

Banner of Truth

"The truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)

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Where the Bible Speaks, We Will Speak

Our title is at least one variation of the front end of a slogan which was adopted by a number of Christians in Great Britain and the United States. The second part was: "Where the Bible is silent, we are silent." Let us first address the "speak" part of this worthy slogan, and end with the "silent" part.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, there was quite a movement among those who considered themselves Christians. There was much division among the various denominations, and efforts were being made to bring about some sort of unity. A number of well-known religious leaders began to work together to bring about unity. Their goal was to go back to the Bible and follow it as the only basis of belief and practice. To help accomplish their objectives, they adopted the slogan of speaking where the Bible speaks. This would, if put into practice, result in a rejection of that which was not authorized by the Bible, and would involve many things. This movement toward unity based on God's word alone would come to be known as The Restoration Movement.

Whereas the slogan — *Where the Bible speaks, we speak* — is not an explicit statement found in the Bible, it is nonetheless a biblical concept. Peter said, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God..." (I Pet. 4:11). This precludes speaking things which are not a part of the oracles of God; and, would, if followed, rule out much of what is seen in the so-called Christian world.

Another very important matter relative to speaking only as the Bible speaks, is the fact that God-approved faith is based upon what God's word speaks. Paul said, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). If the faith of people is based only on the hearing of God's word, then there would be unity. Faith and action must be based on the words or authority of Christ. Why so? We shall be judged by His words: "He that rejected me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the words that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (Jno. 12:48). In an actual prayer of Jesus to the heavenly Father, He prays, →

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—all correspondence to—
P.O. Box 100 Almo, KY 42020

Publisher: Powell Grove church of Christ

46 Powell Grove (615) 444-4972
Lebanon, TN 37090

Editor:

Walter W. Pigg

164 Coles Campground Rd. (270) 753-3675
Murray, KY 42071

Assistant Editors:

Lloyd Gale

1186 Martha Leeville Rd. (615) 449-9474
Lebanon, TN 37090

Alan Adams

1653 Pine Lane Dr. (850) 937-2460
Cantonment, FL 32533

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“Sanctify them through they truth: thy word is truth” (Jno. 17:17). Since it is the truth which makes men free (Jno. 8:32), we can see why there is the necessity of speaking and practicing only that which is approved by God.

In order to better understand the significance of the slogan — *Where the Bible speaks we speak* — we are going back in history to the first century and briefly noting some happenings which occurred from that point forward until the coming of The Restoration Movement. We will consider how these things related to the slogan.

ERROR IN THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH. In reading the New Testament, one learns that error early on reared its evil head within the church which Christ built and paid for with his blood.

There are a number of warnings about the error which was to come. Christ warned of false prophets (Matt. 7:15), and Paul warned Timothy that people with no endurance for the sound doctrine would depart from the faith (I Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 4). John said, “Many false prophets are gone out into the world” (I Jno. 4:1); and, Paul even names a number of false teachers within the early church.

From the first century onward, false teachers and teachings would plague the church. Various departures from the faith would come about as men chose to speak where God’s word does not speak. The departures from the faith would increase over time leading to the birth of the Roman Catholic Church. Boniface III took upon himself the title of the universal bishop, or the Pope, in 606 A.D. The Roman Catholic Church would hold sway until the eleventh century, when in 1054 A.D. a split came within, and the Greek Orthodox Church came into being.

REFORMATION MOVEMENT TAKES ROOT. As people began to see the errors within the Catholic Church, there was an effort put forth to *reform* the Catholic Church. Seeing what they knew to be violations of Bible teaching, a number of people within the Catholic Church began to raise questions and challenges with regard to the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church.

This movement gained momentum as more people came into possession of the Bible and could see the errors of Catholicism. It particularly took root in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Out of this movement emerged a number of *protesting* denominations. Thus, we see the beginning of Protestantism.

This term, which is widely used today, was based on the fact that these people were protesting the Catholic Church. Although a number 1

of influential individuals were leaders in the Protestant Movement, they were merely trying to change or reform the Catholic Church rather than going all the way back to the first century and the pattern of the church which Christ built. Notable among the Protestant churches were the Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, and Methodists. In time, many other denominations came to be. In spite of the fact that the Reformers brought about some changes which were more in keeping with God's word, they failed to go back to the true church and use it as an example to follow. Their divisions only resulted in more and more denominations coming into existence.

THE NEED FOR A RESTORATION MOVEMENT. Among the leaders within the denominations, there was the recognition by some that instead of a *reformation movement* there was a need for a *restoration movement*. The Restoration Movement became a reality within less than two decades (1790 – 1810), when four distinctive movements occurred almost simultaneously in an effort to break with existing conditions in their respective religious groups and return to the New Testament order.

It is amazing that these moves were taking place during the same time period, yet almost totally unrelated to each other. Several men of ability began to put forth their ideas; that there could be a unity among those who claimed to be Christians. The basis for this unity would be based upon taking the Bible alone as God's authority; that is, to speak only as the Bible speaks. This principle indeed was/is in harmony with the teaching of God's word in the first century. Men from a number of denominations began to cast off the teachings and practices which were not in harmony with God's word. The yearning of many to go back to the Bible as man's only true guide accounts for the great

success of the movement. Before the middle of the nineteenth century, many thousands had given up denominationalism and turned to God's word as their only guide.

May it be that the preceding brief history will help us better see the significance of the slogan *Where the Bible speaks, we speak*. It is a concise way of saying that we ought to teach and practice only that which God's word authorizes.

EXAMPLES OF SPEAKING WHERE THE BIBLE SPEAKS

Although many examples could be given, we have chosen only a few. They are, nonetheless, things which commonly relate to the practices of those who claim to be Christians. Many things are seen in churches today that would not have been seen in churches in the first century and should not be seen in any today. Worship, in one form or another, is seen in virtually all churches. Let us begin by considering various acts of worship.

PRAYER. The Bible makes it very plain that Christians are to pray. Christ, in his model prayer, instructs saying, "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed is thy name" (Matt. 6:9). We know it is right to pray to our Father, because God's word clearly speaks to that effect. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to "Pray without ceasing" (I Thess. 5:17), that is, make prayer a regular thing in our lives. Desiring that God hear our prayers, we will strive to be righteous, for "the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (I Pet. 3:12). Now we know that if we are righteous the Lord's ears are open to our prayers. That is what God's word speaks. And, it also lets us know that the face of the Lord is against those that do evil. →

SINGING. The Bible speaks about singing saying, “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in you heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). Scripture again speaks saying, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). From this, we see that the music which God wants in our worship is 1) vocal, 2) from our hearts, and 3) to Him. Our singing should teach, admonish, and offer praise to God.

TEACHING AND HEARING GOD’S WORD. A concise definition of worship is “acts of reverence paid to God by man.” The preaching, teaching and hearing of God’s word is certainly an act of reverence man pays to Him. God’s word is to be taught as that which provides man with what is necessary to follow God’s will. With reverence, we acknowledge and embrace the fact that “every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17, ASV).

We can know that the scriptures are the only instructions which are necessary to furnish us in every good work. We know this because the Bible speaks instructing us in this important endeavor. By following God’s word, we can know that we have the approval of the Father and the Son, because “whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 Jno. 9).

THE GIVING OF OUR MATERIAL MEANS. In this item of worship, God’s word offers some important instructions. The christian is not

commanded to give a certain percentage of his income, but there is a principle of giving which is indeed very equitable. Giving is based on the amount of earnings. “Concerning the collection for the saints,” the Corinthians were told, “as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him...” (I Cor. 16:1-2). This giving is to be on the basis of what one plans or purposes. “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). The individual is to determine his giving, and no one else sets the amount. Advocating this pattern of giving is to speak where the Bible speaks.

EATING THE LORD’S SUPPER. Of all the acts of worship, surely none is more important this one. Our hearts must be involved in all the acts of worship, and our emotions especially stirred in this one. The institution of the Lord’s supper is recorded in Matthew, chapter twenty-six. When Christ sat down with the twelve, He took bread, blessed it, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body” (v. 26). He then took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to the twelve saying, “Drink ye all of it, For this is by blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (vv. 27-28). Recounting this event, Paul quotes Jesus as saying of the bread, “Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me” (I Cor. 11:24); and, as saying of the cup, “This cup is the blood of the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me” (v. 25). For a proper remembrance of Christ and what He did for us, it is necessary that the mind be purged of mundane things and centered only upon what he is doing. †

How often should Christians engage in this great memorial, the Lord's supper? It is true that Christ personally did not specify the day when the Lord's supper was to be observed. He rather, through inspired writers gave us the pattern. Luke, the "beloved physician, tells us about Paul and his company abiding at Troas seven days; and, "upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7). Every week has a "first day." The first day of the week is the time when the church assembles for worship; thus, Paul commands the church at Corinth saying, "Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store...." (I Cor. 16:2).

On that momentous Day of Pentecost, the newly established church is characterized as they who "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). The "breaking of bread" here refers to the Lord's Supper.

Uninspired historical accounts allude to the common practice of the early church's weekly observance of the Lord's Supper.

GOD'S WORD SPEAKS ON OTHER MATTERS

BAPTISM FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS. Of the several things necessary for salvation, the Bible speaks clearly about baptism for the remission of sins. Ironically, though, the essentiality of baptism denied by the majority of denominational churches.

Why not simply allow the Bible to speak on this subject? Why not operate on the premise that if the Bible speaks saying we must do something, we do it?

A clear example of the Bible's speaking about baptism is in Acts, chapter two. The purpose for baptism is said to be "for remission of your sins"

(v. 38). Peter had just preach pointing out to the Jews that they had crucified Jesus, who was "both Lord and Christ." In response to this truth, they were "pricked in their heart" and asked, "what shall we do?" Peter, by the Spirit, responded, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus; Christ for the remission of sins..." (v. 38).

Yet another example is that of Ananias telling Paul, "...arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:26).

The Bible speaks by these examples, and shows us the necessity of baptism. When the Bible clearly commands something, we must obey, if we desire to please the Lord. Baptism is how a sinner gets "into" Christ. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). Being "in Christ" is of the greatest importance, since salvation is "in Christ" (2 Tim. 2:10), and therein we obtain "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3).

THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF THE SINGULARITY OF THE CHURCH. In the Old Testament, where the coming of the church is predicted, it is always in the singular, such as the kingdom, the Lord's house, and so on. In the New Testament, we see the fulfillment of the prophecies. Referring to Peter's confession — "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" — Jesus said, "...thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Again we see the singular being used.

We see the church mentioned in the plural when a plurality of congregation are referred to, such as, "the churches of Galatia" (I Cor. 16:1); "the churches of Christ salute you" (Rom. 16:16). These are references to churches of Christ in different places, and not to different kinds of churches. →

The singularity of the church is clearly revealed in Paul's writings. He refers to the church as the "body" — "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body" (Eph. 5:23); "He is the head of the body, the church:..." (Col. 1:18). Since the church is "the body," we need only know how many bodies there are. — "There is one body, and one Spirit..." (Eph. 4:4).

Popular sentiment may say, "Choose the church of your choice" In New Testament times, however, there was only one church to choose, and that was the one Christ built and paid for by His blood (Acts 20:28). The thousands of different churches in the world to day have been built by men, and they cannot take the place of the one Christ build, which is why He said, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up" (Matt. 15:13).

Yet another popular sentiment is "One church is as good as another." If one is speaking of the churches men have built, the number of which is increasing almost daily, this is indeed true as far as spiritual blessings are concerned. It is fair to say, though, that some churches go deeper into error than others. Many sinful things are upheld and practiced by some man-made churches.

To follow the Bible is the only way of choosing a church, and there is only one from which to choose from, the church which Christ said He would build, and did build. The Bible speaks only about this church.

THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF THE SINGULARITY OF THE FAITH. Just as there is much misunderstanding relative to a multiplicity of churches, so it is with a plurality of faiths. The word faith is used many times in the Bible, and some times with different meanings. "The faith," which we are now considering, is the body of truth: "the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27); "the faith" for which we are to "watch," and in which we are to

"stand" (I Cor. 16:13); "the faith" which Paul once "destroyed," but came to "preach..." (Gal. 1:23); and, "the faith" from which some "in the latter times [would] depart" (I Tim. 4:1). Jude most succinctly describes the faith saying, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you , and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

We contrarily hear people speak of "different faiths," by which they mean different denominational beliefs.

One cannot, however, speak of different faiths and speak as the Bible speaks. The Bible, as noted, speaks of "the faith" many times, and yet it speaks only of the "one faith." Just as surely as there is one God, there is one faith. There is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5).

THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF DISCIPLES AS CHRISTIANS. It is popular to think of many *kinds* of Christians: Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic, Lutherans, and so on. The Bible, though, just speaks only of "christians." If one is a Christian after the New Testament order, there is no additional appellation needed. It would, in fact, be adding something which the Bible does not.

The prophet Isaiah was inspired to foresee the Gospel Age more than seven hundred years before the fact. He saw both those who would obey the gospel and what they would be called — "And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name" (Isa. 62:2). We see the fulfillment of the *new name* prophecy in the Book of Acts — "It came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people, And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (11:26). Clearly the "new name," ↓

the name “Christian” gives Christ the preeminence, rather than some individual or type of organization.

Peter said, “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (I Pet. 4:16). As Paul pressed the case for Christ, king Agrippa responded, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28). When

one wears the name Christian he may know that he is in harmony with what the Bible speaks. If everyone lived in such a way as to be worthy to be called a Christian, and nothing more, just think what that would mean. Our Lord wants unity among those who follow Him, and that means following His word without addition or subtraction.

Where The Bible Is Silent, We Are Silent

As noted from the outset, those who were striving to go back to God’s word as an all-sufficient guide for faith and practice in serving God, adopted a slogan which consisted of two parts: 1) Where the Bible speaks, we speak, and 2) Where the Bible is silent, we are silent. This slogan involves the matter of authority, and whether authority is vested in what God’s word says, or what God’s word does not say. Having authority for what we believe and practice is a very crucial matter. We have discussed a number of examples of speaking where the Bible speaks, and now we shall consider examples of beliefs and practices which are based upon what God’s word does not say. Thus we go from the positive to the negative relative to authority.

If one chooses to consider silence as authority, the things authorized are without number. Books could not contain all about which the Bible is silent.

If silence were authority, there would be little need for what the Bible does say. It seems that those who accept silence as authority are bent upon doing things which God’s word does not authorize.

Using silence as a basis for faith is as contradictory as a thing can be. The Bible says, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the

word of God” (Rom. 10:17). If silence were a basis for faith, would not this mean that everyone would have faith about anything in particular? “Newborn babes [should] desire the sincere milk of the word, that [they] may grow thereby” (I Pet. 2:2). The “milk of the word” does not have reference to that which God’s word does not say, but rather what it does say.

Some so-called authorizing *Law of Silence* is a false idea concocted by man alone. Yet, there are those who are staking their souls’ welfare on the basis of silence. The Bible, however, speaks and says, “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (I John 3:4). The “law” and silence are not the same thing; yet, many treat them as such.

EXAMPLES OF FAITH AND PRACTICE BASED UPON SILENCE

As noted, examples of using silence as permission or authority is a limitless category, particularly if one includes the practices of the heathen people in the world. We, however, shall note a few of the more common ones practiced by professed followers of Christ. →

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC AND SILENCE. The majority of those professing Christianity use mechanical instruments of music in worship. When the subject of authority is mentioned, a common response is “The Bible does not say not to use it.”

God’s word, as earlier noted, does authorize vocal music, singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16); but, it is silent on the use of a guitar, piano, fiddle, drums, flutes, horns, and other instruments of music. The typical justification of the use of such instruments is the silence of the Bible. Even within the Lord’s church, there is an increasing number who appeal to silence to advocate the use of instrumental music; or, they sometimes say it is a matter of indifference.

Very few attempt to seek authority for this practice from the Bible; and, for obvious reasons, they can find no authorization in God’s word. About the only argument made for the use of mechanical music in worship is that it is found in the Old Testament. It is said that if David used it, we can also use it. Mechanical music was used under the Old Testament dispensation, but we are not under the Old Testament now as a rule of faith and practice. It is true that the things written afore time were written for our learning (Rom. 15:4), but the use of the mechanical instrument is not authorized under the New Testament order. If it be contended that we can use instruments of music because David did, we would be justified in offering animal sacrifices, burning incense, and so on. Our personal conclusion as to the main reason for using instrumental music? People like it.

The belief that silence is consent appears to be the basis of practice in a variety of things which are not authorized by the Bible.

INFANT BAPTISM AND SILENCE OF THE BIBLE. A number of religious groups practice the baptism of infants. This practice is based upon

silence to be sure. The Bible is silent as a tomb with regard to that practice. The Bible nowhere says that infants are to be “baptized.” This is another example of man doing that which is not authorized, because the Bible is silent. In New Testament times, only those who were old enough to believe were baptized. The Lord said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mk. 16:16). Common sense tells us that an infant is not capable of believing in the sense Jesus used the term. It was quite a long time after the first century that man came up with what they call infant baptism.

BIBLE SILENCE ON SPRINKLING OR POURING AS BAPTISM. Most will admit that the Bible is silent on sprinkling or pouring as baptism. The first instance of such was in about 250 A.D., when a person by the name of Novation, because he was ill, had water sprinkled on him for baptism. This type of baptism took on the name of “clinical baptism.” It was quite a long time after Novation’s “baptism” that the practice became a common thing. True baptism, as so often mentioned in the Bible, was a “burial” in water. The meaning of baptism is immersion or a burial — “We are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). “They went down both into the water, both Phillip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Phillip, that the eunuch saw him no more...” (Acts 8:38-39). “John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized” (John 3:23). If sprinkling and pouring were authorized on the basis of biblical silence, why is baptism a burial; why was there a need for “much water.” †

and why did Phillip and the eunuch go down both into the water?

BIBLE SILENCE ON CHURCH-SPONSORED ENTERTAINMENT. This doubtlessly is a pleasure-mad generation. Not only is society hooked on entertainment, but it also has crept into the “Christian” religion. The man-made churches began to promote entertainment many years ago, but some of our brethren are also hooked. It is a fact that the Bible is silent concerning the promotion of entertainment as a work of the church. It is hard to know what is in the minds of people, but it appears they think that since the Bible is silent on entertainment, it is permissible for the church to provide and engage in it. A rather large congregation in Paducah had an *entertainment ministry* a few years ago. Efforts were made to defend it, not by what the Bible says, but what it does not say. If people gave up *silence as consent*, many things seen today would no longer exist. Preachers, who are experts in entertainment, are in considerable demand nowadays. Most of our brethren used to seek a *thus saith the Lord* before engaging in an activity.

A few years ago I read of a denomination putting on a striptease act. There is no doubt the Bible is silent about such a thing. Does Bible silence justify such an immodest and evil act as that? Of course not.

BIBLE SILENCE ON THE WORSHIP OF MARY. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that Mary, the mother of Christ, is to be worshipped, or that she serves as a mediator between God and man. However, it is a matter of fact that in reading Catholic literature, that Mary dominates rather than God and Christ. Though the Bible is silent on this matter, it is one of the integral parts of Catholicism. Mary is to be

honored as the mother of Christ, but is not to be worshipped. A few years ago some Catholics engaged in an effort to make Mary a mediator even above that of Christ. The movement failed, but the very idea is so far removed from what the Bible teaches. This is just one example where the Catholics teach and practice that about which the Bible is silent.

BIBLE SILENCE ON VOTING PEOPLE INTO THE CHURCH. In the New Testament, converts were “added” to the church (Acts 2:47). On the day of Pentecost, where the birthday of the Lord’s church is recorded, we are told that “about three thousand souls” were added to the church (v. 41). This “adding” continued with the new converts “praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (v. 47). This shows clearly that the Lord did the adding of those who obeyed the gospel. The Bible is silent with regard to “voting” people into the church. Years ago I attended the services of a man-made church. Included in the activities was the voting of a person into that church. The vote was taken, and the individual was approved for membership. Since the Bible knows nothing about voting people into a church, this action must have been based on the silence of the Bible.

BIBLE SILENCE ON A PRIEST FORGIVING SINS. Christ forgave sins during His earthly ministry. He forgives sins now, but only when we through faith and obedience approach God for forgiveness. The Bible is silent on the practice of having sins forgiven by a priest. This silence, however, does not give pause to Catholic priests. By what authority do the priests claim this power? Since it is not from the Bible, it must be based on what the Bible does not say, or silence. →

The same can be said of many practices of the Catholic Church. The Bible is silent on the matter of a Pope. This man, the Catholic Pope, claims to be the “vicar,” the earthly representation of Christ. Not only is the Bible silent as to authorizing such a person, but it teaches against anyone having such power. Christ is the mediator between God and man, “for there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus” (I Tim. 2:5).

Religious things done on the basis of Bible silence are many. These things cannot be based on faith, since faith is based on hearing God’s word (Rom. 10:17).

CONCLUSION

As we consider whether or not man should take God’s word as the only authority for faith and practice, or consider the silence of the Bible as authority for the same, we are reminded of Elijah and his great contest on Mt. Carmel with the

prophets of Baal. Each was to call upon his “God” to see which would ignite and consume prepared sacrifices. Before beginning, Elijah admonished Israel saying, “How long halt ye between two opinions: if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him” (v. 21). We know the outcome concerning the sacrifices. The prophets went all out to have their god, Baal, hear them. From morning until noon they cried, even cutting themselves drawing blood. All this was to no avail. But when Elijah called upon God, fire came down and consumed the sacrifice, the wood and the stones, and licked up the water.

As we consider God’s word and silence, we must make a decision. If God’s word is all sufficient relative to authority for faith and practice, then choose God’s word. On the other hand, if silence is authority in God’s sight, then choose silence. Choosing silence, however, is like choosing Baal; it is a vain and destructive choice. We must stand with God’s word, not silence. —*Editor*

Blinded to the Truth

Marvin L. Weir

The apostle Paul states, “The god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them” (2 Cor. 4:5). So many in this world profess to believe in God, but their actions belie their profession. How can people claim to be obedient to the Lord and then pick and choose only those commands they desire to obey? It is because they have allowed themselves to be blinded to the truth.

Most denominations teach that baptism (immersion) is not necessary for salvation. There are even those who claim to be members of

the Lord’s church who espouse that baptism is not essential for salvation. What is the truth regarding this matter? The Bible declares the Word of God to be true (Jno. 17:17). In fact, the apostle Paul admonished, “...let God be found true, but every man a liar...” (Rom. 3:4). Unless one has been blinded to the truth, he will always accept God’s Word over man’s word.

Billy Graham, a champion of Baptist doctrine, called on people to repent to be saved, but denied that they must be baptized to be saved. Was Billy Graham correct or is God correct? They both cannot be correct because they differ †

with one another on the question of what one must do to be saved

The apostle Peter rightly accuses the Jews of crucifying the Christ (Acts 2:36). Divine inspiration records, “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye **and** be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37-38; emphasis, MLW).

Billy Graham was right when he said people must repent of their sins, but he was wrong when he said baptism is not necessary for forgiveness of sins. The conjunction *and* clearly shows that remission of sins is reserved for those who repent and are baptized. One cannot be baptized without repentance, or repent without being baptized, and expect to be saved. God has spoken regarding the matter, and His Word takes precedence over the word of man.

Those not blind to the truth of God’s Word will desire to submit to what the Scriptures teach regarding salvation. Please note the following Scriptures and examples that prove that baptism is essential to salvation.

First, the apostle Peter states that baptism saves a person (I Pet. 3:21). How can what Peter states be true if baptism is not necessary for salvation?

Second, baptism is the act that puts one into Christ Jesus. Paul says, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). If baptism puts one into Christ, as God’s Word teaches, how can one be saved without being baptized (outside of Christ)?

Third, baptism is a burial (not a sprinkling), and those who are baptized should then walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). False teachers declare that men are saved and have newness of life before they are baptized, but the Word

of God truthfully teaches that newness of life follows one’s baptism. Those not blinded to the truth will accept the Word of God instead of the word of men.

Fourth, the great commission states, “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth **and** is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned” (Mk. 16:15-16; emphasis, MLW). To repent of one’s sins is to believe and obey the Lord’s command, and to be baptized is to believe and obey the Lord’s command. In the latter part of verse sixteen, it is not necessary to say, “he that disbelieveth [and is not baptized] shall be condemned,” because one who does not believe will not obey the Lord’s commands. Thus, one who refuses to be to baptized to be saved does so because he does not believe baptism is necessary for salvation. It is simply a lack of faith — a failure to believe the Word of God.

Fifth, some three thousand, on Pentecost, repented and were baptized in order to be saved (Acts 2:37-41).

Sixth, those in Samaria who believed the teaching of Philip were baptized (Acts 8:12).

Seventh, the eunuch believed the teaching of Phillip, made the good confession, was baptized, and then went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:36-39).

Eighth, when the gospel was presented to Cornelius, he believed and was baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 10:43-48).

Ninth, the Philippian jailor believed and was baptized; Lydia was also baptized (Acts 16:31-33; 15). One is simply blinded to God’s truth, who allows himself to believe the false doctrine that the act of baptism has nothing to do with his salvation. It does one absolutely no good to claim to believe in God, but refuse to obey him.

—1272 Bonham St. Paris, TX 75460

Hold Fast the Confession of Hope

Roger A. Scully

We have all set out to accomplish certain goals, which we, for some reason or another, have failed to attain. There is the diet started with the goal of losing a certain amount of weight, which goal was never accomplished. There is the instrument that was never mastered, because of loss of interest. There is the remodeling job that was never finished, due to the same reasons just mentioned. But, sadly there is another goal that was started by many throughout the years, but, because of a loss of zeal and focus, has become like the diet and the instrument. We speak of the Christian Life.

Throughout the years, we have observed many men and women who start the “good fight of faith” by being baptized into Christ (Ga. 3:27). We have observed the same develop an interest in attending extra Bible classes offered throughout the course of the week. Their eagerness and zeal has caused them to start “searching the scriptures daily” and even participating more in the work of the church, the church for which our Lord died. Yet, somewhere along the way, the zeal and eagerness become a flame that is only remembered by the gray coals that are left, no longer even smoking.

Though this is seen throughout the glorious brotherhood of those of “like precious faith,” it is nothing new. It is a continuation of a pattern that has long been established. It is the pattern of men and women alike leaving the way of righteousness and returning to the “wallowing in the mire” (2 Pet. 2:20-22), thus failing to finish that which had been started. Such was the case with some to whom the Hebrews writer

wrote. For this cause, the readers are encouraged to “hold fast to their confession of hope.”

The Book of Hebrews focuses on Hebrews leaving Christianity and returning to the Law of Moses, which Law “decayeth and waxeth old” and “is ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8:13). Thus, the Hebrews writer shows the superiority of Christianity having a high priest “after the order of Melchizedech” who, when he “had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:12). As having such, Christians were told to boldly enter, diligently draw near, consistently remain faithful, and actively assemble. By doing these things, the glorious work can be accomplished; that is, the work that was once started with the set goal of reaching the home “prepared” (Jno. 14:1-6), which home is “reserved in heaven” (1 Pet. 1:5).

As we ponder the thought of Hebrews, chapter ten, we find that in verse nineteen, Christians are exhorted to boldly enter into the “holiest by the blood of Jesus.” The boldness with which a Christian is to enter is not a form of cockiness, but rather a form of assurance. We understand that the “holiest,” under Old Testament law, was symbolic of the dwelling of God. Only the high priest once per year was allowed to enter. However, the veil which separated the holy from the holiest, was “rent” due to the sacrifice of Jesus (Matt. 27:51); so it is that, by “his blood,” Christians can do that which was not permitted under the Old Law — Christians can “enter into the holiest.”

“The blood of Christ,” as mentioned in verse nineteen, holds the idea of the totality of

of his glorious death and resurrection. Because of the worth of the sacrifice made by Jesus, now under the Christian system, we have access to the Father — “For through him we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph. 2:18); “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Jno. 14:6).

This access that we now have, which was “dedicated for us...through his flesh,” is a “new and living way” (Heb. 10:20). It is “new” in contrast to the old system, which restricted the people from approaching; and, it is “living” because it is active. This alone should excite Christians to finish what has been started.

To further arouse Christians to remain constant, we read or how we have a “great high priest over the house of God” (Heb. 10:21). This great high priest is, of course, Jesus the Christ, and the house over which he presides as high priest is the church (I Tim. 3:15). Because he is our high priest, who has rent the veil making access possible, Christians are to diligently “draw near” (Heb. 10:22). A Christian’s drawing near is based on the motivation that we have (1) a high priest who has made access possible; and, (2) we can do that which they, under the old law, could only desire to do. We also take note of the fact that “drawing near” is something that takes effort — “Draw near to God and he will near to you” (Jas. 4:8); “in whom we have boldness and access in confidence through our faith in Him” (Eph. 3:12). The veil no longer stands between God and His people. Christians must draw near with a “true heart,” one pure from all guile and hypocrisy; “full assurance of faith,” without doubt; and, “having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience,” by rendering obedience to the New Testament “having our bodies washed with pure water,” a reference to baptism (cf. I Pet. 3:21).

It is out of this beautiful context that Christians are encouraged to consistently remain faithful, something that more than a few have failed to accomplish.

It is now that we revisit the focus of this writing — Christians failing to finish the work they have started. Notice the command: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope, that it waver not” (Heb. 10:22). “Hold fast” is translated from the word *katecho*, which means to “possess and stay”; thus, the ideas of not releasing or letting fall to the ground. That which is to be held is the “confession of our hope.” This is a reference to the promise that is made by all who put on Christ, the promise to remain faithful to the cause for which the Lord died. All Christians made the promise when the confession was made. Our confession is more than simply stating words. It is stating a belief and pledging an oath to be “a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” “Our hope” is the hope of eternal life, which can only be achieved by remaining faithful to Christ and His church. The grounds on which Christians are to remain faithful is “He (God) is faithful that promised” (Heb. 10:23). Knowing that God is faithful, has never forsaken His people, and has always fulfilled His promises, the Christian should be moved to finish the work that has been started, which work involves “not forsaking our own assembling together” (Heb. 10:25).

Diets are not easy to maintain, nor are they impossible. If one has a strong desire to lose weight, he can with constant dedication and motivation. The same can be said of learning to play an instrument or remodeling a room in a house. As it is with these, so it is with the Christian life. Christians have motivation which should cause conviction and desire, and which can only come from dedication. A great work has been started; are you willing to finish it

— P.O. Box 1756, Morgan City, LA 70380

Some Thoughts on Back Seating

Back seating refers to sitting in the back of the auditorium during worship services. The thought is spurred by a recently read, yet subsequently misplaced article. No doubt, then, in the following discussion, we will repeat some of the same points. It was such an appealing article dealing with a subject worthy of some attention.

At the outset, we acknowledge that the New Testament does not set forth seating arrangements for worship services. In fact, as far as we know, no *church buildings* existed in the first century. In India, even today, it is not uncommon for a group to meet under a tree, or some other place where there no seats.

In this country, most of us have seen various instances where people seemed to prefer the back seats in the auditorium. In most instances, it is hard to say why this is the case. Perhaps it is some inherent aversion to front seats. Some jokingly have suggested that seats all be suspended from the ceiling, and as people come in, lower the fronts seats first. It is possible though, that some are so wedded to back seats that they might just stand in the back without being seated at all. This is all in jest, but we believe there are some valid reasons for sitting near the front, and we shall note some of them.

1. Since the activities in the auditorium are usually at the front, the nearer people sit to the front, the better they can hear. Some of us are hard of hearing and need all the help we can get.

2 The singing is improved when people are gathered beginning from the front, especially when the auditorium is only partially filled. Singing is better when people are in close proximity to each other.

3. Being seated closer to the front may indicate greater interest in the activity taking place.

We see this at ball games, or other sporting events. Some will pay much extra to get a front seat.

4. When the seating is generally from the front backward, those seated are not as likely to be disturbed by latecomers.

5. There is a tendency for young people, and some not-so-young, sitting in the back to distract others by talking, passing notes, and such like.

6. If visitors come in at the last moment, it is less distracting when they may be seated in the back.

Let us note as well some reasons for people sitting in the back.

1. Some people have health problems which necessitate their leaving the auditorium. When this is the case, those who are nearer the front are not as likely to be distracted.

2. Those with small children at times find it needful to leave the auditorium. Sitting in the back makes this easier. We admire mothers and fathers who work to keep their children in the auditorium allowing them to learn what it is like to be in a worship service.

3. It is inevitable that small children sometimes will have crying spells. If this happens in the back, it will be less distracting to others. We raised four children, and have seen first hand the care that goes into training children in worship etiquette. My wife managed all four while I preached. She even did a little spanking at times without, we might add, doing any permanent damage.

These are matters which the Bible deals with implicitly They are nonetheless valuable, common sense principles. They are bound up in Paul's general admonition regarding the assembly: "Let all things be done decently and in order (I Cor. 14:40)."

—Editor

READERS' RESPONSE

“Dear brother, I recently finished reading April-May 2008 *Banner of Truth*. I truly appreciate every copy of this good publication, but must say I ESPECIALLY appreciate this issue. Your response to the reader who tried (poorly, may I add) to defend instrumental music was excellent. I just finished preaching a series on this subject and am truly amazed at those who are so illogical when it comes to this and many other subjects. Thank you for your fellowship in the Gospel of Christ and your firm stand for the truth. You and the publication which you labor with is doing eternal good of which many not be aware. Godspeed and may you know you and BOT are in my prayers – A fellow preacher and defender of truth.” – **Rodney Nulph, WV.**

“I have in my possession a copy of *Banner of Truth* dated Nov. 2001. It is the only copy I have and my first exposure to this fine publication. It appears that you are doctrinally sound which is very rare these days. False doctrine seems to be creeping through the cracks these days. Ideas are being advanced and things are being taught that w[ere] unheard of fifty years ago. Is it still being published? If so, I would like to subscribe to this fine magazine. If you have any back issues that you can part with, I would like them as well. Please advise of the cost of subscription and I will send you the money pronto. Thank you for your time and consideration.” – **James R. Blackman, FL.** (*BOT is free; I will find the back issues.* – Editor)

“Dear bro. Pigg, We hope you and sis. Pigg are well. You do a very good work in making *Banner of Truth* available to so many people. We always learn a lot from reading it each month. Enclosed is a check of \$100.00 to help with some of the expense. May the Lord continue to bless you and everyone involved in this publication. In Christian love.” – **Bob & Jackie Thompson, FL.**

“Bro. Pigg, here is twenty dollars to help with *Banner of Truth*. Keep up the good work!” – **Dan Manuel, TN.**

“Walter & Naomi, I hope you will have a good Christ as and a new year 2009. I am still reading the paper that you all put out every month. When I get finished with the papers I pass them on. I am going to put a check in here for postage. Use it any way you see fit.” – **Nanie Philpot, TN.**

“Brother Pigg, Thanks for your good works. My check is not much. But wishes for your wife’s surgery to be successful. Being in pain is not much fun. Blessings.” – **Dot Roberts, TN.**

—Reader Response will be continued in next issue.

A CONVERSION IN HOLLAND

Good friends, David Lemmons, and now Garland Robinson have made electronic BOT possible. On the very first day of BANNEROFTRUTHONLINE.COM, I received a response from Isaak Pfister of Holland. He wanted to be put on our mailing list. I personally mailed him the current issue, and he was well pleased. He informed me that he had been studying with some of our brethren in Holland. Through several email exchanges, it was easy to tell that he had a real interest in the Gospel. Just recently he told me of his plans to be baptized when brethren, from a distant location, could come his way. On March 17, 2009, I received the following e-mail —

Yes Sir, this morning at 11 AM our time, the brothers came and I was baptized. We had to use the baptismal font at a Baptist Church here in Emmen. The brothers came from several different parts of the country. There are churches of Christ here, several I understand are not conservative. The church in the Utrecht area has 11 members. The church where the evangelist (Gert-Jan) comes from has about 5 members. There are also brothers and sisters in England. If I attend church in a building, I will drive about 2 hours to get there. Otherwise the evangelist will come to me on the Lord’s Day to worship. Perhaps too, someone in my area will be interested in the Gospel. I hope and pray. To learn that where the Bible is silent, we need to be silent. To know that, that which is perfect is come is the (Holy Scripture). That God’s word is complete and can be trusted. Wonderful! That Christ has one ONE church. Please greet the other brothers and sisters from me in your church of Christ. Please tell them that their new brother sends them greetings from Europe! And now indeed your brother in Christ, Isaak.

I have written Isaak expressing thanks that he has obeyed the gospel. It will be great if he can influence others and start a congregation, though it would be small to begin with. From Isaak’s letter, we see he has already learned some basic and fundamental things which so many people in this country never learn. We pray that the Lord will richly bless this new brother in Christ.

—Editor

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SAVING STEPS OF FAITH

"walk in the steps of that faith" (Rom. 4:12)

Hear the Gospel

Jn. 20:30, 31; Rom. 10:17

Believe

Rom. 1:16; Acts 18:8; Heb. 11:6

Repent

Lk. 13:3; 24:47; Acts 3:19; 17:30

Confess Faith in Christ

Rom. 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37

Be Baptized

Mat. 28:19; Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 10:47, 48; 22:16; Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12; 1Pet. 3:21

Be Faithful Unto and Until Death

Mat. 25:21, 34; 2Pet. 1:1-11; Rev. 2:10; 1Jno. 1:6-9

FOR YOUR ADDRESS BOOK

EDITOR'S EMAIL: walternaomi@bellsouth.net
ONLINE BOT: www.banneroftruthonline.com