

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION
Psalms: Living By Faith In God
XXXII. Holding To A Good Conscience
(Psalm 32:1-11)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

In today's world, it can be hard to know what is right on debatable moral issues, and how closely to apply it:

(1) The Supreme Court recently ruled that "Joe Kennedy, the Bremerton, Washington high school football coach" had his "constitutional rights" violated when "his school district" removed him from his job "for praying ostentatiously on the field after games." (Chris Powell, "Football prayers are a spectacle," Republican-American, July 6, 2022, p. 7A) However, "old news reports about the coach's practice quoted him as admitting that with his praying he sought to set an example for the players to help improve their lives. If that was his purpose," wrote reputable columnist Chris Powell, "his praying wasn't really private and individual at all but government-sponsored prayer in a public-school setting, which has been deemed unconstitutional since a Supreme Court decision in 1962," Ibid.

So, if a respected columnist like Chris Powell thinks a school official's practice of public prayer violates the Constitution, how do we know whether we should be involved in such a practice, and how closely should we apply it?

(2) After *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, "Paul Waldman of The Washington Post wrote that it was time to 'declare our independence from the Founding Fathers,'" for "the 'America of 1789 becomes a prison the conservative justices (of the Supreme Court) can lock us all in whenever it suits them.'" (Ben Shapiro, "What are modern American values?," Ibid., July 7, 2022, p. 6A) Mr. Waldman's view arose from interpreting the Constitution the way Founding Father "Alexander Hamilton" led others to read it – "as being open-ended: If something isn't prohibited by the document, it is allowed – or as he and his Federalist friends might have put it, implied." (Bill O'Brien, "James Madison would support Dobbs decision," Ibid., July 5, 2022, p. 8A) Thus, "Justice Harry Blackmun in his majority opinion in *Roe v. Wade*" openly "conceded . . . that there were no constitutional words expressly conveying a right to abortion or even any suggestion of an original intent to convey such a right," so a "lack of an expressed instructional prohibition on abortion was claimed in *Roe* to permit the finding of a constitutional right to abortion." (Ibid.)

In sharp contrast to Hamilton, "the Father of the Constitution, James Madison, along with friends like Thomas Jefferson, viewed the Constitution as a limiting document: If something is not expressly stated in the Constitution, it is prohibited . . . Madison would have argued for textualism/originalism" that "first asks judges to apply the text – do what the words say. But it recognizes words can be unclear when applied to varying circumstances. In that event, the originalism part of the approach says to look beyond the words, but only to ask what was intended by those who chose – and those who ratified – those words. They can tell you what they meant." (Ibid.)

So, who is right on how to interpret the Constitution – Alexander Hamilton or James Madison? How do we know, and how closely must we apply the right view to interpret any work, be it the Constitution or even the Bible?

(3) We face such issues in evangelicalism: Tim Chaffey's article, "Life After the Flood" in the *Answers in Genesis* magazine, Answers, July-Sept., 2022, p. 61-65, imagined what it was like for Noah's family to leave the ark after the flood. The article told of an effort by Noah's sons to open the ark's door, and that Japheth became angry at Shem only to calm himself down. This account can influence an impressionable reader to conclude that Japheth was somewhat impulsive, but the Bible presents no such idea! We may then ask if it is right to focus on such fictional stories about Bible characters versus just heeding Scripture! How do we know, and how closely should we apply it?

Need: So, we ask, "**How do we know what is right on debatable moral issues, and how closely should we apply it?**"

- I. **In stating in Psalm 32:1-2 how blessed was the man whom God had forgiven, David explained that one could know he had sinned by the fact that he had violated a statute of the written Law of Moses:**
 - A. The Hebrew word that is translated "transgression" (KJV) in Psalm 32:1a is *pesha'*, and it means "(t)he breaking of the law." (Kittel, Biblia Hebraica, p. 1000; Zon. Pict. Ency. of the Bible, vol. Five, p. 797)
 - B. The "law" to which David referred was the *written* "Book of the [Mosaic] Law." (cf. Joshua 1:8 NIV, ESV)
 - C. In then stating that one was blessed whose violation of the written Book of the Mosaic Law had been forgiven, David affirmed that one could define his sins by written Scripture!
- II. **David added that another way he knew he had sinned was by God's convicting work, Psalm 32:3-5:**
 - A. When David had kept silent, not confessing his sin, he suffered great emotional discomfort, described as a wasting away of his "bones," the figurative seat of one's emotions (Jeremiah 20:9; 23:9), Psalm 32:3.
 - B. The cause of this emotional suffering was the Lord's spiritual conviction of sin in David's heart, Psalm 32:4.

C. When David confessed his sin and God forgave him, his suffering was replaced with joy, Psa. 32:5, 7, 10-11.

III. Based on this experience, David taught other believers how to handle their sin, Psalm 32:6-11:

- A. He urged all the godly who had sinned to pray to God confessing their sin when the Lord was still willing to forgive, for God must eventually punish even the sin of godly believers, Psalm 32:6a with 1 John 5:15-16.
- B. If a believer heeds this directive by David, the rising waters of God's punishment, a figurative allusion to the rising waters of God's Noahic Flood judgment, would not reach the believer, Psalm 32:6b.
- C. Indeed, God would become the believer's Source of Protection, his Hiding Place to protect him and surround him with songs of deliverance from divine punishment due to God's complete forgiveness, Psalm 32:7.
- D. David then urged his listeners not to be like a horse or mule that lacks intelligence and must be directed by the uncomfortable bit and bridle, but to heed God's convicting work and quickly confess their sins, Psalm 32:8-9.
- E. Believers must confess their sins to enjoy not only God's forgiveness, but also to experience the restoration of spiritual fellowship with Him that greatly edifies the inner man, Psalm 32:10-11.

Lesson: *David knew he had sinned by Scripture revelation and God's conviction in his heart, but as he confessed his sin to the Lord, God forgave him and restored David to fellowship with Him. Thus, David taught fellow believers to confess their sins quickly after committing them to escape God's punishment and be greatly blessed.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. (2) May we realize that (a) we can know what is right on even disputed moral issues by means of (i) Scripture, and (ii) God's conviction of sin in our hearts. (b) If we learn that we have sinned, may we quickly confess it to God for forgiveness to escape punishment and regain His fellowship.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

Scripture offers edifying direction on the issues of concern that we mentioned in our introduction (as follows):

(1) On whether ostentatious public prayer by a government official that some reputable people think violates the Constitution's prohibition of the government's establishment of religion, Jesus in Matthew 6:5-6 KJV taught that when we pray, we should not do what the hypocrites do who pray in public to be "seen of men." Rather, we should enter into our closet, shut the door, and pray to God in secret. He will then reward us openly. (Ibid., Powell) We must rather let the light of God's righteousness shine through our good works that others might glorify God, Matthew 5:16.

(2) On how we should interpret the Constitution or even the Bible, when Jesus was questioned on divorce in Matthew 19:3, He referred back to God's creation in Genesis 1-2 to establish that the first married couple God had created was "one flesh," not meant for divorce! Jesus thus used the textualism/originalism method of interpretation!

When the Pharisees in Matthew 19:7 KJV then asked Jesus why did Moses then "command" divorce, referring to Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Jesus ***again*** used the textualism/originalism method of interpretation: He explained that Moses **tolerated – not commanded** – divorce due to the spiritual hardness of Israel's people, but divorce was not the practice at the beginning of God's institution of marriage, Matthew 19:8. If we check the Deuteronomy 24:1-4 text, **contrary** to the **KJV** that places the apodosis (the "then" clause) in verse 1 to read, "then let him write her a bill of divorcement," what makes Moses command that a divorce occur, the text actually has the apodosis starting at the beginning of verse 4 to read, "then her former husband which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife." (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftm. to Deut. 24:1-4) Like Jesus said, Moses did ***not command*** that a divorce occur, but he restrained excessive abuses in divorce: Deuteronomy 24:1-4 actually teaches that if "a woman is divorced from her first husband and marries a second one who also divorces her or dies, then . . . her first husband cannot remarry her." (Ibid.) Jesus ***consistently*** used the textualism/originalism method of interpretation. In then following Jesus's example, when **we** interpret **any** written work, we must rely on what the text literally states, but if that does not clarify its meaning, we should check the cultural and historical contexts of the author(s) to discern what he (they) meant.

(3) On fictional accounts of Bible characters in the Answers article, Paul in 1 Timothy 1:4, 4:7, 2 Timothy 4:4, and Titus 1:14 along with Peter in 2 Peter 1:16 directed believers to avoid "fiction" or "fables," namely, "(m)ythical legends added to O. T. history which may have led to Gnostic teachings." (***muthos***, Abbott-Smith, A Man. Grk. Lex. of the N. T., 1968, p. 297; Ibid., Ryrie, ftm. to 1 Timothy 1:4) Godly edifying comes by use of the words of divinely inspired Scripture and **not** fictitious stories by mere men about Bible characters that can lead to unedifying error!

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. Then, may we discern what is right and wrong on disputed moral issues through Scripture and the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin. If we discern that we have sinned, may we quickly confess it to God for his forgiveness that we might escape His punishment and be restored to His edifying fellowship.