

The Law of Silence and Exclusion

You would not have had to listen to many of my teaching efforts fifty years ago to have heard me tell about the law of silence and exclusion. I found no reference to such a law in the Scripture. It was a “law” derived through specious logic. That logic was not of my own creativity, but I had been nurtured in that line of reasoning by the many preachers that I had heard. They made it sound so sure that I used it regularly.

If your mother sent you to the store to get a loaf of bread and a can of tomatoes, that would exclude your purchase of anything else in the store. Your mother did not have to mention everything else in the store specifically that you were not to buy. The failure to mention other items excluded them. Her silence about them excluded them. Who can quibble with that line of reasoning?

So, when we were encouraged by inspired writers to sing, that excludes playing on an instrument. When we were taught that the “elements” of the Lord’s Supper were unleavened bread (cracker, that is) and wine (oops, grape juice!), that excluded hamburgers and Coke. It is sinful to practice what is excluded. End of sermon.

So far, so good, as long as I was confirming our traditions to the flock. If, however, some questioner had chosen other texts and subjects to which to apply my rule, I would have been at a loss. Let me illustrate by using James’ exhortations in James 5:13-14.

“Is any among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord...” (RSV).

“Let him pray.” Not “Let HER pray!” Sorry, ladies, silence ruled you out!

Pray. Not take Tylenol or go to a doctor. Excluded! Sinful!

“Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise.” Since singing is specified, it excludes playing your guitar, speaking, shouting, writing, clapping, whistling, dancing, or having a party expressing good cheer. Since “O, What A Beautiful Morning” is not praise but just a cheerful song, it would be sinful to sing any such song. The cheerful person is “commanded” to sing praise and that cannot be obeyed by simply remaining silent.

“Let him call for the elders of the church...” Not 911 for EMS. No, you don’t call for the preacher, your wife, your fiends, or the doctor. When he specified elders, he excluded all other persons. So it would be sinful to call anyone else.

“Let them pray over him, anointing him with oil...” Women still excluded. James’ instructions are silent about blood tests, CT Scans, Xrays, antibiotics, surgical operations, and Ben Gay. An injection or a blood transfusion cannot be substituted for anointing and

prayer by elders. Too bad if your congregation has no elders to call. To make any substitution is to do that which is right in your own eyes. It disregards Bible authority. That is liberalism.

I have probably succeeded in turning you off with one page! Most of you regular readers have left such reasoning behind long ago. You know we applied that rule inconsistently when it seemed to support our preconceived notion. For instance, it was not applied when appointing elders. An evangelist was directed to appoint elders and we have example of elders being appointed only by evangelists (Titus 1:5; Acts 14:19-23). No church is instructed to appoint elders nor is there example of it being done. Elders were ordained with fasting, prayer, and laying on of hands, but we have followed other procedures. We have ignored what we read in the Scriptures and done that which is right in our own eyes, substituting other methods and processes. We ignore “the cup” of the Communion and use individual cups. We build “church buildings.” We have Sunday School. We hire young men as surrogate elders to pastor the flock. The Scriptures are silent about those things. Must I give other examples? I think these are sufficient to illustrate my point.

No doubt, others of you who “respect the silence of the Scriptures” as being authoritative have been devising evasive logic to prove me wrong and to reaffirm that I am a liberal who disregards Bible authority and advocates doing what we please.

It is regrettable that it took me almost a lifetime to realize that the Scriptures do not define a menu of activities which disciples may or should do when they meet together. The Scriptures do not even mention a “worship service.” Our prooftexts for singing (Eph. 5:18-19 and Col. 3:16-17) are not even referring to a worship service. Reading the contexts will reveal that they refer to social relationships and activities. The last reference teaches, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Everything we do as dedicated disciples is to honor and serve God, for we present our bodies as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1-2). As long as we are living we are offering ourselves in all our activities. Our activities are not a mixture of the holy and the profane or the sacred and the secular.

Preachers instilled such fear in me based on the zapping of Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire and of others who offered rituals while in rebellion that I repeated those warnings for many years. After so long, I considered the many worshipful activities performed by humble and sincere worshippers which had not been “authorized,” and I was surprised to finally realize that there is no record of God refusing the sincere worship of any person, even though God had not commanded the rituals performed.

Then that means that we can add hamburgers and Coke to the Communion? Other churches have not followed our law of silence / exclusion. Have they added hamburgers and Coke to the Communion? Certainly not! Why not? Worship must have meaning,

and hamburgers and Coke could have no meaning associated with the Communion depicting the atonement.

Hamburgers and Coke, however, can have a very useful meaning in social fellowship / communion and may nurture spiritual values in our associations. What we do, both in social relationships and in assemblies, should be for the welfare and upbuilding of all those present. God trusts us to use our best judgment in using the methods and practices that serve the purpose of edification best. In doing that we are honoring and serving God. For more on this subject, please read *Free To Accept*, Chapter 12, “Worshipping In Spirit and Truth.”

Our “law of silence and exclusion” was devised out of our legalistic mindset and, like most of our simplistic attempts to interpret God’s revealed will as a code of law, has resulted in divisive debate and constant confusion.

(Cecil Hook, August 2001) []