

Making Moral Choices According to God's Word: Part I

Last week we considered Joshua's declaration that he didn't care what the world might look to in making moral choices because he was firmly committed to looking to God. The Word of God would be his guide and his moral compass. And that's the right choice. That is the only choice that is viable. And with that being the case, you may want to ask yourself just how important is God's Word is in your life when it comes to making moral decisions. When you are confronted with some decision to make regarding a particular behavior or a course of conduct, do you make your decision based upon what God's Word has to say? It's a question that really asks how much space does the Bible take up in your heart and in your brain, for that matter. If we could do an x-ray, CAT-scan or MRI of your spiritual being, I hope that your inner-Bible would look as big as this. [Holding up a huge Bible]. Hopefully, it is this big and dominates all the moral choices that you make.

The Bible is God speaking to you. It is amazing when some people fail to consult the Bible but say things like, "I prayed for an answer to my problem, but God never answered me—He never said a word." This is God's Word. This is one of the primary ways that He speaks to you. And when the Bible remains on the shelf or is discarded to some dark corner of your house, it's like turning off your cell phone or unplugging your land line and then wondering why God never calls you. If you would like God to tell how to deal with tough moral decisions, then you need to listen to His voice. His voice speaks to you in a billion ways if you will just read and study this Book. Pick a quiet time—early morning or noon time or in the still of the night—it doesn't matter when, but read God's Word. Study God's Word. If you will do that on a regular basis, you will begin to be filled with the knowledge of God's will. And when that knowledge continues to grow, you will be guided to make the right moral choices day after day. That's exactly what Paul was telling the church at Colossae when he wrote them a letter saying: ⁹ "[We] have not stopped praying for you and asking God **to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.**" ¹⁰ And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, **growing in the knowledge of God.**" Colossians 1:9-10 (NIV) If you believe in God and love Him, then you need to do the things that will allow you to grow strong in your knowledge of Him.

One of the ways that we can gain that kind of strength is to engage in the study of the Bible together. We study the Bible every Sunday morning right over here in the fellowship hall at 10 a.m. When the day-light savings times rolls around again, we'll be having Wednesday night Bible studies every other week. Come and join us. Why?—For the very reason Paul gives us—in order that we can

strengthen each other in the knowledge of God's will. I learn as much as anyone else at these gatherings to study God's Word from the questions and comments of those who attend. If we want the Bible to be this big [show the big Bible]—to be the dominant moral force in your life—then those are the kinds of things that you need to do. But, when you don't approach God's Word in that way, it begins to get smaller and smaller until it begins to look more like this [show the little Bible]. Believe it or not this is a complete version of the Old and New Testament. And if you take out a very powerful magnifying glass, you can actually read each verse. But it is really more symbolic than anything else. Unfortunately, it is symbolic of the space that the Bible takes up in the lives of many Christians who don't give God's Word any real place in their lives.

If you want to be able to make moral decisions based on God's Word, then you need to change that. And that can only occur if you become thoroughly familiar with what God's Word says. Now that is not only for your own good. You see, Jesus demands that we spread the Gospel. And you cannot spread the Gospel if you don't know the Gospel. Spreading the Gospel isn't something left exclusively to missionaries in some foreign land where God's Word is unknown. As far as the knowledge of God's Word goes, **we live** in a foreign land. Many of the people of the United States of America, of the Commonwealth of Virginia, of Louisa County, Virginia—they might as well be living in a foreign land when it comes to knowing what the Bible demands in the way of moral choices. We need to be missionaries right here in **this** foreign land, because God's Word is a foreign language to so many who live right around us. You need to be able to answer the questions and address the comments of young people from a Scriptural perspective. Questions like: "Mom, should I get an abortion?" "Dad, is gay-marriage OK?" Or, maybe a friend of yours turns to you and says: "I'm thinking about moving in with my boy-friend (or girl-friend)—do you think that that would be alright?" Well now, there are some examples of the moral choices that need to be made within the context of God's will. You don't want to be left standing there dumb-founded with a blank look on your face when those questions are posed. You want to be able to respond with some biblical guidance.

Abortion?—is that OK? Well, our society and our legal system say, "Yes! Go right ahead. Step right up to your local abortion clinic—run on over to Planned Parenthood." That's what society would tell you to do. In fact, both the U. S. Supreme Court and the American Medical Association recognize abortion as a perfectly appropriate medical procedure available to any woman who wants one.

What about gay marriage? Of course, the Supreme Court recognizes gay marriage and its part of the law of the land. And while it is yet to be determined by a pending case before the Supreme Court,

the lower courts have clearly said you better bake wedding cakes in furtherance of gay-marriage if you happen to be a baker in that line of work.

And what about shacking-up with your significant other? Is that O.K.? The mind-set of our society seems to be: "Everybody does it, so it must be alright."

So, how do you answer your son or daughter, your grandchild or friend or neighbor when they pose these moral questions? Cite the decisions of the U. S. Supreme Court? Gage your answer depending upon whatever happens to be the current trend of society? I hope not. While *Roe vs. Wade*¹ on abortion and *Obergefell v. Hodges*² (OH-bər-gə-fel) regarding gay marriage might be the law of the land, they are not the law of God. As to abortion, God's Word recognizes us as human beings when we are but an embryo, knit together in our mother's womb.³ The Word of God prohibits the murder of another human being.⁴ Thus, it is clear that when an embryo or fetus is medically terminated the Bible views it as just another form of murder.

The Scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments tell us that homosexual and lesbian conduct is a perversion and a sin in the eyes of God.⁵ Furthermore, the Bible limits marriage to a man and a woman.⁶ Gay-marriage is a contradiction of terms as far as the Bible is concerned.

For men and women who blatantly reject God's will and contently shack-up with each other, the Scriptures clearly say that there is no place for them in the Kingdom of Heaven. By the way, it says the same thing about murderers and homosexuals.⁷

Whether it's these questions or any others regarding moral choices, they all need to be answered according to God's will. And you cannot answer these questions according to God's Will unless God's Word is planted in your heart. Jesus in His parable of the soils tells us that we need to plant the seeds of God's Word in our hearts. We need to nourish those seeds if we ever expect them to grow.⁸ And the way some Christians attend to such planting reminds me of the Farmers' Almanac. Many years ago, farmers swore by the Farmer's Almanac as to the right days to plant their crops. A little over a year ago, an article came out in *Country Living* magazine indicating that only about 18% of farmers today go by the almanac.⁹ (I'm a bit surprised it is that many.) It seems that Christians have followed suit when it comes to planting God's Word in their hearts. Many just don't take the time to do it anymore. And because of that, those seeds fail to take root and no harvest is produced. Jesus tells us what happens to Christians who fail to show any signs of a harvest. They wither up spiritually and become useless. Jesus tells us that they are eventually gathered into a pile to be burned.¹⁰ And He means that quite literally.

Now there is another good reason to know God’s Word from a moral perspective. If we share the Gospel with others in the way of making moral choices, it is not unlikely that whoever you are addressing will come back with some scriptural response of their own. The problem is that so many misquote the Scripture or even quote something for Scripture that is not even in the Bible. Have you ever heard the saying, “**God helps those who help themselves**”? It is amazing how many Christians think that is a quote from the Bible. It certainly isn’t. Rather, it is un-biblical in the sense that God is in the business of helping those who can’t help themselves—the broken and the lost: God restores them. It isn’t something they do by helping themselves.

Or take another example involving, Marion Barry, the disgraced former mayor of Washington D. C. Barry made an interesting quote at his press conference just before they carted him off to prison. Looking out at the crowd, he offered the comment that the Good Book says, “**To thine own self be true.**” No doubt some of his supporters, who may be Christian, nodded approvingly. Well, his Good Book is very different from mine. “**To thine own self be true**” doesn’t appear in the Bible. It is actually a line from Shakespeare’s play, *Hamlet*. The line is about as un-Christian as it gets because what it really endorses is the self-centered view that you should do whatever you like as long as it pleases you. What it does is this: It sets a person as their own god when it comes to making moral choices. We are not supposed to be true to ourselves in making moral decisions. If that were the case, 90% of our choices would be sinful. We are not supposed to be true to ourselves; we are supposed to be true to God. We need to know God’s Word in order to recognize such misplaced quotes and the immoral views of the Marion Barry’s of this world. The Apostle Paul warned about this. In writing to the Romans, Paul stated: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. THEN YOU WILL BE ABLE TO TEST AND APPROVE WHAT GOD’S WILL IS--his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Romans 12:2 (NIV) That is so very true.

So very many “modern” worldviews are not acceptable choices for Christians. We need to weigh everything according to whether or not it is consistent with the will of God as expressed in the Bible. 1st Thessalonians instructs us to “test everything; hold fast what is good.” 1 Thessalonians 5:21 (ESV) And if whatever point of view is being touted as legitimate by the world around us is contrary to the Bible, then we need to be like Paul and call it what it is. It doesn’t matter how acceptable society may claim something to be, if it is immoral according to God’s standard then that’s just what we should call it.

Now without a doubt, there will be a price that you will have to pay to be true to God’s Word. And the price is this: The world will hate you for it. But Jesus said: “If the world hates you, keep in mind

that it hated me first.” John 15:18 (NIV) Jesus also told us that,¹⁴ “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Matthew 5:14-15 (KJV) We are blessed with the Light of His Word and we are called to shine it in the darkness of this world. There is also a price to pay if you fail to heed this call to bearing the Light. Just as the branch that fails to grow in Christ is thrown in the fire, so too are there consequences for that light that fails to seek God’s Word as its fuel. Eventually it goes out. [Blow out the candle.] Know the Word of God—and apply it to all of the decisions that you make in this life, and in so doing: “Let your light so shine before men . . .” Matthew 5:16 (KJV)

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church
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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor

¹ *Roe vs. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973).

² *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. ____; 35 S. Ct. 2584; 192 L. Ed. 2d 609; 83 U.S.L.W. 4592 (2015).

³ Psalm 139:13 (NIV) For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. Jeremiah 20:17 (ESV) because he did not kill me in the womb; so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb forever great. See also: Jeremiah 1:5 (ESV) “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Psalm 51:5 (NIV) Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

⁴ Exodus 20:13 (NIV) You shall not murder.

⁵ Leviticus 18:22 (NIV) Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable. Romans 1:26-27 (NLT)²⁶ That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other.²⁷ And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NIV)⁹ Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 1 Timothy 1:9-11 (NLT)

⁹ For the law was not intended for people who do what is right. It is for people who are lawless and rebellious, who are ungodly and sinful, who consider nothing sacred and defile what is holy, who kill their father or mother or commit other murders.¹⁰ The law is for people who are sexually immoral, or who practice homosexuality, or are slave traders, liars, promise breakers, or who do anything else that contradicts the wholesome teaching¹¹ that comes from the glorious Good News entrusted to me by our blessed God.

⁶ Genesis 2:24 (NIV) For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. See Matthew 19:5.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 7:2 (NIV) But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 18-20 (NLT)⁹ “Don’t you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don’t fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality,¹⁰ or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God . . .¹⁸ Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body.¹⁹ Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself,²⁰ for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

⁸ Mark 4:20 (NLT) And the seed that fell on good soil represents those who hear and accept God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”

⁹ Daily Wisdom for Men 2018 Collection, published by Barbour Publishing, Inc. (January 11) Used by permission.

¹⁰ John 15:6 (NLT) Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned.