

SILENCE IN THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT

1. HOW SILENCE HAS BEEN INTERPRETED IN THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT:

a. After Thomas Campbell, one of the early restoration leaders, arrived from Scotland in 1807, he settled in what is now W. Virginia and worked among Seceder churches. Long worried about division among believers, he chose to offer communion to all believers present including some non-Seceder Presbyterians. After being censured for this, he resigned and sometime later wrote his Declaration and Address. His treatise included thirteen points, three of which related to silence. (3) "Nothing can be bound on Christians unless expressly commanded by the Bible." (5) "When Scriptures are silent as to the time or manner of performance of a command, no one can legislate to supply the supposed deficiency. Nothing can be accepted in the faith or worship of the church that is younger than the New Testament." (13) "If the Bible does not specify how to obey a command, one may do what is essential to carrying out the command with the understanding that such expedients have no Biblical authority" (i.e., a non-specified expedient cannot be dogmatized — cm). As he brought his address to a close, he said, "The rule is this, that where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." Hence, subsequently, he and others began to repeat the slogan, "We speak where the Bible speaks, and we are silent where the Bible is silent." (Alexander Campbell, *Memoirs of Elder Thomas Campbell*, pp. 10-15, quoted in Hal Hougey, *Quest For Understandable Hermeneutics*, pp. 162-163). Andrew Munro, a member of the assembly arose and said, "If we adapt that as a basis, then there is an end to infant baptism." Campbell responded, "If infant baptism is not found in Scripture, we can have nothing to do with it." (Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, V. 1, pp.236-238, quoted in Hougey, *Ibid*).

b. Restoration leaders were not the first to wrestle with the problem of how to interpret silence in Scripture. Luther saw silence as permissive, and on that basis, incorporated Roman Catholic practices not expressly condemned by the Bible (baptism of infants, instruments in worship, etc.) Zwingli desired to abolish everything not specifically authorized in the bible. Ruperatis Meldenius, a seventeenth century protestant theologian said, "In essentials, unity, in nonessentials liberty, in all things, charity." Thomas Campbell modified Meldenius' statement to say, "In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; in all things, love." (Monroe Hawley, *The Focus Of Our Faith*, pp. 136-137).

c. There is a problem. As one writer has said, "This maxim is not so much a formula for biblical interpretation as it is a prescription for unity. While it expresses vital truth relating to the fellowship of believers, it does not explain how faith and opinion are to be distinguished. Simply

put, what is one man's faith is another man's opinion. Ultimately one must find a way of distinguishing essentials from non-essentials, faith from opinion" (Ibid, p. 137). Einstein once said, "Make it as simple as you can, but not simpler than it is."

2. BIBLICAL PASSAGES BROUGHT FORTH TO SHOW THE PROHIBITIVE NATURE OF SILENCE;

- a.** Deut. 4:2, "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you."
- b.** Prov. 30:6, "Do not add to His words, lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar."
- c.** John 10:35, "The Scriptures cannot be broken."
- d.** John 12:48, "He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings, has one who judges him, the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day."
- e.** 1 Cor. 4:6, "Now, these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed (go beyond) what is written."
- f.** Gal. 1:8, "But even though we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed."
- g.** 1 Peter 4:11, "If any man speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God."
- h.** 2 Jn 9, "Any one who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God, the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son."
- i.** Rev. 22:18-19, "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book."

Clearly, we can neither teach nor live contrary to Scripture, we can neither add to nor take away from God's word. Why? Because all of God's will for us is recorded in Scripture just as Paul writes to Timothy, "All scripture is inspired by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Nothing has been left out! We have the complete bible. Josephus said the Palestinian Jews had never added to the 22 books of the Old testament, (the 22 books in question corresponded to our 39 Old Testament books and did not include the Apocryphal books which were accepted only by the Jews of the Diaspora - cm). The Jews had a method of counting that grouped some books together to total 22 so as to correspond to the

number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet (Josephus, Against Apion, i, 8, Quoted in R. Laird Harris, Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible, Zondervan, 1969, p. 141). Nor have Christians ever added to the 27 books of the New Testament because the Holy Spirit guided the writers to record all the truth given by Jesus to the Apostles (see Jn. 14:26, 15:26, 16: 13 1 Cor. 2: 1- 16). These were the teachings that were to be taught to all the world (Matt. 28:20). These were the teachings which constituted "sound doctrine" (2 Tim. 2:2).

3. WHEN IS SILENCE PROHIBITIVE?

a. It is prohibitive when the information given is complete and has left nothing out. For example, if a farmer tells a hired hand to go plow the north forty acres, it is clear that all other fields are prohibited. When a mother tells her child to go play in the back yard, it is clear that all other yards are excluded. When a worker is told his working hours are from 8 AM to 5 PM, nothing is left to the discretion of the worker. By the same token, there are many Biblical examples which show that when God gives a specific order and spells out all of the details involved in fulfilling it, all else is excluded.

b. It is not prohibitive when a generic (general) command is given without spelling out the expedients. For instance if the farmer mentioned above were to tell his worker that he wanted him to do the plowing today, but did not specify the field, then such a command, while specific in stating the activity, would leave it to the choice of the worker as to which field he would plow.

c. It is partially prohibitive and partially permissive when a command is given with some aspects spelled out while others are left to choice. Referring again to the farmer, such would be the situation if the farmer told his employee that he wanted him to do the plowing today, and that he was to begin with the north forty. In this instance, that he would spend the day plowing and that he would begin with the north forty are specific, while where he would plow after the north forty would be a matter of choice.

d. It is partially prohibitive and partially permissive when a command is given, with no specific instruction as to how it is to be carried out, but with some choices clearly prohibited by other passages. I will call again upon the farmer to give us an illustration. If the farmer told the worker to spend the day plowing but did not specify which field, the worker would be able to choose. However, if it had already been specified that there was a particular field that was never to be plowed, this would limit the possible choices of the worker.

4. BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF HOW THE ABOVE FOUR CONDITIONS ARE ILLUSTRATED IN ACTUAL PRACTICE:

- a.** Noah was told to build the ark of gopher wood, Gen. 6; 14-16. He was told what materials to use, and the dimensions. Nothing was left out, so Noah had no wiggle room! This would be an example of condition "a".
- b.** Nadab and Abihu who should have taken fire from the brazen altar to light the incense on the altar in the tabernacle, paid with their lives for going beyond the instruction given them (Lev. 10; 1-3, 12:11-13). Condition "a". Some have said the real problem here was that they were under the influence of alcohol on the basis of Lev. 10:8-9. Although it may be true they were emboldened to violate God's command because of the influence of alcohol, Scripture otherwise states the sin was still the offering of "unholy fire" (Num. 3:4).
- c.** Uzzah was punished for "irreverence" when he touched the ark (2 Sam. 6:1-11), which was to be moved only by specified Levites (1 Chron. 15:2, 11-15) Condition "a".
- d.** Jesus commanded that His gospel be preached to all of the world (Matt. 28:18-20). The command given to the church is specific both in who is to do this work, and the nature and content of the message. However, the questions of time, specific place, specific messenger, and the means of travel are not given. This would be an example of condition "b".
- e.** The church has been commanded to assemble to worship God and to urge each other to do so (Heb. 10:25). There are Biblical passages which spell out what Christians are to do in worship (Acts 2:42, Col. 3:16, 1 Cor. 16: 1-2, etc.). One thing about which virtually all churches are in agreement is that the worship of the early church included study of the Word, singing, the Lord's Supper, a collection, and prayers, and that this occurred regularly. In fact Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection, came to be referred to as the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10). This was the day indicated on which disciples met together to take communion (Acts 20:7), as indicated also in 2nd century documents. However, questions regarding the place of meeting, the hours of meeting, and the sequence of the above worship activities are left a matter of choice. This would be condition "c".
- f.** Jesus commanded that believers be baptized in order to receive the blessings of His mission to the earth (Jn. 3 :1-6). Certain aspects of this commandment were specified and others were not. Baptism was to be offered only to believers (Mt. 28:18-20, Mk. 16:15-16), it was to be done in water (Acts 10:47-48), it was to be in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Mt. 18:20), it was to be done in order to receive the remission of ones sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and to be added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:3 8, 41,47), and it was to be a total immersion (which is the meaning of "baptism" in Greek. . . see Rom. 6:1-7, Col. 2:12). However, who was to do the baptizing, whether the water was fresh or salt, running or standing still, inside or outside,

and when it was to occur were left to choice. This would be condition "c".

g. That elders and deacons are to be appointed in every church is clearly set forth in the New Testament (1 Tim. 3:1-15, Tit. 1:5-9, Phil. 1:1). The passages referred to specify qualifications needed by persons chosen to fulfill these positions but leave the procedure by which such selections would be made, the number (except there is to be a plurality), age, and number of children to choice. This would be condition "c".

h. We are instructed to give liberally and cheerfully of our means on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16: 1-2, 2 Cor. 9:6-11), a commandment which seems to have been clearly understood by all churches! Matters such as what percentage of ones income should be given, where this should fit in the worship structure of the church, and percentages of the collection to be allocated to evangelism, charity, and local costs such as providing a place of meeting, support of ministers etc., are left to choice. However, other passages would indicate that we should not lie about our contribution (Acts 5:1-11), we should not give to be seen of men (Matt. 6:1-4), and certain uses of the funds would be ruled out such as giving money to a needy person for the purpose of promoting an addiction (Tit. 1:3, Gal. 5:19-21), or doing something for a needy person that the family members should do (1 Tim. 5:3-4,8). This would be condition "d".

i. We are taught to sing in order to teach and admonish one another. We are told to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, we are told to make melody in our hearts, and we are told to sing with thanksgiving unto the Lord (Eph. 5:18-20, Col 3: 14-17, Heb. 2:12, Matt. 26:30, Heb. 13:15, 1 Cor. 14:10-15). It is sometimes suggested that Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16 do not refer to the assembly. G. Friedrich, in Kittel's 10 volume Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament makes the following comments on Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16, ""The word HUMNOS occurs only in Col. 3:16, Eph. 5: 19. The Word of Christ is alive in the community in teaching and admonition and in the singing of songs for God, i.e., in these the community praises God from the heart " In a footnote, it is added, "Loh. Kol. On Col. 3:16 is mistaken in relating EN HUMIN to individuals. EN HUMIN "among you" in the community etc. is common in Paul. Of 18 instances in 1 C., 13 plainly have this sense (1:10f., 2:2, 3:3, 18, 5:1, 6:5, 11:18f, 30, 14:25, 15:12, and it is implied in 3:16, 6:19 on the basis of 14:25." (Vol. 8, p. 498). Further, the command to sing indicates a specific kind of music, that of the human voice.. There are only two kinds of music, vocal and instrumental. Those who excuse the addition of instruments to the worship because they are not specifically prohibited must agree the New Testament does not command their use. The choice to add the instrument does in fact constitute the judgment that this is fine with God (while we can know in this life what our own opinion might be, we

will only know at judgment if God agrees with our opinion!). To say the use of instruments in corporate worship is not commanded in the New Testament is not a judgment, but a fact. To say it is not an issue to us does not necessarily mean it is not an issue for God! In the Old Testament, both vocal and instrumental music were commanded by the Lord (2 Chron. 29:25-30, Psl. 150). In the New Testament, only vocal music is commanded. This was understood by the Apostles as they set the church in order in Jerusalem. This was understood by believers for many centuries. In fact, a cappella means "as in church", that is, without instrumental accompaniment. This is still understood today by churches of Christ, by Orthodox Churches representing a membership of more than 300.000.000, and others. To God awaits the decision of how important this is....to us awaits the decision to proceed according to what the Scriptures clearly teach about the corporate worship There are, however, unspecified aspects of singing which are left to choice such as which psalms or spiritual songs are to be sung, whether we are to sing in harmony or in one voice, what song books to use (if any), and when and how singing is to fit into the structure of the worship. This would be condition "d"

5. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

- a.** Silence neither permits or prohibits by itself. In each instance, we must see what the problem is, what the Biblical context presents, and what the broader Biblical content may offer.
- b.** In those areas where Scripture does leave us freedom of choice in some aspects necessary to carrying out a commandment, we must be careful that that freedom of choice be maintained. History shows how quickly choices become dogmatized. It may be as bad to affirm a commandment that the Lord did not make, as it is to break one that He did make!
- c.** Paul tells us that things that may be permissible, may not be expedient (1 Cor. 6:12). He further tells us that we are not to please ourselves (Rom. 15:1-2). He also instructs us not to use our freedoms in such a reckless manner that we override the conscience of weaker members causing them to sin (Rom. 14:14-23). He also clearly states that division is evil, and to be avoided (I Cor. 1:10, Rom. 16:17). It cannot be denied that at its introduction, both in modern day Judaism, and among the churches, instruments have been divisive!
- d.** God makes a comment about His own silence which is very important. It seems that some of His followers were violating many of His commandments and were concluding that God's silence indicated that God saw things the way that they did. After having pointed out the grossness of their conduct God said, "these things you have done, and I kept silence; you thought that I was just like you, I will reprove you, and state the case in order before your eyes" (Psl. 50:20-21).

6. I FIND THE FOLLOWING OVERVIEW BY HAL HOUGEY TO BE USEFUL (op.cit., pp. 167-170).

a. "Silence is prohibitive:

1. "When there is a specific command, which precludes alternatives?"

2. "When broad moral principles are violated, and the specific acts are not mentioned in Scripture (drugs, slavery, etc.)."

3. "When the acts would violate a moral or theological principle."

b. Silence is not prohibitive:

1. When God's word does "not specify what that action shall be (taken)."

2. "When there are different biblical examples which permit alternatives."

c. "When there is a perceived need, but no commands or examples to point the

way (church buildings, baptisteries, etc.)"

d. "When actions are matters of methods, mechanics, manner, time, ceremony

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