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Gleanings

Using God's Principles Correctly



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If God created the universe, then we live as invited guests in his creation. If God is sovereign, it is reasonable to assume that he made all the rules of existence. Furthermore, if the creator of the universe is truly sovereign and benevolent, one would expect that he blesses obedience and does not bless disobedience. Therefore, it follows that the only path to enduring success in his creation is to follow his rules—in other words, his ways.

To follow the ways of God requires three steps: first, the discovery of his ways; second, the correct understanding of his ways; and third, the proper application of his ways.

God's ways are revealed in his creation and in the Bible. The former is commonly called "general revelation" and the latter "special revelation."

Understanding God's ways requires spiritual discernment (1 Corinthians 2:14), which theologians refer to as *illumination*. Illumination means that God, through his Spirit, reveals to his creatures the existence, correct meaning, and proper application of his ways. The fact that God reveals, at least in part, his ways to all—even those in rebellion against him—is known as *common grace*.

An example of common grace can be seen in the Tower of Babel story recorded in Genesis 11. The sponsors of this venture embarked on a self-defined, self-initiated project to glorify themselves. They experienced a level of success because they discovered, understood, and applied some of God's ways. For example, they were strategic and well led, worked as a team, used the right technology, found the right location, and were unified in their purpose. Since they had no written Scripture, we know that all these traits reflect wisdom about the ways of God gleaned from the illumination of general revelation. But the project was never completed because their application of God's ways was flawed. They had wrong motives; they sought to glorify themselves instead of God. Therefore God judged them by confusing their communication.

The Tower of Babel illustrates how people can discover, understand, and apply some of God's ways and, in the short-term, be successful. But in the end, what is not aligned with God ways ultimately fails. This story illustrates that God expects his ways to be discovered, correctly understood, and properly applied. Failure on any of these points will lead to judgment.

This past month, we saw a modern-day example of the failure to understand and apply God's ways. For the first time, a president of the United States publicly supported homosexual marriage. His rationale was based, in part, on the Golden Rule, which is one of the ways of God.

The Golden Rule is to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). The assumption of many, including the president, is that love uncritically accepts all worldviews. This is a pluralistic view of the meaning of love, which is not consistent with Scripture.

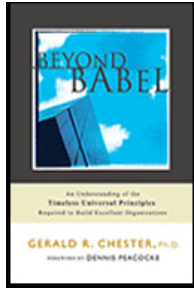
The Greek word translated *love* in English is *agapao* (ag-ap-ah'-o). This word means to sacrificially do what is in the best interest of another person. For example, John 3:16 uses the word *agapao* to express God's relationship with his creation. The text reads: "For God so *loved* the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (NIV). The sense is that God's love for his creation was so deep that he was willing to sacrifice something very precious—his own Son—to bring his creation into alignment with himself. Therefore the correct understanding of the Golden Rule is to seek to bring others in alignment with the ways of God, no matter what it costs you.

If you are truly a Christian, then you want people to express their love for you by helping you align with the ways of God. You want this because you know that the genuineness of your faith is marked by living consistently with your faith. For example, some of the salient marks of genuine believers in Christ are



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love—sacrificial living (1 John 3:10), obedience (1 John 2:3), and increasing holiness (1 John 5:18). These traits don't make you a Christian, but they are evidence that you are a Christian.

To truly obey the Golden Rule means to align with the ways of God *not* the ways of man.

Scripture teaches that there is only one correct worldview, that is, the worldview based on Christ—a biblical worldview. The biblical worldview of marriage is unambiguous; there is no biblical basis for homosexual marriage.

Today, it is politically correct to accommodate all worldviews. The president's desire to accommodate the homosexual community by supporting homosexual marriage based on an incorrect understanding of the Golden Rule is not consistent with the ways of God.

So it appears that the president has discovered the Golden Rule but he does not understand it and, therefore, does not know how to apply it. If he truly understood the Golden Rule, he would apply it differently. He would recognize that homosexual marriage is not in accordance with God's ways and true love for the homosexual community is to encourage them to repent from seeking to live according to their ways and instead to seek to live according to God's ways.

The President's error is similar to the mistake made by the sponsors of the Tower of Babel project who discovered and understood some of God's ways but their application was flawed because of wrong motives. The president discovered the Golden Rule but did not understand it and, therefore, did not apply it properly. Hence, as with the Tower of Babel, one can expect that the president's view of homosexual marriage, if enacted into law, will eventually lead the United States to some form of divine judgment.

There are powerful lessons for all of us to learn from both the Tower of Babel and the president's flawed use of the Golden Rule.

First, we must be vigilant about discovering God's ways. In his universe, the only ways that will produce lasting blessings are his ways (see Psalm 1). The primary source for discovering his ways is Scripture (special revelation) and, secondarily, empirical knowledge of creation (general revelation).

Second, we must be vigilant about understanding God's ways. The apostle Paul told his spiritual son Timothy that properly understanding Scripture is necessary to understanding God's ways. Note his words:

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 [NIV]

Therefore, we must be thoughtful, thorough students of the Bible, which is the best source from which to both discover and understand God's ways.

And third, we must focus our attention on the proper application of the ways of God. Jesus made this clear when he was tempted by Satan and stated that living in accordance with the Word of God (i.e., the ways of God) was more important than even physical food. As an exclamation point, Jesus said this when he was at the end of a forty-day fast (see Matthew 4:4).

If you want to live based on a biblical worldview, then you must be in the ongoing process of discovering, properly understanding, and correctly applying the ways of God in your life. Failure to live accordingly means that you are subject to the error demonstrated in the Tower of Babel project and illustrated by the president. May the Lord give us all grace to discover his ways, properly understand his ways, and correctly apply his ways. Then we will enjoy enduring blessings and success in God's creation.

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