

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

By Keith Greer

One major problem with which many in the religious world wrestle is understanding how we are to apply God's authority. One area where this is most evident is the inclusion and exclusion associated with God's laws. When God gives a specific command, it not only demands that we do all He commands, it also restricts action to only that which the command specifies. Such commands are inclusive, as well as exclusive. The command includes all that we need to carry out the instructions—but it excludes everything else. We cannot add to or take away from God's commands. When God gives a generic command, He allows us to choose the way in which we will carry it out. Let me illustrate this point.

Wood for the ark. "Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch." {Genesis 6:14} What kind of wood could Noah use in preparing the ark? Any wood but gopher wood would have been a violation of God's instructions. How was he to get the gopher wood? God did not give specific instructions. Noah could cut down trees, drag the trees, place them on a cart, or use animals to drag them. He could use whatever tools he needed to help with following God's command.

The Jordan River. "And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, 'Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean.'" {2 Kings 5:10} Naaman was a Syrian military leader who had leprosy. He came to Elisha seeking a cure for the disease. Naaman was angry; he wanted to dip in the cleaner rivers at home {2 Kings 5:11-13}. But the only water that could cleanse him of his leprosy was the water in the River Jordan. He had to dip SEVEN TIMES—not six, not eight, but the number God commanded. In what part of the river was he to dip? He could lay down on the shore; he could go out in the river; he could find a place that would cover his entire body and go under seven different times. But he had to dip seven times in the Jordan River!

Singing in our hearts. God gave specific instructions concerning the music He desires in His church—SINGING. "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." {Ephesians 5:19} What about the songbooks? What about a pitch pipe to set the pitch? What about a song leader? All of these are included in carrying out the command to sing. What about adding an instrument to the mix? No, that would be going beyond the command and changing it from singing to playing and singing.

Wearing His name. What name should Christ's followers wear? "And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." {Acts 11:26} We are brethren. Saints. Disciples. All these names define different aspect of our lives as Christians. What about other names—Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Mormon, etc. Some say they are Baptist Christians, Mormon Christians, etc. This is adding to the name that God gave His followers.

When we talk with and teach others about God's authority, they seem to have difficulty grasping these fundamental lessons. Why? It's probably because human theology gets in the way and doesn't allow them to see the clear truth presented in God's word. The difficulty is not in understanding the issue of authority – it never has been the problem. Each person must be honest and open minded when it comes to handling the word of God. ***