

Introduction

Several years ago, an engaged daughter asked her Christian father, whom I know, to pay for an open bar at her wedding reception. Supposing you're that father, consider two questions. First, what would your action be? What would you do? Second, what would be the basis of your action? Why would you do what you would do?

That anecdote and those questions introduce well the critical subject about which I'm preaching today – the basis of action.

Knowledge as the Basis of Action

I begin with an observation. Human beings, as they live in this world, are condemned to act. Let's go back to the Christian father. His engaged daughter's request immediately forced an action upon him. He would either pay for or not pay for an open bar. Circumstances and events arise over and over again in day-to-day life that compel us to act. A driver tailgates us. Our employer offers us a big promotion that means more pay but more work as well. Our car needs replaced. A school teacher wrongly embarrasses our child in front of the class. And on it goes. There's no escaping it. You and I, as we live in our world, are condemned to act. We have no choice about that.

What we do have a choice about though is the basis of our actions.

Please grasp in that regard that there is a basis of every action of ours, no matter what it is. Something always guides or directs us to do what we do in the moment of action. That something can be ideas, images, beliefs, impulses, desires, and/or emotions. A moment of action arises and one or more of those can move us to do what we do in it.

Before I knew better, I always slowed down when a driver tailgated me. That action of mine had a basis. It was an emotion (anger), a desire (to get even), and a belief (the tailgater deserves to pay).

I'd suggest a little exercise for you this week. After you act here and there, stop and analyze the basis of your action. Identify specifically

what it was that compelled you to do what you did. You'll recognize if you do that there's a basis of every action of ours.

Recognizing that raises a critical question. What should the basis of our actions be? What is it that prompts right actions not wrong ones or wise actions not foolish ones? The answer is "**knowledge.**" The basis of our actions should be knowledge – a grasp of reality, of what is so.

It is true that knowledge isn't always available to us in the moment of action. A colon cancer victim's oncologist told her she didn't need to have chemotherapy. The surgeon who removed the tumor told her she did. So, she didn't know if she should or shouldn't have it. Sometimes, we can't know what needs to be known in order to act with certainty.

When that's the case, we make belief the basis of our actions. So, the cancer victim believed the surgeon because he actually saw the tumor, and had chemotherapy. She made belief the basis of her action.

But while knowledge isn't always available to us, it usually is. And when it is, we seek it, learn it, and make it the basis of our actions.

There are of course different arenas of knowledge. We can have knowledge of law, mathematics, medicine, engineering, or astronomy to name a few. But the arena of knowledge that concerns us today is called *practical wisdom*, which means how to live.

Suppose our spouse reveals he or she has committed adultery but is sorry. How helpful would it be to know everything there is to know about this geometric theorem (power point slide)? Or how helpful would it be to know everything there is to know about the moon's influence on earth? Obviously, knowledge of mathematics or astronomy wouldn't be helpful at all in that circumstance. But knowledge of practical wisdom would be.

My point is that the basis of our actions should be knowledge about practical wisdom, about how to live.

The Source of Knowledge

But where do we get that knowledge? What is its source?

Let me first of all say that we can't get it on our own. Suppose I

want to know about astronomy. I can't do that on my own, starting from nothing. I have to go to standing sources of knowledge about that like astronomy's pre-eminent publication, Astronomy Magazine. The fact is that there are standing sources of knowledge in every arena, and we must rely on those sources to get it. That includes the arena of practical wisdom. We can't learn how to live well on our own, starting from nothing. We must go to the standing source of knowledge in that arena.

It's here that our text, 2 Peter 1:19-21, comes in. It identifies what that standing source of knowledge is, the Bible. In the previous verses, Peter writes about the message the other apostles and he preached about Jesus. He then mentions "**the prophetic word**" in verse 19, which refers to Old Testament prophecies. Those prophecies, he claims, make the message about Jesus, the gospel, "**more sure.**" They confirm it in other words. He then goes on to make a bold assertion about them in verse 20. They aren't "**a matter of one's own interpretation.**" That means that the Old Testament authors didn't write what they had come to know on their own. They wrote what God Himself had revealed to them. Peter reiterates that point in verse 21. The Holy Spirit revealed truth to the authors who communicated it as He directed and empowered them to.

Those verses teach that the Bible, Old Testament and New, is God's word. In it, the all-knowing God reveals the most important information about practical wisdom that is or can be known. That makes it the best standing source of knowledge about our world and how to live in it.

I would quickly note that our cultural context disputes that. Before the Renaissance in 14th to 17th century Europe, the Western world considered the Bible to be *the* standing source of knowledge about our world and how to live in it. But the Renaissance, with its motto "**Man is the measure of all things,**" eventually led to the development of alternative sources like Darwinism and Freudianism to name two. Those sources then took over our higher educational institutions in the late 19th and the 20th centuries and progressively secularized them. The Bible, as a result, lost its long held position in the Western world as *the*

fundamental avenue to knowledge of reality.

In its annual State of the Bible Report several years ago, the American Bible Society reported that 58% of Americans say they don't want the wisdom and advice the Bible offers. To intellectuals and the masses, generally, it's simply irrelevant to real life.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Suppose I want to know about marriage, for instance, and how to relate to my wife. Proverbs 5:15-20 in conjunction with Ephesians 5:22-33 gives me the best possible information about that. God who created the universe and human life itself wrote the Bible. It is, because He did, the best standing source of knowledge about our world and how to live in it.

Pay Attention to the Source of Knowledge

If we want to live well, therefore, we'll do what Peter says in verse 19. He uses a metaphor to describe what the Bible does for us, "**a lamp shining in a dark place.**" As a lamp enables us to act competently in a dark place and not fumble around, so the Bible enables us to act competently in life. It does so until "**the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.**" That language refers to the Second Coming of Jesus, when we will "**become like Him**" as 1 John 3:2 says it. But until then, in order to prepare for that, we'd "**do well to pay attention to**" the Bible to quote verse 19. That the logical response to it and our call. Pay attention to the Bible. We pay attention to it by doing two things.

First, we make the Bible our standing source of knowledge about our world and how to live in it. We do so by learning as much of it in as much detail as we can. Think of some of the deepest concerns humans have: love, marriage, money, sex, work, life after death, influencing others for good, forgiveness, and anger to name a few. The Bible gives us the best information about those concerns. So, we devote ourselves to learning as much of that information in as much detail as we can.

Several years ago, the Christian Science Monitor listed the "**10 best**

self-help books of all time.” The fourth was Dale Carnegie’s book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, which is a primary concern of ours. I read that book and it’s excellent. But the Bible is better. Matthew 7:1-8 in conjunction with 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 gives us the best information about influencing people for good that is or can be known. So, we descend into the details of those texts and learn that information.

That illustrates how we make the Bible our standing source of knowledge about our world and how to live in it. We learn as much of it in as much detail as we can.

We pay attention to the Bible by doing a second thing. We make the knowledge we get from it the basis of our actions. Our ultimate aim when it comes to the Bible isn’t to know it but to live by it. In the moment of action, therefore, we always do what’s consistent with what it reveals. We also never do what’s inconsistent with what it reveals. That’s our intention at least and we try and train as best as we can to carry it out.

Examples abound. I know from Matthew 5:21-22, for instance, that anger is on the same continuum as murder is. So I try and train not to get angry in the moment of action, such as a driver tailgating me. Or I know from 1 John 4:18 that love casts our fear. So I try and train never to purposefully harm anyone in any way. Or I know from Colossians 3:22-25 that there is divine glory and reward in every job. So I try and train to do my work heartily as for the Lord. Or I know from Mark 12:41-44 that generosity is measured by how much we keep not give. So I try and train to live simply not materialistically.

Conclusion

One of the first songs I learned as a little boy in Christian Endeavor years ago sums it up well in closing: **“The B-I-B-L-E, yes that’s the book for me. I stand alone (only) on the word of God, the B-I-B-L-E.”** Let do that. Let’s stand on the Bible. First, make it our standing source of knowledge about our world and how to live in it.

Second, make the knowledge we get from it the basis of our actions.
We'll live very well if we do!