

One of the strangest plays in baseball took place years ago at Ebbets Field, home of the Brooklyn Dodgers. The Dodgers had men on first and second with no outs. The batter hit a fly to right center. The runners stayed close to their bases, thinking the ball would be caught. The batter, however, ignoring the men already on base, lowered his head and charged around the bases like a stampeding bull. The two base runners were bewildered. What were they to do? They couldn't let him pass them on the bases or they would be out. To add to the confusion the center fielder dropped the ball. Now the two base runners knew what to do. They took off. Unfortunately, the three of them, the two base runners and the hitter, arrived at third base in a neck-and-neck finish. Meanwhile the center fielder finally found the ball and pegged it to home plate, cutting off further advance. In the confusion at third base, all three runners stepped off the bag. The opposing catcher fired the ball to the third baseman who promptly tagged all three, completing a bizarre triple play. **It had to be one of the craziest plays in the history of baseball.** I'm sure when the hitter was confronted by the manager, he probably said something like, "*Well. I just got confused . . .*"

**MODERN LIFE IS CONFUSING. Have you noticed that? Many of us spend our lives feeling confused. The world is changing TOO FAST!**

A computer specialist in a high-tech company was required to wear a pager all the time. This beeper was to ensure that he would be available immediately for hardware or software problems. But this poor fellow got reamed out by his supervisor. "*No wonder you haven't been answering my pages,*" said his supervisor, "*You're wearing your garage-door-opener!*" Well, it could happen to any of us. *The modern world is confusing.*

The last few winters have caused confusion in Europe. A couple of years back Britain had its warmest November for more than 300 years. This caused havoc between plants and animals. Normally November in Britain brings chill winds and lashing rain storms. But two years ago, Britain basked in average temperatures of around 50 degrees Fahrenheit, nearly seven degrees above normal. Plants still thought it was summer. Hibernating animals and birds which usually head south for winter stuck around. The average November temperature for central England was the highest since records began in 1659. Much of Europe experienced the warmest November on record. In Holland, daffodils and tulips sprouted and trees began to blossom. No wonder Europeans are alarmed about global warming. **When the flowers and the birds are confused about nature, what are the rest of us to think?**

Are you as confused about the issue of global warming? If the predictions of most of the world's climatologists are accurate, the future for our grandchildren looks grim. Shouldn't we be doing something about it? Yes, it is a very controversial issue. It is an extremely important issue, **BUT IT IS CONFUSING. There are many confusing issues in today's world.**

**Many people are CONFUSED ABOUT THEIR MORALITY.**

Bruce Larson, in his latest book, tells a hilarious true story from his daughter. Her sister-in-law is a conservationist, and she and her husband and young son were driving up the coast of Florida on a vacation. They noticed a sign saying Naturist Camp and assumed that was the same as a naturalist camp. (Some of you are getting ahead of me.) They drove in, parked their car, and headed toward the beach. They quickly realized that this naturist camp was actually a nudist camp, when they came upon a group of people, all stark naked, cycling along the beach. Their five-year-old son stopped and stared in amazement. "*Look, Mom and Dad,*" he said, pointing, "*they're not wearing safety helmets.*"

I am sure that you have noticed a change in television programming in recent years. People are wearing safety helmets but they're not wearing any clothes. And our language rules are disgusting. Swearing during prime time is acceptable. For many years, heroes and heroines on television have been hopping into bed indiscriminately. I don't think I have to belabor the point. No wonder our young people are confused about right and wrong with regard to their bodies and the purity of sex. **YES, they are receiving so many confusing messages.**

It is a confusing world. That's why I cannot help but be attracted by John 16:13: "*But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth . . .*"

**If there is one thing we need today, it is to be led by the Spirit of truth.** How do we discern the truth about the great moral and spiritual issues of life today? How do we know the right things to do? If it is true that Christ has sent his Holy Spirit to guide us into knowing and applying truth to our lives, how can we know that truth and make sense out of the world in which we live? **TOOLS!! HE GAVES US SPIRITUAL TOOLS!**

**THE FIRST TOOL WE CAN USE FOR DISCERNING SPIRITUAL AND MORAL TRUTH IS TO GO TO THE SCRIPTURES--THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS.** The question, "*What would Jesus do?*" has been a reliable one for millions of Christians. So, has this question, "*What does the Bible say?*"

Edward L. Johnson is a former president and chairman of Financial Federation, Inc. In the days when Johnson was at the helm of this savings and loan institution, it was one of the wealthiest, most successful, most stable organizations of its kind.

One would think that Ed and his wife, Joyce, must have lived a charmed life, but that is not the case. Their life bears the defining marks of tragedy, for in 1959 they lost their beloved daughter, Karen, in a car crash.

Fortunately, the Johnson family has a very strong faith in Christ, and it was this faith that pulled them through the heartbreak and brought them out stronger and more committed than ever. When asked how his faith impacts his business, *Ed does not hesitate to say that the Bible serves as his benchmark in life.*

Most of you in business are familiar with the concept of benchmarking. "**A benchmark,**" explains Ed, "*is a surveyor's mark made on a permanent landmark that has a known position and altitude. It is generally a bronze plug used as a reference point in determining other altitudes within a given line of levels.*" Across the country, there are various benchmarks which engineers consult before erecting a building. They locate the benchmark, and then go from there to establish the site of the building. The benchmark is the primary reference point in everything they build; it must be consulted first before any work begins. **That is also how Edward Johnson views God's word.**

**The Bible is the benchmark for moral and spiritual questions.** The first question we must ask when confronted with a moral or spiritual issue is: *Is it in harmony with Scripture and with the Spirit of Christ?* The first rule for finding truth is to go to the Word of God.

**THE SECOND TOOL WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO USE TO RECOGNIZE OUR SPIRITUAL AND MORAL TRUTH IS TO GO TO OUR KNEES.** If it is true that Christ has given us the Holy Spirit to lead us into truth, doesn't it make sense that time spent alone in prayer is a necessary part of finding the guidance Christ promised us?

I like the approach taken by one of the doctors on the popular television show CHICAGO HOPE. Coming to a critical point in an emergency surgical procedure, this TV doctor says to others in the operating room, "*Those of you who are in touch with the Infinite, now would be a good time to open communications.*"

"*What's he talking about?*" whispered one of the new doctors. *One of the nurses whispered back, "Pray if you know how, stupid!"*

**That would be a good bumper sticker, wouldn't it?** "Pray if you know how, stupid!" Well, maybe not. I do believe, though, that people who seek to live according to the Scriptures and the Spirit of Christ and who spend time consistently in the presence of God through prayer, will make better decisions than people who do not. Will we be perfect in making right decisions? No, we will still be sinners. We will still be human. But we will make better decisions, we will be better parents, better citizens, better people if we focus on those two traditional vehicles of truth God's Word and prayer. "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes," Jesus promised us, "he will guide you into all truth."

**THE THIRD TOOL WE HAVE FOR DISCERNING SPIRITUAL AND MORAL TRUTH IS THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH--THE CHURCH.** Jesus' promise about being led into all truth was not spoken to the

Kiwanis Club or the Chamber of Commerce. **IT WAS SPOKEN TO THE CHURCH.** When you are wrestling with moral and spiritual questions, **BRING THEM TO YOUR CHURCH COMMUNITY.**

Now, I realize that most people in this country, even church people, take pride in their independence of thought. That's what surveys show. We don't like for the church to tell us what to do. According to a recent Gallup Poll, when people have a pressing spiritual or moral question, only a small minority consult their pastor, priest or rabbi. I understand that. **But still, when you are struggling with a moral or spiritual question, you need to discuss it with at least one other Christian person.** Jesus said, *"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."* (Matthew 18:19-20)

Most of the great moral tragedies in this world have been performed by loners. A lonely madman, the so-called Unabomber, takes out his anger on innocent people who offended him just by the positions they held in society. In Oklahoma City one man's paranoia is fed by a few isolated individuals who convince themselves that a freely elected government is the enemy of the people. These people are outside the mainstream. On the fringe. And that is just the point. **If people would bring their moral and spiritual concerns to church and air them with people who are committed to Christ, then truth and reason will emerge. Christ has promised it.**

A University of Southern California professor wrote an article in THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY a few years back. In it he traced his religious journey, which took him away from the church for a large part of his adult life and then brought him back again. *In the concluding paragraphs he wrote:*

**"One thing that brought me back to the church was my asking simply: What are the alternatives to the church? Where are the communities that provide the pursuit of meaning and truth in life? Those that have material and personal resources to assist me in this search? that provide regular occasions for confession of failures? that renew and inspire those that gather together? . . . where social issues can be debated? Yes, there are a number of institutions that deal with one or several of these questions, but historically the church has demonstrated its ability to energize all of these activities."**

Are you feeling a little confused about life right now? **TRUTH IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE FOR YOU WHEN YOU...**

- *Look to the Scriptures and the Spirit of Christ.*
- *Go to your knees and look for Christ's guidance from within.*
- *Share your concerns with me or with friends here at the church.*

**Your decisions won't be perfect, but you will make better decisions and find more HOPE. Christ guarantees it. Amen.**