

True Worldliness

A Response to Josh Teis's article, "A Warning Against Worldliness in the Church."

By Chris Chavez

To begin, I believe Josh Teis genuinely seeks to love and follow the Lord, reaching and discipling souls. He is not my enemy in the slightest, but a brother, co-laborer, and helper in the cause of Christ. Know that my comments are not an attack or rebuttal against him personally. They are considerations regarding his article in its teaching and conclusions. (You need to read all of his article first, by the way.)

Josh is an exquisite writer and communicator. Rarely does he write that he hasn't first thoroughly thought over, read about, studied, and prayed over it. Much of his article is good, needed, and convicting. But an underlying premise seemed to confirm a growing trend from several social media personalities and comments I've read recently. *The concern is a shockingly deep and fundamental misunderstanding of Issues of Conscience.*

To be clear, this misunderstanding is not in knowing that Issues of Conscience exist. It is not in knowing there are the weaker and the stronger. Especially in Josh's case, it is not in knowing the stronger and weaker are not to judge one another. (Josh is a challenging example of a gracious spirit that makes his ministry and writing so refreshing.) But rather the misunderstanding is found in *how* the Lord guides through principles in Issues of Conscience and the removal of Biblical authority to these areas.

As I read this, the undertone of "*Be silent where the Bible is silent*" comes to mind. It is a belief commonly used but grossly flawed -- but *not* how you may think.

I think much is accidental in his article; some perhaps, not. But either way, it needs addressed. Allow me to explain concerns through a Brief Lesson, through Response on Josh's article specifically, and then through some Final Thoughts.

Disclaimer: I assume those reading this know the related Bible passages, especially I Corinthians 8-10 and major passages on worldliness. Therefore, for the sake of space, I have not included most references.

Caution: Do NOT read the end first! I assume most people reading are aware of the issues facing IFB and that they are pretty convinced of their positions. Therefore, you are a skim reader, looking for the result and skipping the rest. Please allow me to humor you in your Bible knowledge in this area as I build a point.

A BRIEF LESSON

1. **Issues of Conscience (IOCs) have to do with those areas the Bible doesn't *directly* list.** For example, hobbies to choose from, television episodes, food items, song titles and countless more are not listed in the Bible; they are, therefore, Issues of Conscience (IOCs). Lying, stealing, strife, and unkindness are not Issues of Conscience; they are listed directly in Scriptures known as direct commands. Interestingly, more falls under the realm of IOCs than we give credit. Think about all that occurs in our life that the Bible doesn't list specifically.

The three hot topic discussions these days seem to be Music, Attire, and Methodology. For clarity of explanation and illustration, I've decided to use these Big Three throughout, though, really, any other IOCs could easily be substituted.

2. **Issues of Conscience are just that – issues or matters that relate to an individual’s conscience.** No one can see the conscience and consequently judge that conscience. Each man answers for his own before God. Thus, there are weaker and stronger.

By the way, Paul’s usage of these two terms is not to say there are only two groups on each issue and broadbrush audiences! (i.e. the conservative vs liberal or the contemporary vs traditional.) It is to say there is always someone “left” of us and someone “right” of us on any issue. I am taught how to behave myself Biblically both directions of me! Many miss this!!!

3. **Each man’s conscience is either free (at liberty) or bound in various matters of living.** In what to wear to a church event, for example – a full suit? a dress shirt and tie? a polo? t-shirt? other options? -- I will either be bound (No, I can’t) or free (Yes, I can). There are a lot of reasons that might come into play with what a person wears to various church events, but in the end, we arrive at either a Yes or No for a given moment or situation.

This binding and freeing in Issues of Conscience should be constantly and regularly adjusting – in *both* directions. For example, there may be a song I used to think was right and now I don’t. Or a song I used to think was wrong but now I listen to. An honest Christian will consider *both* directions regularly.

4. **No man is free to decide what he thinks is best!** Gasp! We’ve probably agreed up to this point. But here, many misunderstand. Enter the battle of Libertarians and Legalists. In IOCs, Libertarians believe they can do what they want since the Bible doesn’t give a specific list. Legalists, having no list, create one and give it to everyone. *Both* are unbiblical. Just because there was no list, God wasn’t silent in matters of conscience. In reality, He speaks very loudly through two Agents.

The first Agent for IOCs is the *Holy Spirit*. He indwells *every* believer *equally*, and He attempts to guide *all* believer into holiness – *equally*. He works fervently to conform us to the image of Christ by binding and freeing the conscience in IOCS. But He does not do it alone. We are not mystics.

The second Agent for IOCs is the *Principles of the Word of God*. There are hundreds given, like expediency, deference, slavery to something, we are temples, prudence, wisdom, the entire book of Proverbs! Principles are just as Biblical as commands are! They are just as authoritative and just as pertinent. We sometimes think that direct commands stand higher than principles, as if it’s not a sin to be unwise (principle) so long as you don’t lie (direct command.)

Importantly, these two Agents *always* work together. You will never have principles without the Holy Spirit nor will you have the Holy Spirit without principle (or another dimension of the Word of God).

Also, as you observe life, you’ll find a lot of it doesn’t have the black/white commands to aid a decision. Most of life, I suggest, comes under a host of principles that guide the limitless variables of situations and decisions. Therefore, I suggest principles have are more overarching and pervasive nature than direct commands.

5. **Principles are designed of God; the Bible is *not* silent.** As we know, we are all going to land on different places in IOCs. And we don't like this. We wish the Bible contained soundtracks, pictures of attire, movie titles, or the proper amount of food intake, for that matter. But it doesn't. So, was God silent? *No*, He was masterful; He gave principles.

Principles are timeless. They transcend cultural subjectivity. They address *everything!* The Bible would literally never be completed if had to list everything about everything. For example, there are limitless permutations in music and attire alone. But He did complete His Word and didn't ignore anything. Our all-wise God gave specific, authoritative, and relevant principles to guide us in the thousands upon thousands of IOCs we experience.

Principles, administered through the Holy Spirit, do amazing things in the conscience of a Christian. Consider this as you read: *How do I determine what I should eat?* Principles. I can't eat what I want; nor can I give another a list of food and portions. But I can listen to and give principles like: *Am I gluttonous? Am I honoring the temple? Is this a celebrating occasion? Am I wise? Am I a steward?* Through these, I arrive at right and wrong on what to eat (and, sadly, how much to eat!)

Right and wrong?! Yes, right and wrong. There are right and wrong amounts of food to intake and right and wrong shows to watch. What is that line, then? The Bible gives it in Romans 14:22-23 "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." That is, God draws the line of right and wrong in our consciences through principles. Another cannot draw the line for someone else, but he certainly *can* give the principles God draws the lines with!

Therefore, and authoritatively, right and wrong music, attire, methodology and other Issues of Conscience *can* be discerned – through Biblical principles. The Bible is not silent at all! *It doesn't always directly list but it always lists directions!*

RESPONSE TO THE ARTICLE

What, then, does this have to do with the Josh's article? Getting to the point, when Josh redefines, worldliness, he accidentally removes the role of principle in life of believers and churches and accidentally opens the door to other forms of lawlessness! Massive explanation is need, I know; but please bear with me as I attempt to show this without attacking him. I sincerely want to help against these errors.

1. **First, much of Josh's article is helpful!** It seems that one motivation of the article is to exhort those of the right to stop slapping those of the left with the term "worldliness" when there are a lot of other direct commands being violated. He's right that they should stop. Stop violating direct commands of hatred and wrath *and* stop slapping those who are left of you (I Cor 8)! He is spot on, convictingly so. It needs to be said time and time again, and I think Josh is one of the best to write on judging the weaker and stronger.
2. **The Bible beliefs are problematic.** I know this is a strong statement and needs explanation but it's the Bible beliefs (theology) undergirding his article that are in error and concerning. I may or may

not disagree with his application, but one's application only comes from one's foundational Bible beliefs.

We see what Josh believes by how he concludes the article. In the final paragraph, he asks if you agree. Either worldliness is cultural subjectivity, or it is defined Biblically through direct commands. "Those on the right, stop slapping the left!" If, then, worldliness is cultural subjectivity, the right must stop. And if, then, worldliness is defined through direct commands of hatred, division, etc., those right must stop too! So, either way, stop slapping. (Again, he's right, stop slapping! But I think understanding left/right behavior is the Bible approach to get people to stop slapping, not redefining.)

He illustrates his point through various issues of methodology (lighting and décor), attire, and music – the Big Three, as I said. And, makes application throughout that worldliness does not apply to shallows externals, only to internal spirituality.

Now, whether you agree with his application above or not, it's of no real importance. It's the foundation that should concern Bible believers. What does he lay his arguments upon? What holds up the application?

So, what is the major concern? It's his starting point that worldliness is either cultural subjectivity or defined through direct commands. Ready for the shocker? *He's right on the first; dead wrong on the second!*

By redefining worldliness through direct commands, he accidentally (I think) allowed the Big Three – and by implication other Issues of Conscience – to escape Biblical authority. This progresses to faulty applications and conclusions.

3. **The newly defined definition of worldliness changes its role as Biblical principle.** In his attempt to define worldliness, he chose as examples (others could have been chosen) the direct commands against division, hatred, strife, etc. While this seems good, he is substituting direct commands for principle. This is really, *really* bad. *In fact, whole sections of a Christian's life are pulled out from the authority of the Word of God through this (more on this later).*

Worldliness is not to be defined through direct commands. It is a principle. It's like defining the principle of wisdom through the direct command against adultery. Certainly, committing adultery is unwise, but an unwise person doesn't necessarily commit adultery. We cannot replace a principle with direct commands. Sounds good at first, but it's dangerously limiting.

Notice what happened. Since the direct commands of division, hatred, and strife have nothing to do with music, methodology, and attire, you cannot say these are worldly. And we now have his point: "Stop saying they are worldly; that is nothing but cultural subjectivity." But, again, his application is flawed in its starting point.

4. **The new definition is mistakenly different from what the Bible teaches.** Worldliness means "of this world." But, Josh says, *everything* – from décor to music to dress – came from this world in some facet; therefore, the traditional definition must be rejected. He's right, if the traditional definition

is cultural subjectivity. But what does the Bible say it is? What did Jesus mean in John 17 when he prayed we should be in the world but not of the world? And what about John in saying don't love the world? Neither follow the logic of everything in the world is worldly; it is not a warning against cultural subjectivity. They taught a *principle*.

The principle is defined already in Romans 12:2 when God continues to instruct transformation through renewing the mind. The definition of worldliness is "of this world" and "having the mindset and philosophies of the world." What philosophies specifically, you say? There are a host of them and that is why it's a principle. Just like wisdom has a host of ideas.

But, it's subjective, Josh says. And it is! But so is wisdom, prudence, expediency, and any other principle! The subjectivity of worldliness is by design! It is a principle that probes the conscience. The Holy Spirit ministers through these! *Is what I'm doing, singing, wearing, of the philosophies and mindset of this world?* (I'm using the Big Three only as examples.) It was not meant to be defined with direct commands; it is a principle!

Now watch. Substitute the phrase "of the philosophies and mindset of this world" above with any other principle. *Is it wise? Is it expedient? Is it honoring to the temple? Is it prudent?* The power, authority, and inspection of principle!

What Josh didn't like is the slapping of those left of us, and, again, he's right on this. But what he accidentally did was remove a principle from church's and believer's lives by replacing it with commands.

5. **Inadvertently, Biblical authority is negated from ruling over the Big Three.** To answer the question of whether a shirt, song, or method is worldly, one must ask who the judge is. Josh's beliefs would suggest it's either judgmental cultural subjectivity or direct commands only. Observe that since cultural subjectivity is not worldliness, the Big Three are unjudged. *And* since the redefined worldliness of violating direct commands applies only to people and not practically to the Big Three, they escaped unjudged again.

And here goes the path from belief to behavior. Josh's beliefs have strong application. He asserts that methods, music, and attire *cannot* be worldly (in the traditional definition) and judging so is only culturally subjective.

But the Bible disagrees! There is a judge, or more properly, judges. The Bible gives *authoritative, clear, accountable principles*! One of which is worldliness. Attire, music, methods (as well as other IOCs like hobbies, habits, activities, movies, and entertainment) *can* be worldly. Worldliness is a principle, and principles have authority over every matter unlisted in the Bible, including the Big Three.

Again, Josh would never do this to expediency, but he unknowingly did so to worldliness. The result of his article is that worldliness has no principle-natured authority over The Big Three. It can't be worldly unless it violates direct commands, he says. But the consequence will be dangerously sidestepping Bible authority, making declarations where God did not!

I can, should, and *must* honestly ask the question, “*Is this worldly?*” It is one of many principles that have Bible authority to judge the non-listed-in-the-Bible areas of my life.

6. **There is danger in alleviating the conscience.** “Be not conformed to this world” is a command. It is not a direct command, as a lie is, but has equal authority as a principle. This means, it is to be authoritatively warned: “Don’t listen, wear, or methodologically approach, or do anything else, worldly.” An issue does not have to violate a direct command as Josh says to be worldly. Just like an issue doesn’t have to violate a direct command to be unwise! Disobeying the command against worldliness is sinful in and of itself. Be discerning, be wise, don’t be lazy – all commands that when disobeyed are sinful in and of themselves.

To clarify what is correct, worldliness is not a direct command but a *command of principle*. This means, I am to teach the principle authoritatively *not* mark the line in the conscience. That is the Holy Spirit’s role. Just as I am to teach and command wisdom and the Holy Spirit draws lines. I may land differently than you do, on what worldly or wise attire, music, or methods are, but this doesn’t mean it’s not to be obeyed. And when the Holy Spirit says something is of this world’s philosophies and mindsets, it is sinful.

But sadly, when Josh converted principle to direct commands, he unexpectedly alleviated man’s conscience from the conviction of worldliness. A tool the Holy Spirit uses to prick the conscience is removed in limitless areas, far beyond the Big Three. Now, consciences can be left without one crucial checkpoint: worldliness.

7. **The depth out of worldliness is removed when minimizing it to direct command.** Josh said, “The greatest problem in redefining worldliness to something as shallow as current fashions, current music, and current decorating styles is that we entirely miss the dangers of true worldliness.” He actually went from one version of shallowness to another. When he narrowed “true” worldliness to direct commands like strife and division, he pulled the plug, draining its depth to a small puddle. Worldliness, left as a principle, dives deep into all issues of life.

Consider this more Biblical revision to his statement: It is a great problem and shallow to *limit* worldliness to fashion, music, and décor; or better yet, it is shallow to *judge* the fashion, music, and décor of those weaker and stronger than I. And to add: another great problem is denying that worldliness applies to fashions, music, decorating styles and other Issues of Conscience, as if God was silent and doesn’t care. *True* worldliness can be in any decision we make.

8. **This approach to principles can have long term consequences; and they’re not good.** Again, Josh wanted the right to stop slapping the left over worldliness but he did so by redefining worldliness away from a principle. And, sadly, while alleviating the command against worldliness from conscience is harmful enough, a greater, more subtle potential for error occurred.

Theology has consequences. Bible beliefs and conclusions *are* the most important. And here is the great disturbance. The approach of defining principles through direct commands opens a door – *a door to every man doing right in their own eyes*. No, this wasn’t Josh’s intention, not even in the slightest. Josh genuinely wants to teach the Bible, but a door was accidentally opened.

You see, there are more principles than worldliness and there are more Issues of Conscience than the Big Three. If what Josh said is true, then the permission is granted to do the same to all principles.

Lets' go through the door. If worldliness can lose its principled nature by being redefined through direct commands, then why can't we do the same with expediency, or wisdom, or any other principle. Why, then, do I *really* need these "subjective" principles when I have "clearer" direct commands? So, being left with direct commands only, what happens to the numerous unlisted areas of my life? (*And, soberly, remember that a majority of what we do externally is Issues of Conscience and governed by command of principles. Little, by comparison, is governed by direct command.*)

So, what happens with direct commands only? The result is that God's Biblical authority is only concerned with limited sections of my life. Apply this to, say, getting a tattoo sleeve (had to pick something) and we have: "You can't say that a tattoo sleeve is wrong. The Bible doesn't say anything against it directly. I *am* obeying direct commands." Thus, do what you think is best in music, eating, television, habits, etc. We have the "Chapter and verse" movement, saying show me a verse that says it's wrong. See, God isn't concerned; God didn't speak.

Now, I *know* Josh doesn't believe like this (except for worldliness at it relates to the Big Three) but theologically the entrance to having unguided Issues of Conscience has been unlocked. He didn't mean it at all, but the approach allows it, unfortunately.

Instead, we should preach and command the authority and jurisdiction of principles. God does care and instruct through principles. Teach and preach prudence, expediency, wisdom, stewarding the body, and yes, worldliness, and more and watch principles authoritatively transform in all areas of life – even areas direct commands don't cover.

FINAL THOUGHTS

1. **The Bible must be our Standard for all matters of faith and practice.** It is trending today – I've seen it in several posts from IFBs – that God is silent in some areas. We do not truly believe this, do we?! The Bible doesn't ignore any part of my life. God forbid! Left to ourselves in any area we will do right in our own eyes.
2. **Avoid Legalism and Libertarianism and follow the Bible.** Seems foolish to say that; what man reading this thinks himself either? We think of someone left or right of us, don't we? But consider how we would answer this hot topic question:

So, what songs, clothes, and methods are worldly?

The Legalist says, "I'll tell you which ones are; here's *the* standard!" He thereby denies the Word of God by marking the line in another's conscience.

The Libertarian says, "The Bible doesn't address it so do whatever." He thereby denies the Word of God by saying the Bible is silent on such issues, not knowing he is denying hundreds of principles.

The Lord would say, "You listen to the Holy Spirit that I gave you as to whether it is worldly, following the other principles I gave you as well." He thereby affirms His own Word, pointing to timeless, pervasive, authoritative principles.

3. **How do we preach principles, and especially, worldliness?** Preachers, we cannot avoid these issues, nor can we command a holy list and worldly list. We are to *command* principle. Authoritatively, lovingly *command* them. Teach what worldliness is and all the other principles, too. Don't shy away or treat them as less authoritative. Preach them. Let's see what this looks like from three preachers.

Preacher 1: *I'm not touching any of those issues.*

Christian: *[No knowledge equals no know growth in that area].*

Preacher 2: *I'll tell you straight; your shirt is worldly.*

Christian: *Aye, aye, Capitan, whatever you say. OR Who are you to say? What Scripture do you have? That's your opinion! OR What about that guy over there!*

Preacher 3: *Take time to ask the Holy Spirit if the attire I'm wearing is of this world's mindset and philosophies.*

Christian: *[Internal probing of the Holy Spirit upon the conscience; Biblical results].*

4. **There will always be left and right of us, even in worldliness.** And that's ok, so long as we obey the Bible in behavior and in responsibility. In behavior, for example, I imagine Josh is left of me in some IOCs and right of me in others. I *must* behave myself accordingly with him in judgment, deference, and expedience, etc. And in responsibility, from where I am musically (to use a Big Three example), godly men are right of me and godly men are left of me. But I am not responsible for them. What's important is that I consider principles in my *own* music selections.
5. **Lastly, we *should* honestly, regularly, and humbly examine ourselves and our churches in the matter of worldliness.** Remember this is *one* principle, one of many. But it *is* authoritative, relevant, and important, and Josh wanted to warn us of it. Let's heed the warning and ask if any aspects of our church or life are worldly? I remind that the Bible teaches worldliness to be "of this world" – its system, ways, methods, philosophies, mindsets. So here goes:

Is wearing this suit or those jeans worldly?

Is that song I'm listening to worldly?

Is my approach to reaching souls worldly?

Do I have worldliness in my preaching style?

Do I have worldly goals for my church?

Lord, help us not to be of this world in any area!