

“God’s Morals are Different Than Yours”
For Our Good Always
Downtown
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A story about how Adam hates dumb arbitrary rules where he touched a wall in seventh grade after the teacher commanded her students not to do so.

This is not how God operates. His commands are to line us up with how things are. The way he created life to actually work. They aren't arbitrary, like “don't touch my wall.” They are more like, don't jump off of a building or you will fall to your death. Gravity is the way things are. God’s laws are more like the law of gravity, they just explain “what is.” If you have a society where everyone thinks murder is totally fine, then that society will devolve into chaos. It's not going to work.

In our series for the fall, we are studying the 10 Commandments. And before we talk about each commandment individually we are taking a few weeks to talk about them as a group.

If you were in these videos and you were asked to write your own 10 commandments, what would be your list? And I know we're christians and we're a church and we're here so you're all gonna say "I'd keep the ones God wrote." Yes that's the correct answer but just do this as a thought experiment with me. For things that seem really important to you, what would your list be? What do you think the average modern American would say as their list?

One thing we found from the interviews, and it showed up in this video, is that people do have a moral code. They might not be able to articulate it clearly, in fact usually they couldn't. because it's not something we think about a lot...at least not overtly. But we are always making moral judgements about what we should or should not do, and what others should or should not do. This is the reason, for example, why online, you see certain things and they just absolutely infuriate you and you cannot believe someone is saying something so ridiculous. That’s because it goes against your innate sense of morality.

We’re gonna continue the conversation today by continuing to give biblical categories for all of this.

Turn with me to Romans 2

Romans 2:14-16

14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them 16 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Paul here brings up this concept of conscience. This is spelled out in the book as well because it’s critical for our discussion.

1) You have a conscience.

The argument Paul makes here is simple. When people who don't have access to the law of God by nature sometimes do things that the law calls for, it shows "that the work of the law is written on their hearts."

God hard-wired into you this innate tendency to discern between right and wrong, acceptable and not-acceptable. When you were little you realized that it was kind of fun to pick on other kids at school, but it also made you feel bad when you saw the hurt on their face, that's your conscience. It's why my 4 year old feels bad and often confesses the worst thing he did that day when I got home from work. This is an important part of how God made you. You were made with an onboard morality detector. It doesn't always keep you from doing what's wrong, but it's always there functioning to some degree. Your conscience doesn't determine what is right and wrong, but it serves as a warning system. You may not use the word conscience much. I most often hear people talking about "going with their gut" or "doing what seems right." That's actually about conscience.

2) Your conscience is marred by your sin nature.

Paul goes on to argue in Romans 2 & 3 that the Gentiles, or non-Jewish people, still need access to God's law, because it shows us all the ways we are wrong. It shows our need for forgiveness by God and salvation by trusting Christ. So although our conscience functions to a certain degree, it is not at all an ultimately trustworthy source of determining right from wrong. It's broken by sin and heavily biased.

Consider this metaphor for our consciences: they are like a metal detector that fell out of a truck going down the highway. It still beeps sometimes when you put it near metal. But sometimes it doesn't. And sometimes it beeps when there is nothing metal nearby. That's the effect that sin has on our consciences. It might lead you to believe that things that are not acceptable to God are totally fine, or that things that are acceptable to God are wrong.

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?
The Bible says that our hearts, our gut, our moral instincts are sick.

1 Timothy 4:1-2

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared,

This broken conscience is why you can say or think things like, "*I know that God says it's wrong, but I don't feel conviction for it at all.*" That's because your conscience is broken by sin! That doesn't mean God is wrong. Our consciences are broken.

But sin isn't the only thing that affects your conscience...

3) Your conscience is shaped by your culture.

There are certain areas of your conscience that have been shaped by your culture and the people around you and you may not even know it. Every culture has blind spots that tend to get passed on to the individuals living there. This is a big concept for our series.

-Do you know that you would think about the world very differently if you would have been born into a different culture than ours?

This is why different letters to the churches in the New Testament often have different particular corrections. Because that group has gotten off track in a particular way.

The power of a culture to shape conscience is easiest to see in the negative extremes.

- somehow, modern, Western people less than a century ago got caught up in Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime. Including a belief system that believed the best thing for the world was to exterminate an entire race of people. And somehow they reconciled that with their conscience. Let that sink in for a second. They weren't like, "*We know this is pure evil, but who cares?*" They reasoned themselves there. Their broken consciences, surrounded by particular forces in their culture, led them there.

- Going further back in history, our forefathers somehow came to the conclusion that it was justifiable to kidnap millions of people from Africa and bring them over here to forcefully enslave and build our new country.

- In the ancient Middle East at the time the Ten Commandments were given, other surrounding nations worshipped a God called Molech, an iron god. Would put him in fire so that he would get hot and then lay their first born children on him to burn to death, believing they would receive a better life because of it.

- Just to be clear, this should be terrifying. If you hear all of this and you think, "*Yeah, everyone who came before us was so evil and stupid. I'm glad we got it all figured out.*" You aren't listening. It makes you think what future generations might look back on us and say, "How did they not see it? How were they blind to *that*?" We would be foolish to think the same thing couldn't happen to us. It's very difficult to see the cracks in your own culture's collective conscience.

What I'm trying to tell you is that your gut isn't neutral. Your common sense wouldn't be common to most people who have ever lived. It's been shaped by living here, now.

And if we, rightly so, want God to forcefully confront Hitler and slave traders and people who burned their firstborn and the Taliban, then He has to be able to confront us in our blindspots too. He has to be able to confront the things that we just aren't willing to see because seeing them would have too high of a social cost. "There are times He's going to step in and say 'you're not wearing any clothes on that issue.'"

So that's our groundwork for today: **You have a conscience, Your conscience is marred by sin, your culture affects and shapes your conscience.** Each of these 3 things are at play when you are making day to day decisions about how you should live, and how you decide what is right

and wrong, what's okay and not okay. They affect how you decide to spend your time, how you spend your money, what websites you visit, how you date, what music and media you consume, what and how many extracurriculars you let your kids do--all the gray areas and complexities of life.

Which brings us to the 10 commandments...

Deuteronomy 5

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.

For the average, non-Christian person in America today, here's how I imagine this list of 10 Commandments would strike them. A few would really stand out as important. "Don't murder, don't lie, don't steal..." those seem important. Two thumbs up.

A second category might be things that we understand but probably wouldn't be thought of as top 10 material and we're quick to think of exceptions. "Honor your parents." Ok that's a good idea, not sure it's top 10 and it depends on a lot of factors. "Don't covet." Well jealousy is bad but it's not that bad. "Observe the Sabbath." I like a day off, but I want self care, not worship. top 10? I want Brunch, mimosa, and a lake. Not God.

A third category would be total headscratchers. We wouldn't even understand where they were coming from. Things like, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." Why not? "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, bow down or serve them?" I don't even know what we're talking about anymore.

So out of this list, a few would make a lot of intuitive sense to us here. And others would be real head-scratchers.

Ok, I want to do some cultural analysis for a bit, to try and explain why that is. I'm gonna bombard you with some concepts. But if you'll hang with me, I think it could be helpful for you to understand the Bible more, and understand our culture a bit more. Potentially giving some explanation for things in scripture that were previously confusing.

I want to give you some categories. These categories come from a professor and moral psychologist named Jonathan Haidt, in his book *The Righteous Mind*. He has devoted his life to studying how different cultures develop their morality, what they have in common, and how they differ. From decades of research, he offers 5 primary pillars of morality that cultures (and subcultures like political parties) build off of in varying combinations to produce their morality,

or collective group conscience that acts as an influence on the individuals who make up the group. He compares our moral intuitions to how we have 5 taste buds, to detect different flavors. He says humans tend to have 5 categories in which we can detect when something is right or wrong.

1. **Care/Harm.** This category is exactly what it sounds like. We know that something is wrong because you are harming others. It's protecting individuals from being harmed and wants to prevent pain. Other's are victims of your actions or inactions. The virtues of this foundation are kindness, empathy, and compassion. The greatest sins are being cruel, harsh, or insensitive.

Would you say that secular Americans tend to care about caring for others and not creating a victim? Yes, absolutely. In fact, in the pre-sermon video most people talked about their moral code involving treating others with kindness.

“You shall not murder.” and “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” These are wrong because they harm to others. Americans tend to be sensitive to this category and it's why don't murder and don't lie and don't steal seem important and valuable laws. Our culture shapes our consciences to care about these things.

2. **Fairness/Cheating.** This category is where we perceive something to be wrong if people aren't being treated fairly. It is about justice, rights, and autonomy. The greatest sins here are cheating, deception, and injustice. From racial or ethnic groups getting trampled on, to a kid taking a toy away from another kid, to you beating a vending machine that took your dollar.

Would you say that secular Americans tend to care about fairness, justice, rights? Yes I would. Now we don't see eye to eye on whether we should have equal outcomes or equal opportunities, but overall this idea of fairness is woven into our cultural conscience.

Do not bear false witness,” and “You shall not steal.” Both of those are wrong because they are unjust. Unfair. And once again, it's a category our culture dials us into, so our conscience alerts us to it's wrongness.

3. **Loyalty/Betrayal.** This is where you perceive it to be wrong if you are disloyal to a group or you belong to. Where you belong to a group or a place, therefore should do things that help the group or place. This leads to patriotism, group pride, and individuals being willing to self-sacrifice for the good of the group. The greatest sin here is to be a traitor or be disloyal.

Many cultures around the world today think in much more collectivist ways than we do, where groups like families, companies, nations are more important than the sum of the individuals that compose them. Because of this, people sense an obligation to play their assigned roles for the good of the group. These cultures have a much, much higher value for group loyalty than we do. If you grew up in one of these cultures, odds are you wouldn't ever do anything that put yourself ahead of the group. Doing so would be seen as selfish and foolish, dangerously risking the health and safety of the group you care about more than yourself.

One of our former residents who has an Asian American cultural background said that in their culture, it was viewed as wrong for you not to live near your parents, because when you grow up it's now your role to take care of your parents.

Would you say that secular Americans tend to care about loyalty? I would say it depends. In some ways yes, but in general, this is not heavily prioritized. Anyone from a truly collectivist culture would say that we do not value loyalty here. Maybe more so in different subgroups, but in general I would say we actually lean more towards teaching people that loyalty can be dangerous.

In many ways, we are actually taught that individuals *must* put themselves ahead of the group. Because the most important thing in all of life is for you to become the best version of you, and you can't let anyone or any group get in the way of that. This is basically all of our movies, it's pretty much every single Disney movie, from Moana throwing off the constraints of a small island life to Kung Fu Panda leaving behind the family noodle shop to go be a ninja.

Ok, so look at this:

“You shall have no other gods before me.” (loyalty with God)

“You shall not commit adultery.” (loyalty with spouse)

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house, wife or possessions.” (loyalty with community)

These are wrong because they are betrayals. You are not prioritizing the people or group you belong to. But you'll notice they are commands that the average American might have a harder time with than the ones we've mentioned in the first 2 categories. Our culture doesn't shape our consciences to care much about loyalty.

- 4. Authority/Subversion.** This is where something is wrong because it goes against legitimate authority. So respect for legitimate authority, whether it be God, a parent, boss, government, is considered important and leads to a general respect for traditions and a deference to those above you and older than you. The greatest sin here is disrespect, disobedience and dishonor.

We have visited a church in Oakland California a couple of times and some of you have heard stories because they are amazing. They are almost all originally from China or South Korea. This last trip that we went on, we noticed that nobody in the church had TVs. They had computers and said they would sometimes watch movies and shows on computers but not that often. I assumed it had been a point of teaching and instruction, where they had talked about getting rid of TVs and all the potential problems. But when I asked why they didn't have TV's, they said it was never really talked about. Their pastor has never had a TV and says he doesn't want the distraction in his life. And they said they all just figured that if their pastor thought it was a good idea to not have a TV, then they wouldn't have one either. They wanted to follow his example and not go against it because the Bible says he is to be an example to the rest of them.

Would you say Americans tend to care much about authority and making sure not to go against authority? Absolutely not. Question everyone, suspect everyone, and we think if there is a power dynamic or any sort of hierarchy then that is necessarily exploitative.

We take pretty much any authority structure and put the face of “King George” on it. We don’t like being told what to do. Welcome to America...tear it all down! Again, different subgroups have more value for this, but generally speaking and certainly compared to most other cultures throughout history, we assume authority is almost assuredly, by default, oppressive, exploitative, and abusive.

Scripture calls us to respect civic leaders, spiritual leaders, parents as family leaders. The Bible says that leaders must be servant leaders. And that servant leaders should be respected, honored, followed, and dare I say it out loud, submitted to.

In the 10 Commandments: “Honor your father and mother.” “You shall have no other gods before me.” Quite the authoritative statements there. And I doubt ones that would make the average americans top 10 list.

5. **Sanctity/Degradation.** In this category, some things are wrong because they are degrading. This category claims that some things are elevated, holy, set apart, sanctified...and some things are degrading and contaminating.

This category argues that the same function of germs is also true about behavior. Our behavior can be sick, and our “disgust” response that biologically is designed to keep us from eating rotten food also applies to behavior that is vile or contaminating.

So a muslim person will not allow their copy of the Koran to touch the ground because it is holy to them, set apart.

In a worldview built on Sanctity, the human body is a temple. It’s sacred and therefore some behaviors are just off limits.

I’m not even going to ask you if you think the average American tends to care much about sanctity. That answer is No. Far from seeing the human body as a temple, we see it as a playground. Any society in which 50 Shades of Gray can actually make money does not care about sanctity. We have no category for it.

Ok, watch this. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image” In explanation of this commandment God even says the iniquity, or spiritual sickness, that comes from idol worship is visited on future generations. It’s contagious. “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” There is something vile and contaminating about profaning the name of God, because of His holiness. “You shall remember the Sabbath, and keep it holy.” Even a day can be set apart, sacred.

Our culture has not shaped our consciences to be very concerned with sanctity, so the commandments that deal with it don’t really make a lot of sense to us.

I could point to verses all over the Bible that you could simply drop into these 5 buckets, not just in the 10 Commandments.

In modern Western life, to a great degree, care/harm and fairness have become the primary lens through which we think about right and wrong., arguably the only way we think about right and

wrong. *..If it doesn't hurt anyone*, then it must not be wrong. If it does hurt someone, then it likely is wrong. We have all sorts of language and understanding for this. And on the flip side, we have greatly reduced any understanding of sanctity and purity--that some things are holy and others are degrading, even if I can't point to a victim that it hurts. It's almost like the foundation of sanctity, purity, and degradation is a bit like a lost language for us. And all we are left to think about is whether or not actions create victims. That's the only category we have.

-Leader Retreat 2019, I got asked by a College LG Leader if cannibalism was ok. A bunch of students were discussing and couldn't verbalize a reason for it to be considered wrong or sinful, because there was not a victim involved.

-Couple I met with for pre-marital counseling. Had a great conversation, getting to know each other. Both said they were followers of Jesus. Eventually I asked about sex. They said they are sleeping together frequently. I asked if they knew what scripture said about God's intentions for sex and they said "yeah but we aren't hurting anyone, so we don't understand how it could be wrong."

In other words, my conscience is tuned into the categories of care and harm but I don't really know why something could be wrong otherwise. If it's not hurting anyone, how could it be wrong?

I'm doing all of this work here because I know what's coming in this series as we begin to talk about the specific commandments.

And I want to lay a foundation first that helps explain why you might not like some of them, or understand some of them and hopefully give you some larger categories to perceive right and wrong and to consider the factor that God considers when he says what is good and what is evil.

SO I have a request and then I have good news.

Here is my request. If you would say that there are parts of the Bible that you don't like or even disagree with, if that's you, could I just give you one thing to think about? Just one thing for this series as we talk through some of God's commands for human life and why he gives those commands. And I'm gonna put it all the way on the bottom shelf here, if you'll bear with me. My humble request is that, if only for this series, would you give God the respect that you'd give a trainer at your gym? If you're at the gym and you start doing something and your trainer walks up and you say "oh this feels good" , and your trainer says "well it might feel right but if you keep doing it that way you will eventually destroy your back. It might feel right but it's very wrong." You would say "oh, well how should I be doing it?" And you would open yourself up to correction and re-direction. Because you know your trainer is smarter than you when it comes to working out."

If you're not a christian, then of course what I want is for you to eventually trust and follow Jesus and become a Christian. But I'm not even talking about that right now. I'm just asking that, for a few weeks here, you treat God like you would a physical trainer and give him the benefit of the doubt and at least consider that he might know more than you know. And there could possibly potentially be times where something seems right to you but in fact is very wrong. Or times

where something seems wrong to you but in fact is very right. My humble request is for you to be willing to at least hear God out. And if you ask me, it's a very reasonable request.

Here's the good news...

4) The Holy Spirit begins to align your conscience with God's design.

When you become a Christian, the Holy Spirit begins aligning your conscience with God's design. So when you sin, and your hardened conscience doesn't catch it because you've trained it not to, the Holy Spirit convicts you and brings you a little more in alignment with Him. He is a supernatural helper, sent to indwell you and point you to Jesus. He points you to Scripture, to God's design for human flourishing, and says, "His way is better...repent, trust." To perceive more broadly than our particular culture would lead us into.

John 16:7-8

7 Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. 8 And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

1 Peter 3:21

21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, You have a conscience, given to you by God, with eternal principles of right and wrong stamped from the beginning. But your conscience is still warped by sin, and incredibly affected by the culture you live in and the particular cocktail of values your groupings lend themselves towards. Every culture is different, and the Bible confronts each of those cultures differently. It confronts cultures in India and China and Brazil and the US all very, very differently, and we need to be open to how it confronts us, because it most certainly does.

If you are in Christ, God has given you His Holy Spirit. And He is in the process of lining up how we think about right and wrong, and what leads to human flourishing like He does--where the Spirit's voice and your conscience become one and the same. So that God can lead us into how things are. Into how he created life to work. That's what we're asking God to do over the coming weeks as we study the commandments together.