

SILENCE SAYS SOMETHING!

Although our movement has developed the criteria of Scriptural command, approved example, and necessary inference for authoritative guidance, the most consistent thing about our use of that rule is our inconsistency in applying it. We avoid or "explain away" imperative instructions like "greet one another with a holy kiss" and such commanded examples as that of washing of feet, and we have never been able to agree on what is necessarily implied. Some conclude confidently that the silence of the Scriptures concerning the use of instrumental accompaniment to singing strongly implies that such is sinful, while others say the silence implies that such is acceptable.

Frankly, I cannot believe that God would make eternal life or death dependent upon our ability or inability to judge debatable inferences of a system of law. Sometimes, however, silence speaks and its message may be used as corroborative evidence. So, please let me make a point briefly that is supportive of that idea.

Throughout Old Testament history, God's people were warned against the pitfalls of the cultures about them. They were warned especially against the idolatry of the neighboring peoples. Some of the Mosaic regulations were in reaction to, and a safeguard against, the idolatry which was so popular and infectious in their world.

Jesus warned against popular and accepted evils such as outward show of piety, the perversion of law by traditional interpretations, and the exercising of lordship by religious leaders. He corrected the common notion that the worship of God was to be centered in Jerusalem or Samaria.

The letter composed and sent out by the Jerusalem conference to the Gentile disciples was no attempt to define all sinful activities, but it was a warning against prevalent and accepted evils among the pagans such as sexual unchastity and eating of things sacrificed to idols, blood, and what is strangled, all having to do with idolatrous practices.

Various lists of sins are given in the epistles. Why were they not exhaustive lists and all alike? Each particular list included the prevalent sins threatening the ones being addressed. Paul's instructions concerning women identifying with the cult priestesses by headdress and insubordination, for instance, were not given in all his epistles but only to the Corinthians and Ephesians where those things were local threats.

Paul warned the Thessalonians against idle, nonproductive lives because that was a sin characteristic of that city.

In the latter part of New Testament history, the great philosophical threat to Christianity among the Gentiles was Gnosticism. John deals with their teachings extensively in his epistles, and Paul gives warnings also in letters to Timothy and the Colossians.

Now, let me get to my point about instrumental accompaniment to singing. Such music was generally accepted in all societies. The Jews were familiar with the temple orchestra, or band, dating back through the centuries. David encouraged the use of instruments in praise, and he wrote some psalms to the Chief Musician to be accompanied by specified instruments. The Jews of the First Century used those psalms, and Paul encouraged Christian use of psalms.

If I should tell you that I heard Willie Nelson sing in concert last night, you would not conclude that he sang *acapella* due to the fact that I did not mention that he played his guitar also. Because accompaniment is so common, when mention is made of singing, accompaniment is taken for granted unless the exception is mentioned. So it would be with mention of the singing of psalms.

No doubt, the pagans sang some good secular songs, but it would be more characteristic of them to sing the bawdy, sexually oriented songs of the drinking party and songs expressing their idolatrous concepts. This would be a cultural temptation to disciples. In facing this, Paul did not forbid singing at social gatherings, but he urged that they use such occasions to teach, exhort, and upbuild one another by using psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, influenced by the Holy Spirit rather than alcoholic spirits or pagan, demonic spirits. His instructions (Eph. 5:1 8f; Col. 3:16) give no indication that he is dealing with church assemblies, but the contexts reveal that he is dealing with social relationships.

In view of the common use of instrumental accompaniment, both among the Jews and other societies, posing a universal threat, if such were sinful, it seems imperative that Paul and other inspired writers would have warned the disciples against that ever-present threat to their souls. Many lists are given to identify sins prevalent in their society, but the use of instruments in praise is not in one of the lists! The silence says something! It says that it was a matter of indifference.

When proponents of the use of instrumental accompaniment point out that God was pleased by their use under Moses, we have been quick to reply that the Law of Moses no longer applies as a guide or model for us. We have declared that one could as easily justify the keeping of the rituals of the law as the use of instruments, and that the keeping of Jewish rituals was abolished with the law. To keep such would be to fall from grace, we have contended, for when Jesus died on the cross, all such rituals became offensive to God.

Is that contention true? When Jesus died, did God suddenly come to hate all Mosaic rituals of worship? In our saner moments, we can admit that Jewish disciples continued to circumcise without incurring God's wrath as long as they did not make circumcision a condition for salvation (Acts 15). Moses was still preached in every city with apostolic approval. We can see that Paul would not let the keeping, or lack of keeping, of holy days and dietary regulations of their heritage become matters by which to judge a Christian's faith (Romans 14). Paul cut his hair in a ritual relating to a vow which he took. In Judea, "*many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed;*

they are all zealous for the law." To prove that he was not teaching against keeping the law, Paul agreed to observe the ritual of purification and pay the expenses of others under similar vows. This would require a sacrificial offering at the temple (Acts 18:18; 21 :17-26).

Rituals of the law could be, and were, kept by Christians long after Jesus died on the cross. Neither Paul nor other apostles or prophets objected to that. What Paul objected to so uncompromisingly was the performing of such services in an effort to find justification. Justification had to come through the sacrifice of Jesus alone, but those expressions of devotion and worship through Mosaic rituals were not intended for justification.

In view of God's acceptance of worship through Jewish rituals by Christians, why was instrumental music, which was a part of Jewish worship, not specifically condemned, if, indeed, it was sinful and displeasing to God? Why would Paul and others be silent about that threat to their souls? To say that the music was not authorized by Christ or his apostles does not answer the matter. Neither were those other observances by disciples authorized by Christ or his apostles. But they were authorized under the law, and their practice was continued by Jewish Christians with approval. Although they were not commanded or required of all disciples, those practices were acceptable.

Yes, silence says something. It says that it was a matter of indifference.

I am not proposing that you should sing with accompaniment. It is a matter of indifference. I am saying, however, that you cannot rightly condemn others for their use of it. Our acceptance as brothers in Christ is not based upon agreement on such debatable inferences about things not even mentioned in scripture. It is tragic that we have not faced this issue with greater intellectual honesty but have chosen to elevate it into an issue to divide from and reject others who are God's children. I trust that God has forgiven my ignorant zeal which allowed me to make it a divisive issue. []

This is a revision of Chapter 5 of Free As Sons.

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