

What's behind

today's issues? Pt2

Since lockdown began, one thing that's not been locked down is the public conflict over different moralities.



For example, there has been the death of George Floyd, sparking the Black Lives Matter protests. And yet at the same time, in the fight to save lives from Covid 19, we've seen elderly people moved out of hospitals into care homes where Covid 19 has taken their lives.

And we've also seen Westminster impose on Northern Ireland a far more liberal (barbaric) abortion law than even our own, which could threaten the lives of unborn



children with Downs Syndrome, for example. **So, it (may) appears that some lives matter, and some lives don't – there's more than one morality out there.**

Today we're beginning a new series of sermons to see what the Bible says about all this. And this week, our question is: **What's behind today's issues?**

Why are there these multiple, inconsistent, conflicting moralities – and how can we respond?

Romans 1.18, is the reading we had earlier. And before we go any further, let me lead us in a prayer:

Father, We pray that through this part of your written Word, you would help us to understand what lies behind the issues in our world today, so that we can avoid siding with what's wrong, and speak wisely when we can. In Jesus' name. Amen

In **Romans 1**, the apostle Paul is explaining not just what is behind today's issues, but what is fundamentally behind the issues in any day.

And first he says this:

1. Our sense of morality and rights comes from our Creator God

Look down to **Romans 1.18-21**, where Paul writes:

For the wrath of God [in other words, his judgement] is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men [meaning men and

women], who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth [that is, the truth about God – the truth that he’s there and that he made us and that we’re accountable to him.]. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him...

Now what that Paul is saying is that everyone **really does** know that God is there. People may say otherwise – you may say otherwise right now. But the Bible says: **everyone knows that God is there – and that they’re accountable to him.**

Look at verse 21 again, for the same:

For although they knew God [we know he’s there], they did not honour him as God...[but we know we should – deep down we know we ought to be living the way that he wants us to]

And that is where our sense of morality comes from.

Because morality is basically the sense that we ought to do some things and not others. But where does that sense of ‘**ought**’, of personal obligation, come from?

Because you can only have a sense of personal obligation to a person.

And the Bible says: The Person who gives us that ultimate sense of ‘ought’ in our consciences is God.

And if you’ve ever read [C.S. Lewis’s Mere Christianity](#), that’s where he begins the book. **He begins with the fact that everyone has this sense of ‘ought’, and he argues that only a personal, Creator God explains it – whereas an impersonal cause for why we’re all here, like evolution, can’t explain it.**

And that’s why everyone has the sense that they **ought to care** not just for the people closest to them, or the people it’s in their interests to care for – **but everyone.**

It’s because we have that sense that everyone is created by God, and that we are therefore accountable to him to treat everyone accordingly. *That’s why, if you’re down*

on the quayside and you see a total stranger fall into the river, you feel you ought to do something to help them, and you feel guilty if you don't.

And God is where our sense of human rights comes from.

Because 'rights', if you like, are the other side of the coin of 'oughts'.

If I ought to care for you, another way of putting that is that you have a right to be cared for by me. Two sides of the same coin.

We all have slugs in the Garden...*you know those snails with a housing problem...*One of my Grandmothers tried and trusted ways of dealing with Slugs in the Garden in Wales... **her patented method** – which was to go out last thing at night when it's dark and when they're out and about, with a torch and a pair of **scissors/ secateurs** and snip them in half.

Gruesome....*And perhaps you might be taken aback by her doing that... perhaps more than slightly taken aback by that method*

But however, we do it – *slug pellets, beer traps, whatever* – why do we feel OK about getting rid of slugs from our gardens, when we don't feel OK about Hitler getting rid of Jews from Germany?

The Bible's answer: *because of our sense that human beings are created by God, and therefore have a unique value and deserve unique protection* – **and that we are accountable to God to treat them accordingly.**

And that goes for all human beings, not just some.

It goes for women and men, it goes for all races and colours, and for all conditions of people – rich and poor, young and old, educated and uneducated, well-abled and disabled, of any religion and none, born and unborn.

(OHP) So that's the first thing: our sense of morality and rights comes from our Creator God.

But then Paul says:

2. The problem is: we don't like God defining morality and rights for us

Look at verse 18 again:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men [and women], who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

So, Paul's saying: everyone knows the truth that God is there, and that they are accountable to God.

But they suppress that truth – because they don't like it.

And I should hasten to add: *that's what we're all like by nature – myself included – what we're all like – unless and until we realise it's the wrong way to treat God, and we ask him for forgiveness through Jesus, and we start life over again with him in his rightful place, as Christians.*

But until we do that, we are all in verse 18.

It's like when you want to drive somewhere in a hurry, and you see the 40 mile an hour sign – that's the truth about the speed limit – but you suppress it by your desire to get there quickly.

And that's what the end of verse 18 is saying we're like by nature in relation to God. We're people: who by their unrighteousness [*in other words, our desire to do what we want to do instead of the right that God wants us to do*] suppress the truth [*this time, the truth about God*]

Or look on to **verse 21** again:

For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking [some translations say 'in their minds'], and their foolish hearts were darkened.

And in the Bible the heart really means the will, so the problem is that by nature, in their hearts – in other words, their wills – people say, 'I want to do what I want to do.'

And the **will** then influences the mind to suppresses the truth about God, which in return gives the will permission to get on and do what it wants to do.

So, you might then expect the passage to say, '**So they all became atheists – and lived happily, or un-happily, ever after.**'

But it doesn't. Look at **Romans 1.22-25** Instead, it says:

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. [In other words, they became idolaters: they created idols – substitute gods – to live for.

And, skip to verse 25, and you'll see that it says:] ... they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever!

In other word we worship 'nature' and not who created nature in the first place. but when we are not good stewards of the nature...who do we blame...?

So, what actually happens when people suppress the truth about God is not that they become atheists saying, **'There's no God at all', but that they become idolaters.**

Because, heading number three:

3. We can't live without morality and rights – so we create our own for ourselves
So, what we do is we suppress the truth about God because he's the Absolute Person and we want to get free of his absolutes because they're inconvenient, and they cross ...or go against ...what we want.

But the problem is: we can't live with no absolutes, without some definition of good, without some goals and values that make life meaningful instead of completely pointless. And so, we create our own absolutes. Rugby...games...no rules no game...

Not many people in our society today have literal idols that they're bowing down to three times a day in their homes.

But there are multiple idols in the form of **passionate commitments, identities, ideologies, and group moralities** – you name it – that people are worshipping and serving as the **absolutes** in their lives.

Let's think through a few of them.

First of all, there's the idol of individual freedom. *The freedom to do what I want and to be what I think I am has become one of the great absolutes of our time.*

And it's come to include the expectation that I'll be free from any criticism or any non-acceptance of my chosen lifestyle.

Which means the idol of the individual's freedom now has big implications for everyone else.

Because it's now asking them not just to allow the individual's chosen lifestyle, but to affirm it.

For example, to call the man who has 'transitioned' (in inverted commas) a woman.

And refusing to do that is why J.K. Rowling was lynched earlier this year by the social media and celebrity mob.

Another related idol is the idol of identity. Because identity has also been made into an **absolute that we have obligations** to.

So, once you've identified yourself as something – for example 'gay' (in inverted commas), it becomes something you **'ought'** to be, that you must express: **that sense of 'ought' that we rightly feel towards God has been redirected to a substitute god.**

And then you get the group with the same identity not just asking for affirmation at the personal level but claiming rights at the **political level.**

For example, Stonewall, the campaigning group for so-called 'gay rights', has the slogan, **'Acceptance without exception.'**

And by 'acceptance' they really mean 'affirmation' of homosexual relationships as completely equal to heterosexual ones. That's what they want as a right. **They do not accept your right and accept your decision to disagree... there is no Acceptance without exception...**

And that brings us to another related idol, the third idol I'm going to mention– equality (as it's been recently redefined by The Equality Act).

And that redefined equality is the idol driving our political life at the moment. It's the absolute that says: **you must treat not just all people as equal, but all their beliefs and behaviours as equal, as well.**

And so, we're seeing more and more claims not for human rights – **but for subgroups-of-humanity rights – like 'gay rights', 'trans rights', 'black rights', and so on.**

To which there are a couple of things to say from a Bible perspective.

OHP...One is that if there is no Creator God who's really there, then there really are no rights.

Because your rights are the other side of the coin of my obligation to *God to treat you as someone created in the image of God, and to allow you to be all that that means.*

But if someone doesn't believe that God is really there, obligation to everyone disappears.

The other thing to say from a Bible perspective is that there are really only human rights – the right to be treated as human in the way God defines human.

So, for example, back in the 1960s, the civil rights movement was not asking for black rights, **but for human rights for human beings with black skin.**

They were saying, **'We are equally human and therefore the same human rights should be equally extended to us.'** ...that has changed today...

So, the Bible would say: we shouldn't be arguing for 'black rights' or 'disabled rights' – but for human rights for people of all colour and all abilities and so on. And the Bible would also say: we can only argue for the right for people to be human as God defines human – and includes his definition of what human sexuality is and is not – and what it's for and not for.

So that's how one Bible passage answers the question, 'What is behind today's issues?' Why are there these multiple, inconsistent, conflicting moralities – and how are we supposed to be responding?

And we've seen that the multiple moralities are there because the way we're made and wired means we can't live without absolutes and so we each create our own in place of God.

So, when we're talking to people, it is helpful to sound out and ask what their absolutes are – and why.

They made not be aware that they have any and that'll be a revelation to them or often they may be very strong about what their absolutes are – but, without God as the basis for them, lost for a reason why they.

And we gently need to press them on that.

And then we've also seen the reason why peoples' moralities are often inconsistent, often inconsistent with themselves.

It's because we each substitute for God absolutes that are more convenient for us.

For example, instead of saying all lives matter, from conception to natural death, we might just say that only some lives matter, because others are more inconvenient to our freedom.

Which is inconsistent.

So, when we're talking to people it's helpful to pick them up on their inconsistencies and ask them whether they've noticed them, and what they make of them.

And lastly, we've also seen why these moralities cause conflict.

It's because you can't have more than one set of absolutes running a coherent society.

And while our society took its absolutes from the God of the Bible, that Judeo-Christian tradition (as it was called) actually gave a remarkable level of freedom to everyone and wellbeing to everyone, because those absolutes are actually what we were made to fit, even if the fall has pulled us out of shape.

But as our society takes its absolutes from elsewhere and particularly from groups wanting their absolutes imposed on everyone else, not only will we lose our freedoms, but we'll lose our peace as a society, as well.

But we are not to be despondent and dismayed...as we listen together earlier the song by Kendrick portray the biblical truth that the Cross of Christ will triumph... that the

Yet, O Lord, your glorious cross shall tower
Triumphant in this land
Evil confounding
Through the fire your suffering church display
The glories of her Christ
Praises resounding!

(But) We must awaken!
O Lord, let (your) love reclaim the lives
That sin would sweep away
And let your Kingdom Come....

I/ we know the ending.....

Let's pray.

Father,

As we've tried to apply the Bible to today's issues, and as we do so in the coming weeks, please help us to weigh both what we hear and our own thoughts against your Word; help us to take away only what is right and true; and help us please not to conform to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. In Jesus name. Amen