

How Do I Decide What's Right and What's Wrong?

On Sunday, we studied Jesus' model for how to make important decisions about right and wrong. This was the last in a three-part sermon series on the Bible and homosexuality.

1. Warm-up Question: Jeff mentioned Pat Robertson in Sunday's sermon. Who's your favorite (or least favorite) television preacher?
2. Imagine you're a mother living in an impoverished country with two young children who haven't eaten for three days. You've done everything in your power to find a way to make money, even scavenging at the local garbage dump, but found nothing of value. In the local outdoor market, the bread vendor is momentarily distracted, giving you the opportunity to grab a couple loaves for your kids. But you're a devout follower of Jesus and you know the Bible says, "Thou shalt not steal." Exodus 8:15. If you faced this dilemma, what would you do, and why do you believe that would be the right response?
3. Imagine you're a preacher in Germany during the rise of Hitler. You see all kinds of horrific things happening, including millions of Jews, Gypsies, and Gays being hauled off to death camps. You have an opportunity to participate in a conspiracy to assassinate Hitler. But you know the Bible says, "Thou shalt not kill." Exodus 8:13. German Pastor and Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer actually faced this dilemma. Though he was a pacifist, he decided to participate in the conspiracy, which ultimately failed. He was arrested and executed. If you faced this same dilemma, what would you do and why you believe that would be the right response?
4. Life is full of challenging situations where we have to try to figure out the right thing to do. Many of us have faced that kind of challenge over our own sexual orientation or gender identity (or that of a friend or family member). On Sunday, Jeff described how, as a young adult, he had to try to sort through questions about his own sexual orientation without the benefit of more recent affirming Bible scholarship. For Jeff, the decisive factor was studying passages illustrating how Jesus made important moral decisions. For example, read Luke 13:10-17.
 - a. When Jesus saw the woman who had been crippled and bent over for 18 years, what do you think he thought and felt in his heart?
 - b. Jesus lived in a culture that was all about religious rule keeping. He knew that the Ten Commandments say, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work." Exodus 20:8. He also knew that healing on the Sabbath was work. What do you think ran through Jesus' mind when he saw the woman and evaluated his options?
 - c. The leader of the synagogue was someone who had been taught that Biblical rules are the most important authority in our lives and must be obeyed no matter what. In your own religious background, how were you taught to view Biblical rules?
 - d. When the leader of the synagogue expressed indignation at Jesus' rule-breaking behavior, Jesus didn't respond with a textual or contextual analysis of the Sabbath Command, nor did he cite any other Scripture passage in his defense. Instead he made a simple appeal to common sense compassion, using the analogy of a thirsty

ox on the Sabbath. How would you paraphrase Jesus response in verses 15-16? What's his point? What insight does this give us into how Jesus made moral decisions and the role of religious rules in those decisions?

5. Jeff cited many other Gospel passages where Jesus did the same thing as in Luke 13, i.e., departed from a Biblical rule on the basis of common sense compassion. Clearly, Jesus took a far more flexible approach to Biblical rules than many of us were taught. On page 3, you'll find Jeff's summary of Jesus' model for ethical decision making. Read through the model together, then discuss: What are your questions and thoughts about this model? What you like or dislike about it?
6. Many New Testament passages emphasize that Jesus came to liberate us from the Law, i.e., religion as rule keeping. For example, read Galatians 5:1-26, then discuss:
 - a. What does vs. 1 mean?
 - b. What do vss. 2-4 mean?
 - c. What does vs. 6 mean?
 - d. What does vs. 18 mean?
 - e. What do vss. 22-25 mean?
7. Jeff said, "If there were a rule in the Bible that forbade loving, committed same-gender relationships – and by the way, there is no such rule in the Bible – but if there were and if your heart, as led by the Holy Spirit, told you that loving, committed same-gender relationships are consistent with the highest spiritual values (love, kindness, etc.), then you would have a spiritual obligation to follow the Holy Spirit, not the rule – because that's what Jesus and the New Testament teach us to do."
 - a. Do you believe that loving, committed same-gender relationships can be consistent with the highest spiritual values (love, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, etc.)?
 - b. If there were a Biblical rule against same-gender relationships, would you feel at liberty to depart from that rule based on the passages we've studied tonight?
8. On Sunday, we heard a legendary story about Abraham Lincoln purchasing and freeing a young woman who was a slave. The Bible says Jesus purchased us from bondage to religious rules by his death on the cross. Do you feel you are living in the fullness of the spiritual freedom Jesus intended? Why or why not?

A Model For Ethical Decision Making Based On The Example and Teachings of Jesus

Example Gospel Passages:

Luke 13:10-17
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Matthew 5:27-42

Matthew 12:1-8

Matthew 12:9-13

Matthew 17:24-27

Matthew 19:1-12

Mark 3:1-5

Mark 7:14-19

Luke 6:6-

Luke 14:1-6

John 8:1-11

We are called to make moral decisions in the same way Jesus did:

1. In any given situation, we are called to do what the Holy Spirit leads us to do consistent with the highest spiritual values. (The highest spiritual values are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Galatians 5:22.)
2. For us, Biblical rules are advisory (and often helpful), but not binding.
3. Spiritual values matter more than religious rules.
4. Therefore, if we come across a rule which, if applied, would create a result contrary to the highest spiritual values, we have a sacred obligation to depart from the rule, just as Jesus did. This is what spiritual freedom looks like.