

The “Silence” of the Scriptures

(1 Peter 4:11)

- Introduction:
1. God’s word is our authority in religion (1 Peter 4:11).
 2. What we are permitted or not permitted to do is not determined by our desires, but by what God’s word says (John 12:48).
 3. While most people would agree with that statement, there remains a question that leaves people confused.
 4. That question is “How do we understand the ‘silence’ of the Scriptures?”
 - a. Is silence prohibitive or permissive? This is otherwise known as the regulative or normative principles in academia.
 - b. If God is silent on a matter, does that mean we can do it, or does it mean we cannot do it?
 5. Let’s see how the Bible answers that question.

I. The History of This Question

- A. Approximately 150 years ago, churches began to divide over this issue.
 1. Both sides agreed in the authority of Scripture, but they differed on how to apply the authority of Scripture.
 2. Ills. of Instrumental music.
- B. Tertullian (2nd-3rd century) wrestled with this same question.
 1. The issue was the “chaplet.”
 2. He said that some believe that “the thing which is not forbidden is freely permitted,” However, he said, “I should rather say that what has not been freely allowed is forbidden.”
- C. Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1581) and Martin Luther (1483-1546).
 1. Zwingli said that silence was prohibitive.
 2. Luther said that silence was permissive.

II. History Does Not Settle This Issue

- A. Fortunately, we don’t have to line up men to take a side on this question.
- B. God’s word tells us which view is correct.
- C. Consider a few passages.
 1. (Hebrews 7:14).
 - a. In Numbers 8:1-26, God explicitly authorized the sons of Levi to function as priests.
 - b. However, Jesus, our High Priest (Hebrews 3:1), did not come from Levi, but from Judah.
 - c. The writer of Hebrews used this fact to prove there had to have been a change in the law, for “of this tribe, Moses spoke nothing concerning the priesthood.”
 - d. In other words, God’s “silence” was considered prohibitive.

2. (Exodus 20:3).
 - a. God explicitly stated you shall have no other gods before me.
 - b. But in Jeremiah 7:3,31, God used the principle of “silence” to condemn their idolatry.
 - c. The rationale for their condemnation was not based upon the original explicit prohibition of idolatry, but rather was based on the equivalent practice of doing that which the Lord had not commanded.
3. (Leviticus 10:1-2).
 - a. Nadab and Abihu were condemned because they offered strange fire, “which the Lord had not commanded them.”
 - b. Nowhere did God say you cannot use the fire they used, the problem was that he did not command them to use it.
 - c. Again, “silence” was prohibitive.
4. (Deuteronomy 10:8).
 - a. God appointed the Levites to transport the ark of the covenant.
 - b. God nowhere gave explicit commands to the other tribes, forbidding them from transporting the ark.
 - c. But notice how God’s statement about the Levites was understood, “No one may carry the ark of God but the Levites, for the Lord has chosen them to carry the ark of God and to minister before him forever (1 Chronicles 15:2).

III. The Application of This Principle

- A. If God did not give us permission to do something, we are not acting by his authority if we do it.
- B. The implications are far-reaching.
 1. Instrumental music.
 2. Role of women.
 3. Infant baptism.
 4. Praying to Mary.
 5. The office of a Pope.

- Conclusion:
1. Not only does the rejection of the principle of “silence” fly in the face of the Bible, it flies in the face of common sense.
 2. (Colossians 3:17).
 3. “For what man, dare go in a way which has neither precept nor example to warrant it? Can that be obedience which has not command for it...O, the pride of man’s heart, that instead of being a law-obeyer, will be a law-maker! For my part, I will not fear that God will be angry with me for doing no more than he has commanded me, and sticking close to the rule of his word, in matter of worship; but I should tremble to add or diminish” – Richard Baxter (1615-1691).