

BAPTISTS AND THE ARGUMENT FROM SILENCE

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Today some people seem to regard the Bible as a book of “thou shalt nots.” Taking this attitude can result in the idea that if the Bible does not forbid a thing, it is OK to do it. Thus some Baptist preachers will “dedicate babies” because the Bible does not forbid it. Others will perform marriages because the Bible does not forbid it. Others will allow rock bands, theatricals and even “choreographic performances” (dancing) in their church meetings because the Bible does not forbid these things.

This method of Bible interpretation is based upon the silence of the Scriptures. The argument from silence, as all competent theologians agree, proves nothing. About some things the Scriptures are silent because they did not exist in Bible days or were not problems among the New Testament congregations. Such modern problems as the abuse of prescription drugs, Internet and television pornography, Baptists believing in the spontaneous combustion theory of church organization, couples dating, etc., did not exist in either the Old or New Testament eras. Does the fact that the Bible does not specifically forbid these things mean it is OK to participate in such things?

Back in the days of the Protestant Reformation the Reformers had to

contend with arguments against them from both the Roman Catholics and our old Anabaptist forefathers. The Catholics accused the Protestants of schism and heresy. The big boast of the Protestants was "sola Scriptura." We follow "only the Scriptures" was the claim of the Protestants. And they did use the Scriptures to refute the Roman Catholics. But when it came to dealing with our Anabaptist forefathers, they had to resort to other methods – to Tradition! Why? Because the Anabaptists were on the side of the Scriptures while they, the Protestants, were holding on to "baggage" they brought with them out of the Catholic Church.

The Anabaptists accused the Protestants of not following the Scriptures because they "baptized" babies and young children. Huldrych Zwingli (1 January 1484 – 11 October 1531) was a leader of the Protestant Reformation in Switzerland. This fellow Zwingli, like Calvin, Luther, and others, while claiming to believe in salvation by faith, actually taught salvation by works. They taught that infant baptism brought grace to or saved little babies. That this is still the belief and teaching of the Protestants is illustrated by the following quotation from the United Methodist Church's Articles of Religion. Their Article of Religion XVII says, *"Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; **but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth. The Baptism of young children is to be retained in the Church."***

Our Anabaptist forefathers accused the Protestants of not following the

Scriptures. It was obvious to them that although Protestants make a lot of noise about "sola Scriptura," it is just that: a lot of noise. Since Zwingli could find no Scripture supporting infant baptism, he tried to use the argument from silence in defending it. He said that since the Scriptures do not clearly forbid infant baptism, it is OK to baptize babies. (This is the same argument that some modern day Baptists resort to trying to defend certain unscriptural practices today).

Balthasar Hubmaier, was an important theologian among the Anabaptists. We do not know for sure when he was born: we think about 1480. But we know of a certainty when he died. He was one of those who overcame the devil, "**...by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death,**" (Revelation 12:11). He was tortured on the rack, and tried for heresy and convicted of course, at the instigation of the Protestant Reformer Zwingli. (What? "Godly Protestants" persecuting and killing Anabaptists?) On 10 March 1528, he was taken to the public square in Vienna, Austria and burned at the stake: his wife encouraging him to remain steadfast in the faith. Three days after he was burned, his wife, with a stone tied around her neck, was drowned in the River Danube. Thus were the "dippers dipt."

No doubt one of the reasons the Protestant Zwingli hated the faithful Anabaptist Hubmaier was Hubmaier's stand for the Scriptures. For Hubmaier had staunchly opposed infant baptism. He had answered Zwingli's contention that

since the Bible does not specifically forbid infant baptism is it proper to do it. He answered Zwingli and all the Protestants thus, *"It is clear enough for him who has eyes to see it, but it is not expressed in so many words, literally: 'do not baptize infants.' May one baptize them? To that I answer: 'if so I may baptize my dog or my donkey... I may make idols out of St. Paul and St. Peter, I may bring infants to the Lord's Supper, bless palm branches, vegetables, salt, land and water, sell the Mass for an offering. For it is nowhere said in express words that we must not do these things."*

Roman Catholics openly teach that the Bible is neither sufficient nor perspicuous: that is, it is not enough and it is not clear. The Bible, to the Catholic, must be supplemented by their tradition and the occasional "ex cathedra" (from the throne) infallible words uttered by their papa – their Pope. Tradition completes God's revelation for a Catholic and the priesthood alone can tell the Catholic laity what the Bible means. Protestants, while claiming to follow the Bible, often must make their arguments for their unscriptural traditions from the silence of the Scriptures. They cannot make them on the basis of what the Bible says because the Bible does not teach many things the Protestants believe. We say, like old Brother Hubmaier, if I may baptize infants and please God, I may baptize my dog or my donkey and please Him as well. Why? Because the Bible does not specifically forbid these things.

If I may baptize infants, dogs and donkeys and please God, I may dedicate

babies, take "communion" to sick people at home, bring musical and theatrical entertainments into the meetings of a New Testament Baptist church, engage in bake sales, church yard sales, Brunswick stew sales, Indian taco sales, raffling off rifles, shotguns and handguns, hosting church weddings, and blessing breweries. (All these things and others are the practices of Baptists in various locations).

But there are Bible principles involved in these matters as well as specific instructions left to the Lord's churches as to just what exactly it is they are to be doing. These specific instructions are often called the "Great Commission." That commission states: **"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen,"** (Matthew 28:19-20). Those three duties are specified: they are precise: they are clear.

In connection with the Great Commission, remember this logical and legal principle: the specification of one thing excludes all others. Let me illustrate: if your mortgage specifies that you pay \$650 a month and you have met all contractual obligations to your lender, then your lender may not rightfully demand that you pay \$1,000 a month. Why? Your mortgage agreement does not specifically forbid your lender from demanding a thousand dollars a month, now does it? Does your lender cite the argument from silence, saying that because

your mortgage agreement does not specifically forbid such a thousand dollar a month payment, they are right in demanding it? Of course not! They have not right to do such a thing because your mortgage agreement specifies six-hundred-and-fifty dollar a month payments. The specification of one thing excludes all others.

Christ told His congregations what they are to be busy doing in the commission quoted above. In the parable, He is understood to have meant, **"...Occupy till I come,"** (Luke 19:12). Those ten servants in this parable were to be busy about their master's business until he returned. Is that not the message to the Lord's churches today? Contests, raffles, Superbowl Sundays, concealed carry classes, Sadie Hawkins Day Dances, jamborees, rock concerts, movie nights out – all such like things are not specifically forbidden in the Scriptures, now are they? But if Baptists can properly bring such things into "worship" and "church" then we may baptize dogs and donkeys – and babies. May God be gracious towards us and preserve a remnant upon the earth until Christ comes for His bride and her maidens.