

Looking Before We Leap

Sometimes one of the hardest parts about being a Christian is knowing where to "draw the line." Nearly everyday, we have to make decisions about how to act in certain situations. Now believe me, people can see how close we "draw the line."

This "line" is the one between evil and righteousness. The Bible was never meant to have instructions regarding every possible situation a Christian may confront. Instead, God gave us the perfect book of principles to live a righteous life. People in the world want to pervert this fact into a license to commit any sin not specifically mentioned in the Bible. They are hiding behind the veil of "it did not say not to."

Men have created many vices. Solomon said, "*Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions*" (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Some of these "*inventions*" are obviously wicked, but some just get glossed over by the world. Most people consider them "okay" as long as we use our constitutional freedom of choice to do them. But this attitude is wrong. Paul taught to "*abstain from all appearance of evil*" (1 Thessalonians 5:22). This means keeping absolutely away from them, not just stepping around their boundaries.

Think about how these things have penetrated society and encourage the faithful child of God to indulge: abortion, adultery, alcohol, bribery, carnality, dancing, divorce, drug abuse, gambling, immodest apparel, impure speech, movies, pornography, television, tobacco, and smoking. The world endorses most of these as long as it "does not hurt anyone!" Is that any way for a faithful child of God to act or think?

"Drawing the line" has always been tough, and I have never considered myself as a perfect example. We must always take care and be consistent! For instance, let's say that I use some pretty rough language. I may not curse outright, but I do say some things that are pretty close. Am I keeping my distance from that sin? What about gambling? I would never dream of being seen in public at a betting track but I would slip in a few lottery tickets now and then. Or how about the movies? What if I want to see the newest hit of the summer, even if it has an "R" rating. Do you see how simple it can start? I know of many brethren who have decided that it is acceptable to do these very questionable activities.

How does the world react to our decisions? The first fact to realize is that the world does notice. People recognize when we do things that we should not.

People can see the inconsistencies in the behavior of Christians. They can tell if we "*abstain from all appearance of evil.*" I have had people in the world say that I cannot do what they are doing because I am a Christian.

In 1 Peter 2:21-24, the Bible says, "*For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.*" We are called for a purpose. That purpose is being a righteous, holy, and blameless child of God.

When it comes right down to abstaining from evil, our actions define our heart. If we are really dedicated to God, then we will not have to worry about using "borderline language" or seeing which movie we can watch without it being "too filthy." If we are truly devoted to God, then keeping away from sinful things should be pretty easy. I know that temptation can really bear down on us. But growing stronger in God's word and wanting to do His will can help calm that temptation. It proves the point in Proverbs 23:7 that as a man "*thinketh in his heart, so is he.*"

Long ago, David asked in Psalm 11:3, "*If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?*" There are several points that will help Christians and the church abstain from evil.

First, Christians can avoid the danger of conformity. Jesus said, "*If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*" The Christian exists in the world but must not be of the world. Safety prevails as long as the ship is in the water, but if the water gets into the ship, watch out! The same principle applies with reference to the Christian and the world. Jesus taught us that we are the "*salt of the earth*" (Matthew 5:13-16). That means that we are influences for good. We give the world the flavor of a Christian life. But if our lives become tainted with sin and questionable actions, then the "*salt*" has lost its ability to make a difference.

Second, The Christian can maintain their purity. Peter tells us that we are a "*chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*" (1 Peter 2:9). How easy of a time do you think we would have proclaiming God's praises to someone who saw us

walking out of a lewd, trashy movie or who only minutes before, heard us using wicked, unmentionable language?

Third, Christians should take a firm stand against all evil. Everyone should know your stand against liquor, pornography, fornication, cursing, dirty jokes, smoking, and every other form of vice. This posture should be reflected from every possible avenue, but perhaps most importantly, from the personal lives of Christians. James 1:27 says that *"pure and undefiled religion"* includes keeping *"himself unspotted by the world."*

Fourth, Christians can continue to preach and teach the gospel through every avenue available and convert people to Christ. In the final analysis, this is the only remedy for the immorality and wickedness in the world. It is so easy for us to give up and consider it a hopeless task, but it is not. The gospel is still the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). The church at Corinth was composed of people who formerly had led very immoral lives. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Paul said, *"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."*

I know that I am not perfect, and I have never pretended to be. But God wants people who strive to be the kind of examples that will teach the world about Jesus Christ. If we "look before we leap", a lot of times we can know what will look righteous to the world and what will not. As citizens of God's kingdom, we have the obligation to do what is right (1 John 2:29). Being an example and an influence are the two biggest jobs you will ever have. With faith and courage, we can be good examples and we can go forth as a mighty army of God to do battle against the host of wickedness realizing that through Jesus Christ our Lord we shall ultimately be victorious.

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