

The Silence of the Scriptures

Suppose you sent someone to get you some fruits and he comes back with some apples, has he obeyed your instruction? Definitely yes! But suppose you sent him to get you some bananas and he comes back with some oranges, would that be obedience to what you have sent him? Not at all for you have specified what he needed to buy. In the first instance, "fruits" is generic and gives the messenger the choice to get anything under the umbrella of what is called fruits but in the second example, orange is specific in the instruction and excludes every other kinds of fruits. But then again, suppose he comes back with the oranges and you asked him why he decided to get oranges instead of bananas that you have sent him, how would you feel when he responds "Sir, you didn't tell me not to buy oranges!"

A lot of people are like this man in the second example. They give credence to God's silence which is an attempt to scoff at God's direct commands. Oftentimes, you hear people say "show me in the scripture where God says WE MUST NOT do this or that." But has God specified what you must do? If yes, then that excludes what He did not mention. Silence of the scripture refers to the absence of Divine revelation or instruction on other related subject matters when there have been specific instructions of God. Let us take a few examples from the scriptures:

The man of God was specific about the river (Jordan) and the number of times (7) that Naaman should dip himself (II Kings 5:10). But he was silent about other rivers. Naaman even desired other "better" rivers (vs.12), but he could not have been healed if he chose any other river than the one specified. Suppose Naaman had said, "Well, the man of God didn't ask me not to go to River Abana or River Pharpar in Damascus, let me try out those rivers." Do you think he will be justified? What if he went to the Jordan River and he dipped himself six times, instead of seven, and said "the man of God didn't say I should not dip myself 6 times, so I can do so." Will that make any sense? Obviously not!

Jesus was specific about the pool the blind man should wash himself (John 9:7). The man went and washed himself and came seeing. Notice Jesus mentioned the pool of Siloam but was silent about other pools. The blind man could not have been healed if he desired other pools and went there. But in the command of Baptism, we find that there is no specific instruction on the location of baptism (John 3:23; Matthew 3:6; Mark 16:16; Matthew 28:18-20). That is why a man could be baptized anywhere provided there is much water there.

God specified that the priests should come from the tribe of Levi. But notice He was silent about priest coming from other tribes such as Judah, Benjamin, etc. (Hebrews 7:14). Can we conclude that since God was silent about it, then it would be acceptable to have priests from other tribes? No. if it were so, Jesus could have been a priest on earth for He was of the tribe of Judah. But Jesus could not be a priest on earth (Hebrews 8:4) and so since God specifically mentioned Levi as the priestly tribe and said nothing about other tribes, they were prohibited from being priests.

Noah was told to build an ark of gopher wood with certain specifications (Genesis 6:14-22). God was silent about the use of other kinds of wood. Noah could not have been justified if he used another kind but he was faithful to do "according to all that God commanded him." (vs. 22)

Does the Silence of the Scriptures Authorize?

The Bible, which is the complete and final revelation of God to man is actually silent about many things. For example, we find that in the New Testament, the Bible says nothing about the use of instrument of music in the Christian worship but specified singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). The Bible says nothing about Missionary Societies but the church (Eph. 4:15), infant baptism but alien sinner baptism (Acts 17:30) etc. But does the silence of the Scriptures on these things authorize their practice in Christianity? If we answer "yes" to the question, the only way to get out of such predicament is to ask a follow-up question; "Where in God's word are we told not to use or practice them?" The conclusion will then be that since God never explicitly says we must not do these things, then they are right for us to practice them. This is the same question and response we will frown at when a child who is sent to get bananas but comes back with oranges and say "Sir, you didn't tell me not to buy oranges!" This same unintelligent response now becomes the defense mechanism for some folks when it comes to the things of God and when they are trapped in their errors.

The truth is this: we cannot know the mind of God except He has spoken. We know God's mind by looking at what is revealed. He spoke in time past to the fathers through the prophets and has in these last days spoken to us through His son (Hebrews 1:1). His word is with us now to guide us in all things (II Timothy 3:16-17; II Peter 1:3). We are warned not to think of men beyond what is written (I Corinthians 4:6). We must do all things by the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17).

What About Matters Of Liberty?

If we say the silence of the scriptures does not authorize, what about matters of liberty or expediency? Can we say it is wrong to use microphones, church buildings,

baptisteries, etc.? Is the Scripture not silent about these as well? Indeed, those who infringe the silence of the scriptures and try to practice every single thing they consider good, often point to these things to seek justification for their practice. This problem is solved when we understand that there is a big difference between “aid” and “addition.” Aid is usually incidental but addition is not. Microphones, baptisteries, church buildings, etc. are not sinful and are permissible because they are aids used to fulfill a generic (and not specific) instruction. The silence of the scriptures is violated when a man replaces his opinion for what God has specified. It would not be sinful if Naaman had ridden on a donkey or he trekked to River Jordan because he was not given a specific instruction on how to go but he had a specific instruction on where to go and what to do. If he had rode on a donkey; that is an aid to fulfill the command given to him. For someone to argue and say that it was wrong to have used a donkey because God was silent about it is simply begging the question for how to go is not specified.

Church building is an aid to fulfill the command of “not forsaking the assembling” (Hebrews 10:25). Baptistry is an aid to fulfill the command of “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” and we know that “much water” is what is needed (John 3:23). Microphone is an aid which increases the audibility of one’s voice. Nothing is added to what is said and it merely serves in the capacity of magnifying the voice. We should not misconstrue or conflate aid and addition simply because we want to justify our practices by all means.

Conclusion

God’s silence on an issue does not authorize such thing. We must always check to see if our practices are authorized in God’s word. This is because there is a way that seems right to a man but the end is destruction (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). Indeed, nothing is scripturally good if it has no approval by God. We must not repeat the mistakes of the Israelites who failed to seek counsel at the mouth of the Lord (Joshua 9:14).

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