

# **The Old Hickory Bulletin**

*Old Hickory Church of Christ*

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## **The Silence of the Bible**

There has been a great deal of discussion on "The Silence of the Bible." Some have emphasized the respect we should have for the authority of God by respecting the silence of the Bible. Others have taught that where the Bible is silent, we have a right to speak. The issue is, "Does God give to man the right to teach and practice in the name of Christ anything about which there is no divine revelation?" Has God given sufficient guidance in all affairs that pertain to the work and worship of the Lord? Has He left some things to the wisdom and judgment of man? How shall we know what has been left to the judgment of man in the work and worship of the Lord?

If, by His silence in revelation, God has granted to man the right to teach and practice some things, then there opens a field of strife and division. Man cannot agree with his fellows as to what must be brought in, and no greater source of division can be found than the different standards of men.

The Bible clearly teaches that man should not add to the word of God. "Ye

**shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of Jehovah your God which I command you." (Deut. 4:2).** Here we learn that Jehovah would not let the children of Israel add to nor take from anything He had commanded them. Jehovah had given the law, and it was sufficient to guide them in all of their work and worship. They were to let the law stand, without additions, subtractions, or alterations. This enforced upon them to respect God's silence on any subject. If they could not add to or take from the law, they were not to impose human judgments upon the people. To do so would be to add to or take from the law. They had to respect the silence of Jehovah on the work and worship they were to perform.

The New Testament teaches the same principle: **"I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book." (Rev. 22:18-19).** This demands that man respect the silence of divine revelation. No one is permitted to add to or take from the teachings of the New Testament. It will not do to say that the above quotation applies only to the book of Revelation. God would not forbid one from adding to or subtracting from only one book in the New Testament, but would also grant man the privilege of adding to and taking from other books.

This principle applies to all the books of the New Testament. Other teachings show this to be true. **"Now these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes; that in us ye might learn not to go beyond the things which are written..." (1 Cor. 4:6).** These Corinthians were thus forbidden to go beyond the things that were written. They were to respect the silence of God — the silence of the Scriptures — and not make any alterations. God would not forbid the church at Corinth to **"go beyond the things which are written,"** and at the same time grant other

churches to add what they pleased or to leave off anything they did not wish to teach or practice. What He says here to the church at Corinth is applied to all of the churches, and is applicable to His people through all ages.

The same truth is expressed by John: **"Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works." (2 Jn. 9-11)**. This teaches that the silence of **"the teachings of Christ"** must be respected. John is writing to no particular church, but Christians in general. Hence, the principle of respecting the silence of **"the teachings of Christ"** is here taught by John.

One is safe when one follows the teachings of God. One impeaches the wisdom of God when one attempts to make any alterations in "what is written" in the New Testament. In doing so, one must take the attitude that either God did not know enough to give man a complete guide for all ages, or that God has left man free to make additions where God has not spoken.

The foundation of the argument that man may speak where the Bible is silent rests, like Dagon's temple, upon two pillars, which, so long as they continue sound, will support all the theories of men. The first pillar is that "the church of Christ, like all other societies, has power to make laws for its government." The second pillar is that, "where the sacred Scriptures are silent, human authority may interpose." But if some Samson can be found to shake these pillars from their bases, the whole edifice, with the lords of the Philistines in their seats and the multitude with which it is crowded, will be involved in one common ruin. If the two principles mentioned above are granted, the arguments cannot be refuted. But if it can be shown that the principles are false, the conclusions, with all the arguments based on them, are false.

First, the church of Christ is not like other societies. It is different from all human institutions, because Christ framed a constitution for it which is different from any of the teachings of man. No one can show that God permits man to speak or act in the name of Christ where the New Testament is silent. There is not a single sentence in all the New Testament that warrants man to speak, where the New Testament is silent, in the name of Christ; there is no Scripture that grants man such authority. How, then, can man know that he has the right to speak where the Bible is silent? No human association, no individual has any right to interpose authority where the New Testament neither enjoins nor forbids. We must respect the authority of God here.

To interpose and draft regulations where the New Testament is silent is to legislate for God's people where God has not legislated. It is a fearful thing to impose anything in the name of Christ upon God's people when God has not spoken on that point. If He has spoken, then we must respect what He has said. If He has not spoken, then we must respect His wisdom in remaining silent. It seems that anyone would know that the floodgate would be open and all sorts of innovations would be brought into the work and worship of the Lord's people if we do not respect the silence of the Bible. To respect the silence of the Bible is to respect God. To break that silence is to impeach the wisdom, love, and authority of God. It is to commit the high crime of presumptuous sin. **"Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." (2 Tim. 3:16- 17).**

- H. Leo Boles

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# "Ye Have Done It Unto Me"

*In Matthew 25:34-40, we read, "Then the King will cry to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'"*

Have you ever noticed that at the judgment scene depicted in these verses, our Lord didn't mention doctrine even once? This is not to say that doctrine is unimportant, because the Scriptures teach very clearly, and in multiple places (*1 Timothy 1:3* is just one example among many), that it most assuredly is. Yet, the actions that Jesus mentioned here are similarly striking. Of course, the King knew that the righteous individuals in these verses had been faithful to the doctrine; otherwise, He would not have called them righteous. But the primary concern is with how they had treated one another. This is what we want to discuss in this article.

How many times when you've been feeling a little down and depressed, has one or more of your brethren seemingly swooped in from nowhere just to let you know they were thinking about you and wondering if there was anything they could do to help? That has happened to me on more than one occasion, and I feel confident that those who are reading this article, if they've been Christians for any length of time, could relate many stories about those who reached out to brighten their days during times of difficulty and hardship. Sometimes, almost in spite of ourselves, we are encouraged by the love and concern shown by our brethren. That is exactly what God intended. A well-

known passage is *Galatians 6:10*, which says, "*So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*"

From time to time, we all mention things that we will never forget, but there is at least one thing I know for a fact will stick with me for the remainder of my life. I was working with a congregation in which a handicapped member was greatly mistreated and wronged. To make a long story short, the house in which she was living was in about as bad a shape as any house I have ever seen that was still standing. In such a situation, anyone would have good cause for becoming discouraged and frustrated. But the brethren in that congregation reacted to such an extent as I had not previously, or since, witnessed.

Christians would leave their jobs at which they worked eight to twelve hours and go directly to this poor sister's home to put in another few hours of very hard work. This went on for several months. Sure, the sister experienced some discouragement, but she was never allowed to drown in it because time and again, her brethren demonstrated their love and care by unflinchingly and without complaint springing into action. "*As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.*"

The simple fact of the matter is that Christians are duty-bound and responsible for being there when their brothers and sisters in Christ are in need. But we must get beyond the point where we feel duty-bound to do whatever we can to help our brethren; we need to *want* to be there for them. I may not always be in a position to help a brother or sister who needs financial assistance, but I can contact them and let them know that I am willing to do all I can to help in whatever way I can. If I am able to sit at home without giving them a second thought, it is time for me to take a long hard look at *Matthew 25*.

Can I concern myself with only myself when I know that my brother or sister is sitting alone in a hospital room wishing for nothing more than to see a familiar face? If so, it is time I take a long hard look at *Matthew 25*. Some

Christians appear to attempt to excuse themselves by saying, "This is a time when they need to be with family." They are exactly correct. I personally like the way our Lord put it in *Matthew 12:48-50*. "*But He replied to the man who told him, 'Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?' And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.'*"

The brother or sister who is in financial trouble *needs* to know that I care and am there for him/her in whatever way I can be. Those whose lives have taken a turn for the worse *need* to know that I am willing to help in whatever way I can. The one lying in the hospital bed *needs* to know that I care and am going to make every effort to visit. If I cannot visit, I can at least send a card or place a call. But above and beyond all of this, *Jesus Himself* needs to know that I care. If we are going to claim to be Christians, let's *be* Christians.

- Adam Litmer

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**SUNDAY'S LESSONS:** Sunday morning: "*The Maze of Forgiving Others!*" (text: Matt. 18:21-35); Sunday evening: Bi-monthly singing.

**SCHEDULE:** Our Fall Gospel Meeting will be July 29-Aug. 3, with Aaron Andrews.