE RIGHT ROD

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When God specifies that which man is to do, he must do it or incur Divine displeasure. Man may not add to, omit, or substitute anything in the place of that which God specifics. The Scriptures abound with illustrations of this principle, one of which is found in **Exodus 17:1-7**. On their way to Canaan after God miraculously delivered them from Egypt, Israel murmured against Moses and God because of thirst. God told Moses to take some of the elders with him and to smite a certain rock with his rod, which brought forth water.

God specified the rod that Moses was to take with him to the rock and with which he was to smite it: “THY ROD, WHEREWITH THOU SMOTEST THE RIVER, TAKE IN THY HAND, AND GO” (v, 5). Was one rod as good as another? What if Moses had decided to pick up a stick along the way and use it? What if he had reasoned that he had a rod that he liked better and decided to use it? What if he had reasoned “One rod is as good as another, as long as I am sincere”? Doubtless, God would have been as unhappy with Moses as He was with the people for murmuring.

Herein is demonstrated one of the most significant principles of Biblical interpretation/hermeneutics: the law of authorization and non-authorization. When God specifies what to do or how to do anything, he simultaneously **authorizes** all that he desires and implicitly **does not authorize** every thing else in the same class. When He told Moses what rod to use, He implicitly forbade him to use (without explicitly saying a word about it) **any and every other rod** in that all others were unauthorized.

As faithful saints have long taught (and continue to teach), God’s instruction to Noah to build the ark of gopher wood (**Genesis 6:14**) illustrates the same principle. The specification of this wood as the principal building material implicitly forbade—for lack of authorization—the use of any other variety of wood. What if Noah had reasoned, “Wood is wood, and all wood floats; one wood is as good as another. Besides, pine is much softer and easier to fell and cut to size than this hard gopher wood. God knows we have only primitive saws, hammers, and nails. He will understand”? Some say that had he done so, the ark would never have floated. This perhaps assumes too much but it assumes nothing to state that Noah would have been in rebellion against God had he so reasoned and acted. His rebellion would not have been based on an explicit prohibition, but on God’s prohibitive silence concerning any wood variety other than “gopher wood.” Clearly, Noah understood this authority principle: “THUS DID NOAH; ACCORDING TO ALL THAT GOD COMMANDED HIM, SO DID HE” (**Genesis 6:22**).

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The case of Nadab and Abihu also powerfully demonstrates the same principle (**Leviticus 10:1-2**). The fire they bore to the altar was not labeled *strange*—and thus rejected— by God because He was unfamiliar with it or because He had **explicitly** forbidden it. Rather, it was “strange” because it was fire “WHICH HE COMMANDED THEM NOT” (**Leviticus 10:1**). Perhaps they were in hurry and the fire they scooped up in their censurs was nearer at hand than the sacred fire. (“After all, one fire is as good as another when you’re cooking venison, so why not for the burnt offering?”). While God had not **explicitly forbidden** the fire they sought to use, He **implicitly** forbade it by the fact that He had (1) specified its kind/source and (2) it was a fire “WHICH HE COMMANDED THEN, NOT”—one that was unauthorized **merely by His silence** concerning it.

The **implicit** prohibitions of any other rod, wood, or fire in the foregoing examples were just as forceful and binding as if God had explicitly stated them. God has not changed. Just as one rod was not as good as another in Moses’ day, the principle applies with equal force in every age, for example:

1. One baptism is not as good as another. The Lord specifies immersion of believers in water for forgiveness of sins, thereby rendering every other “baptism” unauthorized (**Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16**; et al).

2. One church is not as good as another. Only the one described in the New Testament exists with Divine approval; all others are unauthorized (**Matthew 15:13; 16:18; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4**; et al).

3. One kind of music in worship is not as good as another. The Lord specified singing as the kind of music we are to offer in Christian worship (**Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16**). Any other kind is “strange music which he commanded not.”

4. One sort of marital union is not as good as another. The Lord specified the bases of marital unions that are authorized by Deity (**Matthew 19:6, 9; Romans 7:1-4**). All others are implicitly forbidden, regardless of civil laws that rule otherwise.

5. One doctrine is not as good as another. All doctrines besides those in the New Testament are **implicitly** prohibited, even if not **explicitly** named (**Romans 16:17; 1 Timothy 1:3; 6:3**; et al). Likewise, all teachers of “different doctrines” are to be **avoided** and **not fellowshiped**, rather than embraced, defended, and endorsed (**Romans 16:18; Ephesians 5:11, 2 John 9-11**).

Men ignore this essential Biblical principle to their own eternal peril.