

WHY THINGS GO WRONG AND HOW TO PUT THEM RIGHT - Part seven

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DETERMINING RIGHT FROM WRONG WHEN IT'S NOT MENTIONED IN THE BIBLE - continued

We're continuing our study of *how to avoid problems caused by our own sinful choices*. Not all problems *are* caused by our sinful decisions, but many are.

Let me say one other thing before we get started tonight. It's a mistake to fall into the mindset that assumes *sinful choices are inevitable*. This is such a common assumption in the church today. And it stuns me that it goes so unchallenged.

A redeemed person has the ability not to sin. This is not always *easy*. We all live at varying degrees of *cooperation with the Holy Spirit* and so, fall into needless sin. But the sin *wasn't and isn't inevitable*.

Do you remember, in the very first part of this series, we looked at *how to get out of a spiritual mess?* We talked about the three steps to getting free and getting clean from sinful situations: *confession, belief, and renewed obedience*.

It's that second step I have in mind here. *Belief* - you can't live outside sin's grip if you are already convinced in your heart that your future failure is inevitable. You must *believe* that He is able to *keep you from falling*.

Let me give you a very brief history of man's ability to walk in holiness before the Lord:

Pre-Fall Man	Post-Fall Man	Reborn Man	Glorified Man
able to sin	able to sin	able to sin	
able to not sin		able to not sin	able to not sin
	unable to not sin		
			unable to sin

The point of this little chart *isn't* to involve us all in theological hair-splitting. What I want to do is remind us that, the fight against sin, while not an *easy* fight, is not an *impossible* fight either.

Romans 6:1-2 - "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? [2] By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?"

Romans 6:17-18 - "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, [18] and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."

Notice those telling words - *"...the standard of teaching to which you were committed..."* You would think Paul would say, *"...the standard of teaching which was committed to you..."* But he words it very intentionally. He's trying to emphasize their *involvement* in receiving the teaching. He's saying they *bought into* the teaching. They *believed it in action*. He's trying to emphasize their reception went beyond mere intellectual comprehension. They *lived* this teaching. They *committed* to it. They *banked* on it. Paul wanted them to conclude it was absolutely unreasonable to for re-born, regenerated, Spirit-indwelt, Christian people to even remotely consider the option of living the rest of their Christian lives *chained and glued to sinful life-styles*.

The devil has won an enormous victory - larger than we can ever imagine - if he can convince regenerated people - people in whom the very power of the Resurrected Jesus lives, that they are helpless, powerless, resourceless victims to sinful bondage in this present age. *Renounce that lie! It isn't true*.

So today we are continuing our study of this issue - *What can I do to make righteous decisions when I can't find the issue in question mentioned anywhere in the Scriptures?* Last week we said there are *principles* - *cross cultural, eternally applicable*

principles - which, *if considered collectively can keep the mind clear of confusion and the life free from bondage.*

We studied the principles of *excess* (Does this action slow me down spiritually?), *expedience* (Is this activity spiritually productive and conducive?), *enslavement* (Does this activity have the potential to reduce the control of the Holy Spirit by gaining too deep a place in my time and affections?), *example* (Can this activity be harmful to others, even though I can't find anything specifically against it in the Bible?), and, finally, the principle of *evangelism* (Will this activity hinder the rapid embracing of the gospel by those outside the faith?).

Today we continue with more general principles:

1) **THE PRINCIPLE OF EDIFICATION - Does this activity build others up spiritually - especially newer, and perhaps weaker believers?**

1 Corinthians 10:23-24 - "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. [24] Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor."

Some of you will notice that I already used this same passage under the principle of *evangelism*. It contains very precious truth for reaching out in love to the lost.

But that's not *all* it contains. Look at the context carefully:

1 Corinthians 10:23-28 - "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. [24] Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. [25] Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. [26] For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." [27] If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. [28] But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience...."

There are actually *two different situations* here. First, if you are with an unbeliever, don't make any fuss about the history of the meat you are being served. It's simply not an issue whether or not it was offered to idols, and Paul *knows* it's not an issue. But if you are with *somebody else* - somebody who is going to be *offended* by your eating that meat, Paul says, leave it alone.

Now, let me ask you. *Who might that offended person be? Who might actually take the effort to ask about or point out the past history of the meat you are about to eat?* The pagan, who invited you over to his house and cooked up the meat in the first place?

That's possible, but I don't think so. But perhaps a believer who has been saved out of a background where idolatry and sacrifices offered with slain meet *would* be honestly offended and hurt by my eating it, and *would* actually enquire about the nature of the meat I was about to eat.

And that's where this principle of *edification* comes into play. Look again at **verse 23** - "All things are lawful," but not all things are *helpful*. "All things are lawful," but not all things *build up*."

When Paul says, "*not all things are helpful*," he's not just thinking of *his own* edification. He means, "*not all the things I am free do will edify my fellow believers. I don't make my own edification the sole factor in my actions. I seek to edify others. I flee anything that won't build up believers who are watching how I live!*"

This principle is also a little different from the principle of *example* we studied last week. In the principle of *example* the emphasis is on the *negative*. I won't do anything that will lead others into situations that might be dangerous for them. The principle of *edification* looks at activities that will *positively encourage spiritual growth* in fellow believers.

These two principles are the opposites of the same coin. They are the *negative* and the *positive* expressions of love for the body of Christ.

2) **THE PRINCIPLE OF EMULATION - Can I imitate Jesus Christ in this activity?**

1 John 2:6 - "...whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."

It takes a fair degree of courage and honesty to use this principle. But you will be amazed, if you dare to do it with a humble, honest, and obedient heart, how faithful the Holy Spirit (who loves to glorify Jesus) will be to show you what *fits* and what *doesn't fit* with your Christian life.

Have you ever sat in your family room at night and honestly asked yourself, "*Can I picture Jesus sitting here, watching this kind of entertainment? Would He find something more spiritually nourishing than House of Cards? Would He miss time in His Father's House to sit glued to a movie?*"

Of course, everyone has to apply this principle for themselves. But in each situation, you will rarely go wrong if you pause, and as one last additional check, see if this activity *has the feel of Jesus in it*.

3) **THE PRINCIPLE OF REVENGE - Is there any taint of revenge toward anyone - even way down deep - in this activity?**

Romans 12:19 - "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

Paul forces us to conclude that every act even tainted by vengeance is an act of *unbelief*. I don't believe God can be trusted to avenge and make right every wrongdoing I experience.

That conclusion is what lies behind the *math* in this text. *How many times can I take any form of revenge against my brother?* Not once. *Never* is Paul's clear command.

This command, and the command not to love the world are the *two most broken commands in the church*. But remember, revenge is hard to admit. It is never the *obvious* reason for anything I do. I won't let it be the obvious reason because I know it's wrong. It's always the *reason under the surface* of other actions and plans.

Vengeance is always hard to track to its roots. We usually *spiritualize* our vengeance so we hide it, even from ourselves. "I'm just thinking about the good of the church." "I'm just sharing this as a matter for prayer." "I'm just trying to protect others from being hurt like I've been hurt."

And if I carry *one* of those plans out, under whatever guise I want to manufacture in my own mind, I am guilty of sin. Even if I can find no command against the specific activity I'm doing.

4) **THE PRINCIPLE OF STEWARDSHIP - Can I demonstrate I am a faithful stewardship of time, talent and wealth in this activity?**

Luke 16:10-13 - "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. [11] If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? [12] And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? [13] No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

This is one of the most difficult of all principles to remember. You have a banker. You have an accountant. You have an investment firm. You have a deed to your house. You have a paycheck with your name on it. *All of those things enforce the concept of ownership on your mind*.

Then you come into the kingdom of God. The first thing you discover about yourself is this: *You aren't an owner of anything. You're a steward of everything*. That truth never registers with millions of North American Christians.

And here's why. I don't think about this issue of stewardship right now very much because there is no *accounting* of my stewardship right now. It's like trying to take seriously a bill that never comes or a payment that's never required. *Are you worried about a Visa bill with a payment due in the year 2257?*

But, and this is the important point, there *is* an actual time of accounting coming. My stewardship *will, quite literally, be reviewed*. The trick is to plan now for what is an eternally fixed, inevitable reality.

The Bible says *it is required of stewards that they be found faithful*. Required by whom? By God our Creator. Required when? When Jesus comes again, or when we die. God will perform an *audit* of my life and yours. He will want an accounting of how I used my wealth and gifts to extend his kingdom.

And the stewardship must be demonstrated *now*, in *this present earthly life*. It will be too late when I pass off this earthly scene. Everything is fixed at that point. So in each day of life, I am to demonstrate this *great, unseen reality of the true ownership of my time and my goods*. It must filter down into the decisions of each day.

5) **THE PRINCIPLE OF MY BODY AS GOD'S TEMPLE - Does this activity demonstrate the Lord's control of my physical body as His creation and dwelling place, or does it demonstrate my own preference and desires?**

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 - "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

This is much like the last principle, only taken to the level, not only of *what I have* in terms of time, talents and possessions, but *who I actually am* in terms of my mind and my body. And Paul makes this issue extremely *practical* and *personal*.

Make no mistake about it. *This principle obliterates personal rights*. Our world *worships* personal rights. The Lordship of Jesus *obliterates* them.

That's why Paul says, even in the part of life our world considers *most distinctly private and personal - sexual activity and expression - the ultimate consideration isn't personal freedom or satisfaction. It's maintaining the purity of God's temple*.

What two consenting adults do in the privacy of their own bedroom *isn't* their own business. It's *God's* business. Our world doesn't presently understand that. But Christians pray about it and contemplate it everywhere they go.

This gets intensely practical and engaging for the Christian. Who gets to determine my sexual identity - straight or gay? Paul says *God does*. He says your sexual body isn't your own. Someone else rules and owns it.

Now, obviously, sexual purity *is* specifically and repeatedly covered in the plain teaching of the Scriptures. But the principle of the stewardship of the body as the Temple of the Lord covers everything from exercise to reading material to substance abuse to the regular and disciplined keeping of the Lord's Day.

We'll look at a few more of these key principles next week.