

Sunday, May 2, 2021 am

WHEN GOD SAYS NOTHING **(A Study of Silence of the Scriptures)**

Today, I want to talk for a few moments about authority. This lesson serves as a reminder of the importance of following God's word and respecting His boundaries. We need such reminders from time to time which is why I have reserved this monthly slot for "first principles" lessons.

The subject of authority is an extensive subject that cannot adequately be covered in a single lesson, nor will I attempt to do that in this lesson. I want to focus on a specific aspect of authority – the silence of God. We are familiar with the 3 avenues through which we establish proper authority for what we do – explicit Command (either inclusive or prohibitive), approved Example (one authorized shows you what to do), or Necessary Inference (through observation of those approved, you reach an unavoidable inference or conclusion about how something is [or is not] to be done).

BUT what about silence? What do we do when God does not specifically prohibit something? There are some who say, where God is silent, we need to respect His silence (this is what I believe), but others say that where God is silent, we have permission to act however we want. I do NOT agree with this and in this lesson, I shall attempt to explain why that is the case.

I. Passages to consider as we study the silence of God

a. Concerning what we are to do –

- i. Colossians 3:17 – Do all in the name of the Lord – by His authority.
- ii. 1 Peter 4:11 – speak as the oracles of God – as if it were God uttering the words.
- iii. 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.
- iv. 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.
- v. 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.
- vi. Consider also what faith is – it is believing God. What He says and how He says it! Even when unpleasant, we don't fully understand it, etc. we must accept what He tells us in His word.
Romans 10:17 tells us, *Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* The idea of hearing is more than the ear receiving a sound. It is bringing it into the mind (and soul) and processing it to glean from it, its intent.
- vii. John 17:17 – *Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.* In His prayer, Jesus declared that what God says is truth – PERIOD!
- viii. 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!

b. Concerning boundaries –

- i. But God's word also 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.
 - ii. 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.
 - iii. 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.
 - iv. 1 Timothy 1:3-4 – as Paul begins his first letter to Timothy, he urges him to charge his audience that they teach no other doctrine. IOW, stay in line with what they had been taught.
 - v. Psalm 19:13 – *Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins...* 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.
 - vi. Galatians 1:10-12 – do I seek to please men? After challenging these brethren to preach no other gospel (because there is only one)(1:6-9), he plainly declares the origin of his gospel was Jesus Christ. He was not seeking to do what men want. Anytime, one transgresses God's boundary, it is self-serving in some way. It is about what man wants to do regardless of what God has said.
 - 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.
 - viii. 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). A word used only 4 times in the NT, Jesus and His disciples were accused of transgressing the traditions of the elders by not washing their hands (Matthew 15:2-3). AND in the response of Jesus to them when He asked, "*Why do you transgress the commandments of God because of your traditions?*" (vs. 3) And in Acts 1:25 speaking of how Judas "by transgression fell". The word is also found several times in the LXX including Joshua 7:11 & 15, where Achan took a few items from Jericho and thereby Israel transgressed the LORD's covenant. All of these point to boundaries being crossed WITHOUT AUTHORITY!
 - ix. Judges 21:25 – everyone did what was right in his own eyes – this is where appealing to silence leads.
- c. In these sections, 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 today 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 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
 - i. Numbers 16 – both 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.

- ii. 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.
 - iii. 2 Chronicles 26:18-20. King Uzziah, who was a fairly righteous king, wanted to offer a sacrifice to God. When the 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.
 - iv. This bears out that when God specifies something, that leaves out everything else. Concerning the Levitical priesthood, it was just that. Consider Hebrews 8:1-4, esp. vs. 4, as the priesthood of Jesus is elaborated upon.
- b. **Possibly the offerings of Cain and Abel** – Genesis 4:1-7 speaks of Cain and Abel offering sacrifices to God. We can necessarily conclude 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.
- c. **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.
- Late, 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.
- d. 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. Baptism - a doctrine that is essential to our salvation, we need to understand this.
 - i. Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, 1 Peter 3:21, Acts 22:16, Galatians 3:27 – all declare baptism necessary for salvation.
 - ii. But what is the proper mode of baptism? Can be your choice of sprinkling, pouring or immersion? No! Scriptures are clear that baptism must be by immersion – Romans 6:3-4 describes it as a burial; Acts 22:16 says you “wash away your sins” – though symbolic, this

still implies much water. And then there is the Greek word itself, baptizo, which means to dip or submerge.

- iii. Yet many will say that you can choose how to be baptized. Just because God did not say, “Do not sprinkle or pour” does not mean those are viable options.

c. 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.

d. 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.
- 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.

There are other aspects of authority that we need to consider (What exactly are CENI? What is the difference between generic and specific authority? How do expedients differ from silences (an expedient is something that helps you carry out a command WHILE respecting its boundaries – e.g. a building and all that encompasses, song books, song leaders, etc.)). But time will not permit a discussion of these elements in this lesson. BUT, if you are interested or have questions about these things, let’s get together and talk about them.

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.