



Traveling a state highway required me to drive through the historic section of a nearby town. The buildings spoke of a long history. Though I saw many interesting sights, a sign in the parking lot of one building especially caught my attention.

This large structure was an old church-house belonging to a main-line denomination. Its size gave it the appearance of having a large attendance. There was a difficulty, though. Parking for the members' cars was scarce. You see, along with neighborhood houses, there were other places of worship nearby. The streets were narrow and not well able to accommodate many parked vehicles. The problem must have been magnified by a similar deficiency at the other church buildings. This congregation had erected a sign with this notice: "No Unauthorized Parking."

Knowing some of the beliefs of that group, I found it curious and even humorous that they should understand the application of this principle when pertaining to parking (expecting others to do so as well) while ignoring it or rejecting it in matters of religion.

When those people constructed that parking lot they intended that their members park there. No one else is to do so. The sign implies that outsiders were not authorized to park there. The leaders of that church intended for their members only to park in authorized spaces. To do otherwise would constitute rudeness and present a problem for neighboring homeowners and churches. The next step is to erect another sign: "Violators will be towed."

But in most religions, including this particular one, people commonly "park wherever they wish" doctrinally speaking. They seem to believe that no restrictions or requirements apply, at least when there are no signs explicitly forbidding a practice. They follow the Protestant principle: "That which is not (explicitly) forbidden is permitted. The silence of the Scriptures is permissive in nature." How wrong they are!

I suppose that the time must have come in the history of that group when encroachment from non-members' parking crowded out the members. Up went the sign. It stated in so many words what had been intended all along: "If you are do not have permission (are not authorized) to park here, do no do so." Another way to say that is "Park here **if and only if** you are so authorized."

God must have anticipated humanity's tendency to ignore the obvious and to miss "gentle hints." When the Bible speaks on matters of doctrine – not opinions or judgments – God has also erected many signs. They can be seen in both precept and example. In essence they tell us "no unauthorized parking." That is to say, "If God has not authorized a practice, one is forbidden to do it." The so-called "silence of the Scriptures" is nearly deafening.

When the Scriptures recount the history of the worship of the early Jews it tells of the priestly nephews of mighty Moses, Nadab and Abihu. They had been told what God wanted in worship. They knew where to get the fire for the sacrifice and what to offer.

But they seemed unconcerned with "authorized parking." The NIV records these terse words when dealing with their ghastly death:

Then Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them. And having sacrificed the sin offering, the burnt offering and the fellowship offering, he stepped down. Moses and Aaron then went into the Tent of Meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown.

*Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and **they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command**. So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke of when he said: "Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people **I will be honored**." Aaron remained silent. (Leviticus 9:22—10:3 NIV).*

God expected His people to follow the rule of "no unauthorized parking" or "parking by permission only." He no less expects it of us. So the next time someone says "but the Bible doesn't say not to" remember the sign in that church parking lot as well as the "sign" God gave during the wilderness wanderings. When the apostle Paul wrote, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." (Colossians 3:17 KJV) this is just what he meant.

If we respect the primacy and authority of God we will have no unauthorized music, fund-raising, organizations, names, methods, "plans-of-salvation," or any like thing. At least, we won't if we wish to honor and please God. If practicing something in the religious realm ("parking") is "by permission only," then only God has the right to say who "parks" and when and where and how they park. When it comes to religion there should be "**No Unauthorized Parking!**"

Remember, you are loved.

— Philip