

Worldview—Morality: What is Good?

Genesis 3:1-15

Assisted suicide. Abortion. The death penalty. Gay marriage. Divorce. Cohabitation. Casual sex. Drugs. Binge drinking. Religion. Evangelism. What do all these seemingly unconnected things have in common? There are people in the world who believe those things are good and right, and there are people in the world who believe those things are bad and wrong. That makes answering the question of morality challenging, doesn't it? How can we know what really is right or wrong, if different people with different worldviews answer the question differently?

There are 5 basic worldviews that people have about morality. One is the Biblical worldview, which believes that morality is determined and taught by God. Another is called the Error Theory, which states that we can't really call anything right or wrong. Another is Cultural Relativism which believes that a person's morality is determined by their culture or society. Another is the Evolutionary Theory of Morality which believes that as mankind evolved, they deduced that treating other people well helped the species better survive, building a basic sense of morality into the DNA of subsequent generations. The most prevalent worldview these days is Individual Relativism or Subjective Morality, which believes that everyone gets to determine morality for themselves.

There are some pretty evident faults in some of those worldviews. Anyone want to argue that we can't call serial killers wrong? No? So, there goes the Error Theory. According to the tenets of Cultural Relativism, if Hitler determined that exterminating the Jews was a good thing according to his culture and society, then who had the right to call his actions wrong? The Evolutionary theory might sound nice, but it doesn't really match up in practice. Ever seen a lion let a gazelle go because it would be wrong to eat it? The "survival of the fittest" proponent of evolution doesn't make sense with morality. Which action would better help a group of people survive a famine—attacking a smaller, weaker tribe and stealing their food and resources for yourself, or giving away all of your resources to a smaller, weaker tribe?

Subjective morality sounds good in theory, right? It seems friendly and loving. It avoids the divisions of disagreement if everyone gets to be right. But while subjective morality sounds nice in theory, it doesn't hold up in practice. If Steve carjacks Al, and drives off shouting, "It's OK! What's wrong for you is right for me!" Al won't just shrug it off to subjective morality, nor will the judge who sends Steve to jail for grand theft auto!

But is objective morality better? God determines right and wrong and then forces us to obey him? Is that loving? God calls certain things wrong, even if they feel right to us? Is that really something we want? Yes. It is! Or at least it's what we really need! Because the biblical worldview of objective morality from God isn't just better, it's also more loving.

Over the last two weeks, we've found the answers of origin and meaning in Genesis, and today we once more turn to Genesis to find the answer to the question of morality.

After God created Adam and gave him life, God gave Adam's life meaning and purpose in serving him. Then, God created a wife for Adam, whom he named Eve. God clearly explained right and wrong, instructing them, ***"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."*** And for a time, Adam and Eve served God with perfectly unified wills.

But then along came Satan, looking to destroy the perfect unity between God and mankind. Satan had been one of God's created angels, until he and some fellow rebellious angels tried to wrest power away from God and were cast out of heaven. Having been defeated by God, Satan turned his efforts towards God's people. In the form of a serpent, Satan asked Eve, ***"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"***

Satan's tactics were subtle. He wanted to plant seeds of doubt so Adam and Eve would think that God was a grumpy tyrant trying to keep them down with his silly, burdensome restrictions, rather than a loving God making these commands for their good.

At first, Eve responded well, catching Satan's subtle lie. God hadn't restricted them from eating from any tree in the garden. Rather, he'd given them EVERY tree to eat from, except for the one. And even that restriction wasn't because God wanted to show them who was boss. As Eve says, God lovingly prohibited them from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because he knew if they did, ***"they would surely die."***

Not easily deterred, Satan countered, ***"You will not surely die."*** Satan was showing his true colors, as Jesus said about Satan, ***"When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."*** God's warning had been very simple. If they ate from that tree, they would die. Period. Satan lied and then continued his rhetoric to convince Adam and Eve that God was just trying to hold them back. ***"God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."***

Satan wanted to convince them that God was greedy, trying to keep Adam and Eve a step below him so he could keep all the power and control for himself. They could be like God, but God didn't want to share the spotlight.

And that struck a chord with Eve. Satan had successfully made the forbidden fruit look extra sweet. In their desire to be like God, Adam and Eve threw away the image of God they already possessed and plunged the world into sin. They now had experiential knowledge of good and evil; the evil they'd done, and the good they'd destroyed. How did it happen? Satan convinced them that morality was subjective, that they knew better than God what was good and bad.

When Satan finds a tempting tactic that works, he doesn't develop new tricks. He just tweaks them to fit the context. Satan originated the lie that God and his will are not good, and he's still pushing it today. Through our culture and our own sinful hearts, Satan whispers, "God made those commands because he doesn't want you to be happy." "God doesn't want you to express your true self." "God doesn't want you to live your best life." "God doesn't want you to think for yourself." Still today, Satan tries to convince people that we can "be like God," determining morality for ourselves. It's an attractive thought. If we can shrug off objective morality, and convince ourselves that morality is subjective, then you're accountable to no one, and no one can tell you your wrong.

Even if we don't really believe we get to determine morality for ourselves, when our consciences open our eyes to the shame of our sin, don't we so often act like Adam and Eve—desperately sewing fig leaves together, feebly hoping to cover our nakedness and shame, not with foliage, but with excuses? Rather than running to God in repentance, like Adam and Eve, we flee from him, trying to hide our sin in the trees of society's subjective morality. "Well, lots of other people do it too." "It's just who I'm made to be." "God must not have meant it that way when he said that in the Bible." "God wouldn't want me to be unhappy." Even if we don't vocally proclaim that we know better than God, our hearts subtly try to cover our guilt with such foolishness.

The problem is, those thoughts are being fed to us by the father of lies, not the Father of truth. The truth is God's objective morality, written in our hearts through our consciences, and written in his Word. God's morality is not a set of rules we must slavishly follow because God says so. God's morality is not burdensome restrictions meant to hold us down.

Rather, far better than Satan's promise of wisdom, the ***"Holy Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."*** God's given us his morality for the same reason that God prohibited Adam and Eve from eating from that tree—so that we will not die. He gives us his morality so that we can live! He gives us his morality not to keep us down, but to lift us up!

How do we know? Look at how God responds after Adam and Eve's fall. God seeks them out, to call them to repentance, not to crush them. It's not like he didn't know where Adam and Eve were hiding, or like he didn't know what they'd done. But with his questions, ***"Where are you?" "Have you eaten from the tree I commanded you not to eat from?"*** God was lovingly giving them opportunities to confess their sin and repent.

God didn't leave his fallen people to themselves. Yes, there would be consequences of sin. They would suffer with pain and sickness. They would struggle with sadness and loss. Eventually they would die. But they wouldn't die forever.

Because God didn't create them to die. He wanted them to live. So he made Adam and Eve the first promise of a Savior. ***"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."***

God would send an offspring of the woman, true God and true man, born into this world of sin to save his fallen people. He would send a Savior who would be mortally wounded from the strike of the deceptive Serpent. But that Savior, through his death, would crush the Serpent's head under his heel—dealing Satan an eternal death blow, and winning life for the world.

We don't have to try to be like God—thinking we know best what is good or evil. Because we already have a God who became like us—who kept God's morality perfectly in our place and took the full punishment for our evil. That makes God's morality so much more than just some rules to follow. God's morality is not a burdensome restriction meant to hold us down. God's morality is a joyful opportunity to worship and thank our Savior who has lifted us up!

How can we determine true morality? It's simple. Stop trying to be God, and let God be God. Because Jesus is good. And if God gave us Jesus for our eternal good, then we can be completely certain that God also gave us his morality in his Word for our eternal good. Let God be God. And let us give thanks.

