

When The Floodgate Was Opened

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The raging flood of unscriptural and sinful practices, in which “mainstream churches of Christ” are awash today, began in a heresy adopted more than a century and a half ago. That’s when the floodgate was lifted. Although that heresy’s genesis was in the formation of the American Christian Missionary Society in 1849 in Cincinnati, with Alexander Campbell as its first president, it was not until 1866 that the floodgate was finally, thrown open.

From 1849 to 1866, the society had its opponents, but it was, in a large measure, successful in supplanting the work of the church across the world. That began to change in December, 1866, when one of its chief advocates, the *American Christian Review’s* Editor, Ben Franklin, finally recognized that it could not be defended by God’s word and began to oppose it on that basis. Reaction to Franklin’s change was vitriolic from the society’s defenders and he wrote the following in his own defense:

”At all events, we have come to the time to rest the question whether *love and devotion* to the creation of a few individuals, in the form of an outside society, with laws and names unknown to the law of God, is sufficient to sink a man with more than thirty years’ labor and devotion to the spread of the gospel, *solely because he will not go for the Society*” (All emph. his, JCB) (“Our Position Defined,” *American Christian Review*, Vol. X, No. 11, Mar. 12, 1867, p. 84 [Cited by Earl Irvin West in *The Search For The Ancient Order*, Vol. 2, p. 49]).

Of Franklin’s new opposition to the Missionary Society, West wrote, “His influence ...found the American Christian Missionary Society in 1866 badly in need of repairs and rapidly losing in popularity” (p. 49) To “repair” the Society and counter its loss of popularity, that body turned to what West called, “its great apologist, W. K. Pendleton, to defend it.” Pendleton’s apologia at the Society’s convention in 1866 opened the floodgate of errors that have inundated the church from that time to the present. His argument was based on Thomas Campbell’s motto—particularly the last part—first enunciated by him in 1809: “Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent.” Pendleton’s speech was carried in full by Moses Lard in the *Millennial Harbinger’s* Nov., 1866 issue. Replying to the Society’s opponents, Pendleton said, in part,

”You say, ‘your Missionary Society is not scriptural’—and you mean by this, that there is no special express precept in the Scriptures demanding it. We concede this without a moment’s hesitation. There is none; but what do you make of it? Is everything which is not scriptural therefore wrong? ...Does he say that it is not *positively and expressly* commanded; then we demand by what canon of interpretation does he make mere *silence* prohibitory?” (p. 501[All Emph his, JCB]).

Pendleton focused on the silence of Scripture (“The Bible does not say, not to”) to justify the Society’s existence. Pendleton’s interpretation of, “Where the Bible is silent, we are silent,” opened the floodgate of every soul-damning error men can devise, and became the mantra of every innovator in the work and worship of the church from that time until the present,. That was West’s conclusion:

”Upon this interpretation of the motto was based every innovation which was brought into the church. The door was now down, and human opinions,, as they applied to the work and worship of the church, multiplied. To try to sweep back the avalanche by calling for divine authority was like trying to dry up the the ocean with a sponge.. Pendleton’s interpretation was picked up by Isaac Errett and the *Christian Standard* and then by J. H. Garrison and B. W. Johnson in the *Christian Evangelist* to resound down through the ages to the present. Nevertheless, an element remained to whom the call for divine authority still meant something” (*The Search For The Ancient Order*, Vol. 2, p. 54).

Pendleton’s words still “resound down through the ages” in the “Social Gospel” under the guise of so-called “ministries,” benevolent, and recreational works of “mainstream churches of Christ.” Asked for “divine authority” for their “Social Gospel” programs today, they blithely reply, “Those are expedients. The Bible does not say we can’t do them.”

Typical of Pendleton's current devotees is Lynn McMillon, president and CEO of *The Christian Chronicle*, and an elder in the Memorial Road church of Christ in Edmond, Okla. In a meeting with a large group of gospel preachers at the 8th and Lee church building in Lawton, Okla., Nov. 17, 2003, McMillon represented Oklahoma Christian University (OCU). The meeting was requested by the preachers to present objections to rank liberals on OCU's lectureship like Mark Henderson of the apostate Quail Springs church in Oklahoma City and Randy Harris, who co-authored, *The Second Incarnation* with Rubel Shelly. Both men have a denominational concept of the church and fellowship denominations. It was pointed out to McMillon that Quail Springs uses mechanical instruments of music in its worship, and was asked, point-blank—not once, but *three times*—if, “the silence of the Scriptures is permissive or prohibitive.” He never answered the question. It would have ruined his defense of Quail Springs and Henderson.

Those of us to whom the call of divine authority still means something, understand that the silence of the Scriptures is *not* permissive. And, we can answer that question from the word of God. Nadab and Abihu are prime examples of that in the Old Testament:

”And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace” (Lev. 10:1-3).

Nadab and Abihu offered incense, which was their responsibility as priests under the Law of Moses. They took fire and put it into their censers and offered “before the Lord.” But the Scripture says they, “offered *strange* fire.” What was “strange” about it? It was fire that “God commanded them *not*.” God had had not commanded them to take fire from the “source of their choice.” The significance of this passage is that God had commanded them to take fire from the source which *He* commanded, but they chose a source about which He was silent (“He commanded them not”). In essence, they argued that, “God did *not* say we couldn't.”

If that is not sufficient to explain the non-permissive nature of God's silence, the writer of Hebrews, in affirming the superiority of Christ's priesthood over Aaron's, wrote,

”If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood” (Heb. 7:11-14).

Jesus Christ could not have been a priest while He was on earth—not because God said He couldn't, but because God commanded priests under the Law of Moses to be from the tribe of Levi. Therefore, Christ was prohibited from being a priest on earth because, “...our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake *nothing* concerning priesthood.” God's silence about Judah and the priesthood did *not* permit a member of that tribe to be a priest.

Closely related to Pendleton's “permissive silence” doctrine, is that *anything* churches devise falls under the classification of expediency and is, therefore, permitted. The Bible authorizes us to act in one of three ways—direct statement (command), approved divine example, and implication. *Direct statement* (“Repent and be baptized...for the remission of sins”) is evident. *Approved divine example* is illustrated in Acts 20:7 when Paul tarried at Troas to assemble with the church and observe the Lord's Supper. That is an approved divine example of assembling on the first day of *each* week to observe the Lord's Supper. *Implication* means that when Scripture “implies” an action it is approved of God. That is shown in Philip's preaching to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. In both instances, it is never explicitly stated that he preached baptism to anyone. But it is *implied* when the Samaritans “believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12), and the eunuch said, “See, here is water; what doth hinder

me to be baptized?” (Acts 8:36).

When we oppose those who add unauthorized things to the work and worship of the church, their stock reply is, “The Bible does not authorize things like church buildings, pews, and song books, either.” Where do they find that kind of sophistry? From W. K. Pendleton who asked, “Is everything which is not scriptural therefore wrong? ...by what canon of interpretation does he make mere *silence* prohibitory?” Like Pendleton, they fail to understand that buildings, pews and song books are not *added elements* to the work or worship of the church, but are *implied* in the commands to assemble in one place (1 Cor. 11:18, 33; Heb. 10:25), and to sing (Eph. 5:19). They are *authorized* expedients.

But for a thing to be expedient, it must *first* be lawful (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23) under one of those three sources of Bible authority. Gary Grizzell wrote,

Expediency plays an important role in the place where God designed for it to be. However, to say that the realm of human judgment (expediency) is **not** a *source* of New Testament authority is **not** within itself a denial of the importance and proper role of expediency. Having said that, it may be said emphatically that ***expediency is not a fourth source of authority*** (www.selfpublishinginnovations.com).

In his comments on the above article, Kent Bailey wrote, “The logical consequence of the authority by expedience doctrine is enough to falsify it. Basically all one has to do is engage in any activity that they desire and then justify it by claiming that such is an expedient to evangelism, edification, or benevolence,” and Charles Pogue wrote,

”The sad reality in the denominational world at large is their whole religious existence is based on expediency which is another way of saying I am my own authority. This is a post-modern world. This is where the idea of expediency as a source of authority will lead the church if those who hold it never admit to its implication and do not give the idea up” (Ibid).

Neither the silence of Scripture, nor expediency is Biblically authoritative. As a *source of authority*, expediency is a false doctrine and, as brother Grizzell wrote in his article quoted above, “Any doctrine which implies a false doctrine is false within itself.” To say that anything man adds to the work and/or worship of the church is “just an expedient” is absolutely false, and carries the anathema of God against it (Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 22:18-19).