

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

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Determining Right From Wrong When It's Not Mentioned In the Bible - continued

I think you can see from the past two studies that, contrary to popular opinion, we're not left without guidelines for culturally specific moral issues. Certainly, because the Bible, while inspired, was written in a specific time of human history, we don't have specific instruction for computers, videos, most forms of recreation or entertainment, and so on. ***But there are principles - guidelines - for doing the right thing if I have the DESIRE to honestly find out what the right thing is.***

Of course, the Word will offer no help for the person who doesn't ***want*** to know the truth. If I ***won't take the time to find out what the principles are, or, think that my ignorance of principles will serve as an excuse, I will rush into choices contrary to Biblical principles.***

The real tragedy in both of those situations is ***not only that sin and bondage continue to grow, but self-deception sets into the soul of the one who, just because he can't find his sinful choice spelled out in the Bible, thinks he is still walking in the light.***

These principles are ***freedom*** principles. They will not ***take away*** anything from your life. Nothing God does by way of admonition, warning, or instruction ***ever*** takes away anything from life. His ways only ***seem*** restrictive ***until you begin to walk in them.*** Once you start on His way of life and liberty, you realize that what you, in your selfish mind, ***thought*** was restrictive, is, in fact, more precious than gold.

Let's look at the last in this three part study of the ***Scriptural principles for determining right from wrong:***

1) **THE PRINCIPLE OF PREFERENCE - Am I putting others ahead of myself in this action?**

Romans 12:10 - "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."

The last part of the verse explains the first. "Love one another with brotherly affection." Good. That's beautiful. I think it's great to love one another. I think Jesus said something about that. ***But how do I know I am devoted to my fellow believers in love?*** That's the issue of this verse.

Here's how you and I can tell if we are truly like Jesus in the way we love others: ***When I can do something that is pleasing to me, but won't fit in with the plans and ideas of others, I put their considerations above mine.*** That's called, "giving preference" to one another.

It takes great wisdom - ***wisdom born of prayer and study*** - to know how to apply this principle. There are many situations where I can do what I want to do, and don't have to worry about giving preference because no one else ***cares*** about the decision I'm about to make. In those cases, there is no problem. As long as I'm not violating some Scriptural command, I'm free.

There are also cases where it is very clear that my actions are strongly at odds with the desires of someone I love. In those obvious cases, the decision is clear. As a follower of Jesus, I ***give preference*** to others, regardless of my own feelings.

Then there are those difficult, more subtle situations, where my wife isn't ***saying*** she thinks I don't spend enough time with her, but, if I were mature and attentive, I would recognize that she does, in fact, feel hurt that I have been out every night this week, and, while she isn't ***saying*** anything, it pains her that the first night I have at my disposal I'm going to the ball game when she wants us both to go shopping.

That's where this principle of ***loving with honor and preference*** needs to be put into action. And make no mistake, love isn't real until it manifests itself in the giving of ***honor and preference.***

2) **THE PRINCIPLES OF PEACE - Will this activity promote, or will it diminish, the priority of peace with others?**

Romans 12:18 - "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all..."

Notice how realistic this verse is. It simply won't always be possible to live at peace with everybody, and the Bible recognizes that. The words are, "***if possible, so far as it depends on you...***" be at peace. Sometimes it's impossible to be at peace with people.

Sometimes we must ***break peace on the grounds of Christian conviction***. Peace is never to be maintained on the foundation of ***compromise***. The Apostle Paul talks about this very situation:

1 Corinthians 5:11-13 - "But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. [12] For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? [13] God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

Here is a clear example of a situation where a peaceful relationship ***could*** be maintained with a stubborn, immoral brother. But Paul says we're ***not to keep peace in that situation***. The peace isn't worth the risk of deepening my brother's commitment to his own sin.

But those situations are rare. Most of the time, we break peace over ***personal preference*** rather than ***Biblical convictions***. And Paul says this is wrong. My preferences, goals, likes and dislikes, are ***never to be so important to me that I will treat people as expendable in order to fulfill them***.

Jesus, of course, takes this principle even further:

Matthew 5:9 - "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

Keeping peace is hard enough. But Jesus isn't talking about ***keeping peace with a friend***. He's talking about ***making peace*** ("peacemakers") ***with an enemy***.

When someone else is clearly guilty in some wrong done to me it's easy to just quietly let them stew in their own juices. When we see others who are at strife with one another, it's easy to ***not get involved***. Neither of those responses is an option if we're to follow Jesus as Lord on the path of peacemaking. ***Ignoring*** is not ***peacemaking***.

Paul says, "***As far as it depends on you...be at peace with all men.***" Pay any price for peace except compromise. When you are considering any action, you haven't considered it from the Biblical perspective until you've considered its affect on the relationships with others in the body of Christ.

3) **THE PRINCIPLE OF THE YOKE - Will this activity link me with unbelievers in a way that will limit my freedom to follow Jesus as Lord in all things?**

2 Corinthians 6:14 - "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?"

I think this verse needs to be interpreted along side of another:

1 Corinthians 5:9-11 - "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— [10] not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. [11] But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one."

The Second Corinthians passage forbids associations that ***link*** (or yoke) me with the actions and decisions of unbelievers. There are unions - marriage, just for one example - that bind up my life with the world view, values and choices of another person. And if that person isn't a believer, I'm bound in a way that ***restricts my own free following of the Lordship of Jesus Christ***.

The First Corinthians passage deals, first of all, with ***associations*** with unbelievers, rather than ***yokes***. Paul explains to the Corinthian church that the pursuit of holiness ***doesn't mean*** we remove ourselves from contact with the lost. First of all, because that is virtually ***impossible*** in this world. But, second (and more importantly) ***how will the lost be reached if we***

have no contact with them?

So there is to be *association* without *yoking*. There is to be *love for the lost* without the *compromising of holiness*.

This needs to be carefully thought through in today's world. At what point do you have to say "No" to a promotion at work. The climbing of the corporate ladder can be heady stuff. The promotions come. The salary jumps. The perks increase. But at what point do you lose your freedom to *go to church on Sunday*? At what point have you lost the freedom to *choose to be the husband God requires you to be*? And what is going to be *your bottom line response when push comes to shove*?

That's what this principle of the *yoke* is all about.

4) **THE PRINCIPLE OF CONFORMITY - Will this activity engage my life in patterns that, even though not specifically mentioned in the Bible, will incline my heart in the direction of future sins?**

Romans 12:1-2 - "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Sometimes verses can be quoted so frequently that we think we know their *meaning* just because we can remember their *words*. That is probably the case with these precious verses.

The subject here is my whole life as an instrument of *worship* unto the Lord. Worship isn't just my *songs of praise*. It's the *offering up of every moment of every day in a way that is as intentionally devoted to God as those sacrifices were in the temple in the Old Testament*. Worship means everything I think, say, and do, happens in the holy of holies of God's Presence. It's all *sacred and devoted to God*.

Confirmation to the world and *transformation* into holiness are both *processes*. Both conformation and transformation are made up of smaller parts. And the part usually happen almost unnoticeably. In the process of my life on this earth, I am constantly being *offered two options* for living. **Verse 2** describes two constant, relentless processes - one *negative*, and one *positive*.

First, there is the *pressure to conform to this world*. Second, there is the *wooing to transformation by God's Spirit*. Both battles begin in the *mind*. And I cast a very deciding vote in which direction my life will go.

In case we lose the tree for the forest, we're studying the process of our choices. And we're looking at Biblical principles to guide us into holiness, wisdom and freedom. Here's how this principle of *conformity* works.

Long before I sin *outwardly*, I partake of an environment that makes still uncommitted sins more likely at some point. This dangerous drift starts *quietly* and *inwardly*. It's like the way you can keep folding a piece of paper over and over again, along the very same line, and eventually, you can tear it perfectly, right along that line.

Imagine the tearing of the paper as the *outward act of sin*. Imagine the repeated folds as areas of *thought that were previously and repeatedly shaped in a certain way by the pressure to think and value and measure by the world's standards*.

You and I are *shaped* into sin long before we *commit* sin. So, if I'm to be *transformed in my mind*, I must also detect, target, and relentlessly renounce ideals, values and concepts that, while not producing sin in my life *immediately*, will start the conformation process in my mind. This means you must start resisting sin while it still looks harmless.

Here's the issue. ***What is the direction of this activity I'm considering?*** Not just the *immediate result*, but the *long range direction*? Will this action make *holiness* easier in the future, or will it make *compromise* easier in the future? That's the crucial issue here.

This is what Jesus was dealing with in most of the Sermon on the Mount. The Pharisees were focused only on the *outward acts* of transgression. Jesus told His disciples their righteousness had to *exceed* that of the Scribes and Pharisees or they

would never make it to heaven.

Why? Certainly Jesus wasn't against the Pharisee's stand against murder or theft or adultery. But Jesus knew that unless His disciples started their pursuit of holiness ***much further back - long before the outward act of sin was committed - they would never be able to sustain true holiness.***

We simply must see our lives as being ***shaped by everything we do.*** Don't just look at the end result. Look at the process. Don't be ***conformed.*** Be ***transformed.*** And remember it's starts way back in the way you are training yourself to think - every day.

In our next study we'll start looking at how to deal with problems that are ***not*** the result of your own making. Is there a way to bring about the good, purifying purpose of God in the middle of difficult situations you can't control? That's what we'll be studying next time.