

## The Natural Man's Struggle with Reformed Theology: Holy Scripture vs. Sacred Individual Rights

2 Peter 1:20-21

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When I was in seminary, there was a saying that we all had: There were two kinds of students: the kind that had it up here, and the kind that had it in a briefcase! Well, I was the kind that had it in a briefcase, that's why I've got a load I'm totin' up here, see, because I have to have it with me when I go places.

Real quick, a summary of what we talked about last week — two minutes' worth. We talked about approximately 85 percent of our population claimed in some way or another to be Christian. We talked about, however, the age group from 18-25, upwards of 20 percent of those claimed to be atheist, agnostic, or nonbeliever. We have what appears to be a growing problem in our population.

We also have human beings who struggle any time they feel a loss of power. They feel guilt, they feel need, they feel fear; and what humans tend to want...they tend to want power and control. The fantasy is the more power and control I have, the safer I am. The old nature has a driving force in it. The old nature's driving force is 'I want for me the greatest amount of pleasure for the least amount of pain.'

We all have that in us. The new nature has a drive to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. There's nothing wrong with seeking appropriate pleasure and appropriate avoidance of pain, but it needs to be under glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. A truly sovereign God is unacceptable in a direct correlation to the commitment felt to this goal of the natural man for pleasure and pain. The higher I am committed to pleasure and pain, the lower I want God to be. The less I am committed, the greater God can be. It doesn't always come out that way, but there is a general tendency there. (And, by the way, my contention is that is the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden. They wanted more than they had. They wanted to be like God.) That is the background.

### **2 Peter 1:20-21 (NIV):**

"Above all you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation, for prophecy never had its origin in the will of man,

but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Let's pray.

*Father, bless our thoughts now. Encourage us and give us a zeal to know You, and to know Your purpose and plan for us and for the world. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*

“Scripture vs. Sacred Human Rights”—that's the title. I came this close (and I want y'all to know this)...I came this close to playing y'all a Johnny Cash song tonight. I got it on my iPod and I came this close to playing it. It's a duet, as a matter of fact, between Johnny and Willie Nelson. You may or may not like that, but anyway it's a good song. It's called *The Family Bible*. I want to read you the words. It won't take but a second.

There's a family Bible on the table,  
its pages worn and hard to read;  
but the family Bible on the table  
will ever be my key to memories.

At the end of the day, when work was over,  
when the evening meal was done,  
Dad would read to us from the family Bible,  
and we'd count our blessings one by one.

I can see us sitting 'round the table,  
as from the family Bible Dad would read;  
I can hear my Mother softly singing,  
'Rock of Ages, cleft for me.'

Now this old world of ours is filled with trouble,  
but this old world would, oh, much better be  
if we found more Bibles on the tables,  
and mothers singing "Rock of Ages, cleft for me."

I like that message, y'all! Of course you would expect that sort of out of Johnny Cash, but Willie is the main one with the voice singing that particular song. I'm hoping he listens to it real closely.

The majority of people in our country have something of a reverence for the Bible. It wasn't that long ago that if you went to court to testify, you put your hand on the Bible and said, "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God, I do."

We don't do that anymore. Every family had a Bible, as a matter of fact. That's part of what I brought up here for you. This Bible belonged to my wife's great-

granddaddy, James McDowell. It was published in 1832, and the date he put in it was 1860. This was his Bible. But guess what? This is the New Testament. In this particular Bible, about 20 percent of each page is Scripture, and the rest of it is commentary on it. So this is a one-volume New Testament plus commentary. This is a part of our family Bibles, and if you want to see it afterwards, if you'll be real gentle with it, I'll let you look at it...because the pages are about to fall out. Leather-bound New Testament...family Bible.

It wasn't that long ago till my daddy reached the age to receive Social Security, so he applied. But they had no record of his birth. He had no birth certificate. But guess what? They took the family Bible down that had his name and date of birth recorded in it, and it was accepted as his birth certificate. That's here in Mississippi, y'all. That's right here in Jackson. Not that long ago, that's where the record of the family was kept, in the family Bible.

Perhaps you remember a song by Alan Jackson: *Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning?* Remember? After 9/11? One of the things he says in it is you go home and dust off that family Bible at home. See? The Bible has been integral to all sorts of things that we think and feel and believe. (Of course, if country music sings about it, it's got to be true!)

But anyway, however, there's something else about the Bible. Not only does it tell us about God loving us, but it also tells us what God wants from us. The same Bible that says "By grace you are saved through faith; it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast," gives us the Ten Commandments. So we have the Old Testament (the law), but we have the New Testament (the grace). It's beautiful the way it's laid out, but the fact that the Bible pulls in that law is a little offensive to some people. As a matter of fact, the view of the Bible has been a dividing point betwixt denominations, betwixt ministers, betwixt Christians and non-Christians. So the Bible is controversial. So sacred Scripture vs. sacred individual rights is what we're talking about.

Because our culture has been dominated by Christians down through the years, Christians inculcated biblical principles into culture and into our law. I'm sure you've gotten the emails about where in the Supreme Court Building pictures of Moses and the Ten Commandments are inscribed. You can't go in a room there almost in the capitol without finding something from the Bible, and yet we can't have Bible reading in the schools. So it's controversial, but it's a part of everything that we believe.

In the last years of life around here, some things have started to happen. This lower view of Scripture has prompted a higher view of individual rights. These are five that I'm just going to come up with. See if you have recognized or heard any of these:

"What I do in the privacy of my home is none of your business." How many

people say that in today's world? And you know what? They get away with it except if it involves child abuse, spousal abuse, if it involves growing marijuana, a meth lab in the basement... [I shouldn't say *meth*...I'm sorry about that.] Any of these things. So the sacred right of my home I claim, but even today the laws don't see that as a barrier that can't be breached.

Second statement: "My view of reality is just as valid as your view." Well, even those who say that have a little bit of a struggle with the Muslim view of females, and especially things like female castration. And those things go on, folks, in today's world. What about animal sacrifices that they still do? Kansas stockyard was in the paper about twelve months ago because they had instituted a program to allow Muslims to come in and do their own killing of the animals, or sacrificing of the animals. That's individual rights at work.

Number three, "No one has a monopoly on truth, because all truth is relative." You've heard that one too, haven't you? That is one of the hallmarks of our society today, unless...unless I step on your rights. Have you been watching TV lately? Poor ol' Dave Letterman, bless his heart...and bless other parts of him, too, I guess...but he got into real trouble because there is a boundary to what you can joke or talk about, and you don't talk about Sarah Palin's daughter, even the wrong one who went to the game, and a guy named Rodriguez. You don't do that kind of thing on national TV, and I think he got the point. I'm not sure. At least he apologized. Maybe he got the point.

So, number four. "It's my body. I can do with it what I wish." I've heard that one about 14,000 times. That is the credo of the 16-year-old female. And guess what? We've somewhat dignified that statement too, because she no longer has to get parental consent to have an abortion. I'm sorry; we've got a problem here. We in fact are seeing cultural boundaries sort of washing away...blending.

And here's the last one: "Because Christians sin, then their values can't be accepted." Isn't that ridiculous? We don't hold up Christians to other people to model, we hold up Christ to other people to model. But because Christian people are human beings and they commit a sin of one type or another, then that's my reason for not buying into Christian values.

Now. Sacred human rights are being held up to us all the time, right and left, all over the place.

Now. Theologically, what do we believe? I'm going to read to you one little paragraph from Chapter I of *The Confession of Faith*, Paragraph X. If we believe in covenant theology, and if we believe in a Christian world and life view, and if we believe our standards of faith, well...let's listen to this:

"The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and

private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.”

That's our theological position, folk. That's what we say we believe.

But that's what presents a bit of a problem. It's one thing for me to have a view of God and say, “Isn't God wonderful? He's just so good, He's just so great.” But when I say, “No, God doesn't like that happening,” then suddenly I have infringed upon sacred human rights. (We'll get to the “sacred” part in just a minute.) What does the Bible say? You know this, but let me just read a couple of things to you. Yeah, II Timothy:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Why do we want Scripture to be read in our schools? Because we want that to be a part of the training, the teaching, the correcting and rebuking of our children. It's not that we're just old fashioned; we really do believe that they will come out better if they have that training, teaching, rebuking and correcting. There's a reason why. So we want all this set out. I'm not going to go into all the details, but we want the correcting, want our kids to get it. And you know what? To be very honest, we'd like for all kids to get it. I would. I have no problem confessing that. I want my kids to get it, but I'd like all children to get it.

Now. The natural man. Okay, psychology. Psychology has a way of looking at human beings. What equals crazy? Well, there's an old slang expression: You are crazy directly proportional to how uncomfortable you make me feel. The more uncomfortable you make me feel, the crazier you are. Now that's not a good one, okay? But that's a fun one.

There are fancier words that are used here. There's a *homothetic* perspective — and let's don't worry about that word, okay? But there's one way that psychologists look at people. They sort of lump everybody together into a big group. They average out what's going on, and they get a mean (or middle) ground. And then how far away from that middle ground you are determines how unstable you are. If you're out here on the fringes, you're a weirdo. If you're here in the middle, you're cool. That's one way to look at human beings.

But there's another way, the *idiographic* perspective on human beings. Think of the word *individual*. This is an approach to human beings that says “I don't care whether you're weird or not; I want to celebrate your individuality and your

uniqueness.” Have you seen the commercial for the new program coming on TV where the doctor has this weird crazy guy going crazy in the hall? Got no clothes on? And in the commercial [of course they don't show anything]...but in the commercial the doctor rips his clothes off - “Aaargh!” And suddenly the guy says, “Wo! That looks sort of crazy.” And it's his way of “relating” to the person. You'll get a chance to watch it. It's up to you. If you want to watch it, go right ahead. I'd just as soon not watch that, personally, because I don't think my acting stupid makes your stupidity more acceptable. It just makes both of us stupid.

Now. But we have this ‘lump everybody together and get an average’ and then we have ‘let's identify each individual and let's honor them for their differences.’ So our world today does that kind of thing.

Now there's a third view. The third view is sort of a little bit of both, and we live in a world that celebrates ‘a little bit of both.’ I'll give you a real concrete illustration. We just had a President who was in office for about eight years who started a program called “No Child Left Behind.” You remember? That's sort of that ‘we're going to have everybody graduate from college.’ [No, not really! He wasn't saying that. I know that.] But we're going to have everybody...no child is going to be left behind.

But we're going to use standardized tests. Now do you realize how those two sort of don't go together real well? Because if no child is going to be left behind, what happens if they don't pass the standardized test? You and I both know what happens. The teacher gets blamed, that's what happens. The program is blamed, because after all, if we're going to dramatize this position of the individual, we can't fail anybody. You do understand that your child should not get a C, don't you? Now other kids can get a C, but not mine. Mine get A's or B's. Now wait a minute. What if my child doesn't study? What if my child doesn't like it, doesn't try, doesn't want to? Well, it's still unacceptable. In the same way that no child should feel like they're not a good swimmer just because they finished last in the race. That is an attempt in our culture of saying we're all individuals, and nobody should be left behind, and isn't it wonderful that we can all be great. Now that's the third view.

There are some people who have come along and challenged these views, and this challenge came back in the '70's when the Vietnam War was a hot issue. And the person who challenged some of these issues was a fairly well known non-religious individual. His name happened to be Carl Menninger. He wrote a book entitled *Whatever Became of Sin?* Some of you may have come across that book. Menninger was making the point: we are not going to label bad “bad;” what we're going to do is we're going to call it sick, or bad training, or this, that, or the other, but we're not really just going to say bad is bad. It doesn't matter what it is. So society let you down if you robbed the store. The government let you down if the car was allowed to go too fast, and the police officer didn't stop it fast, or if you're a police officer and you get all upset with an ambulance driver you get

lawsuits all over the place. [I don't know what's right and wrong with that, I'm not voting. But I know you've seen it on the news this last week. It's one of the most looked at...well, let's don't go there.]

Sin hasn't been done away with, but we need to do away with sin if we're going to have sacred human rights. Sin fits in if we're going to have an objective standard like Scripture, but if we're not going to have Scripture then we have to have a level playing field that makes no one feel badly.

Now I want to present a study to you. This one was done actually back in the '60's. I think it's the best psychological study that I have ever come across. And I have mentioned it to the Sunday School class, and you will hear me talk about it again because I don't have time to go into it right now today.

A guy named Stanley Coopersmith went to the State of Connecticut and he said, 'I want each teacher to recommend to me the student in their class that they feel like has the very best self-esteem.' So the teachers recommended the best student with the best self-esteem. And then he took those students and evaluated and got the *crume de la crume*. He got the best of the best — those that had the best self-esteem of all. And then he went and evaluated their homes, because his question was What kind of a home produces a child with very good, solid self-esteem? Great question. Great thing to do. But what he came up with were what he called *The Four Antecedents of Self-esteem*. [No, you don't want to read it. It reads like Biology 101. It's sort of a dissertation kind of book. You don't want to read it.] But there it is right there, the antecedents of self-esteem.

Now, four antecedents:

Number one, in these homes the parents were very accepting of the child. Now I've got a whole rigmarole on that that I go through sometimes when I'm doing this in a class, but let's just say *acceptance*.

Number two, antecedent of self-esteem: these families establish well-defined and consistently enforced boundaries for their child, so that when Mom or Dad said no, the child knew they meant no. They were not allowed to do whatever they wanted to. They learned to operate within a system.

The third antecedent was they treated the child with respect. No teasing, taunting, ridicule, put-down kind of things — "That's the stupidest thing I ever heard...When are you going to grow up?...Big boys don't cry." That kind of stuff, okay?

The fourth antecedent was the parents had good self-esteem themselves.

I tell you that story for one purpose and one purpose only: children do better when they have boundaries.

I have an expression I like to use sometimes: How do you push a rope? Most of you are going to say you can't, but y'all are ignorant if you say that. Yes, you can push a rope. Number one, through a PVC pipe; and, number two, downhill. You can push a rope through a PVC pipe downhill. If you have structure and motivation, you can push a rope — or a child.

We need structure. We need boundaries. Coopersmith said they have better self-esteem if they do have boundaries. I'm sorry. That's the way it is.

And some people will come up to me and say, "Oh, but my child may not believe that I love them unconditionally if I put too many boundaries on them." Well, I'm going to throw out... I try to do one controversial thing every Wednesday, okay? So this is one for this week: There ain't no such animal as unconditional love. You heard it first right here. I personally do not believe it exists. Even God's love is not unconditional. If it were, every human being would go to heaven. There's one major condition: accept Christ. If you don't, you don't. If you do, you do. Once that condition is met, it's unconditional.

I say to parents all the time, anything that is alive can be killed. I have known situations where children have killed their parents' love for them. This is a long time ago in another city, in another state, different places. She stole the family vehicle and she drove it to another major metropolitan area, wrecked it going through town, was brought to home, placed in the hospital and determined to be on drugs and pregnant. And she was twelve years old. The parents did the best job they could to get through that. They kept the baby, by the way. They were very devout Christians. About four years later, after she had run away from home again, she came back home pregnant again and left another baby. And the parents said, "Don't come home any more." I personally believe that the worst thing that a Christian can do to another human being is to insulate them from the consequences of their sin. To do so is to train them that their sin has no consequence.

Now please understand. There are exceptions to every rule. Please understand. This is not an arbitrary black line that you can't step across. Please understand. I'm not trying to say that. But I am trying to say these individual rights over here... Scripture... individual rights... Scripture. We have a problem going on in our culture, and Christian families are getting seduced into the whole thing as well.

Problem: the individuality of the natural man has been dignified by science, exploited by Madison Avenue, exaggerated by the mass media, and in short all but made sacred. I don't think it is sacred, but all but. If personal freedom, choice, self-determination are exalted apart from an objective standard, then any attempt to hold a standard will be rejected. That's just the way it is.



Scriptures represent repression to the natural man. "I don't want to do it that way. I want to do it my way." So Scripture as authoritative standard fits right into what we talked about last week. It fits right into where our society is. In the light of what we said last week, the Bible puts obstacles in the path of the natural man in his pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain in the moment. There will be pain at one point, but not necessarily in the moment.

One last thing and I'll be through here. This is for your consideration. We live in a world in which evolution sort of dominates the scientific world and dominates an awful lot of education. For the moment we're not discussing evolution as such, but I wish to propose to you that the people who challenge evolution the most are not Christians. The people who challenge evolution the most are socialists. They're the ones who say, "No, no, no! We're not going to have survival of the fittest. We're going to have everybody survive the same." So it's the socialist who is fighting the momentum of evolution. The Christian rejects....

By the way, I believe that there are evolutionary things that happen, because people are taller now than they used to be. And I use this all the time: the average soldier in the Revolutionary War was 5'6. He couldn't make point guard now. We're changing. But what I have a struggle with as a Christian is the concept of quantum leaps. You expect me to believe that there were thousands and thousands of quantum leaps? Evolutionary thought depends upon quantum leaps, not change — quantum leaps. What the socialist is fighting is that one person can be smarter than another; that one person can try harder than another; that one person's sacred individual rights will be spread out over everybody. And we're going to have a level playing field, and we're going to have no child left behind. Everybody will succeed. And by the way, I think that plays into the Government Motor Corporation. I think it plays into all that's happening in society today. It is a leveling of the playing field, whereby we try to hold on to individual rights and a mean (or average) of all people as well.

No. Not it. What we have to understand is as Christians we have an objective standard that we live by. Of course we don't keep it perfectly! Please, don't hold me up as your model! But we do have a model. We have a Savior. We have a God who kept the law perfectly, and we point people to Christ. We don't point people to people. And when we try to do that, we stumble and fall. Traditional mainline Christianity has tried to make all of this accessible and acceptable to everyone, and hence they are left with nothing to say. The church that gives up Holy Scripture as its norm has nothing to say.

Let's pray.

*Heavenly Father, we ask that You will bless us, that You will encourage us, that You will allow us to be Your people. May we see purpose in what we're doing. May we feel Your Spirit moving in our midst, and may we have a dedication to serve You in everything that we do. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.*

Let's stand.

*And now may grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each of you, both now and forevermore.*

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