

From the Shepherd's Heart

“So, whoever knows the right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”

James 4:17

A common topic is whether something is right or wrong. Such conversations hint that good and bad are difficult to dissimulate. The fact of the matter is that we know more about right and wrong than we practice. The difficulty comes about identifying “proper” and “improper” when we apply it to ourselves.

We want to make the determination of right and wrong a personal endeavor. We consider moral issues to be subjective and personal. If we desire to do something, we want it approved. If we are repelled from something, we want it stopped. Therefore, we can have opposing groups in the street waving placards and chanting slogans that conflict. Both groups agree at one point; they try to identify what is “right” and what is “wrong.” Most issues have an opposing view. The challenge is to select the view we affirm.

Our perspective on moral issues becomes personal. Not only do we critique issues, we criticize adherents too. A person can be “written off” because they support another athletic team or push for a change of policy in an organization we support. “Liberal” or “conservative” are terms applied to others that both terms can be considered positive or negative depending on our bent. In a democracy, a vote not only brings a decision, it usually brings a division, too.

Should moral decisions be so speculative? The answer is, “No.” A “moral” is a common expectation of a group or culture. Everyone ought to agree to value life. Everyone ought to respect others. Everyone ought to contribute to society. Everyone ought to be given a chance to succeed. Everyone ought to feel loved.

But, there is another way the Bible encourages moral decisions. The Bible encourages us to be consistent with our own awareness of what is “good.” Too many people don’t live up to their own standards. The way you know that occurs is they are hypocritical. They live differently in private to public. The crowd they associate with determines the language and activities in which they engage.

James 4:17 says, if you know to do good and don’t do it, it is wrong. That is a simple strategy. Don’t offend your conscience. When you know what to do, just do it!

If you don’t know what to do, let me give you a few common principles on identifying what is wrong by biblical standards:

1. Everything wrong begins by making a choice. We choose to do right or wrong.
2. Everything wrong becomes a habit. We soon don’t see any options except what we do.
3. Everything wrong becomes controlling. Bad actions tend to consume our lives. It seems life has no alternatives.
4. Everything wrong becomes destructive. Bad choices ultimately hurt someone.

Today, be intentionally smart in the choices you make. When God prompts you to do something good, just do it. Don’t let the past destroy today. Ask God to help you start over. He believes in second chances. When you commit your life to do what you know is right in God’s sight, your choices will become simple.

Bro. John