

Imagine that you are college student who believes there is no moral right or wrong, everything is relative. For an ethics class you are given an assignment to write a paper. You decide to argue that ‘all morals are relative; there is no absolute standard ... it’s all a matter of opinion.’ Your research paper provides logical reasoning, quotes, and sources. It is the right length, and you presented it in a nice blue folder.

The professor reads the paper and writes on the cover, “‘F,” I don’t like blue folders.’

You become angry and confront the professor. You claim your reasoning is sound; it conforms to what was required; you have done the research.

The professor responds, ‘you say I am not being fair and just? Didn’t your paper argue that it’s all a matter of opinion?’

‘Yes,’ you respond.

‘Fine, then, I don’t like blue,’ states the professor. ‘You get an F.’<sup>1</sup>

*Do you really believe there are no moral absolutes?*

Today’s secular elites and our society say it is okay *to do as we please* because there are no moral rights or wrongs. You might even hear the phrase ‘your truth,’ as if truth or morality is only personal.

But just imagine where such thinking would lead. Our country would look like a ...

- *Mad Max* post-apocalyptic world of scarcity and tribal violence. Why should farmers farm when they could just steal?
- *The Hunger Games* were the powerful exploit the weak for entertainment.
- C.S. Lewis said to ‘Think of a country where people are admired for running away from battle, or where a man felt proud of double-crossing all the people who had been kindest to him.’<sup>2</sup> – C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 174.

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1977), 19.

**Today**, we are continuing our short series, *a skeptic's guide to faith*. **These messages** are a little different because my audience are those who are skeptical of the Christian faith.

- Let's 'Be merciful to those who doubt (Jd 22 NIV). **Let's help them** past their doubt.
- **We are** to 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1Pe 3:15 NIV).'

Our journey has been to answer some big questions. We started with ...

### A Skeptic's Guide to Faith

*How can we trust that Jesus rose from the dead?*

*How do we know there is objective truth?*

*'How do we know there is an afterlife?'*

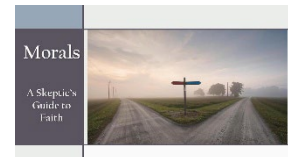
*'If God exists, why is there evil?'* **Last time I spoke**, we examined the question ...

*How do we know the Bible is true?*

**Today**, we will examine the question, 'Why can't I live as I see fit?' It's a question of morals.

### Morals

#### *A Skeptic's Guide to Faith*



If you have ever observed children on a playground, you know, 'you don't have to teach children about fairness and unfairness. A **sense of justice comes** with ... being human.'<sup>3</sup> We are hardwired for right and wrong.

- We know *when* something is not right.
- We *ignore* that '**good and evil run through my heart.**'<sup>4</sup>

We cannot *live as we please* because sin keeps us from who God wants us to become.

**How we live** – morals - is directly *related* to freedom and justice.

We want 'freedom for me but rules for thee.'

- **Secular freedom** means no restraints.
- **Biblical freedom** means living according to design.

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<sup>3</sup> N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (HarperOne, 2007), 4.

<sup>4</sup> 'The battleline between good and evil runs through the heart of every man', Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (1974).

## 1. Freedom & Justice.

Freedom is secular America's most treasured value.

*The secular view of freedom assumes ...*

1. Christianity is a moral straitjacket. Secularists believe that Christianity limit pleasure and freedom with rules; it is 'the archenemy of freedom.'<sup>5</sup>
  - *But* we limit freedom for good reasons. For example, imagine a five-year-old pounding on the piano. He is free. What if that five-year-old practices his scales and arpeggios for several hours every day for 10 years. He learns to read music. Now, when he sits down to play, the sound is beautiful and makes sense. He can deviate from the written music and freely compose music at will.
  - Limiting freedom for a season opens so much beauty.
2. Individuals create their own purpose and meaning in life. Secularists believe that Christianity stands in the way of 'authentic personhood,' and progress.
  - *But* when you don't acknowledge a Creator, we worship created things. Remember the first commandment is, 'you shall have no other gods before me (Ex 20:3 NIV).'
  - It is like a sailboat. A sailboat moves best when it adheres to its design. Sailing into shallow water causes trouble. Trying to sail directly into the wind does not work either. A sailboat cannot move sideways easily.
  - Real freedom comes when we 'become who we were meant to be, realizing our original design.'<sup>6</sup> When we humble ourselves before God and admit that 'you created my inmost being ... I am fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps 139:13-14 NIV).'
3. That freedom is having no restraint.
  - *But* can we really create our own identities?
  - We give our freedom to live in a particular way. For example, we trade our freedom for love. I stopped dating when I found Connie.

*The secular view of justice assumes ...*

1. There is no absolute right or wrong.
  - *But* it is an illusion to say there are no moral laws. Remember the Road Runner defense? 'Relativists are *absolutely* sure there are no absolutes.'<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2016), 100.

<sup>6</sup> Keller, *Making Sense*, 103.

<sup>7</sup> Geisler, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, 173. Italics original.

- Remember our blue notebook.
2. Morals are tribal and cultural. They are based on power of the group.<sup>8</sup>
    - *But* tribal power / justice is a horrible way to live.
    - Is it justice if it is raw power by a few insiders?
  3. Tolerance is a good moral guide.
    - *But* is tolerating evil okay? Tolerance is not a sufficient moral foundation.
    - It is better for laws to be uniformly enforced. It will be a more just society. Tolerance is good, but it is not a good foundation for justice.

We can see this **tension of freedom and justice** in the story of the prodigal son.

- The younger son **desired freedom**. Give me my inheritance. He moved 'To a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living (Lk 15:13 NLT).' He had absolute freedom.
- Meanwhile, note the **cry for justice** from the older son, a rule follower. He became mad at his father for extending grace to the young brother. 'All that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends (Lk 15:29 NLT).' He is saying, 'It's not fair!'

The question is not whether we want freedom, but what kind of freedom leads to a flourishing life.

- When we live according to God's design we will flourish. Freedom without restraint will destroy us.
- We cannot *live as we please* because sin keeps us from who God wants us to become.

## 2. Moral Law.

If we are honest with ourselves, we **know there is a moral law written** on our consciences – we know right from wrong – *even though* we often do what is wrong.

We only know a crooked line because we have seen a straight line.<sup>9</sup> *But where did we get an idea of straight line?* Let's do a one-minute history lesson.

God is the source of right and wrong.

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<sup>8</sup> 'At the root of our most cherished and central institutions ... knowledge and justice reduce to power', James K.A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 85.

<sup>9</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: MacMillian Publishing Co. Inc., 1976), 45.

- From innocence to evil, Ge 3. It started with **Adam and Eve rebellion** in the Garden of Eden. The temptation was to have their eyes opened ‘And you will be like God, knowing both good and evil (Ge 3:5 NLT).’
- Law introduced, Ex 20. Then **Moses received the 10 Commandments** on Mt Sinai for two reasons:
  - 1) To teach the people **how to live holy lives *before a holy God***.
  - 2) To teach them **how to live *together***. ‘Walk in obedience to all that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days (Dt 5:33 NIV).’  
Flourishing is promised if we live rightly!
- Now written on our hearts, He 8:10.<sup>10</sup> Today, the Holy Spirit has written right and wrong on our hearts: ‘This is the new covenant I will make ... I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people (He 8:10 NLT).’

This moral code **written on our hearts** is *not* to limit our freedom, *but* to help us flourish and live up to our full potential.<sup>11</sup>

We cannot *live as we please* because sin keeps us from who God wants us to become.

As *God’s children* he wants us to **take on the family traits**, such as ...

- Generosity,
- Forgiveness,
- Love, and
- Holiness. We are to ‘Be holy, because God is holy (1Pe 1:16).’

But we all fall short. ‘All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Ro 3:23).’

At a **macro level**, we know what evil is ...

- Armenian genocide
- Auschwitz
- Tutsis & Hutus
- Apartheid
- Gulags
- 9-11
- Bosnia

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<sup>10</sup> Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26.

<sup>11</sup> Keller, *Making Sense*, p. 113.

- The Great Leap Forward

Hopefully, no one here is a genocidal maniac, but on a **personal level**, I believe all of us can identify with Paul, who wrote, 'I want to do what is right, but I can't. <sup>19</sup>I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway ... <sup>21</sup>I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. <sup>22</sup>I love God's law with all my heart. <sup>23</sup>But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me (Ro 7:18-19, 21-22 NLT).' We are all selfish sinners here today.

C.S. Lewis reasons that ...

- *If the world is **not governed by God**, then life has no purpose.*<sup>12</sup>
- *If **God exists and we cannot make ourselves better**, then life still has no purpose.*
- *But if God exists and has made a way to correct the evil in our hearts, our life now has purpose.*

Friends, God exists and He wants us to live up to our full potential. 'Christianity tells people to repent and promises them forgiveness ... It is after you have realized that there is a real Moral Law, and a Power behind the law, and that you have broken that law ... that Christianity begins to talk. When you are sick, you will listen to your doctor.'<sup>13</sup> – C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

We will look at God's solution to evil after we hear a testimony.

**Testimony: Daphney Francois**

### 3. Joy of Holiness.

Sin always has **consequences** – not just for us personally, but others as well.

- The man viewing **pornography** may think he is not hurting anyone, but some young lady on the other side has sold herself as an object. Who knows the pain she goes through.
- The woman **gossiping** and being critical may think she is not hurting anyone, but she is separating herself. She hurts those she is talking about and will lose all her friends.

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<sup>12</sup> In addition to Lewis, c.f., 'Without an objective standard of meaning and morality, then life is meaningless and there's nothing absolutely right or wrong', Geisler, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, 171.

<sup>13</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: MacMillian Publishing Co. Inc., 1976), 38-39.

- **Alcoholics** may drink themselves to sleep and think they are not hurting anyone, but they are robbing their family of love and finance.

We cannot *live as we please* because sin keeps us from who God wants us to become.

The **solution to our sin** is the work of Jesus on the cross: ‘Jesus also suffered ... to make the people holy through his own blood (He 13:12 NIV).’

David is a good example.

- David lusted after Bathsheba. He had Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, killed. He slept with her.
- He thought he had gotten away with it even though Bathsheba was now pregnant.
- Nathan the prophet confronted David and David repented, but their child died.

Listen to **David’s prayer of repentance**: ‘For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

<sup>4</sup>Against you ... have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge ... <sup>7</sup>Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. <sup>8</sup>Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. <sup>9</sup>Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

<sup>10</sup>Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me (Ps 51:3-4, 7-10 NIV).’

Not only does Jesus’ suffering cleanse our spiritual filth away, but it also brings us joy!

There is joy in a life of integrity before men and God.

- Solomon wrote, ‘Evildoers are snared by their own sin, but the righteous shout for joy and are glad (Pro 29:6 NIV).’
- Solomon’s father, King David, pleaded with God, ‘Restore to me the joy of your salvation (Ps 51:12 NIV).’

David **sinned greatly**, *but he repented deeply* and God forgave his sins. There was great joy in the palace that day.

Repentance puts us back on track to who we were made to become – ‘holy and blameless (Ep 1:4).’

For years I quoted this passage when tempted: ‘For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. <sup>12</sup>It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, <sup>13</sup>while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-13 NIV).’

- It’s still a great passage to memorize. God still teaches us to say ‘no.’
- But I cannot keep the rules by myself, it is only when I love Jesus more than myself that I can overcome.

It's hard to sin when you are **sitting at Jesus' feet**. Let's choose what is better (Lk 10:42).