

*What crime has he committed?’ asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder; ‘Crucify him!’²⁴When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood,’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’²⁵All the people answered, ‘Let his blood be on us and on our children!’²⁶Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.”
(Matthew 27:1, 2, 11, and 13-26 NIV)*

The pattern throughout history is as subtle as the Serpent in the garden. People propose ideas, directions, beliefs, moral standards and levels of tolerance that are measured by public opinion rather than the Word of God. When a consensus evolves and gains widespread popularity, it is often accepted as being of God *because* it has the appearance of being correct since after all, almost everyone accepts it — so it *must* therefore be from God. It’s simply not possible that *so many* could be wrong! This pattern has repeated in every generation and in the process, God’s Word is consulted less and less as mankind is consulted more and more. If God’s instructions had been the ever-present guide for Sodom and Gomorrah instead of the “*general agreement*” or consensus of that society, would the cities have ever reached the point that they did? Certainly not!

Relying on consensus (rather than the Word of God) as a method of determining a direction to proceed is as great a threat to God’s people today as it was to those whom we have just read about. It’s probably not an exaggeration to say that people in the United States today are less knowledgeable of the Word of God than they were twenty years ago. If this is true and a segment of those individuals are in the Body of Christ (and are *also* less knowledgeable in the Word of God) what source will be consulted for guidance within the Body in this century? We’ve already began to see the results of this in various denominations. More and more practices are being endorsed by religious groups that are *clearly* in opposition to the Word of God. The most recent example of this is the convention of the Episcopal Church. The representatives there voted to allow a practicing homosexual “priest” to be placed in the role of a “bishop.” How did they get to that point? Consensus!

So we see not only from the Biblical examples listed in this article but countless others as well, that consensus is neither an accurate guide for living nor for decision making. As children of God, it’s our responsibility to always measure consensus against the Word of God. No matter what the tide of the times dictates, we as Christians, must *always* let the *Word* be *our* guide.

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DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

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The Nonsense of Consensus

Consensus — as defined by *Merriam Webster* is:

“General agreement; the judgment arrived at by most of those concerned. agreement of the majority in sentiment or belief.”

A course in Modern Management defines consensus as:

“a form of participative decision making in which the entire team is consulted and all members accept a decision.”

But by far, the most *practical* definition of consensus is probably this one offered by Margaret Thatcher.

“Ah consensus...the process of abandoning all beliefs, principles, values and policies in search of something in which no one believes, but to which no one objects; the process of avoiding the very issues that have to be solved, merely because you cannot get agreement on the way ahead. What great cause would have been fought and won under the banner ‘I stand for consensus’?”

The use of consensus (majority rule) as a method to determine the direction that God’s people should go has historically proven to oppose God in favor of gaining acceptance by the masses.

Adam and Eve had a consensus of opinion (both of them) when they decided to accept the deception of the Devil. We all know the outcome of that decision (Genesis 3:1-24).

Genesis 6:12-13 tells us that in the days of Noah...

“...God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted His way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.” (KJV)

We might say that the people of that day certainly would have had good reason for not believing that God was going to destroy them with a great flood. After all, it had never even rained (Gen. 2:5-6) let alone flooded the earth. The “judgement arrived at by most of those concerned” (the consensus) would undoubtedly have been that the mere suggestion of such an event was preposterous. The majority however, were *not* being led by the Words of God, so the consensus was wrong!

“And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl

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of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark.” (Gen. 7:23 KJV)

When God told Abraham that He was going to destroy Sodom, Abraham resisted, confident that God was mistaken about the number of righteous souls that could be found in Sodom. So he attempted to bargain with God (Gen. 18:20-33). Unable to find ten righteousness souls however, the angels set about to destroy the city. Only Lot and his two daughters escaped (Genesis. 19:12-29). A side note is that Lot’s wife and his sons-in-law all perished needlessly. Lot had urged his sons-in-law to leave but they refused to take the warning seriously (Gen. 19:14). Lot’s wife, after being warned to not look back, chose to do so anyway and was turned into a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26). This account of Sodom and Gomorrah makes it very obvious that the consensus of belief in the society in which Lot lived was way beyond the limits of God’s tolerance for acceptable behavior. Out of an entire city, only Lot and his two daughters were spared. The consequence of accepting consensus as a dependable guide to live by, was complete destruction for those in the sinful cities.

“Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven,” (Genesis 19:24 NASB)

While Moses was on Mt Sinai the people became restless and turned to Aaron for leadership. Aaron had been with Moses from the beginning of the Exodus and knew God’s way. Yet he was persuaded to go along with the desires of the crowd and formed a calf of gold to worship rather than hold them to the worship of God. Instead of exercising his role as a leader and holding the people to the way that God had instructed, he apparently crumbled under the desire to be popular and became nothing more than a representative of the masses instead of an effective leader. He chose to abandon all beliefs, principles and values and accept the consensus of the majority rather than the instruction of God. From what we can tell from the Scriptures, the people were all in agreement that they should make an idol of gold and Aaron chose to accept the consensus rather than stand up for what He knew to be right. However, when Moses returned — well — this is the account that Aaron tried to “sell” to Moses.

“When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it. He said to Aaron, ‘What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin? Do not be angry, my lord,’ Aaron answered. ‘You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him. So I told them, Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off. Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!’” (Exodus 32:19-24 NIV)

We also see from the account of the Tower of Babel that acting simply because a consensus has been reached may not always be pleasing to God.

“¹Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ²As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. ³They said to each other, ‘Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly....’ ⁴Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.’ ⁵But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. ⁶The Lord said, ‘If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other. ⁸So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹That is why it was called Babel because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world...” (Genesis 11:1-9 NIV)

Verse 4 states that mankind wanted to “...make a name for (them)selves....” They were apparently more interested in earning fame and glory than they were in serving God.

Perhaps the most thought provoking account where consensus was permitted to rule the situation at hand is found in the book of Matthew.

“¹Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. ²They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor.... ¹¹...Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ‘Yes, it is as you say,’ Jesus replied.... ¹³Then Pilate asked him, ‘Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?’ ¹⁴But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge — to the great amazement of the governor. ¹⁵Now it was the governor’s custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. ¹⁶At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. ¹⁷So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, ‘Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?’ ¹⁸For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. ¹⁹While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: ‘Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.’ ²⁰But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. ²¹Which of the two do you want me to release to you?’ asked the governor. ‘Barabbas,’ they answered. ²²What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?’ Pilate asked. They all answered, ‘Crucify him!’ ²³Why?