

A MAJOR QUESTION: WHAT IS RIGHT OR WRONG?

J.J. Turner, Ph.D.

We live in a society that is continually blurring the lines between what is right and what is wrong. Situation Ethics and Political Correctness affirms that the context of the moment determines if a thing is right or wrong. It champions the attitude “that what may be right for me may not be right for you and visa-versa. This attitude and approach to ethics and morality has been around for a long time: *“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6)*. Men tend to make and obey their own rules of behavior.

Parents are faced with the ongoing challenge of teaching their children how to discern between what is right and wrong. Society is sending a contradictory message. Likewise, sooner or later every preacher, elder, teacher, leader, etc. will be faced with this challenging inquiry related to others as well as related to self: What is right and what is wrong? In many instances when the answer is given, the person asking the question will not accept it. They cast the answer aside by saying, “Oh well, that’s just your opinion; and after all my opinion is just as good as yours.” A popular reply is, “Don’t judge me or tell me what to do!” Ironically, “We are both right.”

King Solomon warned about letting your personal opinions be your guide in ethics and morality: *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12)*. Therefore, the King warned not to do that which is right in our eyes (Proverbs 21:2). Jesus taught that ONLY knowing the truth will set a person free (John 8:32, 36). Lies never free us!

The Challenge of Ethics

Where do ethics originate? As a general observation ethics evolve from a person, group or society applying philosophical and theological beliefs—or assumptions—to the question of what’s right or wrong. Basically there are two views of ethics: The worldview and the Christian (biblical) view. In the context of a larger discussion, relative to *who determines what is right or wrong, there are several possibilities presented by mankind that are raised in question form:*

1. Do men determine through laws they create what is right or wrong?

2. Does a tribe, group, or culture determine what is right or wrong?
3. Does a community or neighborhood determine what is right or wrong?
4. Does a person's "gut feeling", hunch, or instinct determine right or wrong?
5. Does a court or tribunal determine what is right or wrong?
6. Do situational and contextual conditions dictate what is right or wrong?
7. Does a Supreme Being—the God of the Bible—determine what is right or wrong?

A study of history in the context of the ethical question: What is right and wrong? provide some answers. There are numerous examples of how right and wrong are viewed. An article in *Reasoning with the Scriptures* addressed this point: *"In Mexico, before Cortez (1485-1587) it was morally acceptable to have child sacrifices. In the South before the Civil War, slavery was acceptable. Why did morality change? In Hitler's Germany, killing the Jews was a noble act! Did it become wrong only because Germany lost the war? If Germany had won World War II, would the killers have been heroes instead of villains? (truthnet.org/God-and-reason/1-Right-Wrong/Who-determines)*. This is a critical and thorny issue, which must be addressed.

In the midst of decaying, sinful, and arbitrary ethics, the Christian affirms a fixed, transcendent moral order that determines the answer to what is right or wrong. The answer is based on the Divine, impeccable character of God, declared in His Divine revelation in the Holy Bible, nature and man's ability to "know the truth." The moral and ethical right and wrong issues are solved by the nature of God as reflected in His essence and character: His holiness, righteousness, love, truthfulness, justice, mercy, forgiveness, patience, grace, goodness, and much, much more. Since God's nature and being is unchanging, so are his moral and ethical demands unchanging.

How to Biblically Determine what is Right or Wrong

God's word is the perfect manual—His ethics and morality guide—for finding answers relative to the question: **How do I determine what is right or wrong?** His word is inspired and provides us with *"all things that pertain to life and godliness"* (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:3). This is why we *"buy the truth and sell it not"* (Proverbs 23:23).

The Bible contains instructions on what is right or wrong by explicit commands: *The Ten Commandments*. It teaches by specific examples (cf. 1 Timothy 4:12). And it teaches by

principles from God's word that creates guidelines for determining what is right or wrong. For Christians who desire to know the answer relative to a thing being right or wrong, the following principles from God's word are presented as guidelines. Study the following prayerfully and carefully.

Take a few minutes and think about the question you are in doubt about or wondering about, and write it down, and thoughtfully and prayerfully apply one-by-one the following principles from God's word. You must be open and honest with yourself. **ASK YOURSELF:**

1. Am I commanded not to do it? (James 4:17).
2. Can I do it for the glory of God? (Ephesians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 10:31).
3. Am I imitating God when I do it? (Ephesians 5:1).
4. Can I do it in the name of the Lord? (Colossians 3:17).
5. Is it of the world? (1 John 2:15-17; 5:19).
6. Would Jesus do it or approve it? (1 Peter 2:21).
7. Does it have the "appearance" of evil? (1 Thessalonians 5:22).
8. Does it express a Christ-like attitude? (Philippians 2:4-6).
9. Is it a spiritual weight? (Hebrews 12:1).
10. Can I do it when I remember the Holy Spirit dwells in me? (Romans 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20).
11. Is it an example of a faithful believer? (1 Timothy 4:12).
12. Is it, or would it be, a stumbling block to others? (1 Corinthians 8:9; Romans 14:13, 21).
13. Would you want your children, parents, spouse, etc. doing it? (Ephesians 6:4; Prov.22:6).
14. Can you pray faithfully and continually about it? (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
15. Is there any doubt in your mind about it? (Romans 14:23).
16. Will it make you a better person and Christian?? (2 Peter 1:5-8).
17. Will it encourage others to obey the Gospel? (Mark 16:15, 16; Mark 8:36-38).
18. Would you like for a video to be made of the behavior?
19. Is Satan doing it and would he approve it? (1 Peter 5:8).
20. Would you like to be doing it when Jesus returns? (1 Thessalonians 5:2; Revelation 2:10).

21. If you were in heaven would you do it? (John 14:1-6; Revelation 22:14, 15).
22. Are you walking in the light when you do it? (1 John 5:17).
23. Would you have to repent if you did it? (Luke 13:3, 5).
24. Where does the Bible have an approved example of the behavior? (John 8:32).
25. Does it violate your conscience? (John 8:9; Acts 24:16; 1 Peter 3:16, 21).
26. Would you do it in the presence of Jesus? God? Holy Spirit? Church?

After applying these principles to your question, relative to the right or wrong of something you are wondering about, according to the Bible—using the above 26 principles—is it right or wrong? Be honest with yourself. What additional biblical principles would you add to this list?

How will you intentionally use this lesson in determining if a thing is right or wrong? Be specific in your answers:

NOTE:

For a more complete study of this subject read my book, *Christians, Wake Up!* (www.publishingdesigns.com 256-533-4301).