

Rule 9: No Argument from Silence

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Hermeneutics: How to Read and Understand the Bible

RULE #9: The Argument from Silence Is Invalid.

- I. God may (1) command things, (2) prohibit things, or (3) leave things to our judgment.
 - A. If God commands something, we do exactly what is commanded without modification.
 - B. If God prohibits something, we strictly avoid anything related to the prohibited matter.
 - C. If God leaves something to our choice, we neither require nor prohibit that thing.
 - D. Some call this the regulative principle, for governing religious and personal actions.
 - E. A positive command from the Bible is enough: it condemns any other alternatives.
 - F. The Word of God provides a complete system of truth by itself (II Timothy 3:16-17).
- II. The argument from silence is not valid, and it leads to any and every heresy imaginable.
 - A. What is the argument from silence? It is the opposite of what has been stated above.
 - B. They reason, If God has not specifically condemned a thing, we may do it on the grounds of His silence about it; we can do whatever He has not specifically condemned.
 - C. This is the logical fallacy of “burden of proof” or “appeal to ignorance.” It goes like this: since you cannot show me God specifically condemns a thing, then it is allowed.
 1. Really? God did not condemn Coke and chips at communion. Should we try it?
 2. Really? Baptism involves water, and He did not condemn squirt gun fights for baptism. Would a squirt gun fight be good enough, as long as everyone is wet?
 3. There is no end to these absurdities, once you start down this false road.
 - D. They reason, If God commands something, we may alter it short of breaking any other.
 - E. They reason, If God prohibits something, we only have to avoid the specific matter.
 - F. They reason, We may add to God’s Word, if we at least include what He commanded.
 - G. They reason, If God is silent about a matter, it is our choice to require or prohibit it.
 - H. For example, He did not condemn Christian flags, so we say the Christian pledge to it.
- III. The LORD God has clearly stated His opposition to the argument from silence in the Bible.
 - A. God teaches this rule by way of specific precept (Deut 4:2; 5:32; 12:32; Matt 28:20).
 - B. God teaches this rule by way of argument twice in Scripture (Heb 7:13-14; Mat 12:3-4).
 1. How did God condemn men from Judah being priests of God? Think about it.
 2. How did God condemn David from eating the shewbread? Think about it.
 3. God does not condemn all options; a positive command is obeyed exclusively.
 - C. God teaches it by way of example in the lives of several men recorded in Scripture.

1. Cain brought an offering at the right time to the right place to the LORD, but God did not respect his sacrifice regardless of his intentions (Genesis 4:3-5). How did God prohibit bringing the fruit of the ground?
2. Nadab and Abihu, the right men, brought incense at the right time to the right place to the LORD, but God did not respect their service (Lev 10:1-7). How had God told them that He didn't like their new and innovative incense?
3. Moses smote the right rock at the right time with the Lord's rod at the Lord's command with good results, but he did not speak to it as God had commanded him (Num 20:7-13). How had God told Moses he could not smite the rock?
4. Saul preserved the best of the Amalekites' spoil for sacrifice, which seems noble enough; but God seeks obedience rather than sacrifice (I Samuel 15:13-23). How had God told Saul not to save the best of the spoil for sacrifice to Him?
5. David rejoiced to bring the ark back to Jerusalem, and he even used a new cart to transport it; but God wanted the due order (II Samuel 6:1-9; I Chron 15:13). How had God condemned the use of a new ox cart in transporting the ark?
6. Uzziah loved the Lord, and God had blessed him much, so he wanted to offer incense himself, but God gave him leprosy until he died (II Chron 26:16-21). How had God made it clear that Uzziah could not offer incense himself?

IV. It is the duty of study to distinguish between aids and additions to keeping God's commands.

- A. It is called the doctrine of circumstances: it divides circumstances from commandments.
- B. An "aid" facilitates keeping God's commandments without modifying the precept at all.
- C. An "addition" is a modifying change to the essential substance of His commandments.
- D. Consider the result of what is done. Has anything been added? Has anything been deleted? Has the law simply been made easier to obey? Is it merely circumstances?
- E. Noah was told to build an ark of gopher wood (Genesis 6:14). While a hammer would simply be an aid to this commandment, using spruce or cedar would be an addition. How do we know spruce and cedar were condemned? Because He commanded gopher!
- F. The Jews were told to use a lamb or kid in the Passover supper. While a fork and plate would be aids, a young pig would be an addition. How did God prohibit pigs? He never wrote that they could not use a pig. Does He have something against a pretty little pig? After all, He made pigs also, and they have blood, and it is red, and they can die, right?
- G. We are to take bread in the Lord's Supper. Consider the difference of passing the bread on a plate and using turkey sandwiches. How did He condemn turkey sandwiches?
- H. The beverage used in Corinth for the Lord's Supper caused drunkenness (I Cor 11:1). Paul did not correct the beverage, but the manners. While small disposable cups assist in keeping apostolic tradition, using grape juice violates it. How did God require wine?
- I. We are told to sing in the New Testament. Consider the difference between using a hymnal to assist our singing and an orchestra to accompany our singing. The one is simply an aid to promote singing; the other is playing to make a very different product.

- J. We are told to take a collection. Consider the difference between a collection plate and fees to participate in the communion service, like the Catholics have invented.
- V. We are limited to what God has commanded or prohibited in regulating the church or our lives.
 - A. Some condemn the use of wine or beer, but God did not condemn their use. He did condemn drunkenness, but that is where we must stop. We do not have the right to think we are helping the Lord by taking a stricter, more conservative, or safer approach.
 - B. Some condemn the use of tobacco, but God did not condemn its use. He did condemn being brought under the power of anything, but that is where we must stop. We do not have the right to think we are helping the Lord by taking a stricter, more conservative, more healthful, or safer approach to the matter.

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