

Silence Of The Scriptures

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Issue - Does Silence Prohibit or Permit

Does the lack of any Bible instruction; (Biblical Silence) provide for any practices or teachings? Tertullian (ca. 150-225) taught that “anything not taught in the Bible could not be practiced.” Luther espoused -- “What is not *against* Scripture is *for* Scripture, and Scripture for *it*.” Zwingli maintained that *anything* “not enjoined or taught in the New Testament should be unconditionally *rejected*” and others taught anything not forbidden could be practiced.

Response

The statements by Tertullian, Luther, and Zwingli cannot all be what God desires as they are opposing views. Obviously, when God has spoken, He either prohibits (condemns) or permits (commands) a practice. It is correct to say whatever is specified in a command excludes anything else in relation to what was specified. If this were not true then under the New Covenant there would be no room for one to work out his salvation in fear and trembling.

Nothing would be expedient and there would be no room for trust, faith or love. This would leave one’s salvation to be attained by keeping all His commands perfectly, and be like the Old Covenant in the keeping of its requirements.

Today, like the days of the “church fathers” many people agree with Tertullian while others disagree. Both opposing views cannot logically be valid. Great caution must be exercised in researching, analyzing, and drawing conclusions about what God has or has not specified.

The following examples should help explain the difference between requiring, prohibiting, or being silent.

1. Make yourself an ark of gopher (cypress) wood ... now Noah did everything just as God commanded him. (Genesis 7:14, 22) **What would be wrong with using oak?**

God specified so Noah built an ark of the wood God Specified. No other kind could be used.

2. The Lord spoke to Moses ... he (Aaron) is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the Lord ... Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire, fire not from the altar as God required, in them and added incense and they offered unauthorized, or strange, fire before the Lord contrary to His commandment. (Leviticus 16:12, 10:1) **Why were Nadab & Abihu condemned?**

Nadab and Abihu each put fire in their censers and laid incense on it, unauthorized, not the specified, fire. **God specified** that the coals of fire for the censers were to come from the altar before the Lord.

3. Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ... From Troas we put out to sea and sailed ... we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. (Acts 16:9, 11-12) **Could Paul have gone to Macedonia in some way other than sailing?**

Paul sailed from Troas to Macedonia **God did not specify how to go** [nothing was said so the Bible was silent] so any mode of transportation was permitted and none was prohibited. **But he was required to go.**

4. "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:15).

"Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).

Peter stated "...God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. "...Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 3:21) **Why should or should not infants or children be baptized?**

Infant baptism has been practiced for years. Radical reformers and Restorationists rejected it as **not authorized** in the Bible. God excluded their baptism by **specifying** believers were to be baptized while **calling on God; i.e., pleading** to God to forgive by dying to a sinful life, and being buried into Christ, by immersion, baptism.

Conclusion:

When God speaks, He either requires one to perform some action or to refrain from performing some action.

When He has not spoken one must make a judgment based upon his understanding of what God desires without violating their conscience. His understanding may be flawed due to lack of study, human weakness, some type of bias, or by putting self-first; e.g., fame, fortune, honor, ahead of a desire to please God.

No one has a perfect understanding of God's will; if he did, he would be God. In fact, the more one studies the greater the probability they will revise, alter or change to some extent a previous understanding. Such is the nature of the acquisition of knowledge.

Jesus told his disciples "Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear" (John 16:5-12).

Paul wrote to the Corinthians "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly — mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready" (1 Corinthians 3:1-2) and to the Romans "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message that is heard is what Christ spoke (Romans 10:17)

Therefore, as one's knowledge increases so should his faith, and as faith and knowledge increases one's understanding changes.

The apostles warned about the time when people would turn away from sound doctrine and follow their own desires. This was evident in John's letters to the churches of Asia.

In the years following the apostolic era (after 100 AD) the writings of the "church fathers" began following their own opinions based upon a faulty conclusion about Bible silence which neither requires nor prohibits an action. Over the years their teachings and practices became so bad or corrupt that Catholic Bible scholars rejected the practices and teachings of the Catholic Church at the risk of life and livelihood. Some wanted only to reform some of the worst practices rather than a complete return to the Bible for all teachings and practices.

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Comments:

1. One's salvation must not rest in another's personal interpretation. They must be diligent in studying God's Word in order to reach their own understanding.
2. When God speaks, He either requires or prohibits an action.
3. The more one studies the greater the probability he will revise, or alter a previous understanding; such is the nature of the acquisition of knowledge.
4. One's personal interpretation of scripture when nothing is specified must not be forced upon others as a test of fellowship. It is God who puts one into Christ and into His fellowship.
5. The apostles warned that people will turn away from sound teachings and follow their own desires.

Question

Bible Silence on a teaching or doctrine

- a. ___ Requires the teaching to be accepted
- b. ___ Prevents the doctrine from being believed or practiced
- c. ___ Allows acceptance and action without violating conscience

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