

Principle vs. Expedience; Reason vs. Revelation

God wants His people to be principled people; living according to the principles that He has set forth for human life in this Earth. He wants that so much so, that He took the trouble of giving His people a book to read and study, which book contains *all* the principles by which they are to make *all* the decisions of their(our) lives. Whether they're church decisions, personal decisions, job decisions, relational decisions, financial decisions, etc, etc, etc, the principles in the book have been put there by God, to be at our disposal. And here's another beautiful thing... there's only one book, so that we can all be on the same page (pun intended!) regarding how we are to behave, and (within reason) what our decision making is to look like.

The book is filled with principles... all the principles we'll need for life and Godliness. But the principles aren't written in order. Neither are they numbered as in "*Rule #15: Never do such and such*", or "*Rule 673: Always stay... whatever*". Instead, the principles that we are to follow, rather than coming in neatly laid out lists, come in numerous and various other forms. They may take the form of songs, or poems, personal letters, historical narratives or sometimes even pure symbolism. Many, many of our signposts and principles are in the form of stories.

Problems usually arise when people encounter situations in life, and instead of applying God's principles to the situation, they decide upon what would be best for the particular situation. In other words, they decide upon courses of action that they believe will result in certain, desired outcomes. We call this method of decision making, expedience. Expediency is a regard for what is perceived as advantageous, rather than what is right, just and proper (if there even are such thing as right, just and proper anymore!).

Preacher/Teacher types, like me, frequently make up stories of our own for the purpose of teaching God's timeless principles in contemporary and contextually relevant ways. A master of making up these types of stories was the great Oxford Don, CS Lewis.

In CS Lewis' greatly popularized literary series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the fourth book in that series of seven is entitled, *The Silver Chair*. Many of you have read the books and/or seen the movies. As you probably know, Lewis allegorizes Christian principles in fantastic stories which include magic and dragons, wizards and kings. It's really great stuff for grownups as well as kids... my wife and I still watch the decades old, BBC produced movies that are based on these books!

Just like in five of the other six books, human children from this world are magically transported to the "other" realm, Narnia. Also in similar fashion to the other books, Aslan the Great Lion - the Christ allegory, based on the Lion of Judah reference in the Bible - gives the human children

a task to fulfill. They are to find, somewhere in Narnia, a lost Narnian prince named, Rillian. Toward this quest, they are given a helper; a native of Narnia... not quite man, but “sort of” human(ish). He is a “Marsh-Wiggle” named, Puddleglum. He is a marvelous helper; not merely in assisting the human children in fulfilling their task, but also in obeying Aslan; their primary responsibility after all.

Arriving in Narnia, the human boy, “Scrub” and the human girl, “Pole”, get separated. Scrub knows Aslan and has been in Narnia before, but the girl Pole, has not. Alone, she encounters Aslan, the Great Lion, and after getting over her natural fright, she comes to realize that even though a lion, He is Good, and can be trusted. Aslan tells Pole that even though she thinks that she and Scrub came to Narnia voluntarily, He has in fact summoned them there for a particular mission on which He is sending them. Aslan “briefs” Pole on their mission, and in doing so gives her four specific “*signs*” that she and Scrub are to memorize, look for, and *follow without question*, on their journey/mission. These signs are in essence like our principles. Following them will produce success. Not following them, well...

As chance would have it, the two human children arrive too late at the scene to follow and obey the *first sign*.

Next they completely overlook the *second sign* because of their own desire for personal comforts.

Then, through no involvement of their own, Aslan allows them to literally *fall* into the *third sign* by accident, they themselves not intending it at all.

At this point, they’re diligently looking for the fourth sign, feeling badly that they’ve missed the first two, and realizing that Aslan (Christ) has graciously “*given*” them the third.

They find themselves deep underground Narnia in the realm of Narnia’s arch enemy; an evil Witch, “Queen of the Underworld”. The Witch actually has Prince Rillian - for whom they are searching - captive, and under an evil enchantment; a spell! The spell robs him of the knowledge of his true identity as a Prince of Narnia. Instead, the spell has him convinced that he is to be the King of this underground realm, with his betrothed, the Witch, becoming his Queen; they two then conquering and ruling ruthlessly, Narnia above and the Underworld below, together!

But there’s a problem in the Witch’s plan; her spell doesn’t last all day. Therefore, every day for a few hours, Prince Rillian is in his right mind, rather than under the spell. Immediately just before those hours, Rillian is taken by the Witch’s guards and strapped into a Silver Chair (hence the title of the book). He is restrained in the chair lest in his right mind, he remembers who he is and escapes the Witch’s realm.

Our heroes, the two human children and Puddleglum the Marsh-Wiggle, happen to be with Prince Rillian when the guards come to strap him into the chair on that day. But they don't know he's actually Prince Rillian; they have only seen him in a mask, as the betrothed fiancé of the Witch who is planning to overthrow Narnia. But Rillian, though still in the mask, is now in his right mind! He pleads with them to release his bonds and let him out of the Silver Chair. He explains to them that he is strapped into the Chair at that hour, simply because he *is* in his right mind, and the Witch knows he will escape immediately if not restrained!

He is raving, screaming, swearing that if they don't release him, he'll take his revenge on them! He is desperate; not fully remembering, nor sufficiently rational in his sufferings to tell them that he is Prince Rillian of Narnia. All he can think about is that there are three there who are not slaves to the Witch, and who could cut his bonds and set him free.

Two things are happening here in the minds of the human children. *One*, they are looking for the fourth sign. *Two*, the now raving Rillian, is threatening that if they don't free him, when the guards release him from the Silver Chair, he'll take his revenge on them, killing them. They are in a bad spot.

Oh yes; lest we forget... the fourth sign! You may be wondering, "What was the fourth sign?". Aslan had told the human children that during their time in Narnia, if anyone, anyone at all, asked them to do something, anything, in His name, in the name of Aslan, it *must* be done.

Now here is a Prince of Narnia (that land of the people who revere and follow Aslan) yelling, railing and threatening like a "*savage lunatic*", trying to get free of his bonds, asking a Narnian native and two humans to set him free. He begs. He pleads.

Desperate to be free of his bondage and somewhat in his right mind, Prince Rillian says, "*Once I am free, I will take such revenge on this Queen and her people that they will talk of it for a thousand years. Beware! Beware! One night I did break my bonds! The Witch was here to stop me. You will you not have her to help you tonight. Free me now, and I am your friend. I am your mortal enemy, else!*".

Naturally, Puddleglum the Marsh-Wiggle and the human children are frightened out of their wits. This "*madman*", who is actually in his right mind in this moment, is threatening their lives! They don't know that he's the Prince of Narnia, and while he promises to be their friend if they set him free, he is threatening to kill them if they do not. How could they ever trust him enough to free him? Surely, he's a madman and they'll all be killed!

Prince Rillian is exhausted. He stops threatening. They are not responding to his threats and he is still bound. In his hopeless desperation, he takes a different tack. Now subdued and no longer raving, he says quite rationally but quite pitifully, *"I beg you to set me free... by all fears, by all loves, by the bright skies of OverLand, by the Great Lion, by Aslan Himself... set me free"*.

They heard it immediately! Scrub, the human boy says, *"Oh No!"*.

Pole the human girl says, *"Oh Dear!"*.

Puddleglum the Marsh-Wiggle says, *"It's the sign. It's the sign!"*.

"No!", protests the boy. *"It's the words of the sign"*.

"What shall we do?", asks the girl.

"Would Aslan really have meant us to unbind this savage lunatic?", the boy inquires rhetorically.

The lamenting Pole responds, *"If only we knew"*.

Puddleglum breaks in at this moment; he not encumbered with much of what humanity brings to its relationship with Christ/Aslan. He merely pronounces a Biblical *sine qua non*¹ that CS Lewis has buried in the plot line of a children's story. The Marsh-Wiggle says, *"I think we do know. Aslan didn't tell Pole what would happen if she followed the signs. He simply told her what she had to do. This fellow might be the death of us if we loose him. But that doesn't let us off following Aslan's signs"*.

There it is loved ones. When faced with life's situations, we have to decide... will we make our decisions with regard to expediency, seeking to control and ensure that the outcomes will be to our liking, or will we make our decisions in accordance with God's principles, the ones from that Book I was mentioning earlier? You know... the one with Aslan's signs in it?

Pastor

¹ Sine qua non - that without which we cannot do