



## Gospel Blueprints: Morality, Colossians 3:1-8, 9/26/21

Comparing the dominant worldview of our culture- modern secularism with a Christian worldview, particularly how each worldview answers three vital questions- **Who am I? Identity, What is good? Morality and Why and I here? Purpose.** Last week Identity, This week Morality.

Since I spoke about Disney Princess Elsa last week I need to balance the scales with **Wreck-It Ralph**, Characters from Arcade games once their shift is over, they all hang out together. Ralph is a gentle giant, who plays the villain in fix-it Felix video game. For years the villains from the other arcade games have been inviting Ralph to join their **villain support group**. But Ralph doesn't want to because unlike them he doesn't want to be a bad guy. He wants to be the hero, but he's stuck with the villain role in his game. Finally he visits and at the end of the support group meeting the villains stand up, join hands, and chant the bad guy affirmation. "I'm bad and that's good. I will never be good and that's not bad. There's no one I'd rather be than me." Their chant raises several important questions- **[Blank Slide]** What is morality? Who gets to decide what is bad and good? Should our society operate like the book of **Judges 17:6 Everyone did what was right in their own eyes.** As we have done each week, do a brief history of worldview shifts from Traditional to Modern and then compare it to Christianity.

**Traditional Morality (Pre-Enlightenment) Grounded in the sacred Order,** outside of ourselves. All the major religions- If God says it's wrong then it's wrong, regardless as to how you feel about that. Even Greeks had what they called the logos: cosmic order, moral absolutes behind the universe that we should live by. In the East, Confucianism: virtue was rooted in the transcendent which we align ourselves with, with the grain vs. against the grain of the universe.

### Modern Secular Morality: Three Ingredients

**Ingredient #1 Moral Relativism** (Happened in the enlightenment), reliable knowledge is only possible in the natural order of empirically testable scientific facts. And that moral and spiritual truths must dwell in the realm of the private, subjective, relative world. Christian writer Francis Shaeffer referred to this as the **lower story and upper story divide.** You find morality by going inside and finding the common virtue that we share.

### Ingredient #2 Moral Skepticism. (Romantics of 1700-1800s)

**Morality is An Oppressive Social Construct-** As part of Karl Marx's power theory (forms the basis of what is referred to as Critical Theory today)- believed that moral codes like religion are functions of a society at any given point in time that serves the interest of maintaining that structure by justifying the form of life that suits the status quo.<sup>1</sup> That status quo served to benefit those in power (ethnic, religious, political group) and oppress those without power. Therefore he saw the idea of the sacred order as something to be overthrown because **morality is a power play.** While I do not agree with Marx's premise that all morality is, is a power play, and I believe outworking of his philosophy is bankrupt...we cannot deny that religion and sacred order morality has been used as a power play in history. Marx and his companions were

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, p.184

reacting to what they were seeing in state-imposed religion. Os Guinness- “Can anyone dispute, for example, that the European church in the medieval, the late medieval and the renaissance ages was horribly corrupt, egregiously oppressive, and a mainstay of the wider systems of injustice? It was sustained indelibly by the excesses of the inquisition, the evils of the persecution of the Jews, and such horrendous notions as ‘error has no rights’. Almost all that was done wrong in these centuries was blessed in the church’s name. Secularism stands as a parasite on the best of Christian beliefs and a protest against the worst of Christian behavior.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Ingredient #3 Moral Emotivism: (Modern day)**

Emotivism is the doctrine that all moral judgments are less than beliefs and convictions, they are nothing but expressions of preferences and feelings. Morality is simply a matter of taste, not truth.<sup>3</sup> Our modern slogans of love is love, you do you.

Summary: Three Ingredients: Relativism, Skepticism, Emotivism

### **Critique: Modern Secular Morality Has no Answer for Evil, no Grounds for Good and no Rationale for Outrage.**

Atheist Richard Dawkins a proponent of modern secularism in the God Delusion says that the universe has “no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.” So what do we say in the face of Nazi Germany and the extermination of 12k Jews and other minorities per day being killed in concentration camps? What do we say to the words of Hitler- “I want to raise a generation of young people devoid of a conscience, imperious, relentless and cruel.” ISIS- It is permissible, even morally good to rape and enslave young girls who were deemed infidels. Modern Secularism cannot say these things are evil. They are just not my personal taste and preference. And yet that is inconsistent with reality- our collective consciences testify that evil is indeed evil, not a matter of taste.

And, if all morality is relative and a social construct- on what basis can we say any individual or society ought to do something we deem good and moral? MLK Jr. in his Letters from Birmingham Jail said, “If there is no divine higher law, there is no way to understand if something is just or not. If there is no God, then how is any historical event unjust?” Take human rights for example. In the Reason for God, Tim Keller tells the story of Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban who is a cultural anthropologist, her and all her colleagues believe in cultural relativism, that no cultural is morally superior to another. But she was studying some Middle Eastern cultures and was appalled at their oppression of women. She immediately realized her conundrum: what right did she have to promote and even work to legislate her views over those of the non-Western societies? You can read her full response in the book but what she concludes: “When there is a choice between defending human rights and defending cultural relativism, anthropologists should choose to protect and promote human rights. We cannot just be bystanders.” Tim Keller comments on this. “If you insist on a secular view of the world and yet you continue to pronounce some things right and some things wrong, then I hope you see

<sup>2</sup> Os Guinness, *The Magna Carta of Humanity*, p.32-33

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.161

the deep disharmony between the world your intellect has devised and the real world that your heart knows exists.”

No Answer for evil, no grounds for good, and no rationale for outrage. Isn't it strange that in a culture that prides itself in moral relativism, tolerance, that no one has the right to impose their morality on anyone else...that moral outrage, condemnation of behavior, tribalism and cancellation is at an all-time high? Because of the intellectual and practical inconsistency, there are some Atheist Philosophers attempting to ground morality back into a version of “sacred order” based on the theory of a “moral gene” in evolutionary process...I don't have time for it here but I will post an article on our enews.

Rebecca McLaughlin “If no one has the right to say what's good and evil then we're stuck in a world that's even worse than the moral word world of Wreck-It Ralph, where someone has done terrible things could just say I'm bad and that's good. I will never be good and that's not bad. There's no one I'd rather be than me.”<sup>4</sup>

**Christian Morality is** Grounded in the transcendent moral, Triune God who created us in His image, stitched morality to our souls and made us to reflect His glory. Coherent connection between Identity, morality and purpose. Who we are is connected to how we live and why we exist. Scripture always bases our identity, morality and purpose in the Triune God, made visible and demonstrable in the person of Jesus Christ. Listen to how Paul does this. **Colossians 2:8-9** *See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.* Paul challenges the Christians in the first century and Christians today to ground their worldview on Christ not Culture and Spiritual Counterfeits.

**3:3-4** *For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.* Your identity is in Christ.

**3:5-10**<sup>5</sup> *Therefore, put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.* <sup>6</sup> *Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.* <sup>7</sup> *You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.*<sup>8</sup>

*But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.* <sup>9</sup> *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices* <sup>10</sup> *and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.* Morality is firmly fixed on the person of Jesus and the journey of becoming more like Him. His goal is to transform us into His image- Loving, compassionate, kind, seeking good, serving others, truthful.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.80

**[Blank Slide]** Sarah was a compassionate and committed modern secular atheist at an IV league school. But then she heard a lecture from the influential Peter Singer a leading voice shaping modern secular ethics. During the lecture she began to experience “a strange intellectual vertigo.” Singer developed the “personhood theory”- He was arguing that unborn babies as well as infants don’t demonstrate the qualifications of human personhood- reason, self-care and communication, therefore they are not persons. He even argued that animals who do show these abilities are therefore equally if not more valuable. She says, “I began to realize that the implications of my atheism were incompatible with almost every value I held dear. I became morally homesick for a place I had never known.” Through an invitation to study the Bible with a campus ministry, Sarah discovered that the longing for equality, compassion, justice and love that had drawn her to modern secularism was ultimately more satisfied and embodied by Jesus Christ, his compassionate treatment of all people especially children, women and minorities and his radical message to love even your enemies. She was moved by the sacrificial love of Jesus who abandon his rights and embraced suffering, humiliation, and death to save others.<sup>5</sup>

**Application:** As Christians, our understanding of **morality ought not to be grounded in our feelings.** Every study points out that self-identifying Christians across age groups but particularly among Millennials and Gen Z who believe the Bible is God’s Word and authoritative, and yet increasingly shifted away from Christian ethics in the areas of sexual morals, what is OK to watch, and a variety of other traditionally Christian ethics.<sup>6</sup> This shift is fueled by emotivism. It feels right so it must be. Follow you heart presupposes that your heart is an accurate barometer of truth, it’s trustworthy and that it’s not full of complex desires, not easily manipulated by media, advertisers, influencers. The original sin is the desire to redefine good and evil on our own terms, this is primal instinct.

**Morality ought not to be grounded in American Values-** We must guard against the rise tide of Nationalism that seeks to make America our god and America’s values our creed. I believe in honoring our country, guarding the freedoms we have and active citizenship, there are many God-honoring American values, many of which found their basis in Scripture. However- not all American values are God’s values. I would argue that superiority, greed, workaholism, consumerism, and the worship of comfort and security are in many ways also American values that are directly at odds with the person of Jesus.

**Morality ought not to be grounded in the consensus of our culture-** one of our cultural mantras is everyone should live however they want as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone. The problem with that mantra is that it requires the knowledge of good and evil and Jesus’ definition of love not culture’s. Jesus said love is speaking truth, willing the good of another above my own. If my son says- I want to join a nudist colony...even the most ardent secularist would agree- you say no to that. But what if he says I want to be a girl. Or I want to have sex

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<sup>5</sup> Rebecca McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*

<sup>6</sup> Barna Report, *Gen Z*, 2018 study.

with my girlfriend. I want to watch pornography. What do I do as a dad? I want to love and not harm them which requires more than feelings, it requires a grounded morality.<sup>7</sup>

**Morality ought not to be grounded in political parties.** Christians shouldn't have political parties dictate to us what we should value. And if we don't find anything we disagree with in our party, you should question if you really have a firm grasp on Christianity. Our allegiance is not to a party but to a person- Jesus Christ.

Larry Hurtado- Destroyer of the Gods. What ethics set Christianity apart from the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman world?

1) **Unity and Equality Among racial/gender/class**- Based on Christ forming one new man, Ephesians 2. Philemon.

2) **Justice and Mercy**- Very Oriented toward the poor, underserved, discarded. Jesus- What you did for the least of these...

3) **Peacemaking**- not retributive rather turn the other cheek, bridge building, forgiving, reconciliation.

4) **Pro-life**, against infanticide, abortion. Story of Jesus born in a stable by teenagers, love of children...They would rescue babies and adopt them.

5) **High view of the Body and Sexual Ethics**- Body is a temple of God, sex is designed by God between a man and a woman for marriage, sacred.

As one pastor remarked- "Christianity stood out as unique back then just as it does today in our political divides. First two, sound liberal. The last two sound conservative. And the middle one doesn't sound like either."<sup>8</sup>

**Morality ought not to be grounded in religious tradition.** We don't play cards, we don't see movies, we don't wear jeans to church, we don't listen to rock music. When we define morality by a man-made list we miss the gospel and we miss Jesus. We become like the pharisees. Christianity grounds morality in the personal triune God. We are Christ followers who believe that morality flows through the absolutely true veins of Jesus, from his character and DNA. The more we align our lives Christ the more we will experience the rhythms and harmony- mind, body, soul- of what God has intended for us as humans individually, in our marriages, in our churches, in our community. Good is for our good.

While Christianity may share some of the same moral ideas as other religions, it also stands unique. Salvation doesn't come by living up to these moral standards, but embracing the one who did. Every religion boils down in some way to say, do these things, behave this way, lead a good life and God will accept you. In a way each religion says, be good enough and then you will earn it. But Christianity says the opposite. It says, none of us are good enough, none of us can perform well enough. **Jesus is the only one who every lived perfectly moral and died as our substitute for immorality.** What makes you a Christian is not your morality- that you are pro-

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<sup>7</sup> Thanks to John Mark Comer for some language here- Future Church, Moral Relativism Sermon.

<sup>8</sup> Tim Keller on Q Ideas Podcast.

life, or pro-marriage, or anything else. God's grace does not come to people who morally outperform others, but to those who admit their failure to live up to your own standards and certainly not God's standards and acknowledge their need for a Savior.