

God Has Spoken

Tract Series

“Why Doesn’t this Church Use a Piano?”

by A. L. Parr

The above question has often been asked of members of the church of Christ. This question cannot be properly answered until another question is properly answered. That other question is this: How is authority established? In other words, how can we know for sure what God will accept and what He will not accept?

Some people believe that, if God has not forbidden us to do a certain thing, then His silence permits us to do that thing. The Bible teaches a different principle in determining authority. In brief, we may paraphrase God’s principle as, “if God does not authorize it, then we may not do it.” In answering the question we will first illustrate the governing principle, then we will show the verses which teach us to follow the principle. Having done this, we will make the application of the principle.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Mother may send the daughter to the store to buy bread and milk. But to the child that shiny candy wrapper is just too much temptation. When the girl comes home with bread, milk and candy, Mother says, “I didn’t say anything to you about candy. Why did you buy candy with my change?” Very few of us had a mother who would have accepted our argument, “But you didn’t say not to buy candy.”

When, as a boy, I helped my dad build a fence on the farm, one of my important tasks was to hand him tools while his hands were occupied with holding the boards and nails in place. If he said, “Hand me a hammer,” do you think that he would have been happy if I gave him the screwdriver instead? Not likely.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds
(Hebrews 1:1-2).

Why would our parents have named something specific if they didn't care what we did? If we order steak for dinner, spaghetti just doesn't qualify.

BIBLE TEACHING

In Hebrews chapter 7 the argument is being made that we can know that the Old Testament law of Moses has been replaced. We know this because we know that we have a different priesthood. It is evident that we have a different priesthood for, "He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar" (v. 13). Then we read in verse 14, "For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood." The logical argument runs like this:

"Since the Law of Moses said nothing about priests coming from the tribe of Judah, therefore no priest can come from the tribe of Judah. But Jesus is from Judah, and Jesus is our high priest. Therefore Jesus is not operating under the law of Moses, but under another law."

That other law, of course, is the New (not the Old) Testament, but it's the first part of that logical argument that we need to understand as it applies to the question of music in the church (and to our understanding the whole Bible): if God didn't say anything about it, then we have no authority to do it.

The same point is made in Acts 15. When Jewish Christians went out from Jerusalem preaching the gospel (Acts 8:1-4), they at first preached only to other Jews (Acts 11:19). When some of them came to Antioch in Syria, however, they preached also to the Gentiles (v. 20). Some Jewish Christians came from Judea to Antioch (Acts 14:26 - 15:1) teaching that it was necessary to follow the law of Moses first, and then to come into Christ through that. In the assembly which was called to consider this question, Peter spoke, saying, "God ... made no distinction between us and them..." (vv. 8-9). The unspoken conclusion which he clearly intended his hearers to draw is, "Since God did not make a distinction, therefore we cannot make a distinction." What he actually said is, "Now therefore why do you...?" (v.10).

Later in the same chapter (vv. 23-29) is a copy of the letter which the apostles wrote to the church in Antioch. When they wrote in verse 24, "to

whom we gave no such commandment,” they were making the same argument that the mother made with the daughter in the illustration above: we didn’t say anything to them about preaching that Gentiles must obey the Law of Moses. Obedience to the Law of Moses isn’t authorized any more than was candy on the milk and bread trip to the grocery store. Mother didn’t have to list everything in the store that the child was not to buy. It was sufficient that she specified what the child was authorized to buy. So it is with God. Obedience to the Law of Moses was not mentioned in the great commission, nor in any other teaching of Jesus Christ. Therefore it is not a part of the gospel, the teaching of the New Testament church.

Noah was told to use gopher wood in building the ark (Gen. 6:14). Again, why would God have named something specific if He didn’t care what Noah did? Could Noah use pine wood if there were more of that near his home? God didn’t say not to do so. But God’s specific mention of “gopher” rules out all other woods. Noah would have disobeyed God to use any other wood.

APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLE

So it is with singing. Under the law of Moses God told the people, “make a joyful noise unto the Lord” (Psa. 81:1-3). This specifically included singing and using the timbrel, the pleasant harp, the psaltery and the trumpet. But the Old Testament is not our law for today. It has become obsolete, grown old and vanished away (Heb. 8:13). Jesus took that writing of ordinances “out of the way, having nailed it to His cross” (Col. 2:14). Though God once spoke to the ancient people by prophets - even by dreams, visions and angels - yet today He speaks to us by Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-3). Today we are under the “perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25; 2:12). That law, the New Testament (Heb. 9:15-18), does not require the general practice of making a joyful noise. It is more specific.

The New Testament says, “be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). That is very specific: we speak. We speak in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. God has nowhere in the New Testament authorized playing on a man-made, mechanical instrument of music. God has clearly, in this same verse, specified the instrument with which we must be “making melody”: it is the heart of the worshiper. Why would He specify to make our melody with that

instrument if He actually wanted us to make it with another of our own choosing?

Imagine how confusing life would be if we followed in other areas of life the principle that many follow in religion: if there isn't a rule that specifically prohibits a certain action, then that action is permitted. The road sign says, "this way to Dallas," but it doesn't say that I can't reach Dallas if I go that way instead. The recipe says "this much sugar," but it doesn't say that I can't use that much instead, and it doesn't say that I can't use this much salt also. He says that his name is Charles, but he didn't say that it isn't Susan. That principle just doesn't work in everyday life. Why do we want to follow that kind of reasoning in religion? It doesn't work in religion, either. More importantly, it isn't how God told us to understand His book.

If God does not authorize it, then we may not do it. Though they are all required under the Law of Moses for Israel, in the church that Jesus built for the whole world for the rest of time there are neither animal sacrifices, burning lamps, incense, special clothing for preachers, nor instruments of music. God has not authorized them. Every soul who wants to please God will do what God says pleases Him.

God's Says, to be Saved:

1. **Believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:30-31; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 8:37; 17:3);
2. **Repent** from sin (Luke 13:3; 24:47; Acts 2:38);
3. **Confess** that belief in Jesus as the Christ (Matthew 10:32; Acts 8:36;38; Romans 10:9-10; I Timothy 6:12).
4. **Be baptized** in the name of Jesus for forgiveness of your sins (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 4:7, 12; Romans 6:3-7; Galatians 3:27).

And to Stay Saved:

5. **Walk in the light** of His word all the days of your life (I John 1:7; Psalm 119:105; II Peter 3:11-12).



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