

## Morality: Choosing God

### Lesson 3 – Is there an Absolute Standard of Morality?

1. Is there an absolute standard of morality? This question is being asked in all seriousness by many people. They want to do right but are not sure what is right. Mankind is in a state of confusion and uncertainty over his moral standards.
  - 1.1. Things that once were considered evil and sinful are now generally approved and practiced.
    - 1.1.1. Virtues that once were commended to all people are now held in disgrace.
    - 1.1.2. Moral belief has thrown the younger generation drifting without an anchor for their souls.
    - 1.1.3. We would do well to heed the warning of the prophet, “Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light, and the light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” (Isa. 5:20-21.)
  - 1.2. Confusion as this always results when men turn their backs on God.
    - 1.2.1. Man is not sufficiently wise to always be able to determine what is right and what is wrong, because “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” (Jer. 10:23)
    - 1.2.2. Men have turned away from God and through their own philosophies have sought to devise standards of conduct which will be generally accepted and followed. Nothing could be more foolish.
    - 1.2.3. History demonstrates over and over again that when mankind is left to himself he goes the way of evil and unrighteousness. Thus men are leading other men unto destruction.
    - 1.2.4. Christ said, in Matthew 15:14, “And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit.”
2. What Jesus taught
  - 2.1. First, that proper conduct grows out of the right attitude toward God. It should reflect an adherence to the “will of God” on earth - “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).
    - 2.1.1. When Jesus taught about proper behavior in marriage, he took his hearers “to the beginning” as God’s ethic on marriage (Matt. 19:3-9).
      - 2.1.1.1. Ethics must begin with God or with man and his culture. If with man anarchy and confusion result for “every man will do what is right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25).
    - 2.1.2. True morality recognizes God as creator: thus, his right to mandate human behavior.
    - 2.1.3. True ethical behavior grows out of seeing God as a loving, gracious and caring father. He is not a villain eager to pounce on us as sometimes stated by humanists and atheists. According to Jesus, God is patient, understanding, eager to receive and quick to forgive.
    - 2.1.4. For centuries the cry of man was “show us the Father.” Israel, for much of her history, had a strong inclination to erect some sort of visible, tangible replica or graven image. When Jesus came, he was “God with us” (Matt. 1:23). The word that was “with God” and was God, became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1,14). In Jesus we see what God is like.
  - 2.2. True ethics, according to Jesus, is motivated by the heart. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stressed attitude and motive.
    - 2.2.1. Morality is more than a legal code. The Pharisees emphasized a stringent legal code, but with it they mistreated widows, looked with contempt upon sinners and even abused their own parents (Matt. 23:14; Lk. 18:1-14). The Sermon on the

Mount began with a focus on “attitudes of being.” A contrite and humble spirit; and a meek, merciful and pure heart characterize kingdom citizens.

2.2.2. To make peace we must know peace (Mt. 5:1-12).

2.2.3. True morality begins inwardly, and manifests itself outwardly. Jesus stressed “being” before “doing.” The tragedy in many Christians is they seek to do without being. Christianity becomes sham and hypocrisy. Seeking to be a Christian outwardly without being one inwardly is the height of insincerity. Those who have been made righteous must live “soberly, righteously and godly” in this world (Tit. 2: 11 12).

2.3. True morality is tested in our relationships with others. Toward the world the impact of it will be like “salt” and “light.” Christians are lights shining in a dark place. Their morality will be like salt in the midst of dissipation and decay. His speech reflects a good and honest heart. His thoughts and desires are under the control of Christ. He exercises restraint on his thoughts, words and actions (See Mt. 5: 13-48.).

2.4. True morality, according to Jesus, is maintained by being heaven oriented.

2.5. The church is a colony of heaven on earth. Paul said, “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). While living here, our worship is directed toward heaven (Matt. 6: 1-4). Our prayers are directed to our Father in heaven (Matt. 6:5-15). We are to “lay up treasures in heaven-not on earth” (Matt. 6: 19-21). We are not worry and fret while here, because our Father in heaven cares for us (Matt. 6:25-34). Materialism is just as immoral as adultery because it violates Jesus' standard of ethical conduct.

### 3. The Chain of Authority

3.1. All authority inherently resides in God, by virtue of the fact that God is the creator of the world and all things therein, including man (Gen. 1-3; Rom. 9:11-24).

3.2. God gave all authority in heaven and on earth to Jesus Christ, his son (Matt. 28:18-20).

3.3. In turn, Christ sent the Holy Spirit upon the apostles to guide them into all the truth (John 16:13; 14:26; Acts 2:1-41), thus delegating authority to them to reveal his word (truth) to man.

3.4. The apostles laid hands on other men that they might receive miraculous power from the Holy Spirit, thus becoming prophets, with the power to reveal the word of God by inspiration (Eph. 3:5; 1 Cor. 2:12-14; Acts 8).

3.5. For a time, then, the word of God was in inspired men, who were able to infallibly preach the gospel of Christ.

3.6. With the passing of time, these men (the apostles and prophets) wrote the various books of the New Testament. The word of God was then in the inspired book (Eph. 3:5; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

3.6.1. The Bible often speaks of its own miraculous nature – its inspiration – and of the proper uses to be made of inspired scripture. To the Ephesian elders Paul said: “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). If this is the case, and we do confidently affirm that this is the case, then we must be concerned about how the Bible authorizes.

3.6.2. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Paul affirms the inspiration of the scriptures (“Every scripture inspired of God...”), makes reference to the use to be made of the inspired scriptures (“...is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness...”), and shows the designed consequence of this inspiration and use (“...that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work”).

### 4. The Matter of Authority is Simple

4.1. The matter of authority in religion may seem to some people to be so complicated as to be beyond their comprehension. But, it is really a quite simple matter.

- 4.1.1. Let's suppose that the license fee for my car in the State of Texas is \$50 per year. I go to the proper official, pay my money, and I'm issued a license plate number XYZ-123 (for the State of Texas). By receiving my money and issuing me the plate, the State of Texas thereby authorizes me to affix that plate to my car. The plate makes clear to all state troopers and other policemen that the car is authorized to be driven on the public roads. The State of Texas does not have to give me a notice in regard to all the numbers, which I must not affix to my car, but nevertheless, I know that I am not – by law – to affix any other license plate to my car. How do I know this? Because I understand the law of authority. I know that the State of Texas has authorized one – and only one – license plate to be put on my car.
- 4.1.2. Not only do adults understand the principle of authority but children also understand it. If a mother gives her child \$20 and says to him, "go to the store and buy a loaf of bread and a gallon of milk," that boy will know that he does not have the right to spend part of that twenty-dollar bill on candy. How does he know it? By having understanding of the basic principle of authority. If the boy goes home with candy (either in addition to or instead of the bread and milk), both he and his mother will know that he has done wrong – even if she has not specifically forbidden his buying candy by saying, "you must not buy candy!" The boy knows – by the mere fact that his mother did not authorize him to buy candy with part of that twenty-dollar bill – that he is not to buy candy.
- 4.1.3. There are other matters to be considered in the question of authority, but the above is sufficient to show both the crucial importance of the principle of authority and at least some of the basic sub-principles involved.
- 4.1.4. In the New Testament, II John 9-11 makes clear that, to be pleasing to God, one must have authority for what he does in religion (I Cor. 4:6; Rev. 22:18-19; Gal. 1:6-9; Gen. 6-9; Lev. 10:1-2).
- 4.1.5. Just as the principle (law) of authority is crucial in everyday human affairs, so it is throughout the Bible – from Genesis to Revelation. Even though no man living today is under the Old Covenant (all are living under the New Covenant, the gospel, the law of Christ, Heb. 10:9; Col. 2:14-15), the apostle Paul made clear that men living today can learn – in principle – from the record of various events in the Old Testament (Rom. 15:4). Note the following:
  - 4.1.5.1. Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, offered in worship "strange fire" – that is they used in worship fire, which God had not authorized them to use (Lev. 10:1-2). Was their using in worship that which God had not authorized them to use an important matter? It was so important in the sight of God that he destroyed them.
  - 4.1.5.2. King David and others moved the Ark of the Covenant in a way which God had not authorized (he moved it on a cart – not on the shoulders of the Levites, as God had authorized, I Chron. 15:1-15; 13:1-14; II Sam. 6:1-11). Because the affair involved an unauthorized way of moving the ark, and because an unauthorized man touched it, he was destroyed by God. The matter of authority is crucial!
  - 4.1.5.3. All men living today are under the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mk. 16:15-16; Matt. 28:18-20; Lk. 24:45-49). Whatever the law of Christ says, it says to those who are under that law (See the principle set in Rom. 3:19 and 4:15).
    - 4.1.5.3.1. Thus, in order to be pleasing to God, every man living today must have Bible authority for the plan of salvation which he obeys (it cannot involve, for example, instruction to be baptized because one has already been saved – the Bible authorizes the penitent believer, who is still a lost man to be baptized in order to be saved – that is, in order to become a

saved person, a child of God (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:15-16; Romans 6:3-5; Gal. 3:26-27; II Tim. 2:10; I Peter 3:20-21). Every person who seeks to be saved by the blood of Christ by obeying a humanly invented plan of salvation is doomed to fail in attaining that salvation unless he repents and obeys the plan of salvation, which is authorized in the New Testament.

- 4.1.5.3.2. Jesus himself made clear that many people who think they are saved are horribly mistaken. Why? Because they have obeyed mere human plans of salvation rather than the one divine plan of salvation (Matt. 7:13-23). Being a sincere, conscientious religious man will not save without one's obeying the gospel of Christ in being baptized (Acts 9, 22, and 26).
- 4.2. Some men have invented the doctrine that lost men are saved the very moment they believe on Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Many say that "by faith – plus nothing save one minus nothing." But the Bible teaches that faith without works (acts of obedience to Christ) is dead (and compares it to the body without the spirit, James 2:24, 26). Even the devil believes. But he does not obey (James 2). Men must be honest, learn God's will, and do only what the Bible authorizes.
- 4.3. Let us be reminded that in order for us to realize our great "hope" and achieve the "glory" in our future, Christ must be "in" us. Paul reminds us that it is Christ "in you" that adds up to the "hope of glory." We are baptized "into Christ" and then as we drink of his word it "becomes a well of water springing up to eternal life."
5. Galatians 5:16-25
  - 5.1. <sup>16</sup> But I say, Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would. <sup>18</sup> But if ye are led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, <sup>21</sup> envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> meekness, self-control; against such there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk.
  - 5.2. **16 But I say, Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.**
    - 5.2.1. To **walk by the Spirit** means to obey the word of God which is given by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit inspired men who wrote the Bible. To follow after the word of God is to walk by the Spirit. When one walks by the Spirit motivated by love, he will be the holy righteous person God wants him to be. He will not commit the sins of the flesh.
    - 5.2.2. **The flesh** is to live in opposition to God and do one's own will. Flesh is not referring to human body. When one lives in opposition to God, he commits all types of evil. If man does not subject himself wholly in obedience to the will of God, he will become increasingly ungodly and will do things that are an abomination to God.
  - 5.3. **17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may not do the thing that ye would.**
    - 5.3.1. There is the tendency to do evil, which fights against the desire to do right. Man by himself cannot overcome sin; however, Christians can overcome sin with God's help (Romans 7:24; 8:1; 1 Cor. 10:13).
    - 5.3.2. When one becomes a Christian, the battle still rages; however, a Christian can overcome with God's help (Philippians 4:13).

5.4. **18 But if you are led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law.**

5.4.1. This is a summary of what he has been teaching. One is led by the Spirit as he believes and obeys the word of God which is given by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:21). When one obeys the truth of the gospel, he is not under the law. The law has been taken out of the way and "nailed" to the cross.

5.5. **19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,**

5.5.1. Paul taught the differences in the life produced by being led by the Spirit and the life that did what one wanted to do. There are fifteen sins listed here. These are not all the works of the flesh. The first three sins have in common that they are sins of sex.

5.5.2. **Fornication** is a broad term which includes all unlawful sex. It includes adultery, fornication and homosexuality. Adultery is illicit sex of a married person with some one who is not his mate (Matthew 5:32). Fornication would include all acts of unchastity. Chastity is one of the great Christian virtues.

5.5.3. **Uncleanness** means impurity. It includes not only uncleanness in deeds, but also in words, thoughts and desires of the heart. Uncleanness includes unnatural lusts such as homosexuality (Romans 1:24).

5.5.4. **Lasciviousness** means free for any pleasure. The person who has no restraint and does whatever his desires dictate. It implies no moral self-control. It is shameless conduct in unclean indulgences. It is translated "wantonness" in Romans 13:13 and 2 Peter 2:18.

5.6. **20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties**

5.6.1. **Idolatry** refers not only to the worship of images, but also to any evil practice in connection with such worship. Idolatry is based upon a wrong concept of God. Images are made by men. Idolatry includes not only worshipping false gods with an image, but it includes worshipping the one true and living God with images.

5.6.2. **Sorcery** means the use of drugs. It was the use of drugs, potions, spells, enchantments as mysterious and super human powers which are condemned. Sorcery is witchcraft. When one's faith in magic replaces his faith in God, it is a form of idolatry.

5.6.3. **Enmities** is the opposite of love of brethren. Enmities is being hostile to one's fellowman.

5.6.4. **Strife** is the outward manifestation of those filled with enmities. Strife is also translated wrangling, variance, contention and quarreling.

5.6.5. **Jealousies** is the wrong desire to have what someone else has.

5.6.6. **Wraths** means uncontrolled temper. The word used here means anger which bursts out and then dies quickly.

5.6.7. **Factions** denotes ambition, self-seeking, rivalry and self will. This refers to a person who is not seeking to serve others; he is self-seeking. This includes groups which work and scheme against each other, each seeking honor for themselves. Where there are factions, there is no unity.

5.6.8. **Divisions** means a standing apart. It means dissension or discord, the breaking up of family ties, moving apart instead of together. The church should be one, not made up of parties standing apart from one another.

5.6.9. **Parties** indicate the dividing up into groups, one following this leader and another following that leader. These parties work against one another instead of with one another for the cause of Christ. Parties are crystallized dissension. The Greek word means "heresies;" therefore, this is the choosing of an opinion that is self-willed rather than submission to the truth.

5.7. 21 **envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.**

5.7.1. **Envyings** comes from the Latin word “in-video” which means “to look against.” It means to look with ill will at another person because of what he is or has. It is the embittered mind which resents what the other person has. Proverbs 14:30 says envy is the rottenness of the bones. Envy wants to deprive the other person what he has. Jealousy wants what the other person has or something just like it.

5.7.2. **Drunkenness** means to become intoxicated. The word of God condemns not only drunkenness, but drinking as well (see I Peter 4:3 banquetings KJV). The word of God considers alcoholism to be a sin not merely a disease. Drinking is the cause for many of the problems of mankind.

5.7.3. **Reveling** was the boisterous parade of half drunks as they danced and sang through the streets in the wee hours of the morning. It degenerated from a celebration into unrestrained and uncontrolled revelry where they did whatever their passions prompted them to do.

5.7.4. **And such like** includes all sins of the flesh of this matter. Paul did not include every sin in this list, just a few of them. Christians who engage in these sins will be eternally lost unless they repent and ask forgiveness. On the other hand, if one is not a Christian, he will be lost unless he obeys the gospel. These actions are always wrong.

5.8. 22 **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**

5.8.1. When one does not follow the word of God, he will do the works of the flesh. When one obeys the word of God motivated by love, he will grow to be the holy person God wants him to be and these nine items listed here will be characteristic of his life. They are called the fruit of the Spirit because they are a natural result of following the word of God, which the Spirit inspired.

5.8.2. **Love** means the love of one’s fellowman, because love of God must precede this and faithful obedience. The word for love here is **agape**. This is the highest type of love. It seeks to do others good and never seeks to do them harm. This love is not determined by what the other person does, but it is determined by what the Christian is. The Christian acts this way because of what he is even when the other person does not return the love, or even when the other person seeks to harm the Christian.

5.8.3. **Joy** is not the feeling of elation over earthly things or winning in competition. This joy is deep seated and is based on the Christian’s trust in God and his right relation with God (see Psalm 30:11; Romans 14:17; 15:13; Philippians 1:4, 25). This joy does not depend upon outward circumstances, but upon one’s faith and trust in God.

5.8.4. **Peace** is the tranquil serenity of heart which comes from having the right relationship with God and knowing God is in control of the world and God works all things together for the Christian’s good (Romans 8:28). It is the peace which passes all understanding because those who do not believe in God and obey him cannot understand this peace (Philippians 4:7). When one has this peace, it is easy for him to be a peacemaker and live at peace with all men (Matthew 5:9; Romans 12:18).

5.8.5. **Long-suffering** is patience and tolerance in regard to people. It is keeping the right attitude toward those who annoy, oppose or ridicule. It is especially the person who has the ability to strike back; however, he does not retaliate.

5.8.6. **Kindness** means to be gentle, considerate of others’ feelings or situation. It is the attitude which does not irk or gall. Kindness comes out of a loving heart.

5.8.7. **Goodness** carries with it both the idea of being morally good and being good to others. To be morally good means one is good, as God wants him to be. To be good to others means one helps and aids others. He is generous in his relation to others.

5.8.8. **Faithfulness** means loyalty, fidelity and trustworthiness. It includes being faithful and true to God's will. However, these fruits are basically the result of faithfulness and obedience to God's will; therefore, this would primarily be speaking about being faithful, loyal and trustworthy in one's dealing with his fellowman. He is a dependable person.

5.9. **23 meekness, self control; against such there is no law.**

5.9.1. **Meekness** can mean one has submitted himself to the will of the Father. The fruits of the Spirit are those characteristics of a Christian who has submitted himself to the will of the Father. Therefore, meekness would be in relationship to one's fellowman. It is gentleness toward another person. It is the opposite of vehemence, violence and outbursts of anger. It is the quiet spirit which suffers wrong without resentment.

5.9.2. **Self-control** means self-mastery. The person who is able to keep himself in check. This is the person who is able to control his life by principles of right instead of by his desires and wants. This term is used of the athlete's discipline of his body in 1 Corinthians 9:25. It is used of the Christian's mastery of sex in 1 Corinthians 7:9. It includes not only controlling of passions, but includes all parts of one's self. There is no law against these great virtues. In fact, the word of God when obeyed in the right attitude produces these great virtues.

5.10. **24 And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof.**

5.10.1. This verse is similar to Galatians 2:20 and Romans 6:6.

5.10.2. **They that are of Christ Jesus** are those who have been baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:2-6). They have put to death the desires of the flesh with its passions and desires. These passions and desires are still there; however, they are held in check by faith and obedience to God's will. It includes the self-control of one's body. If these are removed, they will spring into action again.

5.11. **25 If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk.**

5.11.1. If a Christian lives by the Spirit, it should be seen in his daily living by bearing the fruit of the Spirit and by refraining from the works of the flesh. The proof one is living by the Spirit is one's manner of life and the fruit he bears.