

TARGETS

Where the Body of Christ is Under
Attack and How To Fight back



MORALITY ~ *Following Jesus in a World with No Boundaries*

- FOUNDATIONS FOR MORALITY

Only fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."

They are corrupt, and their actions are evil; not one of them does good!

Psalm 14:1 NLT-SE

- **Morality for Religious Followers** (Islam, Mormon, New Age, Buddhist, Hindu, Judaism, Christianity)
 - **Every religious group develops a moral framework through which they hope to promote and perpetuate their beliefs.** Thomas Dixon said, "Religions certainly do provide a framework within which people can learn the difference between right and wrong. Typically, when you embrace a particular religious belief system that system will tend to dictate your morals for you."
 - Studies have found that when you think about God's beliefs, the part of your brain active when thinking about your own beliefs is more active than the part of your brain that is active when thinking about other people's beliefs.
- **Morality for Non-Religious Folks** (Secularism, Humanism, Atheism)
 - If you look at morals outside of religion, the development of those principles center mostly around **fairness and empathy**. Instead of looking to a "higher power" to speak into the formation of morality, each individual is charged with the task of deciding what is right and wrong, good and bad.
 - A man's ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties and needs; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hopes of reward after death. ~ **Religion and Science**, by Albert Einstein, New York Times Magazine, 1930
 - Religion is not a prerequisite for a moralistic belief system. The website debate.org has a running opinion poll asking the question, "Is religion necessary for morality?" Currently, the responses generated are, **17% yes and 83% say no, religion is not necessary for morality**. It seems obvious that the strength of non-religious morality is wrapped up in individualism.
- **Morality for Apprentices of Jesus**
 - JESUS STOOD FORTH AMONG humanity as the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5). What did that mean? "In Him was life," the apostle said, "and the life was the light of men"—a light of such power that the darkness in the world cannot extinguish it (John 1:4-5). Light means both energy and knowledge. From the person of Christ there uniquely came into the world the energy and knowledge by which human beings could be delivered from evil and enabled to live life as it ought to be lived. ~ **Renovation of the Heart**, by Dallas Willard, 2002
 - Created in God's image...

- ²⁶ Then God said, “**Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us.** They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.” ²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image. **In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.** ²⁸ Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply...”³¹ **Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!** (Gen. 1:26–28, 31 NLT-SE)
- **God’s first concern...**is not what the church does, it is what the church is. Being must always precede doing, for what we do will be according to what we are. To understand the moral character of God’s people is a primary essential in understanding the nature of the church. As Christians we are to be a moral example to the world, reflecting the character of Jesus Christ.
- Because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to **share his divine nature and escape the world’s corruption** caused by human desires. (2 Pet. 1:4 NLT-SE)
- ¹⁶ **So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view.** At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! ¹⁷ This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. **The old life is gone; a new life has begun!** (2 Cor. 5:16–17 NLT-SE)

- SHIFTS IN MORALITY

• Where have we come from?

- The founding of our nation on Christian values is in no way a hidden phenomenon. There is historical evidence of “God” showing up everywhere in the founding of our nation.
- “We are shifting very fast from a world where right and wrong didn’t change to a world where right and wrong are relative,” McConnell said. “We are not all on the same page when it comes to morality. And we haven’t reckoned with what that means.” ~ **Moral Law: Americans Agree on More Morality, Disagree on Method**, by Bob Smietana, May 2017

• What shifted?

- **Removing God from the cultural equation...**When undirected natural causes replace “In the beginning God created,” the end result can only be, man doing what is right in his own eyes because man has taken on God’s role of defining morality. When you decide to reject God, what you are left with is what Paul told the church in Colosse in chapter 2:8-10.
 - ⁸ Don’t let anyone **capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense** that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ. ⁹ For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. ¹⁰ So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority. (Col. 2:8–10 NLT-SE)
- **If God Word is not the ultimate moral and spiritual authority**, then all man is left with is “empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world.”
 - If there is to be an accurate history written of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it will have to give prominence to the fact that the highest ethical teaching the world has ever been given was rejected by the intellectual leaders of humanity in favor of teachings that opened the way to forms of human behavior more degraded than any the world had seen to that point. ~ **Renovation of the Heart**, by Dallas Willard, 2002

- **What does all this have to do with the decline and fall of American morality?** Everything! Because, denying God as Creator ultimately leads to rejecting His moral authority.
- **Where we are today?**
 - **Radical Individualism** has captured the heart of America. No longer are we “One nation under God.” Our nation has chosen its leader and that leader is “ME.”
 - **Traditional Morality → Moral Relativism → Moral Pluralism**
 - Moral Relativism: The view that moral judgments are true or false only relative to some particular standpoint (for instance, that of a culture or a historical period) and that no standpoint is uniquely privileged over all others.
 - Moral Pluralism: Moral pluralism is the assumption there are moral truths, but that they do not form a body of coherent and consistent truths as those found in the sciences or mathematic approach. There are plural, in other words many truths, not just one, and they may conflict with one another.
 - “It isn’t that conservatives and liberals have shrugged off transcendent ideas of right and wrong. Rather, they each appeal to a different transcendent moral foundation. **We are not in an era of moral relativism but moral pluralism,**” Ted Olsen wrote. “That’s not necessarily good news: It’s hard to build a unified society when we hold radically different moral visions. **It’s even hard to have a conversation when we view each other as immoral.**” ~ **Moral Outrage in America Is Now for Everybody** ~ Kate Shellnutt, May 2017
 - Today those who are concerned about contemporary culture do not seem to fully realize what has happened —that **those identified with Christ, and Christ himself, have come to be seen as morally inferior.** They do not realize that the attacks on what we might call traditional Christian morality—or just “traditional values”—is **a moral attack: an attack from the point of view of (supposed) moral superiority.** ~ **Renovation of the Heart**, by Dallas Willard, 2002
 - Bottom line: If what you’re after is a moral framework that looks like a kingdom, with a King, we are no where near that breakthrough. Our nation has never been more driven by radical individualism which makes it extremely difficult to embrace a King.
- **Where we’re going?**
 - Paul, in his second letter to his spiritual son and emerging leader, Timothy, painted a picture of **a future that would look much different** than the times they were in. As you read through Paul’s description of those “very difficult times,” it sound like he is describing the “Breaking News” we seem to be confronted with on a daily basis.
 - ¹ You should know this, Timothy, that in **the last days there will be very difficult times.** ² For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. ³ They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. ⁴ They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. ⁵ They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that! (2 Tim. 3:1-5 NLT-SE)
 - Again, the apostle Paul writes to the church in Rome about the **moral crisis** they find themselves in with this insight...

- ¹⁸ But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, **wicked people who suppress the truth** by their wickedness. ¹⁹ **They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them.** ²⁰ For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So **they have no excuse for not knowing God.** ²¹ Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. **As a result, their minds became dark and confused.** (Rom. 1:18–21 NLT-SE)

- THE ENEMIES OF MORALITY

- **Identities questioned...**If one of the keys to Jesus followers walking in Spirit and Truth is that we have a firm grasp on who we are in Christ, it follows that the some of the most consistent and severe attacks on us will come in the form of questioning that identity based upon how we feel our morality is being expressed in the world. Who you think you are determines what you do. Because of this, when Satan attacks, he starts by undermining your sense of identity.
 - The enemy attempts to make us feel powerless by dehumanizing us. Once we feel powerless, he has an open door to distort the truth of who God created us to be. **It is a two-step process: first powerlessness, then spiritual manipulation.**
 - This is the exact same formula the enemy uses today. He gets us to doubt our true identity; then he manipulates us through people and situations to believe lies that **paralyze us** from accomplishing God's will in our lives.
- **Boundaries moved...**God establishes boundaries for a reason. They are not given to inhibit us, but rather to define the life for which we, as humans, were created. They define both what is good for us, that will express and fulfill the identity he created us to be, and what is bad for us, that corrupts us and prevents us from ever being what he created us to be. For those who love him, his commands are neither a burden nor a frustration, but a gift from his hand by which he guides us into the life of glory and blessedness for which he created us (1 John 5:3).
 - The previous generation has set boundaries in place. Don't you dare move them just to benefit yourself. Prov 22:28 (TPT)
 - Satan wants us to believe that boundaries are there to help us connect with our true self; that they are based on our beliefs, thoughts, feelings, decisions, choices, wants, needs, and intuitions. **If he can get us to believe that setting healthy boundaries allows us to connect with ourselves, our emotions and our needs, we will move the boundaries accordingly.**
- **Rules changed...**There is nothing more frustrating than realizing that the rules have been changed and no one told you. Especially if you are a rule follower! Satan can and will change the rules on us. Our defense against this strategy is to not only know God's "rules," but to really know the character of the one who wrote them in the first place.
 - **Moral assuredness and self-righteousness** in the practice of what, traditionally, would have been regarded as **blatant evil** is now the single most dominant feature of our common world. "Sex and violence" in the media is but one symptom of this overwhelming fact and is very far from being the central issue. **The central issue is the replacement of Jesus Christ as the light of the world** by people like Nietzsche and John Lennon, or like Lenin and Mao. ~ **Renovation of the Heart, by Dallas Willard, 2002**

- There is always a danger in placing our hearts in the hands of a celebrity, leading politician, spiritual leader, or any other magnetic personality. Once they have our heart nothing will stop them from **changing the rules to capture our soul**.
- **Goals redefined...**The enemy is very strategic with his plans to derail and distract us. He tries to pull us off course by convincing us that our goals are out of reach, too lofty, or too difficult. **If he can get us to “settle” for a human goal when God has promise us a divine destination, he knows we will be tempted to settle for the easier path.** That’s the time to stand firm with the goals God has set and not be moved.
 - Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God’s right hand. (Col. 3:1 NLT-SE)
 - ²⁵ Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you. ²⁶ Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path. ²⁷ Don’t get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil. (Prov. 4:25–27 NLT-SE)
 - Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. (Rom. 8:5 NLT-SE)
- Paul had the right idea when the enemy wanted to redefine his own personal goals:
 - ¹³ **I focus on this one thing:** Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ **I press on** to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. (Phil. 3:13–14 NLT-SE)

- RETURNING TO A “RELATIONALLY MORAL CENTER”

• Who am I becoming?

- For Jesus followers, it’s not just about good and bad, right and wrong. The “guiding light” in our lives is not about what we **do**, but **who we are becoming**. Pastor and church planter in New York City, **Jon Tyson** says most everything in our lives comes down to this question...

**“Who am I becoming; physically, emotionally and relationally?
Am I becoming more or less like Christ?”**

- What about drinking alcohol? Sex outside of marriage? Is the sin of gluttony on the same level as pornography in God’s eyes? Is masturbation a sin? Is watching Netflix OK? Do I even *have* a “moral compass?” The real question we should be asking is...

“Will the choices I’m considering lead to me becoming more like Jesus, or less like Him?”

• What really matters in this life?

- **Relationship with Jesus...**establishing and nurturing our identity in Him.
- **Growing in love...**for God and for others.
- **Being a light in the world...**as opposed to **doing** good things (going to church, reading my bible, committing to pray every day) that might make people think I am light.