



Preparing Souls To Serve The Lord

Volume XXVII

April 2007

Number 9

SILENCE OF THE SCRIPTURES AND BIBLE AUTHORITY

Brian R. Kenyon

Silence of the Scriptures is a concept that must be understood in order for people to please God. Pleasing God is impossible without conforming to his will (Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 4:1; Heb. 11:6). Conforming to God's will is impossible without knowing and practicing what he authorizes (Col. 3:17; Heb. 13:21; 1 John 2:3-6). Knowing and practicing what God authorizes involves, among other things, a proper understanding of the silence of the Scriptures. This article will address major misunderstandings of how the Bible authorizes, give explicit and implicit examples of the argument from silence, and examine silence versus exclusion.

Misunderstandings

Of How the Bible Authorizes

Relative to the subject of this study, there are two major misunderstandings concerning how the Bible authorizes. First, some think that whatever the Bible does not explicitly forbid must be authorized. That is, if the Bible does not explicitly say, "Thou shalt not..." then whatever action under

consideration must be acceptable to God. This view, however, is false. If the Bible had to explicitly specify everything that God did not authorize, it would be so large a volume that no one could physically handle it. Imagine the Book of Leviticus, for example, listing all the animals that were *not allowed* for the Israelites to use for sacrifice! Would it not have to include every kind of animal with which the Israelites would come in contact besides the animals specified in Leviticus? Not only that, if the Bible had to explicitly specify everything that God did not authorize, then much of the Bible would make no sense to certain generations. Imagine a Christian living in AD 150, for example, trying to make sense of "Thou shalt not clone human embryonic stem cells"! Those who seek authority from what the Bible does not explicitly forbid, are asking the wrong question. Instead of asking, "Where does the Bible say I cannot?," they should be asking, "Where does the Bible teach I can?"

Second, on the opposite extreme, some think that

whatever the Bible does not explicitly mention or exemplify must be unauthorized. That is, if the Bible does not explicitly say, "Thou shalt..." then whatever action under consideration must be unacceptable to God. This view, however, is also false. If the Bible authorized only by explicit statements and/or examples, then none of it would apply to people living today because none of it was explicitly addressed to people living today. Nowhere can the reader find his or her name mentioned as an addressee of any New Testament epistle. There are those, for example, who will say that since the Bible does not explicitly say that the local church can support a preaching school from its treasury, there is no authority for it. However, what these same people fail to realize is that the Bible nowhere explicitly says that the church can have a checking account, pay a utility bill, or advertise in the yellow pages, yet the very local churches of which they are members have a checking account, pay a utility bill, and advertise in the phone book.

Lest one think this view is only held by the anti-cooperation camp, consider a statement made by Phillip Morrison at the contemporary discussion hosted by FHU following the 2005 lectureship. He said, "It's disingenuous [hypocritical] to stand in a church building not authorized by Scripture, behind a podium not authorized by Scripture, to use a microphone not authorized by Scripture, to use a hymn book not authorized by Scripture, to use a tuning fork not authorized by Scripture, and argue that you can't use a piano because it's not authorized by Scripture."¹ Aside from the fact that he is admitting he does not need Bible authority (because he does those things, which, according to him, are without authority), he reflects a serious misunderstanding. It is true that the Bible does not explicitly say "Thou shalt use a church building, podium, microphone, etc.," but that does not mean that the Bible does not authorize them. Understanding the relationship between explicit statements, implicit principles, silence of the Scriptures, and Bible authority is a serious matter.

Silence of the Scriptures is more than merely the lack of an explicit statement. Explicit statements are the word for word statements found in the Bible. Implicit statements are true statements people make that are based upon the truth of Biblically explicit statements. For example, the Bible explicitly says, "Abram went up out of Egypt...and Lot with him" (Gen. 13:1). From this

explicit statement one can know that Lot came out of Egypt. However, nowhere does the Bible explicitly say, "Lot went into Egypt." One surely can know that Lot had to go into Egypt before he could come out of Egypt. Thus, the implicit statement, "Lot went into Egypt," is just as true as the explicit statement, "Abram went up out of Egypt...and Lot with him" (Gen. 13:1). The Bible is not silent about Lot going into Egypt even though there is no explicit statement that "Lot went into Egypt."

True silence of the Scriptures, on the other hand, means that the Bible does not teach at all a particular matter, either explicitly or implicitly. This kind of silence, obviously, does not authorize, and it is this silence of the Scriptures that is the focus of the present study.

Explicit Example Of the Argument from Silence

The classic example of the argument from silence concerns the priesthood of Christ. In a context where the Hebrews writer shows that the old law, represented by the Levitical priesthood, was destined to change, he writes, "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood" (Heb. 7:12-14). Of particular interest is the phrase,

"of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood." Jesus being from the tribe of Judah was well known among the first readers of Hebrews ("it is evident" cf. Isa. 11:1-4; Mt. 1:1-16; Rev. 5:5). Jesus could not serve as priest under the old law, not because the old law explicitly said, "People from the tribe of Judah shall not serve as priests," but because the old law taught, positively, that only those from Aaron's seed could serve as priests (Ex. 28:1; Num. 3:10). In other words, there was no authority from God for those of the tribe of Judah to serve as priests. The Old Testament's "silence" concerning the tribe of Judah serving in the priesthood did not authorize it!

Implicit Example Of the Argument from Silence

An implicit example is one that involves the argument from silence in its Old Testament setting, though the New Testament writer does not explicitly mention the silence

The Harvester

Published Monthly
Florida School of Preaching
1807 South Florida Avenue
Lakeland, Florida 33803
(863) 683-4043

Editor: Jackie M. Stearsman, Director
Brian R. Kenyon, Associate Director
Gene Burgett, Public Relations Director

Board of Directors

Gordon Methvin, Chairman	E. Robert McAnally
Denny Smitherman Vice Chairman	Bill Norton
J.H. Blackman, Jr., Secretary	Jackie M. Stearsman
Brian R. Kenyon, Associate Secretary	James H. Sullivan
Greg Littleton, Treasurer	Ted Wheeler
Steve Atnip	
Glenn Burgess	
Gene Burgett	
George K. French	
Scott Gerhardt	

TRAINING PREACHERS SINCE 1969

part of the argument. While there are a number of these examples, let us consider one: the worship of Cain and Abel. The Hebrews writer says, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh" (Heb. 11:4). In the Genesis account, Cain and Abel both brought sacrifices to the Lord. Cain brought "of the fruit of the ground" (Gen. 4:3), and Abel "also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof" (Gen. 4:4). God "had respect" for Abel's offering, but "unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect" (Gen. 4:4-5). The Hebrews writer said that Abel offered his sacrifice "by faith," which implies that Cain did not. There are no explicit commands recorded that early in Genesis as to what exactly God required in offering sacrifices. However, a long standing principle is that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Evidently, in that patriarchal system, God informed these two brothers exactly how to worship Him acceptably. There had to be a standard of authority, and that standard was the word of God. Note again that Paul says faith comes by hearing the word of God, not by what the word of God does *not* say! God may not have explicitly told Cain and Abel, "Thou shalt not offer only the fruit of the ground," but by God's specifying the exact kind of offering, the brothers had no authority for any other kind of

offering, except that exemplified by Abel. Silence of the Scriptures does not authorize.

Silence Versus Exclusion

Some confuse the principle of exclusion with the silence of the Scriptures. Silence in one verse does not exclude. Some well intentioned brethren will say of Colossians 3:16, for example, that since this verse explicitly says "sing," it excludes all other forms of music. The truth of the matter, however, is that Colossians 3:16 only *authorizes* singing as music in worship. If one can find another passage that authorizes mechanical instruments of music and/or hand clapping as an authorized expression of worship, then mechanical instruments of music and/or hand clapping would be authorized. Mechanical instruments and/or hand clapping as worship is not authorized, not because Colossians 3:16 excludes it, but because the Bible does not authorize it! While this may seem trivial or a matter of semantics to some, it is important to understand this distinction, if for no other reason than credibility.

To illustrate, to use the same silence-of-a-verse-excludes "logic" on what God has authorized for worship on the first day of the week worship would make the Bible contradict itself. Acts 20:7 authorizes the church to partake of the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week. To say that the silence of a verse excludes would be to say that Acts 20:7 excludes all other acts of worship except partaking of the Lord's Supper and

preaching. However, the contradiction enters when First Corinthians 16:2 is examined. That verse authorizes a Christian to "lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" on the first day of the week. The truth of the matter is that the silence of a verse does not exclude. The silence of Acts 20:7 on giving does not exclude giving on the first day of the week—Acts 20:7 *authorizes* partaking of the Lord's Supper and preaching. Likewise, the silence on the Lord's Supper of First Corinthians 16:2 does not exclude partaking of the Lord's Supper—First Corinthians 16:2 *authorizes* "laying by in store." Only when the entire Bible is silent on an issue does silence of the Scriptures forbid a matter.

Conclusion

The argument from silence is a crucial part of the Hebrews writer's argument that Christ is superior and offers a better covenant. Members of the church of Christ today must respect the silence of the Scriptures. Because there is not an explicit "thou shalt not" does not give one licence to believe, teach, and/or practice whatever one wants. May the Lord help all to live the principle: "whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17).

Endnote

¹Marlin Connelly and Phillip Morrison, "Should the Use of Instrumental Music in Worship Be a Barrier to Fellowship with Others, Such as Independent Christian Churches?" A Contemporary Discussion Hosted by Freed-Hardeman University. 11 Feb. 2005.

Gene Burgett Report

The Florida School of Preaching is important to me. Its significance in my life began in 1983 when I enrolled as a student in the School, directed at that time by brother B.C. Carr. At that early date I had no idea just how important the Florida School of Preaching would be to me.

In 1985 I graduated from FSOP and began working as the evangelist for a wonderful family of Christian people in Miami, Florida. My understanding of the importance of the instruction I had received grew immeasurably as I began fulfilling the duties of preaching the word of God and ministering to the needs of God's people. I realized how well spent those two years were. Preparing for a work is not time ill spent or

wasted. "If the ax is dull, And one does not sharpen the edge, Then he must use more strength; But wisdom brings success (Eccl. 10:10).

In 1992 the Board of Directors extended to me an opportunity to teach on a part-time basis in Lakeland. This put me on the other side of the student-instructor relationship. It also provided me new insight into the importance of the Florida School of Preaching and its mission of training men to preach the word of God.

I began working with the School on a full-time basis in 2003. Each new step I have taken in my relationship with the Florida School of Preaching has only made me appreciate the work of the School all the more.

However, long before I began a relationship with FSOP men of wisdom and vision had begun this great work with the help of generous Christian people willing to help finance the considerable cost involved in preparing men to preach. Though the price may seem high to some (and we charge no tuition), imagine the price tag the church would have to pay if men were not being prepared to do this work. We thank all those both past and present who have been willing to support this work.

Please note that my email address has changed.

Gene Burgett

burgett.fsop@windstream.net

352-339-3195

Return Service Requested

WEB SITE: www.fsop.net/

E-MAIL: fsop@gte.net

FAX: 863-683-0750

PHONE (863) 683-4043 (800) 320-9780

LAKELAND, FLORIDA 33803-2653

1807 SOUTH FLORIDA AVENUE

FLORIDA SCHOOL OF PREACHING

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Lakeland, FL
PERMIT #235