

Part Three: The Value of the Law

Written by Bob Stone

Exodus 20:1—*And God spoke all these words: 2] "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*

David Guzik's Exodus commentary makes some of the following observations:

"As an introduction to the Law, God introduces Himself and reminds the Israelites once again what He has done—v. 2. It is because of who God is, and because of what He has done for us, He has the right to tell us what to do—and we have the obligation to obey Him. It's also important to draw the connection that the following Laws were not "invented" here at Mount Sinai.

A few aspects of the Law brought to Moses were new revelations, but for the most part what we find in the Ten Commandments is simply written in the heart of man since the time of Adam.

For example: In the book *The Abolition of Man*, C. S. Lewis explains how there is absolutely a universal morality among men; how all cultures in the past have been able to agree on the basics of morality because they were implanted in the heart of man. All cultures have said:

- murder is wrong, and
- kindness is good
- that we have particular obligations to our family
- that honesty is good
- that a man cannot have any woman he wants
- that stealing is wrong
- that justice is good.

Where is the culture where cowardice is good and bravery is bad?

That doesn't mean cultures can't be eventually perverted and reject what is written in their heart—where treachery is good and honesty is bad, etc. In our nation, there has been a

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massive shift, to the point where 63% of Americans reject the concept of moral absolutes, saying that it all depends on the situation. Democracy is only as good as the morality of the majority. The main point here is,

Our hope is not in our system!

Some people think that if there is one case where a lie is justified (say to save the life of someone else), then all bets are off and lies are justified in all sorts of situations—especially their situation! Thus our inability to believe in and teach a common morality has crippled our nation morally; this is why so many among our young people show absolutely no sense of right and wrong. This is why some courts have declared it unconstitutional to post the Ten Commandments on a school room wall! In 1990, media mogul Ted Turner distributed copies of his "10 Voluntary Initiatives," hoping to replace the Ten Commandments." David Guzik, *ibid*.

In 1980 the United States Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in *Stone v. Graham* that the school children of Kentucky have the constitutional right not to be assaulted by the presence of the Ten Commandments on their classroom walls. The Court's majority revealed its rationale, in part, with remarkable secular frankness:

"If the posted copies of the Ten Commandments are to have any effect at all it will be to induce the school children to read, meditate upon, perhaps to venerate and obey, the Commandments. However desirable this might be as a matter of private devotion, it is not a permissible state objective under the Establishment Clause."

In short, the passive display of the Ten Commandments was not permitted because some students *might obey* them.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the Court handed down its decision without hearing oral arguments; and despite the fact the Kentucky statute required that all copies of the Commandments were to be paid for by voluntary contributions; and that a footnote was to be imprinted on each document stating it was not intended as a religious guide but as the basis of

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the secular legal code of western civilization (R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of Grace*, 1993, Crossway, Wheaton, Ill. pp. 11-12).

It is helpful to hear this kind of thing from time to time, to remind ourselves that our nation (not to mention Western civilization) has long been without a moral compass. Without a moral code, a *number of alternative views* now affect how we approach our morality and sense of right and wrong. These will be helpful to review before we look at the Ten Commandments.

Pluralism

Pluralism embraces diversity in a social structure. Plural, of course, means "more than one." Pluralism in the realm of beliefs, morals, values, or lifestyle (*beliefs in particular*) says that there is more than one ultimate. Instead of just one way, there are many.

Secularism

Secularism is a philosophy that simply says God is unnecessary—we can exist without any need for God.

Relativism

Relativism says in effect, the truth is unnecessary, or more specifically, doesn't exist. Relativism reduces truth to opinion, taking what formerly was an external reality and reducing it to internal perspective. My opinion becomes as valid as yours.

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- You do your thing, I'll do mine.
- You don't bug me, I won't bug you.
- We just let the situation determine the ethics, the moral decision—whatever seems right at the time is what we should do.

When we reduce life to existence without objective truth like this, we can do away with absolutes. For example, then, if there is one case in which a lie is justified (say, to save a life), then all bets are off and lies are justified in many different situations!

What if my choices and decisions are in conflict with someone else's, however—if my situational ethics conflict with another set of personal values? "What if one man's vulgarity is another's lyric"? (Ibid, p. 15) Who decides who is right and who is wrong, and by what standard will that judgment be made? I think we can all see the point. Our values and decisions will constantly be in conflict with someone else's unless there is a standard of behavior for our actions.

It is so obvious this inability to believe in and teach a common morality has crippled our nation morally; this is why so many young people/children show absolutely no, or very little, sense of right and wrong.

Democratic Relativism

I call this "democratic morality." One solution to the inevitable moral conflicts that follow adherence to relativism is to believe morality can be determined by a consensus, polls, elections, legislatures, or the law of the land. That should settle it. Really?

The problem with "morality by a consensus," or democratic relativism, is the undergirding belief that the majority must be right and that morality can be determined by a consensus.

Beyond national sins, think practically for a moment:

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How about the myriad of everyday decisions and interpersonal relationships that the courts and the laws of the land do not address (except when there is an outrageous violation of someone's rights or privileges)? We could never come up with enough laws to cover the spectrum of moral decisions made every day. We would have to live in a police state if every action was governed by a law.

Have we ever known a time in human history when the mob, the crowd, even a particular nation was wrong... when a nation was motivated by evil, or an ideology that was destructive and dangerous? Of course! We have many modern examples, and certainly at one time in Israel's history, "Every man did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6)." The result—then and now—is, "Evil is called good and good is called evil." (Is. 5:20, NASB.)

In summary, determining morality by consensus, polls, or the prevailing mood of a nation is an unreliable method of choosing a moral code.

Postmodernism

This view can be either "constructive" or "deconstructive."

- **Deconstructive postmodernism** involves a basic rejection of the tenets of modernism—the doctrine of the supremacy of reason; of the notion of truth; the belief in the perfectability of man; and the idea that we could create a better, if not perfect, society.

- **Constructive postmodernism** does not reject modernism, but seeks to revise its premises and traditional concepts and claims to offer a new unity of scientific, ethical, aesthetic, and religious intuitions. It doesn't reject science as such, but that scientific approach in which only the data of the modern natural sciences are allowed to contribute to the construction of our world view.

Constructive postmodernism seeks to recover truths and values from various forms of

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pre-modern thought and practice. Aspects of this will appear similar to what is also called "New Age" thinking. The possibility that mankind is standing on the threshold of a new age informs much postmodernist thought.

How will these belief systems affect us? Here's a quick comparison:

In **pluralism**, we get life-embracing diversity in a social structure and in the realm of beliefs, morals, values, or lifestyle (beliefs in particular); a pluralist says there is more than one ultimate.

In **secularism**, God is seen as unnecessary; we can exist without any need for God. In pluralism, people who believe in God are allowed to be a part of the social structure, and belief in God is authenticated as legitimate. Secularism simply wakes up in the morning and says, "I can do it on my own. Who needs God?"

In **relativism**, truth is a matter of opinion. In effect, "The truth is unnecessary," or more specifically, "Truth doesn't exist."

In **democratic relativism**, or "democratic morality," is a relativistic viewpoint that morality can be determined by a consensus, by polls, by elections, by legislatures, or by the law of the land.

A **postmodern view** is going two ways at once—one side seeking to recapture what it perceives lost, and the other rejecting the past.

Are you confused? No wonder our society is messed up. All these approaches are similar in some ways and very diverse in others. Which is right? Which one will govern? Actually, it looks like all of them will/are simultaneously. As God's people, we are likely to be increasingly under attack, because we stand for *one* God and *one* code.

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How sad that the people of our society have lost their moorage. I think it is obvious—there must be a better way. I don't speak as a raving fundamentalist who wants everyone to adhere to some legalistic system, but in light of our cultural needs I do believe this: we need God's help to establish the basis for life's fundamental relationships—with God, family, society, and self.

In a world that tragically has lost its bearings , the Ten Commandments is an orientation course that speaks with authority. Most important, the God who wrote them longs to have a relationship of love and life with all mankind.

How sad it is when we begin to exchange a truth for a lie and repress the truth written in our hearts about God. If we pay attention to what God has written about Himself in our hearts in creation (Rom. 1:18-21), the first commandment will follow our understanding of who He is and what He has done for us.

We're finally ready to dig into those commandments. We're going to look not only at the "don'ts" but the "do's" implied in the Ten Commandments. You'll be thankful to the Lawgiver when you see the riches He intended for us. [Come on along!](#)