

# Voices: But Jesus never talked about (fill in the blank)

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Christians believe everything we think and do ultimately should be centered on Jesus. He is the perfect revelation of God, the second person of the Trinity, the Incarnate Word. He is our Savior, Lord and teacher. He's kind of a big deal.

So, it makes sense that Jesus' priorities should be our priorities, right? We should care most about what he cares most. And we have not one, but *four* Gospels telling us all about his life, teachings, death and resurrection. Trite and cliché though it may be, "What would Jesus do?" is still a powerful and valid question.

Doesn't it follow then that if Jesus never talked about something, we should assume either he was OK with it, or at least he didn't care too much about it? At first glance, this seems like a perfectly reasonable assumption.

## Don't set Jesus against the rest of the Bible

The problem with this perspective, however, is that it can set Jesus against the rest of the Bible. Historically, orthodox Christians have believed the *entire* Bible is the inspired and authoritative word of God. It is important to remember there are 27 books in the New Testament, and only four of them are Gospels. The other 23 books are just as inspired and authoritative as those four.

And many of those books talk about things the Gospels don't record Jesus mentioning. The "Jesus never talked about [insert subject]" argument falls

apart if another book of the New Testament talks about that very issue. Christians don't get to pick and choose which parts of the New Testament we believe and which parts we don't.

Note: I do not want to neglect the moral witness of the Old Testament, but Christians have a different and more complicated interpretive approach to the Old Testament than we do to the New Testament, so for simplicity's sake I'm focusing on the latter.

## **Silence doesn't necessarily indicate approval or apathy**

There are reasons Jesus didn't discuss certain issues. He was a Torah-observant Jewish man living in first-century Palestine. His ministry was almost exclusively to other Jews in his area, particularly in Galilee and Jerusalem. His life and teachings all took place in that context.

Jesus never talked about gun control because guns didn't exist. Jesus never talked about dating because marriages were arranged. Jesus never talked about voting because first-century Palestinian Jews didn't have elections. Jesus never talked about abortion because first-century Jews were opposed to it.

Why would Jesus go out of his way to condemn things none of his contemporaries were doing? Why would Jesus go out of his way to talk about subjects that had no possible relevance for the people around him? Jesus' silence on certain ethical issues doesn't necessarily prove anything.

## **Jesus never mentioned rape or sexual**

# violence

For example, Jesus never once mentions rape or sexual violence anywhere in the Gospels. If he talked about it during his ministry, we don't know what he said. What's more, rape and sexual violence were very relevant issues in Jesus' context. Women, children and slaves were sexually exploited regularly. Yet so far as we know, Jesus never said anything about it.

Most of us rightly would assume Jesus thinks rape and sexual violence are unspeakably wicked. But we can't prove that assumption from the words of Jesus written in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Or can we? Jesus condemned violence. Jesus affirmed the value and dignity of women, children and slaves. Jesus promised judgment against anyone who would harm or exploit those weaker than them.

Sure, Jesus never explicitly mentioned rape or sexual violence. But it is no stretch at all to assume, based on everything else he said, that Jesus is fundamentally opposed to such sinfulness.

## Reading the Bible responsibly

The above example shows that reading the Bible for moral instruction is not always a straightforward task. It requires close study and care. The "Jesus never talked about [insert subject]" tactic attempts to circumvent that process and stunts our moral formation.

It is just a bad argument. It neglects the rest of the New Testament—not to mention the Old, it ignores Jesus' historical context, and it forgets that Jesus' teachings weren't always straightforward. Remember, he regularly taught in parables, often and intentionally to confuse his listeners.

Christian morality is not a brief collection of simple rules and principles;

our ethic under the kingship of Christ is a full-orbed and often complex way of life. Our tough moral questions frequently defy easy answers.

We have a responsibility to study God's word with care. Let us not base our lives on simplistic reasoning and lazy interpretation. Instead, let us follow the admonition of 2 Timothy 2:15: "Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."

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