

JESUS AND SILENCE

Up to this point we have looked at covenant obedience as it applied to those in the Old Testament and with a view to the kind of obedience that God desires from us. To some our study may appear irrelevant, to others merely a restatement of “traditional” arguments. The question is not so much whether they are old or new as it is whether they are valid. If they were valid, one would expect to find the principle fulfilled in the life of Jesus who lived under that covenant.

For those of us who look to Jesus as our example and by whose blood we have entered into a new covenant, it is necessary to ask about Jesus’ attitude toward the silence of the Scriptures. Surely Jesus must have dealt with the same problem facing men today. How did Jesus obey the Father? How did Jesus address the problem of His Father’s authority? Did Jesus act only with authority or did He feel free to practice whatever the Father had not forbidden? How did Jesus act toward the hushed silence of the Father?

This chapter will be devoted to that question, because obedience is necessarily related to the silence of an authority. Jesus noted what the Father taught Him and placed parameters on His obedience to the Father. He lovingly, carefully, diligently, completely, and accurately submitted to the will of His Father. His self-restrictive example is significant. His conscious choice to do what His Father willed and no more is significant. Jesus serves as our example in His commitment to His Father.¹ If we regard ourselves as His disciples, then our goal is to be like our Master by obeying Him as He obeyed His Father.² By keeping our eyes fixed on Him, we can learn the kind of obedience God desires.

As a basis for our study, we will look at several passages in the gospel of John that describe the relationship of Jesus to the Father and how Jesus dealt with the will of His Father.

John 4:34

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work."

In this narrative of Jesus and the woman at the well near Sychar, Jesus reveals a basic fact about his character. Physical food is important; but, for Jesus, doing the will of God is what He lives for. F. F. Bruce said that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4); "and no one demonstrated the truth of this principle so thoroughly as Jesus did. To listen to the Father's voice and to do His will were the joy and strength of his life."³ Jesus' mission was inseparably linked to being the Son of His Father. This is but the first of many instances where Jesus makes it clear that He came to do the will of His Father.⁴

Jesus was not interested in seeking His own will but in fully accomplishing the work His Father had given Him to do. Many people characterized Him as a revolutionary or a libertine, who sought religious freedom. Jesus certainly did seek freedom, freedom from the traditions of men, freedom from the fear of death, and freedom from sin for His people.⁵ But Jesus never sought freedom to do His own will, nor did He ever seek freedom from the will of God. He never sought to change or abridge God's will. "Lo, I come to do the Thy will, O God," was the very substance of his life and desire. Jesus never conceived of freedom from God's will. He saw the true freedom in the will of God. Gottlob Schrenk said, "He is in person the will of the Father."⁶

John 5:19

Jesus answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.” (cf. 5:20)

In this passage Jesus is defending His claim that He is the Son of God. He defends his being equal to God by stating that His character is like that of His Father. A. T. Robertson observed that here is a supreme example of a son copying the spirit and work of a father.⁷ Jesus is not here setting up a rival throne or challenging His Father. Instead, his purpose is to do the work that His Father gave him to do.

Jesus restricts His actions to following His Father’s example. He affirms that unless it is something He sees the Father doing, He simply will not do it. Rather, His purpose is to obey the Father by acting in the same manner. The adverb *homoios* reflects the likeness of the behavior between Father and Son. “Unless” gives the extent to which Jesus will allow Himself to act. It is not in the character of Jesus to seek to do things of Himself, on His own authority apart from the Father.⁸

Jesus is the Son of God in a unique sense, and as the Son he maintains an attitude of perfect submission to the Father. F. F. Bruce notes, “It is for the Father to initiate; it is for the son to obey. It is for the Father to show the Son what to do; it is for the Son to follow the Father’s example.”⁹ Jesus’ language in this verse is exactly how one versed in Rabbinic thought would express reliance and dependence upon another for the authority of one’s message. Jesus never acts independently of His Father. His complete subordination is evident. Jesus has chosen to submit wholeheartedly to the Father’s will. Paul’s grand statement of the submission of Jesus to

the Father in Philippians 2 echoes John 5:19. Though Jesus was in the form of God, he took the form of a servant and became obedient to the point of death. Such submission is not from the heart of a rebellious libertine who is demanding his freedom to do as he pleases. Its source is in the heart of One who loves so much that He will set aside His own desires to serve the purpose of His Father.

John 5:30

I can do nothing on my own initiative, as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just; because I do not seek my own will but the will of Him who sent me.

Jesus makes it clear that He does not act on His own initiative or by His own authority.¹⁰ He simply will not do anything without the authority of God, the approval of God, or the appointment of God. He is not acting on His own volition. Jesus regards Himself as a commissioned person; he hears and acts in such a way as one who is sent by another. He can defend His judgment as impartial most strongly by the fact that He will judge only as the Father directs. This is what makes His judgment righteous. His power and the meaningfulness of His work is found in the fact that God is His source. Jesus determined never to go beyond His source. It is clear again that Jesus' whole purpose is to lovingly, completely, carefully, diligently and accurately do His Father's will.

John 5:36

But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.

Jesus completely identifies the work He does with the work that He was sent to the earth to do. Those works prove He is the Son of God. Those “very works” also show His attitude in obedience. Jesus took to heart the works His Father appointed for Him to accomplish. He wanted to do them, do them all, do them as He was instructed without any’ changes, and to bear witness that God truly was working in and through Him.

John 6:38

For I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.

Jesus explains that the Father’s will is that He raises up on the last day all whom the Father has given to Him. In the work of saving souls, the Father and the Son are completely unified. I am thankful that Jesus came to do the Divine will rather than to act as men do. Had Jesus acted as the Pharisees, He might very well have made it impossible for anyone to be saved. But acting in accordance to the will of God, Jesus chose to accept any man who would humbly and penitently believe and obey the gospel. Jesus came to make the infinite mercy of our

marvelous God known to all men and to demonstrate God's perfect love and patience to everyone, even the chief of sinners.¹¹ Had Jesus been of another frame of mind, we would all be hopeless. Had Jesus' judgments been human rather than divine, our hope in Him would be vain.

Jesus never initiates where God is silent. His task is to fulfill the expressed will of God. The Father told Him what to do and sent Him to earth to do it. Jesus respects that and never thinks to go beyond His authority, never seeks to do more than He was appointed to do. Jesus never wanted to go beyond. It was enough for Him to just do as the Father instructed.

Those who seek to act where God has remained silent dare to do something Jesus, the Son of God, never dared to do. It did not enter the mind of Jesus to act without warrant from the Father. He recognized that the Father told Him what we wanted; and since the Father had spoken on the matter, Jesus realized that doing more than he was commissioned to do would be presumptuous. To speak when his Father remained silent is as disobedient as remaining silent when His Father spoke.

John 7:16-18

Jesus therefore answered them, and said, My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself. He who speaks from Himself seeks His own glory but He who is seeking the glory of the one who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

Once again Jesus affirms that his teaching did not find its source within himself: the teaching of Jesus is that of the Father. The authenticity of Jesus depends on that fact, and His Divine identity depends on that fact. Jesus here speaks as a Jew trained in Rabbinic thought would speak. He attributes the authority for his teaching to another.¹²

Jesus' message is not contaminated by a desire for his own glory and so that he might be quoted. He rather points toward God so that men might glorify the Father. Jesus himself makes a contrast between divine and human teaching. This distinction lies in the difference between one who speaks from himself and one who is commissioned to speak. Jesus regards himself as commissioned by' God. The challenge of Jesus to do God's will. It is by doing that will that one comes to the knowledge that Christ's teachings are authentically divine.

John 8:26-29

“I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world.” They did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father. Jesus therefore said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.”

The reason Christ limits Himself to teaching only what the Father taught is so that He might please His Father. This diligence to please the Father is a noteworthy example for men

today. Limiting ourselves only to that which is taught in the New Testament is not an act of self-righteousness but an effort to please the God we love. This correspondence between the teaching of both Father and Son is a sign of unity and identity. It is no wonder that God regards Jesus as His beloved Son, with whom He is well pleased.¹³ James D. Bales asks, “What did Jesus teach? Everything God taught Him plus those things God did not teach him? How did He know what was pleasing in God’s sight? Did He say that God was pleased with one doing also all those things concerning which he was not silent?”¹⁴ Bales knew that Jesus taught no more than what the Father instructed Him to teach.

Just as the Father taught, so the Son spoke.¹⁵ Doctrinal correctness was important to Jesus. He spoke what He heard; He spoke all that He heard; and He spoke no more than He heard. Jesus did not presume freedom to vary from the message. As a further vindication of His message, Jesus pointed to the cross. Even in that, He will not act on His own will but will act as He has been commissioned to do.

Jesus applies this principle in His own life and asks others to do the same in 8:31-32. Now this is significant, for Jesus expects those who follow Him to have the same kind of doctrinal purity that He Himself exhibits. One can find no better example of doctrinal purity than Jesus Christ. He taught, “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” It is only those who abide in the teaching who are genuine disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus authenticates His disciples in this passage by how they deal with His Word. Our response to the authority of Jesus Christ does speak to the issue of who we are and whose we are. Should we ever forsake our determination to stay within the teaching or word of Christ, we shall inevitably lose our identification with Him to the same extent.

To “abide in” means to “continually dwell in” that message. Just as Jesus carefully, lovingly, diligently, completely and accurately devoted himself to what the Father taught Him, so we must devote ourselves to His word. His truth is in His message; that is where the true freedom lies. It can be in no other place. The liberating truth is not in the inventions of men, in the traditions of men, or in loopholes. It is only in the message and teaching of Jesus, which His loving Father taught Him. Jesus promises us, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10).

John 10:18

No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority’ to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.

Even in His death, Jesus acted upon the “commandment” of His Father. The reason He gave His life so freely was that He knew this to be His Father’s will. Had it not been the Father’s will, Jesus would not have been crucified. Peter emphasizes that Jesus’ death was according to the “predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23; 4:28). In this act, as no other, we can see the depths of Jesus’ love and desire to please His Father. He sacrificed all and let no personal desire keep Him from fulfilling the “commandment” that His Father gave to Him. His death was His purpose for coming to the earth. His body had been prepared as a sacrifice; and His burden was, “Lo, I have come to do Thy will, O God!”

Had Jesus not been so authorized to give Himself up, it would have been sinful for Him to do so. His “authority” was his “right, the legal authority” to lay down His life.¹⁶ Since he acted on authority, on the “commandment” of the Father, he fulfills God’s expressed will.

John 12:48-50

He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge Him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.

What Jesus said was important to Him; He makes it very clear that His message is identical with the Father’s message. I, for one, am glad that Jesus took such great care to be accurate with the message, because that is the very message by which we shall be judged on the last day. This commanded message is “eternal life.” I would not want any mistakes or any variation in it. Jesus, true to the form of a servant, tells all that the Father wants Him to tell but tells no more than what His Father commanded Him to say and to speak.

Marcus Dods commented that the phrase “what I should say” designates “the doctrine according to its contents,” and “what I should speak” designates “the varying manner of its delivery.”¹⁷ Clearly, Jesus said what God wanted Him to say in the way God wanted Him to say it. Heb. 1:2 reminds us that God “in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.” Such a message is so important to God and to mankind that our great God entrusted it to no one other than His

Son. I am thankful that Jesus gave the message carefully, completely, diligently, lovingly and accurately. I am glad that He faithfully gave it just as it was commanded Him. I wouldn't want an innovated message, a corrupted message, a substituted message, or a shortened message to judge my soul.

When God started speaking, so did Jesus. Jesus said exactly what the Father told Him to say. When God finished speaking, so did Jesus. Jesus did not dare to go on speaking when God had hushed.¹⁸ If Jesus treated the word of eternal life with such care, should men not also? We who are to be judged by that message have all the more reason to treat it with utmost care. In matters so serious, can anyone dare to be presumptuous, to innovate, to attempt to improve on the revealed will? Can anyone dare to raise an angry fist in the declaration of his rights and freedoms? Such arrogance was certainly not found in the Servant Savior.

John 14:10, 31

Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you

I do not speak on my own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. . . .

but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded

Me. Get up, let us go from here.

Jesus repeats what He has often said. His message is not His own invention but the precise work God gave Him to do. Jesus did exactly as the Father instructs Him. There is no variance from the plan and purpose of God. Jesus came to do the Father's will perfectly. Jesus who kept the law without sin also kept His Father's commandments without sin. He is the utter

fulfillment of the prescribed obedience that God laid out in Deuteronomy.¹⁹ Surely, Jesus' example of obedience is prerequisite to any that would follow after Him. Those who claim to follow Jesus must not overlook this critical example of obedience.

In John 14:31 Jesus professes His love for His Father. This is the only statement of that love in such a direct manner. Jesus wants the "world" to know how He loves the Father. One can see it clearly in the way Jesus obeys. His motive is pure. His strict adherence to the commandment of the Father reflects a pure, perfect love for His Father. We see in Jesus what John meant in 1 John 2:5 "whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected."

As a lover of God Jesus was not a legalist, nor was He a heartless dogmatist. He had no axe to grind against others by strictly adhering to the Father's commandment. Nor was Jesus playing a game of "holier-than-thou." He wasn't trying to justify Himself to the Pharisees or satisfy the multitudes. He faithfully and lovingly obeyed His Father. He took the narrow road He asked others to take. Jesus Christ was narrow in His approach to His Father's commandments. He went neither to the right nor to the left.²⁰ Doctrinal accuracy was no mere pastime for Him. He passionately pursued it as a means of loving his Father.

The example of Jesus is convincing. Those who vary from the commandment by acting without and beyond their authority do what Jesus never dared or wanted to do. Those who seek freedom to do as they please must find their example in someone other than Jesus. Jesus was consumed in doing the will of God. Jesus never contemplated variance from the appointed message or work He was sent to accomplish. He lost Himself in the doing of what He was instructed and authorized to do. Genuine disciples who seek unity can only find it by committing

themselves to the same kind of obedience. There can never be unity among men who find their authority in themselves.

The example of Jesus is not silent about the purposeful hushed silence of the Father. In Jesus one sees perfect obedience that is loving, careful, complete, diligent and accurate. He never once acted without authority, never once innovated, never once sought to do His own will. Jesus never fought for innovations beyond the expressed will of God. Jesus never depended on the silence of the Father to justify His own desire. Jesus never excused himself from obedience by saying, "Well, my Father didn't say I couldn't." Jesus was never presumptuous, even though as the Son of God He could have claimed His place as Deity.²¹ No, He emptied Himself out, took the form of a servant, and was obedient to the point of death (Phil. 2:5-8).

Jesus respected the hushed silence of His Father in heaven. He would neither add to His Father's commandments nor take away from them. Men today would do well to follow His example of obedience. Let each one do all God says to do carefully and diligently. Let each one observe the commandments just as God gave them, going neither to the right nor to the left. Let each one follow the Lord and love Him with all His heart, soul, mind and strength. To do otherwise is to fail to follow in the steps of Jesus.

¹ 1 Pet. 2:21.

² Luke 6:40.

³ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 113. As in John 6:44; 8:18; 12:49; and 14:24, Jesus refers to His Father as the Aone who sent Me.@

⁴John 5:30; 6:38; 7:18; 8:50; 9:4; 10:37,38; 12:49,50; 14:31; 15:10; 17:4; and 19:28-30. "The life of Jesus consists of doing the will of God, *i.e.*, carrying out the work of salvation, in doing this in the works, the preaching and the deeds which are given Him by the Father and the performing of which is the witness that he is sent by the Father, 5:36. In the execution of 'the' historical work by Jesus there thus takes place the glorifying of the Father on earth, 17:4. John stresses that Jesus fulfills only that which is assigned to Him by God" (Gerhard Delling, *teleioo*, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Win. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1964), VIII:81. Hereafter cited as *TDNT*).

⁵ Matt. 15:1-15; Heb. 2:14,15; John 8:32-36.

⁶ *TDNT* V: 998n3, 14.

⁷ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1932), V:84.

⁸ Commenting on this passage, Albert Barnes observed: "That is nothing without the appointment of the Father; nothing contrary to the Father, as he immediately explains it. . . . Such is the nature of this union, that he can do nothing which has not the concurrence of the Father, and which he does not command. In all things he must, from the necessity of his nature, act in accordance with the nature and will of God. Such is the intimacy of the union, that the fact that he does anything is proof that it is by the concurring agency of God. There is no separate action; no separate existence; hut, in being and in action, the most perfect oneness between him and the Father." Barnes, *Barnes Notes on the New Testament*, ed. Ingram Corbin, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, n. d., reprinted 1962), pp. 288,289.

⁹ Bruce, 128.

¹⁰ See 8:28,42; 12:49; 14:10. "Both here and in v. 19 the order of the words lay great stress on 'ouden' (nothing). If he were to act independently of God (supposing such a thing were possible). Jesus would be completely powerless. The whole meaning and energy of his work lie in the fact that it is (sic.) not his work but God's." Leon Morris, *John*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. N. B. Stonehouse (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, n. d.), 323n87. Hereafter cited as *NICNT*.

¹¹ 1 Tim. 1:12-16. "Everywhere Jesus forestalls the idea that He is speaking for Himself, and is uttering merely human judgments, or is in any way regulated in his actions by what is arbitrary: it is the supreme Will He represents." Marcus Dods, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Win. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., reprinted 1976), 1:754.

¹² *NICNT*, John, p. 405. Barnes also notes: "It is not originated by me. Though I have not learned it in your schools, yet you are not to infer that the doctrine which I teach is devised or invented by me. I teach nothing that is contrary to the will of God, and which he has not appointed me to teach. . . . It is such as he approves, and such as he has commissioned me to teach. The doctrine is divine in its origin and in its nature." *Notes*, op. cit., p. 300.

¹³ Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Luke 3:22; Phil. 2:8; 2 Pet.1:17; Isa. 53:10-12.

¹⁴ James D. Bales, *Be Silent Where the Bible Is Silent* (Unpublished manuscript, 1992), 36.

¹⁵ "The truth which he declares is not something that he himself has thought up; it has been entrusted to him by the one who sent him. As the Son can do nothing of his own initiative, but only what he sees the Father doing (John 5:19), so the Son can teach nothing on his own initiative, but only what he is told by the Father." F. F. Bruce, *John*, 149.

¹⁶ Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, trans. and ed. Cleon Rogers (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 242.

¹⁷ Dods, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, 1:814. In 12:50 the words "kathos" and "outos" bear out the fact that in an emphatic way that Jesus spoke in content and in manner just as the Father told Him. Note how these words are used in a comparative sense in I Thess. 2:4; Col. 3:13; and I John 2:6.

¹⁸ At 12:49 the *Revised Standard Version* says: "I did not speak on My own authority." *The Twentieth Century Version* says: "Therefore, whatever I say, I say only what the Father has taught me" (12:50). The *Amplified Version* says: "So whatever I speak, I am saying (exactly) what My Father has told Me to say' and in accordance with His instructions" (12:50).

¹⁹ Deut. 4:2; 5:32,33; 12:32; 28:1,13, 14; 32:46,47.

²⁰ Deut. 5:32-33; Matt. 7:13-14. The *Amplified Version* says: "I do as the Father has commanded Me, so that the world may know (be convinced) that I love the Father, and that I do only what the Father has instructed Me to do.--I act in full agreement with His orders" (John 14:31).

²¹ It should be noted here that the Holy Spirit, in like manner, was never presumptuous so as to go beyond the stated will of the Father. Cf. John 14:26; 16:12-15. No man ever rises above the example of obedience set for us by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.