

The Old Paths

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“God’s Silence”

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Many assume that God’s silence gives us permission to act and speak. How many times have we heard people ask, “Where does God say not to do _____?” Sometimes, people will justify their actions based upon what feels good, or what they perceive as being righteous. In contrast, there are some people today who say that if God is silent on a subject, then this means we cannot act or speak! Which is it? Are we just doomed to “agree to disagree”? Can we ever know the truth? What saith the Scripture about God’s silence? Seeing that God’s word is truth (Jn. 17:17), we can study it and learn what God expects man to do. Let us study the Scriptures and see what people in the Bible did when God was silent.

Moses

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage, it was not long until they reached the Red Sea. Knowing that the Red Sea prohibited their travel, and the Egyptians were quickly catching up, what were they to do? Were they to scatter and meet again in Canaan? Were they to stand and fight? Were they doomed to fail? Exodus 14:10-14 tells us what happened at this time. “*And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were*

sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness. And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will show to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.” Seeing that at this time God was silent about what to do when they reached the Red Sea, Moses could not tell them what to do. Therefore, Moses commanded the people to “*stand still.*” They were not to act until God spoke! Of course, we know that God parted the water, and they crossed on dry ground (v. 15-16), but until God spoke to Moses, they did nothing!

Please read Numbers 9:2-11. After the Jews kept the Passover, two came and said they had missed it because they were defiled with a dead body. They asked what to do. What did Moses say? What *could* Moses say? Did he assume they could go ahead, anyway? Did he tell them to wait until next year? His answer: “*Stand still, and I will hear what the LORD will command concerning you*” (Num. 9:8). Just like when they crossed the Red Sea,

Moses would do nothing if he did not have positive authority from God. Once he inquired of the Lord, the matter was solved. Let us learn a lesson from our study of Moses and resolve that if God is silent, we stand still!

Balaam

Though Balaam would eventually help Balak in causing the Israelites to leave God (Num. 31:8, 16; Rev. 2:14); at the beginning, this prophet had the right attitude. When King Balak offered great honor to the prophet Balaam if he would curse God’s people, Balaam said, “*If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more*” (Num. 22:18). In other words, he could not act if God had not spoken, regardless of the bribe! Later, when King Balak showed how angry he was at Balaam and declared, “*lo, the LORD hath kept thee back from honour*”, he said the same thing again (Num. 24:11-13). He could not go beyond what God had said. If God was silent, then Balaam was silent!

King Saul

King Saul forever teaches us that our reasoning does not allow us to act when God is silent! In I Samuel 13:8-14, Saul offered the sacrifice to God before going into battle because Samuel had not arrived to do it. Saul obviously thought he should have done it, but he was wrong! When Samuel arrived and questioned him as to why he would offer the sacrifice when only Samuel was authorized to do it (v. 11); Saul offered several excuses. He said the people were scattered (v. 8, 11), Samuel was late, (v. 8, 11) and the Philistines were closing in (v. 11-12). Therefore, he said he “forced” himself to do it (v. 9,

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12)! Sadly, his excuses were not good enough! His actions resulted in his losing his kingdom (v. 13-14). It is clear that there is no excuse for acting when God is silent, regardless of the circumstances!

Doing What God Has Authorized Versus What He Hasn't

Deuteronomy 28:1-14 makes an excellent case for doing exactly what God has spoken. When we read Deuteronomy 28:1, and then the resulting blessings, we know that God expected folks to just do what He said, and not operate in the realm of His silence! God promised blessings to those who were obedient to Him.

In like manner, the New Testament promises blessings to us today. It is written, *"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city"* (Rev. 22:14). The blessed person is one who obeys God's commandments, i.e., he does not act or speak when God has been silent! Jesus said we must do the will of the Lord if we are to see Heaven (Matt. 7:21).

Looking to Deuteronomy 28:15-68 we see curse after curse that would come upon the people if they acted when God was silent. Why is it wrong to act when God has been silent? It is because, *"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). God has revealed in the Bible all we need to live a pleasing, acceptable, and enjoyable life (II Pet. 1:3; II Tim. 3:16-17). Why then would we want to act when God has been silent? In truth, most people have

not yet come to terms with what God has said, so why should we be dabbling where God has been silent??

Reasoning From God's Silence

The evidence is overwhelming that we cannot act when God is silent. Therefore, God's silence helps us reason from the Scripture. For example, we know that no angel is God's son (despite what Jehovah's Witnesses and others might say). How do we know this? Because the Hebrew writer asks, *"For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire"* (Heb. 1:5-7). The answer: *"But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom"* (Heb. 1:8; Also read Heb. 1:9-14). In other words, we know that since God was silent about any angel being God's son, then Jesus Christ is not an angel, nor did any angel die on the cross as a sacrifice for sins! This is apparent when we appreciate the silence of God.

Furthermore, in Hebrews 7:12-14, we learn that without a change in the law, Christ could not be a priest. Why? *"For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood."* The Jews understood that by God naming the Levites as the priestly tribe, it excluded every other tribe from priestly duties (Num. 3:1-13; ch. 4)! Therefore, seeing that Christ is our high priest (Heb. 4:14; 6:20; 7:19-28) there has come a change in the law. Therefore, we today are under the New Testament, the New Covenant, and not the Old.

On another occasion, when the Jewish Christians disputed over whether or not uncircumcised Gentiles could be saved, it was God's silence that settled matters (Acts 15:7-15, 24). When Peter recounted what happened, he made it known that he preached the gospel, and physical circumcision never entered the picture! Based upon God's silence, they knew that the Gentiles did not need to be physically circumcised in order to be saved.

Conclusion

Let us learn and learn well that God's silence never permits, it only prohibits! Shame on anyone who says otherwise. *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles (divine utterances, not the silence, JJ) of God..."* (I Pet. 4:11).

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