

# SILENCE FORBIDS

By George Battey

As noted in a previous study (Establishing Bible Authority) the apostles instruct Christians to only do those things which are authorized. "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col 3:17). The word "whatever" is inclusive of "everything or anything" (American Heritage). The phrase "in word" refers to things we taught as doctrine. The phrase "in deed" refers to things practiced. "Do all" reemphasizes that every single thing taught or practiced is under consideration. Everything, no matter how large or how small it may seem, must be authorized. All things must be done "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (by the authority of Jesus – cf. Acts 4:7, 10, 12).

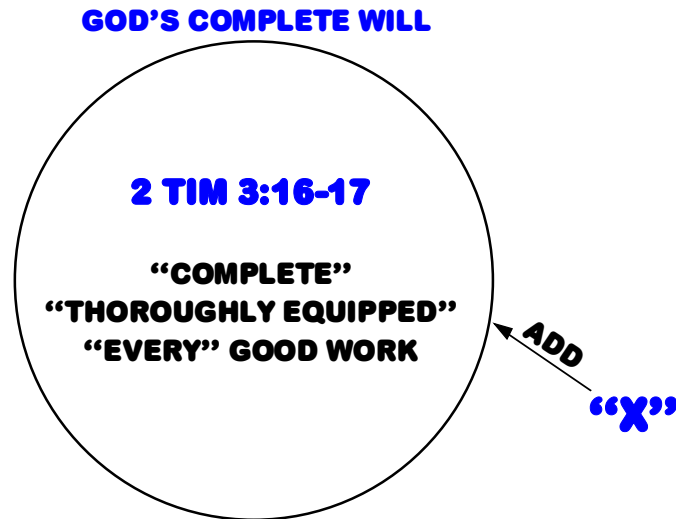
To have authority from Jesus means: (a) either Jesus Himself authorizes the teaching or practice or (b) the apostles (ambassadors for Christ – 2 Cor 5:20) authorize the teaching or practice. Finding authorization from Moses or David (Old Testament authority) is not sufficient. The church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph 2:20). The church is not built on Moses or David or any other Old Testament personality.

## WRITTEN AUTHORITY

Since neither Jesus nor the apostles are alive on the earth today, authorization from each must come in written form. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17).

The "do not add" and "do not alter" passages confirm the scriptures contain "every good work." There is no lack on the part of the New Testament scriptures. "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that 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 Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev 22:18-19). "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Gal 1:8-9).

To illustrate, let a large circle represent "every" good work.



Since the circle represents "every" good work, it also represents God's completed revelation – the New Testament scripture. Christians are instructed that "every" good work is contained in the scriptures. Now, let "X" represent a doctrine or practice which the New Testament scriptures are silent about. In order to teach this new doctrine or participate in this new practice the teacher would have to "add" to the scriptures – something Christians are strictly forbidden from doing.

Silence, then, becomes significant. Significant silence is called "legislative silence." Legislative silence is when the law is purposefully silent about an action and that silence is viewed as expressing the intent of the lawmaker.

#### LEGISLATIVE SILENCE

In both the Old Testament and New Testament one finds consistent proof that when God is silent about something, men are forbidden to practice the thing under consideration or to teach the doctrine under consideration.

The Hebrew writer makes several arguments based on the silence of scripture. The first such argument is found in Heb 1:5. There the reader finds two questions. The first question asks, "To which of the angels did He ever say: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You"?" The answer is: God never said this to any angel. He was silent about calling an angel His Son. The second question asks, "To which of the angels did He ever say: "I will be to Him a Father, And He shall be to Me a Son"?" Again, the answer is: God never called an angel His Son. The entire point of the verse is that silence forbids. Since God is silent about any angel being His Son, all men everywhere are strictly forbidden from teaching the Son of God is an angel.

The apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church recognize this same principle. "Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They wrote this, letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law" — to whom we gave no such commandment" (Acts 15:22-24).

The reasoning in the letter above is based on silence. No apostle ever taught circumcision and keeping the Old Testament law was necessary for salvation. Therefore, men are forbidden to teach and practice such a doctrine today. Jesus said, "In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Mt 15:9). In the same context He said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch" (Mt 15:13-14). "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted" means every doctrine and every innovation of man which heaven did not plant shall be "rooted up." No one has any right to add one innovation to the church of Christ which Jesus Himself did not initially install.

Over and over the scriptures reiterate the point that God has given authority to His Son and only the Son and His official representatives are authorized to establish doctrines and practices. "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Pet 4:11). "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42). No matter how good the intentions of an innovator and no matter how insignificant the innovation, no one is allowed to change the doctrines or practices of the church as the Lord set it up in the beginning.

## INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Having established the need for New Testament authority, let these principles be applied to one particular subject (instrumental music) as an illustration.

Nine times the New Testament speaks of disciples praising God in song, but each time mechanical instruments are conspicuously absent from each passage. The New Testament is silent about mechanical instruments in praising God. Silence means nothing explicitly was revealed. Silence also means nothing implicitly was revealed.

Passage #1: Mt 26:30 – "When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."

Here the Lord and His disciples sang. To sing means to "make music with the voice." From this passage the reader knows vocal music was present, but whether mechanical

instruments were used cannot be determined by the word sing. In order to know whether the Lord authorized mechanical instruments, some passage besides this one will have to prove the point.

Passage #2: Mk 14:26 – "When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."

Passage #3: Acts 16:25 – "At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God."

Passage #4: Rom 15:9 – "I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name."

Passage #5: 1 Cor 14:15 – "I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding."

Passage #6: Eph 5:19 – "In psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

Passage #7: Col 3:16 – "In psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

Passage #8: Heb 2:12 – "In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You."

Passage #9: Ja 5:13 – "Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms."

These are the nine passages speaking of either the Lord or His disciples on earth offering praise to God in the form of singing. In each case the music specified was singing. In no case do these passages either explicitly or implicitly teach mechanical instruments of music were used.

## THE BOOK OF REVELATION

There are no more passages about Christians singing in the New Testament. The Book of Revelation, however, mentions three additional singings. Consider carefully each passage.

Revelation passage #1: Rev 5:8-9 – Here twenty-four elders and four "living creatures" are before the throne of God singing praise to the Lamb. The passage mentions that each has a harp and golden bowls full of incense "which are the prayers of the saints." This passage can hardly be of value in establishing authority for mechanical instruments in the worship of God here on earth.

First, the passage clearly indicates symbolic language is being utilized and should not be understood literally. The golden bowls full of incense are symbolic of the prayers of the saints. A conjunction "and" is found before the mention of the golden bowls. Each living creature has a harp and bowls. Is the passage saying the prayers of the saints are symbolized by both the harp and bowls when viewed together? This point is not clear. The reader knows that at least the bowls of incense are symbolic and this alone is strong evidence that the harps are symbolic as well and should not be considered literal.

Second, if this passage is used to justify mechanical instruments in New Testament worship, does this passage also justify religious burning of incense as practiced by the Roman Catholic Church?

Third, if this passage justifies mechanical instruments and incense, does the passage make both instruments and incense mandatory? Should a symbolic passage from the Book of Revelation be used as a pattern to require instruments and incense? Few people would be willing to go this far.

The very beginning of the Book of Revelation explains to the reader that signs and symbolic language are being used throughout the book (Rev 1:1). To use the passages of Revelation as a pattern for worship would be a misuse of the book. Before long some would be wanting to have symbolic "bowls of wrath" being poured out in worship services (Rev 15:7), horses and horsemen riding through the services (Rev 6:2ff), or the infliction of sores upon the disobedient (Rev 16:2).

Revelation passage #2: Rev 14:1-3 – Here are 144,000 Jews who were "sealed" in the forehead (Rev 7:4-8). These were standing with the Lamb on Mt Zion. A great voice was heard "like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder" and in addition was heard the "sound of harpists playing their harps." The 144,000 sang a song which seems to have been sung along with the harps being played. Yet, as in the previous passage from Revelation, this passage seems to offer little support for the idea of instrumental accompaniment in New Testament worship.

First, the translation of this passage differs greatly from version to version. The NASV, NIV and RSV are all in agreement, "the voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps." Strictly speaking, the passage is not saying harps were present or that John actually heard harps. Instead, he heard a voice. The voice was (a) like "many waters," (b) like "loud thunder" and (c) like "harpers playing on their harps." The passage itself is declaring figurative language is being used (similes).

Second, this passage specifically states that no one except the 144,000 can sing this "new song" which is being sung with harps. In what way could this passage be used to justify all Christians on earth singing with the accompaniment of various instruments. This passage specifically points out the 144,000 are male virgins of the tribes of Israel. In

what way could Gentiles, especially females, justify singing with instruments from such a passage as this?

Third, if this passage justifies instrumental accompaniment, by what logical reasoning can any instrument except a harp be authorized? By what leap of logic can electric guitars, organs, pianos, drums, tambourines and other instruments be used? To illustrate, Moses was told to make two silver trumpets to blow over the sacrifices of Israel (Num 10:1-10). By what logic could Moses decide to make and use banjos, guitars or drums when God authorized only silver trumpets? For that matter, by what logic could Moses decide to make golden trumpets when God only authorized silver trumpets?

Fourth, the passage later warns that anyone receiving the "mark of the beast" would have to "drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation" (Rev 14:10). Few would think this cup or wine of wrath is to be understood literally. Most would agree symbolic language is being used. If symbolic language is admittedly found in the passage, how are the harps of verse 2 to be understood literally? When reading ordinary prose the rule of interpretation is: All language is to be understood literally unless one is forced to understand a figure is being used. Yet in apocalyptic literature the opposite is true: All language is to be understood symbolically and figuratively unless one is forced to understand literal language is being used. Hence, it is a mistake to automatically assume the harps of these passages are literal instruments and not symbolic of something else.

Revelation passage #3: Rev 15:1-3 – Here are saints who have "victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God." They sing the song of Moses and presumably they are using the harps to accompany their singing. Consider the problems of trying to use this passage to justify musical instruments in New Testament worship.

First, if this passage could justify mechanical instruments of music, it would seem reasonable to conclude that only harps are justified. By what logic would every conceivable instrument be allowed?

Second, it appears from the reading of this passage that each and every saint sings and also has a harp. If this passage justifies using literal harps in New Testament worship, would it not also require that each and every participant in worship have the harp and use it rather than having one or two playing while the rest sing?

Third, is this passage requiring the harp? If this passage constitutes a pattern for worship, would it not require the harp?

Each of the Book of Revelation passages (Rev 5:8-9; 14:1-3; 15:1-3) falls short in justifying Christians on earth to sing praise to God with the accompaniment of mechanical instruments. Revelation is highly symbolic. If the use of harps (and only

harps) is justifiable by this symbolic book, it would seem difficult to keep out religious burning of incense, animal sacrifice, temple worship and other practices which are also found in the book. Few proponents would be willing to accept these logical conclusions and most recognize the weakness of the Revelation passages in justification of instrumental music.

## SUMMARY

In summary, two questions been considered. First, is vocal singing authorized in New Testament worship? The answer is yes. Nine passages appear in the New Testament scriptures where both Jesus and His official representatives (ambassadors) authorize "making music with the voice." Second, are mechanical instruments authorized in New Testament worship? The answer is no; they are not authorized. There is silence. Neither Jesus nor His ambassadors either explicitly or implicitly authorized mechanical instruments. If Christians would be true to the New Testament scriptures and if they are going to claim to form the New Testament church, they will sing but will not use instruments for instruments are not authorized.

Because mechanical instruments are not authorized in New Testament scriptures, such were never used in Christian worship for 600 years. When they were introduced for the first time, they threatened to split the church. The Greek Orthodox Church, which broke away from the Roman Catholic Church, to this day does not have instruments. Rather than using mechanical instruments the Greek Orthodox Church sings a cappella – a word which literally means "as done in the church." With the passage of time instruments have become so common place that many simply cannot conceive of the time when no church used an instrument.

## WHAT DOES THE FORBIDDING?

If instrumental music is disallowed in worship, what is it that actually does the forbidding? In other words, are instruments disallowed because the New Testament specifically says "sing" or are the instruments prohibited because of silence.

The common thinking of many who reject instruments is that the specific command to "sing" (Eph 5:19) excludes the use of mechanical instruments. This is a law of exclusion which some call the "to-specify-is-to-exclude" law of exclusion. This law of exclusion simply says: When God specified "sing," He excluded mechanical instruments.

There is, however, something wrong with this law. Suppose one discussed the instrumental music question with a Pentecostal preacher. (The Pentecostal preacher is being focused on in this illustration because he and his people advocate the use of innumerable instruments – guitars, drums, tambourines, banjos, ad infinitum.) Consider the following, hypothetical discussion:

George: "You shouldn't use instruments because God said 'sing.'"

Pentecostal: "We do sing."

George: "But God said 'make melody in your heart to the Lord.'"

Pentecostal: "We do."

He wins this argument. The fact that God said "sing" does not exclude the instrument. G. C. Brewer correctly observed:

[Someone] might say: "I heard a mixed quartet sing, 'Lead, Kindly Light,' at William McKinley's funeral." Can anyone know from that statement whether the quartet sang a capella or whether there was instrumental accompaniment? What is your guess, dear reader? Now, if the word "sing" included instrumental music, there would be no guessing about it. You would know that such music was used. Or if the word "sing" [excluded] instrumental music, there would be no guessing. You would know that it was not used. But since the word "sing" neither includes nor [excludes] the instrument, you cannot know whether or not such music was used at McKinley's funeral. (Beals, 197)

When Eph 5:19 says to sing, all one can know for sure is that vocal music is authorized, but nothing about instrumental music can be known. Instrumental music is not forbidden because God said "sing." Instrumental music is forbidden because God was silent about instruments. Silence does not authorize. Because God is silent about instruments of music in the New Testament, they are without authority, yet everything done must be authorized (Col 3:17).

## TWO LAWS OF EXCLUSION

There are two laws of exclusion. First, there is the "to-specify-is-to-exclude" law of exclusion. Second, there is the "silence forbids" law of exclusion. The first law is false although believed by many brethren.

If "to-specify-is-to-exclude" were true, then the Old Testament would contradict itself. Observe the following illustration. Ps 68:32 instructs the Old Testament saints to "Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth; Oh, sing praises to the Lord." Here God specified singing. If the "to-specify-is-to-exclude" were true, then the Old Testament could never allow any instruments, because here God specified sing and supposedly that alone excludes instruments. Now consider the next passage. "Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; praise



Him with clashing cymbals" (Ps 150:3-5). Did the Old Testament contradict itself? Of course it did not, but if the "to-specify-is-to-exclude" law of exclusion were true, then yes – the Old Testament would have contradicted itself.

The point to be remembered is: When God told people to sing, He could later authorize them to use also instruments if He wanted and He would not be contradicting Himself in the process.

In the New Testament God authorized singing (vocal music – Eph 5:19). If He wanted He could also authorize instruments without involving Himself in a logical contradiction. The command to sing does not prevent Him from later authorizing instruments. The point to be gleaned from this is patience in reading the New Testament. Do not conclude instruments are forbidden simply because singing is authorized in Eph 5:19. Be patient and continue reading. If instruments are authorized, fine. There will be no contradiction with Eph 5:19. If they are not authorized, they should not be used. Their use will not be determined by Eph 5:19 or Col 3:16. Instead their use will be determined by a passage which either explicitly or implicitly teaches their use.

#### THE BAPTIST FALLACY

The fallacy of the "to-specify-is-to-exclude" doctrine is a fallacy committed by the Baptist denomination. Members of the Baptist Church reject the essentiality of baptism by use of the "to-specify-is-to-exclude" doctrine. Here is how the argument goes. First, Baptists read Jn 3:16 which speaks of belief in Christ as the Son of God. Second, they point out the passage says nothing about baptism. Third, they conclude baptism is not essential for salvation because it was not mentioned in Jn 3:16.

What is the correct response to the above reasoning? It should be pointed out that Jn 3:16 is not the final word on the subject of salvation. Passages about repentance (Lk 13:3), confession (Mt 10:32) and baptism (Mk 16:16) should be allowed to speak on the subject of salvation. To be fair with scripture, one will keep reading and give God time to fully reveal His will. (cf. Jn 16:12).

Likewise, when one reads Eph 5:19, he learns God authorizes singing. That alone, however, does not exclude instruments, because if he keeps reading he might eventually find authorization for instruments. Remember, God first commanded singing in the Old Testament (Ps 68:32) and then later commanded instruments (Ps 150:3-5) without contradicting Himself.

As mentioned earlier, God never did authorize instruments in the New Testament. They are excluded. What excludes instrumental music from New Testament worship? The fact that God specified "sing"? No, instruments are excluded because of silence.

## PUT ANOTHER WAY

To put this another way, consider the following question. If God had never said "sing" (Eph 5:19), would instruments have still been excluded? The answer is yes. Instruments would have been excluded without the command to "sing." The command to "sing" had nothing to do with excluding instruments in the first place. If the command to "sing" is not the thing doing the excluding, what is it that excludes instruments? The answer is: They are excluded by the silence of the scriptures. When there is silence there is no passage explicitly nor implicitly saying anything about instruments. Silence means the absence of all explicit and all implicit teaching. When there is silence, there is no authorization. Yet there must be authorization for everything done by Christians (Col 3:17). Since there is no authorization for instruments, they are excluded.

## APPLICATION

The concept of "what does the excluding" is an important concept. Once this concept is realized, many other issues are cleared up. The proper application of "silence forbids" will now be applied to other issues besides instrumental music.

- 1) When God explicitly said "fruit of the vine" (grape juice – Mt 26:29), He authorized that. His silence is what forbids any other liquid (wine, water, etc.).
- 2) When God explicitly said "unleavened bread" (Mt 26:17-26), He authorized that. His silence is what forbids leavened bread, cake, cheese, etc.
- 3) When God explicitly said "cup" (Mt 26:27), He authorized that. His silence is what forbids individual cups.
- 4) When God explicitly said "come together into one place" (1 Cor 14:23), He authorized one united assembly. His silence is what forbids Bible classes.
- 5) When God explicitly said "a collection" (1 Cor 16:1-2), He authorized that. His silence is what forbids multiple collections, yard sales, car washes, etc.
- 6) When God explicitly said "a collection on the first day of the week" (1 Cor 16:1-2), He authorized that. His silence is what forbids a collection on any other day of the week.
- 7) When God explicitly said "break bread on the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7), He authorized that. His silence is what forbids communion on Christmas eve, at funerals, at weddings, more frequently or less frequently than weekly.
- 8) When God explicitly said "baptism for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:28), He authorized that. His silence is what forbids salvation by prayer alone.

9) When God explicitly said the innocent party could divorce and remarry (Mt 19:9), He authorized that. His silence is what forbids the guilty party from remarrying.

10) When God explicitly said "the church of Christ" (Rom 16:16), He authorized that. His silence is what forbids man-made denominations, community churches, Bible churches, all-denominational churches, non-denominational churches, etc.

11) When God explicitly said "let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need" (Eph 4:28), He authorized labor as a means of earning money. His silence is what forbids gambling as a legitimate way of gaining money.

Concerning this last point, many Christians want to know: What passage says, "Thou shalt not buy a lottery ticket?" Or what passage says, "Thou shalt not bet on a sporting event in the office pool?" These questions reveal the "explicit-only" mentality which is discussed in the first article of this series ("Establishing Bible Authority"). Rather than asking, "What passage says 'Thou shalt not ...'?", Christians should be asking what passage authorizes the practice of gambling. If there is no authorization, the action is forbidden because "silence forbids."

12) When God explicitly said, "if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering" (1 Cor 11:15), He authorized a woman to "let her hair keep-on growing" (literal translation of verse 15). His silence forbids any other treatment of the hair. Rather than asking, "What passage says, 'Thou shalt not trim your hair'?", Christian sisters should be asking, "What passage authorizes us to trim our hair?" If there is not authorization, trimming the hair must not be done because silence forbids.

## OLD TESTAMENT VS. NEW TESTAMENT

Before closing, let a remember be given that Christians are living today under a New Testament law. "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Heb 8:8). The Old Testament was nailed to the cross (Col 2:14). The Christians did not follow after the Old Testament law of Moses, but rather, "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

If someone goes to the Old Testament to bring in instrumental music, who will stop another from going to the Old Testament to bring in circumcision, animal sacrifice, burning of incense, stoning sinners to death, Jewish food regulations, the Sabbath day (7<sup>th</sup> day) or worship in only Jerusalem? There is no end. Christians live under a new covenant, not the Old Testament. Christians learn from the Old Testament (Rom 15:4). They live by the New Testament (2 Cor 3:6; Acts 2:42).

## CONCLUSION

When Moses went up Mt. Sinai, he received instructions on building the tabernacle. "Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain"" (Heb 8:5). He was shown a pattern. A pattern is a blueprint – detailed instructions on how to construct the tabernacle. What a blueprint says is very important. What a blueprint does not say is also important.

Likewise, God gave a divine pattern for the church. Let that divine pattern be respected by not only observing what God said, but respect also what He did not say. The scriptures are very clear: Silence forbids.

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