

# You Are Here

"Everyone has to decide for themselves what is right and wrong."

September 10, 2017

We're right in the middle of our series, we call "You Are Here." What we're doing is looking at God's Word and specifically the good news of Jesus to help us make sense out of ourselves and the world we live in. In each week of the series, we've been looking at commonly held beliefs that affect our thinking, whether we realize it or not, and examining those beliefs from a biblical perspective.

Today, the statement that we'll be looking into is, "Everyone has to decide for themselves what is right and wrong."

"What is right for you may not be right for me. You shouldn't judge anyone else's lifestyle or life choices. *You* have to find *your* truth."

"Believe whatever you want, as long as you keep it to yourself. If you tell someone they are wrong, you're: "

- being intolerant
- close-minded
- shaming people

"Just the fact that you think you can tell me how I should be living my life is offensive."

You may have heard it taught as moral or cultural relativism - morality and ethics aren't absolute or transcendent. "Right & wrong are a construct of our society. Morality is relative, it's just about whatever works for your society at a given time."

So, let's look at God's Word and get a biblical look at this belief that we often have.

## **Romans 2:12-16**

For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. 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. 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 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Paul says it clearly here: morality is not subjective. There is such a thing as objective right and objective wrong. There is a such thing as good and evil. And culturally, we really struggle with this. Some question God or reject the God of the Bible who claims the right to declare objective moral truth.

Probably about seven or eight years ago, I met a dude named Dominick at the gym I used to work at. Somehow, we got into a spiritual conversation, and he told me about his background. He grew up around the Catholic church, and in fact, his dad, was one of the teachers in the Catholic church he grew up in.

So, I'm asking if he's still a practicing Catholic. He said, "Naw man. I just always felt so guilty and like I could never be good enough, so I just stopped. I stopped attending the Catholic services and I stopped reading the Bible because I just couldn't take the guilt anymore."

He said that this religion really just made him feel bad.

Guilt feels horrible, right? Feeling guilty, and having to deal with the fact that you royally messed up, is very difficult. It makes us feel so bad, that we do what we can to avoid it.

My college roommate still doesn't know that I was the one that accidentally melted his plastic spatula. He went around asking everyone who did it, and I denied it with the most convincing poker face I've ever mustered up, because I didn't wanna feel that guilt. So, I pretended that I wasn't in the wrong.

When I ask my son Malachi if he hit his brother, his first words are, "Well he was bothering me, and he made me really angry."

We all do this - we try to dodge guilt because we hate how it feels to stand in front of someone you've wronged and have to face our guilt. So, we conclude that we shouldn't put that feeling onto ourselves or anyone else. And because we hate the way it feels we tell others that they shouldn't tell anyone else that what they're doing is wrong. We tell people that they are wrong for telling other people that they're wrong. We also, to try to lift the feeling of guilt off of people's shoulders, we tell them not to let anyone make them feel bad about their decisions.

So, like my boy Dominick, we're doing what we can do get ourselves out from under this guilt by dismissing the thought of the existence of an objective moral standard.

As a whole society we've overwhelmingly come to the conclusion that... the God of the Bible, whom Romans 2:16 says "judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus," as intolerant, unloving, and repulsive. He must be a cruel and unloving God to judge me for my actions, so I reject Him. I reject the bible. I reject Christianity. If you wanna believe that, 'fine, whatever' but don't you dare try to tell me what to do based on the rules in the Bible.

This idea is so common and powerful that you'll find churches and denominations that are wholesale abandoning certain hard texts or faithful submission to the scripture in general. "Don't focus on the things that God tells us to do that we aren't doing or the things that we are doing that God tells us not to do. Stop talking about sin and just tell everyone that Jesus is very nice."

And yet, here we are with Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit of God telling us, "There is such a thing as right and wrong, good and evil, and God holds everyone accountable to it."

The irony about our pushback against a God who sets this objective moral standard which causes a clear cut right and wrong, is that we all actually want and desire a clear-cut, objective, universal, right, & wrong. I'll take it a step further and say that our souls need for there to be objective right and wrong in our world.

So, let me begin here: At the end of the day, deep down, we don't actually believe everyone should choose for themselves right and wrong.

### **1) We know there really is a right and wrong.**

Deep within us, we all know there is such a thing as real right and real wrong. This is what Paul says in verses 14 and 15.

#### **Romans 2:14-15**

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. 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

He says our actions, thoughts and consciences actually prove to us that we do know and believe in an ultimate moral authority.

I mean, I can't go anywhere without people declaring to me what I should do... If I'm watching, listening, standing in line I'm told by everyone what is right or wrong for me to do:

- You should work out. Lose weight. Gain weight.
- You should wake up early.
- You should exercise more -but don't exercise like that group over there. They're ridiculous.
- You should recycle.
- You should vote. You should vote for someone else.
- You should shop here. You should not shop there...do you know what they support?
- You should hold the door for her.
- You should tell him that you can hold your own door.
- Accept your friends' decisions because you love them. Correct your friends' decisions because you love them.
- You should care more about equality.
- You should study more for your test.
- You shouldn't study so much. Live a little.
- Don't eat that. Eat this.
- You should work harder. You should rest more.
- You need to buy a house. Stop renting.
- You should get married.
- You should hurry up and get married, you know, so you can have kids.
- Wait longer to get married and have kids so you can live life first.
- You should only always breastfeed your kids, you know, if you really love them.
- Then you should stay home with your kids instead of leaving your house to work.
- You ought to be a working mom and embrace & further female empowerment and equality in the workplace.
- You should go back to school.
- You have a job, you should get a career. One that pays more than what you're making now.
- You should go ahead and retire early. You've earned it.
- You should wait to retire, so you have a little more money to live off of.
- Live your truth. Don't let anyone tell you what you should do.

Think about it, why are we told things like this? Why do we think things like this? Because deep down we all believe in true right & wrong.

Why do I get frustrated and angry when my wife sent me a text saying that on my kids first day of preschool she saw a kid throw him on the ground while the teacher does nothing? Why couldn't I just shake that immediately and not think about it anymore?

When a good friend breaks a promise to you, or shares something that you told them in confidence, why do you get angry about that?

Why do we get angry when someone hurts or harms someone or something that we care about?

Because there is some standard you expect everyone to operate under.

You expect:

- Not be lied to.
- The strong to not take advantage of the weak.

- Fairness.
- Your significant other to not cheat on you.
- Deebo Samuel to score every time they kick the ball to him!

At times, we like the idea of being able to decide for ourselves what's right and what's wrong, but when someone truly wrongs or abuses someone that you love, you don't have to be convinced that there are some rules that shouldn't be broken.

MLK Jr. said not only do we know this is true, but we need this to be true. He wrote from jail where he was arrested for resisting against racist laws.

### **Martin Luther King Jr.**

You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws. This is certainly a legitimate concern. Since we so diligently urge people to obey the Supreme Court's decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools, at first glance it may seem rather paradoxical for us consciously to break laws. One may well ask: "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that "an unjust law is no law at all."

Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority.

Anytime anyone says that there is a human law that needs to be reformed or changed because of its effect on people, they are saying that there is a higher law that even the highest of human courts should submit to. Without any objective supreme transcendent law, all human rights are at risk, and whether or not you get treated fairly is dependent upon whether or not the people that are in power desire to make sure you're treated well.

Nietzsche, a very influential and world renown philosopher that lived in the 1800s, argued that the humanistic values of most secular people, such as the importance of the individual, human rights and responsibility for the poor, have no place in a completely materialistic universe. He even accused people holding humanistic values as being "covert Christians" because it required a leap of faith to hold to them.

And the greatest reason that this matters so much is because if you remove absolute truth, then you remove the basis for justice altogether.

And therein lies the biggest problem with the whole idea that everyone has to decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong...I might be able to look past a kid playing too rough with my kid and throwing him to the ground.

I might be able to overlook being lied to or lied on, but when it comes to issues of severe injustice and abuse and oppression, we need a law that everyone abides by and submits to no matter how they feel about that law. If we are to have justice there must be a law that is submitted to even when we don't understand the law or feel like we should have to obey it.

If you say that everyone should be able to decide what is right and wrong, you are saying that we should not be able to enforce rules that protect and bring justice to people because everyone gets to decide what's right and what's wrong for them.

The very fact that we have a desire to condemn things that we see as unjust, shows that the work of the law is written on our hearts, and our consciences are bearing witness to it

Which shows us that not only do we know there is objective right and wrong, but we want there to be objective right and wrong.

## 2) We want there to be a right and wrong.

Check out verses six through eight.

### **Romans 2:6-8**

He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth there will be wrath and fury.

If I'm honest, coming from a guy who's been a Christian for over 15+ years now, verses about God's wrath and fury still make me uncomfortable. The thought that God has this stored up righteous anger against sin, if I'm honest, I often don't like that idea. Maybe you're here in the room, and you feel the same way. Or maybe you're in the room and for you, it's not that it just makes you uncomfortable, but rather that it makes you angry or even disgusted with the God of the Bible because of this idea that He will repay sinners with wrath and fury. For some of you, maybe you look at verses like this and think, "I could never worship a God like this! This seems so cruel and hateful and unloving!"

If that's where you are, I'd like to try to help you see a side of this that actually helps me to greatly appreciate the God who loves justice and punishes sin by lovingly asking you, have you considered the alternative? Have you considered what it would mean if God didn't have indignation and wrath towards sin?

Miroslav Volf, who is Croatian, wrote a book called *Exclusion and Embrace*. In it he says,

### **Miroslav Volf**

My thesis is that the practice of nonviolence requires a belief in divine vengeance. My thesis will be unpopular with many in the West, but imagine speaking to people, as I have, whose cities and villages have been first plundered, then burned, and leveled to the ground, whose daughters and sisters have been raped, whose fathers and brothers have had their throats slit...

Violence thrives today, secretly nourished by the belief that God refuses to take the sword. It takes the quiet of a suburb for the birth of the thesis that human nonviolence is a result of a God who refuses to judge. In a scorched land soaked in the blood of the innocent, that idea will invariably die,... If God were not angry at injustice... and did not make a final end of violence, that God would not be worthy of our worship.

People who have been severely oppressed, those who have felt and dealt with the pain and trauma of someone stronger and more powerful than you hurting you again and again and again in a hateful and cruel way don't need much convincing that there is truly right and wrong in the world, and they often don't need much convincing that it's okay for God to have anger and wrath towards sin. To be honest, I've seen many people that I pastor at Two Notch, who have experienced ongoing oppression, rejoice at this attribute of God, because it shows them that He cares for them.

A God who sees...

- The poor being taken advantage of.

- The weak harmed because they can't defend themselves.
- People treated as if they're less than human.
- Those who have been abused in any way.

A God who sees all that and doesn't care at all...is not a God that we can trust and is not a God that I would want to worship. The God who is apathetic about injustice is not a loving God.

Here's something I've learned, we very naturally have a notion in our hearts to defend those that we call, "our people".

We've all done & seen this.

You say something negative about my wife, and I'm gonna naturally get defensive. Even if it's something that I've said about her. I can say that about her. You can't. She's my people, and I get defensive if you talk about her.

Take it up a notch. You do something to hurt my wife. I'm going to assume that God is calling me to do prison ministry from the inside, you feel me?

God's anger against injustice, which can only truly happen if there's an objective, universal moral law, is proof that He truly cares about people.

If God were not a God who established right and wrong and judged by it, it would mean that those who commit all kinds of atrocities in the world would ultimately get away with it. You may think, "How can people worship a God who condemns people under his wrath and fury." But the truth is, we really want God to be a just judge because we don't want people to be able to ultimately get away with the atrocities they commit.

But if we're going to be fair and honest, as much as we know that there's actually right and wrong, and as much as we care and want there to be right and wrong, we also don't want there to be right and wrong.

### 3) We don't want there to be a right and wrong.

That sounds contradictory. Let me explain after we look at Romans 2 one more time.

#### **Romans 2:12**

For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

#### **Romans 2:16**

On that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

As I stated earlier, one of the reasons that we want to believe that we can decide for ourselves what's right and wrong, is that we don't want to feel guilt. We don't like the idea of having to stand in front of someone and be determined to be guilty. We hate the feeling of guilt! And this verse says that there will be a day when we stand before God and are judged by our works.

So yes, we want there to be right and wrong, but that also creates a problem for us because none of us are standing in front of God on that day saying that they haven't done anything wrong. No one's standing in front of God saying, I've lived a completely innocent life.

Even if you use your own moral standards, you don't measure up to them.

If you had a tape recorder around your neck that just recorded every time you made a statement like, “you should do this” or “you shouldn’t do that”. The recordings of the things we said, our own moral standards would condemn us. We violate the laws that we agree are good laws.

I have counseled new husbands and guys who are engaged on the benefit, if your wife really appreciates these types of things, of sending encouraging and loving texts to your wife while you’re away. Just let her know you’re thinking about her and that you like her.

And time after time in my marriage, I’m like, “Man, it’s been weeks since I’ve done that.” I’ve literally told men that they should do this, and I’ve failed to live up to my own standard.

This a great problem: If there is not a right and wrong, there is no hope for us because there is no justice. The cries of the oppressed don’t matter. But, if there is a right and wrong, that’s a problem because we are all standing guilty before a God that we agree should judge against sin! What hope is there for us?

Its great news that God cares so passionately about justice and actual cut and dry, right and wrong, but it’s also the most terrifying news because all of us have done wrong and mistreated so many people in our lives.

My cousin Jason has said things like this:

“I don’t understand how the God of ‘second chances’ in the Bible can condemn people to hell.”

“I don’t understand how God can be good and allow people to go on committing all of this injustice in the world. Why doesn’t he do anything?”

He’s essentially saying God is too harsh when it comes to judging people for their sin and that God is too soft when it comes to judging people for their sin. You can’t say both of those bro!

The truth is, we need a God who cares about people enough to judge those that break universal laws to the full extent of the law, and we need a God who cares about people enough to be able to forgive and show grace to those who have broken his laws

This is where the beauty of the gospel is found...you see Christianity is good news for those who’ve suffered wrong and those who’ve done wrong.

**Jesus takes our wrong to make us right.**

**Romans 3:20-24**

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it - the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

That’s what I was saying earlier. All of us know that we’ve committed wrongs. We’re all lawbreakers.

But there’s this new righteousness, a way of being declared in the right, now that is available to us that is apart from obeying laws. The God who cares about justice has revealed a way that unrighteous people can become righteous.

Everyone has sinned and are all in the same boat, but if we place faith in Jesus, we can have the very righteousness of God Himself and not be seen as guilty in His Heavenly court because on the cross, Christ was willing to have the sins of the world placed on him while giving all of His people credit for His righteous life. He takes all of the anger and fury of God that His people deserved onto Himself so that sinners and lawbreakers can be forgiven.

A gift is something given to you in love that you didn't earn. You can't earn a gift. If you earned it, then it's a wage or a payment for the work you've done. He offers this righteousness to us as a gift at the expense of His own life.

This gift, that He laid down His life to give us is the reason that we know we can trust Him to be the ultimate lawmaker. Everyone other than Him had sinned and done wrong. He had lived a perfect life. He was the only one that didn't deserve judgment for His life, and because of His love, He took the judgment and wrath for others onto Himself to satisfy God's need for justice and allow sinful people to be forgiven.

This gift that He gives is the reason we know we can trust Him as the universal authority.

His life showed us that He was perfectly righteous, without sin.

The fact that God poured out His wrath for sin, shows us that He cares about justice.

The fact that Christ took the wrath of God onto Himself for our sins while sparing all those that believe in Him from the punishment that we all deserve, shows us that He loves us tremendously.

There is no one more qualified to establish the universal law that we all desperately need to exist. So, let us trust in His law even when we don't understand it. Even when we don't feel like it, because the crucified and risen Savior has proven that He and He alone is worthy of establishing the ultimate transcendent law that we should all submit to.