

Determining Right and Wrong in a Changing Culture

I am a people watcher - I can't help it! In my travels I see all shapes, sizes, complexions and languages and what intrigues me most are the marked cultural differences among people groups of our world. I have noticed a marked difference in America and Germany. Yet I have also seen a difference in the United States and Canada or Texas and New York. I have also seen a cultural difference in someone reared in the Klein and Tomball school districts, both suburbs of Houston, within minutes of each other.

This is a beautiful time of the year and I was on my way home from some early morning activity and I wanted to treat my wife and myself to something warm and delicious on this certain morning. So I stopped at the nearest Starbucks and they were quite busy. So I stepped in line to order and just began looking at the people around me. As I stood there I came to the conviction that I am observing a cultural shift in our society. It is led for the most part, as many styles and changes are, by the youth. This youth cultural change is going from coast to coast and throughout the world. As I stood there I was checking out the barista. He was a fine young man with some noticeable oddities, at least to my generation. He had a wool cap pulled to his eyes. A tuft of hair beneath his lip. Then burgeoning out from his shirt was an incredible multi-colored tattoo that appeared to go further than my eye could (or wanted) to behold. What took me back the most were these large wooden earrings in the earlobe that were at least half the size of his ears. I understand that this process is done gradually by putting larger and larger pieces of round wood in the place of the smaller ones until you get these huge oversized earrings that are held by your unnaturally stretched skin of your earlobe. I then noticed the guy in front of me with portions of his hair one color and portions of his hair another color. We are not talking about highlights here, but a deliberate collage of confusion. As I stood there I could but help but ask myself, "Why?" I mean, who decided that body piercing of the eyebrow, lip and nose really look good? I cannot fathom it.

As I stood there I realized I was witnessing the values of a cultural paradigm right before my eyes. With all that is changing, it is appropriate to ask, when is something fashionable or trendish or when do we cross the line and become worldly, crass or carnal?

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is a methodology for theological reflection that is credited to John Wesley, a leader of the Methodist movement in the late 18th century. The term itself was coined by 20th century Albert C. Outler in his introduction to the 1964 collection *John Wesley*. Upon examination of Wesley's work, Outler theorized that Wesley used four different sources in coming to theological conclusions. The four sources are:

- (1) Scripture – the Holy Bible (Old and New Testaments)
- (2) Tradition – the two millennia history of the Christian Church
- (3) Reason – rational thinking and sensible interpretation
- (4) Experience – a Christian's personal and communal journey in Christ

Although we would not share all of John Wesley's theology, I appreciate this method of understanding our Christian worldview and how we come to the

beliefs we have. In this changing world around us, how do we determine what's right and what's wrong? We determine this by:

I. Scripture – the Holy Bible (Old and New Testaments)

This is our foundation. If tradition, reason or experience contrasts with the revealed Holy Scriptures, we go with the Bible. It has been said, "We speak where the Bible speaks and we are silent where the Bible is silent." It has also been said, "If you live with an open Bible, God talks to you; if you live with a closed Bible you don't hear from God."

The Bible says, "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*" (II Timothy 3:16). The Bible is our guide for life. Have you ever heard the saying, "When all else fails, read the instructions?" Why not do it now before the failings in life take place? Let us learn the Bible "doctrine" (what is right). Let us in humility receive the Bible "reproof" (what is not right). Then let us with openness accept "correction" (how to get right) and progress to "instruction," (how to stay right).

II. Tradition – the two millennia history of the Christian Church

Wesley was not only referring to the tradition as is archived in the writings of the church fathers, but for those things taught to us in our more recent tradition of Christian upbringing. If tradition violates the Scripture, we side with the Scripture. Martin Luther and other reformers saw clearly the violation that had become rampant in the church. These men were incensed and rightly so, with the heretical view of indulgences. This is when the papacy was embracing the delivering of souls from the unscriptural view of purgatory (an intermediate place which is neither hell or heaven) by purchasing their freedom into heaven with gifts to the church. There was a quip that became popular at this time, "When the coin of the coffer doth ring, a soul from purgatory doth spring." We reject this as contrary to the true faith. It has been said, "Tradition is the living faith of dead people. Traditionalism is the dead faith of living people." Let us hang on to good tradition but reject man's traditionalism. Here's the contrast, Jesus said, "...*Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?... But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*" (Matthew 15:3, 9).

Later Paul said, "*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us*" (II Thessalonians 3:6). We observe Paul is giving us the understanding that a good tradition is being set up that we should observe, which is Scriptural and godly. When we are baptized and take the Lord's Supper we are following the Bible commandment and tradition.

III. Reason – rational thinking and sensible interpretation

God says in His Word, "*Come now, and let us reason together...*" (Isaiah 1:18). There is a human reasoning we are to reject, the Bible says, "*Casting down imaginations...bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*"

(II Corinthians 10:5). The word for imaginations is the Greek word, “logismos,” from where we get the English word “logic.” We are to use a spirit-controlled logic in determining right from wrong. We reject the philosophy of the world’s thinking (Colossians 2:8) and cling to the God-given common sense our Creator has endowed us with.

IV. Experience – a Christian's personal and communal journey in Christ

This is where we evangelical, Bible-believing fundamentalists have the edge over our friends in other sectors of Christianity. We emphasize that Christianity doesn’t become real until we personally experience its truths in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. “*For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4:20). Again, if experience goes contrary to Scripture, we go with the Bible.

In this ever changing culture let me admonish you to filter your beliefs through this quadrilateral approach. In case you would like to know how I regard the modern craze for tattoos and piercings, please view my blog entitled: [Taboo on Tattoos](#), on our church website: christchurchbaptist.org.

-Pastor Pope-