

## The Proper Order

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Whenever God specifies *how* something is to be done, we should pay careful attention. Treating His instructions lightly can have grave consequences.

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*“You are the heads of the fathers’ houses of the Levites; sanctify yourselves, you and your brethren, that you may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel to the place I have prepared for it. For because you did not do it the first time, the Lord our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order” (1 Chron. 15:12-13).*



After David consolidated his rule over all Israel, he sought to unify the religious and political power centers of Israel in the city of Jerusalem. Part of that plan involved moving the ark of the covenant. So the ark was placed on an ox-drawn cart, and a joyful procession accompanied it on its journey to its new home. Along the way, the cart tipped over and Uzza, one of the young men driving it, reached out to prevent the ark from falling. God immediately “struck him there for his error, and he died there by the ark” (2 Sam. 6:7). The celebration came to an abrupt halt.

At first, David was angry at what God had done (v. 8). But his anger soon turned to fear (v. 9) as he realized the fault was his own. The Law was quite explicit on the procedure for moving the ark: It was to be transported on poles carried by a few chosen Levites. No one, not even the Levites, were allowed to touch the ark

(Num. 4:1-15). Everything about David’s plan for moving the ark had been poorly thought out and executed. Uzza’s casual handling of the ark—as just another piece of furniture on moving day—was the final straw that drew God’s wrath.

Why did God place such severe restrictions on the handling of the ark? We can only speculate. Perhaps God knew that, given the primitive cart technology available at the time, accidents like this were likely to happen, so the ark should be transported manually, with extra care. Maybe it was a ritualistic way of reinforcing the concept of God as a subject who should be treated with reverence. In the end, of course, it doesn’t matter. God specified how He wanted the ark to be transported, and David did not honor that instruction. Someone died as a result of his oversight.

In his enthusiasm to execute his grand plan for the ark, David had failed to “consult [God] about the proper order.” This kind of get-‘er-done approach may work in business or politics, but it’s dangerous in religion. Whether we’re discussing the role of baptism, or worship, or church organization, or the Lord’s Supper, or any one of a host of other elements relating to our faith, whatever God has revealed on these topics should be respected. Details matter, and ignoring them will get us into trouble.

But what if we disagree in our interpretations of what the proper order is? That’s a legitimate question. Brethren of good spirit will sometimes find themselves at odds over how to handle some element of teaching, work, or worship. But even then, God has regulated how we navigate our differences, and we must respect those details, too. Forbearance, patience, humility, forgiveness, gentleness, kindness, and love will go far in helping brethren sort out their differences and come to a peaceful resolution. In the absence of these qualities, our bickering will damage our credibility and weaken our influence among a hostile culture.

After several months of deliberating on how to move the ark, David once again set out to complete the task. But this time, he took pains to get the details right. The ark was safely moved to Jerusalem, where it remained for the rest of its known history. David learned his lesson the hard way. We need to learn it, too, before we get burned for our carelessness. Take care to consult God about the proper order, and stick to His instructions.

— David King