

Using The Proper Standard

Franklin Church of Christ
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October 26, 2003
AM Worship

Introduction:

One of the great debates of our day is regards standards. We live in a pluralistic society in which everyone wants to do what is right in his own eyes. No one is allowed to say whether or not they are wrong. The oft repeated question is, "Who are we to determine what is right or wrong for someone else?" This mindset has found its way into modern churches. In fact, the simple presence of so many churches teaching contradictory doctrines demonstrates the problem. Each denomination and each church wants to do what it wants to do and consistently asks of those who would question them, "Who are you to determine what is right or wrong for us?" Yet, in the midst of this hullabaloo I remember Paul's words in **Philippians 3:15**. We are to walk by the same rule. Therefore, despite the philosophy with which modern society, modern churches and even some modern Christians bombard us, we must discover the standard. However, we must recognize that, the question is not about *what* is the standard? Rather, our question is *Who* is the standard?

Discussion:

- I. God is our standard.
 - A. When God provided the Law for the Israelite people, His most repeated reason for why the people ought to obey Him was, "I am the Lord your God" (**Leviticus 18:1; et al**). His overriding standard was, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (**Leviticus 19:1; et al**). In the New Covenant, Peter repeats this for in **I Peter 1:15-16**. God is the standard for every aspect of our lives, whether personally or congregationally. Note three reasons why God is the standard.
 1. *He is the creator of all things.* **Genesis 1:1** begins with the most powerful statement of God's right to be our standard. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." **Hebrews 3:4** taught that God built all things. He is master over this "house," the universe. He is also master over His house, the church (**I Timothy 3:15**).
 2. *He is the giver of all things.* **James 2:17** said that every good and perfect gift comes from God. In **Ecclesiastes 12:7**, the Preacher claimed that when we die our spirit will go back to God. Why? Because He gave it to us. When it has left our bodies we go back to Him—He is our judge. Regarding the church, He is the giver of the sacrifice which has bought us and put us into His church (**John 3:16; I Peter 1:18-19**).
 3. *He is the owner of all things.* Why do you think Jesus used stewards as examples (e.g. **Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 12:42-48**)? God has given us charge over all these gifts of His. But He is still the owner. Even in **Ecclesiastes 12:7**, the Preacher demonstrated this point when he said that our spirit goes back to God who gave it. It has been completely under our control. But our spirit is still God's and in the end must give account to Him for how we have used His gifts. Regarding the church, remember whose house it is—His (**I Timothy 3:15**).
 - B. God has the right to be the standard. He has the right to tell us what to do and make demands of us. Our understandings, our desires, our thoughts are insignificant in comparison to God (**Isaiah 55:8-9**). No wonder James told us we should be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger (**James 1:19-25**). God is the standard and when we speak against Him or get angry with Him, we will not be righteous—no matter what our pluralistic world says.
- II. How has God communicated His will to us?
 - A. God is our standard. But where does that leave us? We cannot see God. We do not know how to get to God's visible presence. How are we supposed to know His standard? Paul explains this in **I Corinthians 2:6-12**. Just as we cannot know in one another's minds unless we tell each other, we cannot know God's mind unless He tells us. Paul explained that is what He did.
 - B. In **Hebrews 1:1-4**, the Hebrew writer explained that God has revealed Himself to us through His Son, who is the express image of the Father. We can know the Father by knowing Jesus. Thus Jesus answered His disciples, in **John 14:5-11**, that we can only get to the Father through Him and if we have seen Him we have seen the Father. However, we, unlike the apostles, have never actually seen or spoken face to face with Jesus. We are those of whom Jesus said to Thomas in **John 20:29** are blessed who do not see but believe. But, how can we, who have not seen, believe? Jesus explained that in His prayer in **John 17:20-21**. We must believe through

the apostle's word. While not everyone would see Jesus, He was leaving behind witnesses that would testify of Him (**Acts 1:7-8**).

- C. However, these men were fallible. How would they know and remember all that Jesus wanted them to testify. The Holy Spirit would work with and through them (**John 14:25-26; Acts 1:7-8**). That began in **Acts 2:1-3**.
- D. But that was the apostles, what about us? God never promised to grant the power of the Holy Spirit to all Christians as He did to the apostles. In fact, there has never been a time when all Christians learned by miraculous revelation. We read earlier from **I Corinthians 2:6-12** about the Spirit revealing the mind of God. Interestingly, when he told the Corinthians how to live in **I Corinthians 4:6**, he told them not to think beyond what was written. In **I Corinthians 14:37**, he explained that those who were spiritual would recognize what he wrote as the command of God. In **Ephesians 3:3-5**, Paul said that God revealed the truth miraculously to apostles and prophets. They then wrote God's will down. All others could read and understand. In fact, Paul commanded us to understand (**Ephesians 5:17**).
- E. How can we in the 21st century see the Father? How can we know Him and His standard? By knowing, believing and following the testimony of the witnesses Jesus left behind endowed with power of the Holy Spirit. Paul described it succinctly to Timothy in **II Timothy 3:16-17**. The scriptures provide us with all we need to know God, our standard.

III. Do not fall prey to false standards.

- A. *False Standard #1: Personal Feelings*—Whether you wish to refer to this as conscience, preconceived notions or simply emotions, our personal feelings are not the proper standard. **Proverbs 14:12** said that the way that seems right to man ends in death.
- B. *False Standard #2: Personal Experiences*—**Matthew 7:21-23** described people with strong experiences. They would not even allow Jesus to argue with their experiences. But Jesus told them to depart because He had *never* known them. These were not once faithful children who had performed great works but had fallen. Jesus said that He never knew them. His reasoning had nothing to do with experiences. The problem was they did not obey His standard.
- C. *False Standard #3: Parents*—We are certainly to obey and honor our parents. However, God does not want us to follow our parents to hell. Too many people blindly follow after their parents' faith without ever testing it with the proper standard of God's word. Your parents may well be or have been on the straight and narrow path of life. But you can only know that by going to the proper standard. Peter explained that if what we are following is simply a family tradition, it is not the proper standard, it is aimless conduct (**I Peter 1:18-19, 22-25**).
- D. *False Standard #4: The Majority*—The crowd is so easy to follow. If everyone is doing it, it must be alright. But, in fact, Jesus explained that we will be walking on a pretty deserted road. The majority will take the broad easy path, while we must take the narrow and difficult path (**Matthew 7:13-14**). The standard is not the crowd. It is God's word.
- E. *False Standard #5: Religious Leaders*—Whether we think of preachers, priests, elders, teachers, bishops, popes or conventions, men are men and are fallible. They are not our proper standard. Consider Simon the Sorcerer who seemed to demonstrate great miraculous powers such that many in Samaria followed him as the "great power of God" (**Acts 8:9-11**). But he was a trickster who also needed the truth of God. Consider Apollos who was an eloquent speaker, mighty in the word, knew the way of the Lord but knew only the baptism of John (**Acts 18:24-26**). Consider the men who came from Judea teaching that Gentiles had to be circumcised in order to be saved (**Acts 15:1**). These men came from the oldest most established church in Jerusalem (*cf.* **Acts 15:24**). Yet they taught error. Men can be wrong. The issue is not about whether they are honest or dishonest. The issue is whether or not they teach God's word accurately. God's word is the standard, not religious leaders.

Conclusion:

Our modern society cries out against having a standard. But God said, "Be holy as I am holy." God is our standard. We can know God's mind and will for He has told us through His Son, and we have seen and can read His Son's message through the word He left for us through His Spirit and His witnesses. The Bible is our proper standard. Are you using it?