



You Be the Judge of This

Are You Sure You Know What Is Happening?

Have you ever had to stand before a judge in a court of law? I once got a ticket for not properly stopping at a red light before making a right turn. It was one of the intersections that had traffic cameras monitoring for infractions. I felt like I had been unfairly issued a ticket, so I protested the ticket in court. As I stood in front of the judge, the court stenographer and a hundred other people who were there for various legal issues, I dreaded having to announce my occupation as pastor. Yet miraculously, the judge never asked. He simply viewed the replay captured by the red light camera and then after staring at it for a gut wrenching minute, he made a judgement. I was found not guilty of the violation because he could not tell in the video if it was really me driving or not. I stood there in stunned silence, knowing full well I was the driver, but not wanting to question the wisdom of the judge. I mumbled a thank-you and quickly retreated from the courtroom. It was over four hundred dollars I had been saved but I wondered if I had been right to not correct the judge and his decision, admitting I was in fact the one driving the car at the time. Right and wrong decisions fly in on us at a moment's notice and many times we are caught off guard by moral issues that strike us.

James, the great leader of the early church issued a provocative command in his letter to the Jewish Christians around the world. **Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.** (James 4: 7 NIV) There are two aspects to this that stand out grammatically. First, the term translated "submit" means to let yourself be influenced, directed by someone else. In this case, James says to make sure it is God. There are many ways we are influenced by various ones. It can happen when someone says something to us, we notice what another person is doing or simply through the impact that one has had on others. The other point regarding the grammar is that both the "submit" and "resist" are commands. You can of course refuse to follow the orders, but you do so at your own peril. What is interesting here is that this is a moment by moment concern. It is not a blanket order to always be submitting to God and at the same time resisting the devil. It is something that happens again and again. Each time is different, and the circumstances are unique. We realize there is something to do in a way that is how God wants it done and there are in turn moments when the devil is pushing us in a certain direction to act in a particular way and then we must fight the devil off. You have to be the judge of what is happening at any given time. What would God want me to do? Is the devil involved here? How will I respond?

There was a story told in ancient China of an expensive item being stolen and a number of suspects were arrested. It was by no means clear which of them was the thief and each of the prisoners claimed to be innocent. The judge came up with a plan to get at the truth. He announced to the suspects that there was a bell located in a temple that had great spiritual powers and could determine who was honest and who was a thief. If an innocent man touched the bell it would stay silent but a thief touching it would cause it to ring. The suspects were brought into the temple and a curtain was placed in front of the bell. Secretly the judge had the bell smeared with ink. One by one the suspects were brought in and told to reach behind the curtain and touch the bell. The hand of each prisoner was then examined and all of them had ink stains on their fingertips except one man. He confessed immediately to the crime when he was questioned by the judge. He had of course not dared to touch the bell, afraid that it would ring and announce his guilt.

It's not easy to judge between the directions of God and the temptations of Satan. Many who have the hunger to be faithful have come up with unique and oftentimes bizarre tests to try and determine which it is. What is fascinating here is that the way James sets this up is quite helpful. If you say "yes" to God, you are automatically saying "no" to the devil. The reverse is also the case. When you say "yes" to the devil, you are right away rejecting God. This is always the case in any situation. If you pay close attention to the temptations the devil presented Jesus while He was in the desert, they all were clearly this way. Even the seemingly innocuous temptation to calm His hunger by turning the stones into bread was met by Jesus' response that made it clear the choice was between the devil and God. **Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4: 4 NIV)** All three temptations went the same way. Jesus rejected the devil's suggestion by bringing it back to God. **Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" (Matthew 4: 10 NIV)**

God and Satan are not opposites, they are not yin and yang in a fantasy universe. But, when you say "no" to God you say "yes" to the devil and always, when you tell the devil "yes", you are in rebellion against God. The best way to approach the matter of temptation and avoiding any of the strategies of the devil to wreck your life and the lives of others is to make it your practice to say "yes" to God every time. Even a single no to Him is joining up with the devil. You may not be as clever as the judge who figured out who was the thief, but you don't need to be. If you want to stay out of the devil's traps, just be aligned with God. Admittedly, sometimes that is hard. You may not want to follow God in every situation. I'm sure Ezekiel did not want to follow God when the Lord told him not to mourn the death of his wife, but he did it anyway. **The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed any tears. (Ezekiel 24:15-16 NIV)** David and Solomon were great men who were blessed by God for their righteousness but each as king disregarded the clear mandate of the Lord over how kings must rule. The Lord told the Israelites as they were about to enter the Promised Land that all kings of theirs must not be greedy and fight the temptation to gather either riches or wives. **He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. (Deuteronomy 17:17 NIV)**

Mary the mother of Jesus was certainly not perfect. The myth that she was perpetually a virgin is not attested to in Scripture, but she is rightly regarded as a faithful child of God for her quick response to the angel's announcement to her that as a virgin she was going to be the mother of the Son of God. Her reply was praiseworthy. **"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. (Luke 1:38 NIV)** She essentially in that moment said "yes" to God while at the same time telling the devil "no". Mary didn't do so great later when she along with her kids thought Jesus had gone crazy, but she will be forever remembered for her trust in God and willingness to do whatever He commanded. When you say "yes" to God you say "no" to the devil and always the reverse is true. When you say "no" to God, the devil has gotten a "yes" from you.

We have confused our loyalties in the past one hundred years. Many think the question is Christ or science. Christ or Mohammed. Christ or Shiva. Christ or money. It is not. It is always in the history of the earth Christ or the devil. Every time God says do this or that, you decide whether it is Christ or Satan who runs your life. Here are some areas of consideration for you as you look at your loyalty. Has God said something to you about prayer? Has God said something to you about forgiveness? Has God said something to you about generosity? Has God said something to you about faith? Has God said something to you about what you say? Has God said something to you about perseverance? Has God said something to you about judging others? Has God said something to you about habits of yours? Has God said something to you about purity? The question you must ask in every situation where you know God has a take on a matter is this. Have I chosen for Christ, or have I chosen for Satan? It is clear to God. Is it clear to you?