

What Determines Right?

The question, “what determines right,” is very, very important. People who are honest and sincere want to **know** what is right, and they intend to **do** what is right. This desire to both know and do what is right reflects the existence of that “*noble and good heart,*” Luke 8:15, which is so essential to obeying and serving God. But before we can know what is right, we must first of all have a correct understanding of that which determines right.

The Question Viewed Negatively:

1. Right is not determined by human reasoning. Scripture plainly states that “*the world by wisdom knew not God,*” I Cor. 1:21. Note what God said through the prophet Isaiah: “*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts,*” Isaiah 55:8-9. One of the worst times in Israelite history occurred during the period of the Judges, a time when “*everyone did what was right in his own eyes,*” Judges 17:6, and this resulted in chaos, confusion, conflict, immorality, and national apostasy. They followed human reason, and human reason failed them miserably!

2. Right is not determined by the conscience. Well-meaning people often advise others to “just follow your conscience,” but it is not the function of the conscience to determine what is right. To the contrary, based upon one’s own understanding of right versus wrong, the conscience sits in judgment on his action, “*bearing witness,*” thereby “*excusing..or accusing them,*” Rom. 2:15. Jesus told His disciples that “*the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service,*” John 16:2. Even today, some believe they are serving Allah when they deliberately take the lives of both Jews and Christians, or when they strap bombs on their own bodies and blow themselves up in a crowded public arena. They do this in all good conscience! Saul of Tarsus, prior to his conversion, persecuted “*saints,*” shutting some up in prison, cast his vote against them when they were “*put to death,*” and “*punished them often in every synagogue,*” Acts 26:10-11. However, notwithstanding the inherent wicked nature of his conduct, Saul nonetheless “*lived in all good conscience before God..*” Acts 23:1. His conscience was “*good,*” yet his conduct was evil! Right is not determined by one’s conscience.

3. Right is not determined by custom or tradition. In Leviticus 18:30 God warned the Israelites of the “*abominable customs*” which “*were committed*” by the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. Sadly, in today’s world, it is the “*custom*” of many to deliberately conceive children out of wedlock with the view in mind of letting the Government pay for both their own living expenses and that of the children conceived. Jesus plainly said to some scribes and Pharisees that you have “*made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition,*” Matt. 15:6. Custom or tradition does not determine right!

4. Right is not determined by the majority. God said to Israel, “*You shall not*

follow a crowd to do evil,” Ex. 23:2. Regarding the “*way which leads to life,*” Jesus plainly said, “*there are few who find it,*” whereas with reference to the “*the way that leads to destruction,*” He said “*there are many who go in by it,*” Matt. 7:13-14. We ask, where were the multitudes when Noah was building the ark? Genesis 6. We ask, what were the multitude doing while Moses in the mount receiving the law from God? Exodus 32.

5. Right is not determined by our relatives. Yes, children must “*honor*” their parents, Eph. 6:2; husbands must “*love*” their wives, Eph. 5:25; wives are commanded to “*love*” their husbands and to “*love their children,*” Tit. 2:4, and family members in general should love and respect one another. However, as it relates to a person taking his stand for truth, Jesus said “*a man’s enemies will be those of his own household,*” Matt. 10:36. History cites many, many examples of children who were disowned by their own parents for obeying the gospel of Christ, and of others becoming outcasts from their own families for the same reason.

6. Right is not determined by churches! Some churches today condone same-sex marriages, unscriptural divorces, immoral conduct in general, and every conceivable form of doctrinal error. Regardless of the issue, whether doctrinal or moral, one can find churches on opposite sides — some churches condemning what other churches condone, and some churches openly engaged in practices which other churches strongly condemn.

7. Right is not determined by the creeds, doctrines, catechisms, and manuals of modern day Catholicism and Denominationalism. They contradict each other, and often times they are self-contradictory. Separate creeds, advocating conflicting doctrines, cannot both be right!

Only The Word of God Determines What is Right!

The Bible contains the mind of God revealed to humanity. God’s “*understanding is infinite,*” Psalm 147:5. God’s “*thoughts*” and God’s “*ways*” are as much above our ways and thoughts as “*the heavens are higher than the earth,*” Isaiah 55:8-9. God “*cannot lie,*” Titus 1:2; hence, God’s “*word is truth,*” John 17:17.

The word of God was “*given by inspiration, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work,*” 2 Tim. 3:16-17. God’s word, rightly obeyed, will purify the soul, I Peter 1:22. By it, we shall be judged in that last day, John 12:48.

God’s word partakes of the nature of God Himself, and God is infinitely “*holy,*” Isaiah 6:1-3. In contrast to lifeless idols which can neither hear or reply, God declares “*the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand,*” Isaiah 46:10. Jesus said “*heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away,*” Matt. 24:35. Peter worded it this way: “*All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its*

flower falls away, But the word of the Lord endures forever,” I Peter 1:24-25.

Yes, the word of God determines what is right. But it has to be carefully studied and “*rightly*” divided, 2 Tim. 2:15. It can be understood, Eph. 3:4; 5:17, and correctly applied in our own hearts and lives.

Dear reader, we pass this way but once. It is “*appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,*” Heb. 9:27. The things “*done in the body*” will determine how we will fare in that great day, 2 Cor. 5:10. That being the case, we must “get it right” in this life, for after this life there will be no second chance! So let us build our house upon the firm foundation of the word of God, seeking a “*thus saith the Lord*” for every doctrine believed and every practice engaged in. Only by so doing can we be assured of a home in that beautiful place called heaven!

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