

Now let's look at Nadab and Abihu. Leviticus 16:12 states:

"He (Aaron) is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the Lord and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain."

Leviticus 10:1-2 states:

"Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord."

Perhaps we should note here that God had *not* said the fire *couldn't* come from some *other* place. Nor did He say that no one *other* than Aaron could make the offering. So what was the problem? God had told them where to get the fire and who was to do it — He *didn't* tell them where *not* to get the fire or who was *not* to do it. Yet Nadab and Abihu were consumed by fire from the Lord. Did God *expressly forbid* them to offer the sacrifice or to get fire from another source? No. So what do you think? Did His silence *permit* or *prohibit*?

Now another Old Testament incident of which we might want to take note —

"The people of Judah have done evil in my eyes, declares the Lord. They have set up their detestable idols in the house that bears my Name and have defiled it. They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire—something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind." (Jeremiah. 7:29-30 NIV)

Is God saying here that it never entered His mind to *expressly forbid* burning their sons and daughters? What do you think? Even though He didn't say *not* to do so, did God intend His silence on this matter to *permit* or *prohibit*?

What about Moses? In Numbers 20:8 God told Moses to *"speak to that rock"* and it would *"pour out its water."* Numbers 20:10-12 states —

"... Moses said to them, 'Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?' Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff... But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.'" (NIV)

Did God tell Moses *not* to *strike* the rock? Was that a part of not honoring God properly? You decide. Whatever the reason, Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land *because* of his actions in this incident.

Well — we'll continue with this subject in the next issue of *Diligence* and be focusing on the New Testament and how this controversy is affecting various aspects of the Lord's Church today.

*"Diligence" is a privately funded publication of:
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DILIGENCE

"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure." — Hebrews 6:11

A ministry of Dennis and Sherri Owens

Volume 5

June 15, 2006

Issue 9

Silence of the Scriptures — Permit or Prohibit?

Several years ago, we attended what we considered to be an extremely unusual "worship service" of a large denomination. In addition to the guitars, piano and organ used during the service there were two or three young ladies who danced throughout various parts of the service. From *our* perspective, the "event" that this denomination referred to as a "worship service" might have better been called "entertainment." At that time, that church was on the *cutting edge* of adding these kinds of things to a Lord's Day "worship." Now — it's not all that uncommon to have full rock bands, soloists, dancers, million dollar sound systems and lighting rigs that make those of some stadiums look like an amateur set-up — and it's called "worship." Unfortunately, there are congregations that consider themselves to be part of the New Testament Church that are not immune to taking these kinds of liberties with their "worship services."

The reasoning of those who participate in and organize these kinds of "worship services" is that they are permitted to do so since the Scriptures do not *explicitly condemn* the activities that they wish to include. They allege that anything that is not *expressly forbidden* is allowed — that the *silence* of the Scriptures on these matters *permits* their addition. They argue that since the Bible doesn't say *not* to do it, they are therefore permitted *to* do whatever is in question.

Others who do not subscribe to this reasoning, claim that anything that is not authorized is *prohibited* and therefore may not be included simply for the purpose of accommodating the society in which we live. These individuals argue that we are at liberty to do *only* what the Bible *authorizes* us to do and that to do otherwise is presuming to know that God approves of *everything* He did not *specifically* prohibit — or in other words — presuming to know the mind of God.

We very briefly referenced this subject in the November 15, 2005 issue of *Diligence*. At that time we cited just a couple of instances that we had hoped (in a light-hearted way) might have shed some light on why this whole controversy makes no sense at all. We asked the reader at that time to consider whether or not a pharmacist would be at liberty to add two or three *extra* antibiotics to a prescription given to you by your doctor *because* the doctor didn't say *not* to do so. The second scenario we mentioned in that previous issue concerned placing a food order in a restaurant. It seems rather obvious that a server would be required to bring to your table whatever you specifically order — not a lot of *other* items.

continued on page 2

that he or she thinks would be a good idea because you didn't *specifically* instruct him or her to *not* include those items. These examples *alone* seem to make this whole issue as much of a common sense issue as one that would need Scriptural backing to substantiate. Unfortunately however, not everyone sees it that way.

And so the controversy rages on. Just how does the *silence* of the Scriptures regarding any given subject influence what we do or do not do in the assembly of the saints today? Well, since the New Testament Church should without fail, follow whatever the Scriptures instruct, it would behoove us to look to the Scriptures and determine whether or not there are any examples that might clearly answer this controversy. *Are* there any occurrences in the Bible that might reveal whether or not God's *silence* regarding any given subject grants us *permission* to engage in those practices not mentioned in the Scriptures — or does His *silence prohibit* religious practices that are not specifically mentioned? So let's go to the Scriptures and see what we can find there that may help us to determine a solution to this controversy.

Let's begin with a few basic background verses that will establish *why* whatever we see (or don't see) in the Bible is the authority on which we *must* rely since it is God's revelation to us through the inspired writers. The Scriptures are the *only* way we have of knowing what God permits and what God prohibits. We can not know His mind in *any other way* except for what is revealed (or not revealed) to us in the Scriptures. God has not given us the authority to make up our own rules in whatever way we see fit. That becomes rather clear in these Scriptures.

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?" (Romans 11:33-34 NASB)

"O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps." (Jeremiah 10:23 NKJV)

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." (Proverbs 14:12 NIV)

"Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you." (Deut. 4:2 NIV)

"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book." (Rev. 22:18-19 NIV)

So how can we determine what is and is not allowed? Can we find the answer in the Scriptures — even about the things of which God is silent? Do the

Scriptures themselves tell us that God's *silence permits* or do they tell us that His *silence prohibits* whatever is in question?

Galatians 3:24 and 25 (along with many other verses) clearly tells us that we are no longer under the Law but that the Law was the "tutor" (NASB and NKJV) that lead us to Christ. So in order for us to fully understand the New Testament, we can look to the Old Testament for insight that will help us grasp what God would have us to do. So let's start by taking a look at some incidences in the Old Testament. Since we won't have room in this article to print all of the Scriptures to which we will refer, we strongly encourage you to have your Bible handy and read each account that is referenced.

The first account we're going to look at is Noah and the ark. Genesis 6:14-21 lists the instructions that God gave to Noah as to how he was to build the ark. Noah was told to "*put a door in the side of the ark.*" We should notice in those verses that God did *not* tell Noah that he *couldn't* put two or three or more doors — He only said to put "*a door in the side.*" If we were to use the reasoning that anything that is not *expressly forbidden* in the Scriptures is allowed — then Noah would have been at liberty to put a door at each end and on both sides. What do *you* think — did God's *silence* on this matter prohibit or permit more than one door? Would Noah have been at liberty to build the ark with three or four or more doors? Apparently, *Noah* assumed that God's *silence* about whether or not he could use *more* than one door was prohibitive since verse 22 states; "*Noah did everything just as God commanded him.*" Noah assumed he had no authority to add to the plan given to him by God.

Now, a different ark — the ark of the covenant is probably one of the better known sacred items that was a part of the Tabernacle. During the time the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, the ark was carried with them and according to God's command, contained three items: a golden pot of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written (Heb. 9:4). Exodus 25:12-14 explains that the ark was to be carried by placing poles through rings attached to the sides of the ark. The Levites were to carry the ark by placing those poles on their shoulders (I Chron. 15:15). There were absolutely *no instructions* given that stated that the ark *could not* be carried using *other* methods — such as on a cart pulled by oxen. They *had* however been instructed in Numbers 4:15 to "*not touch the holy things or they will die.*" Then in I Chronicles 13:7 we read; "*They set the ark of God on a new cart...*" Well? — why not? They hadn't been told *not* to. However, as we read on through verse 10 of I Chronicles 13 we are told that Uzzah was struck dead by God because he reached out his hand to steady the ark when the oxen stumbled. Wow! No warning — just struck him dead! God didn't *expressly forbid* them to carry the ark on a cart. But Uzzah died because they did that which God had been silent about. So what do you think? Did God's *silence* concerning how *not* to carry the ark *permit* or *prohibit*.