

# *“Respect for God’s Silence”*

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***NOTE: Today’s worship started with a 1-liter Coca Cola and a large KFC bucket on the Lord’s Supper table.***

As most of us know, Judge Judy has become a well-known figure on American television. After serving for more than 20 years in family court in New York, she made the transition and brought her courtroom to television. Several years ago, Judge Judy had an interesting case where a young man had been called upon to house sit for two weeks as the owner went on vacation. The owner left detailed instructions – a rather lengthy list of everything that could be done. According to the instructions, the young man was even allowed to eat the food in the house – the owner had left instructions on how to thaw and cook the frozen meals and at what temperature those meals should be cooked. However, during that two-week period as he was house sitting, the young man did something for which he did not have permission. He drove the owner’s car, and in the process he had an accident and caused more than a thousand dollars in damage. Well, now the case was before Judge Judy, and as the man explained what happened, his defense was that the owner’s silence gave consent. In other words, “The owner never said that I could not use her car!” Well, as you can imagine (if you know anything about Judge Judy), she very quickly turned it around and said, “So, if you saw my car on the street, would you take it for a drive?” The young man answered, “No.” And the judge quickly replied, “Why not? I never said that you couldn’t use it.” Right there, the judge made the point and ruled that silence does not give permission, and the house-sitter had to pay up for the damage done to the car because he took it without the owner’s permission. [John Gipson, *Keynoter*; March 30, 2000]

This morning, I would invite you to think with me about the application of this principle to our study of God’s holy word. There are many times when God’s silence on an issue needs to be respected. Or to put it another way, just because God doesn’t tell us NOT to do something doesn’t necessarily mean that we can just go out and do whatever we want on some issue. And as we study this morning, I won’t be staying with one passage (as we normally do), but I would like for us to just briefly consider four examples from the Bible where God’s silence played an important role, and then I would like for us to close with the “So what?” question, “What do these passages really mean for us today?”

I. **As we get started, I would invite you to turn with me to the example of NOAH AND THE ARK in Genesis 6 (p. 8).**

You might remember that when the earth was overtaken with wickedness, God decided to destroy the human race with a flood. In Genesis 6:8, we find, though, that a man named Noah ***“found favor in the eyes of the Lord,”*** and so, as a righteous man, Noah was commanded to build an ark, basically a giant barge. Please notice Genesis 6:14, ***“Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with rooms, and shall cover it inside and out with pitch.”*** And then, starting in verse 15, we find that God goes on to give Noah some very detailed instructions – the dimensions, the location of the window, the placement of the door, and so on.

Well, this is what we read in Hebrews 11:7, ***“By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”*** So, out of ***“reverence”*** (or fear) of God, we find that Noah followed the instructions that he was given. We are told in Hebrews 11:7 that Noah acted ***“by faith.”*** As we learn elsewhere in the Bible, faith comes from hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). So we learn, then, that Noah heard God’s instructions and he built the ark based on those instructions. To him, God’s word was a blueprint, a pattern. In fact, if you are still in Genesis 6, please notice the very last verse in that chapter – in Genesis 6:22, after giving all of these detailed instructions, the Bible says, ***“Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.”***

Now, many of you have probably thought about this before, but I want to throw something out there for all of us to consider: In Genesis 6:14, God specifically told Noah to use gopher wood (a particular kind of wood); so, the question is: If Noah had used some other kind of wood, would his efforts have been pleasing to God? In other words, what if Noah said to himself, ***“Gopher wood is kind of hard to find around these parts, plus balsa wood is much lighter and will probably float better,”*** if Noah had then gone ahead and used a different kind of wood, would that ark have floated? Well, the question of whether it would have floated is a question that only God can answer, but I’m using the example of Noah here to try to illustrate a lesson about the authority of God’s word. Nowhere did God ever say, ***“Thou shalt not use balsa wood.”*** Instead, God told Noah to build the ark out of gopher wood, and that very specific command automatically excluded all other kinds of wood. Now, if God had said, ***“Build the ark out of wood,”*** then Noah would have had some freedom in that regard, then Noah could have used any kind of wood that he thought was best or whatever wood was closest and most convenient. But as it was, the Lord specified gopher wood, and gopher wood then became the only kind of wood that Noah had God’s permission to use on that project. So, the case of Noah building the ark is our first example illustrating the importance of God’s silence on an issue. Just because God didn’t say don’t use any other kind of wood doesn’t mean that Noah could use any wood that might have been available.

II. **I’d like for us to go on and look at a second example with a rather disturbing incident involving two men by the names NADAB AND ABIHU.**

And as you can see on the wall up here, their story is found in Leviticus 10 (p. 174). I would encourage you to turn with me to this passage. The account of what happened to these two men is a powerful example of how important it is to respect God’s silence. Please notice Leviticus 10:1-3,

***Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, “It is what the Lord spoke, saying, ‘By***

***those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored.” So Aaron, therefore, kept silent.***

Most of you know that I am not a big fan of the New International Version, and yet as I have studied this passage through the years, I have concluded that the NIV absolutely nails it in this passage. In verse 1, the NIV refers to these two men offering **“unauthorized fire”** before the Lord. And that is certainly the idea that comes across here. They offered **“strange fire,”** not that it was weird or that it looked funny, but the fire they offered was **“unauthorized,”** it was some kind of fire from some source other than the source that God had authorized. Elsewhere in the Bible, we find that the fire for burning incense needed to come from the altar. We are not told where these men got their fire this day, but we do know that they offered incense with some kind of fire that they did not have God’s explicit permission to use. And please notice: Like the example of Noah and the gopher wood, God did not need to list all of the millions of places where they were NOT to get the fire (“Don’t use a Bic lighter, don’t use matches, don’t bring in a coal from the cooking fire in your tent,” and so on) – God didn’t need to list every possible source of fire that he DIDN’T want them to use; instead, the Lord only needed to tell them WHICH fire to use, and any fire other than that was outside of God’s command. Any other fire was **“unauthorized.”**

And please notice what happened here. As a result of their sin, God destroyed them with fire. Fire burst out from the presence of God and burned these two men to a crisp, right there on the spot. These two men were killed because they did not respect the silence of the Scriptures. And what always impresses me about this event is God’s response. Two men are burned to death right there in front of the entire nation, and God has a one-sentence response, **“By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored.”** And that is it. That is all that God had to say about this! **“By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored.”** By ignoring the silence of God’s word, these two men had treated God as something less than holy. They had failed to honor God. And the punishment for violating God’s law was death.

At this point, some might be thinking, “Oh, come on! Why would God care about such a small and seemingly insignificant little detail?” I don’t know if you remember this, but in Psalm 19:13, King David asked God to keep him from **“presumptuous sins.”** A presumptuous sin is a sin where we presume or suppose that something will be okay with God, even when He has told us to do something in a particular way. And so, what might seem to be a little thing to us (like gopher wood), might actually be a test of our obedience to God.

Maybe we could imagine going to Culver’s this afternoon and ordering a Butter Burger with ketchup and mustard. We pay for our food and sit down, we are looking forward to this burger that we’ve been anticipating all week, the nice young woman brings it to the table, we open it up, and we find that it is bursting with onions. We take the top of the bun off and we see a big old glob of mayonnaise, and then it looks like there is some bacon on there, and then we see the tomato and the lettuce. To me, of course, this is sounding really good! But imagine if we had ordered our burger with ketchup and mustard. We see it before the young woman leaves, and we say something, we complain. Now imagine that she takes the receipt and looks it over, and imagine that she says this, “Yes, I see that your receipt says ketchup and mustard, but nowhere does it say that you don’t like onions, and mayonnaise, and bacon, and tomato, and lettuce. But these are all high-quality ingredients, and so as we made your sandwich back in the kitchen, all of us decided that surely you wouldn’t mind.” If that was her answer, would we have a right to be upset? Yes, the burger has ketchup and mustard just as we requested, but we might say that there were some **“unauthorized”** additions! In the same way, the only way we know what God wants is what he tells us that he wants, and that is a very important concept,

especially when it comes to our worship. Let us not presume to know what God wants, but let us do exactly what he has told us to do.

III. **At this time, let us move on to a third example, a powerful passage depicting an event from the rather brief life of a man named UZZAH.**

The account of Uzzah's death is found in 2 Samuel 6; however, the story starts many years earlier. As the Israelites were first leaving Egypt for the Promised Land, God gave some very detailed instructions concerning the tabernacle and the furniture in the tabernacle; specifically, the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant was the place where God would meet the people, and in Deuteronomy 10:8, the Bible says, ***"At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to serve Him and to bless in His name until this day."*** So, the Levites were responsible for carrying the Ark, and when it came to carrying the Ark, God's law was also very specific. In Exodus 25:12-24, we find that the Ark was to be constructed with rings on the sides of it, and the rings were specifically designed to have poles inserted through those rings so that the Ark could be carried without the people actually touching the Ark.

Well, several hundred years after these commands were given, the people decided to move the Ark under the leadership of King David, and that brings us to 2 Samuel 6 (p. 500). I would invite you to turn with me to 2 Samuel 6, and let us notice what happens here in 2 Samuel 6:1-7,

***Now David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose and went with all the people who were with him to Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God which is called by the Name, the very name of the Lord of hosts who is enthroned above the cherubim. They placed the ark of God on a new cart that they might bring it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were leading the new cart. So they brought it with the ark of God from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Ahio was walking ahead of the ark. Meanwhile, David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the Lord with all kinds of instruments made of fir wood, and with lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets and cymbals. But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God.***

If we were to keep reading, we would find in the next verse that David got mad at God, but then as he thought about it, his anger quickly turned to fear, and eventually David understood why God did what he did. In fact, after some time had passed, when they finally got down to moving the Ark again, we have an interesting account in 1 Chronicles 15 (p. 668). In 1 Chronicles 15, David specifically calls the Levites together. Remember: In the previous incident, David gathered ***"all the people."*** But now, as the king, David brings in the leaders of the Levites, and I want us to notice what King David says in 1 Chronicles 15:13-15, ***"Because you did not carry it at the first, the Lord our God made an outburst on us, for we did not seek Him according to the ordinance.' So the priests and the Levites consecrated themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel. The sons of the Levites carried the ark of God on their shoulders with the poles thereon, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the Lord."*** Did you notice what happened here? It appears that after Uzzah's death and after the king had calmed down a little bit, King David actually consulted the word of God! And with a little research, David realized, 1.) We'd better have some Levites handle this situation, and 2.) Forget the cart – we'd better use some poles!

Now, for the purpose of our study on God's silence, I want to ask a few questions: Did God ever say that if you were in tribe of Judah (or whatever) that you couldn't carry the Ark? I don't see that in the scriptures. But instead, God gave a positive command – that the Levites were to carry it – and with that positive and very specific command, all of the other tribes were excluded. And here's the second question: Did God ever say, "Do not carry the Ark on a cart?" Again, no – I cannot find that in the Scriptures. But instead, again, God said to carry it with those poles, and by giving that positive and very specific command, all other methods of carrying the Ark were excluded. So, notice verse 13 again, David understood that when they ignored God's silence, they ***"did not seek Him according to the ordinance."*** They had violated God's law of silence. So, on their second attempt, they moved it (according to verse 15), ***"...as Moses had commanded according to the word of the Lord."*** On their second attempt, they moved it according to God's very specific instructions.

**IV. There is one more example I'd like for us to consider, and for this one I'd like to move over into the New Testament, to Hebrews 7 and an interesting reference to the PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS CHRIST.**

The passage is Hebrews 7:12-14 (p. 1876). The author is making the point that the Law of Moses has been nailed to the cross and that we are now under a New Law. And to make the point he emphasizes that Jesus is our High Priest, something that would have been impossible under the Law of Moses. Please notice Hebrews 7:12-14, ***"For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests."*** So we have a problem: Jesus is our high priest, but Jesus is from the tribe of Judah; people from Judah can't be priests under the Law of Moses; therefore, the Law of Moses must no longer be in effect. The key to this argument is that men from the tribe of Judah were excluded from the priesthood, and that's where we see the argument from silence in verse 14 – Jesus was from Judah, ***"a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests."*** You see, Moses didn't have to say, "If you are from Judah you cannot be a priest." He didn't need to say that, because the rule was the Levites were the priests, and with that very specific command, all of the other tribes were excluded. And based on this argument, the author of Hebrews was making the point that the Law of Moses must no longer be in effect, since Jesus is our priest; otherwise, Christ would be breaking God's law.

In the Old Testament, I can think of at least two men who DID break God's law on this issue. First of all, there is King Saul. You might remember a time right after Saul became king when Saul and his men were pretty much surrounded and totally outnumbered by the Philistines (1 Samuel 13). The Israelites were about to panic, Saul wanted to bring God into the situation, the prophet Samuel was on his way, but Samuel was running late, so Saul took matters into his own hands and offered a sacrifice to God right there on the spot, even though he was not a Levite. Well, right as he finished making the sacrifice, Samuel showed up and said, ***"What have you done?"*** Saul tried to explain himself, but Samuel said, ***"You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God which He commanded you..."*** Saul, being from the tribe of Benjamin, could have said, "God never said that I COULDN'T be a priest." But of course, we know that by ignoring God's specific command for Levites to offer sacrifices, Saul had indeed violated God's law.

The second example would be King Uzziah many years later – this is not Uzzah, but Uzziah – and the passage is found in 2 Chronicles 26 (p. 729). The Bible tells us that Uzziah became very powerful, the power went to his head, and in his pride, the Bible tells us that one day he went into the temple to burn incense on the altar. What happens next is found in 2 Chronicles 26:17-21,

***Then Azariah the priest entered after him and with him eighty priests of the Lord, valiant men. They opposed Uzziah the king and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and will have no honor from the Lord God." But Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, beside the altar of incense. Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him out of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because the Lord had smitten him. King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the Lord. And Jotham his son was over the king's house judging the people of the land.***

And so we find that King Uzziah's complete disregard for the silence of God's law basically ruined his life. He lived as a leper until the day that he died. So, the lesson is: When God said that the Levites would serve as the priests, that very specific command automatically excluded anybody else from any other tribe from ever serving as a priest. God's silence was significant.

### **Conclusion:**

As we close our thoughts on God's silence this morning, I would like to make at least a brief application to one of the most noticeable and one of the most-questioned aspects concerning this issue and how it relates to the worship we offer to God. When people visit with us for the very first time, they will often ask, "Why do you people not use instruments in your worship to God?" And the clearest answer we can give is: God has not given us permission to use instruments in our worship. In other words, we do not have God's authority. If God had just said, "Worship me," and if he had just left the details up to us, then we could do whatever we wanted to do in worship. We could use incense. We could bring in the band. We break out into some interpretive dance. We could do all kinds of things. But as it is, God has given some very specific instructions concerning worship. After all, we are here – not to please ourselves, but to please God. What does God want? The Bible tells us that we are to **"sing."** And, as God's people who take his word seriously, our response has been to sing. God does not need to tell us the millions of ways that he does NOT want to be worshiped.

Back when I was in high school, one of my best friends was a member of the Christian Church. His name was Mike, and the last I heard is now a lawyer somewhere near Baltimore. We haven't been in touch for many years now. But you may know that one of the major differences we have with the Christian Church is how we view the scriptures, and a large part of that involves their use of instrumental music as a part of worship. I remember one day in high school we were having a discussion on the silence of the scriptures as it applied to instrumental music, and I asked Mike this question, "If we wanted to add fried chicken and Coke to the Lord's Supper, would that be alright?" And he answered, "Yes." His argument was that those two things had not been specifically condemned. And so, because God never said, "Thou shalt not have fried chicken as a part of the Lord's Super," then the fact that it was never condemned made it acceptable in the eyes of God. I was thinking to myself this week: I would love to work in a restaurant where my friend Mike goes in to order a burger with ketchup and mustard! I would love to see the look on his face. I would love to see my friend try to borrow a car from Judge Judy. But I think you see the difference we have with many in the denominational world. Many around us have the false idea that just because something is not specifically condemned, it is allowed. But we have learned from the scriptures this morning, though, that this is not the case. Noah, Nadab

and Abihu, Uzzah, and even the Lord himself have taught us some valuable lessons concerning the authority of the scriptures, especially when it comes to those areas where God has given some very specific instructions.

As I was doing the research for this morning's lesson, I ran across a quote from brother N.B. Hardeman, a well-known preacher in the early 1900's, and this is what he said on the subject of Bible authority,

Here we are, and here is the Bible. You come and watch us in our worship of God and in our work for Him, and if you find us doing anything in the work or worship of the church for which we cannot give a "Thus saith the Lord," we pledge you that we will quit it. On the other hand, if there is anything you think we ought to be doing if you read it to us from the word of the Lord, we will begin it.

I would agree completely with that statement.

If you are not yet a Christian, we want to give you the opportunity to make that decision at this time. The Bible teaches that God loved us so much he sent his only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. We respond to the sacrifice with faith. We hear the gospel, we believe what we hear, we turn away from sin, we publicly admit (or confess) that Jesus is God's Son, and then we allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism. At that point, the Christian life begins, and we stay focused on remaining faithful for the rest of this life. If you have any questions, please ask. If you need us to say a special prayer for some challenge that you are facing in our life right now, let us know. But if you are ready to obey the gospel, you can let us know immediately as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)

Recommended Reading:

*Where's the Piano?* by Dan Chambers

*The Way of Unity Between the Christian Church and Churches of Christ* by H. Leo Boles