

Silence Is Not Always Golden

Introduction. "Silence is golden" is a proverb that everyone has heard, and that the book of Proverbs supports (13:3; 17:27-28; 21:23). However, proverbs (whether biblical or societal) are not intended as truths to guide our conduct in every situation. Silence does not always manifest wisdom and honor.

In recent years, politicians and political appointees, when questioned before Congress about their conduct, have chosen to remain silent under the protection of our Fifth Amendment, which is a constitutional provision to protect one from giving self-incriminating testimony. Why would an honorable person try to shun an answer and keep a matter shrouded in silence? The most basic reasons are the fear of opposition or to avoid the consequences of wrongdoing. The safe road to avoid taking a stand is to stay quiet or issue a disclaimer to signal neutrality.

In Bible times, some refused to take a stand for God and His truth. They were condemned for their cowardice. People of courage, daring to stand against the views of those in places of power, were approved by God.

I. Examples

A. Elijah.

1. Elijah stood in opposition to the wicked ways of King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. Ahab and Jezebel had introduced the idolatry of Baal to Israel with all of its associated evils. Elijah stood against that system and urged others to oppose it as well. When Ahab came face to face with Elijah, the exchanged words were terse (1 Kings 18:17-18).
2. When all of the people were gathered, they had a choice to make (1 Kings 18:21). Who would they follow? Their king who had the power over them or Elijah who spoke an unpopular message in opposition to the king?
3. Many of that crowd had participated in the idolatry to Baal and their silence stemmed from their own guilt in this sin. Others feared the king more than they loved the truth, so they chose silence rather than standing for righteousness. However, the prophet stood with boldness that day and God gave victory to His truth through Elijah (1 Kings 18:22-39).

B. The man born blind.

1. In John 9, Jesus gave sight to a man who had been born blind. When the Pharisees who opposed Jesus asked the man who had made him to see, the man answered unashamedly even over the objections of the powerful Pharisees. However, the man's parents

did not exhibit such courage (John 9:21-23). This answer was a dodge.

2. His parents dodged a straight answer because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. The level of their cowardice is seen more clearly in their failure to stand in defense of the one who had acted with such grace in healing their son.
- C. The chief rulers.
1. In John 12, there is a similar case involving those in places of power who did not want to lose their position by confessing Christ (John 12:42-43).
 2. Think about the influence for good these leaders could have had if only they had the courage to stand up for truth. What a shame it was that such people loved the praise of men more than God! It is a sad fact that some still do.

II. Applications

- A. Individually.
1. God wants us to correct others (Galatians 6:1; cp. 2:11-14), because He corrected His children (Isaiah 35:3-4). This is part of the purpose of fellowship — of putting brethren together who can benefit from one another.
 2. The justification for silence is made to sound noble with a variety of excuses. However, the nobility of that silence melts when one examines such inaction with the truly superior path commanded by Christ.
 - a) If one knows the wrong is due to his actions, one must take the initiative and reconcile with their brother (Matthew 5:23-24).
 - b) If the wrong has originated from the other person towards us, Christ commands that we approach them for reconciliation (Matthew 18:15).
- B. Congregationally.
1. The early church was plagued by departures from the faith. Inspired men were willing to warn to prevent apostasy (Acts 20:29-31; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12; Peter 2:1-19; Jude 3-16).
 2. When sin and division occurs, confronting the issue is always demanded.
 - a) Our society has witnessed unquestionable ungodliness on display in every realm. And society will try to force us into silence regarding current issues such as abortion, euthanasia, and same-sex marriage. A lot of people will sacrifice a stand for honor as long as peace and prosperity prevail. However, a stand

must be taken and the moral principles of the scriptures must be adhered to.

- b) When people are being factious, a congregation cannot be silent. The contentious must be marked and rejected (Romans 16:17-18; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14; Titus 3:10-11).
 - c) In recent years, we have witnessed an ever growing litany of teachers of false doctrines to be received, errors to overlook as "no big deal" and sins tolerate within our fellowship (Ephesians 5:11; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:16-18). Instead of boldly urging a stand for Bible truth, many elders in large congregations and preachers with heavy meeting schedules have taken the "silence is golden" approach. Too many members have been more anxious to have numerical growth even at the sacrifice of truth. "Unity in diversity" has become the rallying cry of those willing to practice a growing tolerance, except towards faithful saints boldly standing for Bible truth. Just as our Lord warns, this division will cut deep (Matthew 10:34-38; Luke 18:28-30).
3. When division looms, we face choices on how to deal with the conflict. Do we confront the issues openly and honestly in an effort to seek reconciliation or do we choose a more comfortable silence that is easier, but only assures permanent division? A comfortable silence is to be expected as characteristic of the world (1 John 2:15-17). However, God's people cannot be tempted to do the same.

Conclusion. Silence is not golden, nor is it the higher road of nobility or dignity. It is the way of cowardice and disobedience. God wants us to be bold and cry out (Isaiah 58:1; Ezekiel 2:3-8; Ephesians 6:20). If we are to serve God righteously, we must realize our responsibility to stand for God and His truth regardless of the cost. At times, it will cost us ridicule, opposition, and even denunciation. But we must remember that it is the ultimate praise of God that we seek, not the temporary popularity of this world.