

The Arc of Freedom of Action and the Free-Standing Gospel

Mike Strawn
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The focus of this lesson is on two concepts, which demonstrate a fork in the road for human will and understanding. One is the concept of the Gospel of Christ as a freestanding entity, not contingent on any other concept. The other is the insistence and persistence of mankind to try to make that Gospel contingent upon and enclosed within a framework of personal or corporate human reality. If God's Word becomes enclosed within such a structure, this angers God. There are consequences. Ultimately, He withdraws from the structure.

Passages such as Genesis 3, Psalm 78, 2 Corinthians 6 and 7, and Hebrews 10 teach that some people treat the Word of God as freestanding; but some others want to put the "frame of human reality" around it. This is unfortunately a consistent pattern. Often if not usually, the Word of God is put automatically within this frame.

This is the fork in the road for faith. A person of true faith allows the Word of God to be freestanding. He or she would allow it to be freestanding over the world, or in authority over it; and freestanding against the world because the Word contradicts the world. Such a mind sees it as freestanding; but the person of little or no faith puts the word within his own frame.

This human reality frame is comprised of intelligence, experience, moral desire, the five senses, and the faculty of rationality. As faith comes down the highway, it will take one of two forks, depending on whether or not the Word of God is allowed to be freestanding. If it is not allowed this autonomous freestanding stature, faith will begin to interpret the Word of God in terms of human reality. We can call this juncture the faith differential.

In Acts chapter 2, those who believed the gospel saw it as freestanding. Such a position compelled them to obey it. Those who did not see it as freestanding but instead put it into the human reality frame could only see the Gospel as crazy or ridiculous. This is a pattern we see throughout Scripture. At such a point, when someone begins to let his or her human reality frame begin to constrain the Word of God, the incipient or inchoate of unbelief begins.

The
Gospel

We can see this from the beginning of human history. In Genesis 3 Adam and Eve heard and understood God's word, and operated on it. But they came to such a juncture, with the urgings of the serpent, to put it into their own human reality frame. Of course the results were disastrous, for them as well as for us who suffer from that legacy even today.

Not surprisingly, we deal with God's reality just as we deal with God Himself. We either allow Him to operate as a freestanding entity in our lives, or we put Him within a frame of our minds. One or the other becomes a preferred relationship with Him.

Or God is the frame – showing that the human preferred relation is subordinate to Himself.



Man's arbitrary relationship to God is often elevated above His to us. This is always true of unbelief.

Why does this pattern of putting God into the box of our own human reality frame recur? Because of what we can call the arc of freedom of action. Human beings want the widest possible arc of human action – don't want our freedom of action impeded or circumscribed. We don't want to be restricted. We don't want to be proscribed. We have a natural tendency to rankle against anything other than our own desires, especially something that demands a freestanding status against those desires.

In Romans 1:18-32, the Gentiles put God in their own human reality frame. This had effects: First, it diminished the reality of God--not literally but in their conceptions. Secondly, it elevated man above God as their minds tried to force Him within the human frame. This wasn't something just conceptual, they tried to deal with every element of God as a reality in this way.

In verses 28-32, we see all the sociological consequences of their attempt to put God Himself within a human reality frame. These consequences began in the mind but were manifested in actions such as worshiping created things, indecent acts, wickedness,

evil, greed, depravity, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, insolence, hating God, arrogance, boastfulness, disobedience to parents, ruthlessness and many other sins. Added to that, they approve of the wicked actions of others: the sin of applause.

In Psalm 78 – the desert generation did the same thing, putting the Word of God within the human reality framework. This psalm shows the tragic results when three symbols that God himself established were abandoned by Him.

1) *The Tabernacle of Shiloh*. Designed for and gifted to humanity, this was a great symbol, a place of meeting between the two worlds. But when the people put it within their own framework, God abandoned it. Any such symbol has three parts: the reality of God, the object or visible manifestation of the symbol, and of course an indexing or connecting relationship. (In the case of the Tabernacle, it was not like any other tent, because God connected His presence to it in a deliberate, stated way.) But when the people began to try to enclose and constrain God within their own human reality frame, God Himself broke the symbol asunder, pulled off and away from it. From that point on, there was no relation of God to the tabernacle, no meeting point. He severed their relationships.

2) *The Ark of the Covenant*. When the Philistines captured it, this was because God allowed the Philistines to do this. He was demonstrating that not just a box was stolen, the seat of propitiation was gone. This Ark had served as the vanguard of the crossing of the Jordan dry shod. It was not just an ornament, it signified the reality and power and relationship of God with them. As far as the Israelites were concerned, though, once the Philistines took it, it was just a box. It could still inflict power (the Philistines found that it was the source of disasters for them, so much that they couldn't get wait to get rid of it), but for the Israelites it had lost its primary meaning: that of a symbol of a preferred relationship with God.

3) *The people themselves*. In verse 62 His people were given over to the sword. They themselves became a symbol of the abandonment of God.

From this and many other examples we can see that when God relates to an object, an entity, a community, such a relating creates a symbol. And His destruction of a symbol is itself another symbol. This outcome is death.

Another result was something we might call disempowerment. In reality, the only advantage Israel ever had was their relationship to God. They had no way to survive, conquer, or thrive without Him. Without the power of God and the Word of God, the will of God languished.

Why did He abandon His people? The answer isn't spelled out, but it is implicit – It's because they had taken the Word of God and put it in the human reality frame. This action alone is sin and leads to further sin. Ultimately, it causes God to engage in

symbolism breakage. We disobey Him, and He removes Himself and his help from a situation. Then the symbols lose their significance and power as well.

How do we erode confidence in revelation? 1) Diminish the reality of God. 2) That allows for the diminishment of the Word of God. 3) This action simultaneously elevates man over both of these.

That will provoke God's reaction . He will abandon revealed symbolism. With that comes disempowerment.

Romans 1: 8-32 shows the sociological consequences. They were intolerable. When He breaks a symbol, we become intolerable. When sex is perverted, the family breaks down and gross immorality becomes the norm. But where exactly does this symbol breaking begin?

We might look at the continuum like this.

God → Word of God → human mind

At this point, if the Word of God is put into frame of human reality, this induces another process:

Symbol is broken → Disempowerment → God pulls away from the structure of the revealed symbol → No law or truth → Sociological breakdown (as seen in Romans 1.

We can see more evidence of this idea in 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 (New International Version)

Do Not Be Yoked With Unbelievers

14Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? **15**What harmony is there between Christ and Belial^[a]? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? **16**What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."^[b]

17"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord.

Touch no unclean thing,
and I will receive you."^[c]

18"I will be a Father to you,
and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."^[d]

2 Corinthians 7

1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

There are seven concepts we see in this passage that demonstrate this same idea.

First is in the way that a believer can be “yoked” with an unbeliever. The yoke represents the box where the Word of God is encapsulated by the human reality frame.

This happens when righteousness is allied with wickedness; light with darkness, Christ with Belial, the temple of God with idols, and cleanliness with uncleanness.

If such things become linked, the Word of God no longer functions as free-standing.

In 2 Corinthians 7:1 we are warned against trying to unify them. We are to instead come out from them and be separate.

Why? If you see the promises of God as freestanding, not contingent, there will be three effects:

- purify self
- perfect holiness
- reverence for God

The Word of God has to be freestanding, never subject to a yoking process as seen in the previous verses. We have to remove the yoking of the human reality frame.

You must take the word of God out of this human reality frame before any reclamation of human behavior can begin. Along with this, we must reinstate the biblical symbolism.

When we purify ourselves and become holy and reverent, we free the Word of God, one person at a time, from the human reality frame. We become enabled to use Scripture to reconnect God, as Colossians 1 shows He should properly be, to the material world. We have the right kinds of connections to others and to systems and to finances and other concerns.

This is brilliantly shown in the Sermon on the Mount.

People of true faith want to reverse sociological breakdown. This can only be done by taking the Word of God out of a human reality frame. As an example, the church in Corinth had put the Word of God within a human reality frame. That’s why they could congratulate the permissiveness within their church. They were characterized by wantonness -- because the Lord’s body in Corinth was no longer dedicated to revealed symbolisms, such as the role of marriage. Sadly, this human reality frame was apparently well in place in 5 of the 7 churches of Asia Minor, as the book of Revelation shows us.

Jesus accused Pharisees of this in Matthew 5:17-20. He said that our righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. Much of Jesus' ministry in fact was about removing the human reality frame. He challenged it wherever it showed up, by repeatedly telling them "You've heard one thing" (the human reality frame), "But I tell you something different. ."

This brings up the issue of the arc of the freedom of human action. Psalm 27 and Isaiah 30 warn against thinking we have this much freedom of action without consequences. The only way you can believe you have this great arc of freedom is by putting the Word of God into the human reality frame. You have to strip the Word of God of its authority to prescribe and proscribe so that it will fit into that frame. If this is true, then everything else collapses into a single issue: Is the Word of free standing or not? In many churches we have decided it is not. We say we want to have a reading of Scripture that doesn't limit its freestanding status, that doesn't limit what Holy Spirit gave of it status. But in practice, that often is not the case. Generalization is the only consistent way to permit it to be free standing.

In 2 Corinthians 6 and 7 we saw what happens when there is a demand for a break-off from the human reality frame.

Returning to Romans 1:18-32, we can see that the beginning of sociological breakdown becomes a symbol itself of God's abandonment. The freestanding Word of God, though, can't and won't create a symbol within the human reality frame. That's not the way it functions.

In fact, quite to the contrary, an extraordinary thing happens when we consciously take the Word of God out of the human reality frame -- everything becomes symbolic. Everything.

When God comes over and onto anything, it creates a symbol. In Symbol-breaking: when God moves away from it (whether it be an object or a people) a gulf is created. and He no longer connects or indexes Himself to it. The Ark of the Covenant's meaning and connection with God is lost, for instance, and it becomes just a gilded box with no real meaning. It has value, yes; but no longer its inherent meaning. Even the object undergoes a breakdown -- how much more will a people, who lose their inherent meaning as the separated people of God.

The faithful see the importance of purifying, perfection of holiness, reverence for God – because we are a symbol, and our very presence and uniqueness contrasts with the world which has become a symbol of the abandonment of God. If the church does not seek to be such a symbol, it becomes part of the problem.

How did this happen in Romans 1, this breakdown?

- 1) The mind (it became darkened, people were fools, and they changed truth for a lie and their minds were depraved.) The mind was no longer a symbol of the God who created it, and it became desecralized, or divested of its sacredness. It was just processes, and neuro-physics. In fact, such operations of the mind are themselves a symbol of God's abandonment.
- 2) The family (beginning in v. 30.) We see the results of the delinquencies of the parents, who had the choice to encourage in their children the pursuit of good or not, to extend or limit the reach of sin.
- 3) Society. This passage uses all kinds of words to signify wickedness and strife. Such a society is inherently dangerous; and it is self-destructive. There is no such thing as trust. Imagine the psychological burden of this on the individual. In such a case, law is useless because it cannot reverse the degradation and reinstate revealed symbolism -- which is the only hope for the human race.

In James 1:3-15 we see that

the individual mind conceives → growth → evil desires as they mature → birth.

Evil though unseen comes openly into the world, and the law is powerless over the causal factors that preceded it in this continuum. Law just doesn't work.

4) The body. Verse 24 speaks of the unnaturalness of sexual impurity, of indecency, of perversion. The purpose of the body is overturned, as it is no longer an instrument of God to build something symbolic, it is now just something to be gratified. In fact, the body becomes an object to be adored itself – the focal point. As such it is the focal point of the human reference frame.

5) Spiritual knowledge is destroyed (verse 21.) They knew God but exchanged His immortal glory for specific images of man, birds, reptiles etc. They worshiped the created things rather than the Creator. Spiritual knowledge is gone: But it was plain. They are without excuse.

Such spiritual knowledge makes men responsible! They don't want that! So they deal with it by putting it into the human reality frame -- it has to go if you want unfettered freedom of action. In Romans, we see what happened when an entire range of symbolism was consciously jettisoned in favor of the one-dimensional: the human reality frame.

God's abandonment of us should be the issue for us. The Bible teaches that the Word of God is freestanding, over and against the mind, the family, society, body, and spiritual knowledge.

In Romans 1:18-32, we see things that are touchstones of destruction, once you put the Word of God within the frame. It can be reversed if we want, as we saw in 2 Corinthians 6 and 7, with purification, perfection of holiness and reverence for God.

Purify the mind, the family, perfect holiness in a society, bring to bear on body and category of spiritual knowledge: These are touchpoints to restore biblical symbolism in all these areas, reinstating them there.

Revealed symbolism is retained, or lost, in every generation as parents teach -- or do not teach-- children. If we in the churches aren't dedicated to this in every generation, our loss will be like Romans.

Jesus warned in Matthew 5:13-16 about salt that loses saltiness, because it can't be made salty. It leads to abandonment. He tells us not to put a light under a bowl: That, too, is a symbol abandoned.

Unbelief, then, is not just an individual philosophy, it is a sociology. It happens among a group of individuals who form a consensus because they want complete freedom of action to do what they want, to practice homosexuality, to act in depraved ways, to lie and cheat and steal. This isn't a philosophy, it's not hedonism -- we give it too much credit to call it that.]A bunch of people get together and say, "Who's to say we can't do so and so?"

Evil desires request freedom of action -- a complete arc of freedom of action. It is our constant task to keep all human thinking within the frame of the Word of God, so that we do not fall victim to all the results of the human reality frame.