

**Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL**  
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**Worship Series: *Prepared to Answer***  
**Service Theme: *“There Are No Moral Absolutes.”***  
**Sermon Theme: *Absolute Morality, Absolute Love***  
**October 22, 2023—Exodus 20:1-20**

It must have been terrifyingly awesome! 3 months of trekking through the desert after being freed from slavery in Egypt, God instructed the Israelites to make camp in front of Mount Sinai. Lightning flashed, thunder rumbled, a thick cloud covered the mountain, and a deafening trumpet blast rang out from heaven. Smoke billowed from the mountain as the LORD came down in fire, and the whole mountain shook like an earthquake. Unsurprisingly, so did the Israelites!

Then God spoke, proclaiming the Ten Commandments; ten principles that clearly define morality; right and wrong; good and evil; do's and don'ts. 1,500 years later, as Jesus reiterates those Ten Commandments in the New Testament era, he makes it clear that God wasn't just defining morality in this way for those people in that day. This is absolute morality, applying to and governing the lives of all people for all time! Including us.

But much of the world today denies that. They believe, ***“There are no moral absolutes.”*** In their minds, morality is subjective. Meaning everyone determines right and wrong for themselves, based on their own perspectives and preferences. They claim that morality is just a social construct, determined by the opinions and needs of people groups, so that morality perpetually morphs between different cultures and over different historical periods. In their minds, there's no absolute standard of right and wrong that applies to everyone.

Which makes the terrifying picture of Mount Sinai fitting to them. Because they see the idea of absolute morality as something dark. Terrifying. Burdensome. Something that robs people of freedom, instead of setting them free! So how do we answer the skeptic? First, how can we show them the truth that there is **Absolute Morality**

which applies to all people of all time? And second, how can we show them absolute morality not as a picture of absolute terror, but of **Absolute Love?**

First, let's look at the evidence for objective, absolute morality. Although the Ten Commandments God spoke were recorded on stone tablets, the evidence begins inside, in our hearts. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans, ***“Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law...they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness...”***

It's a complicated thought, so let's simplify Paul's point. Basically, he says, “It's no coincidence that non-Jewish people who have never heard the Ten Commandments recorded in the Old Testament, still have a basic understanding of right and wrong that lines up with God's Ten Commandments!” We call it our conscience, that inner voice that makes us feel guilty when we do something wrong, and makes us feel good when we do something right. The word “conscience” literally means, ***“that which we all know together.”*** And that's Paul's point.

Undeniably, there are certain actions which regardless of culture or historical period, everyone will say, “That's bad, you shouldn't do that.” Murder. Rape. The powerful oppressing the weak and defenseless. And there are certain actions which everyone will say, “That's a good, admirable thing to do.” Sacrificial love for others. Caring for the weak and defenseless. Why are those things included in the morality that “we all know together?” Some argue that it's just genetics-- the results of evolutionary development. But does that really make sense?

The basic tenets of evolution are survival of the fittest, and doing whatever is necessary to advance your species. Evolution claims that we humans are just the most advanced animal. Let's press on that. On a basic, animalistic level, if I killed my neighbor and stole his money, food, and resources, wouldn't that make it easier for me and my offspring to survive? Absolutely! And yet, everyone would rightly condemn that as evil. If I sacrifice my time, my food, my money, and

my resources to care for needy, helpless neighbors, doesn't that make it less likely for me and my offspring to survive? Doesn't that completely go against "survival of the fittest?" And yet, everyone rightly applauds such selfless actions. But why? As Prof. Mark Paustian writes in his book, *Prepared to Answer*, "***An evolution driven by survival of the fittest can never explain the sense that people shouldn't live just for themselves, or the guilt we feel when we do!***"

So where does this universal, basic understanding of right and wrong come from? Paul explains, "***The requirements of the law are written on their hearts.***" God, the Creator of all, has written his absolute morality into the heart of every person he's made! The Ten Commandments--God's revealed law—are a simple summary of the law God's placed in our hearts through our conscience-- the natural law.

However, those who deny absolute morality argue that morality is just a matter of personal preference, like chocolate or vanilla. They say that as time progresses, so does morality. But are we really comfortable saying we lock people away for life, or give lethal injections simply based on people's preferences? Are we really comfortable acknowledging that if enough people changed their minds about murder and molestation over the next few decades, we'd have to then call those things good? Are we really OK with the implications of this worldview?

If you say morality is just a matter of subjective opinion, let me ask you, is there anyone in the world doing things that you think are wrong, and that they should stop? Are there things you think are evil, and that should be stopped, regardless of how people personally feel about them? Absolutely! But if morality is just the majority opinion and people's preference, who are we to tell them they should stop? Why should your perception of morality inhibit someone from doing what their perception of morality feels is good and right? The point being, the second we use the word "should" or "should not," we're appealing to some standard of morality that is outside of our own personal opinions. And therefore, morality can't be simply subjective!

So why such a strong push to say there's no absolute morality, and that right and wrong is simply a matter of our own personal preferences? I think the answer is obvious. If morality is only a matter of opinion, then you're only accountable to yourself, and there's no eternal accountability to God! If morality is a matter of opinion, you can massage away the nagging pangs of guilt in your conscience by telling yourself enough times, "It feels right to me, so it can't be wrong." If God isn't the author of an absolute morality that applies to everyone, then ultimately, you get to be the god of your life, and do whatever feels good and right to you. Who isn't attracted by that? As Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky once wrote, "***If God is dead, then everything is justifiable.***"

I recently read a blog by an atheist about all the reasons why "absolute objective morality is ridiculous." One of his primary arguments was that people want to do whatever we personally feel is best, not have morality defined for us by some third party. I agree 100% with that observation about human nature. We crave subjective morality instead of objective morality, because the former lets us do whatever we feel is best, instead of having to listen to God! But is that what's best for us?

I think that's actually a major reason why absolute morality from God is necessary! I think it's also a major reason we can see God's absolute love in his absolute morality. Look again at the commandments God gives all people in Exodus 20.

If you had to summarize God's moral law with one word, what would you say? Some might use a word like "fear," "burden," or "restriction." But Jesus uses a different word-- Love! In Matthew 22, Jesus summarizes God's law like this: "***Love the Lord your God with all your heart...soul...and mind. Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and prophets hang on these two commandments.***" The Ten Commandments, God's definition of morality, is all about love! Love for God, and love for our neighbor.

You can easily divide the Ten Commandments into those two commandments Jesus references. 1-3 are all about love for God: "***You shall have no other gods.***" "***Do not misuse the name of the LORD.***"

***“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.”*** And 4-10 are all about love for our neighbor: ***“Honor your father and mother.”*** ***“Do not murder.”*** ***“Do not commit adultery.”*** ***“Do not steal.”*** ***“Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.”*** ***“Do not covet.”***

To some, that might seem like a list of burdensome restrictions that rob people of their freedom to live their lives however they see fit. But that inherent nature the atheist blogger referenced, which drives us to pursue whatever seems best to us, makes absolute morality completely necessary! Because as God laments in Scripture, ***“Every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.”*** We need God to lovingly give us an absolute morality, because left to ourselves, we’ll pursue and act on the evil and wickedness that feels good to our sin-stained hearts, but leads to our destruction. Restrictions are liberating when they fit with the reality of our nature. The fishbowl that restricts a goldfish from the “freedom” of the kitchen floor is liberating. Because of the nature of a fish, if liberated from that restriction, it would be destroyed.

Students in a classroom need rules and standards. Children in a family need rules and standards. Adults in a society need rules and standards! In God’s absolute morality, we see God’s absolute love that he lays out unmistakable rules and standards for our easily wandering hearts! We need God’s law to be a curb, preventing us from going off the rails in wickedness. We need God’s law to be a guide, showing us the way to walk in life. We need God’s law to be a mirror, reflecting our failures and blemishes to obey God’s Law.

That’s the reason that the Israelites shook in fear at Mount Sinai as God laid out his absolute morality for them. Not just because of the smoke, fire, and trumpet blasts, but because they knew the truth. As sinners, they couldn’t stand before a Holy God who had proclaimed absolute morality and live!

That’s one reason subjective morality won’t cut it. If we view morality as something subjective, we can always explain away our sins or failures. We can always spin our sins and failures into something right or warranted, so we never have to feel guilt or shame. That might seem

ideal. Who wants to feel guilt and shame, right? But the question isn’t, “What do we want?” It’s “What do we need?”

Absolute, objective morality forces us to wrestle with the reality that we’re broken sinners who can’t be good enough or do enough good to save ourselves. Absolute, objective morality forces us to acknowledge that our thoughts, words, and actions fail to measure up to God’s standard. Absolute, objective morality forces us to drop to our knees in guilt and cry out to God for forgiveness, mercy, and salvation. Which is exactly what we as sinners need to do!

Because along with absolute morality, God has also shown us absolute love! Knowing that we can’t possibly live a life of perfect morality and keep God’s law perfectly, God sent a perfect substitute who could do it for us. Walk through every moment of Jesus’ life, and every one of these Commandments is kept perfectly. As Hebrews declares, Jesus was ***“tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.”*** Because of Jesus’ perfect obedience to his Father’s absolute morality, all who have faith in Jesus as Savior have Jesus’ perfect obedience credited by God to their account. So through Jesus, God sees every commandment perfectly kept in our lives too! As Paul writes in Romans, ***“Just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”***

That’s absolute love from God—love that applies for all people of all time. And without that absolute morality, there could be no absolute love! And so, motivated by God’s absolute love for us, we can be motivated to follow God’s absolute morality in our lives. Not to earn God’s love. We already have it. Rather, as our opportunity to serve, glorify, and thank God for his absolute love!

Yes, God’s absolute morality “restricts” us from living however we want. Not to burden or beat us down, but to bless us in the most profound ways! Really, we willingly restrict our freedom all the time for the sake of love. I’m guessing your life had a different kind of independent freedom when you were single than it does in marriage. You’re now thinking about, communicating with, and providing for

another person all the time. That obviously restricts your freedom to do whatever you want. If you're a parent, you know all too well how your freedom is restricted when you have children. Love often requires us to restrict our personal freedom. But in doing so, a completely different freedom—a far superior freedom—is opened. The freedom of love we share with those all-important people we're completely willing to restrict our freedom for! How much more is that true of the freedom that is ours through God's love?

So when you stand before Mount Sinai as God declares absolute morality—you don't need to quake with absolute terror. Because that law points us to another Mount—Mount Calvary, where God showed us absolute love.