

STRAIGHTWAY

And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him [Mark 1:18].

CHRISTIAN PURITIES FELLOWSHIP

The Witness Outreach of Foundations Bible College
P.O. Box 1166 · Dunn, North Carolina 28335

VOLUME 32

SEPTEMBER 2004

NUMBER 7

The Silence of God

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The silence of God is one of the greatest mysteries of man's existence. It often has been an enigma in history in both the secular and the religious Christian world. For centuries there have been the cries of God's people, "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?" (Psalm 73:11)

Our world is filled, it seems, with so many injustices that one wonders where God is. Society has become like a galley ship with a few on deck enjoying laughter, money, and pleasures, while most of humanity is below, toiling and grieving through life with no vindication. Much of humanity is in misery and sadness, living in the chains of despair all of their lives. While it seems that devils and the godless

reign, the cry continues, "Where is God?"

The sage of Jerusalem gave a clear view of his day that has also become a commentary of our times:

So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter. Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun (Ecclesiastes 4:1-3).

Is this the world ruled and

governed by the Almighty? Is He actually in charge of history and the affairs of men? Such observations have produced a real dilemma in the human heart to suggest that God has become silent.

The World's Answer to the Silence of God

Western Civilization, in facing this dilemma of the so-called "silence of God," has birthed a number of theologies and philosophies attempting to answer the problem. Five beliefs have been proposed in the past two hundred years to alleviate the concept of the silence of God.

The first belief has been that of the Deists, who believe that God, after creating the world, left the world to basically run on its own. Therefore, God stays aloof from the affairs of men.

Evolutionists provide a second view declaring there is no silence because there is no God. Life and

history are products of time, chance, and forces that are beyond our control. There is a growing opinion among the evolutionists that humanity is gaining a greater control over the evolution of life, so there will be less problems in the future for humanity. Since the evolutionist believes there is no God, injustice is simply considered a part of life.

A third humanistic belief arises from the Enlightenment's "closed world system" that eventually matured into secular humanism. This opinion suggests that if there is a God out there, He could never enter a closed world system. Every action or reaction within our closed world system is merely a by-product of its laws. Therefore, there can be no supernatural miracles.

A fourth belief arose within Neo-Orthodoxy and was systematized by Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton. Called Radical theology or Theothanatology (the "God is dead" movement), it claims that though God may have lived at one time, He is now dead. His death took place at the death of Jesus Christ or sometime before. Another interpretation of this theology says that man has come forth from a pre-scientific age and that he no longer needs the crutch of a historical God to help him.

A fifth concept has also arisen in recent years called Open Theism. This is the belief that God's omniscience is incomplete, having past

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and present knowledge but no knowledge of the immediate or distant future. The future in His understanding is open and unresolved. Therefore, God cannot work with the hope of an absolute resolve of the future.

The Biblical Christian's View

When a Christian contemplates this matter of the silence of God, it is usually in the context of suffering, persecution, and afflictions of trial. His questioning the silence of God stems from another problem called Theodicy. In theology, Theodicy asks, "Why do the righteous or the innocent suffer?" Where is the Judge, the Avenger, the Justifier? It seems that He is silent in the cruel affairs of men. Why is God no longer talking or working among us? Why doesn't He answer prayer and come down in behalf of our situation?

But we must immediately declare that the reason for suffering, persecution, or affliction is not the same in every incident. Sometimes suffering is the result of personal sin and lack of faith. Let us remember, *there is no silence of God to the genuine Christian*. The Christian faith is the only religion in the world that grants adequate knowledge and assurance from God in times of His seeming silence.

One of the great problems in misunderstanding this silence is our lack of understanding the times in which we live and what God is doing. If we do not see through this, we will

become discouraged, disheartened, and perhaps even change our theology to accommodate a false conclusion about God's workings.

Three Actions of God at This Time in History

God's sifting and shaking of the earth and humanity is one of His actions that we must acknowledge at this time of history. Amos 9:9 expresses His siftings:

For, lo, I will command, and I will *sift* the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.

Hebrews 12:25-29 expresses His shakings:

See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the early only, but also heaven. And this word, yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.

God is sifting and shaking the church and the world today. He does this

through many false prophets, greedy nations, bloody wars, and the falling away. Yet the promise still remains that not the least grain shall fall upon the earth.

The second action that must be viewed as a type of the silence of God is that after giving man a complete revelation through the Scriptures, *God is not adding anything to what He has already said.* The Word of God is complete! God truly has spoken: “ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3), or the Greek rendering is “once for all delivered unto the saints.” The Charismatics are coming forth with audible voices, visions, and dreams that they believe are from God. Through these claims of extant revelations, they are trying to destroy the silence of God. But God is going to manifestly get quieter as we near the coming of Christ. The Bible is His only infallible voice.

God’s *sealing of His true people* is a third action of God at this time. In Ezekiel 9:3-8 the angel with the writer’s inkhorn began marking those that sigh and cry for the sins of Israel. We read of this sealing of God in John 10:27-28:

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

Verse 28 is true only for those identified in verse 27. Such a secur-

ity is only to those who *hear* his voice, to those He *knows*, and to those who *follow* Christ. These true sheep are being sealed in every generation. To His flock there remains this warning:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means (II Thess. 2:1-3a).

We must stay in the blessed Book. God is sealing His saints for glory in these days of apostasy.

The Silence of God in the Life of Jesus

Jesus Christ experienced the silence of God at the cross (Matthew 27:46b), when He cried “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Most likely God was silent because Christ was bearing the sins of the world. At this moment in Christ’s life there was no voice of the Father declaring, “This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” God was silent then. There were also times that the Father was silent when Jesus was reviled and tempted. Yes, Christ had silent times.

Silence of God in the Life of the Godly

One of the greatest examples of the silence of God is in the life of Job, a man who had known the

voice and the presence of the Lord. From the conversation between God and Satan, and the calamities that came upon Job in chapters one and two, it is obvious that God never spoke to Job during that entire time. Others talked, but God did not, until the end of the book. The Jewish writings designate the time period of Job's afflictions to be about one year. The silence became so deep that Job declared the following:

Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him (Job 23:8-9).

The left hand of God is the hand of providence: God is always working through providence, even when the right hand of His power and miracles does not seem evident. Yet, Job could not even see God working in circumstances or tokens of mercy. It seemed that God had turned His back on Job, forgetting about him. Job's friends became bold in their words against him, believing his deep maladies proved that God had left him. The only problem Job had was that he did not understand why these things were happening to him. He did not know of the conversation that had taken place between God and the Devil. He may have cursed the day he was born, but he never contemplated suicide. Job was never fatalistic about the silence of God, for he declared in Job 23:10-12,

But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.

He was going on, holding to his integrity, in what seemed to be silence from heaven. He went on even while the wicked prospered with their words against him. Even in the end God never told Job why.

Asaph, the chief choir leader of David and Solomon, had a hard time dealing with the silence of God in Psalm 73. He observed with concern the prosperity of the wicked and God's silence in judging them. Yet to him it seemed that God was plowing up His people and bringing numerous chastenings in their lives with regularity, not allowing them to escape the least correction. It was only when he went into the sanctuary of God and saw the end of the wicked that he understood.

Silence of God in Judging the Ungodly

How often sinners view the silence of God in judging their sins as evidence that God is not that much concerned. Psalm 50:20-21 declares,

Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. These things hast thou done, and I kept

silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.

Solomon also acknowledges,

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him (Ecclesiastes 8:11-12).

In this passage the silence of God is part of the delusion He sends upon the heart and mind of the sinner who thinks everything is all right.

No doubt there are times when the Christian is concerned that God is not judging situations of sin in the land. This was the concern of the prophet Habakkuk (around 626 B.C.). Amidst his preaching, he observed that God was not judging Judah. God had to tell His prophet (1:5) that He was sending the Chaldeans to judge Judah. God was silent at the time of the burden of the prophet, but the judgment was definitely to come.

Silence of God in the End Time in Preaching

A silence of God that is becoming more obvious today is the absence of Holy Ghost-anointed, insightful preaching. Such days were evident in I Samuel 3:1, “And the child

Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.” Those were days when no vision from the Lord broke forth to the people. In Proverbs 29:18 the Sage of Jerusalem declared, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” The Hebrew rendering is “where there is no prime-vision preaching, the people will become ungovernable.”

Part of the end-time judgment is the Lord’s withdrawal of prime-vision preaching. Prime-vision preaching goes beyond just an expounding of truth. It is preaching truth needed at one’s own point in history, with the immediate anointing of the Holy Ghost, granting insight into the age and godly living. This preaching gives the hearer a vision from God through His Word.

The prophet Amos gave prophetic utterance concerning such a time:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD (Amos 8:11).

How is this passage to be viewed? Will there come a time when people will simply not give their ear to the hearing of the Word as it is being preached? Such a view is true in principle, for churches today are filled with apathetic and indifferent professing Christians who are not

truly hearing the Word of God. But this passage in Amos goes deeper in its understanding; the next verse gives us the insight to what the prophet is saying:

And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.

This is a description of a remnant of people who are longing to hear the Word of God but are unable to find it being preached anywhere. Why is this? God is withdrawing His prime-vision anointing; it will be increasingly rare to find it in a church or a school. Just being fundamental does not assure that there is the prime-vision preaching present. How often we receive letters, e-mails, and phone calls acknowledging that a church pulpit, though not preaching heresy, is no longer feeding the people; there is no anointing upon the pastor; there is no insight coming from his preaching to aid the people in godly living or insight to the age in which we live. Yes, reader, it is becoming rare for a pulpit to have such preaching. The remnant are starving to find it; they tend to simply “live with what they have” for there is nothing better. But now and then they will find a preacher in touch with God, with God’s Word, and in communion with the Holy Spirit to set forth—refreshingly so—the prime-vision preaching for the times in which they live.

Why is God withdrawing such

prime-vision preaching? The answer is evident: it is because of the great falling away in Christianity; people are no longer desiring the Word of God. We live in the time of “no open vision.” These are the days when God’s Word is being questioned and criticized; debate rages as to what doctrine or Bible version is needed. God has not called us to be Bible critics, but rather Bible preachers. The Philadelphia Church Age is gone: its spirit, its preaching, and the unusual movings of God. The modern view of Christianity has now taken over preaching and church music. The Laodicean spirit is now here. People are wanting more of the physical: healings, money, prosperity, charismatic feelings, pizza parties, entertainers for youth programs, and rhythmic music. The day of the deep workings of the Spirit is now past; *this is the day of the flesh*. Even pulpits that once knew the power of God’s Spirit in preaching have now given over to the desires of the people.

Nevertheless, there is a remnant who are longing for that prime-vision preaching; they heard it when they were young and are longing to hear it again. In every church they go, they are listening for that “bell” of the past to ring. But, alas! It is in very few places. One will even be hard pressed to find it in a Fundamentalist church. The preaching has become general, generic, and targetless for our generation. God truly is growing silent with His vision,

the proclamation of the true Word of God.

The Silence of the Dealings of God with the Soul

This so-called silence of God in His dealings with the Christian is a delicate one and must be understood once again in the light of the Word of God and of our times. The Philadelphia Church Age (about 1725 to about 1900) was a period in Church History of the mighty spiritual movings of God in the Great Awakenings and Evangelical Revivals. Deep preaching was clearly evident back then; the greatest Protestant hymns of the Faith were written during that time as well. The Laodicean Church Age—the age of lukewarmness, indifference, apathy, and the fleshly power of professing Christianity—has invented a synthetic presence and moving of God for its worship. Contemporary Christian Music produces a visceral and emotional response that is being falsely interpreted as the moving of God. We have laid aside deep preaching and deep music to become content with the shallow special effects of contemporary worship. Sadly, the typical church today believes this froth to be the moving of God.

There is the tendency for the true child of God to read of the workings of God in the past (the Philadelphia Church Age) and long for such workings again. If these workings do not come in the same fashion or

manner, the Devil convinces him that God is not working in his life. One must understand how God is moving in the end time, yea, at the end of the Laodicean Age.

Revelation 3:20 states, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” The Greek word for *knock* is not a pounding at the door; it is the gentlest rapping. One would have to get very quiet to hear this soft knock. In these days when the Charismatics are looking for “mega” evidences of God, the Lord is working in the contrary. The child of God must not be looking for the “big” workings as the sign of God’s presence but for the small tokens of grace, mercy, and providence.

The dear prophet Elijah, when running from Jezebel, wanted to go to the Mount identified with Moses in quakings, fires, and mega manifestations of God among the people. However, I Kings 19 reveals that although a great, strong wind did come and rend the mountains, the Lord was not in the wind:

And after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it [*the small voice*], that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And,

behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? (I Kings 19:11-13)

While most within the institutional church are listening for the pounding on the door, for the wind to rend the mountains, for the earthquake and fire, God is getting quieter. In the previous chapter, God had been in the mighty fire of Elijah; there He needed to make the distinction between the false and the true prophet. His remnant knows Him in the gentle knock and the still, small voice. One must learn to be encouraged in the small dealings, movings, and workings of God.

The Christian today must discern the silence of God in these matters; He is not choosing His movings today as He did in the past. Christianity today judges the presence or blessing of God by that which is big: big churches, big campaigns, big miracles, big budgets, and big evangelism. The greatest prophet, the forerunner of Christ, was identified as a man of no miracles: "John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true" (John 10:41).

Dear Christian, don't be intimidated by the talk of the modern Christianity. God may not save all of your children; He may not vindicate you as in other days; and He may not increase your church or its budget or your personal bank account. He is now testing to see if the life is of faith. "Nevertheless when the son of man cometh, shall

he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8)

Conclusion

While most are not hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches, there are a few who are not dismayed by the so-called "Silence of God." They are growing on with God; the evidences of grace and the Spirit of God are found in their tenacity and endurance through all that comes upon them. God truly is deepening their heart and spiritual walk with Him. To them God is not silent, for they know how God is working just before His Son's coming.

Faith in God amplifies the Scriptures in times of the silence of God. Providence becomes more precious as well. In Zechariah 1:7-8 the young prophet receives a vision in his time, a time when it seemed as though God was silent and not working among His people. Fifteen years had passed since they had built the foundation of the temple. The people, who had stopped building because of persecution and discouragement, now entered into apathy and indifference in their relationship with God. The vision reads, "I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white" (v. 8). Often in the Bible, horses are a type of the providential forces of God moving in history; but this horse and rider were standing in

the “bottom.” At this time in Jewish history it seemed that God was not working; it was a “bottom” time with no movement from God. A contemporary book to this time is Esther. Although God is not mentioned in the book, it is heavily freighted with providences. In the second chapter of Esther we are told that her name is Hadassah, meaning “myrtle.” The name Esther means “star” or the starflower of the myrtle tree. That book suggests that God, though silent in vision, was still working through His providence during the myrtle tree period of Judah.

Though the world believes that God does not exist, and the Christian world wonders why God does

not deal with the abortionists, the injustices, and the violence in the earth, the true Christian will continue in His walk, trusting by faith the Word of God and seeing God in the small things of life.

Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. (Habakkuk 3:17-19)

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—Dr. H. T. Spence