

# “THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

## When the Bible Is Silent

By Micky Galloway

In this publication, we try to emphasize what the Bible says. We make a deliberate effort to practice what the apostle Peter taught when he wrote, *“If any man speaketh, (speaking) as it were oracles of God”* (1 Pet. 4:11). However, what should we do when God’s word says nothing? It logically follows that if we must speak where God speaks, then we must say nothing when He says nothing. Many Bible students do not grasp the importance of this fact. If believers are to walk by faith, and faith comes by hearing God’s word (Rom. 10:17), then we ought not to practice what we have not read in God’s word.

God’s silence is as sacred as His revealed will. We dare not encroach upon either. That which God revealed in His word is for man. That which He chose not to reveal belongs to God.

*“The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law”* (Deut. 29:29).

What is your attitude toward the silence of the Scriptures? Does it give us authority to act? One’s answers to these questions indicate his attitude toward God’s word.

To illustrate our point, God’s word says nothing about infant baptism, sprinkling for baptism, Christian observance of the Sabbath day, musical instruments in worship, confessing sins to a special priesthood, church-sponsored entertainment, etc. These things are wrong solely because God has not authorized them in His word. All that we do, Paul said, we must do in the name of, or by the authority of, Christ (Col. 3:17).

However, some conclude that whenever God, in His word, has not expressly and specifically forbidden, we are free to act. That is, where the Bible is silent, we are at liberty to act as we think best; thus, silence gives freedom to act. This attitude says, *“Where did God say not to?”* Several Bible examples establish a pattern of how God reacts when there is lack of respect for His authority.

Cain sought to operate on God’s silence (Gen. 4:1-7). Since faith comes by hearing God’s word (Rom. 10:17), and we read in Hebrews 11:4 that Abel offered his sacrifice by faith, we must conclude that God had told him what to offer. Since God is not a respecter of persons (cf. Acts 10:34), we know that He had also told Cain what to offer. Abel based his action on what God said, while Cain appealed to God’s silence.

Nadab and Abihu presumptuously offered *“strange fire,”* that is, fire which the Lord had not commanded them (Lev. 10:1-2). They burned incense in their censers, not with the perpetual fire of the altar (Lev. 6:13; 16:12), but with fire from some other source. God’s wrath answered their appeal to His silence.

These same attitudes have been prevalent throughout church history. During the reformation movement, Martin Luther, the great German reformer, felt that we were at liberty to do anything not expressly forbidden. On the other hand, Ulrich Zwingli, the great Swiss reformer, felt that only that which is expressly authorized should be taught and practiced.

A famous nineteenth-century expression, *“We speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent”* followed the pattern set forth in 1 Peter 4:11.

These same attitudes were also prevalent during the nineteenth-century division of the church. Those who

came to be known as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) adopted the view: we speak where the Bible speaks; where the Bible is silent, we have liberty, and thus, freedom to act as we think best. This explains why they accepted the missionary society and mechanical instruments of music, even though the New Testament authorizes neither. Later, they added statewide organizations, trained choirs, fellowship halls, chicken dinners, etc., all based on the fact that the Bible doesn't say not to have them—in other words, on the silence of the Scripture.

Those who support the use of instrumental music in worship use this same argument. Today, many members of churches of Christ are accepting the past views of the Christian Church concerning the silence of the Scripture. These people often say, “*We do many things for which we have no authority.*” There are many illustrations: Social affairs, recreation, sponsoring churches, societies, old-age homes, youth camps, etc. Error advocates, in and out of the church, continue to make their appeals, not to “*Thus saith the Lord,*” but to the silence of the Scriptures.

Does God's silence authorize anything? We cannot know God, or God's mind, by His silence (1 Cor. 1:18ff; cf. 1 Cor. 2:9-13). Silence **DOES NOT** give consent. Moses spoke nothing concerning priests coming from the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:13-14). Therefore, when God specifically mentioned Levi as the priestly tribe, and said NOTHING about other tribes, it prohibited their being priests.

The answer to all the innovations begun by an appeal to the silence of the Scriptures is simple. Return to a “*thus saith the Lord*” and be content to “*abide in the doctrine of Christ*” (2 Jn. 9). Let us leave the silence of the Scriptures alone and be content to be governed by what God has revealed to us in His word. We must respect what God has said, but we must also respect what He has not said. “*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God...*” (1 Pet. 4:11). — *The Fifth Street East Church of Christ Bulletin*, October 2, 2005. ■

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### Some Facts About The Church

1. It is not a human denomination, but the spiritual body of Jesus Christ — Colossians 1:18; 1 Peter 2:5-6
2. It was built by Christ and He is its foundation — Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 3:11
3. Christ is its ONLY head — Ephesians 1:22-23
4. It was purchased with the precious blood of Christ — Acts 20:28
5. The saved are added to it — Acts 2:47
6. Its worship is in spirit and in truth — John 4:24
7. Its work is assigned by the Lord — Ephesians 4:12-16
8. Its organization is congregational — Philippians 1:1; Acts 20:17, 28; 14:23; 1 Peter 5:1-3
9. It is God's house — 1 Timothy 3:15
10. Christ is its Saviour — Ephesians 5:23

— *The Instructor*, January 1964 ■

***“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1Tim. 3:15).***

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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