

Finding Our Moral Compass

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Introduction.

- A. America today is blessed with a strong central government; some of us would say, too strong. It's undeniable, though, that this country no longer submits to the spiritual sovereignty of God. Every so often, as I'm reading the news, I see an item that drives this home. I found one such in the Dear Abby column on 4-25-08.
- B. It reads: "Dear Abby: I'm in my 20s and work as a cashier in a convenience store. One of my regulars recently won the lottery. I am newly married and have a 7-month-old. We live with my in-laws, and we're dying to get our own place. The lottery winner is somewhat good-looking, but about 20 years older than I am. Abby, he propositioned me--if you know what I mean. He offered a large sum of money which would help my family get our own place. I'm confused. What do I do? --Desperately Seeking My Own Place in Texas."
- C. It seems we have reached the point in this country where people have to write into Dear Abby to find out that they shouldn't engage in prostitution. As revealing as that is, Dear Abby's response was even more revealing. She opposed the transaction, of course, but she didn't use any of the words that I would have used to explain why. Concepts like "adultery," "sin," and "evil" just never came up. Dear Abby argued instead that the lottery winner was a loser, and that Mrs. Desperately Seeking shouldn't sell herself, although she clearly wants to.
- D. Obviously, I agree that prostitution is a bad thing, but folks, that was a weak explanation why, and it illustrates what's wrong with the morality of our country. In the rare occasions when people do try to take a moral stand, they don't have anything stronger to go on than their think-so or Dear Abby's think-so. Folks, if that's all the moral standard I saw, I would do what was right in my own eyes too. We need better answers than that, for ourselves and for our children. Let's turn not to Dear Abby, but to God, in finding our moral compass.

I. Setting the Standard.

- A. As we do this, the first thing we need to figure out is what our standard ought to be. Conceivably, we could be our own standard, but the problem with that is that **NO MAN IS GOOD OF HIMSELF**. In other words, there is not a single one of us who is going to consistently do the right thing. Among other places, we find this in Scripture in Romans 3:10-12. The problem is that we are too easily deceived and led astray by Satan. In the abstract, we can recognize that lying is wrong. We can even resolve that we will never lie. When our parents want to know where we've been for the past two hours, though, and we've been off with the boyfriend or girlfriend we aren't even supposed to have, that's when one little lie starts looking very enticing.
- B. This is a problem that every single human being has. We have a tendency to think well of ourselves. As my brother will tell you, even the murderer on death row thinks of himself as a pretty good guy who is just the victim of circumstances. In our self-assessment, though, we aren't honest. We don't think about the times when we deviate from what we know or should know is right. None of us are good of ourselves.
- C. By contrast, though, **GOD IS GOOD**. We have this from no lesser authority than Jesus in Mark 10:18. Not only is God good; He is the only One who is good. As James tells us in James 1, not only does God not sin, God cannot even be tempted. Just think about that. With what could Satan possibly tempt God? God doesn't have a physical body, so He can't be tempted through it. God already has everything, so Satan can't tempt him with the promise of more. Finally, God is already the pre-eminent Being in the universe, so Satan can't use pride to lead God astray. God is completely immune to temptation and evil.
- D. Because that is so, because God has the wisdom to determine what is right and the character to always do what is right, He is always perfectly good. It is possible for Him to be the standard that our own fallible wisdom and our own fallible strength cannot be. We can always look to God for what is right.
- E. Because God is good, this is something in which He is willing to help us. Not only does He know what is good; **HE TELLS US WHAT IS GOOD**. Once again, this is an idea that is prevalent throughout the entire Bible, but we see it in perhaps its clearest expression in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. God used His infinite understanding to examine our being and determine how we need to behave in every possible instance. He then breathed that message into—or inspired—the authors of the Bible to put that understanding down in writing so that everyone who looks at it can figure out what God wants them to do. Once we go through that process of reading and understanding God's word, it gives us the tools to make good moral decisions in every area of our lives.
- F. This inspired word, friends, is our moral standard. Here's why this is important: it offers us a way to measure what is right and wrong that we don't find in anything else. When we try to invent our own standards, those are always warped by our self-deception and self-interest. When we try to derive a natural law from the physical creation, the forces of evil are so good at twisting things that they make the unnatural and evil appear natural and good. Just look at how this has happened with homosexuality. Romans 1 tells us that homosexuality is against nature, so we should be able to look at nature and figure it out, but the gay-rights movement has got America convinced that homosexuality is genetic rather than a lifestyle choice. By contrast,

the Bible is much less open to misinterpretation. People still manage to twist the word, but it's much more difficult and obvious. Anybody who believes the Bible can open to Romans 1 or 1 Corinthians 6 and learn that homosexuality is a sin, because it says so, in black and white. The Bible is our standard.

- G. It follows naturally from this that, having told us what is good, **GOD EXPECTS US TO DO IT**. Consider Paul's words in Ephesians 2:10. Apparently, though, to many people this point is much less obvious than I think it is. They treat the Bible as kind of an ornament. They keep it on the bookshelf, they take it to church, but they don't really make the effort to put it into practice. Friends, if we're just reading the Bible and not doing what it says, we're missing the point of the whole thing. We're like the traveler who reads a map and says, "If I want to get to Texas, I have to go south, but I feel like going north instead." None of us would do that, but we need to see that it's every bit as foolish to look at the Bible and not obey it. The Bible is the road map to pleasing God, and all ignoring the road map gets us a pretty good idea of the consequences of disobedience.
- H. These consequences will become evident to all, because whether we do good or evil, **GOD IS GOING TO JUDGE US**. Paul makes this promise in 2 Corinthians 5:10. This is something that God can only do because He gave us the word first. When He judges us, He is going to analyze our behavior and see whether we have lived as we should or not, and the way that He's going to do that is by seeing how we measure up against the standard of the word. He's going to see that the word told us not to murder, and He's going to check to see whether we've murdered or not. If we haven't, good for us. He's also going to see, though, that the word tells us not to hate our brother, and he's going to check to see whether we've ever hated anyone or not. If we have, the standard of the word is going to flunk us. This poses a big problem for people who do what is right in their own eyes instead of obeying the word. When that day comes, they aren't going to be able to substitute their standard for God's standard. God isn't going to care that they lived by the rule, "Thou shalt not covet, except when gambling." God is going to use His rule that forbids coveting always, see that they haven't lived up to it, and count them as lawbreakers to be punished accordingly.

II. Our Response.

- A. That's the standard, friends: the word of God that He expects us to follow and will use to judge us. Once we know that, here's how we need to respond. First, we need to **STUDY THE WORD**. David tells us why in Psalm 19:7-10. As we study the Bible, it teaches us what is right and makes us wise so that we can do good and avoid evil. This is where Mrs. Desperately Seeking from Texas went wrong. She shouldn't have asked Dear Abby for moral guidance. She should have opened the Bible and read any one of the many passages where adultery and prostitution are condemned. That would have told her all she needed to know. Of course, judging from her letter, that's exactly the reason why she didn't turn to the word. She knew it wouldn't give her the answer she really wanted to hear. That can be a danger for us, too, but friends, the times when the Bible tells us unpleasant truths are the times we most need to listen. Those are the times when our will is diverging from God's because we want to do evil while He continues to want us to do good. That's when we are most in need of divine guidance. Let's always turn to the word, then, so that we know what is right.
- B. Of course, all the study in the world won't do us any good unless we also **KEEP THE WORD**. Jesus tells us how important this is in Luke 11:27-28. As a side note, this is an interesting passage to bring up whenever we're discussing religion with those who venerate Mary. After all, in it, no lesser authority than Jesus says that when we obey Him, we are actually more blessed than she is. He's discouraging the veneration of Mary.
- C. Our main point, though, is that the blessing of God comes to us not when we merely hear the word, but when we observe it. When we're speeding through one of those small speed-trap towns, and the local cop pulls us over, typically, he's going to ask us if we saw the speed-limit sign at the edge of town. He's not going to be impressed, though, just because we say yes. Instead, he's going to be writing us a ticket, because even though we saw the sign, we didn't obey it. Once again, this is just the commonest of common sense. The Bible isn't a love letter to be ignored. It's a law to be followed. We need to be not just hearers, but doers.
- D. Doing and not just hearing can be hard sometimes. However, it's something to which we need to dedicate our lives, and to help us with that, we need to **REMEMBER THE JUDGMENT**. Look at the words of Jesus in John 5:28-29. Sometimes, folks, when we go speeding through those one-stoplight towns, we get away with it. Sometimes the local cop is off on his donut break, and he doesn't see us as we go screaming down Main Street at the speed of sound. I can't say for sure, but I suspect that there are a lot of folks who are hoping that God is going to overlook their sins in just that same way. Folks, I wouldn't count on that if I were you. God does not take donut breaks, or sleep breaks, or any other kind of break. He is always watching every one of us. Not even our most secret sins escape His notice, and when the day comes, every sin will be judged.
- E. To our minds, that sounds extremely harsh. God is going to go through every day of our lives, count up every sin, and then, if we have any sin at all, condemn us to hell. How can God be so pitiless? How can He be so merciless? What we need to understand, friends, is that the time God has set aside for mercy is not then, but now. God must be perfectly just, but He also desires to be merciful toward each one of us. Indeed, He desires to be merciful so much that He sent His own Son to die in our place. What more can we ask?

Conclusion. If you know that you need mercy from God today, repent according to the terms of His word.