



The Good News

November 3rd, 2019

Volume 19, Issue 43

Scripture or Opinion?

By Michael McCleary

It is often easy to look at the religious world around us and observe the many people who claim “religion” yet act contrary to the claim. However, something that is not so easy is looking within the church of Christ, even our own congregation, and making sure that we are all conducting ourselves in a pure manner. Far too often, however, brethren do not meet the standards that other brethren set, and, instead of going to the brother or sister in question, they are gossiped about in other circles. We want to consider the Bible and ask two (2) combined questions: Is the problem I have with my brother/sister/congregation a matter of Scripture or opinion, and what should I do about it?

If I find a brother or sister is doing something that the Bible clearly defines as sin, I am to go tell them. **Matt. 7:5 and 18:15-17** gives us a four-step process in dealing with perceived sin: **Step 1)** First examine my own life, make sure I can see and judge clearly before going to... **Step 2)** Go to the person individually, **Step 3)** If they will not listen, take two or three with me, **Step 4)** If they still will not heed, take it to the church. If the person ignores all three of these efforts, they are to be as “*a heathen and a tax collector*”, which means to be “withdrawn from”. But what if the situation is not clearly sin? There are circumstances that are sometimes difficult to diagnose. Perhaps we question the attitude of a brother or sister, or we question a decision or practice they are involved in. **If we cannot be certain** that sin has been committed, we **cannot go** beyond step one or two of the above process. We certainly can, and should, express concern to our brother or sister, and we can express to them that the situation they are involved in may be questionable or appears like sin. We can lovingly and humbly bring up cursory observations that may speak to a heart or attitude issue. But if we do not have a clear enough understanding of the situation to make a judgment regarding sin, we must then let it be. We cannot judge motives or hearts; we can only judge according to truth as the Lord commands in **John 7:24**.

What if the situation may be sin in my opinion, but might not necessarily be so in reality? One of the difficult truths we must accept is that just because I observe something in another brother or sister that “feels wrong” or offends my conscience does not make it sin. The definition of an opinion is “*a belief stronger than impression and less*

strong than positive knowledge”. **Rom. 14** commands the stronger brethren not to eat meat that they may not cause a weaker brother to stumble, however it was to be equally understood among the weaker brethren that the **meats were clean**, and their consciences were going to have to get used to it eventually. What if one of these weaker brethren found out that one of the stronger brethren ate a pork chop for dinner when he was alone? This weaker brother **could not claim** that the stronger brother was in sin, even though it may have offended his conscience. It’s fine to have opinions, and it is absolutely fine for those opinions to differ with others’. But when I begin to force those opinions on others, I become an enforcer of my own standards, not the standards of God. Each individual will be judged by their actions according to the standard of God, regardless of the standard that we hold to others or that others hold to us. Therefore, if I have the opinion (meaning I lack “**positive knowledge**”, i.e. lacking authority by Scripture) that a brother or sister is sinning, I must make sure I do not try to force my opinion on them. I can, and should, sit down with them to study the issue, but beyond this, I must allow my brother or sister to make their own judgment regarding their soul and God’s Word. One example of this is the issue of wearing or not wearing the veil “*when praying and prophesying*” of I Cor. 11. Another is judging whether a brother or sister is “dressed up” enough when they attend worship services. There are countless examples where brethren have tried to bind their own opinions on others as if it were a matter of sin.

Perhaps forgotten in all of this is the attitude which we are to have towards each other. Yes, love is certainly the abiding characteristic, but love implies trust. I certainly must love my brother enough to tell him when he is in sin. I certainly must love my sister enough to pay attention to her spiritual needs, and make sure that there is not something lacking in her efforts to please God. But at some point, I must trust my brethren to be striving for perfection just as much as I, because we must all work out (that is, to bring about, put forth the effort for) our own salvation. Therefore, let us seek to worship God in spirit and in truth. Let us be perceptive enough to see if a brother or sister is struggling spiritually and offer help. Let us bring to the attention of our brother or sister that which is truly sin, doing it out of love and concern, examining ourselves first as the Lord commands. And let us strive to leave the enforcing of opinions where they should be left – my own life and not others.