

# When the Scriptures are Silent

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## Introduction

What is this idea of the “Silence of the Scriptures”? Many people will readily admit they don’t understand the concept of the silence of the scriptures and this sentiment is increasing. However, with little effort we can understand the correct nature of the scriptures when they are silent. In this lesson, we will look at some examples of the God’s silence and accordingly answer the question of “Is the silence of the scriptures prohibitive or permissive. Finally we will connect our findings and how they relate to how we should study the Bible.

## Nominal examples of silence

Let’s start by considering some simple, everyday life examples. Many of us as parents can relate to this first example. You instruct you oldest child to go to the store and buy a loaf of bread and a gallon of milk. You give no further instruction. When the child returns they have a bag of hamburger buns, 4 boxes of cereal, soft drinks, chips and hotdogs. Did the child carry out your instructions? No. Is there anything wrong with the items they purchased? No, not at all. The child took a liberty that was not given. Your silence on what NOT to buy holds. In a biblical example, the Lord’s Supper, Jesus said; “This do in remembrance of me.” Just like the previous example, this is a positive command. Jesus didn’t have to explain who NOT to remember. Jesus didn’t have to say, “Don’t remember Abraham. Don’t remember Moses. Don’t remember Joshua. Don’t remember David. Don’t remember Hezekiah. Don’t remember John the baptizer.” Would it be sinful during the Lord’s Supper to remember say, God? Wow, that’s a hard question, but the answer is Yes. This is a basic understanding of what is meant by the silence of the scriptures.

## Application

With the basic principle we have just learned, it is not difficult to apply it to other areas of instruction. Our worship to God is a good area to make some application. One of the most applicable acts of worship, to this principle is Singing. When it comes to singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, the New Testament is not ambiguous. While the passages that speak of music in the church are limited, none of them mention the use of instruments. Interestingly enough, the ALL mention singing. What should our conclusion be? The positive command regarding music in the church is: “Sing!” and no one denies this. In fact most everyone would agree that singing occurred.



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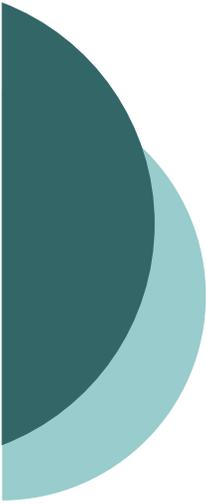
So the question is, why conclude that singing is the only form of music God desires? The answer; the scriptures are *silent* on the use of instruments.

## Is silence permissive or is it prohibitive?

So one might ask, “Is that silence permissive or is that silence prohibitive? Great question and we should look to see if the scriptures are able to answer this question. [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#) tells us the scripture is able to answer all things and is makes us competent concerning the knowledge of God. In the case of Nadab and Abihu there is no question that God’s silence in this case was prohibitive ([Leviticus 10:1-2](#)). When God command Noah to build the ark he provided many examples of his silence being prohibitive ([Genesis 6:22](#)). When listing gopher wood, he did not need to make a list of all other possible types of wood that were not to be used. Moving to the new testament, silence prohibited the church at Corinth from calling themselves Paulites ([1 Corinthians 1:13](#)). A very specific example concerning God’s silence is seen when Jesus is excluded from being a priest under the law of Moses. [Hebrews 7:14](#), says “For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.” Moses’ silence about anyone from the tribe of Judah being allowed t be priests, excluded them. Silence prohibited the exaltation of angels to positions of divine authority ([Hebrews 1:5, 13](#)).

In each one of these examples God’s positive commands put absolute limits on what was allowed, or not. From these examples we can say with all confidence that God’s silence is prohibitive. One might ask, are there any examples of silence being “permissive” and the answer is YES, there are. So how do we make the distinction and how do we know when one is prohibitive and one is permissive?

In order to answer this question, let’s go back to original example concerning the parent\child. In this case, the instruction given by the parent to “go to the store” is a general instruction. Therefore, the child is free to use an expedient to help accomplish that part of the instruction. They can walk, ride their bike or if old enough drive their car to get to the store. The second part or the instruction was the parent instructed the child to buy a loaf of bread and a gallon of milk. In regards to this part, the child is limited, by command *and* silence, to buy only those two items. The same holds true for scripture. Consider the case of Noah. God’s general command was to “build an ark”. In that case, Noah is allowed to use any tool or other expedient means to accomplish that task. However, when God specifies the type of wood (gopher), Noah is now restricted by command *and* silence to use only Gopher wood.



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## Conclusion

By example in both the old and new testament, God has demonstrated the prohibitive nature of his silence. When God gives a specific command, anything He chooses to be silent about is prohibited, not permitted. However, when God gives a general command the silence in this case does allow our use of expedients. In as much as we respect this theory in our own lives, so should we respect this in our spiritual lives.

## Assignment

To practice what we have learned regarding the silence of the scriptures, please take time to complete the following exercise.

*Provide at least 4 examples where God's silence is prohibitive in nature. Additionally provide at least 4 examples where God's silence is permissive in nature. Please give full scripture for each example and how you were able to make your distinction between prohibitive and permissive.*