

Doing What's Right in Your Own Eyes

Gratefully adopted & adapted from: Don't Do Your Own Thing! by C. Philip Green @ SermonCentral.Com

There is an old story about a captain on a ship, who looked into the dark night and saw faint lights in the distance directly in their path. Immediately he told his signalman to send a message: "*Alter your course 10 degrees south.*" Promptly a return message was received: "*Alter your course 10 degrees north.*"

Angry that his command had been ignored. The captain sends a second message: "*Alter your course 10 degrees south – I am the captain!*" Soon another message was received: "*I am seaman third class Jones -- Alter your course 10 degrees north.*"

Immediately the captain sent a third message, knowing the fear it would evoke: "*Alter your course 10 degrees south – I am a battleship.*" The reply came back: "*Alter your course 10 degrees north – I am a lighthouse.*" (Paul Aiello, Jr., Leadership, Vol. 4, no. 2; www.PreachingToday.com)

In these dark and morally foggy times, many people want to be the captain of their own lives. They refuse to submit to any authority, which can only lead to certain disaster. I truly believe this is the root cause of the chaos we see around us today.

Six years ago (August 2015), Barna research conducted a poll, which highlights what they call our "**new moral code**" here in the United States. They presented a series of statements asking whether people agreed "completely," "somewhat," or "not at all." Here are the responses they received:

- "*The best way to find yourself is to look within yourself*"—91 percent of U.S. adults agreed; 76 percent of practicing Christians agreed.
- "*People should not criticize someone else's lifestyle choices*"—89 percent agreed; 76 percent of Christians agreed.
- "*To be fulfilled in life, you should pursue the things you desire most*"—86 percent agreed; 72 percent of Christians agreed.
- "*People can believe whatever they want, as long as those beliefs don't affect society*"—79 percent agreed; 61 percent of Christians agreed.
- "*Any kind of sexual expression between two consenting adults is acceptable*"—69 percent agreed; 40 percent of Christians agreed.

These results led David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons to conclude in a book they wrote the following year that

"the morality of self-fulfillment is everywhere, like the air we breathe. Much of the time we don't even notice that we are constantly bombarded with messages which reinforce self-fulfillment – in music, movies, video games, apps, commercials, TV shows, and every other kind of media." (David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, Good Faith, Baker Books, 2016, pages 55-57; www.PreachingToday.com)

A selfish, self-centered lifestyle is "*the air we breathe*" these days. Everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes, including a lot of believers. As a result, our culture is crashing on the rocks of relativism.

So how do you live in such a culture?

How do you navigate in these dark and morally foggy times?

How do you move forward without crashing into those rocks, yourself?

God gave humanity three institutions for guiding and developing the moral character of society: the HOME, the RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY, and the GOVERNMENT.

Watching the shipwreck of the nation of Israel in all three of these areas as depicted in the final chapters of the book of Judges – *when all the people did what was right in their own eyes* (17:6) – can at least give us some clues in how to steer away from a similar disaster ...that is, if we are willing to change our course.

Judges, chapter 17, opens with the story of a man named Micah and his mother living in a typical Israeli home during the period of the Judges. Micah whose name ironically means, "Who is like YHWH" (the personal name by which God identified Himself to Moses), having stolen a very large sum of money from Mom, hears her placing a curse on the unknown thief. So Micah confesses and returns the money, not out of the fear of God but of his mother's curse. Mom then blesses her son in the name of YHWH, thus removing the curse, and then solemnly dedicates the entire sum to YHWH but later uses just a small portion of it to craft a silver idol for her household.

Apparently also very religious, Micah builds a shrine for the idol, originally appointing one of his sons to be the family priest; dressing him in all the appropriate priestly garments and religious jewelry. But when he later meets a wandering Levite looking for work, Micah hires him for the job, concluding that God will surely bless him because now he has a genuine Levite serving as his priest.

Thus, Micah and his mother managed to break most all of the Ten Commandments without even leaving their home. The amazing part is that they not only did not feel any guilt for their actions, they actually invoked God's name several times thinking that what they were doing would be blessed by God! But that's what happens when everyone does what is right in their own eyes.

After a well-known preacher and his family moved to a small town in Missouri, his two sons found what seemed to be a stray black dog with a few white streaks on its tail. The boys asked if they could keep the dog and Dad agreed.

A few days later a family came knocking on the preacher's front door looking for their lost black dog with white streaks on its tail. Overhearing the conversation that their dad was having with the new neighbors, the two boys used shoe polish to color the white streaks on the dog's tail black. They then carried the dog to the front door to show its rightful owner that "their" dog did not possess any white streaks. The preacher asked the neighbors, "How could this be your dog, for our dog doesn't have any white streaks on its tail?" The preacher lied to cover for his sons; while they kept the dog, the Preacher later lost his boys.

The names of these two boys were Frank and Jesse James, two of the most notorious gang members in American history.

Jesse James: Facts, information, and articles about Jesse James, confederate soldier and famous outlaw from the Wild West," <http://www.historynet.com/jesse-james>

That's what happens when there is no spiritual authority in the home and everyone does what is right in their own eyes.

So what can we do in times like these?

1st of all... we need to SUBMIT TO GOD'S AUTHORITY IN OUR HOME.

We need to yield to God's lead, starting with our own family.

Years ago, Barbara Bush rightly said, "*Your success as a family, our success as a society, depends not on what happens in the White House, but on what happens in your house*" (Susan Page, "Barbara Bush never sent her final letter to her children. Here's what she wanted to say," USA Today, May 10, 2019).

Ronald Reagan said it this way: *If we fail to instruct our children in justice, religion, and liberty, we will be condemning them to a world without virtue, a life in the twilight of a civilization where the great truths have been forgotten*" (Ronald Reagan quoted in the Washington Post, August 24, 1984, p. A7).

Reagan warned us 37 years ago! Now, we're seeing the results of two generations raised without the moral absolutes of God's Word. Joshua declared for all Israel to hear, *as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord* (Josh 24:15), and at least for all those generations who remembered Joshua, the nation followed his lead.

Do you want to see order restored to the moral chaos in our society? Then begin at home with your own family. Submit to God's authority in your own household.

Submission to God is never easy, especially in the home, but that's where you must begin to bring order out of the chaos in your own personal world. Our survival as a society depends on our children learning both faith and morality from their parents. The children may still rebel against what they know to be right, but how can they even know what is right if such is never taught and modeled at home.

I know for most of us hearing this message, it may feel like being asked to close the barn door long after the cows have gotten out... but perhaps we can still share this warning message with our children and our children's children and try to persuade them that it is absolutely essential for the moral health of their families that they submit to God's authority first in their own homes. **Then 2nd... we and they must SUBMIT TO GOD'S AUTHORITY IN HIS HOUSEHOLD. We must follow God's lead as His people in the family of believers, in the church.**

When Israel's spiritual leaders failed to point people to God, Israel spiraled out of control as a nation. While only the descendants from the family of Aaron were ordained as priests, the entire tribe of Levi had been charged with leading in worship and teaching the people the Word of God. That this Levite who had left his home in Bethlehem, in Judah, looking for any kind of work indicates that Israel was no longer honoring God's command to support such Levitical teaching in their communities. So, he just couldn't pass up Micah's offer of a regular salary, the necessary uniform, a place to stay, and all his meals just for pretending to be a priest?

Micah thinks he can manipulate God, because he's hired a "real priest," but this pretend priest now lives under Micah's control. Do you think he is going to condemn Micah for his idolatry at the expense of losing his job?

That was the spiritual state of Israel back then, and that is the spiritual state of many today. They think they can manipulate God and they hire so-called "preachers" who are not teaching God's word at all. They are hirelings, who only say what people want to hear.

The Apostle Paul warned that *"the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth"* (2 Timothy 4:3-4 ESV).

Friends, we live in those times today. When our nation needs a prophetic voice from the pulpits of America, preachers are afraid to speak the truth for fear of losing their jobs.

Dr. Rosaria Butterfield, a former tenured professor at the University of Syracuse, was a committed and comfortable lesbian until she had what she described as a “train-wreck conversion” to Christ. At one point in her life, she wrote, *“I found peace and purpose in my life as a lesbian and the queer community I helped to create.”* Today she is married to Pastor Kent Butterfield and mother of four adopted children and numerous foster children.

After her conversion, Dr. Butterfield describes talking with one of the college’s female counselors who wanted her to soften her publicly outspoken stance on homosexual practice. She said, *“Rosaria, I want you to change your message...tell people that it is only in your opinion that homosexual practice is a sin.”*

Dr. Butterfield responded that she was *“not smart enough to have this opinion, but that this is the position the inspired and inerrant Word of God upholds.”* (Rosaria Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ*, Crown and Covenant Publications, 2015, [www. PreachingToday.com](http://www.PreachingToday.com))

Sad to say, but many pastors have softened their message about this and many other moral issues. They’re afraid to speak the unchanging truth of God’s inerrant Word, and so they have lost the prophetic voice that our country so desperately needs.

Certainly, we must speak the truth IN LOVE, but speak the truth we must! We must submit to the authority of God’s word even when it’s unpopular. For the Good News of God’s desire to both forgive and recreate in us a new life is a powerful force for restoration and good in our world if we don’t water it down.

Nowhere, do we see the power of the Gospel more clearly these days than at the site of George Floyd’s death. Since May, 2020, several Gospel based ministries – **Youth With a Mission; Circuit Riders**, a California-based missions movement; and **Worldwide Outreach for Christ**, a local church – have held daily services there.

One 19-year-old, who was hopeless, overdosed on drugs, and left without a pulse, the next day found a purpose to his life at that service. He later felt God’s call for him to be an evangelist and signed up to go to Bible school in order to share the message that radically changed his life. Many others have been baptized.

Christophe Ulysse, 37, a YWAM leader, told Fox News they are seeing real change. *“We’re going from pain and hatred to healing and hope... I came here and I was broken,”* Ulysse explained. *“But those of us of color, as we’re here, we’re watching the change happen through the gospel. My heart is so filled with hope.”*

Ulysse says, *“For us, there is this deep conviction that we have tried everything to deal with this issue. We’ve tried politics, we’ve tried economics, and we’ve tried social reform. It’s the same thing over and over,”* he says, but *“we have to go back to what actually works” – and that’s the Gospel of Jesus Christ.* (Caleb Parke, “Ministries hold daily services at site of George Floyd’s death: ‘From hatred to healing and hope,’” Fox News, June 9, 2020)

You see, Jesus’ death on the cross not only reconciled us to God, it also broke down the barriers between races in order to reconcile us to each other.

Ephesians 2 says, *“[Jesus] is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups [Jew & Gentile] into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.* (Ephesians 2:14-16).

The cross kills the hostility between races and brings us together! That's another part of the message the church must proclaim loudly and boldly today to a world in desperate need of such grace and unity of spirit.

In times like these, it's absolutely essential that we first submit to God's authority in our homes. After that, we must submit to God's authority in our churches, God's household. And also we must **SUBMIT TO GOD'S AUTHORITY IN OUR COMMUNITY.** That is the only way we can again yield to God's lead in the nation as a whole.

Israel failed to do that, and it led to anarchy in the nation. Which is what, the continuation of Micah's story in Judges, chapter 18, is all about.

The tribe of Dan being unable to settle in the land God gave them in the southern part of Israel, sent five spies north to find a more suitable piece of land. On their way north, the spies stop at Micah's house to ask of his "priest" a blessing for their task – which of course he gave them in God's name.

In the far north, they find a quiet, peaceful and prosperous city with no defenses, the city of Laish. The spies return with their report and 600 soldiers from Dan move out to take the city. On their way north, the army then steals Micah's "priest" along with his idol. Claiming both the priest and the idol now as their own, the soldiers threaten Micah's life when he tries to stop them. Micah sadly returns home.

Arriving at Laish, the Dannite army slaughters all the residents and burns down the city (Judges 18:27). Then they rebuild the town, naming it Dan, and installing Micah's fake priest along with his stolen idol as their religious guide. In another ironic twist, it turns out that the "priest" they stole from Micah – whose name "Jonathan" means "YHWH's gift" – was actually a grandson of Moses himself (vs.30). Jonathan and his descendants then continue to lead the Dannites thereafter in an idolatrous religion, *until the time the land went into captivity* (18:30)

Sounds a lot like what's happening in our country right now.

Why?

As the book of Judges tells us: "In those days, there was no king in Israel" (18:1).

There was no national authority, so everyone did their own thing, which led to anarchy in the country.

What we see going on around us, with our cities on fire and a deeply divided nation – philosophically, politically, and morally – is the result of two generations (at least) rejecting God's authority. We've kicked God out of our schools, our courts, and our public discourse. As Ronald Reagan also said, "***If we ever forget that we are One Nation Under God, then we will be a nation gone under.***"

Today, we are watching our nation going under unless we invite God back into our public discourse. We need to submit to His authority again as a nation. Appropriate authority is not a bad thing; it's a good thing, especially when it's God's authority. It allows us to flourish, rather than flounder on the rocks of moral relativism.

So, what can we do now in these dark and foggy times?

It's simple, but it will not be easy; swimming against the current never is. We must first submit to God's authority in our homes, then in the household of God, then in the community at large. Follow God's lead for your life. Don't just resign yourself to what's going on around you.

Elizabeth Elliot said,

- *“Resignation lies down quietly in an empty universe. Acceptance rises up to meet the God who fills that universe with purpose and destiny.*
- *Resignation says, ‘I can’t,’ but God says, ‘I can.’*
- *Resignation says, ‘It’s all over for me.’ Acceptance asks, ‘Now that I’m here, Lord, what’s next?’*
- *Resignation says, ‘What a waste.’ Acceptance says, ‘In what redemptive way can you use this mess, Lord?’”* (Jill Briscoe, “In the Father’s Arms,” Preaching Today, Tape No. 141; www.PreachingToday.com)

If we would be a part of God’s plan to redeem a broken world, it must begin with **ourselves**, our **homes**, and our **churches**; only then will we be able to change our **communities** and our **nation**. Christians have done so several times before in western history, so with God’s help we can do it again.

Let’s pray about this.