

CONSIDER YOUR WAYS!

Joe Slater

God's people will never know the rich blessings He desires to give them as long as they neglect to obey His word. That was true in the days of the prophet Haggai, and it remains true today.

It had been sixteen years since the Jews who returned from captivity had begun to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Once the foundation had been laid, the king of Persia had ordered a halt to the work, fearing a rebellion if Jerusalem became strong again (see Ezra chapter 4). No doubt the Jews were discouraged and intimidated. They turned their attention to growing crops, building their own homes, and other day-to-day concerns.

Now a new king ruled the Persian empire, yet God's people were still preoccupied with their own affairs. *"The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built,"* they said (Haggai 1:2). Isn't that typical? Yes, we ought to rebuild God's house, but this just isn't a good time! They had become accustomed to the status quo. It was a fine time to build their own houses, but not God's! (Haggai 1:3)

God challenged them twice in quick succession: *"Consider your ways!"* (1:5, 7) They were missing out on God's blessings because they were engrossed in their material matters.

Do you need to consider your ways? We aren't building a physical house, but a spiritual one, the church (1 Timothy 3:15). How often do you say, "Yes, I know I need to (call that person, make that visit, send that card, prepare that devotional . . .) but now just isn't a good time." But it's a great time to do six dozen other things for my personal pleasure and benefit.

Consider your ways!

The Wrong Question

A recent headline asked, "Does the death penalty deter rape?" I have no idea the answer; I doubt that anyone knows the answer. I will go even further and say that I have no interest in knowing the answer to the question. I have no interest in knowing, because it is the wrong question. The right question will always be, "Is the death penalty just for this crime?" To ask instead, "Will the death penalty deter this crime?" is to imply that we should do what works, and that the question of justice is secondary — if indeed it is to be considered at all.

That is a horrible attitude. I am sure that the death penalty, if it were carried out with regard to jaywalking, would be incredibly effective. But that does not make it just. When will we learn that a justice system is supposed to be about justice, not about what works?

Please, be alert. There are a lot of people asking the wrong questions on a lot of subjects. Don't answer wrong questions; instead point people to the right questions.

Capital punishment is not a pragmatic, "what will work," question. It is a justice question. In cases where it is just, capital punishment should be carried out, whether it deters or not. In cases where it is unjust, it should not be carried out, whether it would deter or not.

Gender is not a personal choice question ("Tom wants to be Tina, so he ought to be allowed to be"). Gender is a matter of fact, not of choice. Tom is what he is whether he likes it or not. That he might prefer to be something else (perhaps a dog, a cat, or an amoeba) is irrelevant. He is what he is, and those who really care about him will help him come to grips with reality. Some people wish that 2 plus 2 could equal 5, but wishes are irrelevant when dealing with matters of fact.

Worship is a matter of honoring God, not a matter of pleasing ourselves. Perhaps Bill, Sue, and Jim decided that they all think that they would enjoy worship more if we included a gold calf, or some other impressive idol. Perhaps they have even taken a survey and found that 99.9% of the unchurched agree with them. All of that is irrelevant. Worship is supposed to honor God, not to please us. It must be done according to God's instructions. If we really love God, we will learn to adjust our preferences to his commands. If we instead insist on modifying his standards to suit our preferences, we are worshipping ourselves, not God."

--Thayer Salisbury (Toledo, OH)

A Word Fitly Texted?

Most American families have cell phones and the accompanying service plans, including text messaging. Texting provides a convenient way to get a message to a person in a variety of situations where phone conversation is not practical. Last minute "to do" lists, quick information, phone numbers, etc., can be quickly and (mostly) quietly conveyed between those who need to communicate.

I am fully aware that there are inappropriate uses of text messages. "Sexting" (the sending of sexually-explicit words and/or pictures) has gotten many people (including a congressman awhile back) into big trouble. Cruel and demeaning (bullying) messages are out of place as well. We must not allow texting to be an avenue of sin or rudeness.

However, texting can be a vital link for you and those you hold dear as family and friends. It can provide you with opportunities to reinforce your emotional connection to those you love. An "I love you," sent at just the right time, can cheer and comfort a husband or wife separated from each other for any length of time. An "I know you can do it!" can encourage and motivate a child or friend to press on through a difficult test or task. A text saying "Great job!" can be a modern-day version of a pat on the back for someone tackling a difficult speaking assignment, role in a play, or athletic contest.

Not only will texting allow you to communicate your feelings immediately, but it will provide the receiver an opportunity to respond immediately. That positive message you send will likely be matched by a similar one, sent from a grateful heart.

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver" (Proverbs 25:11). Today that word "fitly spoken" can be texted as well. Try it! I think you'll like it.

--Lance Cordle (adapted) via *Old Paths*