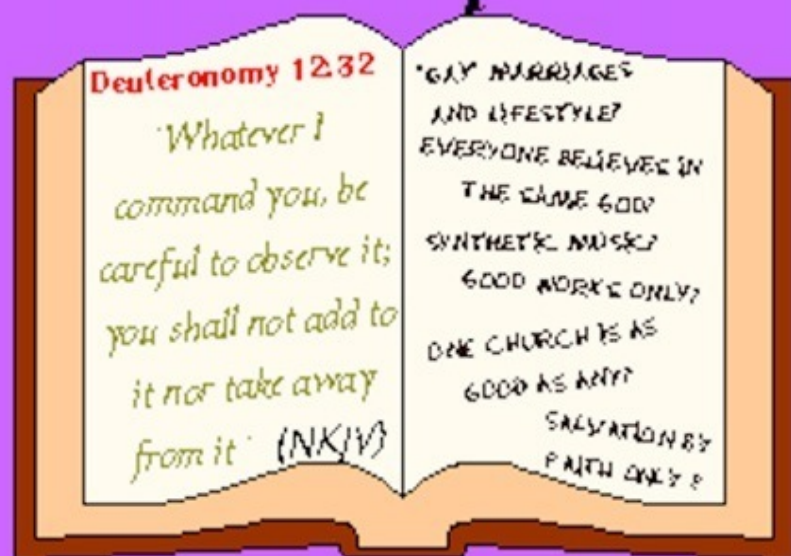


The *Absolute Authority*
of the **SILENCE**
in the *Scriptures*



by
John T. Polk II

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Referring back to the Old Testament, the writer of Hebrews said:

“For *it is* evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood” (Hebrews 7:14).

This simple statement referring to Scripture shows how absolute the power of God’s Word is: that whatever God specifically authorizes and is silent thereafter on the subject, cannot be changed, altered, or modified to suit even His only begotten Son!

The complete argument contained in this verse is found in the center of this booklet [“CHART ON HEBREWS 7:14”] and that chart’s numbering will be referred to throughout this treatise for ease of study.

A.

A. 1. That Moses authorized Levi as the tribe from which priests could be taken is clearly stated. After God delivered the Children of Israel from Egypt (Exodus chapters 3-15) and gave them the Law through Moses (Exodus chapters 19-40), He told Moses in the Book of Numbers:

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“You shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the Testimony” and that the “outsider who comes near shall be put to death” (Numbers 1:47-54). He further said, “Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine” (**Numbers 3:11-13**).

A. 2. One can read the rest of the revealed, written Word of God that is The Old Testament (**Numbers chapter 3 through Malachi chapter 4**) and never find where God either forbade priests coming from the other tribes of Israel or where He authorized any other tribe to produce priests. The silence of God in His written Word was to be respected.

A. 3. *The inescapable conclusion must be that since Judah was one of these tribes from which Moses did not authorize priests, that none from Judah could lawfully be a priest under Moses’ Law!*

B.

B. 1. The logical conclusion of the facts presented in **A** becomes the beginning fact of application to a specific person from the tribe of Judah: Jesus Christ. No one from Judah could be a priest under Moses’ Law.

B. 2. Jesus (Christ) is of the tribe of Judah. There was but one prophecy of this fact in the Old Testament, and that is in **Micah 5:2**:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *Yet* out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth *have been* from of old, From everlasting.”

When wise men from the East asked Herod where this “ruler” in Israel was to be born, his “chief priests and scribes” quoted this as the only passage to be used, and Bethlehem the only city in which the prophesied “ruler” could be born (**Matthew 2:1-6**). The prophecy was fulfilled only one time, and that was with the birth of Jesus Christ as recorded in **Matthew chapter 1** and **Luke chapter 2**.

B. 3. *BUT since Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem as a member of a tribe God had not authorized to produce priests, THEN JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF COULD NOT/WOULD NOT BE AUTHORIZED TO FUNCTION AS A PRIEST OF GOD AS LONG AS MOSES’ LAW WAS IN FORCE (Hebrews 7:11-17)!* Jesus Christ could not,

and did not, function as a priest while He was on earth (Cf [Matthew 8:1-4](#); [Luke 17:11-14](#)).

The argument that God specified the priestly tribe under Moses, but was absolutely silent authorizing any other tribe, shows that no one, not even God's only begotten Son should violate that silence!

The most obvious application for churches of Christ is in the choice of music that we use in worship to God. There are

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but two kinds of music: vocal and (mechanically-produced) instrumental. Scripture may specify either kind (or both!), but the written Word of God must have the final say-so. Since the argument made in [Hebrews 7:14](#) was so ironclad that not even Jesus could break it, let's take that very argument, in the exact same form, "plug in" the appropriate Scriptures, and make application to this subject of music which some find so controversial.

C.

C. 1. The New Testament authorizes vocal music in Christian worship. *Every passage that has a bearing on this subject is listed on the chart.* Worship is the act of reverence offered to God, so only Scriptures involving Jesus and His disciples in worship activity on earth are used.

Matthew 26:30 and **Mark 14:26** say the exact same thing:

“when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

The “they” referred to Jesus and His disciples (the Twelve). They had observed the last Passover to be conducted according to Moses’ Law, and its elements had been given new meanings for Jesus’ disciples (His body and blood, **Matthew 26:26-29**; **Mark 14:22-25**). *This is the only record of Jesus using music to worship God while He lived under Moses’ Law (**Galatians 4:4-5**), and it is only translated by “sing,” (Greek, humneo) or vocal music!* Jesus’ perfect example of obedience to Moses’ Law shows us that even under Moses, there

was no authority from God for the use of mechanical instruments in connection with Passover worship. Also, the Lord's Supper, which had just begun with the Passover elements but after that Jewish meal of remembrance, was to be observed "in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25). It was also not to be associated with anything other than vocal music.

After the church of Christ began in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, there is no specific mention of music among Christians until Acts 16:25, which finds Paul and Silas "praying and singing hymns to God." Following the Master's example, vocal music (Greek, *humneo*) was the specified means of offering hymns to God. Paul and Silas were not only following Jesus' example, but setting an example for worship in the churches of Christ. *Since the music is offered "to God," and God would have to be pleased with that offering, then God would have to authorize any other type or combination of music for it to be lawfully given. And just as Jesus did not violate God's limitations in Moses' writings, neither should Christians violate God's limitations in the New Testament.*

Romans 15:9 quotes **Psalm 18:49** which prophesied the time when "Gentiles might glorify God for *His* mercy" It said,

"For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name"

In describing this worship, once again, "sing" (Greek, *psallo*), or vocal music, is specified.

The Psalm could not have been referring to Gentiles under Moses' Law but was pointing to the church of Christ in which both Jew and Gentile could

"with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (**Romans 15:6 Cf verses 5-12**).

While He was completing the revelation and writing of the New Testament (Cf **1 Corinthians 14:37**), the Holy Spirit wrote one of many restrictions placed upon the worship in the first century in **1 Corinthians 14:15**:

"I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding."

"Sing" (Greek, *psallo*) is once again, specified as vocal, or the "kind" of music to be offered in worship to God. One can argue for a mechanical instrument to

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take the place of, or accompany, prayer as easily as one can for singing! Since no mechanical instrument has "spirit" (Greek, *pneuma*, "the power by which a human being feels, thinks, wills, decides,"

1 Corinthians 14:14, 16; John 4:23; 1 Thessalonians 5:23) or "understanding" (Greek, *nous*, "the faculties of perceiving and understanding"), then no mechanical instrument can do what is required by this verse! It is this ability to grasp meaning ("understanding") and cause behavior ("spirit") that allows Scripture (including Jesus' words) to be comprehended and obeyed (**Luke 24:45**). *It is insight that no computer or other instrument outside the human mind could possibly have in the same fashion. Computers can conclude, but cannot exude, Scriptural behavior!*

Ephesians 5:19 shows Christians

"Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

The "singing" specified (Greek, *ado*) is vocal and must come from "your heart" (Greek, *kardia*), the center and seat of one's spiritual life. "Making melody" (Greek, *psallo*) shows that any "instrument" to be

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used must be the specified "heart." There is no mechanical instrument that can substitute for, or accompany, the human voice and comply with all of this verse. This is mutually done, for it is "speaking to one another," that is, it involves others than the one doing the speaking. *Choirs and choruses cannot completely fulfill this verse's activity, either, for this verse doesn't authorize some to sing and not others. There is no audience or entertainment in this passage!*

Colossians 3:16 says:

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

This is a parallel to **Ephesians 5:19**, and it uses "sing" (Greek, *ado*) to specify the kind of music for Christian worship. The "word of Christ" cannot "dwell in" a mechanical instrument in the same way that it can in a human heart ("richly in all wisdom").

-- Here follows the Chart on Hebrews 7:14 --

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CHART ON HEBREWS 7: 14			
<p>"For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">A</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Moses authorized Levi as a priestly tribe (Numbers 1:47-54; Numbers 3:5-13). 2. Moses spoke nothing of Judah as a priestly tribe (Hebrews 7:14). 3. THEREFORE Judah not authorized to be a priestly tribe under Moses. 	<p style="text-align: center;">B</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Judah not authorized to be a priestly tribe under Moses (A, 3) 2. Jesus (Christ) is of the tribe of Judah (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:4-6). 3. THEREFORE Jesus Christ Himself was NOT authorized by Moses to be a priest (Hebrews 7:11-17). 	<p style="text-align: center;">C</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The New Testament authorizes vocal music in Christian worship (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25; Romans 15:9; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; 13:15; James 5:13). 2. The New Testament spoke nothing of mechanical instruments in Christian worship. 3. THEREFORE mechanical instruments are not authorized in Christian worship. 	<p style="text-align: center;">D</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mechanical instruments are not authorized in Christian worship. (C, 3) 2. Guitars, pianos, horns, keyboards, drums, computers, etc. are mechanical instruments. 3. THEREFORE guitars, pianos, horns, keyboards, drums, computers, etc. are not authorized in Christian worship. 1. Jesus Christ, Himself, could not and would not bring change to music that God had already specified in His Written Word!
<p>-----John T. Polk II-----</p> <p>(This argument was first written in this form by the writer in 1974 to prepare for public debate. It was used on a cloth chart.)</p>			

Singing should have the effect of “teaching and admonishing” which encourages all involved to better serve God. Mechanical instruments cannot respond like the human heart can. Again, the singing must affect the “hearts” of the worshipers, which clearly are missing from mechanical instruments. If “psalms” in this and the previous passage in **Ephesians 5:19** is a reference to the chapters in the Book of Psalms of the Old Testament, it is not to provide instructions for the use of mechanical instruments, but to suggest words that are to be sung! Plainly, a psalm is to be sung, but nothing is said about playing them!

Hebrews 2:12 quotes **Psalm 22:22**:

“I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.”

Lest there be any confusion as to how the “praise” is given, the Holy Spirit-inspired writer of this New Testament book added the word “sing” (Greek, *ado*) to the quotation from Psalm 22. *The verses in Hebrews 2:12 and Romans 15:9 are the only quotations from the Book of Psalms relating to music among Christians and both of them are verses that specify “sing.” Since God has specified that vocal music is all the Book of Psalms*

authorizes in Christian worship, and was silent in adding any of the many instruments referred to in that Book, then no instrument referred to in the Book of Psalms may be used in Christian worship by the authority of God!

Christians are “a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (I Peter 2:5). These sacrifices include doing good and sharing (Hebrews 13:16). However, when it comes to praising God, **Hebrews 13:15** says:

“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name.”

It is “the fruit of *our* lips” and not the fingertips that must be involved in this praise. No mechanical instrument can “give thanks” (Greek, *homologeō*, “to profess oneself the worshipper of one,” or, as in this verse, “to praise, celebrate”) which this passage demands.

James 5:13 says:

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.”

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Again, the term “sing” (Greek, *psallo*) does not allow addition or subtraction of another kind of music, nor does it permit a combination of the two kinds of music! The limits of [I Corinthians 14:15](#) apply here, also. The human that understands “suffering” (Greek, *kakopatheo*, “to be afflicted,” [James 5:10](#)) cannot be mechanical, so the response of prayer must come without the aid of something mechanical. The same is true for one who is “cheerful” (Greek, *euthumeo*, “joyful, of good courage”) with the response coming from within that human. If not, why not? No computer or other mechanical device can either feel affliction or express courage as described in this verse. Thus, no device other than a human can do this singing. Paul’s circumstances in [Acts 16:19-25](#) describe that to which the word “suffering” here alludes.

There are references to singing in Heaven mentioned in the Book of [Revelation \(5:9; 14:3; 15:3\)](#) which have not been included in this discussion because:

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1. These occur in Heaven, and are not descriptions of Christians worshiping on earth;
2. There are many symbols surrounding these references that must be considered, i.e. in **Revelation 14:3**, those singing “were not defiled with women, for they are virgins” (**verse 4**); those singing in **15:3** were standing on “the sea of glass” (**verse 2**). If the “harps” are authorized for church worship, then the other symbols must be literalized and applied, also. If not, why not? In **chapters 1-3**, which describe the churches of Asia, not one mention is made of the music in their worship.

C. 2. Having examined every New Testament Scripture that deals either with Jesus setting the precedent, or Christians following the teaching, we find that there is no authority for the use of mechanical instruments of music in Christian worship. What God has written in Scripture is completely silent authorizing anything but singing for vocal praise before Him. The silence of God in His written Word must be respected.

C. 3. *The inescapable conclusion must be that since mechanical instruments are a kind of music that God has not authorized, that mechanical instruments of music are not authorized in Christian worship!*

D

D. 1. The logical conclusion of the facts presented in **C** becomes the beginning fact of application to a specific practice of churches claiming to follow Jesus Christ: Mechanical instruments of music are not authorized in Christian worship.

D. 2. A plethora of mechanical instruments of music could be listed here: guitars, pianos, horns, reeds, harps, percussion, computers, keyboards, stringed, and all others that produce music outside the heart, which do not sing with the lips, that have no spirit in them nor teaching of words through them.

D. 3. Therefore since God has specified singing (vocal music) as a sacrifice of praise in Christian worship, and has been totally silent authorizing any other kind of music either as a substitute or combination, *then Jesus Christ, Himself could not and would not violate*

the sacred silence either by bringing in a mechanical instrument Himself, authorizing someone else to bring in a mechanical instrument, or otherwise contradicting clear, Holy Spirit-inspired, written teaching on this subject.

Since Jesus Christ could not be a priest on earth because He was born of a virgin in Bethlehem into a tribe of which Moses spoke nothing by way of authorizing it to produce priests, then Jesus Christ could not play a mechanical instrument in Christian worship nor authorize anyone else to do so, since those instruments are of a "tribe" of music concerning which God spoke nothing by way of authorizing them to produce music!

This argument does not only apply to the subject of music in worship, but has application to whatever God has authorized for Christians. For example, **Ephesians 4:4-6** says:

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“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

The New Testament explains which “one” of each of these is to be believed and taught. By letting the Bible speak in every passage on a given subject, God can add details for our understanding and faithful practice, but God has been silent over the centuries authorizing any other substitution, subtraction, addition, or contradiction to any of these. Not even angels have authority to override God’s written word, hence Paul said in [Galatians 1:8-9](#):

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him accursed.”

“One body” – This is the spiritual body of Christ, the church of Christ ([Ephesians 1:22-23](#)). It is His “fulness,” thus all who are saved through His blood have been added to His church ([Ephesians 1:7](#); [Acts 2:47](#)). Attempts to divide the church of Christ are condemned in Scripture ([Romans 16:17-18](#); [1 Corinthians 1:10-13](#); [Galatians 5:19-21](#); [Jude 17-](#)

19). God has been silent in authorizing denominations within His church, or religion outside His church.

“One spirit” – The Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead (**Romans 1:4**) and revealed other reasons why “Jesus is Lord” (**1 Corinthians 12:3; Acts 2:22**). The teaching of this Spirit leads all who follow it into the same body of Christ (**1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 8:14**). The miraculous work of the Holy Spirit required to give us the Bible ended with its completion in the 1st Century (**John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27**).

“One hope” – This is that we may be like Jesus when He comes again (**1 John 3:2-3**). There is no “once-saved, always-saved,” for a Christian lives in hope (**Titus 1:2**) which is not seen (**Romans 8:24**), and is not present while on earth (**1 John 2:25**).

“One Lord” – This is Jesus Christ (**Acts 2:36; Romans 10:8-13**) and no other! Jesus is the only law-giving Prophet God has had since the first century (**Hebrews 1:1-4**). God has raised no other “prophet” from the dead, nor has any other “prophet” died for

our sins ([1 Corinthians 1:13](#)). Therefore the conclusion is as Peter said:

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” ([Acts 4:12](#)).

“One faith” – The faith of Jesus Christ is always spoken of in the singular in the New Testament ([Jude 3](#); [2 Corinthians 13:5](#)). It is based upon the written Word of God ([Romans 10:17](#)), and nothing else ([John 12:48-50](#); [20:30-31](#)). No other creed, discipline, manual, or tradition is authorized by God to supplant the Bible. Certainly, when it comes to Biblical matters, everyone is not entitled to his or her own opinion!

“One baptism” – Jesus Christ was the only exception to baptism and did not need to be baptized to be saved ([Matthew 3:13-17](#)). Baptism is the final act of a sinner’s entering into Jesus’ death ([Romans 6:3-5](#)); no one has been saved before being baptized ([Acts 22:16](#)); and no one has arisen from it as a new creature who believed it unnecessary to salvation ([Acts 8:35-39](#))! It is: for “every creature”

(**Mark 16:15-16**); “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (**Matthew 28:19**); the last requirement to receive “remission of sins” (**Acts 2:38**); in water (**Acts 10:47-48**); and that which “saves” (**I Peter 3:21**). No other “baptism” in or out of Scripture can save.

“One God” – He is not an idol made with men’s hands or invented in men’s minds (**1 Corinthians 8:4-6**), but He created and constantly gives life (**Acts 17:24-25**), gives all good things (**James 1:17**), and desires people to know the truth that they may be saved (**I Timothy 2:3-4**). The One Godhead consists of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (**Colossians 2:9; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14**). All who deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (**1 John 2:23**), or who deny that God was in Christ through the cross (**2 Corinthians 5:18-19**), or who claim that Jesus is merely an angel (**Hebrews 1:1-9**) do not serve God and have not the truth (**1 John 2:22; John 8:47**).

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No one has been given authority, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to change the written Word of God. In **Ephesians 3:1-7**, Paul wrote:

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.”

Here, (1) the dispensation of God’s grace through Jesus Christ, offered first to the Jews, but now has been extended to Gentiles, has been fully revealed; (2) it was not previously known to the sons of men, that is, it was not a provision under the Old Testament; (3) the Holy Spirit wrote this through Paul briefly (that is, with few words); (4) those who read the inspired written word of God may thus obtain whatever knowledge the living Apostles had to teach Christians then. There is no unrevealed “mystery” of

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God's plan, or difficulty with His Word, that requires an active on-going revelation of His Will, or a miraculously guided constant interpretation of His written Word. All who claim such power to add Scripture or private interpretation should simply acknowledge that

"When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

The Bible is the word-for-word inspired Word of God. We must respect what He has said in it, but also notice that when He has been specific, and leaves that subject alone with silence, we should respect that, too.

----- **John T. Polk II**

All Scriptures and comments, unless otherwise noted, are based on the New King James Version.

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someone in the churches of Christ
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