



Truth Matters

A Publication Discussing Matters Related To Truth Because Truth Matters

Scripture Reading Week of August 21st - 27th

Monday

- ❖ Job 21, 22
- ❖ Psalm 145
- ❖ Galatians 4

Tuesday

- ❖ Job 23, 24
- ❖ Psalm 146
- ❖ Galatians 5

Wednesday

- ❖ Job 25, 26
- ❖ Psalm 147
- ❖ Galatians 6

Thursday

- ❖ Job 27, 28
- ❖ Psalm 148
- ❖ Ephesians 1

Friday

- ❖ Job 29, 30
- ❖ Psalm 149
- ❖ Ephesians 2

Saturday

- ❖ Job 31, 32

Sunday

- ❖ Job 33, 34

The Dearth of Discernment and the Dictionary

Defining Our Terms

My wife made a visit in the home of a friend one day some years ago. While they were there they had a profitable conversation about life and all things spiritual. But as my wife got up to go she noticed that there was a coat hook on the back of the front door; and on the hook hung a skirt. I do not recall how the topic came up but the lady informed my wife that the skirt was hanging there in case someone from her church came to the house unannounced. You see, her church had preached that modesty for women meant no pants. This woman did not particularly buy that particular standard but she didn't want to appear to be disobedient to her church so she would quickly change before answering the door.

One day I crawled into the passenger seat of a friend's car. He was a youth pastor at my home church. As we got established in the car we began a fruitful conversation about music standards. He quickly turned on a CD to have me listen to a particular song. We enjoyed the song, discussed its lyrics and truly worshipped God. But once we got to the man's church, he ejected the CD, returned it to its case and slipped it under his front seat as though it were a pornographic picture. When I confronted him he replied that the pastor does not see any distinction between personal standards and corporate standards. "If you wouldn't sing it in church that way, you shouldn't listen to it in your car," was the pastor's mantra.

I have now stated in my last two articles that all Fundamentalists ask the question "Is it approved?" "Are these pants approved?" "Is this music approved?" And the fundamental danger, in my estimation, with simply building fences is that we wreak havoc on the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. We destroy this great truth by making men and women answerable to mere men and mere movements

rather than to God. My wife's friend was answerable to her church's standard on Tuesday and in her own home. My friend was answerable to his pastor on Friday and in his own car. What, are these individuals not their own priests? Can they not go to God for their own answers? The Apostle Paul is unequivocal on this issue when he writes about disputing brothers, "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls" (Rom. 14:4). *When we seek to pass judgment on others because they violate a standard, we had better be crystal clear about just whose standard they are violating.*

It is true that real biblical discernment demands we ask of anything "Is it approved?" But the real question is "Who sets the standard?" I want to help define and clarify what we mean by biblical standards, biblical principles and sin.

The crucial question is really about sin. If I violate a biblical standard, do I sin? If you violate a biblical standard, do you sin? If I violate a biblical principle, do I sin? If you violate a biblical principle, do you sin? I am asking it in this way for reasons that will become obvious in a moment.

First let's ask the question "What is the difference between a biblical standard and biblical principle?"

Biblical Standards

The Apostle Paul says in Romans 4:15 that "where there is no law there is no transgression." Similarly, John defines sin as breaking the law (cf. 1 John 3:4). So clearly, the only way you and I can speak

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of *universal* sin is by referring to individuals who violate the clear written and revealed *commands* of Scripture – the moral will of God. Everyone who violates the commands of Scripture sins – universally! Thus, the clear commands of Scripture make-up the true definition of a *biblical standard*. The Bible contains the clear and *explicit* truth of God.

Biblical Principles

At the same time, the Bible contains numerous truths that are truth by *implication*. It takes hard work to interpret the Bible legitimately and arrive at its timeless message. But truth that has to be mined out by following the rules of biblical interpretation can only ever be truth as I see it. Its message is *derived* from the legitimacy of our interpretive methods and there will be others to challenge not just your conclusion but your method of interpretation. One's conclusion, therefore, are exactly and only that – one's conclusions. They may not be deemed as universally true; they may only be deemed as *personally* true – as I see it. Even the Apostle Paul spoke in this language in 1 Corinthians 7 as he went back and forth between personal concessions and biblical commands when speaking of marriage and singleness. He knew that he worked out his own theology of Lordship and last days that singleness was clearly the best path for his kingdom endeavors. But he also knew that it was simply his way of seeing things and that he could not issue it as a command. Singleness was Paul's personal standard based upon his own formulation of biblical truths. However, if you or I were to violate Paul's principles and get married, he knows you are not sinning (cf. 1 Cor. 7:25-28, esp. v.28). Biblical principles, therefore, are to be defined as the individual *formulation of biblical teaching* so as to arrive at a certain conclusion on a certain issue. It is nothing more than one's personal application.

However, to have biblical principles and personal application is a part of God's

moral will for every individual Christian. Paul commands of each and every Christian that they are to “test everything” (cf. 1 Thess. 5:21). That is, it is commanded of Christians to be discerning. No believer should ever give the answer “I don't know; I never thought about it” to the question, “Why do you do that?” To give that kind of an answer is sin. It violates the command of Scripture to be discerning, to see if each and every action we undertake is approved by God (cf. Eph. 5:10). Furthermore, Paul says in Romans 14:5 that if you are going to worship on one day over another then “each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.” Thus, the biblical word for “personal standard” is conviction. I am fully convinced in my mind that what I am doing is either completely righteous or unrighteous, so that “whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23).

Biblical Authority

Everything I have stated thus far really can be boiled down to a rather frightful statement: There is no grey area for an individual believer. Everything we do is either righteous or unrighteous. “The imperatives of God's moral will touch every aspect and moment of life. This is so because they prescribe the believer's goals [why he does what he does], and attitudes [how he does what he does], as well as his action [what he does]” (Friesen, 154).

The problem comes in when you put two people in a room (marriage), or 5 people in a room (family), or 200 people in a room (church) and ask them to agree. But even then, it is really quite simple because in each room, God has also clearly placed a head – someone in authority. The head of the home is the father and the head of the church is its elders (not to diminish Paul's words that Christ is the head of the church). Once people come into a given context, the leadership over that context must establish rules and standards. There

must be a *contextualization* of biblical truth.

Wives submit to their husband's authority (cf. Eph 5:22); children obey their parents (cf. Eph 6:1); and the church submits to its elders (cf. Heb 13:17). There is freedom for the wife and child and parishioner to question the establishment of standards because there is nothing wrong with seeking to understand how one has come to his conclusions. Teach the people under you how to interpret the Bible and be humble and open to have your interpretations critiqued and challenged. What are we afraid of?

But by the same token, leaders in given contexts must not abuse their authority by widening their charge beyond the limits established by God. The pastor has authority for what goes on in his charge but his charge does not extend into the homes where he usurps the role and responsibility of a husband and father. The pastor may set standards as he sees fit for *corporate* gatherings, but he may not attach a level of righteousness to those standards such that it becomes binding on his people when they are outside his charge. Jesus addressed this practice of the Pharisees in Mark 7:6: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.” This is a stinging indictment. The Pharisees were teaching their commandments as though they were the commandments of God – doctrine.

When a person violates a corporate standard, they sin not because they have done a certain act – wear a pair of pants to church – but because they have chosen to not obey and submit to their elders. Of course, whether or not an elder should make such a rule is obvious to me and pointless to debate; but they do have the right and responsibility to govern their flock as they see fit. And when a person violates the corporate

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standard by wearing a pair of pants in their home, the pastor has sinned by extending his "command" to make it equal

with God's. He has over-stepped his charge and is now treading where God has placed another figure, namely, the

woman's husband or father. The pastor's charge ends at the front door of his church.

Conclusion:

I have given you three categories and levels of authority and clarity:

Text	Clear Command	Explicit Authority	Universal	Biblical Standard
Interpretation	Formulated Truth	Implicit Authority	Personal	Biblical Principle
Application	Standard / Conviction	Derived Authority	Contextualized	Personal / Corporate Standard

Let's return again and answer our questions asked of these categories:

Biblical Standards:

- If I violate a biblical standard do I sin?
- If you violate a biblical standard do you sin?
- If they (someone outside our context) violate a biblical standard do they sin?

The answer to all three of these questions is yes because it is universally applied.

Biblical Principles / Personal Application:

- If I violate my biblical principles do I sin?

- If you violate my biblical principles do you sin?
- If they (someone outside our context) violate my biblical principles do they sin?

The answer to the first question is yes because I must be firmly convinced in my own mind; everything I do must proceed from faith. If I violate my own biblical principles, I am sinning against my conscience and that it always sin. If my conscience has been wrongly taught, then I need someone to come and properly teach me according to biblical interpretation.

The answer to the other two is no (or at least, not necessarily) because you are responsible for

yourself and must be firmly convinced for yourself.

Biblical Authority:

- If I violate our corporate standard do I sin?
- If you violate our corporate standard do you sin?

If they (someone outside our context) violate our corporate standard do they sin?

The answer to the first two is yes because we are both in the same context and under the same authority. But those not within our context (members of another church, for example) are not under the authority of this church.