

## Does Silence Authorize Opinion?

Have you ever been discussing applications of authority with someone, and run into the argument that if the New Testament is silent on a specific subject, then man is free to exercise his opinion on that matter? It usually goes like this: “Yes, I realize the New Testament does not authorize it, but neither does it forbid it. Therefore man is free to have and to exercise his opinion on the matter.” Such an attitude will open the door to all kinds of unscriptural activity.

For instance, the New Testament is completely silent on the subject of the sponsoring church, church-supported orphan homes, church-supported schools and colleges, infant baptism, social drinking, etc. That is, the New Testament does not expressly say, “Thou shalt not” to any of these issues. However, the New Testament does not authorize such either. In fact, Holy Spirit-inspired men argued against this notion. In Acts 15, when false teachers wanted to add to the gospel of Christ, the inspired men said, “Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment” (v. 24). Silence did not give them permission to act!

Does Christ’s silence place these matters into the realm where we have a right to exercise an opinion? The answer is no! Silence does not authorize anything. There is New Testament authority for:

1. A church to directly support an effort to preach the gospel (Philippians 4:14-17).
2. Orphans to be visited and good done by individual Christians (James 1:27; Galatians 6:10) and this might even entail supporting institutions called orphan homes (though families serving as foster or adoptive homes would be far better).
3. Individuals to provide for their own, and to spend their money on acceptable activities as they see fit (Acts 5:4; 1 Timothy 5:8) and therefore individuals might support colleges to educate the young.
4. Baptizing repentant believers (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:37-38).
5. “Medicinal” usages of a “little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities” (1 Timothy 5:23).

These are authorized activities, and there is often some generic authority that goes with these activities. Some examples of generic authority:

1. A preacher may be sent cash, check, or wire transfer.
2. Orphans may be kept and raised in personal or institutional homes.
3. Children may be home schooled, public schooled, or sent to a college or technical school.
4. Repentant believers may be baptized in baptisteries, rivers, or lakes.
5. “A little” alcohol may be taken for stomach problems, colds, and coughs (though today medical science has often provided better alternatives).

Although we have general and specific authority, we must be very careful in its application. God's silence in matters of authority does not authorize:

1. One church sending funds to another church to support a preacher (a sponsoring church).
2. Church support of orphans homes.
3. Church support of colleges.
4. Christening and baptizing infants.
5. Using alcohol as a general beverage of consumption.

Silence is silence — not authority. If you order a white shirt, a blue tie, and black shoes online and you are sent two white shirts, a red tie, and a pair of slippers, if you are like me you are going to say, "I didn't order that. You've to take all this back." The online store could easily say, "But you didn't forbid us to send these items." My answer would be, "No, I authorized you to send only what I authorized." Likewise, New Testament silence does not extend authority or give anyone the right to practice an opinion that violates God's word.

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