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## *Who or What Determines Morality?*

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From where does the concept of right and wrong arise? Why are some things “right” and other things “wrong?” Ethics deals with what is morally right and wrong. Morality is concerned with establishing and disseminating principles of right and wrong in conduct or behavior. Simply put, ethics states what one "ought" and "ought not" do. The Bible has much to say about ethics, morality, goodness, and truth. But first, man has tried to discover morality apart from Him.

- **Morality Is NOT Determined by the Individual**

The Greek philosopher, Protagoras, claimed “man is the measure of all things.” According to the “New Age” movement every individual is god. As god he can look from within and decide what is right or wrong.

Jeremiah wrote, “*O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps*” (Jer 10:23). And Solomon wrote, “*there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death*” (Pr 16:25). If every man did his own thing, anarchy and chaos would prevail over society. No one could be accused of a crime and no one would have a right to object to the behavior of another.

- **Morality is NOT Determined by Power**

What if right or wrong was determined by certain powerful individuals? The Greek philosopher, Thrasymachus, said, “justice is the interest of stronger party.” Right makes right. This could be political, military, religious or financial power. Thus, the rules for right and wrong are determined by the “golden rule:” he who has the gold makes the rules. However it has been said that “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Nero and other tyrants of history have shown that those with great power can propagate great evil.

- **Morality is NOT Determined by Humanity**

The next view not only takes the job of the

moralist out of the hands of the every individual and powerful individuals, it puts it in the hands of all men in general. Now man is the measure of all things.

Yet humanity as a whole or in part has never been able to determine what is right or wrong. Only if majority rule were enforced could this methodology work. When that happens the issue of the source of morality is back in the hands of a few powerful individuals.

- **Morality is NOT Determined by Culture**

Societal traditions have been used as the determining factors of what is considered morally right or wrong. Samuel Butler said, “morality is the custom of one’s country: cannibalism is moral in a cannibal country.” At the war crimes trial in Nuremberg, Germany, Hitler’s henchmen argued that they had broken no laws. Germany’s own legal system, they contended, permitted the elimination of those who impeded the advance of the Third Reich. Adolph Eichmann protested before his execution, “I had to obey the laws of war and my flag”.

Robert H. Jackson, chief counsel for the U.S. in the Nuremberg Trials, was forced to appeal to permanent values, “a law beyond the law.” That law is the moral code of God found in the Bible. Furthermore, to let culture determine morality is to say that the majority rules when it comes to morals. Augustine aptly wrote, “right is right even if no one is doing it; wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it.”

- **Morality is NOT Determined by the Times**

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus maintained that “no one ever steps into the same river twice, for fresh waters are ever upon him.” Times are always changing. Some will argue against a moral standard they consider archaic by demanding that everyone needs to step into the twenty-first century. “There probably cannot ever be any absolutely correct or proper rules of morality, since people and conditions change over the years and what is ‘right’ today may be ‘wrong’ tomorrow. Sane ethics are relativistic and situational” (Albert Ellis, *The Humanist*, Sept/Oct, 79, 18.)

Can a book over 1900 years old be relevant for the 21st century? Is Biblical morality out of date? God is the author of the Bible and Jesus is the Truth

and the Word. God and Jesus do not change (Heb. 7:12; 13:8). An unchanging, all-knowing God can make laws for all the ages. Times have changed greatly in the scientific community. However, the law of gravity is immutable or changeless. It keeps things grounded to the earth’s surface. God’s moral laws are equally immutable.

- **Morality is NOT Determined by What Feels Good**

Hemingway believed, “what is moral is what you feel good after, and what is immoral is what you feel bad after.” According to modern man, “if it feels good, do it.” This is the old Epicurean philosophy of hedonism. Corliss Lamont explains this view in modern terms, “for Humanism no human acts are good or bad in or of themselves. Whether an act is good or bad is to be judged by its consequences for the individual and society...He bows down to no alleged supreme moral authority either past or present” (Lamont, 235).

However, not everything that brings pain is evil. Giving immunization shots to children causes pain yet is for their good. Conversely, not everything that brings pleasure is good. This is especially true when comparing the temporary pleasure of sin with eternal glory. “*By faith Moses, ...choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward*” (Heb. 11:25-26). The artist formerly known as “Prince” said it well, “hard to say what’s right when all I wanna do is wrong.”

- **Morality is NOT Determined by Moderation**

Some believe man cannot control his passions and desires for what makes him feel good, thus some believe all things are acceptable in moderation. This is what Aristotle called the “golden mean.” He “believed that temperance is the mean between indulgence and insensibility. And pride is the moderate course between vanity and humility. Likewise, courage is the halfway point between fear and aggression” (Geisler, *Norman L., Christians Ethics*, 19).

Not everything can be practiced in moderation. For example, how can anyone accept

murder, rape, adultery, stealing so long as it is done in moderation. Who gets to determine what is moderate and when an action becomes immoderate? Some virtues are not meant to be done in moderation. Paul commanded the Christians of Corinth to *"be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord"* (1 Cor. 15:58). God's children are not to practice moderation when it comes to love. *"In sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart"* (1 Pet. 1:22).

● **Morality is NOT Determined by Situations**

Joseph Fletcher's book *Situation Ethics - The New Morality* claims that morality is determined by the current situation. He told Time Magazine, "as to sexual morality, the traditional rules are giving way to 'situation ethics' - meaning that nothing is inherently right or wrong, but must be judged in context on the spur of the moment" (TIME, Apr 22, '66, 42). "Is adultery wrong?" Fletcher says, "one can only respond, 'I don't know. Maybe. Give me a case. Describe a real situation.'" According to the Humanist Manifesto II, humanists "affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest. To deny this distorts the whole basis of life... We strive for the good life, here and now" (17).

● **Morality is NOT Determined by Love**

Fletcher even spoke before the Southern Baptist Convention, "I am prepared to argue that the Christian obligation calls for lies and adultery and fornication and theft and promise-breaking and killing sometime, depending on the situation. The normative in Christian decision-making is loving concern rather than law" ("Morality Gap Shoot-Out", Christianity today, Apr. 10, 1970, p. 647).

Love cannot be the lone factor in determining right from wrong, because men will be lovers of self (2 Tim. 3:2); lovers of money (1 Tim. 6:10); lovers of the world (1 Jn. 2:15); lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Tim. 3:4) and *"the love of many will grow cold"* (Mt. 24:12). Love does have a great deal to do with right or wrong, but only when love has the right object and does the right thing. Jesus explained that the

essence of all law is love for God and fellow-man (Matthew 22:36-40). Yet, Jesus said, *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word"* (Jn. 14:23). *"God is love"* (1 Jn. 4:16) and therefore He alone has the right to define what is love and what is the loving thing to do. *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome"* (1 Jn. 5:3). Paul said, *"love is the fulfilling of the law"* (Rom. 13:10).

● **Morality IS Determined by God**

God created man. He made man in His own image. He lovingly created rules with man's best interest in mind. His moral laws for us cannot be improved or replaced. *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts'"* (Is. 55:8,9). What is wrong has nothing to do with God not wanting us to be happy, but for us to rejoice in this life and have eternal joy in the next. What is good is not good simply because He said so, but it is only good because God is good. Love is good because *"God is love."* Honesty is always the best policy because God never lies. His moral code is knowable (Jn. 8:32) and absolute (Jn. 14:6; Pr. 3:5-7). He gives us lists of what is evil and therefore must be repented of and avoided or else forfeit eternal life (Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 21:8). He listed virtues that must be practiced (Gal. 2:22,23). It is by His law that all will be judged (Jn. 12:48).

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**Sunday**

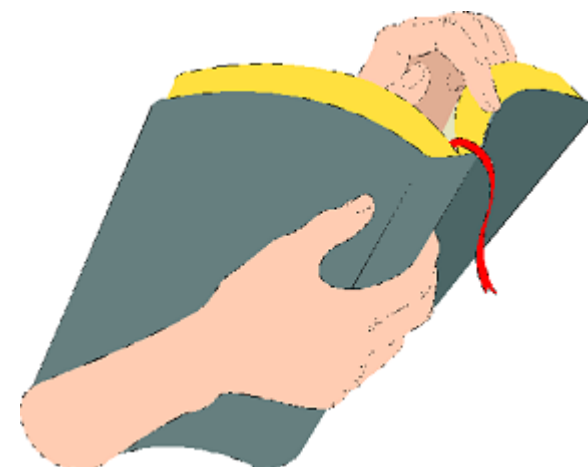
Bible Study.....9:30 am  
 Worship Service.....10:30 am  
 Worship Service.....5:00 pm

**Wednesday**

Bible Study.....7:30 pm

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*by Daniel R. Vess*