

# “...WHERE THE BIBLE IS SILENT WE ARE SILENT”

## I. The Bible is “Prescriptive and Descriptive.”

A. **Martin Luther** said that whatever the scripture does not expressly say "not to do" is O.K. to do. If he is saying, “unscriptural is not necessarily antiscritptural,” I agree with that.

B. **John Calvin** said that silence forbids everything.

The Bible "prescribes" every aspect of church life, state life and home life. Society is determined by the Bible. In other words the Bible is a kind of recipe and we cannot add to the ingredients. It is a type of chemical formula. If the Bible doesn't prescribe it .... then forget it !

C. **I believe** that God inspired the Bible in written "human" language and that being so, it is done in "**Prescriptive**" as well as "**Descriptive**" fashion. The silence of prescriptive and descriptive language should and must produce liberty.

1. Let's test two examples of this:

a. The Prescription and Description for **baptism** is found in Matt. 18:20-28; Acts 2:38.

b. The Description and procedure of the **synagogue** are found in:

**Mark 5:22** One of the synagogue officials named Jairus \*came up, and on seeing Him, \*fell at His feet.

**Acts 15:21** "For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

**Act 13:5** When they reached Salamis, they *began* to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper. **See also Lk. 4:16f.**

(a) Where is the prescription? **“Unscriptural is not necessarily antiscritptural.”**

## II. A Purity of Speech.

A. This subject was addressed by A. Campbell in the **“Christian System”** on pages 102-105.

1. “If I were to classify in three chapters the whole Christian institution, after the fashion of the modern schools, for the sake of being understood, I would designate them **Christian faith, Christian worship, and Christian morality**. To these the moderns have added two others, which, using the same license, I would call **human philosophy and human traditions**. Now, in the first chapter, we and all Christians are agreed:...' ‘...In the second chapter we are also agreed.’ ‘...In the third chapter we all acknowledge the same moral code...’ ‘...It is not faith, nor piety, nor morality, but philosophy and tradition, that have alienated and estranged Christians, and prevented the conversion of the world....’ ‘...We choose to speak of Bible things by Bible words, because we are always suspicious that if the word is not in the Bible the idea which it represents is not there; and always confident that the things taught by God are better taught in the words and under the names which the Holy Spirit has chosen and appropriated, than in the words which man's wisdom teaches...’”
2. **“There is nothing more essential to the union of the disciples of Christ than purity of speech...’** ‘...It requires but little reflection to discover that the fiercest disputes about religion are about what the Bible does not say, rather than about what it does say— about words and phrases coined in the mint of speculative theology. As far as known on earth, there is not, in ‘the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,’ the name of any person who was either converted or sanctified to God by any of these controversies about human dogmas, nor by anything learned from the canons or creeds of all the Councils, from that of Nice to the last Protestant Conference.”
3. **“It is a concession due to the crisis in which we live, for the sake of peace, to adopt the vocabulary of Heaven... I would appeal to every honorable, good, and loyal citizen of the**

kingdom of heaven,— to everyone that seeks the good of Zion, that loves the kingdom and the appearing of our common Lord and Saviour, whether such a concession be not due to the Lord, to the saints in heaven and on earth, and to the whole human race in the crisis in which we are now placed; and whether we could propose less, or ought to demand more, than to make one whole burnt-offering of all our "empty and deceitful philosophy," —our "science, falsely so called," — and our traditions received from our fathers. I would leave it to the good sense of every sane mind to say, whether such a whole burnt-offering would not be the most acceptable peace-offering which, in this our day, could be presented on the altar of the Prince of Peace; and whether, under the teachings of the apostles of the Great Prophet, the church might not again triumphantly stand upon the holy ground which she so honorably occupied before Origen, Austin, Athanasius, or the first pope, was born!

### III. God's Word Requires Two Hermeneutics (The science and methodology of interpretation.)

- A. (1) One is to decide what I will bind on myself, and another to decide what I will see as binding on everyone. The "command, example, and necessary inference" is fine to decide what I will believe. (2) But how can my inferences be an authority standard for others? The scriptures are infallible, but the work of translating and interpreting falls to human minds and thus is not infallible.
- B. Thomas Campbell, in the appendix to his Declaration and Address said, "We only pretend to assert what every one that pretends to reason must acknowledge, namely, that there is a manifest distinction between an express scripture declaration, and the conclusion or inference which may be deduced from it."  
"Alexander Campbell wrote, "The inferences drawn by the human understanding partake of all the defects of that understanding. .. These conclusions then are always private property and can never be placed upon a level with the inspired word of God. Subscription to them, or acknowledgment of them can never be rationally required as a bond of union." (Christian Baptist -vol. 2, pg. 155)
- C. The Bible cites at least 4 ways to be disloyal to God's word.
  1. Lawlessness. The Greek word meaning lawlessness is usually translated "iniquity." (KJV)
  2. Substituting. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for this in Mat. 15:9.
  3. Perverting it. Condemned in Gal. 1:7 and through the book.
  4. Using it in a divisive, sectarian way. This is what the 14th chapter of Romans is about.

### IV. The "Principle of Silence" becomes the "Law of Silence."

- A. Late in the 1800's, Daniel Sommer replaced the "Principle of Silence" with the "Law of Silence." In his "Address and Declaration," he would tolerate no free thought from the brethren if they differed with his thought.
- B. In the Declaration and Address, proposition 6 said that "Although inferences and deductions from scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may truly be called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet they are not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection and evidently see that they are so."
- C. In 1975 Thomas Warren, then editor of "The Spiritual Sword," openly affirmed a concept opposite to the idea on which the movement began, and labeled that idea false. In his book, "When is an Example Binding?" he wrote, "To hold that the conclusions which are drawn (from explicit statements of the Bible) by the correct use of reason (the principles of logic) is mere human doctrine, and thus cannot be binding on anyone, is to advance an **absurdly** false doctrine." (Pg. 89). Friends, a hermeneutic that divides the Body of Christ is a very poor hermeneutic.

- D. The “Law of Silence” would read as this: “Thou shalt not add even the most minute detail to the biblical blueprint.” Park your brains on the curb, please. Guy N. Woods, for example, forbade even humming in the assembly. Toe tapping will surely follow and sneezing is next!
- E. The difference between a **principle** of exclusion based on silence, and an absolute, inflexible **law** of exclusion, based on silence is vast. In "Memoirs of Alexander Campbell," Richardson describes their understanding on this point this way: "Whatever private opinions might be entertained upon matters not clearly revealed must be retained in silence, and no effort made to impose them on others. They believed it is wrong to say, "God said," if God has not said it. So do I. **Jere. 23:31** "Behold, I am against the prophets," declares the LORD, "who use their tongues and declare, 'The Lord declares.'"
- F. Only God has the authority to legislate. James 4:12 “There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?”

## V. What is the Biblical Teaching on This Matter of “Silence?”

- A. The question is not, “Does it restrict at all?” But rather, “Does it restrict absolutely?”
  - 1. May we add any minor detail that is not specified in the command? Yes! Is unleavened bread on a plate different than unleavened bread without a plate? Where is the prescription for the plate?
  - 2. See **Matt. 12:1-8**. The Pharisees saw only an absolutely inflexible law. **Matt. 12:2** "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." **Matt. 12:3-4** “But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, 4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone”  
Jesus saw this as a principle not a law. **Matt. 12:7-8** "But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you would not have condemned the innocent. 8 "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."
  - 3. Jesus was committed to the principle of exclusion or silence. **Matt. 10:5-6** These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in *the* way of *the* Gentiles, and do not enter *any* city of the Samaritans; 6 but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” See Rom 1:16 But see Jesus override the “Principle of Exclusion” with mercy. **Matt. 15:22-28**
  - 4. See another example of the principle of silence. Heb. 7:14 “For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. The verse does NOT imply an absolute law of exclusion for: Heb 7:26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens.  
Does this passage contradict 1 Kings 12:31? And he made houses on high places, and made priests from among all the people who were not of the sons of Levi. This is not inflexible law.

## VI. “We Have Arrived” is not a Biblical Attitude.

- A. The pioneers saw this as the fundamental cause of all the strife and discord which had ever plagued the body of believers.
  - 1. In the Declaration and Address, prop. 11 said: "That (in some instances) a partial neglect of the expressly revealed will of God, and (in others) an assumed authority for making the approbation of human opinions and human inventions a term of communion, by introducing them into the constitution, faith, or worship of the church, are, and have been, the immediate, obvious, and universally acknowledged causes of all the corruptions and divisions that ever have taken place in the Church of God."

2. They did not oppose interpretations as such. They knew the Bible has to be understood and applied. They just opposed making interpretations into divine law. They believed we should go back to the Biblical attitude of "pressing on," rather than claiming to have already attained. They saw it as vitally important to keep the deductions and the scripture facts separate. Express scripture statements were seen as authoritative. The conclusions men would deduce from those statements were not authoritative.
3. We need a sound hermeneutic, a reasonable and consistent approach to the Bible, not a careless gullibility to whatever notions of men we happen to encounter. Some things that are eternal in nature depend on it. Jesus said, "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." (John 12:48). I would not want to face the judgment having mishandled the very word by which I will be judged, and especially so if it is due to a deliberate unwillingness on my part to be careful. But we need to be sure that our quest for doctrinal security is not a false sense of security.

## VII. The "Follow After" or "Press On" Principle.

- A. **John 8:31-32** So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."
 

**2 Pet. 3:17-18** You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

**2 Tim. 3:16-17** All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.
- B. The Bible says the Gospel way is simple. A brilliant mind is not required to understand it. Where the brilliance is valuable is in the matter of keeping it simple.
 

**1 Cor. 1:17-19** For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. 18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE."
- C. "Our inference, upon the whole, is, that where a professing Christian brother opposes or refuses nothing either in faith or practice, for which there can be expressly produced a 'Thus saith the Lord,' that we ought not to reject him because he cannot see with our eyes as to matters of human inference, or private judgment."
- D. We must remember we are message bearers, not message authors.
 

**1 Peter 4:11** Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God...

**1 Tim. 4:16** Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.
- E.. The idea of a "following after" or "press on" concept is what the Bible sets forth. Even the inspired apostle Paul wrote,
 

**Phil. 3:12** Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.