

Pastor's Note

Hello

To understand our culture well you first have to answer some fundamental questions of life. Like, who determines what is right and what is wrong? And the answer is; God does. But is it really as simple as that? Well maybe it is. But we Christians are much more comfortable giving answers than we are wrestling with questions. And these questions, the big questions of life, are not just small, simple questions. Philosophers throughout history have called these the first order questions. Artists and thinkers have wrestled with questions of meaning and purpose and where's history headed and where do we come from and how do we know what's right and what's wrong. In fact Leo Tolstoy, the great Russian novelist, came up with seven different questions. He said if I can't find answers to these seven questions I'm going to kill myself. That's what he said. So guess what he did? No, he did not kill himself, he became a Christian! Pondering these questions is what every human does. It's not just for the philosophers and the artists and the thinkers. It's what humans do. We wrestle with these big questions. It's one of the things that makes us different than animals.

Do you have pets? Your pets don't wrestle with these questions. Your dog doesn't go around wondering, where did I come from? Why am I here? Cats don't wonder, do all dogs go to heaven? These aren't questions that they ask. All animals care about is when are they going to have their next meal? When are they going to have their next nap? And when are they going to find their next mate? I know that sounds like college freshmen. But we are most human when we're wrestling with these big questions. Let me give you three reasons why these big great questions, these ultimate questions, matter.

A. They shape how we live.

We may think these big questions, these esoteric, philosophical ruminations we have about them have no impact on our lives. But really what we value, what we treasure, walks out of our lives. There's a phrase that you need to know. You've probably heard it but if you haven't you need to know it. Here it is. Ready? Ideas have consequences. Right? And the bigger the idea, the bigger the consequences. And there are no bigger ideas than questions about the meaning of life, questions about right and wrong, and questions about the source of moral authority. These are the big questions that we have.

Ideas have consequences. And they have consequences on two levels. What we believe about this, first of all, impacts how we live as individuals. You may not live what you profess, but you will live what you really believe. Ideas have feet. They walk out of our brains and into our lives and they determine how we live, how we make decisions, how we relate with other people, what we buy, and all kinds of different things. Not only do these big questions impact how we live as individuals they impact how we live as a culture. As you work out your beliefs and someone else works out their beliefs they come together and they produce a culture, a world in which we live. If you think about it we live in a culture right now where there are a lot of big questions and moral dilemmas we face. Dilemmas about the definition of what it means to be one of us. The question of identity. What gives humans value? What gives us purpose and meaning? Questions about relationships get to the fundamental question of what's right and wrong and who gets to say. Questions about international relations even, when we talk about people on the other side of the planet who have different views than we do, sometimes different views in such way that they want to actually hurt us or we want to hurt them; international conflict. They all come back to the

working out of these ultimate questions. These big questions in life matter because they shape how we live.

B. They are unavoidable.

The second reason they matter is because they're unavoidable. You may not want to ask these questions but you do answer them in how you live. You can't choose not to wrestle with morality because we make moral decisions. We can't choose not to wrestle with meaning because we live lives based on meaning. We live in a culture that tries to suppress these questions.

We think that's just a matter of personal, private belief and I don't want to wrestle with them. But as one person said, these beliefs are kind of like beach balls in a pool. You may try to suppress them but if you do, they're just going to pop up over here. You may try to push them down but when do they pop up? They pop up in times of crisis. They pop up at times when we've been deeply hurt by somebody, when we've had a great failure, sometimes when we've had a big success. That's when we ask; is this all there is? Isn't there more? These questions are unavoidable.

C. They are connected.

The third reason why these questions really matter is because they're connected. How you answer one of these questions impacts how you answer another. Is there any purpose in life? If there's no purpose behind creation how can there be purpose for our lives? Does that make sense? The question of morality is very much impacted by how we answer the other questions. If believe that you live, you die, and that's it. If that's true for you, then who's there to keep your morality in check. This is what it means when we say ideas have consequences.

So these great questions shape how we live. They're unavoidable and they're connected. In fact they're really connected. The Judeo Christian family of faith would answer the big questions by pointing to a God who created the world and revealed himself through the Scriptures. The secular family of faith, the atheists and materialists, would say there is no God. The world is just a physical place. It's just what you can see, feel, touch, hear and when you die you die. Then you have the Eastern family of faith with its roots in eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism. These are the faiths that say that God is all of us. We are god. It's not that there's a god out there but you're god and I'm god and there's a oneness that we're all a part of. It's not just eastern any more by the way; this kind of new agey thing is going on here in the west.

So here you have three different families of faith and they answer these big questions differently. The secular family and the eastern family are very different from each other on many levels. Secularism thinks that only the physical world exists. The eastern families think that only the spiritual world exists. The secularist faith thinks the spiritual is an illusion. The new agey eastern faiths think that the physical is an illusion. They're very different. But on one question they agree, fundamentally. And it's the question we're wrestling with today; morality or authority. Because neither of these faiths believe in a god outside the created universe. And if we can't look outside the universe for our moral obligations, if we can't look out there, the only place left to look is in here. If there's no one out there who's the authority, then we have to rely on ourselves. So we're going to walk through this question of morality comparing the Judeo Christian family of faith and the biblical story of moral authority with that of these other two faith families. As we look at the biblical picture of moral authority we could just go and read all the verses in which God says something about morality and what his moral expectations for us are. But Micah 6:8 (ESV) sums up God's moral expectations and the moral design for the world about as well as anything does. *"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"*

Look at the beginning of that verse, *"He has told you, O man..."* He has told us. Not we have told him. So there you have the direction morality goes from the Biblical perspective. God has told us. And he requires something of us. What is that? *"...To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."* So there you have God's moral expectations. A moral claim on our lives. But what does the Bible say about God's moral authority and how it compares with the other faith families? We're going to break this down into four parts; creation, the fall, redemption, and restoration. This week we're looking at creation and next week we'll wrap up with the fall, redemption, and restoration.

1. Creation

This world belongs to God. There you go. The creation story of the Bible assumes that the world belongs to God. God does not come and visit your world. You live in God's world. In the beginning God created. In fact, if you want the theological concept upon which the entire story of the Scripture is based it is this; God is in charge. Nothing exists unless he wants it to exist. You remember how the phrase goes? God said, Let there be... and it was so. God is in charge. In fact, God is so in charge even nothing obeys him. He speaks to nothing and says be something and nothings like, Got it! God's in charge.

So the world is a place under God's authority. It's God's world. So creation tells us that God is the authority over the world. And that includes the moral authority over the creation and everything in it. What about the other faith families? What if we say there is no god out there? Then the only place left to look for moral norms, for moral obligation is not out there but only in here. We have to look inside. And both of these faith families agree on this.

Paul Kurtz, a secular humanist who helped write the Humanist Manifesto said this, *"Humans should not look beyond themselves for salvation. What humanism teaches is that we must muster our own courage and compassion to realize our highest aspirations."* In other words we don't look to God. If it's going to be, it's up to me. The Eastern family is very similar. They believe we all have the truth inside of us and life is about finding your inner truth. They believe we have all the truth inside of us because we're all god. Both the secularist and the eastern faith families say we don't have anything outside of us to point to, so the answer to moral authority is inside us.

Two differing approaches; look outward or look inward. Let's look at the inward approach. What if we look inward and what we find inside is actually violent or sad?

Imagine a person looks inside and discovers that what's true and right for them is to torture little babies for fun. Do you believe that's right? No. You absolutely don't believe that. The point is, we all hear the stories of people who think their own pleasure is the highest good and they live for their highest pleasure even if it means abusing other people. But we all know that's wrong. Telling you to go look inside for moral truth is like sending you out into the wilderness with a compass that always points at you. A compass that always points at you means you are always lost. A compass works because it points at something fixed and unchanging outside of you. And from that point you can orient yourself. These two faith families have nothing by which you can orient yourself.

The other problem with looking inside is sometimes what's inside me and what's inside you might clash. This is what happens. What do you do when something inside you clashes with what's inside somebody else? Who's ultimately going to be right? Friedrich Nietzsche was considered a great atheist, and he told us this, *"Without God there is no right and wrong. There's only power."* So who's going to be right? The strongest. Might makes right. Oh sure there are lots of atheists who are moral. There are lots of Hindus who are moral. That's true. There are some atheists who are far more moral than some Christians I know. The question isn't can you be an

atheist and be moral? The question is can you explain morality as an atheist? In other words do you have a reason for being moral?

C.S. Lewis wrote a book called Mere Christianity, and in the very first chapter he said this, *"The idea that we all believe in right and wrong is a clue that there's a God. It's a clue to the meaning of the universe. If you ever meet someone who claims to be a relativist, who claims to say whatever's true for you is true for you and whatever is true for me is true for me... here's what you do: Cut them off in line. When you cut them off in line they'll say, you were wrong. And you should have known that you ought not to have cut me off in line. You should have known that it was wrong."* Is it true that you should have known, if you only look inward for moral truth?

Inwardly, we'd all like to go to the front of the line. But creation says there is a God that gives us moral obligation. And being disconnected from God is what has caused all of the moral decay that now exists on planet earth.

We're going to talk about the fall next week, but right now I'd like you to think for moment about what life on earth would look like if there were no outward influence to keep human selfishness in check. What would it be like if we raised a generation to believe that their own inner desires gave them the right to do whatever it was they felt like doing, without regard for how that would affect the people around them or even themselves for that matter? What kind of world would that be? What kind of life would that be? Morality is the gift God has given us, not to spoil the fun, but to save us from becoming completely selfish, miserable, lonely people on the inside.

Blessings,

Scott

