

# Right? Wrong?

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Luke writes in Acts 17:6 that the Thessalonians considered the first-century apostles to "have turned the world upside down." This back-handed compliment means that they had "stirred up," "excited" or "troubled" everyone who had heard the gospel of God's Kingdom. No one could be neutral on the subject; people were either zealously for it or vehemently against it.

As the years wind down toward the twenty-first century, the world is again being turned upside down, but this time for the worse. In early America, issues were black and white, right and wrong, good and evil. Gray areas were rare, and most people considered middle-of-the-road positions and compromises as indicative of weakness and indecision. People valued strong leadership and commitment to ideals and high standards.

How times have changed! America's recent Presidents have campaigned—and won—on centrist platforms for fear of alienating one "extreme" or another. The electorate votes for such moderates because they are "safe" and "can bring the two sides together to form a consensus." What they get is the status quo with a drift toward gridlock and degeneration everywhere!

In such an age of compromise, the blurring of right and wrong is a certainty. Moral and ethical matters, resolved by consensus, sink toward the level of the lowest common belief in the community, self-interest. Leaders "fix" social problems by commissioning inconclusive, scientific studies and boxcars of money rather than by applying common-sense solutions, particularly personal and communal responsibility. Political disputes get "hammered out" by compromise in smoke-filled back rooms. Even religious questions, whether moral, societal or organizational, bow to majority opinion and mores. Black becomes gray, and white becomes gray.

Isaiah cries out in Isaiah 5:20:

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

A curse falls on those who water down standards and substitute individual preferences and ethical compromises for absolutes, leading to moral relativism and societal upset. What will happen to such people?

Therefore, as the fire devours the stubble, and the flame consumes the chaff, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom will ascend like dust; because they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore the anger of the Lord is aroused against His people; He has stretched out His hand against them and stricken them, and the hills trembled. Their carcasses were as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still. (Verses 24-25)

Unfortunately, this scenario awaits this nation, as the following examples in medicine, politics and religion show.

## Medical Mendacity

As far as we know, the crisis of AIDS has been with us since 1981, although blood samples from as early as 1959 show evidence of the HIV virus. Approximately 6.4 million have died from AIDS already, and since 30 million people are HIV-positive, another 13 million are expected to die by the year 2000. Although the disease can be spread by other means, the primary vehicle for the contagion is sexual contact.

Before AIDS, sexually transmissible diseases (STDs) like gonorrhea, syphilis, herpes and chlamydia—politely called "social" or venereal diseases—raged around the world for centuries. Like AIDS, these are primarily spread by sexual contact, usually of an illicit nature. Today, the Centers for Disease Control reports, 87 percent of all reportable disease is sexually transmitted!

This means, of course, that 87 percent of all disease is preventable—by keeping the seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14), which includes all forms of sexual immorality. Mankind could eliminate nearly nine-tenths of all disease by changing sexual behavior to conform to the standard of God's law! Imagine the health, joy and peace this would cause!

What a breakthrough, right? Wrong! The medical establishment worldwide—except for a few "radical" countries, most of which are Moslem—utterly rejects behavioral changes in favor of the politically correct "safe sex" procedures. Dr. Ed Payne, a faculty member at the Medical College of Georgia, calls the medical community's attitude of rejection of moral values "deliberate naiveté" (*World*, November 1, 1997, p. 5). Like children, they believe that if they just shut their eyes to the underlying cause of the problem, it really does not exist.

Dr. Payne writes:

The crisis of American medicine is not tobacco, AIDS, silicone, the Gulf War Syndrome, breast or any other form of cancer. . . . The crisis of American medicine is far greater than any one of these problems; indeed, it is far greater than all of them combined, because the answers to these problems do not come from within them, but from medical ethics. It is the same crisis that faces our culture in every other area: How do we decide ethics? That is, how do we decide what is right and what is wrong? (ibid.)

Once, the Hippocratic Oath set the standard for the medical profession. Notwithstanding its references to pagan deities, the oath prohibits abortion and euthanasia along with its dictum, "First, do no harm." Today, this historic oath is routinely considered to be outdated, and doctors feel free to pick and choose which of its tenets they will follow.

In its absence, the medical profession respects no consistent standard of ethics. Thus, when confronted with an ethical dilemma, a doctor has three choices:

1. He can pursue his own course out of personal belief—each man for himself.
2. He can take the side of the majority of health professionals—majority rule.
3. He can find a pluralistic middle ground to please both sides—compromise.

The basic idea of right and wrong rarely arises.

What is the result? In the case of STDs, the medical establishment actually promotes promiscuity and immorality. Rather than "weigh in" on pre-marital sex, it provides sex education, condoms and birth-control pills to adolescents. To the majority of "health professionals," homosexuality is not wrong, but unsafe homosexual sex is "at-risk behavior." The risk is not that God will punish for sin but that a person might get a fatal disease.

Wrong becomes right, and if it is so right, their actions say, we should do more of it!

### **Political Poppycock**

It has become axiomatic that American politics is corrupt. Elected leaders from dog catcher to President have used their positions to influence decisions, get rich and stifle the competition. This is hardly new, but recent political corruption has taken a new twist that should be highly alarming. This twist is the claim that illegal actions are not wrong, just indictable.

The present White House, including the President, Vice President and First Lady, have all made this claim during recent scandals. President Clinton says that requesting political contributions on federal property may be contrary to the 1883 law prohibiting it, but since other Presidents have done it, he has really done nothing wrong. It is just the way things are done and have always been done. Al Gore made a similar statement in defense of his taking large, second-party contributions from Buddhist nuns during a campaign fund-raiser. It is not wrong to take such donations of foreign money, he claims, though it may be against campaign fund-raising rules. Hillary Clinton also played this game during the White House Travel Office scandal a few years ago. Without an indictment, she considered herself guilty of no wrongdoing.

They could make these claims all day, but they would not be taken seriously unless others in political leadership gave them credence. As the many investigations, inquiries, hearings, independent counsels and special prosecutors indicate, official Washington has not fought this trend. Political commentators, such as *Washington Post* editor Meg Greenfield, are beginning to take note of it:

Everything is illegal; but nothing is wrong. In fact, there is no wrong. To great numbers of people the very concept appears to sound antiquated, simplistic, even repressive. There is only being indictable or subject to fines or penalties under law, raps you can beat as distinct from the kind with moral force that you cannot beat no matter what the jury says about the relevance of some obscure section of the law. . . . The silence from all our leaders on this subject—the moral rights and wrongs of what has been going on—has been total and chilling. . . . Right? Wrong? What's that? (*Washington Post*, September 29, 1997)

What makes this especially revealing is that these elected leaders *have little or no concept of right and wrong*. They are not merely proclaiming their innocence; they sincerely have no basis for determining right from wrong! Having rejected traditional, biblical moral standards, many of our leaders have no stable moral code to fall back on. They handle each situation based on its own merits, historical precedent and their own experiences, feelings, desires and needs.

Hosea 4 speaks of such a situation:

Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel, for the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: "There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed after bloodshed. . . . My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children." (verses 1-2, 6)

Seeing the examples of the "leadership" in the highest offices of the land, the general populace has begun to embrace a similar moral ambiguity. Polling data shows Clinton and Gore suffered very little in terms of popularity and approval during and after recent scandals. This indicates that Americans basically agree with their leaders' actions. This "trickle-down" morality is having and will continue to have a disastrous effect on American society.

### **Religious Retreat**

To its credit, the Catholic Church has—up to this point—held firm in its stand against homosexuality, including gays in the clergy. Elsewhere it is still staunchly conservative in this area, but not in America. U.S. Catholic bishops, more liberal than the Vatican in nearly every respect, have broken ranks with Rome in a pastoral letter released on September 30.

The document, titled "Always Our Children," advises parents of homosexual children to put love and support for their sons and daughters *before* church doctrine. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops writes that sexual orientation is not freely chosen, so parents should not repudiate their gay offspring in a society full of rejection and discrimination because such rejection could lead to substance abuse or suicide.

The letter states that the bishops recognize that multiple factors account for homosexual orientation. Homosexuality is "generally . . . experienced as a given, not as something freely chosen. By itself, therefore, a homosexual orientation cannot be considered sinful, for morality presumes the freedom to choose."

The bishops make a distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual activity. While urging acceptance of those with homosexual orientation, they insist that sexual intercourse be limited to marriage between a man and a woman. The letter stresses that friendship as "a way of loving," and friendship "outside of genital sexual involvement" should be an integral part of a gay's life.

The bishops also advise priests to "welcome homosexual persons into the faith community," "seek those on the margins," and "avoid stereotyping and condemnations." Finally, they write, "do not presume that all homosexual persons are sexually active."

The letter also supports the role of gays in the church, saying that "homosexual persons have a right to an active role in the community." Chaste homosexuals, they say, should be considered for leadership positions in the church. As one commentator writes, is this "a 'don't ask, don't tell policy' for the army of God?" (*NetRadio*, "News Editorial Feature," October 1, 1997).

It is pure hypocrisy. It is playing both sides of the issue. It is moral compromise at its lowest ebb. Most of all, it completely ignores God's Word on the subject. The Bible never makes a convenient distinction between "homosexual orientation" and "homosexual activity"; it simply calls homosexuality "an abomination" (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13), "perverted" (Deuteronomy 23:17; Judges 19:22), "uncleanness" (Romans 1:24), "against nature" (verse 26) and "shameful" (verse 27). Paul tells Timothy that the judgment of the law applies to sinners, among them sodomites (I Timothy 1:8-10). No one who remains in this condition "will inherit the kingdom of God" (I Corinthians 6:9-10).

Religions have gone into full retreat on doctrines that condemn politically correct practices, and they cloak it in compassion and tolerance. What used to be soundly rejected as perverted and unspeakable evil is now routinely accepted, even encouraged, by "concerned Christians." This fulfills Romans 1:28-32 where Paul says that once the world rejects God's revelation, the people fall into unrighteousness and approve those who practice such sins.

### **A Fixed Standard**

The world's sliding scale of ethics and morality provides a fitting non-foundation for a society enamored with limitless personal freedoms without the corresponding personal responsibility. It is perfect for people who want to feel good about themselves no matter how they live. It makes "sense" to those who see no ultimate purpose for their lives.

But for us, it is a slippery slope to the second death. Through His law, God has provided us a fixed standard, a pattern of approved behavior that is valid and profitable for anyone in any place at any time. We have a God who does not change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), and since His Word is based on His very character, it does not change either. This is the factor that allows us to have unshakable faith in Almighty God and His purpose for us.

And we need such an unshakable faith during these last days. Paul warns us in II Timothy 3:1 that our time would be "perilous" to us because of our belief in the truth of God. The apostle then lists specific attitudes (verses 2-5), many of which apply to these three examples of traditional ethics and morality being turned upside-down. Though the world continues to increase its store of knowledge, the people and their leaders are

always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further [*their successes will be short-lived*, Revised English Bible], for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was. (Verses 7-9)

One day, hopefully soon, the folly of man's misguided immorality will be revealed by the coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Then, "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14), and the problems will truly begin to be solved.