

“For Our Good Always”  
August 22, 2021

**Week 1 downtown**

- Is getting the Covid vaccine a personal decision or a moral imperative?
- Is building a giant wall at the border a function of common sense to protect our nation, or a cruel way to keep out those who desperately need help?
- Is it okay for me to burn an American flag? Is that an act of free speech or an act of betrayal and ingratitude?
- Should consenting adults be supported in doing absolutely anything they please sexually, or should there be restrictions on human sexuality beyond consent?
- If someone really, really desires to end their life, is it morally acceptable for a doctor to help them do it?
- Is it acceptable for a person of any age to pursue surgical measures to try and align their gender with their self identified gender?
- Is a football player kneeling during the national anthem an act of bravery to stand up for justice, or a betrayal of a nation and the spilled blood of soldiers to protect our nation?
- Why does the moral views of the political left almost feel like a different universe than the moral views of the political right? Why do both sides believe they hold the moral high ground?

How do we decide what is good and what is evil? How do we know what is right and wrong? Who gets to decide when we have very different and irreconcilable ideas about what is right and wrong? And more importantly, \*why\* do we decide one thing is right and another is wrong? How do we go about doing that? What underlying foundations and principles are we relying upon to make such important judgments?

There might not be any phrase that is more repeated in the gibson house than this one....

“But I don’t want to.”

Clean your room. But I don’t want to.

Eat your broccoli. But I don’t want to.

Get in the car, it’s time to leave for school. But I don’t want to.

I’m sure you other parents don’t have any of this happening at your house. But it’s my children’s passionate belief that life works better when they can do whatever they want to do and aren’t required to do anything they don’t want to do.

A quick glance at just the 10 commandments, not to mention other commands in the Bible, reveals that God does not agree with my children. God does not believe that humans flourish when everyone does what is right in his or her own eyes. In the 10 commandments alone, God says we shouldn’t do whatever we want with our bodies. We shouldn’t do whatever we want with our possessions. We shouldn’t do whatever we want with our words. We can’t treat other people however we want. And we shouldn’t treat God however we want.

Well, that’s a lot of restrictions. There’s no real way to dodge the accusation. God does not intend for people to live however they please. And more specifically, god knows it isn’t a good thing when and if people live however they please.

But broadly and generally speaking our society has a big disagreement with God. We do not see right and wrong the way he does. We do not see good and evil the way he does.

So how do we decide what is good and what is evil? What are the criteria? And who gets to decide it?

Ok let me talk about the same issue from another angle.

One of my favorite things to do is to talk with people who aren't Christians about faith. About Christianity, about their spiritual lives, about what they believe and why. And I can't tell you how many times through the years I've talked to people and we will get to more particular aspects of Christianity, and the person I'm talking to will say something like "I just can't believe in or trust a god who would "blank." And the blanks are sometimes different but really there's a small handful of things that Americans might say there. "I can't believe in a God who... dot dot dot."

And what that person is saying is, my sense of morality cannot possibly coincide with gods. I disagree with God about what is good and what is evil. About what is right and what is wrong. And I don't see any way for it to be reconciled.

So I ask you again, how do we decide what is good and what is evil? What are the criteria? And who gets to decide it?

Morality, simply defined, is how you distinguish between right and wrong, or good and bad behavior. It's very, very important. It decides who's in and who's out, who's good, who's evil. And we haven't the slightest clue how to actually talk about it.

And all of this is what this series is about. How do we go about deciding what is right and what is wrong? Why is it that some things "seem" wrong to us but other societies don't see them as wrong? How are our moral intuitions, our moral instincts, shaped?

So we will look at the 10 commandments and ask, why does God say this? Why does he intend to shape human life in this way? Why does God say certain things are good and others are evil?

Today, and to begin, our question is critical and it cannot be skipped. Our question for today is, why should we trust God in the first place? Why should we believe him, why should we trust him? Well we aren't the first people to ask that question and god himself expected that question. And today we will look at the passage of scripture that our series title comes from, where god predicts and answers this very question.

### **Turn with me to Deuteronomy chapter 5**

Today we're going to cover a story that sits right in the context of the Ten Commandments and gives us the "why" behind them. Deuteronomy literally means "second law," since it is a retelling of the Ten Commandments and other laws originally given in the book of Exodus. In Chapter 5, the Ten Commandments are given for the second time.

#### **Deut 5**

1 And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them.

6 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

7 "You shall have no other gods before me.

8 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image...

11 “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain...  
12 “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...  
16 “Honor your father and your mother,...  
17 “You shall not murder.  
18 “And you shall not commit adultery.  
19 “And you shall not steal.  
20 “And you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.  
21 “And you shall not covet your neighbor's wife.  
And just after that, here is what we find in chapter 6:

### **Deuteronomy 6:20-25**

**20** “When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord our God has commanded you?’ Hey mom, hey dad...why? Why should we listen to what God says about right and wrong, about human life and how it’s meant to be lived? Why should we trust God, why should we obey God?

**21** then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. **22** And the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. **23** And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. **24** And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, **for our good always**, That’s where we got the title of this series that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. **25** And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us.’

So after giving his people commands on how life ought to be lived, instruction and clarification on right and wrong, good and evil, God anticipates future confusion, misunderstanding and potential distrust. And through the inspired writing of Moses, God provides answers.

Notice that he starts not with “if,” but with “when.” “When your son asks in time to come.” There would be a son or daughter, in time to come, who would suddenly stop and go “Wait a minute--what’s the meaning of these laws and rules God has given us?”

In other words, “What are God’s intentions in restricting and directing our behavior in these ways?” What are His motivations? Is He trustworthy? Is He wise? What are the purposes for these rules? What good could you have in mind when you restrict this, forbid that, put a fence around behavior in such a way? How could you be right in doing so? I just don’t understand.

You and I are, in many ways, the son or daughter in time to come. We often ask the same questions. God why do you say this is right, why do you say that is wrong? Are you sure? And am I sure that I should trust you? Fellow Christians in the room, have you ever found yourself thinking “am I a crazy person for believing this? All of it. For believing that God’s ways are higher and better than my ways and he knows best how life works and he can be trusted. Have I lost my mind?”

I don’t know where you are personally with God this morning. I don’t know in what ways you may be questioning God’s goodness or intentions. I do know that the struggles and questions are many, from my experience shepherding people and from my own questions. So I want to

highlight the fact that God meets this genuine struggle with compassion. Do you know that He meets you in a spirit of gentleness, like a father approaching his confused child? Is that the way you see Him?

And even better--in His compassion, He deems questions like these worthy of answers. I see at least 4 answers here. Let's trace them:

First, God says we should trust him because he saved us

### **1 - God Saved Us**

**21** Then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. **22** And the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes.

The Ten Commandments are a part of a story of salvation. In Exodus 3, after having fled Egypt Moses was wandering in the wilderness when he saw a burning bush. God revealed Himself in a very personal and powerful way, even telling Him His personal name: Yahweh. Anytime you see the word LORD in capital letters in your Bible, it is actually the name Yahweh. Long story short, translators and scholars were afraid of misusing or profaning God's name, and offered a substitute title instead.

So on this mountain, called both Mt. Horeb and Mt. Sinai, Yahweh tells Moses to go lead Israel out of slavery to the Egyptians. Moses is rightly concerned about his ability to overthrow the most powerful nation on Earth, but Yahweh says "You leave that part up to me."

So what is actually happening there is that Yahweh looks at Moses and says "Go get my Son, Israel." Go get my people. They are enslaved and I want them free to worship me. And it plays out just like that--it's a bit like the Old Testament version of a Liam Neeson movie, and Yahweh is Liam Neeson throat punching Pharaoh. Showing up with a mighty hand, signs, wonders, "great and grievous" as the passage says. The nation of Israel watches all of these things with wild eyes. In time Moses would lead them back to the very same mountain where they would receive the Ten Commandments. From slavery to sonship, where then and only then do they receive instruction on how to live as God's people, in line with God's sense of morality.

The order of this is wildly important.

The Law of God was not given to the children of Israel while they were in Egypt. They were delivered first. They were rescued first. They were saved first. They were set free first. Their enemies were struck down first. First redemption, then instruction on how to live as the redeemed.

God doesn't come to the children of Israel in Egypt and say, "Here's the Law; obey it and I'll save you. I'll deliver you. And if you obey enough I'll pull you out."

No. He set his love on the children of Israel and he pulled them out and he delivered them, and then he sat down with them and said, "Here is how I created life to work. Here is how you relate to me as your heavenly Father, here is how you relate to others, here is how you relate to creation, here is how you relate to yourself."

I do not want to gloss over this because I continually find that Americans are wildly confused about it. There are two ways to relate with the commands in the bible. The first way is to see

them as a way to earn God's approval, get him to answer your prayers, bless your life, and earn your way to heaven. In other words, in order to be accepted I will obey.

The other way is the one laid out in this passage and all over the bible. It's to come to God in acknowledgement of my sin, my brokenness, my need, admitting that I don't measure up. And to receive his acceptance, his forgiveness, his deliverance as an act of grace. Undeserved, unearned kindness. And then because I am accepted, begin to obey him.

Christianity is not, 'in order to be accepted, I will obey.' Christianity is 'because I AM accepted, I will obey.' Deliverance first, salvation first. And if you flip the order then you switch religions. It's that big of a deal.

Here's what all of this means: **any discussion about God's goodness starts with salvation.** This is line 1 in the answer. It's the necessary starting place. In the Old Testament the primary metaphor for salvation was the Exodus. They were literally, physically saved and placed back in covenant with Yahweh. So the recurring call was to remember this. "Remember--we were slaves in Egypt, helpless and miserable. And Yahweh brought us out with a mighty hand."

For us, we have an even greater salvation to call back to. For Christians, we don't just recall the Exodus, we recall the salvation we've received through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We have been saved from a more powerful enemy than Pharaoh--sin, death, and hell--and that only happened through the mighty hand of Yahweh sending His only begotten Son to go get His church.

We were slaves to sin. And the Lord brought us out through the sacrifice of His Son, great and grievous, as He lived, died and rose.

"Mother, Father, why should I trust God?" Because he saved us.

Second reason.

## **2 - Because He is Smarter than Us**

**23 And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers.**

If you are familiar with the story after their miraculous rescue from Egypt, you know that the Israelites weren't always thrilled about being saved. Pretty quickly while wandering through the wilderness they start grumbling. Complaining. Sometimes even expressing Stockholm Syndrome, where they miss their oppressors. They say things like "Did God just bring us out in the wilderness to die?" "How long do we have to eat miraculous manna from heaven?" Everyday it's the same thing God. Same flavor. Can we get some vanilla manna, chocolate manna, peanut butter banana manna? "At least we had meat in Egypt!" It's almost as if they truly thought that Yahweh would go through all of that dramatic effort to save them, only to let them die in the wilderness.

As a parent, I've gotten little glimpses of what God must have felt like then.

**This past spring my son played soccer at a place we hadn't played before.** He and my daughter and I were headed to his first practice and as we're driving my son says "dad this isn't the way to soccer." But it was, so I said "yeah it is buddy, we're good." A few minutes later he says it again. "We're going the wrong way. This isn't how we get to soccer." And we were going the right way, so I said "nah man this is the way to get to soccer." Like a minute later, again "we're lost. I'm never gonna get to soccer practice!" And he's actually having real emotions

about this. "Daddy doesn't know where he's going!" And he just kept saying it. He wouldn't stop. He was really getting worked up. So finally I said "bro, this IS the way to soccer. I promise. But even if it wasn't, you wouldn't know that. You've never driven anywhere and your soccer practice is at a place you've never been before. You have no idea how to get there. Even if we were lost, you wouldn't know that. So I just need you to trust me."

Right about then we pull up to the soccer field. And my daughter goes "daddy knew what he was doing all along."

The thing I sometimes tell my kids is "right now, I am smarter than you. One day I won't be and that gap gets smaller every day. But right now, I am absolutely smarter than you are."

The Israelites thought God was taking them the wrong way. That after such a powerful display for the history books, He suddenly turned incompetent. But then finally they arrive at quote vs 23 - "the land that he swore to give to our fathers." and it turns out God knew what he was doing all along.

It turns out, He was trustworthy the whole time! Even when we doubted. Even when we couldn't see it. He was working on our behalf and guiding our path. Now we can see it. He knew where He was going. He knew what He was doing after all.

God sees things we never will. He knows how each and every one of your decisions will affect you 1 hour from now, 1 month from now, 100 years from now. He knows how your decisions will affect others. How the decisions of individuals will affect entire communities. The unforeseen effects of each decision every person has ever made. He sees all of it.

Do you realize how small the chances were that you would exist at all? Like, a thousand years ago someone turned left somewhere that they usually turn right and they met a person and ended up having a baby with that person and that baby is one of your ancestors and if they didn't turn left that day at that moment you don't exist. If the wrong person gets a headache at the wrong time, you don't exist. You are one headache, 10,000 years ago away from non-existence! And that's just the start of the billions of decisions that had to happen exactly as they did for you to be here. Yet God saw to it that no headache or anything else would stop him from forming you in your mother's womb. That you would be born here and now and not only that but you would find yourself sitting in a room hearing a sermon about his trustworthiness because of how he is smarter than you.

It's a great relief to know that God is immeasurably smarter than us.

I can make it very simple. Either you think that God is smarter than you, or you think you are smarter than God. In a way it really is that simple. There really isn't another alternative. When someone is demonstrably smarter than you, it's a great reason to trust them.

Third reason.

### **3 - He is For Our Good Always**

**24 And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are to this day.**

His intentions for them were good. He was not trying to take something from them, but give them something far better than what they had. He didn't save them in order to give them a life

that was worse than what he had saved them from. He saved them to give them a life that was BETTER.

God sees into the future and knows what is going to be for our good. He has a vision for human flourishing where a vibrant community of people are free from the devastating effects of sin. And He gives us commands, not to take fun or joy from us, but to bring us to that place of radiant flourishing.

God didn't free us from slavery to sin to give us commands that hinder our joy.

He didn't give us His life to take the joy out of our lives.

If His death on the cross was to give us life, then His commands are to give us life.

If His death was to free us from the destruction of sin and unrighteousness, then His commands are to do the same thing.

**Which leads us to the last reason...**

#### **4 - His Commands Lead Us to True Righteousness**

**25 And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us.'**

God says for this mother or father, in response to their child's question about God's trustworthiness, to say "It will turn out the absolute best for us, if we are careful to do as Yahweh has commanded." It will be righteousness-- The word "righteousness" may not have a warm feel for you. It may give you preacher-on-TV vibes, or come off at first a little cloudy or cold. But really it's this picture of the right relationship with God, with others, with the world, with yourself even. It's literally the ache of our souls. Every pain we feel is a direct result of a lack of righteousness. Righteousness is when everything is right. All is whole, perfect, joyous.

So what he's saying is, In time, we will find joy in the providence and wisdom of God, even through times where we may not understand it. We will grow into golden, radiant children of Yahweh. And our community, coming together under His rule, will put on display the wisdom of God and the true path to human flourishing.

Ok, this is really important.

God Loves You

If you are sitting there unsure of what to think about any of this, and wondering if I'm deranged--God loves you.

If you are here today and you're realizing that you are well on your way down the path to deciding that God is in fact not good, God loves you.

If you walked in today and you feel so numb, so dead inside that it's hard for you to muster any care molecules for what I'm saying today, God loves you.

If you are so engulfed with mental health issues that you can't even think straight, God loves you.

If you are still integrating how God can be good and allow that thing to happen to you, God loves you.

If you've been burned in the past by Christians or the church so your guard is up the whole time I've talked today, God loves you.

If you find certain parts of God's worldview hard to stomach, God loves you.



If you find in yourself a desire that God forbids and you just can't understand why and how He's still for your good, God loves you. If you have a godly desire that is yet to be fulfilled and you have railed at heaven assuming God's indifference, God loves you.

God. Loves. You.

And. Love is not undifferentiated approval. Love is not synonymous with affirmation.

Here's how one writer puts this idea:

*"Love is not synonymous with undifferentiated approval of everything the beloved person thinks and does in real life. . . . [nor is it] the wish for the beloved to feel good always and in every situation and for him to be spared experiencing pain or grief in all circumstances. "Mere 'kindness' which tolerates anything except [the beloved's] suffering" has nothing to do with real love. . . . No lover can look on easily when he sees the one he loves preferring convenience to the good." -Josef Pieper*

This is an important point. When we say that God loves us, when we say he is for our good always, we do not mean His intention is, like this writer says, for us "to feel good always," the way that we would define feeling good. Nor does God's love mean that in every situation He wants us to be spared experiencing pain or grief.

Please don't fall for the idea that God does not love you if He does not approach you with undifferentiated approval. Or because He doesn't approach others with the same. Love is far more fierce, far more powerful, and far better than that measly alternative.

God loves you just like you are. Yes! And. And he loves you too much to leave you as you are. He wants for you, righteousness.

God's commands are meant to lead us to that place of perfect wholeness with God and everything else, what the Old Testament calls shalom, or a deep abiding peace. A community perfectly following God's laws out of love and gratitude for His salvation would lead to the utopia you've always wanted but would have never arrived at on your own. His commands lead to righteousness.

It's another great reason to trust him.

If you know much about the Old Testament, you know that the Israelites never became very adept at being God's sons and daughters. They did not master the house rules. They failed in heartbreaking ways. Their sin natures got the best of them.

But all throughout this saga, God had a plan. He knew what he was doing all along. While Israel repeatedly failed at being God's sons, God did have a perfect Son. This Son, Jesus, was with Him from the dawn of time. And he knew that it would ultimately require him putting on human flesh to display what a human being is truly supposed to look like. What righteousness incarnate looks like.

Jesus perfectly followed all of the Fathers commands.

God's pleasure for this Son beamed from the heavens. Jesus was radiant in this sonship. This is what all of us were supposed to be.



And the message of the gospel tells us that all of that perfect righteousness, all of that glowing sonship stands in our place. It has been imputed to us, by grace through faith.

So thinking back to Deuteronomy 6, where in time to come a son of Israel begins to doubt the goodness of God, and asks “What is the meaning of all this?” There is a poetic beauty here-- Because God knows, even as the words “When your son asks you in time to come” are being written, that in time He will give up His one and only perfect Son to prove His goodness once and for all.

The ancient son of Israel would ask the question, and the eternal Son of God would answer it.

**Pray. Communion.**

