

LET ALL
THE EARTH
KEEP
SILENCE

A STUDY ON THE SILENCE OF THE SCRIPTURES

By Philip Sanders

Introduction By Mack Lyon
Revised, Second Edition, 2005

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INTRODUCTION

For several years Phil Sanders and I have enjoyed frequent studies together. He has been a tremendous source of information and help to me in preparation of materials for television.

At times both of us have expressed concern over some of the questions and controversies among God's people arising from varying principles of biblical interpretation. This was done not for the purpose of determining who was right and who was wrong. In a personal pursuit of truth, Phil engaged in an intensive search for an acceptable interpretation of the "silence" of the Scriptures.

As his thoughts took form, I urged him to publish them and make them available to others who may be experiencing the same struggles he had. I am happy that after reworking the material several times, Phil offered them in this book. With the newly revised second edition, it will be even more useful to all Bible students.

Phil has something to say here that hasn't been said, and that deserves a hearing before one has drawn any conclusions based on "silence."

I pray and expect that many others will profit from reading this material.

Mack Lyon, Speaker
SEARCH Television Program
Edmond, Oklahoma

PUBLISHER'S STATEMENT

It has been over fifteen years since the first edition of this book appeared in 1989. All those concerned about maintaining the pattern of New Testament Christianity will find this revised study even more helpful now in these increasingly turbulent times of change.

The guidelines by which we may come to a true understanding of God's Word are vital, and the significance of silence cannot be ignored in this process.

Alvin Jennings, Director
Star Bible Publications

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COVENANT OBEDIENCE

In Deuteronomy Moses asks the people of Israel to renew the pledge of faithfulness to the covenant made at Sinai 40 years before. God promised them love, providence and protection. He asked them, in return, to keep the commandments, statutes and ordinances of His covenant as they earlier had sworn to do. Covenant obedience is the product of love, faithfulness and the fear (respect) rendered to God. The details of the covenant are complete, both in the promises made and in the obedience the Lord required.

Moses addresses the subject of obedience in three sermons, which comprise the book of Deuteronomy. In this book he lays out the parameters of obedience, which reveal what obedience does and does not do. Moses never left it in the minds of the children of Israel that they could observe God's laws in any manner that they wished. In this sense Deuteronomy may be regarded as a book that contributes greatly to our understanding of hermeneutics, the science of interpretation. God in Deuteronomy tells His people how He wants them to understand and obey His will. Take notice of these verses from Deuteronomy.¹

“You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.”

“So you shall observe to do just as the Lord your God has commanded you: you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live.”

“Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.”

“Now it shall be, if you will diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord God will set you high above all the nations of the earth if you will listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I charge you today, to observe them carefully, and do not turn aside from

any of the words which I command you today, to the right or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.”

In these passages there are five statements revealing how God wanted Israel to understand and obey His laws. They are: 1) to obey carefully,ⁱⁱ 2) to obey completely,ⁱⁱⁱ 3) to obey diligently,^{iv} 4) to obey lovingly,^v and 5) to obey accurately.^{vi} From these passages as well as the context of the whole book, it is clear that God not only wanted obedience from Israel but that He also wanted a heartfelt, careful, complete, diligent and accurate obedience. He expected His people to understand and comply with His will. Partial obedience, subtractions, additions or substitutions would stand condemned in His economy. Careless or half-hearted compliance would not please Him. The obedience Moses pleaded for follows a straight course that did only what God ordained or appointed to be done. Strict adherence to every commandment is required. Moses regarded God’s commandments as no trivial matter to be treated lightly; rather loving and accurate obedience was their “life” (Deut. 32:46-47).

Someone might say at this point, “No one doubts that, but what has this to do with silence?”

This has everything to do with silence! The commandments of the old covenant given through Moses contained the instructions that God wanted His people to know. Moses said, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29). Had God wanted Israel to do more than this, He would have revealed it. Their task was not to speculate on what God did not reveal but to carefully observe the law He did reveal! True obedience always has its source in what is revealed, not in the empty justification of what God has not forbidden.

There is a highway from which we are not to depart, to go either to the right or the left (5:32). This phrase declares the exacting care the children of Israel were to show in following God’s way. Just as the children of Israel passed through the valley of Arnon, going only on the highway and not turning to the right or to the left, so Israel was to follow all the commandments of God with precision.^{vii} Solomon’s advice is a good hermeneutic:

Watch the path of your feet,
And all your ways will be established.
Do not turn to the right nor the left,
Turn your foot from evil. (Prov. 4:26,27)

Those who seek to do what God has not forbidden usually do what they want rather than seek what God said. They are searchers for loopholes rather than being diligent and careful to keep all the commandments of God and to not vary to the right or the left. Such is the nature of one whose mind is more set on one's freedoms than on losing oneself in the will of God.

Obedience always asks, "What does God will in this matter? What has He appointed to be done?" To search for ways and means of getting around the commandment or varying it to suit oneself is to miss the point Moses is making. True religion consists of hearing and doing what God has said (Matt. 7:24-27). Hearing is often the hardest part of obedience, for man is often likely to hear as he pleases and do as he pleases. Such is not obedience.

Hermeneutics begins with hearing accurately. Moses points out the need for carefulness 27 times in the book of Deuteronomy.^{viii} Obedience is not to be a thoughtless or careless enterprise. Rather those who love the Lord and recall His goodness will exercise the greatest of care to make their obedience exactly what God wants.

"Selective obedience," said John Gipson, "in the final analysis, is not obedience at all." Retiring Admiral Hyman George Rickover said in 1982, "I did what I wanted and obeyed all orders that I agreed with." The admiral may have been patriotic and celebrated, but he was not obedient. We cannot pick and choose which of God's laws we will obey because we agree with them and which ones we will ignore. We cannot do what we want and be successful with God. We cannot change the ones we do not like.

There are parameters to obedience, parameters that rule out the freedoms many claim in the principle of silence. Silence cannot permit what has never been appointed. Silence cannot authorize anything; for if God has finished speaking, silence can add nothing more. Those who speak, when God has hushed, speak from their

own authority and not from God's. We are to live by everything that proceeds from the mouth of God (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4). We have no life in any other message or word. What God's word does not say cannot justify, sanctify or authorize. Silence cannot appoint or ordain.^{ix}

Silence cannot demand obedience to itself, but God can demand obedience to His revealed Word. When God has hushed, His silence is not a license to innovate. The fact that He has spoken and has said all He intends to say implies that there is no need for innovation. Silence is not a loophole for the innovation of ideas or practices. God has made His will known; He spoke what He desired to say and said no more. To act in His silence is presumptuous; it is continuing to speak when the Lord has hushed, thinking that His instructions need correction. Acting without scriptural warrant is presumptuous. If someone does so and, hoping to justify himself, then appeals to the absence of a prohibitive, he is not really listening to God at all. He is vainly searching for loopholes.

Moses instructed the Israelites to put tassels on their garments so that they might look at them and remember all the commandments of the Lord, so as to do them and not follow after "your own heart and your own eyes" (Num. 15:39). The children of Israel were no longer to do whatever was right in their own eyes but to follow the choices of the Lord and what was right in His sight (Deut. 12:8,13,14; 13:18).

Such obedience is not legalism as the Pharisees practiced it, for they added the traditions of men and stood condemned (Matt. 15:1-15). Instead, such obedience springs from the heart. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments (John 14:15).^x Obedience is not legalism; it is love! Moses was not concerned with passionless rituals. He sought for people to "obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you" (Deut. 30:2). Obedience is the act of the whole person lovingly, humbly, freely and carefully submitting to God by complying with His will.

The words "heart" and "love" are used more frequently in Deuteronomy than in all the rest of Moses' writings combined. Twelve times Moses emphasizes loving God in Deuteronomy.^{xi} In

every instance of the requirement to love God, love is joined with obedience to God's commandments. Love does not excuse one from the will of God. Love wants to please; and observing God's laws is one means by which a person shows his love. To separate love and obedience is to do a great injustice to understanding what God wants from men. The kind of obedience Moses pleads for is not the guilt-ridden slavery of legalism. Moses was not a Pharisee. Rather the heart of one faithful to the covenant is one who loves God with his whole heart, soul and strength (Deut. 6:5).

But someone objects, "If silence cannot authorize anything, because it says nothing, how then can it forbid, when it says nothing?"

The reason silence can forbid when it cannot authorize is that God has said all that He intends to say on a matter. He spoke what He wanted to say, He spoke all He wanted to say, and He hushed Himself. Since God said all He intended to say, to say more than He has said is presumptuous. His hushed silence authorizes nothing and forbids anything more. To say God approves of an act in the absence of His stated will is to act without authority: it is building upon sand. Our omniscient God knows what He wants and is able to tell us what His will for all time is. He has authorized all that He wills to be authorized for all time. To go beyond what He has authorized presumes that one can improve upon the perfect will of God; that is sinful and thereby must be forbidden. God's positive statements tell us what God wants us to know and to do. Our faith in His Word as the perfect law of liberty ought to instruct us that His Word is sufficient. Additions to that Word say that His Word is neither perfect nor sufficient. It is arrogance to assume God's ways need correcting or improving. Those who add to God's Word trust in their own judgment not God's, do what they want and not God's will. It is what that adding says to God and about God that makes it such great sin! Does our omniscient God really need our counsel? Does He need us to edit His work?

True obedience always abides within the commandment; it is careful and diligent to do so. Going to the right or to the left are signs of acting where God has not specified and which He Himself condemns. Jesus said, "If you abide in My words, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth

shall make you free” (John 8:31,32).^{xiii} Staying within the command is essential if one expects God’s blessing. There is no blessing for those who willfully disregard the stated will of God. God’s grace ought to prompt in all of us a heart that is willing to comply with any desire He has. When He has told us what He wishes, we have no excuse for doing anything other than what He asks. Love does exactly what it takes to please our gracious God. Permissive silence violates the law of love, which seeks to please. To teach a doctrine or practice an act that is unauthorized, even when accompanied by great emotion, shows a lack of love toward God, for it pleases itself rather than seeking to please God.

Therefore, let us determine to love God by obeying Him carefully, completely, diligently and accurately. Let us neither add to His words nor take away from them. Let us neither go to the right nor to the left but steer a straight course. Let us abide within that doctrine and never go beyond it. Such action is the proper response to our great and gracious God. Such action seeks to build upon rock not sand.

THE PRINCIPLE APPLIED

The Scriptures provide some examples of this principle applied, viz., that men must obey God completely, carefully, accurately, diligently and lovingly.

First, Noah was an example of such obedience. When Noah built the ark, God not only commanded Noah to build it; but He also said, “And this is how you shall make it” (Gen. 6:15). Noah did what God instructed him to do. “Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did” (Gen. 6:22; cf. 7:5). It was not Noah’s purpose to vary from the will of God either to the right or to the left, to add or to take away. He just did what he was told to do carefully and diligently. He took the commandment to heart and responded properly to the grace of God by faith (Heb. 11:6,7).

Second, Moses obeyed the Lord in the building of the tabernacle. God told Moses, “According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of the furniture, just so you shall construct it.” Again. “and see that you

make them after the pattern for them, which was shown you on the mountain” (Ex. 25:9,40; 26:30).

Moses did just as he was commanded. “Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was completed; and the sons of Israel did according to all that the Lord had commanded Moses, so they did” (Ex. 39:32). The Bible further says, “So the sons of Israel did all the work according to all that the Lord had commanded Moses. And Moses examined all the work and behold, they had done it; just as the Lord had commanded, this they had done. So Moses blessed them” (Ex. 39:42,43). It is obvious from this example that Moses took seriously his responsibility to build the tabernacle correctly. He was diligent and careful to examine all the work to assure that it was just exactly what the Lord wanted. This is the sincere, loving, careful and accurate kind of obedience God desires. “See that you make them according to the pattern, Moses.” And Moses did.

But there are also examples of people who failed to obey the Lord. They did not do what He desired. For whatever reasons, their actions were careless and improper; and in the absence of authority, their attempts to obey were unacceptable to God.

First, Nadab and Abihu put incense on their firepans and offered strange fire before the Lord, “which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord” (Lev. 10:1,2). By doing that which the Lord had not commanded, Nadab and Abihu failed to treat the Lord as holy (Lev. 10:3). For whatever reason, the two sons of Aaron carelessly offered up something different than what God asked for. Their offering was not according to the commandment. Some have suggested that the two were drunken (Lev. 10:8); in any case they acted without authority from God and went beyond the commandment. Carelessness did not excuse them; others carried out the bodies of these dead brothers.

Second, Moses failed to treat God as holy at the waters of Meribah-kadesh and thus broke faith with God (Deut. 32:51). God had told Moses, “Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for

them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink” (Num.20:8). “So Moses took the rod from before the Lord, just as He had commanded him” (Num. 20:9). Had Moses continued this course, he would have continued with the blessing of the Lord. Moses and Aaron gathered the people before the rock. And Moses said to them, “Listen now you rebels; shall *we* bring forth water for you out of this rock?” Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly (Num. 20:10,11). While the people and the beasts received the water they needed to sustain their lives, Moses sinned against the Lord.

The Lord told Moses and Aaron, “Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them” (Num. 20:12). Moses and Aaron acted presumptuously by using the word “we” rather than setting apart God as holy. Moses also acted presumptuously by *striking* the rock twice in the absence of any command. God had not forbidden the presumptuous talk or the striking of the rock, but Moses and Aaron sinned by breaking faith with God. Obedience and faith are irrevocably linked to each other. Moses acted arrogantly on his own authority and not by the will of God. So Moses, in this instance, did not fulfill the principle of a loving, careful, diligent, complete and accurate obedience to God’s commandment.

Third, Saul made an unauthorized offering at Gilgal (1 Sam. 13:8-14). After Samuel anointed Saul as king of Israel, he told Saul, “go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do” (1 Sam. 10:8). Saul, however, did not fully do what Samuel told him to do. He waited seven days, the appointed time; but Samuel took his time coming to Gilgal. Consequently the people were scattering from their new king. So Saul said, “Bring to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings.” And Saul offered the burnt offering. When Saul finished, Samuel arrived; and Saul went out to greet him.

But Samuel said, “What have you done?” Saul replied, “Because I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that

you did not come within the appointed days, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash, therefore I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the Lord.’ So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering” (1 Sam. 13:11,12).

Samuel told Saul, “You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, for now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not endure.” Samuel spoke plainly, “you have not kept what the Lord has commanded you” (13:13,14).

Saul acted on his own authority in offering up the sacrifices. Since he was not a priest and since he was told to wait, Saul had no right. Saul failed because he did not listen to Samuel’s instruction to wait. Samuel’s absence did not authorize Saul to disobey. Saul foolishly allowed the circumstances of the Philistines and the pressure of the people to prompt him to act without authority. Saul added to himself a privilege to which he had no right. He acted on his own because he felt he was forced to, but Saul was deceiving himself. He acted without authority and without faith. God expects loving, careful, diligent, accurate and complete obedience.

Fourth, David transported the Ark of the Covenant by ox cart from Kiriath-jearim (1 Chron. 13:7-10). They carried the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Abinadab on a new cart. Uzza and Ahio drove the cart. God had not authorized the use of an oxcart to transport the ark. God had given directions as to how and who was to carry the ark (Ex. 25:12-16; Num. 7:9; 1 Chron. 15:2, 15). When men act thoughtlessly, not considering God’s instructions, they face God’s wrath. “When they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzza put out his hand to hold the ark, because the oxen nearly upset it. And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzza, so He struck him down because he put out his hand to the ark; and he died there before God.” Uzza died for his “irreverence” (2 Sam. 6:7). Transporting the ark in an unlawful and unauthorized way led to the upsetting of the cart and the death of Uzzah.

David became angry at the Lord's outburst against Uzza. Not understanding how he could correctly bring the ark home to him, David left the ark of God at the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite (1 Chron. 12:11-13). Later he realized, "No one is to carry the ark of God but the Levites; for the Lord chose them to carry the ark of God, and to minister to him forever" (1 Chron. 15:2). David consequently told the priests and Levites, "Because you did not carry it at the first, the Lord our God made an outburst on us, for we did not seek Him according to the ordinance" (1 Chron. 15:13,15).

God expects His way to be observed. Someone today might accuse God here of being legalistic and not considering the good intentions of Uzza. Some people today feel that the good intentions of the heart are "all that matter"; but good intentions do not change the unlawful into lawful. Good intentions will not change God's law. David became angry because he felt God was unjust to Uzza. One might well ask what the harm is for using a cart rather than having to carry it on the shoulders of the Levites? Isn't the cart more expedient? Expedience in this case is beside the point. God is holy, and He will not be treated as unholy. He demands reverence to all His ordinances. What may *seem advantageous or expedient* to us may not appear so to God. What we think is "no big deal" may be very important to God.

Isaiah reminds us that His thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:8,9). God demands that we do things His way (Deut. 5:33). Man is unable to direct his own steps but like a sheep goes astray (Isa. 53:5,6; Jer. 10:23). This is why man needs the direction of God, but God does not need man's improvements to His declared will.

The principle of obedience is that man must lovingly, completely, carefully, diligently and accurately obey God. To do otherwise is both folly and sin. When we apply that principle to our study of the silence of the Scriptures, we recognize that men have no right to act on their own authority. Our task is not to innovate new ways but to abide within the commandment. Nadab and Abihu, Moses and Aaron, Saul, and David learned too late that one must act just as the commandment says if one is to please God and enjoy His blessing. To act first and later try to justify oneself

by an appeal to what God has not forbidden is foolish. It is to speak presumptuously in God's hushed silence. No one has that right.

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¹ Deut. 4:2; 5:32,33; 12:32; 28:1,13,14. Cf. Deut. 6:17,18, 25; 10:12,13; 13:4; 32:46,47. All quotations are from the New American Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

²Deuteronomy uses careful” 19 times to describe our keeping of God’s law’s: 2:4; 6:3,25; 8:1; 11:22,32; 12:13,19,28,32; 16:12; 17:10; 23:23; 24:8 (2); 26:16; 28:1,58; 31:12. “Carefully” is used to describe how we obey eight times: 4:15; 5:1; 12:1; 15:5; 17:19; 19:9; 28:13; 32:46.

³ Deuteronomy emphasizes doing “all” the will of God by “keeping all the commandments,” “observing all the commandments,” and “walking in all the ways of the Lord” 31 times. Deut. 11:8 urges men to “keep every commandment.” Continuous obedience is emphasized by the use of “always” four times: 5:29; 14:23; 11:1; 19:9.

⁴ Deuteronomy emphasizes “diligence” five times: 4:9; 6:9,17; 24:8; 28:1. (This statistical information is taken from the *Exhaustive Concordance* of the New American Standard Version.) It is interesting to note that the word translated “diligent” in the NASV is the same Hebrew word as is “careful.”

⁵Deuteronomy commands that the Israelites “love” God 12 times: 5:10; 6:5; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1,13,22; 13:3,4; 19:9; 30:6,16,20. In every case “love” is used in a context of obeying God’s laws and walking in His ways.

⁶While the word “accurate” is not used in Deuteronomy, “accurate” well describes a prominent concept in the book. Deut. 5:32 insists that men “do just as the Lord commanded.” The concept of not turning to the right or left is emphasized in 5:32; 17:11,20; 28:14. The idea of walking in His ways” is emphasized in 5:33; 8:6; 10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9; 30:16. To turn from His way is regarded as great sin: 9:12,16; 11:28; 31:29. Deuteronomy also contrasts between doing what men wish and what God wishes. Men’s doing what they desire is condemned in 12:8 and 29:19. Doing what is right in God’s eyes is approved in 13:18 and 21:9.

⁷ Deut. 2:27. Cf. 17:11,20; 28:14; Josh. 1:7.

⁸See endnote 2.

⁹The subject of silence and expediency is dealt with at length in chapter 8 of this hook. At this point it is sufficient to say that expediency is not in the realm of the hushed silence of God discussed here. It is not silence that authorizes expedients. The commands, direct statements, inferences, and examples of the Scriptures authorize expedients.

¹⁰Cf. John 14:21,23,31; 1 John 2:5.

¹¹See endnote 5.

¹²Cf. 1 Cor. 4:6; 1 John 2:22-24; 2 John 9-11.

JESUS AND SILENCE

Up to this point we have looked at covenant obedience as it applied to those in the Old Testament and with a view to the kind of obedience that God desires from us. To some our study may appear irrelevant, to others merely a restatement of “traditional” arguments. The question is not so much whether they are old or new as it is whether they are valid. If they were valid, one would expect to find the principle fulfilled in the life of Jesus who lived under that covenant.

For those of us who look to Jesus as our example and by whose blood we have entered into a new covenant, it is necessary to ask about Jesus’ attitude toward the silence of the Scriptures. Surely Jesus must have dealt with the same problem facing men today. How did Jesus obey the Father? How did Jesus address the problem of His Father’s authority? Did Jesus act only with authority or did He feel free to practice whatever the Father had not forbidden? How did Jesus act toward the hushed silence of the Father?

This chapter will be devoted to that question, because obedience is necessarily related to the silence of an authority. Jesus noted what the Father taught Him and placed parameters on His obedience to the Father. He lovingly, carefully, diligently, completely, and accurately submitted to the will of His Father. His self-restrictive example is significant. His conscious choice to do what His Father willed and no more is significant. Jesus serves as our example in His commitment to His Father.^{xiii} If we regard ourselves as His disciples, then our goal is to be like our Master by obeying Him as He obeyed His Father.^{xiv} By keeping our eyes fixed on Him, we can learn the kind of obedience God desires.

As a basis for our study, we will look at several passages in the gospel of John that describe the relationship of Jesus to the Father and how Jesus dealt with the will of His Father.

John 4:34

Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.”

In this narrative of Jesus and the woman at the well near Sychar, Jesus reveals a basic fact about his character. Physical food is important; but, for Jesus, doing the will of God is what He lives for. F. F. Bruce said that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4); “and no one demonstrated the truth of this principle so thoroughly as Jesus did. To listen to the Father’s voice and to do His will were the joy and strength of his life.”^{xv} Jesus’ mission was inseparably linked to being the Son of His Father. This is but the first of many instances where Jesus makes it clear that He came to do the will of His Father.^{xvi}

Jesus was not interested in seeking His own will but in fully accomplishing the work His Father had given Him to do. Many people characterized Him as a revolutionary or a libertine, who sought religious freedom. Jesus certainly did seek freedom, freedom from the traditions of men, freedom from the fear of death, and freedom from sin for His people.^{xvii} But Jesus never sought freedom to do His own will, nor did He ever seek freedom from the will of God. He never sought to change or abridge God’s will. “Lo, I come to do the Thy will, O God,” was the very substance of his life and desire. Jesus never conceived of freedom from God’s will. He saw the true freedom in the will of God. Gottlob Schrenk said, “He is in person the will of the Father.”^{xviii}

John 5:19

Jesus answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.” (cf. 5:20)

In this passage Jesus is defending His claim that He is the Son of God. He defends his being equal to God by stating that His character is like that of His Father. A. T. Robertson observed that

here is a supreme example of a son copying the spirit and work of a father.^{xix} Jesus is not here setting up a rival throne or challenging His Father. Instead, his purpose is to do the work that His Father gave him to do.

Jesus restricts His actions to following His Father's example. He affirms that unless it is something He sees the Father doing, He simply will not do it. Rather, His purpose is to obey the Father by acting in the same manner. The adverb *homoios* reflects the likeness of the behavior between Father and Son. "Unless" gives the extent to which Jesus will allow Himself to act. It is not in the character of Jesus to seek to do things of Himself, on His own authority apart from the Father.^{xx}

Jesus is the Son of God in a unique sense, and as the Son he maintains an attitude of perfect submission to the Father. F. F. Bruce notes, "It is for the Father to initiate; it is for the son to obey. It is for the Father to show the Son what to do; it is for the Son to follow the Father's example."^{xxi} Jesus' language in this verse is exactly how one versed in Rabbinic thought would express reliance and dependence upon another for the authority of one's message. Jesus never acts independently of His Father. His complete subordination is evident. Jesus has chosen to submit wholeheartedly to the Father's will. Paul's grand statement of the submission of Jesus to the Father in Philippians 2 echoes John 5:19. Though Jesus was in the form of God, he took the form of a servant and became obedient to the point of death. Such submission is not from the heart of a rebellious libertine who is demanding his freedom to do as he pleases. Its source is in the heart of One who loves so much that He will set aside His own desires to serve the purpose of His Father.

John 5:30

I can do nothing on my own initiative, as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just; because I do not seek my own will but the will of Him who sent me.

Jesus makes it clear that He does not act on His own initiative or by His own authority.^{xxii} He simply will not do anything without the authority of God, the approval of God, or the appointment of God. He is not acting on His own volition. Jesus regards Himself as a commissioned person; he hears and acts in such a way as one who is sent by another. He can defend His judgment as impartial most strongly by the fact that He will judge only as the Father directs. This is what makes His judgment righteous. His power and the meaningfulness of His work is found in the fact that God is His source. Jesus determined never to go beyond His source. It is clear again that Jesus' whole purpose is to lovingly, completely, carefully, diligently and accurately do His Father's will.

John 5:36

But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.

Jesus completely identifies the work He does with the work that He was sent to the earth to do. Those works prove He is the Son of God. Those "very works" also show His attitude in obedience. Jesus took to heart the works His Father appointed for Him to accomplish. He wanted to do them, do them all, do them as He was instructed without any' changes, and to hear witness that God truly was working in and through Him.

John 6:38

For I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.

Jesus explains that the Father's will is that He raises up on the last day all whom the Father has given to Him. In the work of saving souls, the Father and the Son are completely unified. I am thankful that Jesus came to do the Divine will rather than to act as

men do. Had Jesus acted as the Pharisees, He might very well have made it impossible for anyone to be saved. But acting in accordance to the will of God, Jesus chose to accept any man who would humbly and penitently believe and obey the gospel. Jesus came to make the infinite mercy of our marvelous God known to all men and to demonstrate God's perfect love and patience to everyone, even the chief of sinners.^{xxiii} Had Jesus been of another frame of mind, we would all be hopeless. Had Jesus' judgments been human rather than divine, our hope in Him would be vain.

Jesus never initiates where God is silent. His task is to fulfill the expressed will of God. The Father told Him what to do and sent Him to earth to do it. Jesus respects that and never thinks to go beyond His authority, never seeks to do more than He was appointed to do. Jesus never wanted to go beyond. It was enough for Him to just do as the Father instructed. Those who seek to act where God has remained silent dare to do something Jesus, the Son of God, never dared to do. It did not enter the mind of Jesus to act without warrant from the Father. He recognized that the Father told Him what we wanted; and since the Father had spoken on the matter, Jesus realized that doing more than he was commissioned to do would be presumptuous. To speak when his Father remained silent is as disobedient as remaining silent when His Father spoke.

John 7:16-18

Jesus therefore answered them, and said, My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If any' man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself. He who speaks from Himself seeks His own glory but He who is seeking the glory of the one who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

Once again Jesus affirms that his teaching did not find its source within himself: the teaching of Jesus is that of the Father. The authenticity of Jesus depends on that fact, and His Divine

identity depends on that fact. Jesus here speaks as a Jew trained in Rabbinic thought would speak. He attributes the authority for his teaching to another.^{xxiv}

Jesus' message is not contaminated by a desire for his own glory and so that he might be quoted. He rather points toward God so that men might glorify the Father. Jesus himself makes a contrast between divine and human teaching. This distinction lies in the difference between one who speaks from himself and one who is commissioned to speak. Jesus regards himself as commissioned by God. The challenge of Jesus to do God's will. It is by doing that will that one comes to the knowledge that Christ's teachings are authentically divine.

John 8:26-29

“I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world.” They did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father. Jesus therefore said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.”

The reason Christ limits Himself to teaching only what the Father taught is so that He might please His Father. This diligence to please the Father is a noteworthy example for men today. Limiting ourselves only to that which is taught in the New Testament is not an act of self-righteousness but an effort to please the God we love. This correspondence between the teaching of both Father and Son is a sign of unity and identity. It is no wonder that God regards Jesus as His beloved Son, with whom He is well pleased.^{xxv} James D. Bales asks, “What did Jesus teach? Everything God taught Him plus those things God did not teach him? How did He know what was pleasing in God's sight? Did He say that God was pleased with one doing also all those things concerning which he was not silent?”^{xxvi} Bales knew that Jesus

taught no more than what the Father instructed Him to teach.

Just as the Father taught, so the Son spoke.^{xxvii} Doctrinal correctness was important to Jesus. He spoke what He heard; He spoke all that He heard; and He spoke no more than He heard. Jesus did not presume freedom to vary from the message. As a further vindication of His message, Jesus pointed to the cross. Even in that, He will not act on His own will but will act as He has been commissioned to do.

Jesus applies this principle in His own life and asks others to do the same in 8:31-32. Now this is significant, for Jesus expects those who follow Him to have the same kind of doctrinal purity that He Himself exhibits. One can find no better example of doctrinal purity than Jesus Christ. He taught, “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” It is only those who abide in the teaching who are genuine disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus authenticates His disciples in this passage by how they deal with His Word. Our response to the authority of Jesus Christ does speak to the issue of who we are and whose we are. Should we ever forsake our determination to stay within the teaching or word of Christ, we shall inevitably lose our identification with Him to the same extent.

To “abide in” means to “continually dwell in” that message. Just as Jesus carefully, lovingly, diligently, completely and accurately devoted himself to what the Father taught Him, so we must devote ourselves to His word. His truth is in His message; that is where the true freedom lies. It can be in no other place. The liberating truth is not in the inventions of men, in the traditions of men, or in loopholes. It is only in the message and teaching of Jesus, which His loving Father taught Him. Jesus promises us, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10).

John 10:18

No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority' to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.

Even in His death, Jesus acted upon the “commandment” of His Father. The reason He gave His life so freely was that He knew this to be His Father’s will. Had it not been the Father’s will, Jesus would not have been crucified. Peter emphasizes that Jesus’ death was according to the “predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23; 4:28). In this act, as no other, we can see the depths of Jesus’ love and desire to please His Father. He sacrificed all and let no personal desire keep Him from fulfilling the “commandment” that His Father gave to Him. His death was His purpose for coming to the earth. His body had been prepared as a sacrifice; and His burden was, “Lo, I have come to do Thy will, O God!”

Had Jesus not been so authorized to give Himself up, it would have been sinful for Him to do so. His “authority” was his “right, the legal authority” to lay down His life.^{xxviii} Since he acted on authority, on the “commandment” of the Father, he fulfills God’s expressed will.

John 12:48-50

He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge Him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.

What Jesus said was important to Him; He makes it very clear that His message is identical with the Father’s message. I, for one, am glad that Jesus took such great care to be accurate with the message, because that is the very message by which we shall be judged on the last day. This commanded message is “eternal life.” I would not want any mistakes or any variation in it. Jesus, true to the form of a servant, tells all that the Father wants Him to tell but

tells no more than what His Father commanded Him to say and to speak.

Marcus Dods commented that the phrase “what I should say” designates “the doctrine according to its contents,” and “what I should speak” designates “the varying manner of its delivery.”^{xxix} Clearly, Jesus said what God wanted Him to say in the way God wanted Him to say it. Heb. 1:2 reminds us that God “in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.” Such a message is so important to God and to mankind that our great God entrusted it to no one other than His Son. I am thankful that Jesus gave the message carefully, completely, diligently, lovingly and accurately. I am glad that He faithfully gave it just as it was commanded Him. I wouldn’t want an innovated message, a corrupted message, a substituted message, or a shortened message to judge my soul.

When God started speaking, so did Jesus. Jesus said exactly what the Father told Him to say. When God finished speaking, so did Jesus. Jesus did not dare to go on speaking when God had hushed.^{xxx} If Jesus treated the word of eternal life with such care, should men not also? We who are to be judged by that message have all the more reason to treat it with utmost care. In matters so serious, can anyone dare to be presumptuous, to innovate, to attempt to improve on the revealed will? Can anyone dare to raise an angry fist in the declaration of his rights and freedoms? Such arrogance was certainly not found in the Servant Savior.

John 14:10, 31

Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. . . . but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here.

Jesus repeats what He has often said. His message is not His own invention but the precise work God gave Him to do. Jesus did exactly as the Father instructs Him. There is no variance from the plan and purpose of God. Jesus came to do the Father’s will perfectly. Jesus who kept the law without sin also kept His Father’s

commandments without sin. He is the utter fulfillment of the prescribed obedience that God laid out in Deuteronomy.^{xxx1} Surely, Jesus' example of obedience is prerequisite to any that would follow after Him. Those who claim to follow Jesus must not overlook this critical example of obedience.

In John 14:31 Jesus professes His love for His Father. This is the only statement of that love in such a direct manner. Jesus wants the "world" to know how He loves the Father. One can see it clearly in the way Jesus obeys. His motive is pure. His strict adherence to the commandment of the Father reflects a pure, perfect love for His Father. We see in Jesus what John meant in 1 John 2:5 "whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected."

As a lover of God Jesus was not a legalist, nor was He a heartless dogmatist. He had no axe to grind against others by strictly adhering to the Father's commandment. Nor was Jesus playing a game of "holier-than-thou." He wasn't trying to justify Himself to the Pharisees or satisfy the multitudes. He faithfully and lovingly obeyed His Father. He took the narrow road He asked others to take. Jesus Christ was narrow in His approach to His Father's commandments. He went neither to the right nor to the left.^{xxxii} Doctrinal accuracy was no mere pastime for Him. He passionately pursued it as a means of loving his Father.

The example of Jesus is convincing. Those who vary from the commandment by acting without and beyond their authority do what Jesus never dared or wanted to do. Those who seek freedom to do as they please must find their example in someone other than Jesus. Jesus was consumed in doing the will of God. Jesus never contemplated variance from the appointed message or work He was sent to accomplish. He lost Himself in the doing of what He was instructed and authorized to do. Genuine disciples who seek unity can only find it by committing themselves to the same kind of obedience. There can never be unity among men who find their authority in themselves.

The example of Jesus is not silent about the purposeful hushed silence of the Father. In Jesus one sees perfect obedience that is loving, careful, complete, diligent and accurate. He never once acted without authority, never once innovated, never once

sought to do His own will. Jesus never fought for innovations beyond the expressed will of God. Jesus never depended on the silence of the Father to justify His own desire. Jesus never excused himself from obedience by saying. "Well, my Father didn't say I couldn't." Jesus was never presumptuous, even though as the Son of God He could have claimed His place as Deity.^{xxxiii} No, He emptied Himself out, took the form of a servant, and was obedient to the point of death (Phil. 2:5-8).

Jesus respected the hushed silence of His Father in heaven. He would neither add to His Father's commandments nor take away from them. Men today would do well to follow His example of obedience. Let each one do all God says to do carefully and diligently. Let each one observe the commandments just as God gave them, going neither to the right nor to the left. Let each one follow the Lord and love Him with all His heart, soul, mind and strength. To do otherwise is to fail to follow in the steps of Jesus.

¹ 1 Pet. 2:21.

² Luke 6:40.

³ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 113. As in John 6:44; 8:18; 12:49; and 14:24, Jesus refers to His Father as the “one who sent Me.”

⁴ John 5:30; 6:38; 7:18; 8:50; 9:4; 10:37,38; 12:49,50; 14:31; 15:10; 17:4; and 19:28-30. “The life of Jesus consists of doing the will of God, *i.e.*, carrying out the work of salvation, in doing this in the works, the preaching and the deeds which are given Him by the Father and the performing of which is the witness that he is sent by the Father, 5:36. In the execution of ‘the’ historical work by Jesus there thus takes place the glorifying of the Father on earth, 17:4. John stresses that Jesus fulfills only that which is assigned to Him by God” (Gerhard Delling, *teleioo*, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Win. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1964), VIII:81. Hereafter cited as *TDNT*).

⁵ Matt. 15:1-15; Heb. 2:14,15; John 8:32-36.

⁶ *TDNT* V: 998n3, 14.

⁷ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1932), V:84.

⁸ Commenting on this passage, Albert Barnes observed: “That is nothing without the appointment of the Father; nothing contrary to the Father, as he immediately explains it. . . . Such is the nature of this union, that he can do nothing which has not the concurrence of the Father, and which he does not command. In all things he must, from the necessity of his nature, act in accordance with the nature and will of God. Such is the intimacy of the union, that the fact that he does anything is proof that it is by the concurring agency of God. There is no separate action; no separate existence; hut, in being and in action, the most perfect oneness between him and the Father.” Barnes, *Barnes Notes on the New Testament*, ed. Ingram Corbin, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, n. d., reprinted 1962), pp. 288,289.

⁹ Bruce, 128.

¹⁰ See 8:28,42; 12:49; 14:10. “Both here and in v. 19 the order of the words lay great stress on ‘ouden’ (nothing). If he were to act independently of God (supposing such a thing were possible). Jesus would be completely powerless. The whole meaning and energy of his work lie in the fact that it is (sic.) not his work but God’s.” Leon Morris, *John*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. N. B. Stonehouse (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, n. d.), 323n87. Hereafter cited as *NICNT*.

¹¹ 1 Tim. 1:12-16. “Everywhere Jesus forestalls the idea that He is speaking for Himself, and is uttering merely human judgments, or is in any way regulated in his actions by what is arbitrary: it is the supreme Will He represents.” Marcus Dods, *Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Win. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., reprinted 1976), 1:754.

¹² *NICNT*, John, p. 405. Barnes also notes: “It is not originated by me. Though I have not learned it in your schools, yet you are not to infer that the doctrine

which I teach is devised or invented by me. I teach nothing that is contrary to the will of God, and which he has not appointed me to teach. . . . It is such as he approves, and such as he has commissioned me to teach. The doctrine is divine in its origin and in its nature.” *Notes*, op. cit., p. 300.

¹³Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Luke 3:22; Phil. 2:8; 2 Pet.1:17; Isa. 53:10-12.

¹⁴James D. Bales, *Be Silent Where the Bible Is Silent* (Unpublished manuscript, 1992), 36.

¹⁵“The truth which he declares is not something that he himself has thought up; it has been entrusted to him by the one who sent him. As the Son can do nothing of his own initiative, but only what he sees the Father doing (John 5:19), so the Son can teach nothing on his own initiative, but only what he is told by the Father.” F. F. Bruce, *John*, 149.

¹⁶Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, trans. and ed. Cleon Rogers (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 242.

¹⁷Dods, *Expositor’s Greek Testament*, 1:814. In 12:50 the words “*kathos*” and “*outos*” bear out the fact that in an emphatic way that Jesus spoke in content and in manner just as the Father told Him. Note how these words are used in a comparative sense in I Thess. 2:4; Col. 3:13; and I John 2:6.

¹⁸At 12:49 the *Revised Standard Version* says: “I did not speak on My own authority.” *The Twentieth Century Version* says: “Therefore, whatever I say, I say only what the Father has taught me” (12:50). The *Amplified Version* says: “So whatever I speak, I am saying (exactly) what My Father has told Me to say’ and in accordance with His instructions” (12:50).

¹⁹Deut. 4:2; 5:32,33; 12:32; 28:1,13, 14; 32:46,47.

²⁰Deut. 5:32-33; Matt. 7:13-14. The *Amplified Version* says: “I do as the Father has commanded Me, so that the world may know (be convinced) that I love the Father, and that I do only what the Father has instructed Me to do.--I act in full agreement with His orders” (John 14:31).

²¹It should be noted here that the Holy Spirit, in like manner, was never presumptuous so as to go beyond the stated will of the Father. Cf. John 14:26; 16:12-15. No man ever rises above the example of obedience set for us by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

WHAT HAS THE LORD SPOKEN?

As citizens of the twenty-first century, we are products of our past. The philosophical, theological and hermeneutical roots of our beliefs affect not only what we believe but also how we think or reason. We can often see this clearly in our denominational neighbors; but it is more difficult to see this in ourselves. We must resolutely and steadfastly be seekers of truth, and to do this we must take our blinders off. We must look deeply once again into the text of God's Word to examine and to test the validity of our beliefs.

Taking off the blinders of our own heritage, I believe, is what makes the task of restoration so very difficult. One's heritage often speaks when God is silent, and one is sometimes unable to distinguish when God has finished and tradition has begun. As twenty-first century seekers, we may be joining the conversation not fully understanding what has been said before or by whom.

Further, it is easy to assume that what God has said and what we believe are one and the same. It is only right that we should evaluate the sources of our beliefs. Paul exhorts us to "examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil."^{xxxiv} Paul writes this passage with a view to examining what one is taught.^{xxxv} We will be judged not only by the fact that we believe, but also by what we believe. Jesus sets one standard of His acceptance in "doing the will of the Father" (Matt. 7:21). Those who hear and do the teachings of Jesus will survive as wise men; but those who hear and fail to act will perish in foolishness (Matt. 7:24-27). Jesus sets the standard of judgment in His teachings (John 12:48). Since this is the case, our task is to please God by keeping His revealed Word in the New Testament. Neither pleasing any other man or ourselves will do. We must do God's will to please Him.

God has always expected men to act in accordance with His expressed will. The idea of not adding to or taking from His commandments is not unique to Deuteronomy.^{xxxvi} Prov. 30:5-6 says:

“Every word of God is tested;
He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.
Do not add to His words
Lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar.”

Paul warns the Corinthians “not to exceed what is written,” in order to avoid arrogant strife and division (1 Cor. 4:6). Paul further warns that any distortion of the one gospel by preaching a contrary gospel will lead to *anathema*, being accursed (Gal. 1:6-9). Men who do not teach the doctrine of Christ but go beyond it do not have God, says John; but those who abide in the teaching have both the Father and the Son (2 John 9). The book of Revelation warns that anyone who adds or takes away from the prophecy of that book will be punished (Rev. 22:18-19). At no time in history has God allowed men to add to subtract from or change His stated will in any way. It is presumptuous to think that our time *now* allows what has before *never* been allowed. Paul even argues, ‘Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man’s covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it’ (Gal. 3:15). If such is true of human covenants, surely it must be true of God’s covenants with man.

God expects His Word through His Son to be heard and obeyed by all men until Christ comes again. This durative factor should not be set aside as meaningless in the matter of silence. We shall be judged by the same expressed will in this twenty-first century as those who lived in the first century. What God said to them, He also says to us. What He bound upon them as necessary to salvation He binds upon us. What God willed for the church in the first century, He wills for the church in the twenty-first century. What He restricted for them, He restricts for us. What would be presumptuous for them is presumptuous for us. Our task is to listen and to practice that expressed will lovingly, carefully, completely, diligently and accurately.

Christ’s word is durable and will still be speaking when every reader of this book has been silenced by the grave. Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35). Peter says, “for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is,

through the living and abiding word of God. For, all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord abides forever. And this is the word that was preached to you" (1 Pet. 1:23-25). Jesus commissioned His apostles to preach the gospel to all the nations, "teaching them to observe all that I command you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). The promises of the gospel, the requirements of the gospel, and the presence of the Lord were all meant to last until Jesus comes again.

Jude urges Christians to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Gustav Stahlin states, "The epistle of Jude formulates the thought of Christian once-for-allness in a more rigid and intellectual manner ... Thus Christians are...men who know everything necessary for salvation (Jude 5) and who therefore, according to the author, possess it. Here there is no danger of loss."^{xxxvii} "By the faith," Raymond C. Kelcy observed, "Jude does not refer to subjective trust or belief but rather to the body of doctrine, that which is believed, the gospel."^{xxxviii} Kelcy further recognizes that "once for all" means that the revelation is complete and final. "The faith once delivered is not to be supplemented in any way."

God's Word is both complete and final; it is all-sufficient. Let us remember that when we speak of the silence of the Scriptures, it is a silence that follows a complete and final revelation. God has said all He wills to say and has purposely hushed. Some today are unconsciously questioning that all-sufficiency; others are questioning it openly. They are wondering if there are not gaps in the New Testament. They think perhaps God forgot to tell us some things.

Paul would argue that we lack nothing. "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16,17). We must at some point decide whether we genuinely accept that. Does the Bible need some help? Does it need a little improvement? Couldn't God have said a little bit more about...? Hush, Phil, My Word like My grace is sufficient for you.

Paul argues “we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete (*teleios*) in Christ” (Col. 1:28). Epaphras prayed earnestly that the Colossians “may stand perfect (*teleios*) and fully assured in all the will of God” (Col. 4:12). Peter says that God has “granted to us everything that pertains to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (2 Pet. 1:3). Paul could say he declared the “whole purpose (or counsel) of God (Acts 20:27). Such declarations could not be made by men who regarded the delivery of the faith as incomplete. Even if the canon were incomplete in their lifetime, they said that they knew all the will of God and were striving to teach others that they too might be complete (*teleios*) in Christ (Col. 1:28-2:3). This is in accordance with the promise of Christ.

J. D. Bales in his book, *The Finality of the Faith*, states:

The revelation of God to man on this earth reached its consummation and completion in the first century. Speaking to certain men in the first century, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things, and guide them “into all the truth.” (John 14:26; 16:13) In contrast with the incomplete revelation which was made during His personal ministry (for He left many things unsaid), all the truth--the truth in its entirety--was to be delivered to them by Christ through the Holy Spirit. (John 16:12-15) Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. We know that He did not speak falsehood or make empty promises. Therefore, when He said that they would be guided into all the truth, we can rest assured that this is exactly what happened. Furthermore, since the promise was made to them, it had to be fulfilled before they died. If they all passed on without the complete truth being revealed, the promise of Jesus failed. Since Jesus Christ is the teacher of truth, not falsehood, we know that these men in the first century had the complete truth revealed to them.^{xxxix}

The Word of God is durative till the Second Coming, binding upon all, delivered once for all, and all sufficient. One can

confidently say that God has spoken! He has spoken enough and said all He intends to say. Since He has finished, He is purposely silent. Since He is now finished and silent, we would be presumptuous to speak.

There are examples of men speaking in the hushed silence of God, and God's subsequent disapproval of them. Let's take time to look into these examples:

The Altar of Ahaz

Ahaz at a young age was given great responsibility—and freedom to do as he pleased since he was king. Jotham, Ahaz's father had not taken down the high places, and the people remained in idolatry. Even though Jotham himself did what was right, he permitted others to continue their sins. All that is necessary for evil to grow is for good men to do nothing. Today's failure to stand against sin opens the door to tomorrow's compromise and error. Since Jotham failed to say no to the high places, Ahaz embraced them fully. Every generation must be faithful to its calling; when one generation compromises, the next one falls headlong into apostasy.

Ahaz faced a critical test in his life when Rezin and Pekah besieged Jerusalem (2 Kings 16:5-9). This war came because of the wickedness Ahaz himself committed and the wickedness he permitted in Judah. We learn from 2 Chronicles that “the LORD humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had brought about a lack of restraint in Judah and was very unfaithful to the LORD (2 Chron. 28:19). Ahaz did not grow in spiritual maturity. Looking for the easy way out, he appealed to Tiglah-Pileser, king of Assyria, to crush his opponents.

Isaiah had counseled Ahaz not to give in to Rezin and Pekah so quickly (Isa. 7:4-9). Unfortunately, Ahaz would not believe and would not even test the Lord. It is to Ahaz that God reveals through Isaiah the great Messianic prophecy of the virgin birth. This prophecy was to have an immediately fulfillment in the time of Ahaz, that a young woman would bare a child. By the time that child reached the age of understanding good and evil, the two nations would be destroyed. Within a dozen years (734-722 BC), God's prophecy through Isaiah about Israel and Aram came to

pass. Rather than finding comfort in God, Ahaz chose to find help from Tiglath-Pileser and became even more unfaithful (2 Chron. 28:22-25). In every way this undisciplined young king forsook the Lord God and became even more unfaithful. Allowing his fleshly desires to control his decisions, Ahaz even began perverting the temple.

After entering into a treaty with Tiglath-Pileser, Ahaz went to Damascus to meet him. While he was there, Ahaz noticed an altar, which he felt a replica needed to be in Jerusalem. “King Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the pattern of the altar and its model, according to all its workmanship” (2 Kings 16:10). Incredibly, Urijah never questioned whether a new altar should be built and placed in the Temple. “So Urijah the priest built an altar; according to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus, thus Urijah the priest made it, before the coming of King Ahaz from Damascus” (16:11).

When he returned from Damascus, King Ahaz himself offered his burnt offerings, his meal offerings, his libations, and his sprinkled blood upon his new altar. “And the bronze altar, which was before the LORD, he brought from the front of the house, from between his altar and the house of the LORD, and he put it on the north side of his altar” (16:14). King Ahaz had the audacity to remove God’s authorized altar and put his own “great” altar in its place. Then King Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, “Upon the great altar burn the morning burnt offering and the evening meal offering and the king’s burnt offering and his meal offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land and their meal offering and their libations; and sprinkle on it all the blood of the burnt offering and all the blood of the sacrifice. But the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire by” (16:15).

Ahaz was not content merely to replace God’s altar, he limited the altar of God to own personal use. Ahaz moved from compromise and weakness to setting up his own altar in the Temple. Surely, Ahaz was one of the wickedest kings ever to reign in Judah. He had no use or respect for God and filled the land with idolatry. The substituted altar was not only Ahaz’ fault; Urijah must also face judgment. Urijah failed to stand up for God—he did what Ahaz told him to do. When God’s people allow the king to

speak and overrule the teaching of God, they sin greatly. Urijah never even warned Ahaz about his error. Faithful men of God must do better than Urijah; they must stand for the truth and not allow error to creep in.

First the altar of Ahaz was an addition, then it became a substitute. Substitutes dishonor God. They say to God that He was not smart enough to do it right in the first place, that He needs an editor. Such presumption is indeed “great transgression” (Psalm 19:13). Today some substitute sprinkling for immersion, some substitute entertainment for worship, some substitute infant baptism for baptizing a penitent believer, and some substitute Saturday night for the Lord’s Day. We might get excited about something new we see or hear, but that does not give us the right to try to improve on God’s ways. It is human nature to notice what is new or elaborate, but God in His wisdom gives us what we need most already. God does not need a counselor to tell the church how to improve; His wisdom is limitless.

Jeremiah 23:16-40

In the time of Jeremiah there were false prophets who claimed to speak for God. To wicked Judah these prophets were spreading false hopes, telling the people that they would have peace and that no harm would come to them (16, 17). But they were speaking visions of their own minds and deceiving their own hearts (16, 26). God said that He did not send them or speak to them (21). He said, “if they had stood in my council, then they would have announced My words to My people, and would have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds” (22). God’s true word was not one of peace but like a fire and like a “hammer which shatters a rock” (29). They were wagging their tongues and declaring, “the Lord declares” (31). Jeremiah said God was against them.

God says, “I am against those who have prophesied false dreams...and related them, and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting; yet I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit” (32). Here is the result of unauthorized preaching. It leads

the people astray, it puffs up those who do it, and it doesn't benefit anyone. Once false prophets add to the word of God, Jeremiah laments, "you will no longer remember the oracle of the Lord, because every man's own word will become the oracle, and you have perverted the words of the living God, the Lord of hosts, our God" (36). This was not only true in Jeremiah's time, but close observers of the charismatic movement today see the same problem of each person claiming inspiration being unable to separate the thoughts of his own heart from the Word of God.

Jeremiah told them that when they hear one of these false prophets speak and call their message the "oracle of the Lord," they are to ask, "What oracle? The Lord declares, 'I shall abandon you'" (33). God promised to bring punishment upon any person who claimed to speak an oracle of the Lord (34). The ultimate question, then, to be asked was "What has the Lord spoken?" It was correct that God's people insist on God's message, and it is correct today for God's people to resist any innovations and to insist on God's truth (33-40).

Men are not to speak in the silence of God. God has spoken, and our task is always to ask, "What has the Lord spoken?" To go beyond what He has said is to walk without the authority or the approval of God.

Micah 6:6-8

*With what shall I come before the Lord
And bow myself before the God on high?*

*Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings,
With yearling calves?*

*Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams,
In ten thousand rivers of oil?*

*Shall I present my first-born for my rebellious acts,
The fruit of my body for the sins of my soul?*

*He has told you, O man, what is good;
And what does the Lord require of you*

*But to do justice, to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God?*

God had indicted His people for their sins in Micah 6:1-5, and now in these verses, the people are responding to God, willing to do anything God asks. They first suggest burnt offerings, next thousands of rams. They progress on to ten thousand rivers of oil, a tremendously costly tribute. At length they offer the supreme sacrifice of their own first-born children. None of this would do. Their desire to do exorbitant things would not replace doing what God had already told them to do. The Lord had told them what He wanted from them: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with their God. They had been awakened to their former ingratitude and their need of forgiveness; they wanted to please God. Suggesting, however, alternate ways to make things right would not suffice. They must repent.

Through the centuries men have suggested the idea of purgatory as a supplement to the blood of Christ in the purging of sins. The doctrine of purgatory suggests the blood of Christ is inadequate to wash away all sin. Purgatory is “a cleansing fire...a place and condition of temporal, purgative punishment reserved for those Christians who die with the stain of venial sin still on them or who die without having completed temporal satisfaction or penance for their sins.”^{xli}

The Reformers with one voice objected to purgatory on the basis that God’s word said nothing about it; therefore, there was no such place. Purgatory is not a part of the complete, once for all faith that was delivered to the saints. The doctrine of purgatory is an obvious made-made addition. To teach it is to speak where God has not spoken, to pervert the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:6-9).

The doctrine of purgatory is offensive to those who believe in the sufficiency of the blood to cleanse men from sin. The New Testament clearly teaches that the blood of Jesus can cleanse one from all sin.^{xli} Christ suffered on a cross and shed His own blood for us that we might become the righteousness of God (1 Pet. 2:21-24). To suggest that saved persons must still be punished for their sins is to make a mockery of the cross of Christ. To disregard the sufficiency of the blood of Christ is grievous error. There is no other way but God’s way, and there is no sacrifice for sin but the blood of Jesus.

Matthew 15:1-14 and Mark 7:1-13

In this narrative the scribes and Pharisees demand that Jesus and his disciples obey the tradition of the elders in a ceremonial hand washing, which Jesus calls commandments of men. The Pharisees regarded the traditions of the elders as equal in authority with the written word. Jesus, however, flatly denies that these traditions had their source in God. Teaching and binding man-made commandments make one's relationship with God empty and render one's worship to God vain (Matt. 15:8-9). Reflecting on the commandments of men, Jesus said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up" (15:13). God only authorizes what He Himself plants, and nothing more. When men plant doctrines and practices God has not authorized, they do so presumptuously and to their own destruction. God will uproot every unauthorized effort, and unauthorized teaching renders people blind to the truth. "And if a blind man lead a blind man, both will fall into a pit" (14). It is sinful to teach unauthorized practices, and it is wrong to follow those who so teach. Such unauthorized teaching causes neglect of the Word of God (7:8), sets aside the Word of God (7:9), invalidates the Word of God (7:13), and transgresses the Word of God (15:3).

Jesus uses the figure of planting, mentioned by Isaiah. In Isa. 60:21, Isaiah speaks of the "branch of My planting, the work of My hands that I may be glorified." Again in 61:3, he speaks of "the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified." It is obvious that God's plantings glorify Him. To do God's will and to practice God's authorized commands in God's way is to glorify Him and not us. Commandments of men and traditions replace the glory that belongs only to God with a glory given to man. The Pharisees and rabbis considered a "leader of the blind" as an honorific title (Rom. 2:19). Falling into a pit, however, was to the Jew proverbial of disaster.^{xlii} Leaders who are blind to the truth help no one.

The establishment of new religious practices, new churches (different from the one of the New Testament), new doctrines, or new forms of worship is not the way to heaven but to destruction. God wants us to walk in the way He has established. To establish

new things is to speak when God has finished speaking. It is to assume God didn't say all that needed saying. It is presumptuous and sinful. The whole system of denominational names, churches, creeds and practices speak beyond the commandments of God. There is no Bible authority for man-made names, creeds, churches or practices. These are plants of men that will be uprooted by God. Jesus does not compromise with the Pharisees. He doesn't give way to long-held traditions that invalidate God's Word. Pruning is not called for here but destruction. He destroys the whole plant and considers the whole tradition evil. Reform here will not solve the problem. Respecting the "opinions" of others isn't called for here. Jesus confronts these Pharisees in hard words and condemns them.

Needless to say, the Pharisees were offended. Their religious pride blinded them to the fact that they were more loyal to their forefathers than they were to God. Strong loyalties to man-made traditions often blind people to the truth of the gospel today. Like the Pharisees, whom Jesus told his disciples to leave alone, some will be hardened by the truth today. For this reason, we must all stay sensitive to what the Lord has spoken and examine afresh our own beliefs and practices. We must not be afraid to abandon that which men have planted. We must open our eyes to see where the guides we follow are going. Jack Lewis noted, "The fact that the blind is being misled will not save him"^{xliii}

Acts 15:1-28

When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch after their first missionary journey, men came from Judea and began teaching, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (15:1). At Jerusalem certain believing Pharisees said, "It is necessary to circumcise them (Gentiles), and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses" (15:5). Because this created a controversy, the apostles and elders came together to look into this matter. They wanted to see what God willed.

Peter asked, "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our

fathers nor we have been able to hear?” (15:10) Requiring Gentiles to observe circumcision and the Law was clearly unwarranted. Paul noted that Christians who required circumcision and the keeping of the Law were “severed from Christ” and “fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4). Those who distorted the teachings of the one true gospel of Christ were to be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9). Adding requirements that God has not authorized is to speak beyond the Word of God. It is to assume that God had somewhere failed to say everything that needed saying and that His system needed improvement.

The letter from the apostles and elders make it clear that requiring circumcision and observance of the Law by Gentiles is not authorized. They write, “Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you (Gentiles) with their words, unsettling your souls...” (15:24). The apostles argue that they gave no such instruction and therefore was not required. Binding circumcision and the Law upon Gentiles is to speak in the intentional silence of God.

The Holy Spirit Himself laid “no greater burden” on the Gentiles “than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell” (15:28,29). No man has the right to bind greater burdens than the Holy Spirit does. Binding (speaking) where God has purposely silenced Himself is an arrogant presumption and rebellion toward the living God. Can anyone be more righteous than God directs him to he?

This forms the basis that we use to argue against Sabbatarians, who bind the fourth commandment of the Ten upon Christians. They require more than the new covenant requires by binding an old covenant law. It is on this basis we argue against the Roman Catholic binding of Christmas, Lent and Easter upon the consciences of Christians. They bind the observance of unscriptural holidays, innovations, and make them mandatory for one to be a “good Catholic.” Men have no right to bind what God has not bound or to loose what God has not loosed. Unauthorized binding is sinful and leads men into error every time.

Col. 2:20-23

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourselves to decrees, such as, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters, which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

“All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are hidden in Christ Jesus, “and in Him you have been made complete” (2:3,10). These statements form the foundation of Paul’s message to the church at Colossae. Paul feared that they might be moved away from their faith and be taken captive “through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ” (2:8). Apparently a false teaching was influencing some in this church to submit themselves to man-made decrees and the elementary principles of the world. This false teaching promoted self-abasement, food restrictions, the worship of angels, and calendar regulations (2:16-19). It was defrauding these Christians of their prize. It came from erroneous visions and arrogant, fleshly minds. God was not its source, and so faithful Christians had no fear of its judgment.

Decrees such as “Don’t handle, don’t taste, don’t touch!” were unauthorized and man-made. Men had no right to bind these prohibitions, and Christians were free to ignore them. Paul said in regard to them, “Let no one act as your judge” (2:16). The gospel of Christ sets one free from self-made religion or will-worship. The Christian is dead to the world’s teachings in the same way he is dead to himself (Col. 3:3) and “to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry” (3:5). The Christian is to put them (things to which he is dead) all aside (3:8) and to set his mind upon the things which are above (3:2). Fleshly minds seek to make laws, prohibitions and regulations that God

hasn't made. The "old self" with its evil practices expects others to participate in practices and forms of worship that have no clear warrant from God. The new man is free.

Speaking practically, man-made decrees have "no value against fleshly indulgence." One cannot improve upon God's ways in doctrine or in practice. These false teachers thought they could enlarge upon Jesus and upon His teachings, but they could not. They appeared wise to the naive, but their methods didn't work. Some today are still seeking the wisdom of men to improve upon the revealed will of God. The all-sufficiency of God's ways and God's Word is often passed over in the mad rush for the latest findings of psychologists and church growth experts. In our success-oriented world too many are all too ready for the quick fix, which appears wise. In too many cases the quick fix proves vain. Let us not forget that "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ Jesus." To hear less than all He speaks is to cheat ourselves; to speak more than these treasures is to deceive ourselves.

Heb. 1:5, 8, 9, 13

For to which of the angels did He ever say, "Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee?" And again, "I will be a Father to Him, and He shall be a Son to Me?" . . . But of the Son He says, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy companions." . . . But to which of the angels has He ever said, 'Sit at My right hand until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet?'

The question here is whom God is addressing as "Son." Jews sometimes regarded Angels as Sons of God^{xliiv}, but Jesus has a unique place with God that no angel can have; He sits on the throne and is addressed as "God." Since God did not speak of angels or to angels in this manner, His message does not apply to angels. Jesus is greater than the angels.

God made several statements in the Psalms to and about His Son Jesus. God's remarks to His Son excluded any application to angels. When He spoke of His Son, He did not mean angels. Specific address to one person or one class of persons excludes those not in that class. To include those whom God has not included is presumptuous; it is to speak in the purposeful silence of God.

Paul gives specific instructions to classes of wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves and masters.^{xlv} Good Bible students know that specific instructions apply only to those addressed and do not apply to any other group. To insist that husbands obey their wives or that fathers obey their children is to distort God's expressed will. It is to speak where God has not spoken. Now there is no prohibition in these passages, which says fathers cannot obey their children or husbands cannot obey their wives. But for husbands and fathers to abdicate their places as heads of their families is wholly unwarranted in Scripture. Doesn't common sense and experience (as well as the Scriptures) teach us the unhappy results of a child who rules the home and of a wife who dominates her husband? God's ways are best and right.

Let us apply what God applies to whom God applies His message. To go beyond that is presumptuous and will end in great harm.

Heb. 7:11-14

For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.

Jesus is the high priest of the new covenant. Since he is of the tribe of Judah, he would have been excluded from the Levitical priesthood of the old covenant. Moses said nothing of priests being from the tribe of Judah; priests were from Levi. "If he were on earth, He would not be a priest at all" (8:4); but He is in heaven and a priest after the order of Melchizedek.^{xlvi} The positive selection of Levites to be priests under the old covenant excluded

any of the other eleven tribes. One is mistaken to assume that God's silence about Judah permits men from that tribe to serve as priests. Here silence prohibits rather than permits. For Jesus to be a priest (which he could not do under the old covenant), there must be a change of law. The Hebrew writer said that no man from Judah could serve as priest. Here that which is not commanded is forbidden. This is a new covenant principle and argument based on an old covenant position. God through Moses authorized priests from the tribe of Levi; nothing was said of Judah. He did not have to say, "do not take them from Judah, Benjamin, etc." They knew from the positive statement that priests can only come from the tribe of Levi. As long as the Law stood, Christ could not serve as priest.

Silence does not qualify one to assume a role that God has authorized for others. Timothy and Titus say nothing of women serving as elders or overseers. We generally understand that the statement, "An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife" rules out women. Women cannot be husbands; and, therefore, women cannot be elders. Silence does not permit women to assume a role God has not authorized them to fill.

One of the first rules of hermeneutics is to determine to whom a passage speaks. A passage is never correctly applied if this vital step is missed. This is part of handling accurately the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). To demand an instruction be applied more broadly than the context is to speak where God has not spoken. To apply God's instructions less broadly than He does is to be silent when He has spoken. Both actions conflict with His will and lead to error.

2 John 6-11

And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have

accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

Those who love God walk “according” to His commandments and teach them accurately. They do not do less than His commandments, nor do they go beyond His commandments. Jesus said, “Whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.” Again, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” Again, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in His love.”^{xlvi} John says, “Whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected”; and “this is the love of God that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.”^{xlviii}

Where has anyone gotten the idea that strict adherence to the laws of God is unloving? Careless obedience is not more loving than careful obedience, is it? Sentimentality and sincerity in carelessness are not sufficient replacements for loving obedience. Obedience without love is insufficient to satisfy God, and love without obedience is insufficient to please God. Love without obedience is like faith without works; it is useless. Obedience without love is like works without faith; it can never please God. The idea that sentimentality somehow makes up for failure to follow the clear teachings of God, however, is false. The kind of love God wants is obedient love; no other will suffice.

Love does not excuse one from keeping the commandments of God or give one permission to presume upon the grace of God. Instead, hearts filled with gratitude and love are zealous to carefully, completely, diligently, and accurately obey God. This is the mature, complete, perfect love God desires. The selfish and immature person seeks to satisfy himself as he attempts to obey God. He is always speaking of his freedom to do as He pleases. Mature lovers of God, on the other hand, are ready for selfless

devotion and sacrifice. Lovers of God, like Jesus, walk in His commandments, not above them, below them, or around them.

The deceivers John opposed were antichrists. They denied that Jesus came in the flesh, they denied Jesus was the Christ, and they denied the Father and the Son.^{xlix} These false teachings were dangerous to Christians, and John warns and admonishes them to watch themselves that they “might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward” (2 John 8).

“Anyone,” John says, “who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ,¹ does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). False teachers speak when God has silenced Himself; they go too far--they go beyond what God says and teach error. “Goes too far,” then, describes the process of progressing beyond the authorized teaching. This progressive teaching changes the true teaching of Christ Jesus. It advances beyond the doctrine; and to the minds of those who believed it, it is an enlargement of the doctrine.

Going beyond God’s Word is speaking where He is silent; going beyond the teaching is not abiding in it. To fail to abide in the teaching of Christ is to sever oneself from God. One cannot possess God and presume to enlarge His teaching. God has taught us the truth, and we are to walk in it (2 John 4). Jesus describes His true disciples as those who abide in His word (John 8:31). Abiding in any teaching of Christ means a careful, complete, accurate, diligent and loving obedience.

Christians, moreover, are to reject false teachers. They are not to receive them into their homes or give them a greeting. There is to be no compromise with or blessing of the false teacher. To receive or to greet a false teacher is to share in his evil deeds. False teaching is evil; we need to remember that. God hates the liar. False teaching lies about God and lies about God’s Word. It leads saved people away from the truth and divides the body of Christ (1 John 2:19). It offers false hopes and ends up destroying all that believe it. False teaching is a great evil.

Revelation 22:18-19

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues

which 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 tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

Careful students of the word of God realize that this passage is a reference to the things which are written in the book of Revelation. They proclaim rather clearly, however, that adding to or subtracting from what God has said in this book will lead to condemnation. What is true of the book of Revelation, however, by application is also true of other books. Who has the right to add to any book of the New Testament? Who has the right to erase any verse from the Bible? Are we to learn nothing from this passage except we are not to add or take away from only one book of the Bible? If silence were permissive, then are we to conclude that one could freely edit any other book of the New Testament? What is explicitly taught in this book, surely applies in principle to other books that bring us the authoritative word of God.

While we do not wish to "place restrictions" on what may occur in the assembly or on the ways one may serve and worship the heavenly Master, we must wonder if a valuable principle is not being taught here. We might point out that the words of this prophecy were read and heard in the assemblies of the seven churches (Rev. 1:3). Churches had "readers" in their assemblies that read aloud so everyone else could hear. The earliest manuscripts were uncials, written in large capitol letters so that they might be easily read in the assembly. May Christians add to the worship of the church or diminish from the teachings in general? We do not see how this kind of infraction is any less serious than that mentioned in Rev. 22:18-19. Where have men ever had the right to second-guess God? Where have men ever had the right to overrule God? Where have men ever been able to one-up God in what they do?

One of the great problems in dealing with this issue is that "permissives" look at such a passage and attempt to atomize it to the point they miss the principle within. All Scripture is sacred; and no one has a right to edit, add, subtract or change what God says. The thought that God has misspoken or failed to say all that

needed saying is offensively presumptuous and blasphemous. God is God! We ought to listen to Him and learn rather than sit in judgment of Him. Permissive silence is an affront to the one true and living God; it permits men to become their own gods, to pursue their own desires, and to design their own religions. True disciples abide in the words of Jesus (John 8:31-32), and by doing so they find real freedom.

Perhaps the divisiveness among the groups known as the American Restoration Movement is not from a regulative principle, but from the advancing beyond the clear teachings of Christ. To innovate is to start a practice that is beyond the stated will of Jesus Christ. It is this “going beyond” as in using instrumental music, which has created the division among us. Had some not gone beyond the teaching, perhaps no division would exist today.

Some have criticized any call to return to the biblical pattern of vocal praise alone. They claim that the principle of prohibitive silence created the division, but this is far from the truth of the matter. The principle of loving, careful, accurate, diligent and complete obedience does not divide. Those who call everyone back to vocal praise only would not have spoken had others not gone beyond the practice of the New Testament. To call others back to the New Testament pattern is not dividing but restoring.

To hear and do the will of God in the teachings of Christ is to build on solid rock as a wise man (Matt. 7:24,25). But to hear and fail to do that will is to build upon unsafe ground as a fool (Matt. 7:26,27). If God had not spoken, we could not know His will; but now that He has spoken, we must hear and act accordingly.

Rather than speculate on what God might permit in those areas where He has remained silent, let us act on what He has spoken. Rather than allow our assumptions and presuppositions to go unchecked, let us ask anew, “What has the Lord spoken?” Rather than excuse ourselves by appealing to what God has not said, let us zealously and single-mindedly do what we know is safe and right. Let us all take off our blinders and clearly see the pure and true gospel in the teaching of Christ. Let us commit ourselves

never to vary to the right or to the left from His teaching. Let us once again be fully convinced that Christ's all-sufficient teaching needs no man-made improvements. And let us love our God with a complete, careful, diligent and accurate obedience.

¹ 1 Thess. 5:21,22

² 1 Thess. 5:19,20.

³ Deut. 4:2; 12:32.

⁴ TDNT 1:383.

⁵ Raymond C. Kelcy, *The Letters of Peter and Jude* in The Living Word Commentary Series, ed. Everett Ferguson (Austin, Tex.: R. B. Sweet Co., Inc., 1972), XVII:172. Cf. Acts 6:7; 13:8; Eph. 4:5; 1 Tim. 4:1.

⁶ James D. Bales, *The Finality of the Faith* (Shreveport, La.: Lambert Book House, 1972), p.34.

⁷ Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 253.

⁸ Eph. 1:7; 1 John 1:7-9; Rev. 1:5

⁹ See Isa. 24:18; Jer. 48:44; Psa. 7:16; Prov. 26:27.

¹⁰ Jack P. Lewis, *The Gospel According to Matthew* in the Living Word Series (Austin, Tex.: R. B. Sweet Co., Inc., 1972), 2:2:26.

¹¹ Gen. 6:2; Job 1:6; 2:1

¹² Eph. 5:23-6:9; Col. 3:18-4:1

¹³ Heb. 7:11; 8:1

¹⁴ Mark 3 :35; John 14:15; 15:10

¹⁵ 1 John 2:5; 5:3

¹⁶ 1 John 4:2; 2:22

¹⁷ Brethren have discussed whether “the teaching of Christ” refers to what Christ teaches (subjective genitive) or to the teaching about Christ (objective genitive). Some have argued that if this is an objective genitive, i.e., the teaching about Christ (that He is the Christ, the Son of God, who came in the flesh), then abiding “in the teaching” in this passage refers *only to the specific doctrine about the person of Christ*. If this were a subjective genitive, however, it would apply to any teaching of Christ. One can make good cases for both the subjective and the objective genitive in 2 John 9. In either case, however, *one must abide in the teaching of Christ* to have a relationship with both the Father and the Son. This is true with regard to this particular teaching on the person of Christ, and it is equally true with the gospel (Gal. 1:6-9) and the teaching of Christ in general (John 8:31; 1 John 2:24; 3:24). It is impossible to believe that one could advance beyond the teaching of Christ in any number of vital doctrines and still please God. *It is the advancing beyond the revealed will that excludes one from possessing God. Advancing beyond the teachings of Christ is sinful and creates heresy.* The failure to abide in the teaching or to keep the commandment makes one as guilty as a deceiver. The presumptuous belief that God’s Word needs editing or enlarging on any subject has led men to speak when God is silent. This presumption is great error and will always lead to heresy.

Hugo McCord pointed out that "it makes more sense to speak of going onward or transgressing the doctrine which came from Christ than to speak of going onward or transgressing the deity of Christ. If exclusive reference to the deity of Jesus were intended in 2 John 9, it appears the word *deny* (cf. 1 John

2:22) would be more fitting than the words *go onward or transgress*. Further, the word *abide* in 2 John 9 may be used of the words of Christ (John 15:7) just as easily as the deity of Christ. In addition, items non-separable from the doctrine of Christ in 2 John 9 in John's thinking are the following: walking in the truth (vs. 1-4), walking in the commandments (vs. 4-6), loving (vs. 5), and working (vs.8). It would be difficult to understand that John meant one could fellowship a person who, though not walking in the truth, not walking in the commandments, not loving, and not working, nevertheless held to the deity of Christ."

SILENCE AND THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH I

THE FATHERS AND MIDDLE AGES

The concept that men do not have freedom to add to God's laws or use man-made practices did not begin with the Restoration movement in America. Thomas Campbell proclaimed, 'Where the Scriptures speak, we speak, and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.' This proclamation only echoed the belief in the all-sufficient Scriptures held for centuries.

Prohibitive silence is implied by the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures. The faith that was once for all delivered to the saints is not in need of additions, deletions or changes. It does not need improvement, for the New Testament contains the "perfect law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25). It is clear that to "go beyond" the things that are written and to teach another gospel or doctrine is sin (I Cor. 4:6; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 John 9). Our task is to "abide in" the words of Christ if we are to truly be His disciples (John 8:31). To add to His word, to change it, to subtract from it, or to vary from it is to deny that God's word really is sufficient.

Paul argues that the Scriptures are able to make the man of God complete, being completely furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Peter states that God has granted to us "everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him 'ho called us by His own glory and excellence (2 Pet. 1:3). Jesus promised the apostles that they would be guided into all truth by the Holy Spirit (John 10:12,13). Such passages remind us that there is no need for additional revelation, and we use them to argue against those who claim miraculous knowledge today. But if we are persuaded that there can be no modern miraculous additions, how much more we should oppose any man-made laws and practices.

The history of the Reformation movement bears its opposition to the inventions and innovations of the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformers broke away from Roman church to go back to the source of truth found in the Scriptures and them alone. But even before the Reformers. History records those who

recognized that a body of doctrine was given as a rule of faith and practice. Throughout the history of the church there were men who stood against any attempt to corrupt the pure doctrine delivered by the apostles. In this chapter we will take a glimpse at the beliefs about the Bible which demonstrate that men have understood not only the all-sufficiency of the once for all time faith but also that human inventions are disapproved by God and should be forbidden. It is not suggested here that the Fathers had as full an understanding of the canon or the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures as men do today. We acknowledge that oral tradition and apostolic succession were used in determining orthodoxy. But at the same time these quotations will show that the early church believed in a complete and incorrupt revelation.

CHURCH FATHERS

The Didache or Teaching of the Apostles (2nd Century A.D.)

“Thou shalt hate all hypocrisy, and everything that is not pleasing to the Lord. Thou shalt never forsake the commandments of the Lord; but shalt keep those things which thou hast received, neither adding to them nor taking away from them.” (4:12,13)

“Whosoever therefore shall come and teach you all these things that have been said before receive him; but if the teacher himself be perverted and teach a different doctrine to the destruction thereof, hear him not.” (11:1,2) ¹

The Epistle of Barnabas (between 70 and 132 A.D.)

“Thou shalt keep those things which thou hast received, neither adding to them nor taking away from them.” (19:11)

“It is good therefore to learn the ordinances of the Lord, as many as have been written above, and to walk in them.” (21:1) ²

Tertullian (ca. 150-212 A.D.)

Tertullian demands Scripture proof for every doctrine, and declares that heretics “cannot stand on pure Scriptural ground.”

“In the Lord’s apostles we possess our authority; for even they did not of themselves choose to introduce anything, but faithfully delivered to the nations the doctrine (*disciplinam*) which they had received from Christ.”³

In his book against *Hermogenes*, 22, Tertullian argued, “In the beginning,” then, “God made the heaven and the earth.” I revere the fullness of His Scripture, in which He manifests to me both the Creator and the creation. In the gospel, moreover, I discover a Minister and Witness of the Creator, even His Word. But whether all things were made out of any underlying Matter, I have as yet failed anywhere to find. Where such a statement is written, Hermogenes’ shop must tell us. If it is nowhere written, then let it fear the woe which impends on all who add to or take away from the written word.” On another occasion Tertullian said, “But the thing which is not forbidden is freely permitted. I should rather say that what has not been freely allowed is forbidden.”⁴

Tertullian in his *Prescription Against Heretics*, 33-35, makes it clear that any doctrine not as old as the apostles is thereby condemned by the “silence of Holy Scripture.” He says of heresies that arise later than the apostles: “Even if they were free from any participation in condemned doctrine, they would stand already judged on the mere ground of time, being all the more spurious because they were not even named by the apostles.”

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-220 A.D.)

In chapter 9 of his *Exhortation to the Greeks*, Clement says, “Now when godliness sets out to make man as far as possible resemble God, it claims God as a suitable teacher; for He alone has the power worthily to conform man to His own likeness. This teaching the apostle recognizes as truly divine, when he says, ‘And thou, Timothy, from a babe hast known the sacred letters, which have power to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ.’ For the letters which make us sacred and divine are indeed themselves sacred, and the writings composed from the sacred letters and syllables, namely, the collected Scriptures, are consequently called by the same apostle ‘inspired of God, being profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction

which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.”⁵

In his *Stromata*, Clement said, “But those who are ready to toil in the most excellent pursuits, will not desist from the search after truth, till they get the demonstration from the Scriptures themselves.”⁶ Everett Ferguson, discussing Clement’s *Stromata* and the rule of faith notes:

The faithful are those “taught by God, through the instruction of the Son, in writings that are indeed sacred” (*Stromata* 1.20.98.4). So faith is that which is taught by God, through Christ, in a written revelation, and it is a belief in that which is taught. Faith is also that which can be concluded by syllogistic reasoning from the revealed texts and teachings, and further, it is belief in those conclusions (*Stromata* 2.2.8.4; 8.3.7.6). For Clement, then, theological conclusions, if they begin from revealed premises and are logically appropriate, are to be accepted on faith as articles of faith. With Clement, we take long steps toward the understanding that faith is intellectual assent to theological propositions. (“Faith,” *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 339).

Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (177 A.D.)

Irenaeus laid it down as a fundamental principle that all Christian teaching must be in harmony with the teaching of Christ and His apostles and is to be had from them alone.

“For we have learned the plan of salvation from no others than through whom the gospel has reached us, which at that time they proclaimed in public, and afterwards by the will of God handed down to us in writings to be the foundation and pillar of our faith. For it is wrong to say that they preached before they had perfect knowledge, as some dare to assert, priding themselves on improving upon the Apostles.”⁷

The establishment of Irenaeus’ principles meant the permanent loss of primitive trust in present-day revelation. It was

believed that while the Apostles still lived, there had been direct communications from God; but after they passed from the scene there were no more. They now relied on a “revelation given once for all and never to be added to or altered.”⁸

Everett Ferguson notes that Irenaeus in opposing false teaching always pointed to the facts of the preaching as it had come down to them. Irenaeus calls his summaries of Christian teaching the “canon of truth” or “rule of faith.” Some supposed these terms referred to creeds, and others supposed they referred to a body of tradition that came down from the apostles alongside the Scriptures. Ferguson says, “It now seems clear that, for Irenaeus in particular, the ‘canon of truth’ is the truth itself, the main content of the Scriptures.”

Hippolytus (ca. 160-235 A.D.)

In his *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, Hippolytus said, “These things, then, I have set shortly’ before thee, O Theophilus, drawing them from Scripture itself, in order that, maintaining in faith what is written, and anticipating the things that are to be, thou mayest keep thyself void of offence both toward God and toward men...”⁹

In his book *Against the Heresy of One Noetus*, Hippolytus said,

“There is, brethren, one God, the knowledge of whom we gain from the Holy Scriptures, and from no other source. For just as man, if he wishes to be skilled in the wisdom of this world, will find himself unable to get at it in any other way than by mastering the dogmas of the philosophers, so all of us who wish to practice piety will be unable to learn its practice from any other quarter than the oracles of God. Whatever things, then, the Holy Scriptures declare, at these let us look; and whatsoever things they teach, these let us learn; and as the Father wills our belief to be, let us believe; and as He wills the Son to be glorified, let us glorify Him; and as He wills the Holy Spirit to be bestowed, let us receive Him. Not according to our own will, nor according to our own mind, nor yet as using

violently those things which are given by God, but even as He has chosen to teach them by the Holy' Scriptures, so let us discern them.”¹⁰

Athanasius (ca. 296-373 A.D.)

“They (the Scriptures) were spoken and written by God, through men who spoke of God. . . . These (the Old and New Testaments) are the fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to these, neither let him take aught from these.”¹¹ While Athanasius, the father of orthodoxy, always based his conclusions on Scripture, he also appealed to the authority of tradition. But his appeals to tradition were only “in proof that he rightly understands and expounds the sacred books. The catholic faith, says he, is that which the Lord gave, the apostles preached, and the fathers preserved; upon this the church is founded, and he who departs from the faith can no longer be called a Christian.”

In his work “On the Incarnation of Christ,” Athanasius said,

“If ye are disciples of the gospel, speak not unrighteously against God; but walk in the things that are written. But if you will speak any thing besides that which is written, why do you contend against us, who are determined neither to hear nor to speak any thing but that which is written? The Lord himself says, If ye continue in my word, ye are truly free.”¹²

Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem (315-386 A.D.)

“It behooveth us not to deliver the very least thing of the holy mysteries of the faith without the Holy Scriptures; that is the sincerity of our faith, not that which is from our own inventions, but from demonstrations of the Holy Scriptures.”¹³

Basil, a Greek father, (ca. 326-79 A.D.)

“The hearers that are instructed in the Scriptures must examine the doctrines of their teachers; they must receive those things which are agreeable to Scripture, and reject what are contrary to it.”¹⁴

Again, “We ought carefully to examine whether the doctrine offered us is conformable to the Scriptures.” “Nothing must be added to the inspired words of God; all that is outside Scripture is not of faith but is sin.”¹⁵

John Chrysostom (ca. 350-407 A.D.).

In his third homily on Philippians 3, he said, “Seest thou, that he wills that his precepts should be a rule to us? And a rule admits neither addition, nor subtraction, since that destroys its being a rule.”

In his third homily on Lazarus, he said, “The knowledge of the Bible is a powerful defense against sin: while an ignorance of them is a deep precipice, a profound gulf! It is a great betraying of salvation to know nothing of the Divine Law, it is this ignorance which has given birth to heresies!”¹⁶

Jerome (ca. 345-420 A.D.)

“The Church of Christ, who has churches in the whole world, is united by the unity of the Spirit; and has the cities of the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel, and the Apostles; she has not gone forth from her boundaries, etc., that is, from the Holy Scriptures.”

In his commentary on Haggai 1, he said, “But the word of God smiteth the other things, which they spontaneously discover, and feign as it were, by an apostolical authority, without the authority and testimony of the Scripture.”

“The Chiefs of the Church, and the Chiefs of Christ did not write to a few, but to the whole people. And see what he says of the Princes, that is, of the Apostles and the Evangelists who were in her. He says who were, not are, so that, with the exception of the Apostles, whatever should afterwards he said, should be cut off, and should henceforth have no authority.”¹⁷

Vicentius of Lerinum (ca. 450 A.D.)

This little known monk formed an epoch which has remained the standard in the Roman church: We must hold “what has been everywhere, always, and by all believed.” Concerning him, Philip Schaff notes that while he is thoroughly Catholic in spirit and tendency, he had little toleration for new dogmas.

“He wished to make tradition not an independent source of knowledge and rule of faith by the side of the Holy Scriptures, but only to have it acknowledged as the true interpreter of Scripture, and as a bar to heretical abuse. The criterion of the antiquity of a doctrine, which he required, involves apostolicity, hence agreement with the spirit and the substance of the New Testament. The church says he, as the solicitous guardian of that which is intrusted to her, changes, diminishes, increases nothing. Her sole effort is to shape, or confirm, or preserve the old. Innovation is the business of heretics, not of orthodox believers. The canon of Scripture is complete in itself, and more than sufficient.”¹⁸

THE MIDDLE AGES

John of Damascus (ca. 730-760 A.D.)

“All that was ever delivered by the law, the prophets, the apostles, and the evangelists, we receive, acknowledge, and give reverence unto, searching nothing besides them.”¹⁸

Peter of Bruis or Bruys (1104-25 A.D.)

“It is certain that he rejected the authority of the church and of the great teachers, to whom it was customary to appeal, and would recognize nothing as obligatory on faith but what could be proved from the Bible.”¹⁹ Peter of Bruys among other things

attacked infant baptism, prayers for the dead, the veneration of crosses, ecclesiastical ceremonies, the structure of the Catholic church and the Pope, and various sacraments as worthless.

Henry of Lausanne (12th Century A.D.)

Henry of Lausanne attacked various customs, which could not be directly proved from the Sacred Scriptures, as corruptions of primitive Christianity; such, for example, as the worship of saints and infant baptism.²⁰

Peter Waldo (Ca. 1175-1218 A.D.)

The Waldenses went on the principle that the Sacred Scriptures, independent of every other authority explained from themselves, are to be recognized as the only source of the knowledge of the Christian faith, and that whatever could not be derived from them ought to be rejected. Waldo and the Waldenses therefore fought the doctrines of the special priesthood, the doctrine of seven sacraments, of the sacrifice of mass, of transubstantiation, of the worship of saints, of purgatory, and of indulgences.²¹

“By 1260, the Waldenses of Lombardy and Germany at least had come not only to reject the Roman Church with its statutes and observances, but to deny as unwarranted by Scripture the Ave Maria and the Apostles Creed, the doctrines of transubstantiation, purgatory, prayers for the dead or to saints, and indulgences, while rejecting also fasting in Lent and the observance of other sacred days than Sunday and those commemorative of the life of the Lord.”²²

In 1320 Bernard Gui, a famous inquisitor of southern France, noted that the Waldensians “denied purgatory, for which they could find no basis in the New Testament.”²³

William of Occam (ca. 1280-1350)

“A Christian is not bound to believe, as necessary to salvation, anything which is neither contained in the Bible nor may

he plainly and of necessity inferred from what is contained there.”²⁴ Occam further noted that “Popes and councils may err, but the written word is sure.”

“In the second book (*Dialogue Between Scholar and Teacher*) the proofs are arrayed in defense of the position that no doctrine incapable of being proved from holy Scripture was to be acknowledged as catholic and necessary to salvation; neither the church nor the pope could make new articles of faith.”²⁵

John Wycliffe (ca. 1329-84 A.D.)

“In his *De Ecclesia, De Veritate Sacred Scripturae* and *De Potestate Papae* (1377-78) Wycliffe maintained that the Bible, as the eternal ‘exemplar’ of the Christian religion, was the sole criterion of doctrine, to which no ecclesiastical authority might lawfully add, and that the authority of the Pope was ill-founded in Scripture. In *De Apostasia* (Ca. 1382) he denied, in violent terms, that the religious life of his times had any foundation in Scripture, and appealed to the government to reform the whole order of the Church of England. The friars in particular were the object of his denunciation.”²⁶

In 1380 Wycliffe defended his translation of the English by saying, “All laws and doctrines of the prelates were to be received only so far as they were founded on the Sacred Scriptures.”²⁷ “The aim of the Wycliffe translators was undoubtedly’ to set up a new and all-sufficient authority’ in opposition to the Church. By now’ the Church sanctioned much that was unbiblical and did not satisfy’ Wycliffe’s criterion for ecclesiastical institutions: that they should conform to the practice of Christ and his followers as recorded in the Scriptures.”²⁸

Wycliffe in 1381 “startled England with the declaration that the doctrine of transubstantiation was an error to be condemned. He now denied the infallibility of the Roman Church in matters of faith, rejected the necessity of auricular confession, criticized the doctrines of purgatory, pilgrimages, worship of saints and veneration of relics as unscriptural, and maintained that the Bible reveals no other officers than priests and deacons as necessary for the Church.”²⁹

Jan Hus, or John Huss (1369-1415 A.D.)

“Hus regarded the Scriptures as an infallible authority and the supreme standard of conduct.” Hussites recognized ‘the edicts of prelates only so far as they accorded with the Scriptures.’³⁰ Arguing against indulgences in 1411, Hus said in his *Quaestio de Indulgentiis* that “from the proclamation of the commissioners for granting indulgences, it was evident that their sole object was to extort money from the people. Not an instance was to be found in Scripture of a holy man saying to anyone, I have forgiven thy sins; I absolve thee. Nor were any to be found who had absolved from punishment or guilt for a certain number of days.”³¹

The Utraquists and the Taborites

In 1419 the Hussites were divided. They were unanimous in regarding the Scriptures as the supreme authority in doctrine and life, but they split into two parties in application of this principle. The Utraquists, who demanded free preaching of the Gospel, the cup for the laity, apostolic poverty, and strict clerical life, would forbid only those practices which they deemed prohibited by the Bible. The other group went on the principle of rejecting everything for which they could not find express warrant in the “law of God,” the Bible. Consequently, the Taborites rejected the doctrines of purgatory and worshipping saints.³² The Utraquists would forbid only those practices which they deemed prohibited by the ‘law of God,’ or the Bible. However, the “Taborites repudiated all practices for which express warrant could not be found in the ‘law of God.’”³³

John Pupper of Goch (ca. 1400-1475 A.D.)

Pupper attacked monasticism on the ground that it could not be justified from the Bible. He held that “only the Bible has irrefragable authority,” and that the Church and even the fathers of the Church are subject to error and are of value only in so far as they are in conformity with the Scriptures.”³⁴

John of Wesel (ca. 1410-1481 A.D.)

John of Wesel “held as a fundamental conviction that he should not say or write anything contrary to what is contained in the Bible.” Wesel appealed to the Scriptures and rejected the authority of tradition. He said the holy fathers and doctors were not guided in their interpretations of Scripture by the same infallible Spirit by which it was originally revealed. Wesel believed in the sufficiency and clarity of Scripture. On this basis, he challenged the Papal authority for indulgences and absolution.³⁵

“He rejected the “*Filioque*” clause of the Nicene Creed as unbiblical. This clause, “and the Son,” did not belong to the original form but was added by the Council of Toledo in 589 A.D. It suggested that the Spirit did not come from the Father alone but from both the Father and the Son, a view held only from the time of Augustine onward. He also virtually denied the Augustine doctrine of original sin on the same grounds. Canon law was binding only inasmuch as it accorded with Scripture. Fasting, clerical celibacy, indulgences, distinctions between bishops and priest were all human institutions and held no authority over the conscience of the faithful.”³⁶

John Wessel or Wessel Gansvoort (1420-1489 A.D.)

John Wessel “held that, being inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Bible is the final authority in matters of faith.” He rejected indulgences.³⁷

A Word of Caution

We must be careful not to imagine that all these men have the same mindset toward the Scriptures characterized by the restoration movement in America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In some cases they were far more concerned with ethical restoration and with overturning corrupt authorities. But what is important to this study is these men understood the hermeneutical principle that Christians are forbidden to go beyond

the Scriptures, which had their foundation in Christ and His apostles. They realized the abuses of a permissive view of the silence of Scripture. When men take authority to themselves to overrule the Scriptures or to add their own doctrines or practices, they act presumptuously and often cruelly. They understood the only sure and correct foundation for faith or practice was in what comes directly from the word of God.

For men such as Tertullan, Irenaeus and Origen, the “rule of faith” consisted of that which was first orally handed down by the apostles along with the Scriptures to an unbroken succession of bishops from Christ to their day. Apostolic succession was for them a bulwark against heresy. Philip Schaff, speaking of this tradition says:

To estimate the weight of this agument, we must remember that these fathers still stood comparatively very near the apostolic age, and that the succession of bishops in the oldest churches could be demonstrated by the living memory of two or three generations. Irenaeus, in fact, had been acquainted in his youth with Polycarp, a disciple of St. John. But for this very reason we must guard against overrating this testimony, and employing it in behalf of traditions of later origin, not grounded in the scriptures.

Nor can we suppose that those fathers ever thought of a blind and slavish subjection of private judgment to ecclesiastical authority, and to the decision of bishops of the apostolic mother churches. The same Irenaeus frankly opposed the Roman bishop Victor. Tertullian ...contested various points with the catholic church...and laid down...the genuine Protestant principle, that the thing to be regarded, especially in matters of religion, is not custom but truth.³⁸

Schaff further remarks that among these fathers that in “the substance of its doctrine this apostolic tradition agrees with the holy scriptures, and though derived, as to its form, from oral preaching of the apostles, is really, as to its contents, one and the same with those apostolic writings. In this view the apparent contradictions of the earlier fathers, in ascribing the highest

authority to both scripture and tradition in matters of faith resolve themselves.” They regarded the preached gospel and the written gospel as one and the same (2 Thess. 2:15).

On another note Alfred DeGroot, in his book *The Restoration Principle*, after surveying the Ante-Nicene Fathers suggests that none of them has taken occasion to trace out the specific ideas for which we have been searching. “Apparently they have not felt that such conceptions are of lively importance for the Christian community today. If the pattern of an ideal church organization were in the mind of the apostles and fathers, the leading students of their literary remains would be expected to notice the existence and weigh the importance of such a theme.”³⁹ DeGroot and others seem to forget the emphasis the early church placed on the Scriptures and the need to stay with their teachings. These men lived within a few generations of the apostles, who constantly emphasized the need stay with the divine traditions. Paul said to the Corinthians, “Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you” (1 Cor. 11:2). To the Thessalonians he said, “brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us” (2 Thess. 2:14). Again, “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us” (3:6). These traditions were divinely inspired and binding on the church; the early church fathers were well acquainted with them. As has been shown, the early fathers knew the need to stay with what they had been taught.

¹ J.B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1989).

² Lightfoot, *Fathers*.

³ Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heresies* 6, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3 (n.p., n.d.; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975), p.246. Hereafter cited as ANF. In chapters 22-25 of Tertullian's *Prescription*, he makes a case for the apostles that "there was nothing of which they were ignorant, to whom He had promised the future attainment of all truth by the help of the Spirit of truth. And assuredly he fulfilled His promise since it is proved in the Acts of the Apostles that the Holy Spirit did come down" (253). Cf. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1910, reprint 1959), 2:520.

⁴ Tertullian, *Against Hermogenes*, 22, ANF 3:490. Also ANF 3:94. In speaking of Lamech's two wives being an unscriptural arrangement, Tertullian wrote: "What scripture does not note, it denies." ANF 6, quoted in James D. Bales, *The Church in Transition to What?* (Searcy, Ark.: Bales, 1992), 59-61. In his *Prescription Against Heretics*, Tertullian further argues, "Now this heresy of yours does not receive certain Scriptures; and whichever of them it does receive, it perverts by means of additions and diminutions, for the accomplishment of its own purpose; and such as it does receive, it receives not in their entirety; but even when it does receive any up to a certain point as entire, it nevertheless perverts even these by the contrivance of diverse interpretations. Truth is just as much opposed by an adulteration of its meaning as it is by a corruption of its text" (Chapter 17).

⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 9, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 193.

⁶ Clement, *Stromata* VII:16, ANF 11:550. The title given to chapter 16 is, "Scripture, the Criterion by Which Truth and Heresy is Distinguished." A. Cleveland Cox in an elucidation on the chapter notes: "The Primitive Fathers never dream of anything as dogma which cannot be proved by the Scriptures, save only that the apostolic traditions, clearly proved to be such, must be referred to in proving what is Holy Scripture. It is not possible to graft on this principle the slightest argument for any tradition not indisputably apostolic, so far as the "de fide" is concerned. "Quod semper" is the touchstone in their conceptions, of all orthodoxy. No matter who may teach this or that, now or in any post-apostolic age, their test is Holy Scripture, and the inquiry, "Was it always so taught and understood?" (ANF 11:557)

⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3: pref.:1. ANF, vol. 1. Cf. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 153, 154.

⁸ McGiffert, *History*, p. 164. Irenaeus believed that if it was not apostolic, it was not true. For him what was apostolic belonged to the first two generations of the church, and this was alone Christian (p. 163). As successors of apostolicity, however, Irenaeus appealed to the living voice of the bishops who presided over churches founded by apostles and to the apostolic creed. (160, 161). Eusebius

quotes Papias as accepting oral tradition over written word. Eusebius Pamphilus, *Ecclesiastical History* 3:39, trans. Christian Frederick Cruse (n.p., 1850; reprint Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1974). In spite of this, it is clear that the early church fathers sought to go to the foundations. See also Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak* (Austin, Texas: Sweet Publishing, 1971), 28. Valdemar Ammundsen, "The Rule of Truth in Irenaeus," *Journal of Theological Studies* XIII (1912), 574-80.

⁹ Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and the Antichrist* 67, ANF V:219.

¹⁰ Hippolytus, *Against the Heresy of One Noetus* 9, ANF V:227. In a footnote on this passage, A. Cleveland Coxe says, "This emphatic testimony of our author to the sufficiency of the Scriptures is entirely in keeping with the entire system of the Ante-Nicene Fathers."

¹² Quoted by Alexander Campbell in "Unanimous Consent of the Fathers," *Millennial Harbinger*, 1st ser., 1 (Jan., 1837):19-22; reprint, Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1976), VIII:19-22. Campbell says, "If there be any consent at all among the Fathers, it is in recommending upon all, and to all, the necessity, utility, and importance of reading the Sacred Scriptures, as the true and only source of faith and morals" (p. 20). See Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1957 reprint of 5th ed. of 1910), 3:606,607.

¹³ Cyril, PNF, ser. 2, 7:32.

¹⁴ Basil, *Moralium Regula* 72. Quoted by Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger* 8:20.

¹⁵ Basil, *Moralium Regula* 28, 80 as summarized by Blomfield Jackson, PNF, ser. 2, 8:lii.

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, PNF, ser. 1, 13:240 and 14:236-240.

¹⁷ Campbell, "Unanimous Consent of the Fathers," 21.

¹⁸ Vincentius of Lerinum, Cap. 2. Cf. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3:613-615.

¹⁸ John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa* 1. Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967) quoting Lecture 71 G and I sent. Prol. q. 1, a 1, note 3d.

²⁰ Neander, 8:346. Latourette, 1:450.

²¹ Latourette, 1:452. Neander, 8:364. Note also J. C. Stockbridge, "Waldenses," in *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, John McClintock and James Strong eds., ten volumes (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1881), 10:855. Stockbridge lists the things the Waldenses opposed in Rome. Peter Waldo translated the four gospels into French, the first translation of the Bible in a modern language. He held the Holy Scripture to be the source of faith and religion, without regard to the authority of the fathers or to tradition.

²² Williston Walker, *Ten Epochs of Church History*, ed. John Fulton, 9 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1900), 9:49.

²³ Tim Dowley ed., *Eerdmans Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977), 316.

²⁴ Reinhold Seeburg, "William of Occam," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Grand

Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1951), 8:218. See also Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1970), 252.

²⁵ Neander, 9:58. Some scholars deny that this book was written by Occam and attribute it to a contemporary. Even if Occam did not write the book, this example shows the supremacy of Scripture for doctrine.

²⁶ F. L. Cross ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed., (New York: Oxford, 1974), 1503.

²⁷ Neander, 9:217.

²⁸ Henry Hargreaves, “The Wycliffite Versions,” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe, 3 vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), 11:392; see also p. 208. Wycliffe believed the Scriptures “are the only law of the church.” Walker, *History*, 269.

²⁹ Walker, *Epochs*, 9:41.

³⁰ Latourette, 1:666,667.

³¹ Neander, 9:411.

³² Latourette, 1:669.

³³ Walker, *History*, 273. The Taborites were “fundamentalists in the tradition of John Wycliffe and wished to confine doctrine to what was explicitly stated in the Bible.” Rudolf Heinze, “Taborites,” in *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1974), 951. Hereafter cited as NIDCC.

³⁴ Latourette, 1:670.

³⁵ *Ibid.* See also “Wesel,” in McClintock and Strong, 10:906.

³⁶ David C. Steinmetz, “John of Wesel,” in NIDCC, 544. Cf. Richard A. Mueller, “filioque,” *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1985), 118.

³⁷ Latourette, 1:670.

³⁸ Schaff, *History*, 2:526-528.

³⁹ Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Restoration Principle* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1960), 79.

SILENCE AND THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH II

THE REFORMATION

In the early sixteenth century, men grew weary of the excesses and abuses of Roman Catholicism. They refused to endure any longer the edicts of councils and Popes, considering them human in origin. Reformers had seen Roman religion introduce numerous beliefs and practices into Christianity, things not found in the teaching of Scripture. They objected to purgatory, to infant baptism, to sprinkling for baptism, to instruments of music, to a special class of priests, to the Pope, and to the binding of Christmas and Easter. The Reformers regarded God's voice to be in Scripture not in a corrupt church leadership.

The slogan of the Reformation, "*sola Scriptura*" Scripture only, proclaimed the Bible should function as the only authority for the individual and the church. The Reformers believed that to hear or read the Scripture is nothing else than to hear God. Unlike those of former times, the Reformers did not assume papal and conciliar doctrines were in harmony with the Bible's teachings and practices. They believed Scripture, "as the only Word of God in this world, is the only guide for conscience and the church, the only source of true knowledge and grace, and the only qualified judge of the church's testimony and teaching, past and present."^{li}

This view was built upon several principles: that God's people need instruction from God; that God teaches us by the Spirit through the Scriptures; that the Scriptures are a rule or measuring rod for our faith and life; that the Scriptures were meant to be understood; that Scripture teaching is sufficient for our guidance in all matters of faith and life; that there is no need or possibility of supplementing the Bible with additional revelation; and that to differ from the Bible is to differ from God, and so to be wretchedly wrong.^{lii}

Rene Pache observed, 'The unconditional return to the sovereign authority of Scripture was the great objective of the Reformers. Their motto is also ours: Scripture alone and the whole of Scripture. This rediscovery set believers free from all the

usurpation, superstition and impoverishment of the earlier centuries. Jesus promised exactly this to all who would accept His clear message: ‘If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free’ (John 8:31-32).^{»liii}

Bernard Ramm further noticed, “What is not a matter of revelation cannot be made a matter of creed or faith. It is the heritage of the Reformation that only what is taught in Scripture is directly binding to conscience. We can loose and bind only as we are in accord with Sacred Scripture.”^{»liv}

Commenting on the Reformation, Roland H. Bainton said, “The principle of *sola scriptura* had thus come to be affirmed. Nothing as to the faith can be asserted which contradicts or goes beyond Scripture.”^{»lv} Martin Luther proclaimed at the Diet of Worms in 1521, “Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God.”^{»lvi}

Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531 A.D.)

Zwingli in his book *Apologeticus Archeteles* (1522) confessed his utter trust in the Bible. “Zwingli’s reform principle was to test the biblical foundation of traditional ceremonies, practices, and teachings and ask whether they promoted the central message of the New Testament. What to Zwingli’s mind obscured this message ceased to be a matter of obedience. Such a test quickly raised questions about a host of traditional teachings and practices; fasting, the veneration of saints, belief in purgatory, the payment of tithes, and the use of images, vestments, and music in churches.”^{»lvii}

Zwingli said, “We shall try everything by the touchstone of the Gospel and by the fire of Paul. And when we find things in harmony with the Gospel, we shall keep them, when we find things not thus in harmony, we shall throw them out.”^{»lviii}

As Zwingli applied this principle, he stripped the Zurich cathedral of its ornate statues and images and destroyed its organs and altar equipment. The Roman mass was reduced to a simple

memorial meal. Zwingli believed that everything not based upon Scriptural precedent ought to be thrown out, for “everything that is added to the true institutions of Christ is an abuse.” In 1524 Zwingli separated from the Anabaptists by going back on his own principle. Zwingli tried to show that, although the Scripture nowhere commands infant baptism, it could be inferred from several passages. “In the process, he violated his earlier adamant concern to do nothing but what the New Testament explicitly authorized.”^{lix}

Conrad Grebel (ca. 1498-1526 AD)

Conrad Grebel was a convert of Zwingli in Zurich and began a movement called the Swiss Brethren. He said,

“Whatever we are not taught by clear passages or examples (in Scripture) must be regarded as forbidden, just as if it were written: ‘This do not; sing not.’ . . . We must not follow our notions; we must add nothing to the word and take nothing from it. . . . It (the Mass) must be uprooted by the word and command of Christ. For it is not planted by God.”^{lxx}

John Calvin (1509-1564 A.D.)

Calvin believed: “Let this then be a sure axiom--that nothing ought to be admitted in the Church as the Word of God, save that which is contained, first in the Law and the Prophets, and secondly in the writings of the Apostles; and that there is no other method of teaching in the Church than according to the prescription and rule of his Word.” Calvin carried this principle of the sole authority of Scripture further than Luther, by requiring that all ecclesiastical regulations and ordinances must have a positive basis and precept in the Bible. “I approve of those human institutions only which are founded upon the authority of God and derived from Scripture, and therefore are certainly divine.”^{lxxi}

Calvin said in “Reply to Sadoletto” (1540): “I have also no difficulty in conceding to you that there is nothing more perilous to our salvation than a preposterous and perverse worship of God. The primary rudiments by which we are wont to train to piety

those whom we wish to gain as disciples to Christ are these; viz., not to frame any new worship of God for themselves at random, and after their own pleasure, but to know that the only legitimate worship is that which He Himself approved from the beginning. For we maintain what the sacred oracle declared, that obedience is more excellent than any sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22). In short, we train them by every means to be contented with the one rule of worship which they have received from His mouth, and bid adieu to all fictitious worship.^{»lxii}

Again, “I will not press you so closely as to call you back to that form which the apostles instituted (though in it we have the only model of a true church, and whosoever deviates from it in the smallest degree is in error).^{»lxiii}

In 1559 Calvin wrote *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in which he said, “Therefore, to hold to a proper limit in this regard also, we shall have to turn back to the word of the Lord, in which we have a sure rule for the understanding. For Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which, as nothing is omitted that is both necessary and useful to know, so nothing is taught but what is expedient to know....

“Let us, I say, permit the Christian man to open his mind and ears to every utterance of God directed to him, provided it be with such restraint that when the Lord closes His holy lips, he shall at once close the way to inquiry. The best limit of sobriety for us will be not only to follow God’s lead always in learning but, when He sets an end to teaching, to stop trying to be wise.^{»lxiv}

Henry Bullinger (1504-1575 A.D.)

Henry Bullinger, a pupil of Zwingli, continued and carried on his work in Zurich. Bullinger said,

“The organs in the churches are not a particularly old institution, especially in these parts. Since they do not agree with the apostolic teaching, the organs in the Great Minster were broken up on the 9th of December in this year 1527. For from this time forth neither singing nor organs in the Church was wanted.” He later added: “The church should hold tightly to no other form than

that transferred and established by the Lord and the Apostles and should remain unchanged.”^{lxv}

Henry VIII (1534 A.D.)

“He abolished the conferring of the papal pall, arguing that it was not given in the England of pre-Norman days, and had no precedent in the early church. As H. O. Wakeman says, ‘The appeal was no longer to be solely to the historical precedents of the English Church but to primitive antiquity itself.’ In 1534 Parliament passed a resolution denying the primacy of the pope, and asserting that Scripture contains no evidence of such a prerogative”^{lxvi}

Dirk Phillips (16th Century)

Phillips, a friend of Menno Simons (1496-1561), in his book *Vindication* said, “From these words it is evident that whatever God has not commanded and has not instituted by express command of Scripture, He does not want to be observed nor does He want to be served therewith, nor will He have His Word set aside nor made to suit the pleasures of men.”^{lxvii}

William Chillingworth (1602-44 A.D.)

Chillingworth wrote *The Religion of Protestants a Safe Way to Salvation: or an Answer to a Book Entitled Mercy and Truth* (written by Jesuit Matthias Wilson). In it he said, “The Bible, I say, the Bible only is the religion of the Protestants.”^{lxviii}

Edward Stillingfleet (1635-99 A.D.)

Edward Stillingfleet, an Anglican who desired unity and lived in the days of a religiously divided England, observed that neither the episcopal nor the presbyterian form of church government rested upon divine right. In 1662 Stillingfleet published his *Eirenicon*, proclaiming. “It would be strange indeed the Church should require more than Christ himself did, or make

other conditions of her communion than our Savior did of Discipleship. Without all controversie, the main inlet of all the distraction, confusions and divisions of the Christian world hath been the adding of other conditions of church communion than Christ hath done.^{»lxi}

Stillingfleet wrote *The Rational Account of the Grounds of the Protestant Religion* in 1664. In 1659 he said. “For the church to require more than Christ himself did, or make the condition of her communion more than our Savior did for discipleship, is wholly unwarranted.”^{»lxx}

John Locke (1634-1702 A.D.)

In 1680 Locke wrote a “Defense of non-conformity” and argued that “the primitive church and its practices should be the criterion for a reconsideration of the establishment.” In 1669 his Letter Concerning Toleration stated, ‘But since men are so solicitous about the true church, I would only ask them here by the way, if it be not more agreeable to the Church of Christ to make the conditions of her communion consist in such things, and such things only, as the Holy Spirit has in the Holy Scriptures declared, in express words, to be necessary to salvation?’^{»lxxi}

In 1695 Locke wrote *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, in which he said: The credit and authority Our Saviour and his apostles had over the minds of men, by the miracles they did, tempted them not to mix (as we find in that of all sects of philosophers, and other religions) any conceits, any wrong rules, any thing tending to their own by-interest, or that of a party, in their morality; no tang of prepossession or fancy’ . . . It is all pure, all sincere; nothing too much, nothing wanting; but such a complete rule of life, as the wisest men must acknowledge, tends entirely to the good of mankind, and that all would be happy, if all would practice it.^{»lxxii}

What Can We Learn from History?

In nearly every century someone has made the argument that men have no right to go beyond the Scriptures for their

doctrines or for their practices. That which cannot find its place in the teachings and examples of Christ and the apostles can never be a binding for the New Testament church. Consider the long list of things that people have opposed through the centuries because they cannot find warrant for them in the word of God. One must wonder how anyone can be consistent in upholding the instrument of music in worship yet oppose many of these things. For the one foundation upon which men have rejected these doctrines and practices is their profound absence in the Scriptures. Let a man argue against purgatory, and he will speak of its absence in Scripture. Let a man argue against infant baptism, and he will speak of its absence in Scripture. Let a man speak of the binding of Christmas and Easter, and he will speak of their absence in Scripture. One must wonder how any brother in Christ can argue for the instrument of music, knowing its absence in the teaching and example of the New Testament, and yet by the same reasoning argue against purgatory.

Let the reader be reminded here that while these men and groups have acknowledged the prohibitive nature of the silence of the Scriptures, they were not always consistent in fully applying that principle to themselves. Earl West correctly observed that Campbell's proclamation, while not new in concept, was revolutionary in one phase: a few people now applied it to Protestant creeds and confessions of faith whereas, the Protestant bodies had almost exclusively applied it to Roman Catholic traditions.^{lxxiii} West noted that for the first time this motto struck with equal force against human creeds as it did against Catholic traditions.

Prohibitive silence is implied by the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures. The faith that was once for all delivered to the saints is not in need of additions, deletions or changes. God still does not need an editor. The gospel does not need improvement, for the New Testament contains the "perfect law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25). It is clear that to "go beyond" the things that are written and to teach another gospel or doctrine is sin (1 Cor. 4:6; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 John 9). Our task is to "abide in" the words of Christ if we are truly to be His disciples (John 8:31). To add to His word, to change it, to

subtract from it, or to vary from it is to deny that God's word really is sufficient.

No argument from history is conclusive; one must always seek what the Bible says. But this information does confirm the fact that men through the centuries have recognized that one must have Bible authority for one's faith and practices. They have used the silence of the Scriptures as a means of pointing out error and condemning the traditions of men. Those among us who have suggested that the doctrine of prohibitive silence was unknown are surely mistaken.^{lxxiv} Men have always understood the concept, and it dates back to the days of Noah.

¹ James I. Packer, “*Sola Scriptura* in History and Today,” in *God’s Inerrant Word*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 43,48,49.

² *Ibid.*, 49,50.

³ Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, trans. Helen I. Needham (Chicago: Moody, 1969), 324.

⁴ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, revised ed. (Boston: W. A. Wilde Company, 1956), 159.

⁵ Roland H. Bainton, “The Bible in the Reformation,” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. S. L. Greenslade, 3 vols., Cambridge: University Press, 1963), 3:4.

⁶ C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, Tex.: ACU Press, 1988), 23.

⁷ Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (London: Yale University Press, 1980), 324. See Latourette 11:748. In 1528 Zwingli defended the Theses of Berne, which said: “‘The Church of Christ makes no laws or commandments without God’s Word. Hence all human traditions, which are called ecclesiastical commandments, are binding upon us only in so far as they are based on and commanded by’ God’s Word.” *Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church*, 1514. For the theses, see Arthur C. Cochrane ed., *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), n.p.

⁸ Bainton, *Cambridge History*, 3:4,5.

⁹ C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, Tex.: Abilene Christian University Press, 1988), 27-29.

¹⁰ Conrad Grebel, “Letter to Thomas Muntzer,” in *The Protestant Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968), 124,125. See also 126,127.

¹¹ Norman Sykes, “The Religion of Protestants,” in *Cambridge History*, 3:176.

¹² John Calvin, Reply to Sadoletto.” in *The Protestant Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand, 156.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 158. See also 166,169.

¹⁴ John Calvin, “Institutes of the Christian Religion,” *Ibid.*, 182, 183. Ramm points out that Calvin insisted that the ‘illumination of the Spirit’ was the necessary spiritual preparation for the interpreter of God’s Word (*Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 58). For many Protestants today illumination means the leading of the Spirit into a sensitivity and spiritual perception of the meaning of the text. They are quick to point out, however, that no man can say he has had infallible illumination from the Holy Spirit (*Ibid.*, 14).

¹⁵ Allen and Hughes, *Roots*, 30.

¹⁶ Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Restoration Principle* (St. Louis, Mo.: Bethany Press, 1960), 116 citing H. O. Wakeman, *The History of the Church of England*, 10th ed., 217.

¹⁷Cited in James Deforest Murch, *Christians Only* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard, 1962), 15.

¹⁸ Pt. 1, chap. 6, sect. 56 quoted in West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 4 vols. (Nashville, Tenn.: Gospel Advocate Company. 1964), 1:47. See also *Cambridge History.*, 3:175.

¹⁹ Quoted in DeGroot, *The Restoration Principle*, 118.

²⁰ A. C. Watters, *History of British Churches of Christ* (Indianapolis: Butler University, 1948), 2; quoted by West, *Search*, 1:47.

²¹ Quoted in DeGroot, 118.

²² John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, ed. I. T. Ramsey (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958), 67.

²³ West, *Search*, 1:47.

²⁴ Dwaine E. Dunning noted, “The viewpoint that silence means ‘forbid’—originally appearing in Calvinistic Puritanism....” “Are subjects of Debate Important to God?” *One Body*, n.d., 35,36. Allen and Hughes argue, “The stress on ‘Scripture alone,’ the strong anti-traditionalism, the call for a return to the sources, the insistence on the right of the individual to read the Bible for him—all of these things are a legacy to us from the Reformation.” *Roots*, 32,33. There is no doubt that we can trace similarity of approach to Zwingli, Calvin and the Anabaptists among others. But one must recall the Bible examples long before the time of the Reformation. Josiah also learned of Israel’s error by simply hearing the Law. Josiah was unconcerned with Humanism but highly concerned with repentance and restoring Israel’s worship.

THE CREEDS OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Quotations from this section are taken from Volume 3 of Philip Schaff’s *The Creeds of Christendom: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds with Translations*. Roman numerals and numbers refer to articles.

The Augsburg Confession (1530 A.D.), written by Philip Melancthon and approved by Martin Luther.

XXI. But the Scripture teacheth not to invoke saints, or to ask help of saints, because it propoundeth unto us one Christ the Mediator, Propitiatory, High-Priest, and Intercessor.

XXII. But the dissension is concerning certain (traditions and) abuses, which without any certain authority have crept into the churches. (Part II: Articles in which are recounted the abuses which have been corrected.)

VI. It is no light offense in the Church to propound unto the people a certain service devised by men, without the commandment of God, and to teach that such a service (monastic vows) doth justify men.

VII. If so he that the Bishops have any power of the sword, they have it not as Bishops by the commandment of the Gospel, but by man's law given unto them of kings. Moreover, it is against the Scripture to ordain or require the observation of any traditions, to the end that we may merit remission of sins, and satisfy for sins by them. Moreover, the authors of tradition do contrary to the command of God when they find matters of sin in foods, in days, and like things, and burden the Church with the servitude of the law Whence, then have Bishops power and authority of imposing these traditions upon the churches, for the ensnaring of men's consciences, when Peter forbids (Acts 15:10) "to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples," ...?

Conclusion: "Those things only have been enumerated which it seemed necessary to say, that it might be understood that in doctrine and ceremonials among us there is nothing received contrary to Scripture or to the Catholic (Universal Christian) Church, inasmuch as it is manifest that we have diligently taken that no new and godless doctrines should creep into our churches."

Formula of Concord (1576 A.D.)

X. There has also arisen among the divines of the Augsburg Confession a controversy touching ecclesiastical ceremonies or rites, which are neither enjoined nor forbidden in the Word of God, but have been introduced into the Church merely for the sake of order and seemliness. For the better taking away of this controversy we believe, teach, and confess, with unanimous consent, that ceremonies or ecclesiastical rites (such as in the Word of God are neither commanded nor forbidden, but have only been

instituted for the sake of order and seemliness) are of themselves neither divine worship, nor even any part of divine worship. For it is written (Matt. 15:9): ‘In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (Roman Catholics made such ceremonies necessary to merit grace) . . . We repudiate and condemn the following false dogmas as repugnant to the Word of God: That human traditions and constitutions in things ecclesiastical are of themselves to be accounted as divine worship, or at least as part of divine worship.

The French Confession of Faith (1559 A.D.)

“That since God has sufficiently declared his will to us through his Prophets and Apostles, and even by the mouth of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, we owe such respect and reverence to the Word of God as shall prevent us from adding to it any thing of our own, but shall make us conform entirely to the rLiles it prescribes. And inasmuch as the Roman Church, forsaking the use and customs of the primitive Church, has introduced new commandments and a new form of worship of God, we esteem it but reasonable to prefer the commandments of God. who is himself truth, to the commandments of men, who by their nature are inclined to deceit and vanity.”

- V. We believe that the Word contained in these books has proceeded from God, and receives its authority from him alone, and not from men. And inasmuch as it is the rule of all truth, containing all that is necessary for the service of God and for our salvation, it is not lawful for men, nor even for angels to add to it, to take away from it, or to change it. Whence it follows that no authority, whether of antiquity, or custom, or numbers, or human wisdom, or judgments, or proclamations, or edicts, or decrees, or councils, or visions, or miracles, should he opposed to these Holy Scriptures. but, on the contrary, all things should he examined, regulated, and reformed according to them.

XXIV. We believe, as Jesus Christ is our only advocate, and as he commands us to ask of the Father in his name, and as it is not lawful for us to pray except in accordance with the model God hath taught us by his Word, that all imaginations of men concerning the intercession of dead saints are an abuse and a device of Satan to lead men from the right way of worship.

The Belgic Confession (1561 A.D.)

VII. We believe that these Holy Scriptures full contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein. For since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for anyone, though an Apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: nay, though it were an angel from heaven, as the Apostle Paul saith. For since it is forbidden to add unto or take away any thing from the Word of God, it doth thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects. . . . Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule, which the Apostles have taught us, saying, Try the spirits whether they are of God; likewise, If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house.

XXXII. And, therefore, we reject all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever. Therefore we admit only of that which tends to nourish and preserve concord and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God.

XXXV. Therefore we reject all mixtures and damnable inventions, which men have added unto and blended

with the Sacraments, as profanations of them, and affirm that we ought to rest satisfied with the ordinance which Christ and his Apostles have taught us, and that we must speak of them in the same manner as they have spoken.

The Scotch Confession of Faith (1560 A.D.)

XVIII. In the quhilk (which, i.e., the Old and New Testaments) we affirme, that all things necessary to be beleaved for the salvation of mankinde is sufficiently expressed. . . . When controversie then happines, for the right understanding of ony place or sentence of Scripture, or for the reformation of ony abuse within the Kirk (church) of God, we ought not sa meikle to luke (look) what men before us have said or done, as unto that quhilk the haly Ghaist uniformelie speakes within the body of the Scriptures, and unto that quhilk Christ Jesus himselfe did, and commanded to be done.”¹

The Second Scotch Confession, or The National Covenant (1580 A.D.)

“But in special, we detest and refuse the usurped authoritie of that Romane Antichrist upon the scriptures of God, upon the Kirk, the civill Magistrate, and consciences of men: All his tyranous lawes made upon indifferent things againis our Christian libertie: His erroneous doctrine againis the sufficiencie of the written word, the perfection of the law, the office of Christ, and his blessed Evangell.”

“We detest all his vain allegories, rites, signes, and traditions brought in the Kirk, without or againis the Word of God and doctrine of this trew reformed Kirk.”

The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England (1571 A.D.; American Revision, 1801 A.D.)

VI. Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

XXII. The Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping and Adoration, as well of Images as of Relics, and also Invocation of Saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.

The Irish Articles of Religion (1615 A.D.)

6. The holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation, and are able to instruct sufficiently in all points of faith that we are bound to believe, and all good duties that we are bound to practice.

75. It is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word: neither may it so expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of holy Writ, yet as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not enforce any thing to be believed upon necessity of salvation.

76. Wherefore things ordained by them (general councils) as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be shown that they be taken out of holy Scriptures.

87. Those five which by the Church of Rome are called Sacraments, to wit: Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction, are not to be accounted Sacraments of the Gospel; being such as have partly grown from corrupt imitation of the Apostles, partly are states of

life allowed in the Scriptures, but yet have not like nature of Sacraments with Baptism and the Lord's Supper, for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God, together with a promise of saving grace annexed thereto.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647 AD.)

I:6. The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men (2 Tim. 3:15-17; Gal. 1:8,9; 2 Thess. 2:2).

I:10. The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

XX:l. But the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited to his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.

The Savoy Declaration of the Congregational (1658 A.D.)

This declaration is a modification of the Westminster Confession.

XXI:2. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to his Word, or not contained in it;

so that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith and an absolute and blind obedience is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.

The Declaration of the Congregational Union of England and Wales (1833 A.D.)

Principles of Church Order and Discipline:

II. They believe that the New Testament contains, either in the form of express statute, or in the example and practice of apostles and apostolic churches, all the articles of faith necessary to be believed, and all the principles of order and discipline requisite for constituting and governing Christian societies; and that human traditions, fathers and council:, canons and creeds, possess no authority over the faith and practice of Christians.

The Baptist Confession of 1688 (The Philadelphia Confession)

7. To each of these churches thus gathered, according to his mind declared in his Word, he hath given all that power and authority which is any way needful for their carrying on that order in worship and discipline which he hath instituted for them to observe, with commands and rules for the due and right exerting and executing of that power.

Methodist Articles of Religion (1784 A.D.)

V. The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or he thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

XIV. The Romish doctrine concerning purgatory, pardon, worshiping, and adoration, as well of images is of relics, and also invocation of saints, is a fond thing,

vainly invented, and grounded upon no warrant of Scripture, but repugnant to the Word of God.

Articles of Religion of the Reformed Episcopal Church in America
(1875 A.D.)

- V. And hence it (the iloly Scriptures) containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may' he proved thereby is not to be required of any man, that it should he believed as an article of faith, or he thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

XXXI. The Romish doctrines concerning purgatory, penance, and satisfaction have no support from the Word of God, and arc, besides, contradictory of the completeness and sufficiency of the redemption in Christ Jesus . . . Praying for the dead is man's tradition, vainly invented, and is in violation of the express warnings of Almighty God to the careless and unconverted. The adoration of relics and images, and the invocation of saints, besides that they are grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, are idolatrous practices, dishonoring to God and compromising the mediatorship of Christ.

The Second Helvetic Confession (1566 A.D.)

- I. And in this Holy Scripture, the universal Church of Christ has all things fully expounded which belong to a saving faith, and also to the framing of a life acceptable to God; and in this respect it is expressly commanded of God that nothing he either put to or taken from the same (Dent. 4:2; Rev. 22:18,19).
- II. Therefore, in controversies of religion or matters of faith, we can not admit any other judge than God himself, pronouncing by the Holy Scriptures what is true, what is false, what is to be followed, or what to be avoided. . . . We do likewise reject human traditions,

which, although they be set out with goodly titles, as though they were divine and apostolical, . . . yet, being compared with the Scriptures, disagree with them; and by that disagreement bewray themselves in no wise to be apostolical.

XIV. We believe that this sincere confession (of sins), . . . is sufficient; and that it is not necessary for the obtaining of remission of sins that any man should confess his sins unto the priest, whispering them into his ears, that the priest laying his hands on his head, he might receive absolution: because we find no commandment nor example thereof in the Holy Scripture.

XVI. But as for such works and worships of God as are taken up upon our own liking, which St. Paul calls “will-worship” (Col. 2:23). they are not allowed nor liked of God. Of such the Lord says in the Gospel, “They worship me in vain, teaching for doctrine the precepts of me” (Matt.15:9). We therefore disallow all such manner of works, and we approve and urge men unto such as are according to the will and commandment of God.

XVII. We say, then, that the true unity of the Church does consist in several points of doctrine, in the true and uniform preaching of the Gospel, and in such rites as the Lord himself has expressly set down.

XVIII. And we have not taken away the ministry of the Church because we have thrust the popish priesthood out of the Church of Christ. For surely in the new covenant of Christ there is no longer any such priesthood as was in the ancient Church of the Jews: which had an external anointing, holy garments . . . For the Lord himself has not appointed in the Church any priests of the New Testament, who having received

authority from the suffragan, may offer up the host every day, that is, the very flesh and the very blood of our Saviour For the minister of the Church is commanded wholly, and in all parts of his duty, not to please himself, but to execute that only which he has received in commandment from his Lord. . . . But if the minister deal not in all things as the Lord has commanded him, but pass the limits and bounds of the faith, then the Lord does make void that which he does.

XIX. The author and institutor of all sacraments is not any man, but God alone: for man can by no means ordain sacraments; because they belong to the worship of God, and it is not for man to appoint and prescribe a service of God, but to embrace and retain that which is taught unto him by the Lord. And therefore, we cannot allow of them who attribute the consecration of the sacraments ...which are not left unto us either by the word, or by the example, of Christ or his apostles.

XX. We believe that the most perfect form of baptism is that by which Christ was baptized, and which the apostles did use. Those things, therefore, which by man's device were added afterwards and used in the Church we do not consider necessary to the perfection of baptism. Of this kind is exorcism, the use of lights, oil, spittle, and such other things; as namely, that baptism is twice every year consecrated with divers ceremonies.

XXV. As for Popish visiting with the extreme unction, we have said before that we do not like it, because it has many absurd things in it, and such as are not approved by the canonical Scriptures.

WHERE THE SCRIPTURES SPEAK

We must now ask a crucial question about the Scriptures: “What precepts, instructions or examples are binding upon men living today?” This question concerns biblical authority and hermeneutics, the science of the interpretation of the Bible.

This is not a new question for those acquainted with our heritage: it is at the very heart of Restoration theology. Serious-minded Christians have neither wanted to bind where God has loosed or to loose where God has bound. They seek to lovingly, accurately, completely, carefully, and diligently heed all that God has instructed. Where do the Scriptures speak with authority to men today? How do we know what things in Scripture are meant for us?

Paul exhorted Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Genuine religion is accurate; it is precise because God expects it to be. It is unfortunate that some who have never understood this point will cry out, “legalist!” or “Pharisee!” at any person who insists on accuracy. To be sure, accuracy without compassion is useless; and precision without justice is hypocrisy. Legalism and Pharisaism are blights to the name and the cause of Christ. They are both lawlessness; neither is lawfulness. They are not the doctrinal purity or doctrinal accuracy demanded by Paul in Scripture. (Gal. 1:6-9). Jesus practiced doctrinal purity and demanded doctrinal accuracy (John 8:31). Let us not slander the doctrinal purity and accuracy that Jesus prized.

Doctrinal accuracy is not an accident; it demands the discretion of a workman who knows his work and does not have to be ashamed. Much of the religious confusion we have in our world has come from those who do not know how to accurately handle the Bible. Many do not understand the rules of interpretation and cannot distinguish what is to be a model for following and what is not. Christians need to distinguish the things that matter (Phil. 1:9-11). This requires study, reflection, training and common sense. Those who are familiar with hermeneutics realize that some

instructions in the bible are binding upon men today and some are not. It is with this in mind that we make these suggestions in determining what precepts, instructions and accounts of action in the Bible are binding upon Christians today:

1. *We must distinguish between what the Bible records and what it approves or prescribes.*

Bernard Ramm in *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* correctly observes, "Men frequently make the mistake of assuming that whatever is written in the Bible is thereby approved."^{lxxxv} He remarks that the fact of divine inspiration does not mean that all, which is in the Bible, is the will of God. "The Bible no more morally approves of all that it records than the editor approves of all that he prints in his newspaper." What is recorded in the Bible, though it is factually correct and inspired of God, may not be a model for us to follow today. The question is what has God instructed us to do, to be or to believe.

Judas betrayed Christ; Peter denied Him three times; Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit. Surely no one will suggest that these are models for us to follow today. We ought to look at Scripture and use our common sense to see what God approves in the moral realm and in the doctrinal realm. Some Jewish Christians were teaching that Gentiles had to be circumcised (Acts 15:1-5), but anyone who investigates the context realizes that no Gentile Christian is obligated to obey those instructions. A study of the context and common sense will help a person make this distinction.

Everett Ferguson observed this difference in the *Christian Chronicle*,^{lxxxvi} where he noted the difference between what is *descriptive* and what is *prescriptive*. He regarded Paul's account of women praying and prophesying (1 Cor. 11:4-7) as descriptive, without regard to its being right or wrong. The fact that Paul records the behavior of women praying and prophesying does not mean that he approved, prescribed, or permitted it. Dale Hartman, commenting on this, likened it to 1 Cor. 15:29, where Paul describes the Corinthian practice of baptizing "for the dead." Paul was not prescribing this practice, merely calling attention to the

fact that it was taking place. The admonition in 1 Cor. 14:34-37, however, Ferguson regards as authoritative and prescriptive, telling the Corinthian women how they should behave in worship services.

2. *We must distinguish between the old covenant and the new covenant.*

In his book, *When Is an Example Binding?*, Thomas B. Warren devotes an entire chapter to the question, “Can an Account of Action in the Old Testament Be Binding upon Men Living Today?”^{lxxvii} It is obvious that the old covenant was made specifically with the Israelite nation and their posterity (Deut. 5:1-3). The law of Moses was never meant to be binding upon anyone except those who entered into that covenant. Paul said, “Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law’ . . .” (Rom. 3:19). Jeremiah predicted that the time would come when a new covenant would be established with the people of God (31:31-34). This new covenant is the covenant of Christ, which makes the first obsolete (Heb. 8:6-13). Paul made it clear that we are now delivered from the law (Rom. 7:4-7); that we serve in newness of the Spirit not in oldness of the letter (2 Cor. 3); that we are no longer under the tutor (law), which was to bring US to Christ (Gal. 3:15-25); and that Christ abolished in his flesh (at the cross) the Law of commandments contained in ordinances (Eph. 2:13-16).

Christians, therefore, do not go to the old covenant to find the details of the new covenant teaching. Christians are to be judged by the teachings of Christ (John 12:48), the gospel (Rom. 2:16). God expects Christians to obey Christ not Moses (Matt. 7:24-27; 17:1-5).

Warren, however, (does correctly observe that while the specific details of the old covenant are not binding upon anyone today, its principles contain truth, which ought to be believed and practiced today.^{lxxviii} The argument from Deuteronomy in the first chapter of this book recognizes this point. There are truths and principles found in the Old Testament that need our learning today to keep us from error. The New Testament cites scores of these

very principles. New Testament Christians ought never to think there is nothing to learn from the Old Testament; but at the same time neither should they look to the Old Testament for the details of that covenant that unites us to God. The new covenant is a sufficient covenant and a better covenant than the old one.

3. *We must distinguish between specific instructions to individuals and instructions for all.*

Obviously, Paul's request to Timothy for his cloak, the books and parchments (2 Tim. 4:13) are not binding upon anyone living today. It was neither addressed to us, nor could we fulfill it if we wanted to. Not every instruction of the Bible is applicable to every person. Every student of the Bible needs to learn the basic rule of asking to whom a passage speaks. It is the worst kind of error to apply a passage to a group of people to whom it is not addressed. The Judaizers of Acts 15 were guilty of this; and by so doing were guilty of perverting the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1 :6-9). Those who today are blending the God-given roles of male and female are ignoring the distinctions that God has made. The teachings of Scripture ought to apply as broadly as it is meant to apply. Some teachings, to be sure, will apply to every church and every Christian. Others will be addressed to specific groups. The context and common sense will help us make these classifications.

4. *We must distinguish between the temporary and the permanent.*

Some instructions of the New Testament are binding upon all churches of all times, yet others have a temporary nature. The limited commission of the apostles instructed them to go only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6). This limited commission, of course, was later superseded by the great commission to go into the entire world and preach the gospel to every person (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15). Those who look to the examples of conversion in the gospels make the mistake confusing temporary matters with permanent. In His earthly ministry Jesus certainly had the right to save any and every person He desired by any means He desired. But after the cross, when He established the

new covenant with His blood, all men were expected to obey the same gospel in the same way. The book of Acts records the pattern that men followed in their obedience to the gospel. The accounts of conversion in Acts, however, were meant for all time. Peter's sermon and instructions on Pentecost was not just meant for that audience that day. Its instructions and promises were for all (Acts 2:38,39).

5. *We must distinguish between faith and opinion.*

Faith deals with that which is revealed. We can be certain of what is revealed. Opinion, on the other hand, involves the realm of speculation. On what God has revealed, there can be no dispute. In those things, however, about which the details are unknown, we must be content with uncertainty. Teachers and preachers who speak their opinions ought to be fair enough to state when they are giving their opinions; and they ought to be gracious enough to allow the liberty of opinion. There are some things God has not revealed (Deut. 29:29); it is arrogance to act as if one knew with certainty something that God says one doesn't know. We know Christ is coming again; we do not know when (Matt. 24:35,36; 1 Thess. 5:1-10; 2 Pet. 3:11). Some today are speaking their opinions as if they had the authority of the Scripture. Such confidence becomes arrogance (James 4:13-17).

Paul spoke of some men "straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions" (1 Tim. 1:6,7). We know that Noah had rooms on the ark. To deny that is to deny the teaching of the Bible. But we can only speculate on how many rooms there were on the ark. Now an educated guess may be closer to the truth than a haphazard one, but both are still guesses. Your opinion on the number of rooms in the ark is as good as mine is. Speculations can be intriguing, but they can also be futile (Rom. 1:21). Christians are urged to "refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels" (2 Tim. 2:23; cf. 1 Tim. 1:4; 6:4; Tit. 3:9). We must never demand that

others accept our opinions to the exclusion of all other views, for we are not God.

At the same time, we should not treat matters of faith as if any old idea were just as correct. The current spirit of pluralism in matters of religion is dangerous. There is a difference between truth and error. What God has said in His word is not to be disputed, even if we do not understand it. It is a matter of faith as to whether Jesus is the Son of God (Matt. 16:16-18). Those who teach He was nothing more than a man blaspheme Christ and stand condemned. What God has said is true, even if it appears to contradict other Scriptures. God's Word is always true, and it does not contradict itself. Faith, and "the faith," come by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Christians are commanded not only to hear that faith but also to contend for it (Jude 3). The Bible does not demand unity on matters of opinion, but it does demand unity on matters of faith (Lph. 4:4-6; 1 Cor. 1:10-13).

6. *We must distinguish between background circumstances and essential requirements.*

Many accounts of actions in the New Testament provide a background setting for a narrative but do not make a requirement. The fact that Jesus and his disciples met in an upper room at nighttime to institute the Lord's Supper is circumstantial. These circumstances are incidentals, which describe what they did but do not have any binding force upon men today. One can carefully, completely, accurately, diligently and lovingly remember the Lord's death in communion during the daytime on a ground level. To bind such incidentals is to go beyond the meaning and the intent of the memorial feast. In keeping the commandment to remember, however, eating unleavened bread and drinking the fruit of the vine are not optional circumstances. These elements are essential requirements of Jesus' instructions. There is liberty in circumstances because circumstances vary; but there is never liberty in essential requirements.

In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus gives a lot of background circumstances that are useful to tell the story but are not necessary to be replicated to observe the principle

of the story. The cities, the road, the inn, the cause of the injury, and the amount of money are all circumstances that may vary greatly in keeping the principle. But the principles of loving your neighbor, meeting pressing needs, and showing compassion on the hurting are essential requirements to pleasing God.

7. *We must distinguish between human customs and God's laws.*

The Pharisees had many customs they followed rigidly. One such custom was fasting, which pious Jews observed twice a week (Luke 18:12). Keeping this custom, however, did not make the Pharisee more righteous than the confessing sinner. The Pharisee wrongly made judgments of others on the basis of a human custom that was never binding upon anyone. The New Testament does not bind fasting upon anyone today, though Christians are at liberty to practice it.

In my opinion, holidays fall into this category. One may personally decide to set aside a certain day to remember the Lord and worship. There is no compulsion to do this, and such a person would not have a right to bind his personal or family custom upon another. Paul discusses the Jews who observed their national holidays in Romans 14. Paul says,

Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God (14:4-6).

It is clear that in human customs men have a freedom in some circumstances to follow personal convictions. (Obviously, they would not under all circumstances, such as those mentioned later in 14:13-23). In those matters which involve human customs there are two basic principles which must be followed: (1) let us

not judge one another (unless the custom was immoral or lawless); and (2) let us not put a stumbling block in another's way.

Those who bind the observance of Easter and Christmas bind more than God does. They do not respect the freedom to abstain from these human customs if one so desires. On the other hand, those who judge others for acts of love, seasonal greetings, and decorating one's home as a seasonal custom may be denying a brother a right to do "for the Lord." We are not to judge in this regard.

Divine law, however, is another matter. No one has a right to set aside divine law, to change it, to abridge it, or to add to it. God has settled His Word in heaven, and He will judge every man according to what He has said.

8. *We must distinguish between interpretation and application.*

While there may be many applications of a passage, there will only one correct interpretation. There is but one meaning of a passage, for if each passage had several meanings, we could not determine if any interpretation could be trusted. Occasionally someone says, "When you read a passage of Scripture to a group, there will be as many interpretations of that passage as there are people in the room." I understand what this speaker means by his statement, but his statement is technically misleading. While it is true the different people may apply a passage to their own lives and situations differently, it is incorrect to assume that many different interpretations can all be correct.

Correct interpretation of Scripture comes from many more principles than can be described in this volume. It demands an understanding of language, forms of literature, history, cultural backgrounds, syntax, and the total context. The notion that any old idea about a passage is a correct one makes the interpreter of the passage the authority rather than the Scripture itself. The task of one who wants to interpret the Scripture correctly is to find out what the message, intent and purpose of the author is. What the author is intending to say is always the correct understanding of any passage.

Truth is always consistent with itself. Truth is multifaceted and may contain many points of emphasis, but truth never conflicts with itself. God is not a pluralist, and His Word is not pluralistic. To conclude that God's Word can be interpreted correctly in a multitude of ways is to accuse God of inability to be clear. God wants His people to be one, to have the same mind and the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10). Jesus promises His people that they will know the truth that makes them free (John 8:31-32).

Interpretation is the correct understanding of a passage as the author meant it in its context. *Application*, on the other hand, is the working out in our lives a scriptural principle. We must listen to and apply Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jas. 1:21-25). One has not really heard a passage until one has applied it. We can apply a passage in many different ways. The golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," is capable of literally thousands of applications. Yet any interpretation of the passage needs to consider the background, language, context, and the intent of Jesus in Matthew 7:12.

We must caution ourselves not to give application the same status as interpretation. For some, there is "the temptation to misinterpret a passage so as to derive an application from it," as Bernard Ramm suggests.^{lxxix} Such handling of the Scriptures leaves no place for listening to it. Such interpreters read into the passage things that are not there and may cause the development of human traditions. We must not speak where God has not spoken, and we must be silent where God has intentionally hushed.

¹ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Boston: W. A. Wilde Co., 195b), 171.

² Everett Ferguson, "What about Women in the Church?" *The Christian Chronicle*, September 2001, 32. Ferguson made this observation in review of Carroll D. Osburn's book, *Women in the Church: Reclaiming the Ideal*, ACU Press, 2001. Ferguson criticizes Osburn for assuming that Paul "approves" of the women's practice. Ferguson notes that the head covering is prescriptive while the praying and prophesying are descriptive of what some Corinthian women were doing. Writing in an earlier volume edited by Osburn on the same subject, Ferguson says, "Except in some heretical and schismatic groups, the churches in the early patristic period evidence prohibitions on women speaking in the assembly and serving in leadership positions of bishop/presbyter or presiding at liturgical functions. On the other hand, in ministering functions women were actively involved and exercised leadership responsibilities in a variety of other ways." Ferguson, "Women in the Post-Apostolic Church," in Osburn, ed. *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, Vol. 1, 1995, 513.

³ Thomas B. Warren, *When Is an "Example" Binding?* (Jonesboro, Ark.: National Christian Press, 1975), 109-119.

⁴ Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6,11; 2 Tim. 3: 16,17; Jude 5.

⁵ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 117.

EXPEDIENCY AND SILENCE

There are many things commonly practiced among churches, about which the New Testament says nothing. There is no mention in Scripture of church buildings, Bible schools, children's homes, baptisteries, public address systems, printing presses, televangelists, blackboards, electric lights, overhead projectors, video projectors, and many other such things. Those who have heard the argument from silence often point out the apparent inconsistency of using twentieth century conveniences in the pursuit of Biblical Christianity. Is one speaking in the silence of God by using modern conveniences to do the work of the church? Is there a realm of freedom for man in doing the will of God? Are we totally confined to doing first century things?

The answer to these questions lies in an understanding of expediency and the freedom Christians have to use varying expedients in the fulfillment of God's expressed will. An expedient is that which benefits, helps or profits one in keeping God's instructions. When God requires or authorizes an action, He permits men to use their good judgment to find the most beneficial means of accomplishing that action. Expediency is not a license to perform unauthorized actions; it can only expedite what has already been authorized or required. Additions, unlike expediencies, go beyond the command to make new kinds of actions. Expedients are helpers that perform the precise action called for by the instruction.

For example, a baptistery filled with warm, clean water and located in a church building would be very convenient to fulfilling the commandments to baptize (Matt. 28:19) and to be baptized (Acts 2:38). Baptisteries are expedients; they are profitable and beneficial to fulfilling what God said to do. But a small font, used for sprinkling babies, is designed for a different action than the immersion of responsible believers. It is an addition because it promotes a different action than immersion for an unqualified class of people (babies). Small fonts would be an addition: fonts do not speak where the Bible speaks. Expediency cannot be used to

justify what God does not command or authorize. Expediency is not a license to justify any practice we wish to do.

Expedients do not add to the practices of the New Testament; rather they are a profitable means of carrying out those practices when the means has not been specified in Scriptures. Expediency benefits an act that has been commanded, but it cannot authorize an act which God has not instructed us to do. Expedients act only in the realm of the lawful. If an act is not first lawful (such as the immersion of believers), then it cannot have aids or expedients to help it do its work to the pleasing of God. Loving Christ means keeping His commandments (John 14:15), and we are free only to the extent that we abide in His Word (John 8:31,32). We have no right to add to His ordinances.

Expedients are beneficial means of fulfilling unspecified commandments. When God has been specific, He intends for His people to obey His instructions with precision. There is no room for variation from the instruction (Deut. 5:32). When God, however, has not specified the means, men are free to use their good judgment as to the most efficient and effective manner of performing exactly what God wills.

With the progress of time, it is to be expected that men would find ways to perform God's expressed will more efficiently and effectively. The invention of the printing press was a great blessing to spreading the Word of God to the common man. The printing press assured greater efficiency and accuracy in the transmission of the Bible to all. Knowing what the modern press can do to preach the gospel and get the Bible into the hands of men searching for the truth, no one would demand that men go back to the first century practice of making copies of Scripture by hand. Comparatively speaking, it is more expedient to print Bibles and gospel tracts. Good stewardship demands improvement whenever possible, and the best use of time and money in the publication of the Scriptures is to use printing presses. Presses yield greater good to the most people with the greatest accuracy and the least expense.

God's people have always used expedients to accomplish the tasks He has instructed them to do. Noah undoubtedly used tools to build the ark. Though we know nothing of the kind of tools or the number of tools he used, we can logically infer that Noah

and his sons used the most beneficial means available to work the wood and the pitch. The command to build the ark contained within the command the right to use their good judgment and tools to do exactly what God wanted. Noah used tools as expedients, and this did not keep him from doing “according to all that the Lord had commanded him” (Gen. 7:5). One can use expedients to obey God lovingly, carefully, completely, diligently and accurately.

God placed wisdom and skill in the heart of craftsmen Bezalel and Oholiab (Ex. 32:1-6). They were to construct the tabernacle and its furniture according to the pattern God showed Moses in the mountain. From the text, it is obvious that they could work gold, silver and bronze; could cut stones; and could carve wood. Though we are told the specifics of *what* God wanted in the building and the services of the tabernacle, we are not told how Bazalel and Oholiab with the other skilled people performed exactly what they were commanded. We do not know what tools and methods they used, but we can be sure they did it exactly as it was called for (Ex. 39:32-43). That they used tools and wise methods is a logical inference. The use of tools was not an addition to the commandment, for they did exactly what they were told. The tools were a beneficial and efficient means to do what they were told. One can use an expedient to obey the instructions of God lovingly, carefully, completely, diligently and accurately. Expedients are used to do what God says and are thereby authorized by the instruction.

When God commanded him to come “over to Macedonia” and “preach the gospel to them,” Paul immediately “put out to sea” (Acts 16:9-12). The commandment did not specify how Paul was to come to Macedonia; it emphasized merely that he was to come. How Paul managed to get there was left to his discretion. He chose a ship as the most expedient means. I suppose Paul could have walked around the Black Sea to get to Macedonia, hut in this case walking would hardly be the most efficient way. Walking would be physically exhausting and time consuming. Paul used good judgment and chose the most efficient, effective and available means. Though the command did not explicitly say use a ship, Paul had every right to use one. By using a ship, he was not doing something different than he was commanded. On the contrary, he

was doing exactly what God meant for him to do in the most expedient way.

Expedients are not additions. Expedients carry out that which has been commanded or authorized. Expedients carry out that which is lawful. Additions go beyond the law to actions different from that specified in the instruction. Expediency can offer the freedom to use good judgment in doing that which is specified, but expediency can never authorize new and different instructions.

Alexander Campbell recognized that expediencies were to be placed in a different category from additions or substitutions. In his book, *The Christian System*, Campbell argued:

The Christian institution has its facts, its precepts, its promises, its ordinances, and their meaning or doctrine. These are not matters of policy, of arrangement, of expediency, but of divine and immutable ordination and continuance. Hence the faith, the worship, and the righteousness, or the doctrine, the piety, and the morality of the gospel institution, are not legitimate subjects of human legislation, alteration, or arrangement. No man nor community can touch these and be innocent.^{lxxx}

Yet Campbell recognized that expedients have a legitimate place in the work of the church, even though they are not specified by Scripture.

Still, there are many things left to the law of expediency, concerning which no precepts are found in the apostolic writings. To ascertain these is the object of this chapter. They are then, in one sentence, those things, or forms of action, which it was impossible or unnecessary to reduce to special precepts; consequently they are not of faith, piety, nor morality; because whatever is of the faith, of the worship, of the morality of Christianity, was both possible and necessary to be promulgated; and is expressly and fully propounded in the Sacred Scriptures. The law of expediency, then, has no place in determining the articles of faith, acts of worship, nor principles of morality. All these require a “thus saith the Lord” in express statements,

and the sacred writings have clearly defined and decided them. But in other matters that may be called the circumstantial of the gospel and of the church of Christ, the people of God are left to their own discretion and to the facilities and exigencies of society.^{lxxxix}

At this point in his book, Campbell illustrates several expedients that are not expressly mentioned in the scriptures but are obviously helpful in the performing of the work of God. Campbell said, “Now the law of expediency is the law of adopting the best present means of attaining any given end.”^{lxxxii} Campbell recognized that this was a matter, which the wisdom and good sense of individuals and communities must decide. “This is not,” Campbell said, “this cannot be, a matter of standing revelation.”^{lxxxiii}

To illustrate his point Campbell uses many fine illustrations. That men should keep safe and multiply copies of the Scriptures is certainly the will of God, but no precept can be found in Scripture as to how the copies should be multiplied, in what languages they should be translated, or how they should be distributed. We are taught to assemble as a church (Heb. 10:25), but no precept in the New Testament can be found for building, buying or possessing meeting houses. Nor is there precept for what other purposes a meeting house can fulfill. We are taught to baptize (Matt. 28:19), but we have no precept concerning baptisteries. We are taught to remember the Lord’s death by partaking of the Lord’s Supper (Matt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:23-26); yet we have no precept whatsoever about tables, trays, containers for the fruit of the vine, or at what hour during the first day of the week we should partake. We are taught that marriage is honorable (Heb. 13:4), but “whoever read a verse on the manner in which this most important of all social institutions is to be performed?”^{lxxxiv} Indeed, the requirements for entrance into marriage and the means by which men enter marriage differ from culture to culture.

Campbell noted that good and wise men will be of differing opinions in the use of expedients. Differing congregations have the right to use varying expedients. Some congregations evangelize with literature, some with radio, some with television, and some

with campaigns. Many congregations use a variety of methods. Each congregation has the right to use the means best suited to her talents. One congregation is not more spiritual or more biblical than another because it uses one expedient rather than another. Each congregation owes her sister congregations the freedom to use differing expedients. No congregation has a right to demand another congregation use a favored expedient. No congregation has a right to bind an expedient upon another. On the other hand, no congregation has a right to break fellowship with another congregation because the other congregation uses an expedient that the former does not like.

One isn't more baptized because one was baptized in a river than a brother who was baptized in a baptistery. One is not more biblical because he preaches from a chart than another brother who preaches on television. A church is not more biblical because it teaches all its members in one class than a church who teaches its members in a variety of classes. A church that drinks from one cup is not more sacred than a church that drinks the cup of the Lord from many containers. A church that partakes of the Lord's Supper at night only is not more holy than a church that partakes of it during the day.

There needs to be both freedom and mutual respect between congregations who differ on expedients. Paul and Barnabas went their separate ways after a sharp difference of opinion on John Mark, but they still considered each other faithful brethren (Acts 15:36-40; 2 Tim. 4:11). *Differences of opinion on expediencies is not a basis for breaking fellowship with a brother.* It is unfortunate that some brethren by not making the proper distinction between expediencies and additions have caused division in the body of Jesus Christ.

God gave elders to the church to oversee the work of local congregations (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:5; 5:17; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). In His wisdom God designated wise and experienced men to oversee the work of the church. God has given His church the marching orders, but He has left much of the details as to how to accomplish that work to the good judgment of caring shepherds who manage the flock of God but do not lord it over them. Elders have a right to make decisions involving expedients, and they have

a right to expect the congregation's compliance to their caring leadership. Members of the church are instructed to submit to their leadership and obey them (Heb. 13:17).

Elders have a right to designate the times and frequency of church gatherings, the order of services, the persons who lead in worship, the persons who teach in classes, how many classes, the location of the assembly, the nature of the building, whether to have a baptistery, how many cups are used in the Lord's Supper, whether to contribute to a missionary, how much to contribute to a missionary, whether to give to an orphan's home, how much to give to a children's home, and many other such things. Wise elders act with a listening ear to the desires of the congregation. They make decisions with everyone in mind. Expediency demands that they do the best they can with what they have. But members also have an obligation to follow their elders, even when elders make unfavorable decisions.

There are some basic criteria that need to be considered in the choosing of expedients, either as individuals or as churches:

1. *Is it truly beneficial* (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:22)? Some things churches do hinder more than help. Anything that is expedient can be abused to the extent that it becomes more of a hindrance than a help in the work of the church. The abuse of a thing does not argue against its valid use, but when an expedient is being abused, churches would do well to rethink the use of that expedient. They either need to correct the abuse or discontinue to use that expedient.

This applies to some simple problems like blackboards, to which chalk no longer adheres. They ought to be replaced or painted. This principle also ought to be applied to many unwise and out-dated judgment calls. Congregations do change with time, and the leadership of churches needs to recognize that there are more efficient ways of doing the same things. Holding to established ways of doing things may actually diminish the effectiveness of the church in evangelism or in the use of money. Churches who use interest bearing checking accounts, in my judgment, make a better use of their money than those which get no interest. In many cases, bus programs poorly executed cost huge

sums, exhausted the laborers, frustrated the members, and made few converts. Many bus programs did great good, but not all. Elders need to use wisdom and discretion in what they do.

Congregational leaders need to use wisdom and tolerance in using expedients. What works in one place or time may not work in another place or time. Unreasonable pride over an established expedient can cloud the thinking of some that it splits the church. Nor should unreasonable pride in some new idea be so important that it splits the church. Elders ought to be careful not to lord it over the flock to the extent that divide the church over an expedient. Nor should the younger and more aggressive members so demand their way in matters of expediency that they disrespect and disobey those who lead them. Expedients should never be political footballs. Churches should frankly ask themselves what God wills as they use expedients with faith and practicality.

2. *Is it enslaving* (1 Cor. 6:12)? Some traditions (which are expedient) become overpowering to churches and individuals. God did not mean for men to become slaves to their fleshly appetites. Nor is it God's will that churches become slaves to long-held opinions and traditions. A matter is not right or wrong simply because it is either old or new. It is tragic that churches have split over traditions such as the order of services. When that happens, it is clear that someone wasn't recognizing a man-made tradition as a man-made tradition. Somehow in someone's mind a long-cherished tradition became as sacred as God's law. When this happens, men begin to speak where God is silent. We need to remind ourselves that any expedient can become enslaving. Let us never allow an expedient designed for good to cause us to stumble.

3. *Is it edifying* (1 Cor. 10:22)? Some expedients cause much confusion, which tears down rather than builds up churches. The uncontrolled use of tongue speaking is an example of this principle. God is not the author of confusion, and neither should the church be (1 Cor. 14:27-33). Paul says, "Let all things be done for edification" (1 Cor. 14:26). Any expedient that doesn't make the church stronger ought to be discarded, replaced or changed. Paul said, "So then let us pursue the things which make for peace

and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food” (Rom. 14:19,20). Expediencies that offend the conscience of another ought to be approached with the greatest of caution that no brother be lost. Freedom in expediency is not a license to cause a stumbling block (Rom. 14:13-21).

4. *Is it to the glory of God* (1 Cor. 10:31-33)? Paul said, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved." The behavior of some Christians, rather than endearing them to the Lord, pushes them away from the truth. Some indeed do this by focusing the glory on themselves rather than on God. Anything that takes the focus off of God and His will is an effort in the wrong direction. Jesus warned the disciples about displaying their righteousness to be seen of men (Matt. 6:1-18). When Christians display piety for accolades, whatever praise they receive for their talent will be all the reward they will receive.

Following after contemporary worship styles among popular religious groups, some members of the church have promoted an entertaining style of musical worship and dramatic presentations. Such exercises fall easily into the trap of becoming performances showcasing the talents of the performers rather than worship services that seek to glorify God. Many such services have all the amenities of a theater: special lighting and sound systems, instruments of music, stylistic solos and small group singing, hand-held microphones, raised hands, dramatic presentations, skits, and abundant clapping. The audience is thrilled, and the performers self-fulfilled; but have they glorified God? Any expedience that robs God of glory ought to be abandoned. Theatrics has no place in worship.

5. *Is it done in decency and order* (1 Cor. 14:40)? The church at Corinth apparently had allowed the order in their worship services to get out of hand. Some were speaking in tongues with no interpreter. First, Paul ruled, "If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and let one

interpret; but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God" (1 Cor. 14:27-28). Second, Paul instructed the prophets,

"And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace" (1 Cor. 14:29-33).

Third, Paul addressed the women, "Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church" (1 Cor. 14:34-35). In Paul's teaching, women were to learn in quietness with all submissiveness (1 Tim. 2:11-12). Women at Corinth may have been interrupting the service with questions or comments. Paul said it was improper for them to speak in church, so let them ask their husbands at home. Apparently the spontaneity at Corinth led to more confusion than peace. Paul admonishes churches to pursue decency and order in their worship.

6. *Is it done in the name of our Lord Jesus (Col. 3:17)?*

Paul said, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. Some, again following after popular religious groups, have sought to become "ministries" and "community churches." To do things in the name of the Lord Jesus means that one acts by His authority to carry out His business. Churches ought to act with authority what God wills for them to do. In some cases, religious people have forgotten God and have acted by their own authority to pursue their own agendas. Remarkably, some have acted in God's name to do that, which has never been God's will. One denomination voted to encourage their women to seek abortions.

7. *Is it done in love* (1 Cor. 16:14)? Christians are not to seek their own good, but the good of their neighbors (1 Cor. 10:24). Christians are to pursue love (1 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 6:11). It is tragic that the work of God is sometimes supplanted by the politics and power struggles of little men who wish to win more than to love, it is more than tragic when personalities from jealousy and stubbornness split the church over an expediency. Everyone loses; only the devil wins. In some cases it is the refusal of lawful expedients that splits churches; in others it is the unnecessary intrusion of an expedient. May the peace of Christ always rule in our hearts (Col. 3:15)!

¹ Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System* (1835, reprinted Nashville, Tenn.: Gospel Advocate Co., 1970), 57.

² *Ibid.*, 71.72.

³ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

SOME OBJECTIONS

Not everyone has accepted the principle of prohibitive silence. In recent years several voices, even among churches of Christ, have spoken out against it. They have argued that silence implies permission to do as one pleases, as long as they do not violate the Scripture. Our understanding in churches of Christ of this issue was greatly sharpened by the discussions over the use of instrumental music in worship. If silence is prohibitive, instrumental music is manifestly wrong; but if silence is permissive, instrumental music is acceptable but not mandatory.

Several objections have been made against prohibitive silence in order to justify the use of the instrument. We will examine some of them here:

The Problem of Division

Some have charged that the divisions among churches of Christ are the result of our insistence on prohibitive silence. They believe that the objection to change is what has caused the division rather than the change itself.

The causes of division are complex. They frequently involve personalities, such as at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10-13). When men are immature, arrogant and apostate, they cause faction in the church. Divisiveness is a work of the flesh, created by the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21, 24). Men who wish to do the will of the Lord avoid division because they are instructed to be of the same mind and of the same judgment. When something foreign to the will of God is introduced, however, brethren who wish to follow God must divide from those who seek their own will. James asks, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?" (James 4:1). When Christians make friends of the world they make themselves enemies of God (4:4).

It was the introduction of unwarranted practices that caused the division between churches of Christ and Christian churches more than a century ago. They divided not so much over the

instrument itself as the presumptuous progressing beyond the authority of the Scriptures. This violation of prohibitive silence moved beyond the instrument to permitting women to lead in worship.^{lxxxv} Amazingly, this same error, this same denial of patterns and authority, is causing our present-day division. Had brethren not grown presumptuous, the division would not have taken place. But those who favored the instrument, wanting to appear like their neighbors, insisted on its use. Those who rejected the instrument in order to preserve the New Testament pattern of worship were not the divisive ones. In fact, by singing only, they had the sole platform for unity. But those who demanded the instrument would not yield their position so as to keep the body of Christ together. This division was more a conflict of wills than a defect in the doctrine of prohibitive silence.

It is not surprising that those today who wish to embrace the instrument in worship must do away with prohibitive silence, rigid patterns, and our “traditional” hermeneutics. Two sets of authority cannot stand together, and those progressives who wish to dismiss the authority of silence will surely not be able to stand with those committed to the Biblical hermeneutic of prohibitive silence. Mike Benson in a bulletin article wrote:

NASA had high hopes for its Mars orbiter-- it would make possible some exciting new research into the Red Planet. They were stunned when suddenly, without warning, they lost the Mars orbiter in deep space. After the initial shock, NASA tried to determine what went wrong. The answer was almost as alarming as losing the orbiter itself. The fatal malfunction was the result of a tragic error in calculations - - bad math doomed the Mars craft. One set of engineers had worked with English measurements, while another set of engineers did their calculations by the metric system. This costly failure was the result of measuring by two different standards. Much of the reason for religious division today is because men adopt differing standards. One group follows the Bible, another group adheres to a creed or catechism, another loosely accepts long-standing tradition, still another is guided by the wise sayings of some ancient persona. If we would just all follow the same standard of

religious measurement [the Word of God, cf. 2 Tim. 3:16,17], we not only fulfill the Lord's prayer for oneness/unity [cf. John 17:20], but we would effectively stop the aggression that is frequently perpetrated in the name of faith.^{lxxxvi}

It is not our hermeneutic that causes the division, but the unwillingness brethren show to apply it consistently when they do not want the results. Amazingly, those who will not use silence to argue against the instrument will use it to argue against many other errors. J. E. Choate and William Woodson rightly demonstrate that the hermeneutic that leads us to refuse the instrument cannot be confined to that controversy.^{lxxxvii} They rightly pointed out that when the inner logic of adhering to the text is rejected, that there is no stopping other innovations. Jack Lewis observed,

What one misses in their articles is any sort of explanation of why and on what basis they would oppose such practices. The only conceivable reason is that Scripture does not authorize them; hence, we are back to the argument from silence that excludes the things they do not want to practice. In my sense of logic, there is a basic inconsistency here.

When Hayden, Dunning, and their brethren tell us clearly why they do not use incense, holy water, religious dancing, and the like, I cannot conceive of its being merely that they do not like them. Anyone needs a better basis of opposition than that. It seems to me that their basis of opposition has to be fairly close to why I do not sing with musical instruments—the New Testament does not authorize it! If one is free where the New Testament has not spoken, as these brothers insist about their musical instruments, why is her not also free in practices which other people wish to engage in? Is it logical to apply the argument from silence to exclude the things one does not want but then to refuse to apply it to what one does want?^{lxxxviii} Could it be that the hermeneutic is sound? Could it be that silence really is prohibitive? Has the division resulted from a faulty hermeneutic or from a faulty

application of truth? Consistency is “not the hobgoblin of little minds”; consistency is honesty within good hearts.

The Problem of the Conscience

Some have charged that forbidding the use of the instrument of music in worship is binding a law upon the conscience of another that God has not bound. They say that men have no right to impose restrictions on the conscience without the clear teaching of God. They cite such passages as Matt. 15:1-14 and Col. 2:16-23 in confirmation of their point.

Men certainly do not have the right to bind human traditions or human prohibitions upon the consciences of others. In the study of the history of silence in chapter 5, we noted the protestant rejection of the Roman church due to its insistence on binding holidays and sacraments upon the consciences of others. The consequent rejection of Roman Catholicism is justified on this basis, because Rome added new and unauthorized terms of fellowship. Rome said that one who did not observe Christmas and Easter was not a “good Catholic.” This clear addition to the demands of the New Testament is manifestly wrong. It is in this context that the Reformists and the Campbells spoke when they argued against binding the conscience of another with a man-made law. Some have misunderstood this and pointed to those who reject instruments of music in worship as men who have imposed a man-made prohibition upon the conscience of another. In reality, those who reject the instrument have not made a man-made law but called their brethren back to the New Testament pattern. This call to doctrinal purity and this rejection of man-made religion is no different than Josiah’s restoration of Israel to the old covenant and his consequent rejection of man-made idolatry. It is no different than Campbell’s call to baptism for the remission of sins and his consequent rejection of man-made infant baptism. The call to truth is never unjustified.

What is unjustified is the introduction of pianos and organs into the worship in the first place. Those who entered assemblies where they were used had no choice in the matter of worshipping with or without them. The only choice they had was to

compromise their conscience in sin (Rom. 14:23) or leave the congregation. Don H. Morris' essay, 'Play On. Miss Bertha--Add-Ran and Its Heirs,' is a perfect illustration of the attitude that went with the introduction of the instrument.^{lxxxix} A spirit that says, "If you don't like it, you can leave," hardly befits the spirit of Jesus Christ. Who is binding whose conscience? Those who introduce additions to the New Testament worship or those who are calling men to observe the New Testament pattern?

The Problem of Inferences

Some have asked if it is correct to make an inference binding upon men today. An inference is a deduction or a conclusion reached by human reasoning. Since men are fallible in their thinking, one should not ever make human reasoning binding upon the conscience of another. Moreover, they argue, men do not reason alike. Whose inferences, they ask, will become the standard of right and wrong?

The argument in opposition to inferences is based upon statements made by Thomas and Alexander Campbell. In proposition 6 of "The Declaration and Address," Thomas Campbell said:

Although inference and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians *farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so*; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore, no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the church. Hence it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church's confession.^{xc}

Alexander Campbell further stated about inferences:

The inferences drawn by human understanding partake of all the defects of that understanding. . . These conclusions

then, are always private property, and can never be placed upon a level with the inspired word. Subscription to them, or an acknowledgement of them, can never be rationally required as a bond of union.^{xci}

It is obvious that human understanding, reason, logic and inference have pitfalls. But the abuse of a thing does not argue against its valid use, and the abuse of reasoning does not argue against valid reasoning.

One has to wonder how the Campbells deduced that inferences could not be binding. Did they infer it from their study of Scripture? If so, then that inference is itself only private property and cannot be on the level of the inspired word. Further, the primary watchword of the Campbells, “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent,” is a principle deduced from Scripture (correctly, I might add). Is it never to be “required as a bond of union”?

Reasoning from the Scriptures determines more than a few important doctrines of the church. It is by inference we partake of the Lord’s Supper each Lord’s day. By inference we rightly reject infant baptism. The clear teaching of baptizing believers implies that unbelievers and those incapable of belief are unqualified candidates for baptism. The clear teaching that baptism is immersion implies that sprinkling will not do. We teach against gambling by reasoning that it violates the Christian work ethic.

Further, Christians have a right to assume all that the word of God assumes and takes for granted. They have a right to infer whatever God has implied. D. R. Dungan in his book, *Hermeneutics*, says, “Things assumed in the Bible are to be regarded the same as those which have been stated.” Again he says, “Anything God takes for granted is true; hence, anything which He has assumed or taken for granted, we are bound to regard as true.”^{xcii} As an illustration of this principle, Dungan observes that God has everywhere treated man as if he could repent, that an honest heart is necessary to the reception of the truth, and that man has general wants.

In addition Thomas Campbell noted that fairly inferred deductions may be “truly called the doctrine of God’s holy word.”

It seems inconsistent to state in one breath that a matter is the true doctrine of God's holy word and in the next breath that the same matter can never be made into terms of communion. Again we ask, how did Campbell himself come to such a deduction? There is no explicit statement in Scripture that says all the fairly inferred conclusions of men from a Scripture premise have no binding force. Campbell must have reasoned that on his own. According to him, even if his deduction is true, it is not binding on anyone else. Why then does he ask others to agree with him in the matter? How can this self-contradictory maxim consistently be bound today?

Thomas B. Warren in his book, *When is an Example Binding?*, notes, "There are no explicit statements in the Bible which explicitly say that only explicit statements have binding force on today."^{xciii} It is self-contradictory to reason that the use of reasoning can never lead to the truth. Warren further says:

the fact that reasoning must be used in order to understand that the teaching applies to men living today does not, as some allege, render the conclusion human rather than divine doctrine. God demands that men reason validly in connection with the evidence which He has given to them. To hold that the use of reason (the principles of valid reasoning) renders a doctrine human rather than divine is obviously false. The reason that what is bound by implication is binding on men is not because men have *inferred it*, but because God has *implied it*.^{xciv}

God expects men to use their reasoning powers. Luke calls the Bereans noble for examining Paul's preaching in the light of the Scriptures "to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Paul demands that Christians "examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; and abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess. 5:21,22). John urged the church to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1); and Jesus applauded the Ephesians for doing so (Rev. 2:2). Commandments to "remember," to "consider," to "meditate," are such that expect men to reason upon the word of God.

Sound arguments and fair deductions come from true premises and valid reasoning. Some reasoning is invalid but not all reasoning. Some premises are false but not all. Some conclusions are erroneous but not all. Jesus promised that we can know the truth He revealed. When we draw only such conclusions from the evidence of the Scriptures as are warranted, we can arrive at truth. Yes, we must do our exegetical work. We must study the language, the context and the background. We must consider all the evidence, but we can draw divine truth by reasoning from the Word of God.

To the credit of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, some current writers may be making more of this problem of inferences than the Campbells meant. Proposition 6 actually does not argue against all inferences. It argues against inferences that go “*farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so.*” Dr. Robert Richardson in his book, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, described a little more in detail what Thomas Campbell meant when he said “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.” He said:

Henceforth, the plain and simple teaching of the Word of God itself was to be their guide. God himself should speak to them, and they should receive and repeat His words alone. No *remote* inferences, no *fanciful* interpretations, no religious *theories* of any kind, were to be allowed to alter or pervert its obvious meaning [Emphasis mine].^{xcv}

If we allow this later statement to stand about the feeling of the Campbells about inferences, we have a completely different idea. Here the objection was not to all inferences but to “remote” ones, fanciful ideas, and theories. Certainly all men are correct to reject these as a basis for doctrine. But to reject all use of reasoning provides some very significant problems. Though some men may reject reason as a basis for finding binding truth, in practice all men use logic in their preaching. When they teach, explain and apply the Word of God to men today, they without exception use reasoning to get the correct sense of Scripture. Campbell’s suggestion of excluding inference in forming a belief system is impossible to implement.

The Problem Of The Synagogue

Some have made charges against a prohibitive silence by pointing to the synagogue. There is no mention of the synagogue in the Old Testament, and yet there is a full-blown synagogue system mentioned in the New Testament with its own worship and organization. They infer that since there is no mention of the synagogue in the Old Testament and since it is prominent in the New Testament, men must have added it. This addition, since it had the approval of Jesus (Luke 4:16), must be an example of permissive silence, which says that anything not forbidden must be allowed.

The synagogue, though not explicitly mentioned in the Old Testament, is not an advancement beyond the teaching of the Old Testament. Had Jesus considered the synagogue sinful, He certainly would not have worshipped there. But Jesus used the synagogues to teach in, and Acts records the apostles' use of the synagogue to spread the gospel. Clearly they approved its use. Was the synagogue then authorized by God (prohibitive silence) or accepted by God because it was not forbidden (permissive silence)?

To answer this we must ask: what is the synagogue? Some would have us think that it was a clear departure from the teaching of the Old Testament. Rather than a departure, the synagogue is a fulfillment of what God wanted from committed, pious Jews. It was an expedient way to perpetuate the religion of the old covenant.

The synagogue arose during the time of or consequent to the Babylonian captivity, when the Israelite people were cut off from worship in the temple. Their need for common worship on Sabbath days and festivals remained the same. The Dispersion of the Jews throughout the known world made this need even greater. The Jews were not attempting to replace the temple worship with something else but were making available an opportunity for God-fearing Jews to study God's word, pray and worship, actions they could do anywhere. Synagogues first served as schools for those who needed teaching in the Law.

A synagogue is simply a meeting or a “gathering together” of God’s people to pray and study His word. Such activity is so in line with God’s revealed will that it does not demand explicit Scriptural authority in detail. The synagogue was an expedient. The Jerusalem temple was where the sacrificial worship took place, but it was only on high and holy days that Israelites throughout Palestine could go there to worship. It was therefore the synagogue that provided the local place of study, worship and fellowship.

F. F. Bruce noted that “express authorization, if such were necessary, might be found in a passage like Psa. 50:5.^{xcvi} Others pointed to such passages as Psa. 78:4 and Ezra 8:17 as possible references to gatherings. The ancient Jews in their targums on Ex. 18:20 taught that Moses himself instituted the synagogue. Whether these passages explicitly teach a synagogue system is beside the point. The point is that God’s people met to worship, to pray and to study His Word. That is certainly authorized; who can find any fault in that?

It is incorrect, however, to assume that Jesus approved of every action of every synagogue. Jesus opposed many abuses of the synagogue. He opposed the exalting of men to seats of authority (Matt. 23:1-2). He opposed the man-made laws of those who were in authority roles, such as those who made laws for the Sabbath (Matt. 12:9-14). He opposed those who would throw someone out of the fellowship of the synagogue for professing belief in Himself (John 9; 12:42,43). Jesus approved the right and condemned the wrong with regard to the synagogue. We would expect this from the Son of God.

Since there is authorization for the practices of studying, prayer and worship, then certainly Jesus was right to do these things in the synagogue. Jesus approved what was authorized. But Jesus stood against presumptuous traditions and presumptuous men who went beyond the will of God. Jesus practiced silence that was prohibitive; He participated only in that which was authorized.

The Problem of Anachronisms

Some have charged that the Word of God does not deal with the problems of modern society and that modern man is permitted to make up his own mind in such matters. The Bible does not explicitly refer to biomedical ethics, tobacco use, drug use, genetic engineering, test tube babies, surrogate parenting, birth control, euthanasia, or many other matters. Again, they suggest that whatever is not specifically forbidden must be permitted.

First we need to recall that the Bible often teaches by principles, which apply to a broad set of circumstances. Though a particular circumstance may not be specifically mentioned, it is correct to apply eternal principles accordingly. For instance, polygamy is not specifically forbidden in any passage. Our opposition to it has been that the New Testament only authorizes one mate for each person (Matt. 19:5; 1 Cor. 7:2). It is from these positive statements that we infer the immorality of polygamy. The same thing is true of gambling. From the positive statements relating to the Christian work ethic in passages like (Eph. 4:28), we recognize the evils of gambling. We apply both the positive and the negative statements of Scripture to the situation at hand.

This generation is facing some new wrinkles in moral problems that are unknown to other generations. Our advances in medical technology are more sophisticated than other generations. Genetic engineering, test tube babies, surrogate parenting, birth control and many other matters do challenge us to search the Scriptures afresh. It is our task to “examine everything carefully; hold fast to what is good; and to abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess. 5:21,22). The Scriptures still provide a basis for us to do just that. Instead of reasoning that God says nothing, let us look again to those broad principles of Scripture to see what God has said. There can be no doubt that the Word of God will provide answers to whatever moral dilemma modern man faces. At issue here is the all-sufficiency of the Word of God. God has not deceived us in His promise to provide all truth. God is the One who is able to call the end from the beginning and to see beyond His day to the future. He is able to reveal all His will for all time (Col. 4:12).

What we often consider “new” is nothing more than the revival of old errors in new garments. This revival is not a

sufficient reason to question the completeness of revelation. The fact that difficult questions arise does not mean that God has no answers or that He has not spoken with finality. Just because past generations have not dealt with our problems and issues is no reason to doubt the all-sufficiency of God's Word.

Because there are new questions arising, some have questioned whether we have come to know the truth to the extent that we are truly part of God's kingdom. We frankly agree with those who are saying that restoration is a process. Each of us must be pruning the problems out of our own lives continuously. In a larger sense, the restoration of New Testament Christianity is like growing healthy plants by pruning the unhealthy and unproductive branches. The Word of God, which was preached to us, prunes us (John 15:1-5). That pruning process must continually go on as long as the church survives.

We disagree, however, with those who think the process of Restoration to New Testament Christianity has never taken place because there is a new challenge to the truth, which means we may not know all there is to know. As new challenges arise, so the Word of God is there. The Word of God is imperishable; it is the seed that caused us to be born again (I Pet. 1:23). That same Word is also there to prune away error so that what is healthy may live. The fact that new, unhealthy growths arise and must be pruned does not mean that we have never been part of the vine! It is because we know the truth that we can reject error as it arises (1 John 2:21, 24-27). God's word will survive all attacks and all new challenges from the ingenuity of men.

Let us not be frightened by the unknown, or let it shake our faith in God and His Word. Just because we may not have crystallized our thinking about some new challenge is not proof that God's Word lacks anything! We must not impose our own limitations on the Bible. God's Word is all-sufficient. Our task is to search the Scriptures, to be workmen that do not have to be ashamed, and to handle the Word of truth accurately. Christians in the past have faced tremendous new challenges from false teachers, philosophers and science. They survived, and so can we!

Nor let us be fooled by newly devised compromises to our faith. Satan is offering the same old sins he has always offered.

The packaging may be new; it may have the appearance of wisdom; and it may offer the easy and quick solution. Yet sin is still sin, and the consequences of sin in this life and the next are hard to bear. Our generation has become experts in marketing old products in new packages. Re-labeling doesn't excuse sin. Let's look beneath the veneer and see the real issues before we buy the arguments of the devil.

The Problem of the Canon

Some today are suggesting that because the canon was not fully recognized by all everywhere in the church, one cannot press the issue of silence. Silence cannot be prohibitive, they say, because the canon was not complete until the fourth century. It is obvious that prohibitive silence is bound to belief in the complete and all sufficient Word of God. If early Christians differed on what they understood as the complete truth and yet sustained their relationship with God, some think there can be diversity of opinion on the use of instrumental music in worship and many other doctrines with the approval of God.

Before the written word was the standard of truth, the spoken word of Jesus was the standard of truth. Jesus expected men to receive Him and His words (John 12:48). He promised that the apostles would be guided into all truth (John 16:12-13) through the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit revealed truth to the apostles and prophets in the first century, that revealed Word was the authoritative standard. Paul said to the Ephesian elders, "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20-21). What is even more significant is that Paul regarded his message as whole or complete, "the whole counsel of God" (20:27 ESV, "whole will of God" NIV). Early Christians had a spoken standard until they had the written word. Once the New Testament scriptures were written, they became the standard or "canon." When John penned the last sentence of Revelation, the full New Testament canon was complete. F. F. Bruce said:

One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect. The first ecclesiastical councils to classify the canonical books were both held in North Africa--at Hippo Regius in 393 and at Carthage in 397--but what these councils did was not to impose something new upon the Christian communities but to codify what was already the general practice of those communities.^{xcvii}

Don Shackelford of Harding University further notes:

Although not all the books were known in one place, all the New Testament books were accepted as divine and authoritative by Christians somewhere. No writing known as apostolic was rejected anywhere. Within one generation after John completed his writings, all twenty-seven books of the New Testament were cited as Scripture by some church leaders. Within two centuries, all but less than a dozen verses of the New Testament were quoted in from three to four thousand citations that are now preserved.^{xcviii}

The canonization process of the New Testament is not the same as inspiration. The books of the New Testament are authoritative because they are inspired of the Holy Spirit. They were authoritative the very day they were written. The Lord's Supper was first an orally received Divine tradition and then a written tradition (Matt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). Christians sang praises to God before Paul wrote either Ephesians or Colossians. Without a doubt the uniform practice of the church was vocal praise in song. Whether by spoken truth or by written truth, the apostles and prophets understood the will of God for their lives. If diversity in musical praise were acceptable to God, surely the inspired apostles and prophets of the first century would have known it. Instead, what the evidence clearly shows is an absence of and opposition to instruments of music.

Conclusion

These objections do not change the fact that God does not want us to go beyond that which He instructs us to do. Let us determine never to act without authority from the God who loved us enough to send His Son to die for our sins.

¹ See Robert E. Hooper, *A Distinct People* (West Monroe, La.: Howard Publishing Co., 1993), p. 43. Hooper said, "For a hundred years the Restoration Movement was tenuously held together by a belief in a plea for Christian unity. When a change developed in the definition of the plea, no long was it possible for the movement to remain one body. The first group, therefore, that felt it must follow its own course designated themselves as churches of Christ in the census of 1906. The Disciples were digressive."

² Mike Benson, "Costly Mistakes," *7th and College Bulletin*, Mayfield, Kentucky, Oct. 20, 2002.

³ J. E. Choate and William Woodson, *Sounding Brass and Clanging Cymbals* (Henderson, Tenn.: Freed-Hardeman University, 1991), 236.

⁴ Everett Ferguson, Jack P. Lewis, and Earl West, *The Instrumental Music Issue* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1987), 54.

⁵ Don H. Morris, "Play On, Miss Bertha: Add-Ran and Its Heirs," in *The Instrumental Music Question*, ed. Foy F. Wallace Jr. (Fort Worth, Tex.: Foy E. Wallace Jr. Publications, 1980), 64-74.

⁶ Thomas Campbell, "Declaration and Address," quoted by James DeForest Murch, *Christians Only* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing, 1962), 46.

⁷ Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptist*, Vol. 2, 155.

⁸ D. R. Dungan, *Hermeneutics* (Delight, Ark.: Gospel Light Pub. Co., n.d.) pp. 92,93. Dungan also notes, "Of course great caution should be had in the use of this rule, that we may not at any time be mistaken as to what has been assumed."

⁹ Thomas B. Warren, *When is an "Example" Binding?* (Jonesboro, Ark.: National Christian Press, 1975), 92.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹¹ Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, pp. 235-38, quoted by James DeForest Murch in *Christians Only*, 40.

¹² F. F. Bruce, "Synagogue," in *Answers to Questions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 243.

¹³ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Fifth ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1960), 27.

¹⁴ Don Shackelford ed., *New Testament Survey* (Searcy, Ark.: Resource Publications, 1987), 54,55.

Musical Worship in the New Testament Church and the Use of the Instrument

Many people do not understand why anyone would discuss the use of instruments in the worship of the church. Most folks believe that churches have always used instruments of music in their worship. They are surprised to find that some churches today don't use instruments, and they think them rather peculiar. Churches, however, did not always use instruments; and some churches have never used instruments. In fact, Christians for several centuries were adamantly opposed to using any instruments of music in worship. Not until the thirteenth century AD did churches begin using the instrument widely. Some might ask why one should return to the ancient practice and not adopt the musical instruments so popular today.

In asking this question we are not asking about personal preferences or heritages. We are not interested in opinions or feelings. What we are asking is what does God desire. The New Testament is God's written revelation to all, a faith once for all time delivered to the saints (Jude 3). The New Testament Scriptures provide for us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3) and fulfill Jesus' promise to guide the apostles into all truth (John 16:12-13). The Scriptures tell us what God desires in worship musically, but His instructions never include the use of instruments. Since we are charged to handle Scripture accurately (2 Tim. 2:15), we should review the relevant passages pertaining to musical worship among Christians:

And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26)

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:25).

And for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, "Therefore I will give praise to thee among the gentiles, and I will sing to thy name." (Rom. 15:9)

What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also. (1 Cor. 14:15)

What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a

tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (1 Cor. 14:26)

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:18,19).

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col. 3:16)

Saying, "I will proclaim Thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise." (Heb.2:12)

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. (Heb. 13:15)

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. (James 5:13)

In each and every instance, the music described emphasizes verbal communication: singing, speaking, teaching, making melody in your hearts, confessing, giving thanks, and the fruit of lips. The absence of a reference to instrumental music is startling. God desires music that is both of the mind and the spirit, not something irrational or non-verbal. God did not accidentally leave out instruments in these passages. There must have been a reason. When one considers the common use of instruments among pagans and in the Jewish temple, one is quite shocked to see Christian opposition to their use.

Instruments cannot speak, teach, admonish, give thanks, praise, proclaim, confess or make melody on your heart. These are the things God wants us to accomplish in our singing. Instruments of music fail to do any of them. This is what makes them additions; they do something different from the instruction. They go beyond the instructions in the New Testament.

Jesus taught us in Matt. 7:21-27 that Christians are to do what He says in order to obey His will and enter heaven. The

burden of proof for pianos and organs must be on the one who introduces them to show where Jesus has instructed this form of worship. There has never been any evidence from the Bible, from the language, or from history to show that instrumental music in Christian worship has won God's approval.

The Argument from Authority and the absence of instruments in New Testament worship.

All authority resides in Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18). In any and every question of faith, Christians must ask what the Lord wills (Eph. 5:10,17). The Lord Jesus must have first place in everything (Col. 1:18). It is only when we abide in His word that we are truly His disciples and know the truth (John 8:31-32).

Jesus never taught the disciples to use them. No apostle ever gave an instruction to use them, and no church in the Scriptures gives an example of their use. They were long in existence but ignored in the teaching and the practice of the entire church described in New Testament. The New Testament contains God's complete will for our time, from Pentecost till the Second Coming. Had God wished that Christians use instruments in worship, He would have said so. Since God gave us His entire will for our lives, the fact that He intentionally left them out is quite remarkable. Surely God was aware of their presence, for they were used in the temple. We can only conclude that God left them out intentionally, because He did not want them. Men need to have authority from God for what they believe and practice. Like Jesus, we too should ask, "Is this from heaven or from men?" (Matt. 21:23-27). God requires that those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24; 17:17). One must wonder how an unscriptural practice, begun centuries late by men, can be from heaven or according to the truth. Men have no right to change God's plan or His teaching on any matter. When they do so, they act on their own authority not the authority of God.

Some one says, "The Bible doesn't say we can't play the organ! Therefore, it must be all right." But neither does the Bible specifically condemn burning incense, praying to Mary, roast lamb

with communion, sprinkling for baptism, infant baptism, or a mourner's bench. How can we justify organs and reject these? These, just like using an instrument of music in worship, comes not from God but from men. The right question is not "Where does the Bible condemn an instrument in worship?" but "Where does the Word of God authorize using instruments of music in Christian worship?"

If the Bible were to include everything that God did not want, it surely would be too large to carry. God has chosen to tell us in positive terms what His will is for our lives and our worship. He has shown us *the* way, which rules out all other ways. "*One baptism*" (Eph. 4:5) means there can not be other approved baptisms, and "*one church*" (one body, which is the church, Eph. 4:4; 1:22-23) means there cannot be other approved churches. The specific instruction to *sing* means one should sing. There is no authority for other forms of music. When God instructs us through His Word, He has authorized only that which He has identified. God does not have to exclude all other possibilities with a series of prohibitions. Laws only authorize what they authorize; they do not have to detail everything they do not authorize.

If something must be specifically condemned for it to be wrong, then God wrongly put Nadab and Abihu to death (Lev. 10:1-2), unjustly denied Moses entrance into Canaan (Numbers 20:6-12), unjustly removed Saul as king (1 Sam. 10:8; 13:8-14), and unjustly put Uzzah to death (1 Chron. 13:7-13; 15:2-15; 2 Sam. 6:7). In each of these cases, men acted on their own authority rather than listen to the instructions of God. When men act on their own authority, they greatly err. These examples show that God expects men to follow His expressed will and not follow their own desires.

The Silence of the Scriptures

Since the New Testament says nothing about the use of instruments of music in worship, Christians must consider how they will understand the silence of the Scriptures.

If God requires an action, we all agree that it is necessary for us to do what God requires. If God forbids any action, we all

agree that it can never be acceptable to do what God forbids. It is when God has not spoken on a matter that there is disagreement. One group holds that if God is silent, then every man is free to believe and practice his own opinion. The other group argues that it is necessary to have Scriptural authority for all we believe and practice; otherwise it is forbidden. We hold that this second view is the Biblical one. In dealing with silence we must be careful neither to act beyond what the Scriptures teach nor to make laws where God has not made them.

The Scriptures throughout the Old and New Testaments teach emphatically that men should observe God's teachings carefully, lovingly, completely and accurately. Jesus said, "so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me" (John 14:31). Paul urged Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

If silence were permissive, men could easily introduce any number of corrupt ideas and practices in the church. We would enter a slippery slope leading to certain destruction. But if men maintain what has been taught in the Scripture and carefully observe everything Jesus commanded, they will remain in His Word as true disciples (John 8:31-32). To go beyond the things that are written (1 Cor. 4:6) is to add to the word of God. Moses taught Israel, "Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it" (Deut. 12:32).

John said of false teachers who were corrupting the teaching about Christ, "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9). What is true of this doctrine is also true of other doctrines. No one can go beyond what Christ teaches on any number of subjects and maintain favor with God. Men tread upon dangerous ground when they presume to add to the worship of the church a practice never authorized in the New Testament. Worshiping according to

the teachings of men is called “will-worship” in Col. 2:18-23 and condemned. This self-made religion is offensive to God in that it goes beyond and outside the teaching of the New Testament to pursue its own desires.

The Bible itself uses the argument from silence in its prohibitive sense. In Heb. 1:4-5 the Hebrew writer demonstrates the superiority of the Son to the angels by the fact that God did not say at any time that the angels were His sons, begotten by Him. In Heb. 7:13-14, the same writer says, “For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.” God’s specific instructions to take priests from the tribe of Levi excluded every other tribe.

Divine revelation gives bounds, both positive and negative, to the worship of God. God Himself condemned Israel for worshiping in a way that He had not commanded, a way that never entered His mind (Jer. 7:31). The word “transgression” (παράβασις) means “a going beyond the prescribed limits.” It always denotes a breach of the law. The Hebrew writer, in pointing the superiority of Jesus to angels and the Law, said, “For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” (Heb. 2:1-3) How can we escape if we have such little respect for the teaching of our Lord Jesus that we add our own forms of worship, which He did not command. Is this not transgression, i.e., “going beyond the prescribed limits?”

Both Jesus and the Holy Spirit stayed within the bounds of what the Father told them to speak and to do. Jesus said in John 12:48-50,

"He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak. And I know that His

commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."

Jesus was very careful to speak only that which the Father told Him to speak. He also delivered to us that message with great accuracy and fidelity. I, for one, am thankful that Jesus took such great care to tell me precisely the will of the Father, for I shall one day be judged by that message.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit never dared to speak on His own initiative. Jesus describes the work of the Spirit in John 16:12-13:

"I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come."

If Jesus and the Holy Spirit were unwilling to speak or act on their own initiative, then what right have we to speak or act on ours? If they never dared to innovate, then what rights have we to innovate?

To use instruments of music in the worship of the church is to go beyond what we have been instructed in the New Testament. It is to act on our own initiative rather than listening to what God wills for us.

God has spoken to us in His Word. He has revealed all the truth (John 16:13), and there is no more truth. The silence of the Scripture is not merely a gap, as if God had forgotten something. The silence of the Scripture is an intentional hush after God had revealed all the truth. Since all the truth has been revealed, God did not need to say any more. For us to add more information or to pursue additional practices says to God that His teaching was not sufficient for us. To speak in this kind of silence is to correct or become an editor to God. Paul said in Rom. 11:33-36,

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became his counselor? Or who has first given to

him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

God does not need an editor, and His ways are superior to ours. It is presumptuous to think that we must change God's instructions on any matter by adding our own will. Like David, we should pray,

“Also keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins;
Let them not rule over me;
Then I shall be blameless,
And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.” (Psalm 19:13)

If God had wished us to use the instrument, He would have told us so. The silence of the Scriptures in this instance is prohibitive, because the Scriptures are complete and all-sufficient. Should we go beyond what is written, we act presumptuously on our own initiative. For this reason, the use of instrumental music in worship to God is sinful.

The Argument from History.

The history of the church conclusively shows that instrumental music was an innovation. For many centuries no church used instruments of music. The use of the instrument is of human origin and not of Divine instruction.

“The general introduction of instrumental music can certainly not be assigned to a date earlier than the fifth or sixth centuries; yea, even Gregory the Great, who towards the end of the sixth century added greatly to the existing Church music, absolutely prohibited the use of instruments. Several centuries later the introduction of the organ in sacred service gave place to instruments as accompaniments for Christian song, and from that time to this they have been freely used with few exceptions. The first organ is believed to have been used in Church service in the 13th century. Organs were, however, in use before this in the theatre. They were never regarded with favor in the Eastern

Church, and were vehemently opposed in some of the Western churches.”¹

Everett Ferguson noted:

“It is quite late before there is evidence of instrumental music, first the organ, employed in the public worship of the church. Recent studies put the introduction of instrumental music even later than the dates found in reference books. It was perhaps as late as the tenth century when the organ was played as part of the service. This makes instrumental music one of the late innovations of the medieval Catholic church. When introduced in the Middle Ages, the organ was still not part of the liturgy proper. That is, it did not initially accompany the hymn service, but was a separate item in the service. The type of chant employed left no place for instrumental accompaniment until new styles of music developed.”²

“Both the Jews in their temple service, and the Greeks in their idol worship, were accustomed to sing with the accompaniment of instrumental music. The converts to Christianity accordingly must have been familiar with this mode of singing...But it is generally admitted that primitive Christians employed no instrumental music in their religious worship,” says Lyman Coleman.³

“Only singing, however, and no playing of instruments, was permitted in the early Christian church.”⁴

“There can be no doubt that originally the music of the divine service was everywhere entirely of vocal nature.”⁵

“Indeed, all evidence points to the chant and music of the primitive church as practically identical with the customs and traditions of the synagogue (vocal).”⁶

1 “Christian Music,” John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1876, reprint 1969), VI: 759.

2 Everett Ferguson, *A Cappella Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (Abilene, Tex.: Biblical Research Press, 1972), 81.

3 Lyman Coleman, *The Primitive Church*, 276-77.

4 Hugo Leichtentritt, *Music, History, and Ideas*, 34.

5 Earl Nauman, *The History of Music*, 177.

James W. McKinnon, in his 1965 doctoral dissertation at Columbia University, shows that the early church music was wholly vocal, and that the opposition of the church fathers to instrumental music in worship was both monolithic and vehement.

The Early Church Fathers opposed instruments of music in Christian worship.

Justin Martyr (ca. 150 AD) condemned any association with musical instruments as worldly.

Tertullian (150-222 AD) mentions only vocal music in worship.

Clement of Alexandria (200 AD) severely denounced the use of instruments among Christians even at banquets.

Augustine (354-430 AD) displays the general attitude of the early church against instruments of music for any purpose. "Let no one's heart revert to the instruments of the theatre."

Gregory of Nazianus (330-390 AD) mentions instruments but not in any way to approve them. He believed their only use was the arousal of sensuousness.

Jerome (347-420 AD) speaks only of vocal music and emphasizes that the heart is the source of songs.

Theodoret (ca. 400 AD) says the use of the instrument is a "childish" relic of the Old Testament and is excluded from the worship of the church.

Chrysostom (4th century AD) says of the instruments of the Old Testament allegorically look forward to the pure worship of the lips.

What Various Men Have Said through the Centuries

Thomas Aquinas (1250 AD): "Our church does not use instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that she may not seem to Judaize."

Martin Luther: "The organ in the worship to God is an ensign of Baal."

John Calvin: "It is no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of tapers, or revival of other shadows of the law. The Roman Catholics borrowed it from the Jews."

John Wesley: "I have no objection to the organ in our chapels provided it is neither seen nor heard."

Adam Clark: "I am an old man and an old minister, and I here declare that I have never known instrumental music to be productive of any good in the worship to God, and have reason to believe that it has been productive of much evil. Music as a science I esteem and admire, but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music and I here register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of that infinite Spirit who requires his followers to worship Him in spirit and truth."

Charles Spurgeon: "I would as soon pray to God with machinery as to sing to God with machinery."

John Knox called the organ: "a kist (chest) of whistles."

Alexander Campbell: "To the really spiritually minded, it (using instruments in worship) would be like a cowbell in a concert."

J.W. McGarvey: "And if any man who is a preacher believes that the apostle teaches the use of instrumental music in the church, by enjoining the singing of psalms, he is one of those smatterers in Greek who can believe anything he wishes to believe. When the wish is father to the thought, correct exegesis is like water on a duck's back."

Our purpose is to restore the New Testament church, which never used and greatly opposed the use of instruments of music in worship.

Scripture Shows That God Condemns Innovation:

In Leviticus 10:1-2, the Scripture tells the sad story of the two sons of Aaron who offered up strange fire to the Lord. For eight days Aaron and his sons had consecrated themselves and had obeyed every instruction "just as the Lord had commanded Moses." On the eighth day the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the

burnt offering. When the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

“Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord” (Lev. 10:1-2).

Their offering of strange fire came of their own initiative. While we are not sure exactly what they offered, we do know it was “strange,” i.e., offered in a way not prescribed by the Law. We have no doubt that Nadab and Abihu had good intentions of accompanying the shouts of the people with their offering, but their offerings were self-willed not God-willed. Leviticus 10:3 says:

“By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy,
And before all the people I will be honored.”

Self-willed worship does not honor God, because it arises from the will of men rather than the will of God. Col. 2:23 describes this kind of worship as “will-worship” or “self-made religion” (NASB). Whether under the old covenant or new covenant, God has always demanded that men follow His teachings rather than innovate their own doctrines or practices (John 8:31-32; 2 John 9-11).

The prophet Samuel anointed Saul as king over Israel. In 1 Sam. 10:8, Samuel told Saul, “And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do.”

Saul, however, became anxious before the battle with the Philistines, because the Philistines were so numerous and the Israelites were beginning to scatter (13:1-8). Consequently, Saul presumptuously took it upon himself to offer up a burnt offering. Samuel told Saul,

“You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded

you, for now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.” (1 Sam. 13:13)

Saul had gone beyond his authority and acted on his own to offer up the burnt offering. God rejected Saul as king that day and gave his kingdom to a man after his own heart. We cannot act on our own initiative and maintain a pleasing relationship with God.

When the Pharisees bound traditions of men upon others, they acted beyond the will of God (Matt. 15:8-9).

When Judaizers corrupted the gospel by binding the Law upon Gentiles, they went beyond their authority and were accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

When the false teachers of Jesus day said that Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh, John by inspiration said,

“Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds” (2 John 9-11).

Men have never had the right to develop new doctrines or initiate new practices in the worship and work of the church. To perform any action without divine authority is sinful. To offer a strange offering, which is not prescribed or commanded by God, even with the best of intentions, fails to honor or treat God as holy. We treat God as holy when we listen to His instructions and do them (Matt. 7:24-27). Only by listening to His words and by acting upon them can we please God.

Arguments used by those who favor instruments:

A. The use of Psallo (ψαλλω) in Eph. 5:19.

Over time *psallo* has gradually changed in meaning. It first meant "to touch, twang, strike strings." Next it meant "to touch or play strings of harp." Later it meant, "to sing with the harp." At last it meant, "to sing praises." (without any thought of any instrument of music). The only time in the LXX that *psallo* meant play was

when the instrument was specified in the context; otherwise it meant to sing (LXX 150 B.C.). In the New Testament *psallo* is used four times. It meant

- "sing" Rom. 15:9; 1 Cor. 14:15; James 5:13
- "make melody or make music" in Eph. 5:19. The maker of the music or melody is to be the heart. No instrument is even considered here except the heart itself.

Everett Ferguson said of *psallo*, "If the precise meaning of certain verses may be in doubt, what is clear is that an instrument did not inhere in the word *psallo* in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, dating 150-250 BC). *Psallo* could translate a word meaning 'play' (*nagan*), or a general word (*zamar*). The meaning, which would cover all occurrences, is 'make melody.' This could include making melody on an instrument, but in the preponderance of occurrences it clearly refers to making melody with the voice."¹ F. F. Bruce said of *psallo* in Eph. 5:19, "Nor should the etymological force of the terms be pressed, as though *psalmos* inevitably meant a song sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument...while such plucking of the strings is the original sense of *psallo*...it is used in the NT with the meaning 'to sing psalms.'"² In confirmation of this view, the Greek Orthodox Church (who knows Greek better than anyone) has never used instruments of music in worship.

While some have abandoned the idea that *psallo* requires the use of an instrument, they today suggest that it permits the use of the instrument in Ephesians 5:19. If this were so, the first readers of the epistle of Ephesians and early churches did not know it. If Paul indeed was permitting the use instruments, we are at a loss to explain why early churches so adamantly and uniformly opposed them. Actually, no ancient writer ever made the argument that *psallo* and *psalmos* permitted the use of instruments in worship. In fact, George P. Slade³ in 1878 was the first ever to

¹ Everett Ferguson, *A Cappella Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (Abilene, Tex.: Biblical Research Press, 1972), 6-7.

² F.F. Bruce, *NICNT on Ephesians and Colossians*, 284.

² F.F. Bruce, *NICNT on Ephesians and Colossians*, 284.

³ George P. Slade, "Psallo and Psalmos," *American Christian Review* 21, no. 4 (22 January 1878): 25.

argue that *psallo* or *psalmos* permitted the instrument even if the instrument is not mentioned. Early Christians never understood the context of Ephesians or Colossians to demand or permit instruments.

The first rule of hermeneutics in the study of words is that a word does not and cannot mean what the author and the first readers did not understand it to mean. Whatever the words *psalmos* and *psallo* meant to them, it could not have demanded or permitted the use of instruments. The universal opposition to the use of instruments among the early church fathers makes it clear they understood the epistles of Ephesians and Colossians to teach vocal music only.

B. The use of instruments in the Old Testament.

Psalms 150 and 2 Chron. 29:25-27 show that the use of instruments in Jewish worship is a command from God. However, Christians are not bound to and do not live under the Old Covenant that God made with the Jews. We are under a new covenant ratified by the blood of Christ and taught in the New Testament. For this reason, we don't offer incense, dance, or make animal sacrifices. The New Testament is a better covenant than the old and is a spiritual covenant (Heb. 8:6-13; 10:1-10).

The Old Testament had a temple building; in the New Testament Christians are the temple of God. Our laws are written on our hearts not on tablets of stone. Our worship is not outward and showy but inward and spiritual (John 4:21-23).

C. There are harps in heaven (Rev. 5:8; 15:2)

Each of these passages refers to a vision John had of the throne of God in heaven, not Christian worship in the church. Each reflects Old Testament literature where the worship of the temple is considered ideal. But Christians do not worship in the Jerusalem temple; instead they are the temple of God. Incense is burned in heaven as well; are we to burn incense? Saints in heaven wear crowns and cast them toward God? Are we to do the same? Our task is not to imitate what is done in heaven but to be obedient to Jesus and His teachings for us. If Christians should play harps, why didn't the church do it in the New Testament? Why didn't

they understand they were to imitate what is done in heaven? Heaven is heaven and earth is earth.

D. The use of instruments is an aid to singing.

Some say, "Instrumental Music is justified as an aid to worship in song in the same way a song book is an aid. What is the difference in having a song book aiding in following the words of the song and a piano aiding in following the music of the song?"

Expedients or aids must first be lawful, *i.e.*, *they must aid in doing that which is instructed by God*. Nothing more than singing is done when a songbook is used. The words of a book help all the singers to sing in harmony with each other. A piano, however, involves something more than singing, speaking, teaching or admonishing. Song books aid in accomplishing the purpose of singing. Pianos make a different kind of music. Expedients must truly aid. Organs and bands often hinder the singing, which must compete to be heard. Expedients must edify. Pianos produce musical sounds that are meaningless to the mind, but the songbook has words. Organs may stimulate the emotions, but they do not instruct the mind.

Expedients must not divide, but the instrument has been a source of division for many churches. Hundreds of thousands of Christians have parted ways, because men have introduced into the worship an unscriptural practice.

Playing an instrument adds a new form of worship. The instrument is not merely an aid but was itself a means of praising God in the Old Testament but is unauthorized in the NT. (2 Chron. 5:13; 29:25) Playing lyres and psalteries were themselves forms of worship not merely aids. An expediency aids in the performance of an instruction, but an expediency does not change the instruction. An addition changes the instruction so that people do something different than the instructions required. Expedients are lawful, whereas additions are not lawful.

Most people understand these differences in other areas. It is one thing for Noah to use tools to build the ark; it is another matter for Noah to add floors or windows to the ark. While we do not know how many rooms the ark had, we know that it had three floors and one window. God did not specify the number of rooms

but left that up to Noah to decide; but God specified the number of windows and floors. If Noah had acted beyond his authority and made a second window or a fourth floor, the Bible could never have said that Noah “according to all that God had commanded him, so he did” (Gen. 6:22).

When God gives specific instructions, He expects His people to do precisely what He commands; but when God gives general instructions, He permits men to use their wisdom to fulfill those commands. One might use a tray or cups to serve the Lord’s Supper of bread and fruit of the vine. Trays and cups aid in doing what God wills. Adding roast lamb to the Lord’s Supper, however, goes beyond the instruction and is of human design. It can never please God to pursue self-made religion.

It matters not whether a person is baptized in baptistery, pool, river, lake, sea or bathtub. Any one of these places contain enough water to fulfill the instruction to baptize (immerse). What the command to baptize does not enjoin, however, is a different action. Immersion is not sprinkling or pouring. And when one substitutes one action for another, one violates the commandment of God. Fulfilling the commandment through an expedient is not equivalent to changing the commandment.

The singing God asks of us comes in the form of speaking, teaching, admonishing, giving thanks, confessing, and offering the fruit of our lips. A songbook or a pitch pipe can help us fulfill these instructions, doing exactly what God wills. A piano or instrument of music, however, adds a different kind of music and a different means of praise. Instruments cannot speak, teach, admonish, or give thanks. They offer their own form of worship, different from what the Lord specified for musical worship.

Instrumental music in the Old Testament was not merely an aid to worship; it was itself a form of worship (Psalm 81:2-3; 92:1-3; 150). David made arrangements with the Levites, who “shall offer praises to the Lord with instruments which I have made for praise” (1 Chron. 23:6). David “stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with harps, and with lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the king’s seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for the command was from the Lord through His prophets” (2 Chron. 29:25; cf. 28). To suggest today that it is

merely an aid ignores that it was used for a different purpose in the Old Testament.

The Difference between Expedients and Additions

*Expedients Help Fulfill the Instruction,
but Additions Change the Instruction.*

Bible Example	Expedients Lawful and Authorized	Additions Unlawful and Unauthorized
Noah's Ark Gen. 6:13-22	Tools to cut, join, and to spread pitch	Larger size, additional windows, additional woods
Tabernacle Ex. 25:9,40; 26:30 Ex. 39:32,42,43	Tools to work silver, gold, and wood in making the tabernacle and its furniture.	Making ark of covenant out of both acacia and pine wood
Lord's Supper Bread and Fruit of the Vine	Trays and Cups	Roast Lamb
Baptize, Be Baptized	Baptistery, pool, river, lake, sea, or bathtub	Sprinkle and pouring Are different actions.
Singing Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 13:15	Songbook, pitch pipe, tuning fork	Piano, Organ Different kind of music, Different means of praise

As an aid, a pitch pipe or a tuning fork does not operate during the singing and is not designed to be heard by all. They give the pitch and then remain silent. Instruments, on the other hand, are designed to be played loudly enough to be heard by all throughout the song. Pitch pipes and tuning forks do not play tunes; their only function is to give a pitch, so that the leader may know the correct pitch on which to begin a song.

E. There are no laws in the New Testament regulating corporate worship.

That God takes the worship of Christians seriously can be seen quite clearly in 1 Corinthians 11. When the Corinthians were abusing the Lord's Supper (11:17-34) by taking their meals before one another and some getting drunk, Paul called a halt to their unloving behavior. He pointed them to the original instruction to remember the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. Because they had failed to discern the body, some were weak and sick and others asleep spiritually. The Lord's Supper was a corporate activity, a means of worship in the assembled church. Failure to worship properly led to spiritual disapproval before God. Because the Corinthian church failed to keep God's regulations of the Lord's Supper, Paul had to rebuke them. Paul both received and delivered instructions regulating the Lord's Supper. These instructions were Divine tradition and were taught widely throughout the church. This shows there are indeed laws in the New Testament regulating corporate worship.

Colossians 3:16 should not be interpreted out of the context of Col. 4:16, where Paul said, "And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea." While the letter was written specifically to Colossae, its teaching was also meant for other churches. It is important to know that both Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 were first read to an assembled church.

F. Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 do not apply to worship assemblies.

Some are saying today that there are no laws in the New Testament that apply to the corporate musical worship of the church. The argument is that Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16 were to be fulfilled by an individual in his daily life and did not speak to the corporate worship of the church. This is an odd argument, considering that both Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16 are verses in cyclical epistles to be read in assembled congregations. The very nature of the passages show that neither can be fulfilled by an individual but require a group of people to fulfill.

Ephesians 5:18-21 has a series of five masculine plural participles (“speaking,” “singing,” “making melody,” “giving thanks,” and “submitting yourselves”) all of which have imperative force agreeing with the verb “be filled,” which is itself imperative. This sort of Greek structure can be seen in Matt. 28:19-20 where the imperative “make disciples” is followed by participles “baptizing” and “teaching.” The actions designated by such a construction are not optional. To fulfill the command, “speaking to one another,” there has to be mutual communication between at least two people. I know of no way in which one can distinguish in a plural imperative between two people and a much larger group.⁴ The Ephesian letter is addressed to the saints [in Ephesus] who are also faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1). The imperatives of 5:19 should be no less inclusive than the people to whom the letter is addressed.

Ephesians 5:19 says, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.” The pronoun (εαυτοις)□ “one another” used in this passage is reflexive, used reciprocally. It indicates that the subject of the action is also the object of the action of the verb. The “speaking to one another” is from each and to all the others. In this instance, the pronoun is not singular but plural. Since most versions translate the term “one another,” this reflexive pronoun is used reciprocally to indicate an exchange between two or more groups.

Speaking, teaching, and admonishing are actions that require speakers and listeners; it demands a plurality of people. These verses are not speaking about private singing but functions of groups, where pluralities of people are present. Singing was a means of mutual edification as well as praise. Everett Ferguson said,

Although Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, which provide rich sources for the discussion of early Christian singing, have as their literary context the Christian life in a larger sense, the

⁴ This argument based on one made by Jack P. Lewis, “New Testament Authority for Music in Worship,” *The Instrumental Music Issue* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1987), 36.

statements are drawn from practices of the church. The practice of the assembly is to influence the entire Christian life. Other texts make clear the presence of song as a congregational activity (Matt. 26:30; 1 Cor. 14:15, 26).⁵

Clearly these passages include instructions to assembled congregations as clearly as to other situations in life.

G. Christians Worshiped with Instruments when they went into the Temple.

Some are suggesting that since Jewish Christians in the first century worshiped in the temple (Acts 2,3,21), and since instruments were used in temple worship, then Christians participated in musical worship with instruments.

What Jews did in the temple is not a model for what Christians are to do in the church. While some eagerly wish to employ instruments of music in the worship of the church, they ignore that in the temple Jews also offered animal sacrifices and burned incense. Are they suggesting that we also practice these things?

It is clear that some participation took place, but there was a progression of change also taking place in the book of Acts. Until the conversion of Cornelius, all Christians were Jews and participated in temple worship as Jews. Gentiles like Cornelius, however, were not required to keep the Law when they became Christians (Acts 15; Gal. 2:11-21). In fact, Paul condemned those who bound the Law on Christians (Gal. 5:1-4).

While the temple stood, Jewish Christians had the option of offering sacrifices as Paul did in Acts 21. Later New Testament epistles, however, make it clear that Christians were not to offer such sacrifices any more (Eph. 2:13-16; Heb. 9:11-10:4). Jesus Christ is our atoning sacrifice, once for all time. When the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, the Temple worship ceased.

⁵ Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christs: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 268.

Early church history confirms that churches saw no need to bring Jewish worship into their assemblies. If temple worship served as permission for Christians to use the instrument, why did the early church fathers oppose the instrument? Theodoret in the fifth century argued that the use of instruments is a childish relic of the Old Testament and is to be excluded from the worship of the church.

The priests and Levites, not the congregation carried on worship in the temple. At its center, temple worship was not a congregational assembly,⁶ although people customarily did gather in the courts at the time of sacrifice. The Levites did the singing.

The church seems to have kept more to the practices of the synagogue for its worship. Carl Kraeling and Lucetta Mowry said, “Both at home and abroad, the music of the early Synagogue was exclusively vocal, whether because of opposition to pagan custom or as a sign of mourning for the destruction of the Temple.”⁷

H. Instrumental Music is not a “Salvation Issue”; it is a non-issue.

Some suggest that whether or not one uses instrumental music in worship really doesn’t matter. Since we all are imperfect and stand in the need of the grace of God, whether we use instruments is a moot question. They believe they can continue using the instrument without losing favor with God.

Any issue that involves sin is a “salvation issue.” When people persist in sin and do not repent, they put their souls in peril (Heb. 10:26; 2 Pet. 3:9; Luke 13:3,5). The question here, then, is the use of instrumental music in worship sinful. Based upon the Scriptural evidence we have examined, we believe it is sinful to go beyond the authority of the New Testament and use musical instruments to worship. Some might use it for a time and then repent; surely God’s grace will forgive them in response to their repentance. What will happen to those who will not repent?

6 Jack P. Lewis, “New Testament Authority for Music in Worship,” *The Instrumental Music Issue* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1987), 24.

7 Carl H. Kraeling and Lucetta Mowry, “Music in the Bible,” *New Oxford History of Music*, ed. Egon Wellesz (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), I:302.

Today some believe they may persist in doctrinal error without repentance. Paul said to the Romans, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” (Rom. 6:1-2) We ought to be grateful for the grace of God. Presuming upon that grace is dangerous; it is building upon sand. Those who use the instrument must do so on their own initiative, for there is no command, approved example, or inference in Scripture that the church ever worshiped that way.

Conclusion

We can only conclude based on the evidence that to play instruments of music in the worship of the church is to act beyond the authority of the New Testament. Self-made religion has in all times found disfavor with God. God has told us what He desires from us musically. If we love Him, we will please Him and glorify in the way He instructs us. If we do otherwise, we are building our houses upon sand. We can give no assurance to those who practice self-made religion that their way will find the approval of God.

It is so much better to listen to the teaching of Scripture and simply follow it. We know that singing is approved of God, but we cannot find any evidence that playing is approved. Is it not wiser to do that which we know God approves? Loving the Lord means that we will follow His teaching and obey His will (John 14:15). We urge all men everywhere to follow the New Testament pattern of singing and to avoid adding an instrument to their musical worship.

LET US HOLD FAST

*“But examine everything carefully;
hold fast to that which is good;
abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess.5:21, 22).*

**“Retain (hold fast) the standard of sound words
which you have heard from me, in the faith and love
which are in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13).**

The Restoration heritage has rightfully pointed us to the New Testament for our rule of faith and practice. That written record of the covenant between our God and us is built upon the shed blood of our Lord, by which our God has reconciled us. While to some the principle of a prohibitive silence seems far away from the death of Christ and the blood He shed for our sins, it is not. Jesus himself lived by the principle of doing only that which is authorized. He died upon the cross at the commandment of His Father. It is by His grace and because of His willingness to pay the price that a church even exists. These reasons are sufficient for any caring Christian to want to carefully, lovingly, completely, diligently and accurately obey His Lord, the Author and Finisher of his faith.

For several years critics of our brotherhood have made the unwarranted assumptions that strong doctrinal stances somehow indicate a lack of love or that strong conviction somehow points to hypocrisy. Jesus, however, took strong doctrinal stands. Indeed, Jesus believed in doctrinal purity; and no Christian needs to be ashamed to regard doctrinal purity as a virtue. Following the Savior's lead, Paul took a stand on the gospel, of which he was not ashamed, and for which he withstood others to the face (Rom. 1:16; Gal. 2:16). The gospel is our only hope of truth in this world. For this reason we all must strive to find the gospel in all of its love and beauty, its grace and mercy, and its firmness and truth.

This book is about God's instructions and God's silence. It is written with the conviction that *the content of what one believes* is as important as *the fact that one believes*. The Scriptures never debase doctrine. It never ridicules doctrinal purity or commitment to accuracy. It is the purpose of this book to help the reader to distinguish between what the Lord wills and what He does not will. With this in mind, let me suggest these five classes into which doctrines and practices may be evaluated:

1. *The Instructed*. This is the complete biblical instruction. To this we urge all men to hold fast. To this we urge study, meditation, prayerful consideration, memorization, and steadfast application. To be sure, let every serious student be concerned with the language, the context, the background, and the intent of Scripture. Let every man handle it accurately and he a workman who does not have to be ashamed.

2. *The Unwarranted*. This is the doing of what God has not authorized. It may be similar to that which is authorized but changes its essential character. A teaching or practice is unwarranted when it produces something less than what God instructs, teaches or practices something more than what God instructs, or teaches or practices something other than what God instructs. To teach or practice less than what God warrants is to be silent when God has spoken. To teach or practice more than what God has taught or warranted is to speak in the silence of God. To teach or practice something other than what God instructs is to follow a man-made doctrine; it is going to the right or the left and not following the way of God. (It is precisely here that using instruments of music in worship belongs, for example.)

3. *Expedients*. This is what is helpful in doing what God says to do but may not be specifically mentioned in Scripture. These things are authorized and warranted by the general authority of Scripture. One maintains doctrinal purity when he uses an expedient.

4. *Tradition*. Tradition is what has been passed down from

those who are before us. The word itself reflects that which has the authority of its originator. Traditions can have no more authority than their source, but Divine tradition has the authority of God. There are three kinds of traditions.

The first kind is that *which comes from God*; it is to be followed (1 Cor.11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6). To follow these traditions is to do so with the approval of God.

The second kind is the *tradition of men* which arises from the teachings of the world (Col. 2:8). It is manifestly false and leads men away from Christ.

The third kind of tradition comes from men who seek to please God *by binding a teaching or a practice* that they believe is an expedient to serving God. In some cases these regularly practiced expedients help, but in other cases they may invalidate the word of God (Matt.15:1- 14; Mark 7:1-13). These traditions often begin as expedients for good but end up as if a law of God. Bound expedients, to the exclusion of viable, alternative expedients, can create a wedge that destroys churches and adds to the law of God. We must always be careful to distinguish between Scriptural instruction and man-enforced traditions, between an expediency that is for good and one that enslaves. Only God has the right to bind and to loose; man-made traditions must never gain that status.

It is not wrong to fulfill a command in an expedient way on a regular basis. It is wrong to bind the expedient tradition as if it were the law of God. As long as men understand an expedient as an expedient and not law, they do well. As long as men remember that an expedient tradition is subject to change, they will do well. But if men ever take a notion to bind a regularly practiced expedient, they will speak presumptuously.

5. *Opinion*. An opinion is defined as speculation without evidence, a guess without proof. Men certainly have freedom in this realm to hold whatever opinions that they choose and that do not conflict with the Scriptures. Opinions operate in those areas where God has not spoken and are thereby speculations. Speculations can never be made into binding doctrine. Paul warned

about the need to avoid useless speculations (2 Tim. 1:4; 2 Tim. 2:23).

Making the proper distinctions between these classes of thought and practice will help us greatly in our determination of the will of God. Respecting the things that God has said and the silence of the Scripture will help us greatly in this endeavor. Bill J. Humble said in the 1969 Fort Worth Christian College Lectures:

Early in the history of the restoration movement, Thomas Campbell coined the plea “We speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent.” This commitment to the authority of the Bible has been the secret of our strength, our uniqueness, and our growth. And if the time ever comes when we surrender this commitment and become unconcerned about speaking as the oracles of God, from that time onward it will make little difference what we speak, or whether we speak at all.^{xcix}

Humble is correct in this assessment, and it pains this author to realize that many have lost sight of this Biblical principle of respecting not only the spoken will of God but also His silence. In the past churches of Christ were known as “people of the book” who listen and take heed to what they read in the Word of God. This is a noble and good quality which must not ever be abandoned. It truly is this unwillingness to compromise, to disregard, or to depreciate the place of Scripture that has distinguished churches of Christ from the churches of the world. Our very identity as the people of God is wrapped up in our dogged determination to do the will of God lovingly, accurately, diligently, completely, and carefully. If we ever move from that goal, we will cease to enjoy the favor of God. If we belong to Christ, let us truly belong to Him and not to ourselves or the popular ideas of the world. Let us with one accord listen to Him and to Him alone.

Where Are We as a Brotherhood?

There is no little confusion today among churches of Christ on the issue of silence. A minority of brethren has fully embraced permissiveness. They feel no hesitance to allow instruments of music and quasi-choirs in their worship services. They see prohibitive silence and *a cappella* worship merely as a tradition of men, which may easily be abandoned. Other churches, preferring *a cappella* music, have chosen to remain vocal in their main assemblies but permit instruments in other gatherings. They do not oppose the instrument for Scriptural or doctrinal reasons but for "traditional" reasons. They do not condemn the use of instruments but will not use them for the sake of their identity and heritage. Having cast aside the Scriptural arguments, they embrace a *cappella* music for sentimental reasons.

Many brethren are naive, having little idea what kind of musical praise God desires. They know we don't use instruments of music in worship, but these brethren *don't know why*. Unfortunately, because they don't know why, they cannot give the coming generation a sufficient reason for their practice. Without sufficient reason one way or the other, many younger Christians have chosen to do as they please. When an older generation can't tell the younger why, the younger generation will wonder why even ask the question. Many young Christians see no reason today to discuss the instrument. They can see no reason to oppose it and find the condemnation of it quite offensive. The fact that older brethren have not studied the issue sufficiently to teach later generations does not mean that opposition to the instrument is Biblically unjustified. Brethren who understand the truth must not remain silent and allow sin in the camp.

One can only imagine the uproar when generations of unimmersed people learned that Biblical, Christian baptism was by immersion. Some gladly accepted the message, while others reviled the messengers for their judgmentalism. For some it was much easier to remain naive than to think through the matter; others sentimentally clung to what their families had practiced no matter what. Truth is sharper than a two-edged sword; it divides those who will accept from those who will not. Truth can even look into a man's soul and determine the thoughts and intentions of his heart (Heb. 4:12).

How we react to the silence of God has much to do with attitude and approach. Some will hear the Scriptures and respond appropriately, while others will mock and do as they please. Our brotherhood is large and diverse; in its current state brethren will respond in a variety of ways. Some will intentionally embrace the instrument, ultimately causing a breach of fellowship with those who refuse to use it. Such division is tragic but unavoidable, when mindsets are so strong. Those who choose to act beyond the teaching of Scripture will have to go without the support of their brethren who hold fast to the teaching. Love for God and His truth cannot coexist with error and presumption.

Christians who have made up their minds to hold fast to the Biblical teaching of vocal praise must do a better job of teaching the reasons why they worship *a cappella*. They cannot assume people know the reasons why or that our "heritage" will be strong enough to keep the instrument out of our assemblies. The doctrine of prohibitive silence, the regulative principle, is sufficient reason to remain vocal and to refuse instruments. If Jesus would not act beyond the Father's instructions, then neither can His faithful servants.

God has spoken! He has clearly and plainly instructed us in how to worship Him. We can see no value in putting Him to the test, to see whether He means what He has said. God has spoken fully and completely. When He finished speaking, He hushed. Nothing more needs to be said; our task is faithfully to do what He has instructed.

¹ Bill J. Humble, "Issues Arising Over Authority," in *1969 Ft. Worth Christian College Lectures* (Ft. Worth, Tex.: FWCC Book Store, 1969), 84.

ⁱ Deut. 4:2; 5:32,33; 12:32; 28:1,13,14. Cf. Deut. 6:17,18, 25; 10:12,13; 13:4; 32:46,47. All quotations are from the New American Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

ⁱⁱ Deuteronomy uses careful” 19 times to describe our keeping of God’s law’s: 2:4; 6:3,25; 8:1; 11:22,32; 12:13,19,28,32; 16:12; 17:10; 23:23; 24:8 (2); 26:16; 28:1,58; 31:12. “Carefully” is used to describe how we obey eight times: 4:15; 5:1; 12:1; 15:5; 17:19; 19:9; 28:13; 32:46.

ⁱⁱⁱ Deuteronomy emphasizes doing “all” the will of God by “keeping all the commandments,” “observing all the commandments,” and “walking in all the ways of the Lord” 31 times. Deut. 11:8 urges men to “keep every commandment.” Continuous obedience is emphasized by the use of “always” four times: 5:29; 14:23; 11:1; 19:9.

^{iv} Deuteronomy emphasizes “diligence” five times: 4:9; 6:9,17; 24:8; 28:1. (This statistical information is taken from the *Exhaustive Concordance* of the New American Standard Version.) It is interesting to note that the word translated “diligent” in the NASV is the same Hebrew word as is “careful.”

^v Deuteronomy commands that the Israelites “love” God 12 times: 5:10; 6:5; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1,13,22; 13:3,4; 19:9; 30:6,16,20. In every case “love” is used in a context of obeying God’s laws and walking in His ways.

^{vi} While the word “accurate” is not used in Deuteronomy, “accurate” well describes a prominent concept in the book. Deut. 5:32 insists that men “do just as the Lord commanded.” The concept of not turning to the right or left is emphasized in 5:32; 17:11,20; 28:14. The idea of walking in His ways” is emphasized in 5:33; 8:6; 10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9; 30:16. To turn from His way is regarded as great sin: 9:12,16; 11:28; 31:29. Deuteronomy also contrasts between doing what men wish and what God wishes. Men’s doing what they desire is condemned in 12:8 and 29:19. Doing what is right in God’s eyes is approved in 13:18 and 21:9.

^{vii} Deut. 2:27. Cf. 17:11,20; 28:14; Josh. 1:7.

^{viii} See endnote 2.

^{ix} The subject of silence and expediency is dealt with at length in chapter 8 of this book. At this point it is sufficient to say that expediency is not in the realm of the hushed silence of God discussed here. It is not silence that authorizes expedients. The commands, direct statements, inferences, and examples of the Scriptures authorize expedients.

^x Cf. John 14:21,23,31; 1 John 2:5.

^{xi} See endnote 5.

^{xii} Cf. 1 Cor. 4:6; 1 John 2:22-24; 2 John 9-11.

^{xiii} 1 Pet. 2:21.

^{xiv} Luke 6:40.

^{xv} F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 113. As in John 6:44; 8:18; 12:49; and 14:24, Jesus refers to His Father as the “one who sent Me.”

^{xvi} John 5:30; 6:38; 7:18; 8:50; 9:4; 10:37,38; 12:49,50; 14:31; 15:10; 17:4; and 19:28-30. “The life of Jesus consists of doing the will of God, *i.e.*, carrying out the work of salvation, in doing this in the works, the preaching and the deeds which are given Him by the Father and the performing of which is the witness that he is sent by the Father, 5:36. In the execution of ‘the’ historical work by Jesus there thus takes place the glorifying of the Father on earth, 17:4. John stresses that Jesus fulfills only that which is assigned to Him by God” (Gerhard Delling, *teleioo*, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Win. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1964), VIII:81. Hereafter cited as *TDNT*).

^{xvii} Matt. 15:1-15; Heb. 2:14,15; John 8:32-36.

^{xviii} *TDNT* V: 998n3, 14.

^{xix} A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1932), V:84.

^{xx} Commenting on this passage, Albert Barnes observed: “That is nothing without the appointment of the Father; nothing contrary to the Father, as he immediately explains it. . . . Such is the nature of this union, that he can do nothing which has not the concurrence of the Father, and which he does not command. In all things he must, from the necessity of his nature, act in accordance with the nature and will of God. Such is the intimacy of the union, that the fact that he does anything is proof that it is by the concurring agency of God. There is no separate action; no separate existence; hut, in being and in action, the most perfect oneness between him and the Father.” Barnes, *Barnes Notes on the New Testament*, ed. Ingram

Corbin, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, n. d., reprinted 1962), pp. 288,289.

^{xxi} Bruce, 128.

^{xxii} See 8:28,42; 12:49; 14:10. “Both here and in v. 19 the order of the words lay great stress on ‘ouden’ (nothing). If he were to act independently of God (supposing such a thing were possible). Jesus would be completely powerless. The whole meaning and energy of his work lie in the fact that it is (sic.) not his work but God’s.” Leon Morris, *John*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. N. B. Stonehouse (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, n. d.), 323n87. Hereafter cited as *NICNT*.

^{xxiii} 1 Tim. 1:12-16. “Everywhere Jesus forestalls the idea that He is speaking for Himself, and is uttering merely human judgments, or is in any way regulated in his actions by what is arbitrary: it is the supreme Will He represents.” Marcus Dods, *Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Win. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., reprinted 1976), 1:754.

^{xxiv} *NICNT*, John, p. 405. Barnes also notes: “It is not originated by me. Though I have not learned it in your schools, yet you are not to infer that the doctrine which I teach is devised or invented by me. I teach nothing that is contrary to the will of God, and which he has not appointed me to teach. . . . It is such as he approves, and such as he has commissioned me to teach. The doctrine is divine in its origin and in its nature.” *Notes*, op. cit., p. 300.

^{xxv} Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Luke 3:22; Phil. 2:8; 2 Pet. 1:17; Isa. 53:10-12.

^{xxvi} James D. Bales, *Be Silent Where the Bible Is Silent* (Unpublished manuscript, 1992), 36.

^{xxvii} “The truth which he declares is not something that he himself has thought up; it has been entrusted to him by the one who sent him. As the Son can do nothing of his own initiative, but only what he sees the Father doing (John 5:19), so the Son can teach nothing on his own initiative, but only what he is told by the Father.” F. F. Bruce, *John*, 149.

^{xxviii} Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, trans. and ed. Cleon Rogers (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 242.

^{xxix} Dods, *Expositor’s Greek Testament*, 1:814. In 12:50 the words “kathos” and “outos” bear out the fact that in an emphatic way that Jesus spoke in content and in manner just as the Father told Him. Note how these words are used in a comparative sense in I Thess. 2:4; Col. 3:13; and 1 John 2:6.

^{xxx} At 12:49 the *Revised Standard Version* says: “I did not speak on My own authority.” The *Twentieth Century Version* says: “Therefore, whatever I say, I say only what the Father has taught me” (12:50). The *Amplified Version* says: “So whatever I speak, I am saying (exactly) what My Father has told Me to say” and in accordance with His instructions” (12:50).

^{xxxi} Deut. 4:2; 5:32,33; 12:32; 28:1,13, 14; 32:46,47.

^{xxxii} Deut. 5:32-33; Matt. 7:13-14. The *Amplified Version* says: “I do as the Father has commanded Me, so that the world may know (be convinced) that I love the Father, and that I do only what the Father has instructed Me to do.--I act in full agreement with His orders” (John 14:31).

^{xxxiii} It should be noted here that the Holy Spirit, in like manner, was never presumptuous so as to go beyond the stated will of the Father. Cf. John 14:26; 16:12-15. No man ever rises above the example of obedience set for us by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

^{xxxiv} 1 Thess. 5:21,22

^{xxxv} 1 Thess. 5:19,20.

^{xxxvi} Deut. 4:2; 12:32.

^{xxxvii} TDNT 1:383.

^{xxxviii} Raymond C. Kelcy, *The Letters of Peter and Jude* in The Living Word Commentary Series, ed. Everett Ferguson (Austin, Tex.: R. B. Sweet Co., Inc., 1972), XVII:172. Cf. Acts 6:7; 13:8; Eph. 4:5; 1 Tim. 4:1.

^{xxxix} James D. Bales, *The Finality of the Faith* (Shreveport, La.: Lambert Book House, 1972), p.34.

^{xl} Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 253.

^{xli} Eph. 1:7; 1 John 1:7-9; Rev. 1:5

^{xlii} See Isa. 24:18; Jer. 48:44; Psa. 7:16; Prov. 26:27.

^{xliii} Jack P. Lewis, *The Gospel According to Matthew* in the Living Word Series (Austin, Tex.: R. B. Sweet Co., Inc., 1972), 2:2:26.

^{xliv} Gen. 6:2; Job 1:6; 2:1

^{xlv} Eph. 5:23-6:9; Col. 3:18-4:1

^{xlvi} Heb. 7:11; 8:1

^{xlvii} Mark 3:35; John 14:15; 15:10

^{xlviii} 1 John 2:5; 5:3

^{xlix} 1 John 4:2; 2:22

^l Brethren have discussed whether “the teaching of Christ” refers to what Christ teaches (subjective genitive) or to the teaching about Christ (objective genitive). Some have argued that if this is an objective genitive, i.e., the teaching about Christ (that He is the Christ, the Son of God, who came in the flesh), then abiding “in the teaching” in this passage refers *only to the specific doctrine about the person of Christ*. If this were a subjective genitive, however, it would apply to any teaching of Christ. One can make good cases for both the subjective and the objective genitive in 2 John 9. In either case, however, *one must abide in the teaching of Christ* to have a relationship with both the Father and the Son. This is true with regard to this particular teaching on the person of Christ, and it is equally true with the gospel (Gal. 1:6-9) and the teaching of Christ in general (John 8:31; 1 John 2:24; 3:24). It is impossible to believe that one could advance beyond the teaching of Christ in any number of vital

doctrines and still please God. *It is the advancing beyond the revealed will that excludes one from possessing God. Advancing beyond the teachings of Christ is sinful and creates heresy.* The failure to abide in the teaching or to keep the commandment makes one as guilty as a deceiver. The presumptuous belief that God's Word needs editing or enlarging on any subject has led men to speak when God is silent. This presumption is great error and will always lead to heresy.

Hugo McCord pointed out that "it makes more sense to speak of going onward or transgressing the doctrine which came from Christ than to speak of going onward or transgressing the deity of Christ. If exclusive reference to the deity of Jesus were intended in 2 John 9, it appears the word *deny* (cf. 1 John 2:22) would be more fitting than the words *go onward or transgress*. Further, the word *abide* in 2 John 9 may be used of the words of Christ (John 15:7) just as easily as the deity of Christ. In addition, items non-separable from the doctrine of Christ in 2 John 9 in John's thinking are the following: walking in the truth (vs. 1-4), walking in the commandments (vs. 4-6), loving (vs. 5), and working (vs.8). It would be difficult to understand that John meant one could fellowship a person who, though not walking in the truth, not walking in the commandments, not loving, and not working, nevertheless held to the deity of Christ."

¹ J.B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1989).

² Lightfoot, *Fathers*.

³ Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heresies* 6, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3 (n.p., n.d.; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975), p.246. Hereafter cited as ANF. In chapters 22-25 of Tertullian's *Prescription*, he makes a case for the apostles that "there was nothing of which they were ignorant, to whom He had promised the future attainment of all truth by the help of the Spirit of truth. And assuredly he fulfilled His promise since it is proved in the Acts of the Apostles that the Holy Spirit did come down" (253). Cf. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1910, reprint 1959), 2:520.

⁴ Tertullian, *Against Hermogenes*, 22, ANF 3:490. Also ANF 3:94. In speaking of Lamech's two wives being an unscriptural arrangement, Tertullian wrote: "What scripture does not note, it denies." ANF 6, quoted in James D. Bales, *The Church in Transition to What?* (Searcy, Ark.: Bales, 1992), 59-61. In his *Prescription Against Heretics*, Tertullian further argues, "Now this heresy of yours does not receive certain Scriptures; and whichever of them it does receive, it perverts by means of additions and diminutions, for the accomplishment of its own purpose; and such as it does receive, it receives not in their entirety; but even when it does receive any up to a certain point as entire, it nevertheless perverts even these by the contrivance of diverse interpretations. Truth is just as

much opposed by an adulteration of its meaning as it is by a corruption of its text” (Chapter 17).

⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 9, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 193.

⁶ Clement, *Stromata* VII:16, ANF 11:550. The title given to chapter 16 is, “Scripture, the Criterion by Which Truth and Heresy is Distinguished.” A. Cleveland Cox in an elucidation on the chapter notes: “The Primitive Fathers never dream of anything as dogma which cannot be proved by the Scriptures, save only that the apostolic traditions, clearly proved to be such, must be referred to in proving what is Holy Scripture. It is not possible to graft on this principle the slightest argument for any tradition not indisputably apostolic, so far as the “*de fide*” is concerned. “*Quod semper*” is the touchstone in their conceptions, of all orthodoxy. No matter who may teach this or that, now or in any post-apostolic age, their test is Holy Scripture, and the inquiry, ‘Was it always so taught and understood?’” (ANF 11:557)

⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3: pref.:1. ANF, vol. 1. Cf. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1960), 153, 154.

⁸ McGiffert, *History*, p. 164. Irenaeus believed that if it was not apostolic, it was not true. For him what was apostolic belonged to the first two generations of the church, and this was alone Christian (p. 163). As successors of apostolicity, however, Irenaeus appealed to the living voice of the bishops who presided over churches founded by apostles and to the apostolic creed. (160, 161). Eusebius quotes Papias as accepting oral tradition over written word. Eusebius Pamphilus, *Ecclesiastical History* 3:39, trans. Christian Frederick Cruse (n.p., 1850; reprint Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1974). In spite of this, it is clear that the early church fathers sought to go to the foundations. See also Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak* (Austin, Texas: Sweet Publishing, 1971), 28. Valdemar Ammundsen, “The Rule of Truth in Irenaeus,” *Journal of Theological Studies* XIII (1912), 574-80.

⁹ Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and the Antichrist* 67, ANF V:219.

¹⁰ Hippolytus, *Against the Heresy of One Noetus* 9, ANF V:227. In a footnote on this passage, A. Cleveland Coxe says, “This emphatic testimony of our author to the sufficiency of the Scriptures is entirely in keeping with the entire system of the Ante-Nicene Fathers.”

¹² Quoted by Alexander Campbell in “Unanimous Consent of the Fathers,” *Millennial Harbinger*, 1st ser., 1 (Jan., 1837):19-22; reprint, Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1976), VIII:19-22. Campbell says, “If there be any consent at all among the Fathers, it is in recommending upon all, and to all, the necessity, utility, and importance of reading the Sacred Scriptures, as the true and only source of faith and morals” (p. 20). See Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1957 reprint of 5th ed. of 1910), 3:606,607.

¹³ Cyril, PNF, ser. 2, 7:32.

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- ¹⁴ Basil, *Moralium Regula* 72. Quoted by Campbell, *Millenial Harbinger* 8:20.
- ¹⁵ Basil, *Moralium Regula* 28, 80 as summarized by Blomfield Jackson, PNF, ser. 2, 8:lii.
- ¹⁶ John Chrysostom, PNF, ser. 1, 13:240 and 14:236-240.
- ¹⁷ Campbell, "Unanimous Consent of the Fathers," 21.
- ¹⁸ Vincentius of Lerinum, Cap. 2. Cf. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3:613-615.
- ¹⁸ John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa* 1. Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967) quoting Lecture 71 G and I sent. Prol. q. 1, a 1, note 3d.
- ²⁰ Neander, 8:346. Latourette, 1:450.
- ²¹ Latourette, 1:452. Neander, 8:364. Note also J. C. Stockbridge, "Waldenses," in *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, John McClintock and James Strong eds., ten volumes (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1881), 10:855. Stockbridge lists the things the Waldenses opposed in Rome. Peter Waldo translated the four gospels into French, the first translation of the Bible in a modern language. He held the Holy Scripture to be the source of faith and religion, without regard to the authority of the fathers or to tradition.
- ²² Williston Walker, *Ten Epochs of Church History*, ed. John Fulton, 9 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1900), 9:49.
- ²³ Tim Dowley ed., *Eerdmans Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977), 316.
- ²⁴ Reinhold Seeburg, "William of Occam," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1951), 8:218. See also Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1970), 252.
- ²⁵ Neander, 9:58. Some scholars deny that this book was written by Occam and attribute it to a contemporary. Even if Occam did not write the book, this example shows the supremacy of Scripture for doctrine.
- ²⁶ F. L. Cross ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed., (New York: Oxford, 1974), 1503.
- ²⁷ Neander, 9:217.
- ²⁸ Henry Hargreaves, "The Wycliffite Versions," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe, 3 vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), 11:392; see also p. 208. Wycliffe believed the Scriptures "are the only law of the church." Walker, *History*, 269.
- ²⁹ Walker, *Epochs*, 9:41.
- ³⁰ Latourette, 1:666,667.
- ³¹ Neander, 9:411.
- ³² Latourette, 1:669.
- ³³ Walker, *History*, 273. The Taborites were "fundamentalists in the tradition of John Wycliffe and wished to confine doctrine to what was explicitly stated in the Bible." Rudolf Heinze, "Taborites," in *New International Dictionary of the*

Christian Church, ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1974, 951. Hereafter cited as NIDCC.

³⁴ Latourette, 1:670.

³⁵ *Ibid.* See also “Wesel,” in McClintock and Strong, 10:906.

³⁶ David C. Steinmetz, “John of Wesel,” in NIDCC, 544. Cf. Richard A. Mueller, “filioque,” *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1985), 118.

³⁷ Latourette, 1:670.

³⁸ Schaff, *History*, 2:526-528.

³⁹ Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Restoration Principle* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1960), 79.

^{li} James I. Packer, “*Sola Scriptura* in History and Today,” in *God’s Inerrant Word*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 43,48,49.

^{lii} *Ibid.*, 49,50.

^{liii} Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, trans. Helen I. Needham (Chicago: Moody, 1969), 324.

^{liv} Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, revised ed. (Boston: W. A. Wilde Company, 1956), 159.

^{lv} Roland H. Bainton, “The Bible in the Reformation,” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. S. L. Greenslade, 3 vols., Cambridge: University Press, 1963), 3:4.

^{lvi} C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, Tex.: ACU Press, 1988), 23.

^{lvii} Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (London: Yale University Press, 1980), 324. See Latourette 11:748. In 1528 Zwingli defended the Theses of Berne, which said: “‘The Church of Christ makes no laws or commandments without God’s Word. Hence all human traditions, which are called ecclesiastical commandments, are binding upon us only in so far as they are based on and commanded by’ God’s Word.” *Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church*, 1514. For the theses, see Arthur C. Cochrane ed., *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), n.p.

^{lviii} Bainton, *Cambridge History*, 3:4,5.

^{lix} C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, Tex.: Abilene Christian University Press, 1988), 27-29.

^{lx} Conrad Grebel, “Letter to Thomas Muntzer,” in *The Protestant Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968), 124,125. See also 126,127.

^{lxi} Norman Sykes, “The Religion of Protestants,” in *Cambridge History*, 3:176.

^{lxii} John Calvin, Reply to Sadoleto.” in *The Protestant Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand, 156.

^{lxiii} *Ibid.*, 158. See also 166,169.

^{lxiv} John Calvin, “Institutes of the Christian Religion,” *Ibid.*, 182, 183. Ramm points out that Calvin insisted that the ‘illumination of the Spirit’ was the necessary spiritual preparation for the interpreter of God’s Word (*Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 58). For many Protestants today illumination means the leading of the Spirit into a sensitivity and spiritual perception of the meaning of the text. They are quick to point out, however, that no man can say he has had infallible illumination from the Holy Spirit (*Ibid.*, 14).

^{lxv} Allen and Hughes, *Roots*, 30.

^{lxvi} Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Restoration Principle* (St. Louis, Mo.: Bethany Press, 1960), 116 citing H. O. Wakeman, *The History of the Church of England*, 10th ed., 217.

^{lxvii} Cited in James Deforest Murch, *Christians Only* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard, 1962), 15.

^{lxviii} Pt. 1, chap. 6, sect. 56 quoted in West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 4 vols. (Nashville, Tenn.: Gospel Advocate Company. 1964), 1:47. See also *Cambridge History.*, 3:175.

^{lxix} Quoted in DeGroot, *The Restoration Principle*, 118.

^{lxx} A. C. Watters, *History of British Churches of Christ* (Indianapolis: Butler University, 1948), 2; quoted by West, *Search*, 1:47.

^{lxxi} Quoted in DeGroot, 118.

^{lxxii} John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, ed. I. T. Ramsey (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958), 67.

^{lxxiii} West, *Search*, 1:47.

^{lxxiv} Dwaine E. Dunning noted, “The viewpoint that silence means ‘forbid’—originally appearing in Calvinistic Puritanism....” “Are subjects of Debate Important to God?” *One Body*, n.d., 35,36. Allen and Hughes argue, “The stress on ‘Scripture alone,’ the strong anti-traditionalism, the call for a return to the sources, the insistence on the right of the individual to read the Bible for him—all of these things are a legacy to us from the Reformation.” *Roots*, 32,33. There is no doubt that we can trace similarity of approach to Zwingli, Calvin and the Anabaptists among others. But one must recall the Bible examples long before the time of the Reformation. Josiah also learned of Israel’s error by simply hearing the Law. Josiah was unconcerned with Humanism but highly concerned with repentance and restoring Israel’s worship.

THE CREEDS OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Quotations from this section are taken from Volume 3 of Philip Schaff’s *The Creeds of Christendom: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds with Translations*. Roman numerals and numbers refer to articles.

The Augsburg Confession (1530 A.D.), written by Philip Melancthon and approved by Martin Luther.

XXI. But the Scripture teacheth not to invoke saints, or to ask help of saints, because it propoundeth unto us one Christ the Mediator, Propitiatory, High-Priest, and Intercessor.

XXII. But the dissension is concerning certain (traditions and) abuses, which without any certain authority have crept into the churches. (Part II: Articles in which are recounted the abuses which have been corrected.)

VI. It is no light offense in the Church to propound unto the people a certain service devised by men, without the commandment of God, and to teach that such a service (monastic vows) doth justify men.

VII. If so he that the Bishops have any power of the sword, they have it not as Bishops by the commandment of the Gospel, but by man's law given unto them of kings. Moreover, it is against the Scripture to ordain or require the observation of any traditions, to the end that we may merit remission of sins, and satisfy for sins by them. Moreover, the authors of tradition do contrary to the command of God when they find matters of sin in foods, in days, and like things, and burden the Church with the servitude of the law Whence, then have Bishops power and authority of imposing these traditions upon the churches, for the ensnaring of men's consciences, when Peter forbids (Acts 15:10) "to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples," ...?

Conclusion: "Those things only have been enumerated which it seemed necessary to say, that it might be understood that in doctrine and ceremonials among us there is nothing received contrary to Scripture or to the Catholic (Universal Christian) Church, inasmuch as it is manifest

that we have diligently taken that no new and godless doctrines should creep into our churches.”

Formula of Concord (1576 A.D.)

X. There has also arisen among the divines of the Augsburg Confession a controversy touching ecclesiastical ceremonies or rites, which are neither enjoined nor forbidden in the Word of God, but have been introduced into the Church merely for the sake of order and seemliness. For the better taking away of this controversy we believe, teach, and confess, with unanimous consent, that ceremonies or ecclesiastical rites (such as in the Word of God are neither commanded nor forbidden, but have only been instituted for the sake of order and seemliness) are of themselves neither divine worship, nor even any part of divine worship. For it is written (Matt. 15:9): ‘In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (Roman Catholics made such ceremonies necessary to merit grace) . . . We repudiate and condemn the following false dogmas as repugnant to the Word of God: That human traditions and constitutions in things ecclesiastical are of themselves to be accounted as divine worship, or at least as part of divine worship.

The French Confession of Faith (1559 A.D.)

“That since God has sufficiently declared his will to us through his Prophets and Apostles, and even by the mouth of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, we owe such respect and reverence to the Word of God as shall prevent us from adding to it any thing of our own, but shall make us conform entirely to the rules it prescribes. And inasmuch as the Roman Church, forsaking the use and customs of the primitive Church, has introduced new commandments and a new form of worship of God, we esteem it but reasonable to prefer the commandments of God, who is himself truth, to the commandments of men, who by their nature are inclined to deceit and vanity.”

V. We believe that the Word contained in these books has proceeded from God, and receives its authority from him alone, and not from men. And inasmuch as it is the rule of all truth, containing all that is necessary for the service of God and for our salvation, it is not lawful for men, nor even for angels to add to it, to take away from it, or to change it. Whence it follows that no authority, whether of antiquity, or custom, or numbers, or human wisdom, or judgments, or proclamations, or edicts, or decrees, or councils, or visions, or miracles, should be opposed to these Holy Scriptures. but, on the contrary, all things should be examined, regulated, and reformed according to them.

XXIV. We believe, as Jesus Christ is our only advocate, and as he commands us to ask of the Father in his name, and as it is not lawful for us to pray except in accordance with the model God hath taught us by his Word, that all imaginations of men concerning the intercession of dead saints are an abuse and a device of Satan to lead men from the right way of worship.

The Belgic Confession (1561 A.D.)

VII. We believe that these Holy Scriptures full contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein. For since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for anyone, though an Apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: nay, though it were an angel from heaven, as the Apostle Paul saith. For since it is forbidden to add unto or take away any thing from the Word of God, it doth thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects. . . . Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule,

which the Apostles have taught us, saying, Try the spirits whether they are of God; likewise, If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house.

XXXII. And, therefore, we reject all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever. Therefore we admit only of that which tends to nourish and preserve concord and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God.

XXXV. Therefore we reject all mixtures and damnable inventions, which men have added unto and blended with the Sacraments, as profanations of them, and affirm that we ought to rest satisfied with the ordinance which Christ and his Apostles have taught us, and that we must speak of them in the same manner as they have spoken.

The Scotch Confession of Faith (1560 A.D.)

XVIII. In the quhilk (which, i.e., the Old and New Testaments) we affirme, that all things necessary to be beleaved for the salvation of mankinde is sufficiently expressed. . . . When controversie then happines, for the right understanding of ony place or sentence of Scripture, or for the reformation of ony abuse within the Kirk (church) of God, we ought not sa meikle to luke (look) what men before us have said or done, as unto that quhilk the haly Ghaist uniformelie speakes within the body of the Scriptures, and unto that quhilk Christ Jesus himselfe did, and commanded to be done. ^{»lxxiv}

The Second Scotch Confession, or The National Covenant (1580 A.D.)

“But in special, we detest and refuse the usurped authoritie of that Romane Antichrist upon the scriptures of God, upon the Kirk, the civill Magistrate, and consciences of men: All his tyrannous lawes made upon indifferent things againis our Christian libertie: His erroneous doctrine againis the sufficiencie of the written word, the perfection of the law, the office of Christ, and his blessed Evangell.”

“We detest all his vain allegories, rites, signes, and traditions brought in the Kirk, without or againis the Word of God and doctrine of this trew reformed Kirk.”

The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England (1571 A.D.; American Revision, 1801 A.D.)

VI. Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to he required of any man, that it should he believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

XXII. The Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping and Adoration, as well of Images as of Relics, and also Invocation of Saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warrantie of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.

The Irish Articles of Religion (1615 A.D.)

6. The holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation, and are able to instruct sufficiently in all points of faith that we are hound to believe, and all good duties that we are bound to practice.

75. It is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God’s Word: neither may it so expound one place of Scripture that it he repugnant to another.

Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of holy Writ, yet as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not enforce any thing to be believed upon necessity of salvation.

76. Wherefore things ordained by them (general councils) as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be shown that they be taken out of holy Scriptures.

87. Those five which by the Church of Rome are called Sacraments, to wit: Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction, are not to be accounted Sacraments of the Gospel; being such as have partly grown from corrupt imitation of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures, but yet have not like nature of Sacraments with Baptism and the Lord's Supper, for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God, together with a promise of saving grace annexed thereto.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647 AD.)

I:6. The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men (2 Tim. 3:15-17; Gal. 1:8,9; 2 Thess. 2:2).

I:10. The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined and in whose sentence we are to

rest, can he no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

XX:1. But the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited to his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.

The Savoy Declaration of the Congregational (1658 A.D.)

This declaration is a modification of the Westminster Confession.

XXI:2. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to his Word, or not contained in it; so that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith and an absolute and blind obedience is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.

The Declaration of the Congregational Union of England and Wales (1833 A.D.)

Principles of Church Order and Discipline: II. They believe that the New Testament contains, either in the form of express statute, or in the example and practice of apostles and apostolic churches, all the articles of faith necessary to be believed, and all the principles of order and discipline requisite for constituting and governing Christian societies; and that human traditions, fathers and council:, canons and creeds, possess no authority over the faith and practice of Christians.

The Baptist Confession of 1688 (The Philadelphia Confession)

7. To each of these churches thus gathered, according to his mind declared in his Word, he hath given all that power and authority which is any way needful for their carrying on that order in worship and discipline which he hath instituted for them to observe, with commands and rules for the due and right exerting and executing of that power.

Methodist Articles of Religion (1784 A.D.)

V. The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

XIV. The Romish doctrine concerning purgatory, pardon, worshiping, and adoration, as well of images is of relics, and also invocation of saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warrant of Scripture, but repugnant to the Word of God.

Articles of Religion of the Reformed Episcopal Church in America (1875 A.D.)

V. And hence it (the Holy Scriptures) containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

XXXI. The Romish doctrines concerning purgatory, penance, and satisfaction have no support from the Word of God, and are, besides, contradictory of the completeness and sufficiency of the redemption in Christ Jesus . . . Praying for the dead is man's tradition, vainly invented, and is in violation of the express

warnings of Almighty God to the careless and unconverted. The adoration of relics and images, and the invocation of saints, besides that they are grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, are idolatrous practices, dishonoring to God and compromising the mediatorship of Christ.

The Second Helvetic Confession (1566 A.D.)

- I. And in this Holy Scripture, the universal Church of Christ has all things fully expounded which belong to a saving faith, and also to the framing of a life acceptable to God; and in this respect it is expressly commanded of God that nothing he either put to or taken from the same (Dent. 4:2; Rev. 22:18,19).

- II. Therefore, in controversies of religion or matters of faith, we can not admit any other judge than God himself, pronouncing by the Holy Scriptures what is true, what is false, what is to be followed, or what to be avoided. . . . We do likewise reject human traditions, which, although they be set out with goodly titles, as though they were divine and apostolical, . . . yet, being compared with the Scriptures, disagree with them; and by that disagreement bewray themselves in no wise to be apostolical.

- XIV. We believe that this sincere confession (of sins), . . . is sufficient; and that it is not necessary for the obtaining of remission of sins that any man should confess his sins unto the priest, whispering them into his ears, that the priest laying his hands on his head, he might receive absolution: because we find no commandment nor example thereof in the Holy Scripture.

- XVI. But as for such works and worships of God as are taken up upon our own liking, which St. Paul calls

“will-worship” (Col. 2:23). they are not allowed nor liked of God. Of such the Lord says in the Gospel, “They worship me in vain, teaching for doctrine the precepts of me” (Matt.15:9). We therefore disallow all such manner of works, and we approve and urge men unto such as are according to the will and commandment of God.

XVII. We say, then, that the true unity of the Church does consist in several points of doctrine, in the true and uniform preaching of the Gospel, and in such rites as the Lord himself has expressly set down.

XVIII. And we have not taken away the ministry of the Church because we have thrust the popish priesthood out of the Church of Christ. For surely in the new covenant of Christ there is no longer any such priesthood as was in the ancient Church of the Jews: which had an external anointing, holy garments For the Lord himself has not appointed in the Church any priests of the New Testament, who having received authority from the suffragan, may offer up the host every day, that is, the very flesh and the very blood of our Saviour For the minister of the Church is commanded wholly, and in all parts of his duty, not to please himself, but to execute that only which he has received in commandment from his Lord. . . . But if the minister deal not in all things as the Lord has commanded him, but pass the limits and bounds of the faith, then the Lord does make void that which he does.

XIX. The author and institutor of all sacraments is not any man, but God alone: for man can by no means ordain sacraments; because they belong to the worship of God, and it is not for man to appoint and prescribe a service of God, but to embrace and retain that which is taught unto him by the Lord. And therefore, we cannot allow

of them who attribute the consecration of the sacraments ...which are not left unto us either by the word, or by the example, of Christ or his apostles.

XX. We believe that the most perfect form of baptism is that by which Christ was baptized, and which the apostles did use. Those things, therefore, which by man's device were added afterwards and used in the Church we do not consider necessary to the perfection of baptism. Of this kind is exorcism, the use of lights, oil, spittle, and such other things; as namely, that baptism is twice every year consecrated with divers ceremonies.

XXV. As for Popish visiting with the extreme unction, we have said before that we do not like it, because it has many absurd things in it, and such as are not approved by the canonical Scriptures.

^{lxxv} Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Boston: W. A. Wilde Co., 195b), 171.

^{lxxvi} Everett Ferguson, "What about Women in the Church?" *The Christian Chronicle*, September 2001, 32. Ferguson made this observation in review of Carroll D. Osburn's book, *Women in the Church: Reclaiming the Ideal*, ACU Press, 2001. Ferguson criticizes Osburn for assuming that Paul "approves" of the women's practice. Ferguson notes that the head covering is prescriptive while the praying and prophesying are descriptive of what some Corinthian women were doing. Writing in an earlier volume edited by Osburn on the same subject, Ferguson says, "Except in some heretical and schismatic groups, the churches in the early patristic period evidence prohibitions on women speaking in the assembly and serving in leadership positions of bishop/presbyter or presiding at liturgical functions. On the other hand, in ministering functions women were actively involved and exercised leadership responsibilities in a variety of other ways." Ferguson, "Women in the Post-Apostolic Church," in Osburn, ed. *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, Vol. 1, 1995, 513.

^{lxxvii} Thomas B. Warren, *When Is an "Example" Binding?* (Jonesboro, Ark.: National Christian Press, 1975), 109-119.

^{lxxviii} Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6,11; 2 Tim. 3: 16,17; Jude 5.

^{lxxix} Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 117.

^{lxxx} Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System* (1835, reprinted Nashville, Tenn.: Gospel Advocate Co., 1970), 57.

^{lxxx} *Ibid.*, 71.72.

^{lxxxii} *Ibid.*, 74.

^{lxxxiii} *Ibid.*

^{lxxxiv} *Ibid.*

^{lxxxv} See Robert E. Hooper, *A Distinct People* (West Monroe, La.: Howard Publishing Co., 1993, p. 43. Hooper said, "For a hundred years the Restoration Movement was tenuously held together by a belief in a plea for Christian unity. When a change developed in the definition of the plea, no long was it possible for the movement to remain one body. The first group, therefore, that felt it must follow its own course designated themselves as churches of Christ in the census of 1906. The Disciples were digressive."

^{lxxxvi} Mike Benson, "Costly Mistakes," *7th and College Bulletin*, Mayfield, Kentucky, Oct. 20, 2002.

^{lxxxvii} J. E. Choate and William Woodson, *Sounding Brass and Clanging Cymbals* (Henderson, Tenn.: Freed-Hardeman University, 1991), 236.

^{lxxxviii} Everett Ferguson, Jack P. Lewis, and Earl West, *The Instrumental Music Issue* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1987, 54.

^{lxxxix} Don H. Morris, "Play On, Miss Bertha: Add-Ran and Its Heirs," in *The Instrumental Music Question*, ed. Foy F. Wallace Jr. (Fort Worth, Tex.: Foy E. Wallace Jr. Publications, 1980), 64-74.

^{xc} Thomas Campbell, "Declaration and Address," quoted by James DeForest Murch, *Christians Only* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing, 1962), 46.

^{xci} Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptist*, Vol. 2, 155.

^{xcii} D. R. Dungan, *Hermeneutics* (Delight, Ark.: Gospel Light Pub. Co., n.d.) pp. 92,93. Dungan also notes, "Of course great caution should be had in the use of this rule, that we may not at any time be mistaken as to what has been assumed."

^{xciii} Thomas B. Warren, *When is an "Example" Binding?* (Jonesboro, Ark.: National Christian Press, 1975), 92.

^{xciv} *Ibid.*, 65.

^{xcv} Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, pp. 235-38, quoted by James DeForest Murch in *Christians Only*, 40.

^{xcvi} F. F. Bruce, "Synagogue," in *Answers to Questions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 243.

^{xcvii} F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Fifth ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1960), 27.

^{xcviii} Don Shakelford ed., *New Testament Survey* (Searcy, Ark.:Resource Publications, 1987), 54,55.

^{xcix} Bill J. Humble, "Issues Arising Over Authority," in *1969 Ft. Worth Christian College Lectures* (Ft. Worth, Tex.: FWCC Book Store, 1969), 84.