

"Tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?"-1King 22:16

Biblical Authority and the "Silence" of the Scriptures: Does it Allow or Disallow part 2?

The priesthood was an important part of Israel's relationship with God. Priests were to come from the tribe of Levi. "You shall thus give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the sons of Israel. So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons that they may keep their priesthood..." (Num. 3:9-10). Thus genealogical records were scrupulously kept.

When the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity, they were setting things in order and reestablishing the priesthood. There arose a problem with certain ones who could not prove their ancestry. "Of the priests: the sons of Hobaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai, the Gileadite, and was named after them. These searched among their ancestral registration, but it could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood" (Neh. 7:63-64). What was the problem? The records were "silent" about these men, therefore they were not authorized to serve. Silence did not give consent.

In the New Testament

"**Going beyond**" was something on Paul's mind when he wrote to the church at Corinth. "Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other" (I Cor. 4:6). The ASV says they were "not to go beyond..." Paul referred to himself and Apollos as ones authorized to speak with authority. To "go beyond" is to enter the realm of silence, which was not to be done.

Colossians has Paul's warning against certain practices that were not acceptable. "If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!' (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) --in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and

self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence" (Col. 2:20-23).

How should we define this "self-made religion" (NASV) or "will-worship" (ASV)? Paul says these things have "the appearance of wisdom...but are of no value..." Many practices in the worship of denominations are justified because they are entertaining and draw large crowds. Some of the popular preachers are described as "Dr. Phil in the pulpit," referring to their practice of taking a verse of scripture and delivering a "feel good" sermon.

Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words defines will-worship as "voluntarily adopted worship, whether unbidden or forbidden." Doing that which is forbidden is clearly understood, but if "unbidden" does not refer to that which is unauthorized, or about which the Bible is "silent," then what else could it mean? Thayer's Lexicon defines this as "worship which one devises and prescribes for himself." "Here is the issue: if one may, with divine approval, operate in the realm of silence, why can't he 'devise and prescribe for himself' whatever pleases him? And yet, it is this very thing being censured" (Wayne Jackson).

"Going beyond" is also mentioned in II John 9: "Whosoever goes onward and abides not in the teaching of Christ, has not God: he that abides in the teaching, the same has both the Father and the Son." There has been much speculation about whether "the teaching of Christ" involves just the teaching *about* Christ, or the teaching that Christ did. But in the end it makes no difference. It would be absurd to claim we must adhere to the teaching *about* Christ, but then do not have to abide within the boundaries of what Christ taught.

"**The priesthood and superiority of Christ**" is a much-discussed topic in Hebrews. The letter opens with Christ's superior position over the angels. "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, This day have I begotten thee? and again, I will be to him a Father, And he shall be to me a Son?" (1:5). Why could angels not be considered as equal to the Son? Because God was silent about the matter, and so should we be silent, and not ascribe to angels an equality with the Son.

If all the foregoing reasoning is not convincing concerning the fact that silence does not give consent, please consider carefully the matter of the

priesthood of Christ. “For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests” (**Heb. 7:13-14**). Then in **8:4**, this statement is made: “Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law.”

Why did the Law have to be changed? Why could Christ not be a priest under the Old Testament? **Because Moses “spoke nothing” about those from the tribe of Judah serving as priests.** In other words, **the law was “SILENT” about this matter.** Question: If “silence gives consent,” then why could not one from Judah be a priest? Nowhere does the Old Testament *forbid* one from Dan, Simeon or Judah from the priesthood.

The Consequences of “Silence Gives Consent”

If we accept the view that “silence gives consent,” there are logical consequences that cannot be ignored.

“If it were the case that anything not expressly forbidden in the New Testament is permissible in the Christian religion, then we could not only use pianos to accompany our singing but beads to aid our prayers, crucifixes to focus our devotion, and hashish to enhance our sensitivity. We could also initiate an organizational network similar to that which has been protested so strongly in Catholicism or begin financing church projects with bingo games (where legal) on Tuesday evenings. Not one of these things is explicitly forbidden in the New Testament, and no one who denies the legitimacy of the authority principle as outlined above can consistently argue against any of them” (Rubel Shelly).

The opposing view is expressed by one who favored instrumental music in worship:

“God’s silence is not a governing factor in matters pertaining to life and godliness. The whole idea of ‘silence,’ as those of the anti-instrumentalist position have used the term, requires the interpretation of fallible men. **If God did not say it,** then how can we be sure that men have said what He meant, but did not say? How dare mortal

men to take upon themselves to thus **unauthorizedly** speak for God? “(Blakely, emphasis added).

Mr. Blakely is arguing that we cannot rightly use the silence argument since God was silent about the silence argument! But God has *not* been silent about the silence argument, as we have seen in passage after passage of Scripture. In fact, the arguments made in Hebrews about the priesthood of Christ should be enough to settle the matter. In checking fourteen translations of **Hebrews 7:14**, they unanimously say concerning the tribe of Judah that Moses “spoke nothing.” If indeed Moses “spoke nothing,” that means he was **silent**. And that silence settled the matter. To intrude on the silence, and take it as “permission,” would be a violation of God’s intent.

A second consideration about Mr. Blakely uses his own reasoning. He says that since God is silent about silence, then we cannot use the “silence” argument. Logically, then, we cannot use instrumental music in worship since God is silent about it! The man is silenced by his own logic!

Those favoring “silence gives consent” to allow instrumental music counter that God was not “silent” about Noah’s wood, Moses’ sacrifice or Nadab and Abihu’s fire, because God “specified” what he wanted. Agreed! But then they want to use instrumental music in worship because God is “silent” about instruments. Wait a minute. God did specify about music! He said **“sing.”** Surely the legs of the lame are unequal. (**Cf. Col. 3:17; Eph. 5:19, etc.**) An examination of the history of the early church will confirm that no instruments were used in worship for over 600 years.

Conclusion

If we apply the concept that “silence gives consent,” then what rule would apply when someone wants to borrow my bicycle? I authorize that, and then find the borrower has taken my car instead. When questioned by the police and charged with theft, his plea is, “But he didn’t say not to take the car. I found it suited my needs better to use the car, and since he was silent about it, I saw no reason not to take it.”

How far do you think that argument would get in a court of law? Not very far! And how far will that reasoning get in the Court of the Last Day—Judgment Day? I don’t want to risk it, and I trust that what has been written will encourage us to remain within the guidelines given in the revelation written by the inspired apostles and prophets. The only way we can do that is to respect the silence of the Scriptures.

-- Jefferson David Tant

HAVE YOU STUDIED YOUR BIBLE TODAY?