

# Going Beyond Scripture

“Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (1 Cor 4:6-7)

It’s always tempting to think that our ideas are better than what Scripture reveals. This passage reminded the Corinthians that when they boasted, were puffed up against the apostles, or listened to those other than Christ and the apostles and prophets as their authority, they were being arrogant and acting as though what they had was of their own doing.

Why would we boast about something that we have received? If we do, are we not being arrogant and acting superior to others? Then, when we are using something other than what is written as our authority, is that also not a form of arrogance?

Yet isn’t this what is happening when we get away from Scripture? Traditions are not bad in themselves, and biblical tradition is necessary (2 Thess 2:15), but when we think that extra-biblical tradition is on par with, or even above, Scripture, then we have become arrogant (cf. Mark 7:9).

There are religious groups that hold their traditions as being just as valuable as the written text. They believe that the councils of the past, the experiences of the “fathers,” and the wisdom of the present is as authoritative as the Scriptures. They don’t even deny that their practices cannot be found in Scripture. They rather affirm that the practices are authorized on the basis of some form of apostolic succession. Authority has been passed down, and they are beneficiaries.

Yet where does that stop? Once we get away from the text of Scripture as being the standard, there is no true stopping point, for the wisdom of men will take over. The next group of wise men and leaders from their tradition can make changes, claim authority, and people are just supposed to follow. How does that differ substantively from what the Pharisees were doing?

Today’s wisdom, even among many who claim to be following the Bible only, is that we may still adjust our doctrine and practice to match the prevailing attitudes of the day. Need we bring up “gay marriage” as an example? A few references to “love” in the Bible, and suddenly just about anything goes as long as we can attach our version of “love” to it. Practices that are clearly spelled out as works of the flesh, keeping people from inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10), are quickly anointed as being holy on the basis that love covers it all. Forget the text. Just

go with our interpretations of love.

The issue here is not whether everything must be specified to be authorized. I really don't know anyone who thinks that. The issue is whether we can legitimately establish, from Scripture, our practices and beliefs. If we can't, and we do it anyway, are we not being arrogant?

What have we received? Paul answers: "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe" (1 Thess 2:13).

Isaiah reminded the people of his day that there is a stark difference between what God thinks and what people think, between what God intends for His word to accomplish, and what we think might work better. This reminder is just as significant now, for we are constantly in a battle for a standard. The question is whether or not we will trust God's word, or whether we think it necessary at some point to go beyond Scripture in order to establish practices that are nowhere near what Scripture teaches.

For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord.  
"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways  
And My thoughts than your thoughts.  
"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
And do not return there without watering the earth  
And making it bear and sprout,  
And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;  
So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;  
It will not return to Me empty,  
Without accomplishing what I desire,  
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. (Isa 55:8-11)

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