

Might or Right?

1 John 5: 1-5

Philosophical questions are sometimes fun to ponder. There are a few classic questions that might come to mind. If a tree came crashing down in the forest and no one was there to hear it, did it still make a noise? How do we know for sure that the light in the refrigerator turns off when the door is closed? Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

Does might make right, or does right make might? Do those with the biggest armies, the best weapons, the loudest voices or the most votes get to decide what is good and right for all? How we answer that question will depend on the context. When it comes to raising kids perhaps might does make right, since parents and grandparents are older, wiser and for a time bigger than their children. Their rule is often like the rule of the ancient god of Nike. *Just do it*, whether you want to or not or face the consequences. However, what if the child was punished for tipping over the potted plant when it was really something the dog did? Did might make right?

At the other extreme, was it right for Adolph Hitler to decide that killing millions of Jews, Catholics and handicapped people was acceptable because he had the support of many of his countrymen and an army large enough to carry that atrocity out? The answer most certainly is no. It took a global war and too many gallons of spilled blood to count, but what was inherently good and right prevailed over what was clearly evil and wrong. On a related note, can or should a powerful country like the United States force weaker countries that oppress their citizens to allow them freedom, equality, and basic human rights? Is it even possible to compel nations or people to do what is right? Not only that, how do we determine what is right, and what is wrong?

To answer such questions, we will need to begin with the start of creation and a fundamental Biblical truth found in Deuteronomy 10:14. The universes and galaxies and everything in between belong to God, from the smallest atom to the largest mass. All life, human and otherwise originates with and belongs to God, and much like the proverbial owner of the ball on the playground the owner sets the rules of the game. Not only does God own the ball, God owns the playground.

God is the ultimate authority over right and wrong. The truth is that God loves right so much and hates wrong so much that gave us His written word, the Scriptures and then sent His living Word, His Son Jesus into the world to show and teach us the difference between the two. God's desire is for us to make right choices that please Him, rather than wrong choices that please us. In simple terms, doing right means loving God and loving others as we would want to be loved and doing wrong means loving something or someone more than we love God's Living and written word. That would include loving ourselves more than we love God and loving the world more than we love each other. Doing wrong is driven by selfishness, and there is no greater sin on earth. Nothing can be more displeasing to God. We know from Ezekiel and Isaiah that Lucifer was guilty of it and God tossed him out of heaven, which resulted in evil and sin entering the world as we know it.

Even so, **the desire to do right or wrong comes from within the human heart**, not by exterior influence, systems, or circumstances. That might sound strange, because we often think of our heart only as the organ that circulates blood through our body. It is the most important muscle in the human body, beating 60-100 times per minute and continuously pumping a gallon of blood throughout our veins and arteries. It is truly an amazing organ, and one more clue that a divine designer and creator was involved in making it. And as some of us know all too well, when it doesn't work as designed, major problems are the result.

The heart muscle does many things, but what it can't do is reason, remember or make judgments. Though we tend to think of those things as a function of another organ we call the human brain, the Scriptures say something different. Proverbs 27:19. In the Biblical sense, the heart is not an organ that pumps blood but a holistic reflection of our inner person, revealing our thoughts, our intentions, our feelings, our motives, and decisions that govern our day to day lives. And much like the heart muscle, when it doesn't work as God designed it to major problems result. Mark 7: 21-23.

Psalm 51 reminds us that we are born with a broken heart, a heart that doesn't work as God intended. In Ephesians, Paul states that we are by nature children of wrath. The desire to do right or wrong comes from within the human heart, not by exterior influence, systems, or circumstances. In fact, society's greatest wrongs- war, crime, poverty, and racism- all have roots in the common sin of selfishness, the sin of not loving God's Word. They are graphic reminders that we live in a fallen world.

War is a prime example. Wars are fought because humans fail to abide by God's revelation of right and wrong. That does not imply that all war is wrong. There are times when holy justice demands that battles be fought, times when we may not sit on the sidelines because innocent lives are at risk. Even so, war will only end, and peace will only come when people love God and love one another like God loves us. Peace will come when hearts are changed and selfishness ends.

Likewise with crime. Crime is the direct result of humanity failing to understand and abide by God's revelation of right and wrong. Crime is much like war, a battle between right and wrong, but on a smaller and more personal scale. Crime as we know it will cease to exist when people love God and love one another like God loves us. Crime will end when hearts are changed and selfishness ends.

Poverty is also a result of a fundamental misunderstanding of right and wrong. It is right for society to care for those who are truly unable to provide for themselves. That is a genuine reflection of love. On the flip side, it is wrong to care for those who can care for themselves. It is also wrong to take from those who have to give to those who have not. That is not charity but stealing. Poverty as we know it will cease to exist when people love God and love one another like God loves us. Poverty will not end until hearts are changed and selfishness ends.

Racism and bigotry are the ultimate expressions of selfish people choosing to do wrong. The reason it is so wrong is that all of humanity is created and seen as equal by God. Equality is a basic Biblical concept. Biologically speaking, we are all children of God, descendants of the same parents. In fact, the DNA of any two human beings is said to be 99.9 % percent identical. Charles Darwin and those that hold to his secular theory of evolution might disagree, but Biblically speaking there is only one race, the human race. Racism and bigotry are of the world, human constructs that do not come from broken or flawed systems but from broken and flawed hearts. They are powerful weapons used for one primary purpose, and that is for one group of people to gain political power over another. They are another reminder that the hearts of many in the world are not working as God designed. Racism and bigotry will not end until hearts are changed and selfishness ends.

The social ills of the world won't be fixed unless we address the heart of the problem, pardon the pun. The question is how are hearts changed? To go back to the question I posed earlier, does might make right? Is it truly possible to require or even force people to do what God has revealed to be good and right? Maybe, but history has shown that it hasn't worked yet. Even the hearts of God's original chosen, the Israelites were not changed. **Might doesn't change hearts, but the love of Jesus does.** God sent His Son Jesus to earth so that hearts might be changed, and we might choose to do what is right. Love God, love each other and love God's word.

To put it in context with today's Scripture reading, that is how we will overcome the world and the problems of the world. Apart from faith and belief in Christ, people will never know what is truly right and what is wrong. If we allow our understanding of right and wrong to be swayed by popular opinion rather than God's revelation through His Word, we are not overcomers and conquerors of the world but instead conquered and overcome by the world, those who care not to know the truth. It is safe to say that is the wrong place to be.

By design it is Christ's church, followers of Jesus that will ultimately help society choose to overcome wrong and do right. If we are to be successful, we will need to get our own hearts in order and become a unified body of diverse believers (not diverse beliefs) with a single purpose: to make the love of God, more specifically the love of Jesus our own, so that hearts might be changed, and His commandments might be kept. John reminds us **that keeping them is the ultimate expression of our love.** How are hearts changed? When we love like Jesus and keep His commandments. Problems solved! Amen