

Communicating with God (34)

Bible Study - 7

IS SILENCE CONSENT?

As we continue our study about how to study the Bible, we are currently addressing the subject of authority. To “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), we must respect the boundaries God has set within His word. We have noted that the idea of authority is what we are permitted to do (and the way we do it). We have noted the 3 ways we establish authority for something and the nature of authority (general and specific commands). In this lesson, we want to address silence. What do we do when God does not specifically prohibit something?

This is a challenging subject, because many see “silence” and “unspecified” (or generic) as equal. Some say: Where God is silent, we need to respect His silence; But others say that where God is silent (what He has not specifically prohibited), we have permission to act however we want. In this lesson we want to address silence.

I. Some Principles Regarding Silence

a. Some preliminary observations

- i. God has revealed to us His will. 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 – Paul asks how do we know the mind of God? The answer, God has told us through His Spirit (Holy Spirit). We know what He wants us to know because He has revealed it.
- ii. 2 Peter 1:3, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 – God’s word makes man complete. Psalm 119:89, a psalm about the word of God notes, “*Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.*” Think about the expression, we sometimes hear, “God said it, I believe it, and that settles it!” The point of that expression is to say. “I am going to respect what God tells me in His word”. BUT, in truth, what this should say is, “God said it, and that settles it!” (Whether I believe it or not). Again, the point is, we MUST respect what God tells us.
- iii. What does silence really imply? The answer is NOTHING! You CANNOT know what is expected by appealing to silence. It is presumptuous (assuming something is acceptable). And that is ALWAYS dangerous ground. It is like the child sent to the store to buy bread and he comes home with bread PLUS candy, chips and coke. WHEN he gets in trouble it is not about what he was told to do, but acting on the presumption, “Well you didn’t say I could not buy those things.” And with the Bible, we are dealing with God and our eternal destiny!
- iv. When God is silent, consider the options:
 1. He intended to be silent! IF that is so, should we be careful before we act presumptuously. Deuteronomy 29:29 – the secret things belong to the LORD. That is the point Moses is making.
 2. He intended to say something but FAILED or forgot. I am unwilling to consider this because that would make God incompetent.
- v. In logic, there is a fallacy known as *ad ignorantiam* (the appeal to ignorance). It is arguing that something must be true because we do NOT know that it is NOT. It is a fallacy because ignorance can never be a premise or reason in making your argument. You are assuming based on lack of information.

b. When God speaks –

- i. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 – test all things, hold fast to what is good. 1 John 4:1 calls for us to test the spirits whether they are of God. The idea of this is to thoroughly examine something by use and other procedures to determine its genuineness. Concerning God’s word, we need to take what it says and determine, to the best of our

ability, its precise meaning and application. This is how we can be sure that how we apply it is a way that is pleasing to God.

- ii. John 17:17 – *Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.* In His prayer, Jesus declared that what God says is truth – PERIOD!
- iii. There are many other verses we could add to these, but what we see here is sufficient to understand that we need to accept God’s word AS IS, and apply it AS IS!

c. Concerning boundaries –

- i. God’s word sets boundaries. By boundaries, we mean limits. We cannot simply say we believe in God and then do whatever we want and think it is acceptable to Him. We need to say WITHIN the boundaries He has set. God has ALWAYS set boundaries!
 - ii. Deuteronomy 12:32, “*whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.*”
 - iii. Proverbs 30:5-6, *Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.*
 - iv. Matthew 7:13-14, when Jesus spoke of the road that leads to life (heaven), He noted that the gate is narrow, a word meaning restricted, and the way is “difficult”. Jesus said, “*there are few who find it.*” His point is clear: Only those who are willing to follow God’s pattern and respect His limitations will enter heaven. Matthew 7:21- its not enough to say, Lord. Also remember John 10:7, 1-2, Jesus describes Himself as the door to the sheepfold and notes that one who enters any other way is a thief and a robber.
 - v. 1 Corinthians 4:6 – very pointedly Paul says we are to *NOT to think beyond what is written.* And he wrote and taught the same thing everywhere he went (4:17). Clearly Paul is saying there are boundaries.
 - vi. 2 John 9-11 – the word *transgress* means to pass by or to go beyond. It includes the idea of ignoring or overstepping a boundary (think of trespassing).
 - vii. Revelation 22:18-19 - Do not add to or take away. While applying to Revelation specifically, the principle clearly states our attitude toward God and His word.
- d. With these scriptures, and many more, it is clear that God expects us to do what He says, and to respect whatever boundaries He has put into place. But far too many do what they want and often they will say, “But God didn’t say I could not do that”. So, let’s dig a little deeper into that!

II. Some examples in scripture

- a. ***The offerings of Cain and Abel*** – Genesis 4:1-7 speaks of Cain and Abel offering sacrifices to God. We can necessarily infer from this text that God had given specific instructions about sacrifices. Abel followed those instructions and Cain did not and thus his offering was rejected by God. The LORD told him that if he did well, he would be ok. We know the tragic ending. But here we note that whatever God had specified, He did not have to verbally exclude everything else.
- b. ***Israel’s inheritance laws*** – Numbers 27:1-11. As inheritance laws were being addressed, the daughters of Zelophehad asked for inheritance because they had no brothers. Notice vs. 5-7, Moses brought the case before YHWH, and even clarified further rules (8-11). NOTE they needed an answer before they could act. Numbers 36 places boundaries on who they could marry (limited to their tribe).
- c. ***The Levitical priesthood*** – Hebrews 7:14. The classic example of scripture pointing to silence. When God specifies something, it excludes everything else. God specified that Aaron and his descendants would be the priests for Israel. None other were authorized. There are in the OT several other examples of attempts to subvert the priesthood, but they were condemned. Numbers 16:1-3 – Korah – a son of Levi (but not a descendent of Aaron), along with Dathan, Abiram and On – sons of Reuben, challenged Moses and Aaron and the

priesthood. They were struck dead by God because of their rebellion, including a desire to subvert the commands of God.

- d. 1 Kings 12:31 – one of the sins of Jeroboam (first king of Israel when they divided), was the setting up of a substitute for worship in Jerusalem. He erected golden calves at Dan and Bethel. And he appointed a priesthood “*from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi.*” He was condemned by God.
- e. 2 Chronicles 26:18-20. King Uzziah, who was a fairly righteous king, wanted to offer a sacrifice to God. When Azariah and other Levitical priests tried to prevent him, he began offering it anyways and became a leper immediately. He remained a leper the rest of his life.
- f. **Uzzah struck dead** – 1 Chronicles 13:7-12. David desires to bring the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem (a well-meaning, and possibly even authorized action). But he has a brand-new cart built to transport the Ark. While transporting it, the oxen stumble and Uzzah reaches out (VERY well intentioned) to steady the Ark from falling to the ground. He is struck dead on the spot. The procession is stopped.
Later, according to 1 Chronicles 15:1-3, 12-15 – David inquires and knows the truth about how to transport the ark and does it properly the second time.
When God specified HOW the Ark was to be transported, even 4-5 centuries later, He did not have to list the ways they could NOT transport the ark. When He specified, that excluded everything else.
- g. These are some examples of how the silence of God does NOT give authority. Many others could be added to these, but we can see here that silence does NOT give permission.

III. Making application today

- a. Our music in worship – it is no secret we only sing in our services.
 - i. We do this because the Bible is clear in commanding us to sing ONLY when we are assembled. Ephesians 5:19 & Colossians 3:16 both give that as instructions. Some might argue this text does not mention assembling. BUT both letters are written to churches and both speak about us “teaching and admonishing one another” – thus it is clearly dealing with collective action.
Also, 1 Corinthians 14:15 is a chapter about orderliness in assembly and specifically speaks about singing and praying “with the understanding”.
 - ii. The point, we are commanded to sing. There is NO authority to ADD instrumental music to our singing. That is an addition to what God has specified.
 - iii. Some argue, that “God did not say we couldn’t use instruments” -that is arguing from silence, and as we have noted, it is WITHOUT authority.
- b. The Lord’s Supper
 - i. When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, He took bread (unleavened, because that is what was part of that feast), and “fruit of the vine” to institute this memorial. Matthew 26:26-29. Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:26ff addressed abuses concerning the Lord’s Supper (they had turned it into a common meal) and Paul reemphasized what the Lord taught.
 - ii. Furthermore, the only example of WHEN Christians partook after His kingdom was established, was the first day of the week – Acts 20:7.
 - iii. When we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we need to use the emblems we KNOW were there AND we need to partake on Sunday, as that is the ONLY example we have of when they partook.
 - iv. We understand in this that we cannot use Coke and Hamburgers for the Lord’s Supper. When God specified, it prohibited everything else.
Furthermore, when God specified Sunday, that eliminates all other days as to when we partake. That is why we reject partaking of this memorial on other days of the week.
- c. The work of the church – time will not permit a detailed discussion of this, but we want to simply say:

- i. God has given us a pattern for the church – what it is, terms of admission, how we are to worship, what our work is, how we are to be organized, etc. All these things are developed in the New Testament by way of command, example and necessary inference. If we desire to please God, we will respect His pattern.
- ii. Yet many today do many things without authority – turning the church into a recreational, social or benevolent organization in ways that are completely silent in scripture. And many appeal to the silence of God’s word. “He didn’t say we could not do it this way.” Some might contend that what they are doing is based on “generic authority”, but a closer examination shows that their actions are based on what God did not specifically prohibit - His silence.
- iii. I say, He didn’t HAVE TO prohibit these activities. All He needed to do was tell us WHAT to do and HOW, and that eliminates everything else. It is just that simple.
- d. Why do we keep appealing to music in worship and the Lord’s Supper as examples? Because properly applying authority involves weaving together everything we have discussed – the type of authority we use, how we establish authority, and other aspects.

IV. Summarizing the silence of God.

- a. Isaiah 55:8-9, *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.*
- b. 1 Peter 4:11 – speak as the oracles of God – as if it were God uttering the words. You CANNOT do that by appealing to what He has NOT said.
- c. Colossians 3:17 – Do all in the name of the Lord – by His authority. Again, you CANNOT do that by appealing to what He has NOT said.
- d. Psalm 19:13 – *Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression.* The idea of presumptuous sins would be arrogance in doing what you ought not. When one fails to respect God’s boundaries, he is being presumptuous.

But in this lesson I simply want us to understand that how we do what we do matters. And WHEN it comes to serving God, we are dealing with our eternity. What is the safe thing to do? (cf. Philippians 3:1) Respect God’s boundaries. Then you can KNOW that you are right with Him. Think about these things.