

Applying Heavenly Authority to Everyday Life

As human beings, we understand and apply authoritative instructions using everyday common sense. We learn to do so from a very early age. We may not use distinctive labels or philosophical definitions to describe what we're doing, but we comprehend and follow the fundamental principles of authority and compliance in thousands upon thousands of actions and reactions over a lifetime of interaction.

For example, a father knocks on the bedroom door of his teenage son and communicates clear instructions to him. "Take this \$25 and go to Pizza Hut on Main Street. I just called in an order for a sausage pizza, an order of breadsticks, and a Diet Coke. Go straight there, and come straight back home. We'll have the table set when you get back." That teenager is now the recipient of very **specific** instructions that carry the authoritative weight of his father. These instructions, by their very nature, logically rule out millions of other variables.

- ▶ Can the teenage son take his father's \$25, pick up his girlfriend, and head for the movie theater? No! Why not? His father specifically told him to go to Pizza Hut and spend the money there. Even though his father did not methodically list every possible place his son should *not* go, the teenager naturally understands something, doesn't he? To take that \$25 and spend it anywhere other than Pizza Hut will be to disobey his father at home. His father's **specific** mention of Pizza Hut on Main Street **logically rules out** every other pizza place, every other restaurant, every other venue, and even every other Pizza Hut other than the Pizza Hut on Main Street.
- ▶ The same principle applies to the sausage pizza, the order of breadsticks, and the Diet Coke. If the teenager comes home with a pepperoni pizza, an order of hot wings, and a Mountain Dew, he will have failed to follow his father's instructions. Why? Even though the teenager went to Pizza Hut, his father **specifically** ordered a sausage pizza, breadsticks, and a Diet Coke. The specific nature of his communication **logically rules out** every other kind of pizza, every other side item, and every other beverage.
- ▶ "Go straight there, and come straight back home" were his father's final **specific** instructions. Even *if* the teenager goes to Pizza Hut, to go anywhere other than Pizza Hut will be to blatantly disregard his father's instructions. Why? All other stops are **logically ruled out** by the specific instructions of his authoritative father.

On the other hand, suppose the same father knocks on the bedroom door of the same teenage son with similar, but more **general** instructions. "Your mom is in the mood for pizza. How about taking this \$25 and picking one up for all of us? And while you're at it, grab some dessert and a soft drink or two." That teenager has received some very **generic** instructions that carry the authoritative weight of his father. He is still expected to go and pick up some pizza with the money provided by his father. But the nature of his father's instructions provide a certain amount of freedom to choose how those instructions will be carried out.

- ▶ Pepperoni? Sausage? Supreme? Hawaiian? Cheese? Any one of these—including a number of other options—are available to the teenager, as long as he comes home with a pizza.

- ▶ Ice cream? Cookies? Cake? Brownies? Candy? Any of these—including a number of other options—are available to the teenager, as long as he comes home with some type of dessert. His father has no logical right to be upset with his son if the teenager comes home with vanilla ice cream instead of Milky Way candy bars. Why not? He gave his son **generic** instructions. “Grab some dessert.” The category of dessert was assigned, but **anything within that category** is a fulfillment of the father’s instructions.
- ▶ Where should he buy the dessert? Pizza Hut? Dairy Queen? A grocery store? A gas station? Any of these—including a number of other options—are available to the teenager, as long as he comes home with dessert. The source of the dessert was not limited by specific instructions from his father.
- ▶ Coke? Pepsi? Dr. Pepper? Mountain Dew? Sprite? Any of these—including a number of options—are available to the teenager, as long as he comes home with a 2-liter ... or two. Neither the type (plastic bottles, cans, etc.) nor the size (2-liter, 16 oz., etc.) nor a specific number of containers were specified. “A soft drink or two” were the **general** instructions provided by his father.

The difference between **specific** and **generic** instructions from an authority figure is not hard to discern, is it? **Specific instructions specify.** By their very nature, they exclude and rule out every other option.

- ▶ Your Last Will and Testament specifies *who* is to receive *what* in your inheritance. It doesn’t list everyone who is excluded from your inheritance.
- ▶ The deed to your property specifies the *owner* of the property. It doesn’t list everyone without a claim to your property.
- ▶ The prescription you got from your doctor specifies the medication you *can* receive from your pharmacist. It doesn’t list every single medication that’s off-limits to you in your present condition.
- ▶ Your airline ticket specifies *who* can board an airplane and *where* that flight is headed. It doesn’t list everyone without a right to board and every city that isn’t included in your destination.

On the other hand, **generic instructions generalize.** By their very nature, they include any number of options within a specific group, category, or class.

- ▶ Elementary teachers provide supply lists at the start of a school year. “Five folders” on the list provides general instruction with many options. The brand, color, and texture of the folders is up to the student, as long as he or she brings five folders to school.
- ▶ The college professor who assigns a biography term-paper to his students has provided generic instructions. Each student can select from millions of options, as long he or she writes a term-paper that is biographical in nature.
- ▶ The boss who sends an intern out of the office to buy a box of 8.5" x 11" paper has provided general instructions. The intern has a choice as to where he or she purchases the paper, as long as the paper is purchased.
- ▶ The father who tells his son to fill up the gas tank of the car before bringing it back home after the Friday night date has provided general instructions. The gas station used by the son is up to the son, as long as the gas tank is full when he pulls the car into the driveway.

Specific and Generic Authority in the Bible

It is God who created human beings with the ability to understand and apply authoritative instructions using everyday common sense. He equipped us to comprehend and follow the fundamental principles of authority in thousands upon thousands of actions and reactions in everyday life. And he uses the same principles in his authoritative Word. Take your time with the following charts. In the column to the right, come up with your own answers as to what is naturally excluded by specific instructions and is free to be included in generic instructions.

These Specific COMMANDS or EXAMPLES	Logically Exclude These VARIATIONS
Noah (Genesis 6.14) Make yourself an ark Of gopher wood	A house, wall, tower, well, altar Oak, poplar, cedar, pine, olive wood
Abraham (Genesis 22.2) Offer Isaac as a burnt offering	
Passover (Exodus 12) Sacrifice a lamb Without blemish 1 year old Male On the 14 th day of the 1 st month	
Laws for Purification (Numbers 19.1-2) A red heifer Without defect On which a yoke has never come	
Proclaim (Mark 16.15-16) The gospel to the whole creation Belief and baptism	
Baptism A burial (Romans 6.4) In water (Acts 8.36; 10.47) For the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2.38)	

Assemblies of Christians The Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11.25) Prayer (Acts 2.42) Singing (Ephesians 5.19) Teaching (Acts 20.7) Collection for the saints (1 Cor 16.1-2)	
The Lord's Supper On the first day of the week (Acts 20.7) Bread & fruit of the vine (Matt 26.26-29)	
The Church's Raising of Funds Voluntary giving (2 Corinthians 9.6-7)	

These General COMMANDS or EXAMPLES	Logically Include Any Number of OPTIONS
Noah (Genesis 6.14) "Make" yourself an ark	The tools Noah was to use were not specified; Noah could use whatever was available as long as it did not violate another command
The Great Commission (Matthew 28.19-20) "Go" "Baptizing" "Teaching"	
Assembling with the Saints Not neglecting to meet (Hebrews 10.25)	
The Lord's Supper On the first day of the week (Acts 20.7)	
Addressing one another in song (Ephesians 5.19; Colossians 3.16)	