

Doing What Is Right

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I graduated from law school and passed the Bar in 1968 and, while practicing law during the day, began to study psychology at Catholic University in the evening. Everything was going well for me professionally, and I was in my second year at Catholic U when God made Himself known to me and, a week later, I knew that Yeshua was my savior.

One of the first things I did after meeting God was to study Scripture intensively with complete conviction that whatever it said was true. And it didn't take long for me to notice contradictions between what Scripture taught and how I was conducting myself in the practice of law. I was practicing ethically by the bar's standards, but I began to realize that Scripture called for a higher standard.

I'll give you a "for instance." A lawyer is expected to be a vigorous advocate for his client and do everything that is legal to promote his client's interest. Well, at that time, I was practicing mainly criminal law, and my clients' interests were, understandably, "beating the rap," if you get my meaning. Now in a criminal trial, the prosecutor puts witnesses on the stand to testify to what the witness knows that would lead the jury to conclude that the defendant is guilty as charged. Often, such witnesses are "eye witnesses" – that is – they testify that they saw the crime being committed, and the defendant committing the crime. This kind of testimony almost always leads to a conviction if the jury believes the witness, so I saw my job, as defense counsel, as cross-examining the witness in a manner that would make the jury believe that the witness was deaf, blind, stupid, lying, and probably a criminal himself, even though I knew none of those things were true. To me (and frankly to the bar also), that approach was entirely fair, and even expected, because the prosecutor was then given a second shot at examining the witness, the theory being that the witness' testimony could be rehabilitated, and the jury, now having seen the best of what both sides of the case could produce, would return a proper verdict.

Now the problem is that, while ethical according to legal standards, I was lying according to biblical standards because I was trying to discredit a credible witness, which is different than cross-examining to assure that the witness actually saw what he said he saw. Because of my new faith, I started to feel unclean, and soon concluded that a believer could not be a criminal lawyer and be right with God.

And I ran into similar difficulty with my studies of psychology. It was in my second year and I was studying a course in "projective techniques." You may have heard of the Rorschach Inkblot test where you show the client inkblots and they tell you what they see in them? Well, it seemed a little loony to me in the first place, but what really capped it off was that my professor was unbiblical in just about everything he thought and taught and, by his own admission, his own life was in shambles; yet, he was professing how to treat people whose lives were in similar disarray. And, with my new biblical understanding I said to myself what I was also concluding about law: "This can't be right, so it must be that a believer in God can't be a psychologist or a lawyer so, with all the

fervor and naiveté of a new believer, did what seemed right at the time – I disenrolled from Catholic U, and shut down my practice of law.

In the year following, I earned a living doing legal research, which took me off the firing line of having to conduct trials, and I also discovered biblical counseling – a therapy that uses the wisdom and power of Scripture to minister the same kind of healing that my professors of psychology were trying to bring about. And as time passed and I grew in spiritual maturity, contrary to what I thought when I quit the practice of law, I realized that it wasn't law that was the problem; it was the way I was conducting myself in it. And I came to understand that there was a very simple three-step solution to what earlier seemed like a hopeless contradiction between being an advocate and being biblical, and that solution was – are you ready for the secret? The secret solution was and is: (1) Determine what's right; (2) Do it; (3) Let God take care of the consequences.

Simple and straight-forward as it seems, even after I became a believer, the truth of it did not occur to me for a long time because my analytical nature was to always try to predict and manage the consequences of my actions. So even when there was a clearly right thing to do, I often didn't do it, and did something else instead, because I foresaw a negative consequence and sought to avoid it.

I didn't see it then, but I see now that this “secret” solution isn't a secret at all – it is merely applying 2 Corinthians 5:7 that says: “*We walk by faith. not by sight.*”

Now because this approach requires faith, it is very difficult for anyone who is unwilling to trust God with consequences. That is why God sometimes tests us by allowing us to be in situations where we are given choices that have consequences, and where there is only one right choice. We read, for example, in Exodus 15:25b-26, where God gives a commandment, tells Israel to do what is right, and then steps back to see what Israel will do:

There He made a statute and an ordinance for them. And there He tested them, and said, "If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you."

There are many occasions in Scripture where God instructs Israel to do what is right; sometimes Israel did what was right, and sometimes it didn't. Here are two such instructions, and an instance where God gave praise for doing what was right:

Deuteronomy 6:18

And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which the LORD swore to your fathers, ...

Deuteronomy 12:28

Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God.

2 Kings 10:30

And the LORD said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in doing what is right in My sight, and have done to the house of Ahab all that was in My heart, your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation."

One might ask: "If we know that God wants us to always do right, then why don't we?" The answer lies in our unwillingness to trust Him – to put ourselves in His hands. This lack of trust produces fear in us and causes us to try to protect ourselves by mulling over situations and making decisions according to what seems safest rather than according to what we know is right. And acting on fear rather than on faith is sin, for we read in 2 Timothy 1:7:

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

And in James 4:17 we read:

Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

I haven't yet told you what this realization finally led to in my own life. About a year after I quit the practice of law, I returned to it with a new ethos and determination to apply the three biblical steps: (1) Determine what's right; (2) Do it; (3) Let God take care of the consequences. When I took Criminal cases to trial I no longer cross-examined witnesses with the intent to discredit them; rather I probed their testimony to determine if it was credible, and to bring out areas where there might be doubt. If a witness testified that he clearly saw the face of my client 50 feet away in a dark alley, I probed whether his eyesight justified his certainty. If he normally wore glasses but didn't have them on at the time, I brought the fact out to the jury. If the witness was charged as a co-defendant in the crime, I probed whether he had been offered a plea bargain conditioned on his giving testimony against my client; that, of course, would have made the truth of his testimony suspect. If, in a background check, I found that the witness had previously been convicted of perjury, I brought out the history of his lying under oath. All that I considered fair. However, if after respectful cross-examination I uncovered nothing that reasonably to cast doubt on the witness' testimony, I carried it no further.

My clients often didn't appreciate it when I told them in advance about my biblical approach to cross-examination. Some sought another attorney, and some who could not (because I was court-appointed and they couldn't pay an attorney themselves) threatened to complain to the Bar. None ever did, and I resolved in my own mind to do what was right regardless of the possible danger to me and to my license to practice law.

I felt moved to speak to you on this subject today after I heard a sequence of news stories about national figures making decisions motivated by fear of consequences. One politician agonized over our supporting Israel against its Arab enemies because its enemies controlled much of our oil supply. Another story reported that a university was in the midst of deciding whether to allow sexual partners of all genders to share dormitory rooms; this arose because a depressed homosexual student committed suicide some months ago, and the university feared retaliation from the homosexual community. A third story told of how each year the United States vacillates over

sending money to a certain dictator head of state for fear that if we didn't, he might begin showing favor to Alkeida. There were others and, by the way, I just heard that the university did decide to open its dormitory rooms to roommates of mixed gender.

I found myself thinking: "What's wrong with these people?" They know what's right and wrong, so why don't they just do what's right and trust God to manage the consequences? The answer is, of course, obvious. They don't know God, they don't trust God, and they fear the consequences.

Those stories are national and international, but many of us have personal stories as well of times we wrestled with decisions even though we knew only one decision was the right one. There are many ways we can find ourselves in that place, and when we do, it is well to remember two Scriptures in particular; the first has already been mentioned:

2 Timothy 1:7

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Consider that God has not given us a spirit of fear and we allow ourselves to act out of fear, where shall we suppose the fear is coming from and whose interests are we serving? The other Scripture is:

Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Messiah who strengthens me.

Making decisions out of fear – that is, trying to figure out which course of action is safest rather than which is right is, in effect, trying to do things through our own strength rather than through God's strength, and that neither pleases God nor bodes well for a good result. Do you remember the men who Moses sent to spy out the land at God's direction? Moses instructed them:

Numbers 13:17a-20a

Then Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, "Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains, and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; whether the land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests there or not. Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land.

The men were to gather intelligence to assist Moses in formulating a plan for capturing the land which God promised to the Israelites. Moses was not trying to decide whether or not to capture the land, because God had already told him that victory would be his and he believed God. However, ten of the twelve spies did not trust God. They succumbed to fear, brought a bad and fearful report of Giants in the land, and tried to persuade Moses and the Israelites not to try taking possession of it – that it would be impossible. The Israelites who also did not trust God said:

If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness!

Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"

.... *Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.* (Numbers 14:2-4).

Joshua and Caleb who saw the same things in the land as their ten comrades, but they trusted God and said in response:

The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them. (Numbers 14:7b-9).

As you no doubt recall, God was not very happy with the men who brought the bad report and with the Israelites who did not trust God to keep His word and wanted to return to Egypt. It was the quintessential example of knowing what was right, but wanting to do what seemed safe.

How many of us are prone to the same thing? How many of us are willing to say, even in advance of a situation occurring, whatever temptation I am faced with, no matter how dangerous the circumstances, I will trust God by (1) Determining what's right; (2) Doing it; (3) Letting God take care of the consequences? If our answer is: "Sure I'm willing to trust God, but show me the situation before I make the commitment!" then we are walking on weak and dangerous ground insofar as our faith is concerned, and we need to repent.

I pray that this message will embed itself in each of our hearts and minds as a restatement of God's Commandments that on all occasions, we are to determine what's right, and to trust God by doing it, and letting God take care of the consequences!