



THE MORALITY QUESTION

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[VIDEO] What is truth? Most of the people on the video agreed that truth is individual; it's up to us, it's what we feel, it's what we think. The video showed that only a third of people believe truth is absolute and concrete, and less than half of Christians believed that. So, the majority of people, Christian or not, spiritual or secular, believe that truth is fluid and determined by each person. The problem is that we don't live that way.

The noise in our culture proves the point. We have all of these cultural voices telling us their view of truth. The news media tells us one truth, and the President calls it "fake news." Science tells us one truth, and the Bible tells us another. Parents tell us one truth, and the culture tells us another. Teachers, celebrities, politicians, and peers tell us a different truth. Doesn't that prove that there is no absolute truth? No, it only proves that there are a lot of opinions. We're yelling at each other "but that's not true!" The noise proves that we really don't tolerate each other's truth. We don't live that way.

That's why we have to ask the question, what is truth? Where does it come from? Who decides what's true? And from that truth, how do we determine right and wrong?

This is one of the human questions, questions everyone wonders about. A couple of weeks ago, we asked the happiness question – what is the key to happiness and the meaning of life? Last week, we asked the God question – is God real, and if so, is He relevant to our lives? Next week, we're going to ask the chaos question – why is there so much evil and suffering in the world? And in two weeks, we're going to ask the death question – what happens when we die?

[Morality] This morning, we're going to ask the morality question.¹ What is truth and how do we determine right and wrong?

The Apostle Paul wrote most of the New Testament, and he wrote a letter to the young Christians in Rome to clarify the Gospel. It is the most significant theological book in the Bible. Paul explained that the Gospel was founded on the resurrection of Jesus, proving that He was the Son of God and proving that everything He said was true.² Paul described himself as obligated, eager, and unashamed of the Gospel.³ And he believed the Gospel was the power of God for salvation, that this message could rescue people from the human dilemma. Paul began his letter with the solution, and with hope, hope through faith in Jesus Christ.

But 382 words into the letter, his tone changed. Paul's description of the condition of humanity is grave. It is distressing. It is harsh. Remember, Paul is simply the writer. God is the author. This is God's description of the condition of humanity.

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who *suppress the truth* in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, *have been clearly seen*, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

²¹For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became *futile in their speculations*, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²²Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

²⁴Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. ²⁵For they *exchanged the truth of God for a lie*, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. ²⁶For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, ²⁷and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

²⁸And just as *they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer*, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, ²⁹being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;

³²and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also *give hearty approval* to those who practice them. (Romans 1:18-32, NAS).

This is one of the most sobering and distressing passages in the entire Bible. It is uncomfortable to hear. It's uncomfortable because we don't like God being harsh. We don't like being included in the description. And, with the acceptance of homosexuality in our culture, God and His word seem old-fashioned and obsolete.

But Romans 1 is like a doctor's diagnosis, and God is the doctor. No one likes to hear a doctor give the diagnosis of cancer, but if he doesn't, there's no hope of a cure. None of us like to hear God's diagnosis, but if we don't, there's no hope for a cure. Romans 1 tells the truth about us. It exposes us for who we really are. It leaves no doubt that all of humanity's problems are due to a rejection of God.

And there's no room for self-righteousness. Yes, Romans 1 is an indictment on the big, bad culture in which we live, but guess what? We are a part of that culture. Each of us, with our own sin, has contributed to the brokenness and the evil we see in this world. Romans 1 includes all of us. It is only by God's grace that we are rescued from the eternal consequences of our sin. Thank God, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

So, it should be with tears that we hear Romans 1. It should be with sadness that we look at the brokenness in our world. As we realize that *all the brokenness we see in the world is the result of life without God. But God sent His Son to mend the brokenness and to give us new life and eternal life.*

Why talk about this on Mother's Day? This is supposed to be a happy day. What is the number one priority of mothers, of parents, and of the church? To disciple our children to follow Jesus and learn how to live in this broken world! Romans 1 describes the result of drifting from God, from His truth, from His will, and from His best. ***All the brokenness we see in the world is the result of life without God. But God sent His Son to mend the brokenness and to give us new life and eternal life.***

The great apologist-theologian Francis Schaeffer grieved the culture he observed. "The spirit of the age is autonomous freedom – that is, freedom from all restraints and especially rebellion against God's truth and moral absolutes."⁴ But then he held the church accountable. "The failure of the church to stand for truth as truth. There is only one word for this – accommodation. The church has accommodated to the world spirit of the age."⁵

That makes today's question extremely important. ***What is truth, and how do we determine right and wrong?***

NO GOD

As Christians, we believe the answer starts with God. In the past, God was used to fill in the gaps in what we did understand scientifically. He was called the "God of the gaps." But we've come so far in our understanding that science has made God unnecessary. Do we even need God? So, we live with this tension between science and religion.

Evolution is the prominent view of the universe today and stands opposed to the Bible's account in Genesis. Some Christians try to blend evolution with Genesis in the form of theistic evolution. But any form of evolution does not explain why we are here. It does not explain what makes us human. It does not explain meaning and purpose. It cannot answer the question, what is truth and how do we determine right from wrong?

Now, science is not our enemy. We benefit from science every day. But scientific interpretation based upon atheistic assumption, like evolution, is a rejection of God.

That's why Romans 1:18 says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who ***suppress the truth*** in unrighteousness. Because ***that which is known about God is evident within them***; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:18-20, NAS). Evolution ignores the obviousness of God. It is a denial of the existence of God, or at least, a denial of the need for God. So, how do we respond to that?

One, ***believing in God makes sense because every effect must have a cause.*** Everything that exists is contingent on something else. Children come from their parents. Plants come from seeds. A watch proves a watchmaker. Every effect must have a cause. Three thousand years ago, King David marveled at the same stars we see at night, and said, "The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known" (Psalm 19:1-2, NLT). The universe is evidence for God.

Two, *believing in God makes sense because of the “fine-tuning” of the universe*. The earth has been custom-made for us.⁶ If the sun were a little closer, we would burn up. If it were a little farther away, we would freeze to death. If the earth did not rotate on a 23° axis or if our atmosphere contained less than 21% oxygen, the earth would be uninhabitable. NASA scientist Dr. John O’Keefe writes, “We are, by astronomical standards, a pampered ... cherished group of creatures ... If the Universe had not been made with the most exacting precision we could never have come into existence. It is my view that those circumstances indicate the Universe was created for man to live in.”⁷

Three, *believing in God makes sense because complexity requires intelligence*. The universe is too complex to be the result of random chance. Think about the difference between the Grand Canyon and Mount Rushmore. The Grand Canyon is the result of wind, water, erosion, and time. Could Mount Rushmore, with the presidential faces, be the result of wind, water, erosion, and time? Of course not! Complexity requires intelligence. Every human being is stamped with a one-of-kind DNA fingerprint, so intricately aligned that it is impossible to be the result of chance. Robert Shapiro, world-class chemist was asked, “What do you think are the chances that DNA could have been formed by random process?” His answer? “Absolutely none.”⁸ As human beings, we are complex creatures who live in a complex universe, and complexity requires intelligence.

Four, *believing in God makes sense because of the uniqueness of humanity*. Just take a look at us. We have an inherent sense of morality, of right and wrong. It’s built in. Where did that come from? We have personality and feelings, the capacity to love and hate, to feel joy and sadness. Where did that come from? We have the ability to create, to be artistic, and to appreciate beauty. Where did that come from? From evolution? By chance? The Bible says that we are created in the image of God.⁹ What we are had to come from someone who also possesses those qualities.

The famous atheist Bertrand Russell was once asked, “What will you do, Mr. Russell, if after you die you find out there is a God? What will you say to him?” Russell replied, “I will tell him he just did not give me enough evidence.”¹⁰ Oh, but He did! The evidence for God is all around us.¹¹ Near the end of his life, the French existentialist Jean Paul Sartre at last let down his guard and admitted, “I do not feel that I am the product of chance, a speck of dust in the universe ... but a being whom only a creator could put here ...”¹² “What a fool I have been!”

NO TRUTH

Paul writes, “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools ... For they *exchanged the truth of God for a lie*” (Romans 1:21-22, 25, NAS).

In 1966, the cover of *TIME* magazine read “Is God Dead?” In 2017, the cover read “Is Truth Dead?” The issue was about President Trump’s claim that the media is “fake news,” while the media questioned unsubstantiated claims made by the president. In 2016, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the “word of the year” was “post-truth.”¹³

Is truth dead? What do we mean by truth?

- Truth is revealed by God. God is the creator of the universe, so anything we know has been revealed to us by Him. God is the source of truth.
- Truth is objective and experiential. Truth is not some philosophical abstraction determined by the best debater. Truth is what is obvious, what is real, what is fact, what is actual, what is self-evident. Contrary to the opinions of the people in the earlier video, truth is not a matter of personal opinion or personal preference.
- Truth is absolute. To say $2+2=4$ is true. It's the final verdict on that equation. Truth does not change. It is not determined by majority vote.
- Truth is universal. Truth is truth at all times, in all places, and to all people. The scientific truth is that gravity is true at all times, in all places, and to all people. The moral truth is that stealing is wrong at all times, in all places, and to all people.

But the postmodern culture in which we live rejects everything I just said. The video proved that most people do not believe in absolute truth. We see Romans 1 in our culture today. "They exchanged the truth of God for lie."

An example of this is abortion. Taking the life of a baby, with eyes and ears, fingers and toes, and eyelashes, and calling it "reproductive healthcare" is absurd. In their book *Beating Hearts: Abortion and Animal Rights*, law professors Sherry Colb and Michael Dorf advocate for both abortion and animal rights. Both are vegan and believe it is immoral to eat meat or to manufacture leather. For them, abortion is morally permissible, while animal use is not. Abortion is legal in the United States, and on the other hand, Texas law imposes a \$10,000 fine and 2 years in jail for dog fighting, cock fighting, torturing an animal, poisoning an animal, abandoning an animal, or tripping a horse. We live in a country where it is legal to abort a baby, but illegal to trip a horse.

The prophet Isaiah mourned what happened in his day. "Truth has stumbled in the streets" (Isaiah 59:14, NIV). He said, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil" (Isaiah 5:20, NIV).

That's the Romans 1 indictment. "They became *futile in their speculations*, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools ... For they *exchanged the truth of God for a lie*" (Romans 1:21-22, 25, NAS).

NO MORALITY

If God is dead and truth is dead, then what about morality? According a Gallup poll, 79% of Americans believe the state of moral values is poor or fair at best. And 73% believe morals are getting worse. And Romans 1 predicts that. *All the brokenness we see in the world is the result of life without God.*

"Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them ... For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions ... God gave them over to a depraved mind" (Romans 1:24, 26, 28, NAS). Three times the text says, "God gave them over." That's chilling! Next week, I'm going to talk more about this, because it is the answer to the chaos question – why is there so much evil and suffering in the world?

When it comes to morality, we know certain things are wrong. A 4-year-old knows something is wrong when a bully pushes her down and takes her candy. A 4-year-old knows that's wrong, and not because she has read laws about assault and battery. Morality is built in. It is intuitive. In every culture, we know stealing is wrong, we know murder is wrong, we know child abuse is wrong.

But when we reject God and reject His truth, we also reject His moral code. That's why "God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity ... God gave them over to degrading passions ... God gave them over to a depraved mind" (Romans 1:24, 26, 28, NAS).

The example of the death of morality Paul used was homosexuality. Why bring that up? Why talk about such a controversial issue on Mother's Day? Because the Bible does. The point of Romans 1 is that the death of God leads to the death of truth, and the death of truth leads to the death of morality. Homosexuality is certainly not the greatest sin; Paul expanded the list to include a lot more. His point is that all the brokenness we see in the world is result of life without God.

²⁸And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, ²⁹being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; ³²and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. (Romans 1:28-32, NAS).

It's not a pretty picture is it? We might criticize Paul for being pessimistic. And we would be right if it were not for the fact that what he writes is so painfully true. Nothing in that list is out of the ordinary. Without God, this is what people become.

Romans 1 also refers to those who "*give hearty approval*" to these things (Romans 1:28-32, NAS). We see the hearty approval of things that are not right.

Last year, controversy erupted when popular Christian author Jen Hatmaker declared that same-sex marriage is "holy." Jen has been very influential in challenging Christians to live with more understanding and compassion for all people, no matter what they believe or how they live. Her challenge was right on. But her drift from the Bible was sad to watch. Her publisher pulled her books from bookstores and comments from critics and defenders flooded social media.

In response, I defer to response of Dr. Rosaria Butterfield to Jen Hatmaker's declaration. Rosario Butterfield was a tenured university professor, a lesbian, and fierce advocate for LGBT rights. In 1999, she was converted to Christ and left that lifestyle. She said if she had heard Jen Hatmaker speak about the holiness of gay relationships back in 1999 she would have never turned to Jesus. She writes, "I hear Jen's words – words meant to encourage, not discourage, to build up, not tear down ... – and a thin trickle of sweat creeps down my back. If I were still in the thick of the battle over the indwelling sin of lesbian desire, Jen's words would have put a millstone around my neck."¹⁴ Meaning, if she had hear someone say her gay relationship was holy, she would have never turned to Jesus, never repented, never received God's mercy, and been forever separated from God. She added, "Conversion to Christ made me face the question squarely: did my

lesbianism reflect who I am (which is what I believed in 1999), or did my lesbianism distort who I was? I learned through conversion that when something feels right and good and real and necessary – but stands against God’s Word – it reveals the proof of sin’s mark on me.”

Woe to those who “give hearty approval.” “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness ... Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight! ... For they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 5:20, 21, 24, NAS).

What is truth and how do we determine right and wrong? The Creator of a thing determines how that thing should operate. Who determines truth? God does. Who determines right and wrong? God does. And when we deny God, deny His truth, and deny His moral code, it all comes tumbling down. All the brokenness we see in the world is the result of life without God.

HOW ARE WE LIVE?

So how are we to live? If we know God, if we know His truth, if we know His moral standards, how are we live?

Show and speak grace. Romans 1 is the distressing description of who we are and what we have become without God. But the book of Romans is about the Gospel, about the grace of God. All the brokenness we see in the world is the result of life without God. But God sent His Son to mend the brokenness and to give us new life and eternal life. “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8, NAS). That means we are show people the love of God and the truth of God. Show and speak grace.

Stand firm on what you believe.¹⁵ Are you so convinced of the gospel and do you passionately love Jesus so much that you will stand firm even if you are in the minority? Paul said, “I know whom I have believed and I am convinced” (2 Timothy 1:12). You’ve got to be convinced. When the majority of people around you don’t agree with you, you’ve got to know why you believe what you believe. You’ve got to make up your mind about the word of God. Is it true or not?

Live a distinctly holy life. The Lord said, “Be holy as I am holy.” In contrast to how the majority of people live, we’re supposed to be different. Not perfect, but different. “Do not be conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2, NAS). “Be blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe” (Philippians 2:15, NIV).

Influence. Jesus said we are to be salt and light in our world.¹⁶ But we can’t be salt and light if we hide behind the brick wall of Christianity and talk about how bad the culture is. Culture is people, friends and neighbors who desperately need to hear the gospel, to hear about the grace of God. **All the brokenness we see in the world is the result of life without God. But God sent His Son to mend the brokenness and to give us new life and eternal life.**

NOTES

¹ Timothy Keller's book *Making Sense of God*, speaks to the secular thinker about meaning and happiness. He fairly outlines the secular view and then exposes weaknesses in comparison to the Christian view. He explains why the Christian view is better, and more satisfying and coherent than the secular view.

² See Romans 1:4.

³ See Romans 1:14-16.

⁴ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1984), page 32.

⁵ *Ibid.*, page 37, Schaeffer called this "the great evangelical disaster."

⁶ Known as the anthropic principle.

⁷ Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, page 157

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ See Genesis 1:26.

¹⁰ Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1994), page 183.

¹¹ The Bible is very blunt when it says, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 14:1, NAS). Paul also said that those who ignore the obviousness of God "become futile in their speculations, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:21-22).

¹² Stephen Board, "The Old, Old Story," *Editor's Ink, Eternity*, July/August 1983, page 3.

¹³ Vince Vitale, "The Trajectory of Truth," *Just Thinking Magazine*, RZIM, February 23, 2017.

¹⁴ Rosaria Butterfield, "Love Your Neighbor Enough to Speak Truth: A Response to Jen Hatmaker," *The Gospel Coalition*, October 31, 2016.

¹⁵ See 1 Peter 5:9, 12.

¹⁶ See Matthew 5:13-14.