

How Do We Know Which Way Is Right?

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Yogi Berra, the Hall of Fame Yankees catcher and manager, is well known for his funny sayings known as Yogiisms. You've heard some of these even if you didn't know it was Yogi Berra that coined them. Probably his most famous is "It's like déjà vu all over again." Another one that is pertinent to our question was, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." The story goes that he was giving directions to his house, and regardless of which direction the person took at the fork in the road, it would eventually lead to his house. Therefore, it didn't matter which way he went—he just needed to take the fork.

People try to say the same thing is true with the way to heaven. You might have heard people say, "All roads lead to heaven; we're just taking different routes." Billy Graham said it this way: "Join the church of your choice and glorify God" (*My Answer*, Dec. 15, 1955). He also said, "Whenever anyone points a critical finger and demands to know why there have to be so many different churches all serving the same God, I am always tempted to point out how many different styles of hats have to be designed for both American men and women. We all belong to the same human race, but we all have enough physical differences to make it impossible for us to wear the same style of hat with equal satisfaction" (*Peace With God*, p. 193).

Many have believed that churches and the various doctrines promoted by them are a matter of personal preference and that God doesn't care that there are differences. In fact, God is glorified even amongst the many denominations! But the more spiritually astute will understand that the disparate doctrines can't all be correct; somebody has to be wrong. And so the question one should ask is, "In trying to understand God's will, how do you know who's right and who's wrong?"

One of the great Bible verses comes to my mind when this question is asked. "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death*" (Prov. 14:12). If we leave it up to our own thinking, then we naturally end up with statements like the Billy Graham quote. It's all subjective at that point. What you like and want may be different from what I like and want. Who's right? At that point, no one. Truth, however, is not subjective; it's objective. That is, there is a standard which must be abided by, and that standard is the inspired word of God.

One of the many reasons various churches exist is because people are more interested in what sounds good to them rather than diligently trying to discover what the Bible actually says. They judge what is taught or what they read through their own human standards rather than submitting to a higher standard. The same logic that says the standard for right and wrong is the God that defines morals should also say that the standard for what churches teach and preach is the God that designed the church and gave himself for it. And yet, when it comes to the latter subject, the relativism that is not ok for morality and whether or not God even exists is all of a sudden acceptable for church doctrine. It just doesn't make sense. Either God is the standard for both or he's not the standard for either!

Another form of this human standard is evident in the way Thomas Jefferson approached the Bible. He acknowledged belief in God and devotion to the teaching of Jesus Christ. However, he disagreed with the Gospel writers on some matters. He rejected specific passages because he felt they were “contrary to reason.” In other words, he felt his way was best. He felt he knew better. So you know what he did? He created his own personalized Bible! The Smithsonian website says he took a penknife and cut up copies of the New Testament and pasted them together to fashion a Bible that he liked! People today may not literally do what Thomas Jefferson did, but many mentally create their own version of the Bible, taking things out that they don’t like or rewriting it to fit their own views.

Before we get too arrogant wagging our self-righteous finger at all those people who say anything goes in religion, remember that we can just as easily be guilty of committing the same mistake but in a slightly different way. If we judge theological matters by what the “church of Christ” teaches, we’re approaching it the wrong way. If we judge whether something is right or wrong by what our traditions are or “the way it’s always been done” or “the way I was always taught”, then we’re appealing to human wisdom and thinking. Scripture is the standard, and if our views, traditions, or doctrine violates scripture, then we must change if we expect to be pleasing to God, no matter what anybody else is doing or how we’ve always done it.

“Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4).