

Combating the Relativization of Scripture

Lesson Two The Relativizing Agency of The Self

Text: 2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21

BASIC CONTEXT:

1. David the King of Israel has determined to number the troops. As will become apparent, this will not be considered an act of faith by the Lord. (2 Sam. 24:1)
2. Joab and the army commanders are aghast at the order to formulate a military census. They attempt to dissuade the King from this action. They are not successful. (2 Sam. 24:3)
3. The military census according to the 2 Samuel passage takes 9 months and 20 days. At the end of this, the census is made known to David (2 Sam. 24:8).
4. David's reaction is immediate: "I have sinned greatly by doing this" (1 Chron. 21:8).
5. David's seer Gad offers to David, on behalf of the Lord, three forms of punishment (1 Chron. 21:11-12).

RELATIVIZATION INDEX:

The design of the lesson is to now link or index the nine suggested categories of relativization to the personalities in the passage, and note the results. By way of review, the Nine Categories of Relativization are: EXPERIENCE, HUMAN INTELLIGENCE, TEMPORAL VARIABLES, COMMUNITY, HISTORY, CULTURE, RACE, TIME, DESIRE/AMBITION.

APPLICATION TO 2 SAMUEL AND 1 CHRONICLES:

At least three sources or forms of relativization can be detected:

1. HUMAN INTELLIGENCE:

- (a) David is operating here from what we can identify as "objectivity" and "subjectivity." Both of these are manifestations of the self.
- (b) One notable thing missing from King David's approach in this passage is any appeal to a revelation from the Lord.
- (c) Objectivity involves the actual military census from which he will derive a number. The practice of subjectivity is his feeling about the situation. Both are incapable of getting David beyond the self.

- (d) A fact can be recognized here: until a word from the Lord comes into the situation, then as far as we are concerned, the self is the situation and the situation is the self.
- (e) The King is relying uniquely upon his intelligence in this project of numbering the troops.

2. EXPERIENCE:

- (a) In any human circumstance we often try to “get out” of the situation. We do this by being “objective” about what is going on. The thought is that if we can get the measure of the situation empirically or statistically, that frees us from the trap of the subjective. This passage teaches us that this is not the key issue. The key is rather to get revelation from the Lord *into* the situation.
- (b) Getting revelation into the situation comes with a price. To do this, one must require that both the objective and the subjective functions of the self become passive.
- (c) Upon consideration, it appears that the objective and the subjective (or in our parlance: the self) are the source of all despair, discouragement and unfaithfulness. Any major example of great faith from the Scriptures shows that this is the case. 1 Sam. 17; Num. 13,14 and others are examples of this fact.
- (d) David relied on his experience, and demonstrates this dependence by numbering the troops as his basis for making appraisals regarding the security of the nation of Israel.

3. TEMPORAL VARIABLES:

- (a) The temporal variables are directly involved in this action of numbering the troops. David is King; and as such, is charged with the security of the people. His reasoning takes into consideration the surrounding nations that wish Israel harm and not good will.
- (b) The troops themselves represent such temporal variables. Temporal variables are not deniable; but what David does wrong is to make such things determinant in this thinking and his behavior. In doing this, King David has relativized God.

WHAT DAVID SHOULD HAVE DONE:

1. The King should have asked for a word from the Lord. This necessarily means that in so doing, he would have had to marginalize both objectivity and subjectivity as functions of the self. In our world to do that is considered ludicrous.
2. We have unfortunately found ways to operate on the basis of the self and maintain some modicum of faith in the word of God.

3. The objective and the subjective are means of pushing God out of the picture. When these two functions of the self are operating, then it is the Lord Himself and His Word that are pushed to the margins.
4. If this be true, then there is a contradiction between two things: On the one hand there is the revelation of the Lord. and on the other there are these two functions of the self -- objectivity and the subjectivity.
5. All of this poses a question or set of questions: Where, or in what, is the mind to be anchored? Or where, or in what, is language to be anchored?
6. There are two possible answers to these questions: Either the mind will be anchored in the revelation of God, or the mind will be anchored in the self. But it is not possible to do both.
7. The grand generalization from these texts is: We cannot anchor the mind in the self! Which means that the mind and self are not identical – they are not the same.
8. Perhaps we have three levels of consciousness here: the highest is the revelation of the Lord; and then a step lower is the mind; and the lowest level of all is the self, as evidenced by objectivity and subjectivity.
9. Because of the King's sin, a great plague fell upon the nation and 70,000 fatalities were recorded.
10. These texts reveal that God is proximate to several things:
 - (a) God is proximate to the mind – and so David was told what the Lord thought.
 - (b) God is proximate to biology – this explains why and how a great pathogen spread and killed so many.
 - (c) God is proximate to history – that explains why David could have experienced 3 months of fleeing from his enemies: History would go that way because the Lord would send it in that direction (1 Chron. 21:12).
 - (d) God is proximate to weather patterns – this accounts for the 3 years of famine that could have become fact. (1 Chron. 21:12)
 - (e) God is proximate to agricultural patterns – see above for the same explanation. (1 Chron. 21:12)
11. The functions of the self-- objectivity and subjectivity --are incapable of detecting such truths.
12. This makes the point: We must isolate and marginalize the self. If we do not, then it is a foregone conclusion that the self will relativize the Word of God.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISCOURSE:

King David had a choice to make and he chose poorly. We face the exact same choice as did he between two discourses:

- (a) A DISCOURSE THAT TRIES TO RELATIVIZE SCRIPTURE. This is a way of thinking and speaking that has been overtaken by the categories of relativization. David was overtaken by such discourse in his insistence upon numbering the

- troops. The King of Israel should have sought for the wisdom of God. Pity that he did not.
- (b) A DISCOURSE SHAPED BY THE REVELATION OF THE LORD. Here is discourse that has been shaped by exposure and obedience to the will of the Lord. David could have responded to the situation and to Satan's wiles (1 Chron. 21:1) by insisting upon some word from the Lord. His discourse could have been shaped by greater faith in the word of the Lord.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. From "the inventory of analytical elements" in the Introduction to this lesson series, explain in your own words the definitions of the following elements: human intelligence, experience, and temporal variables.
2. Often people say that "objective" issues have to do with "cold, hard facts" and "subjective" issues deal with people's feelings. In what way does the story of David's sin show that both objectivity and subjectivity are manifestations of the self?
3. If David had depended upon a truly accurate and valid assessment of his past victories, why would he have concluded that the number of troops made no difference in any future victories? How does this show the necessity of relativizing experience to the Word – and the power – of God?
4. In what way does the Scriptural command, "Wait on the Lord," demonstrate relativization? How would the lives of David and his country have been different if he had waited upon the Lord?
5. Explain: "Either the mind will be anchored in the revelation of God, or the mind will be anchored in the self. But it is not possible to do both."
6. What are the three levels of consciousness listed in the lesson?
7. According to the lesson, in the story of David's numbering of the troops, to what five things is God proximate? Would you add any other things after reading this text?
8. As you consider the list of analytical elements, are there any you would add to the three elements under consideration for this lesson? If so, explain your answer.
9. In what way has studying relativization given you insight into why David's commanders were so horrified at his proposal to number the troops?
10. Think of a situation you are facing, in which you could be lured by an objective appraisal and an subjective appraisal. What have you learned from the example of David that would help you talk about, and deal with, this situation?

Specifically, what elements of your assessment must be relativized to the Word of God?