

Respecting the “Silence” of Scripture

“God has spoken!” The God of heaven has lovingly yet clearly revealed His will and purpose for mankind (1 Cor. 2:6-16). We find all authority located in the revealed word of God (cf. Matt. 28:18; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Col. 3:17). However, what are we to do with issues that the Scriptures do not specifically address? What should people do with the silence of Scripture?

One popular approach is to argue that silence is permissive: whatever God has not specifically said NOT to do must be permissible. The other approach is to respect the fact that God authorizes specifically and generically: even where there appears to be silence about a given matter, God has still given “generic” commands and principles that must be appreciated and respected. The latter approach has much to commend it, especially in Scripture itself. Consider the following:

God authorizes by what He says, not by His silence – The will of God is found by examining and doing what He has SAID. The prophets were known for boldly declaring, “Thus says the Lord.” Whether we speak or act, Christians are commanded to do all, “In the name of the Lord Jesus,” which means that there is NO part or area of our lives that can remain uninfluenced by His words (Col. 3:17; cf. 1 Cor. 10:31). Just as a disciplined army awaits the orders of its commanding general, so we are expected to humbly ask, “Is there any word from the Lord?” (Jer. 37:17; Eph. 6:10-18). Good students of the Bible will gather all that God says about a subject and will draw only the conclusions warranted by the evidence, because God authorizes by His words, not by His silence. Mary said it well: “Whatever He says to you, do it” (John 2:5).

When God speaks generically, we are authorized to use a measure of wise judgment – Jesus told His apostles to, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Jesus was generic regarding the means by which those men might go. Therefore, Jesus left His apostles liberty to decide whether to go by foot, by horseback or even by boat. Generic principles allow us to use our best judgment, provided that we respect and remain in harmony with the rest of God’s revealed will.

When God speaks specifically, He excludes other things in the same category – One example of this principle in the New Testament is found in Hebrews 7:14, when the writer affirms that Jesus could not be a High Priest under the Law of Moses because, “It is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.” Moses was silent about Judah where appointing priests was concerned, but he DID specify that priests should come from the tribe of Levi (cf. Deut. 21:5). When God specifically named Levi as the priestly tribe, the Hebrews writer (as well as the early Christians to whom he was writing) understood that all other tribes were automatically excluded.

The words which God has spoken are authoritative and must be allowed to govern every aspect of our lives. May all men truly respect God's authority.

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