**The Silence of the Scriptures**

**Introduction**

1. What function, if any, does silence have in Bible authority? (Permissive? Prohibitive?) Is there authority in silence to be respected?
2. At the end of a sermon, Thomas Campbell, a preacher in the restoration movement in the early 1800’s, said, “Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent.”
   1. Is this approach to the Bible legitimate?
   2. Is this concept based in Bible truth?
3. What about the silence of the scriptures?
4. God’s Silence in Scripture
5. Old Testament
   1. **Deuteronomy 29:29** – the function of revelation.
      1. **Revealed** – that you may do all.
      2. **Secret** – i.e. until revealed.
      3. **Implication** – what is not revealed, i.e. disclosed by God to observe (negatively or positively), belongs to God, **i.e. is not a matter of our prerogative to do, or not do.**
   2. **Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Proverbs 30:5-6** – since a command is revealed, and that not revealed is God’s, adding to the commands God has revealed is prohibited.
   3. **Examples:**
      1. **Nadab and Abihu** – **Leviticus 10:1-3** – not commanded them – result? **(v. 2)** – fire devoured them.
         1. **(v. 3)** – God not regarded as holy, nor glorified.
         2. They added to…
      2. **Moses** – **Numbers 20:7-8, 11-12** – told to speak, but struck – result? **(v. 12)** – not enter promised land.
         1. **(v. 12)** – did not hallow God – regard Him as holy.
         2. He added to – (**cf. Exodus 17:6** – God said strike) – however, now in **v. 8** God WAS SILENT ABOUT STRIKING.
      3. **David (transporting the ark)** – **1 Chronicles 13:7, 9-12; 15:13** – did not follow proper order – result? **(13:10)** – God’s anger aroused.
         1. **Cf. Exodus 25:12-14** – God gave instructions on the transportation of the ark.
         2. They added to – He SAID NOTHING about a cart.
      4. **David and Nathan (request to build God a house)** – **2 Samuel 7:2-3, 7** – Nathan gave consent when God was silent – result? – God showed such was unauthorized.
6. New Testament
   1. **1 Peter 4:11a** – only speak as God speaks.
      1. Another way of saying, “Speak where the Bible speaks, and keep silent where the Bible is silent.”
         1. **Speaks** – *laleō* – talk, i.e. utter words (Strong).
         2. **Oracles** – *logion* – an utterance.
      2. **Implication** – if you must speak where God speaks when you speak, **then you must not speak where God does not speak when you speak**.
   2. **1 Corinthians 4:6** – don’t think beyond the written word.
      1. Paul and Apollos merely built upon the foundation of Christ, i.e. the message of the cross revealed by God.
      2. Their message was not a newfangled philosophy.
      3. **Beyond what is written = what is not written = where there is silence. 🡪**
   3. **2 John 9** – God is not with the one in the realm of silence.
      1. ***“Anyone who goes too far” (NASB).***
      2. ***“Everyone who goes on ahead” (ESV).***
   4. **Examples:**
      1. **Tradition of the Elders –** **Matthew 15:2-3, 9** – commandment of men, not of God – God was SILENT about that – result? – Vain worship.
         1. **Cf. Luke 20:4** – from heaven or men.
         2. From men, then not from heaven – i.e. heaven was silent on the matter.
      2. **Circumcision is Not to be Bound** – **Acts 15:24** (reason for sending letter/decrees) – binding circumcision? – not commanded – result? – Unauthorized practice.
      3. **Hebrew Writer’s Argument for Christ’s Superiority to Angels** – **Hebrews 1:5** – Jesus is Son, but the angels are not.
         1. Hebrew writer argued from silence concerning the superiority of Christ to angels.
         2. **God called Him Son, but did not call the angels Son.**
      4. **Christ’s Priesthood** – **Hebrews 7:14** – Hebrew writer explains the need for Christ as High Priest, thus, the need for a change of law.
         1. **(v. 11)** – Levitical priesthood not perfect, and another is needed.
         2. **(v. 12)** – If there needs to be another priesthood, there needs to be another law. Why?:
            1. **(v. 13)** – Christ belongs to a tribe that has not produced any priests. Why?
            2. **(v. 14)** – Moses spoke nothing concerning a priesthood from Judah.

**Numbers 3:9-10** – Levites, Aaron and sons.

**Hebrews 8:4** – Christ could not and would not be a priest on earth according to the law.

**Nehemiah 7:63-63** – some could not prove they were of Levi, thus, were not permitted to serve as priests.

* + - 1. The Hebrew writer argued for the necessity of a change of law **because silence prohibited** Jesus from serving as High Priest under the Old Law.

1. **Silence has never been an acceptable source of authority.**
2. The Principle of Scriptural Silence
3. Two Angles for Silence
   1. **Permissive** (*false*) – God didn’t say not to, so we can? (Childish – EX: child to parent.)
   2. **Prohibitive** – God didn’t say to, so don’t.
4. Revelation and Silence
   1. **Sin of Judah** **– Jeremiah 7:28, 31** – not obey, truth perished, because did something God was silent about:
      1. ***“nor did it come into My heart”*** – how do we know what comes into God’s heart?
      2. **1 Corinthians 2:10-12** – God has to reveal such.
      3. **Ephesians 3:3** – Mystery because God has not revealed (been silent), but then revealed and made known (silence broken).
      4. **The ONLY way we know God’s will, i.e. what is authorized, is for God to reveal such to us.**
   2. **The reality of claiming authority from silence, or without revelation:**
      1. **Colossians 2:20-23** – from men = self-imposed religion.
         1. ***“appearance of wisdom”*** – ***“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” (1 Corinthians 1:20)***
         2. ***“self-imposed religion”*** – *ethelothrēskia* – voluntary (arbitrary and unwarranted) piety (Strong).
            1. From *thelō* (to determine) and *thrēskeia* (ceremonial observance; worship).
            2. **To determine worship – BUT WHO IS TO DETERMINE WORSHIP? GOD!**
            3. “voluntarily adopted ‘worship,’ whether unbidden or forbidden” (VINE – “unbidden” – undisclosed, i.e. silent)
            4. “voluntary, arbitrary worship, i.e. worship which one devises and prescribes for himself, contrary to the contents and nature of the faith which ought to be directed to Christ” (THAYER)
         3. **To act on silence is to determine arbitrarily for self, and thus, without authority from God.**
      2. **Acting without faith:**
         1. **Hebrews 11:4** – by faith, i.e. Cain did not have faith.
         2. **Romans 10:17** – faith comes by hearing God’s word.
         3. Cain operated on the silence of God, and such was not acceptable.
         4. **Specific authority implies silence (things not specifically mentioned), and such excludes all other things. (If the word of God is silent on the matter, such is not authorized.)**
5. Arguments Against Prohibitive Silence
   1. **Silence about the principle of silence?**
      1. “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?**” (Given O. Blakely, “Banner of Truth,” July, 1996)
      2. **Firstly**, the Bible is not silent about the principle of silence – **cf. Hebrews 7:14**
      3. **Secondly**, this argument proves our point – if the silence principle is wrong to appeal to because God has been silent about it, then anything is wrong to practice which God has said nothing about.
   2. **Prohibitive paralysis?**
      1. There are a lot of things we do, that if silence prohibits, we all of the sudden cannot do because the Bible is silent on the matter.
      2. EX: song books, LS supplies, church building, pews.
      3. **Answer – generic authority** – whatever is necessary or expedient in carrying out an authorized action is included. (EX: Noah – tools)
6. Practices Which Appeal to Silence for Authority
7. Instrumental Music
   1. **Grounds** – God didn’t say NOT to use instruments in worship.
      1. He never said TO use instruments either.
      2. In OT – instruments are specifically mentioned.
      3. Where are they specifically mentioned in the NT? – They aren’t.
   2. **Only thing mentioned for music worship is singing:**
      1. Command – **Ephesians 5:19** (“speaking”; “singing”); **Colossians 3:16** (“singing”)
      2. Example – **Matthew 26:30** (“sung”); **Mark 14:26** (“sung”); **Acts 16:25** (“sang”); **Romans 15:9** (“sing”); **1 Corinthians 14:15** (“sing”); **Hebrews 2:12** (“sing”); **James 5:13** (“sing”)
   3. **If God did not mention in any way His desire for mechanical instruments, who are we to add them to worship?**
8. Institutionalism
   1. **Grounds** – God didn’t say NOT to support human institutions with the Lord’s money, or NOT to develop a central institution separate from the church to further evangelism.
      1. He never indicated a desire for such either.
      2. There is not a command, direct statement, example, or necessary implication in all the NT which would indicate otherwise.
   2. **What does the Bible say?**
      1. **Use of the Lord’s money:**
         1. Benevolence for needy saints: **Romans 15:26**
         2. Support of Evangelists (from local congregation to individual): **Philippians 4:14-16**
         3. **Carrying out the work of the church** – evangelism, edification, benevolence.
      2. **Evangelistic efforts authorized** – nothing greater than the local church (**cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:8; Acts 8:3-4**).
9. What else will we include?
   1. Catholic traditions – burning incense, sprinkling babies, counting beads, kissing the Pope’s toe, the Pope, etc.
   2. Any limit we place on the things we practice on the basis of silence – because God didn’t say not to – is arbitrary. The logical progression of such an approach to scripture has no end.
   3. Silence does not permit!

**Conclusion**

1. Whatever we do must be done with authority **(cf. Colossians 3:17).**
2. The scripture is sufficient for our servitude before God (**cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17).**
3. If we do not have generic or specific authority given through declaration, approved example, or necessary implication then there is no authority at all.