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Presentation Transcript
The Source of Morality
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We're working on a presentation that is the second in a series on *Morality*. You'll remember – if you listened to the first one – that we talked about that humanist group in Halifax, Nova Scotia, that wanted to place an advertisement on the side of city buses that said, “You can be good without God.” So what do you think about that? Is that possible – to be good without God? Where does morality come from? Well, that's what we're going to talk about today – the *source* of morality. And the reason that we're going to talk about it is so that we can teach our children in a way that makes sense to them.

I was watching, not Oprah, but that show she has with the panel, and they were talking about the program they had where a mother had “the talk” with her ten-year-old daughter. They had the little girl on the program and they were interviewing her in the aftermath. They were all so amazed that she had so many questions and was so interested in the topic. She reported that many of her friends at school really wanted to know all about what happened. Just watching the adult reactions reminded me that adults are so tuned out to what goes on in kids' minds in our society – even their parents, sometimes.

I can remember, when I was in the second grade, grilling my parents about the seventh day Sabbath. Why don't we go to church on the seventh day like it says? That was my question. It should be obvious by now that I never did get a satisfactory answer to that one.

So when our kids ask us, “Why isn't it good enough just to be a good person?” we have to have an answer for them that makes sense to them. Now, I'm not going to cover again the definition of morality. We talked about that last time. But by way of refresher, the word *morality* means a code of values by which people operate in everyday life.

So before we can effectively teach our children about this topic, we have to know what the other side of the aisle is teaching them. The secularists have wormed their way into the schools and, pretty much, have control of the entire curriculum. How do they think about that? What is their approach?

Well, first of all, they make an observation. They observe that all human societies have morals – have standards – that people need rules, boundaries, values to live by. If we go

to the Internet or the library, we can learn that the earliest recorded serious discussion of morality came from the Greeks seven hundred years before Christ. Of course, when we read something like this on the Internet, we have to be astounded, because we know the Bible predates the Greeks by more than three thousand years. But because it is religious, it doesn't count. So we have a lot of Greek preserved, so they tend to go with that. Since people can see moral codes in *all* societies, they tend to think that it predates religion, because they believe that there were people before there was religion – that it is more of a *human* thing than it is a religious thing.

They also point to the latest brain research that shows where, in the brain, we *do* morality – that the brain – well, they can't say *designed* for it – but sometimes that slips out and they say that.

Then they try to separate religion from morality. A lot of us think that that is because they are rebellious against God and all of that – and there is a human nature factor there – but there are other reasons that they are more aware of. Under the name of religion, some of the *worst* things ever seen in the world have been done. Our nation was founded on the principle of freedom that comes right out of the Bible, and yet, when our country was founded, a good proportion of Christian people *owned* other people – didn't allow them freedom. The first Christian Roman emperor, Constantine, had a dream. A being dressed in white came to him and told him to go forth and conquer. And that's exactly what he did. I don't know if millions were, but many, many, many people were killed in the name of Christ. It just seems like when people get in groups in the name of religion, everybody else is fair game. Have you noticed that?

Hitler. Germany was a nation of Lutherans. They wiped out the gypsies and the Jews to purify the earth. So people that aren't religious look at these things and they are appalled by it. Do you know what Mahatma Ghandi said about Jesus? "A man who was completely innocent offered Himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including His enemies and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act." Here's what else he said, "Your Jesus I like. It's your Christians who are problematic." Isn't that true – if you look at it from a Hindu's perspective? The British were Christians, right? And they caused a lot of problems.

Then we look in the world today. We have people who get violent about the rights of the poor, but they won't defend the unborn. We have people who bomb abortion clinics because they're angry about the loss of human life – so angry they are willing to kill people. You know, it just doesn't make sense. And these are, supposedly, Christian people.

So they set about looking at the way people operate, whether they have religion or not, and they kind of lump God in with religion, and He gets set aside along with all the churches and different religions. So, when they observe, in the world, that every society and every religion has a set of rules about how to treat other people, they think it is possible to be good without God.

I remember, when I was in the seventh grade, I learned about Hammurabi's code – one of the ancient civilizations. They found some tablets that had a code of conduct on it – not much different from the Ten Commandments. And they say, “See, it wasn't just the Jews that had commandments. It was lots of people. And that is about everybody having, sort of, an internal moral compass. And they say morals are a human thing, not a Christian thing, not a religious thing. And they tell us that humans function better when there are boundaries, which is true, isn't it? We know how to navigate when there is some sort of structure.

I was thinking about this the other day – thinking about when I went to the Feast with my friend, Ron Dart, and watching him walk around the festival site looking at his watch. He knows that a well-run operation runs on time. People count on that. He also knows that the egos of those who go before the group are going to run wild unless there is someone to hold the line on that. He wants to run a quality operation, and he knows that even the people who are chronically late still need a solid start time to resist. That's true. How else can they consistently be five minutes late. I mean, you're just in limbo if there is no set start time. So, if you take the solid start time away from them, it's frustrating because they don't know when five minutes late is any longer. It's kind of like being on quick sand with no firm bottom. And all the rest of the people, who want to be on time...they're disappointed when they make the effort to show up and the organization can't do as well as they're doing it – being on time. It shows the organization isn't serious and isn't competent. So it just works better when there are boundaries – not just about time, but lots of things.

“You and I are going to get along good as long as you don't steal my stuff. That's how it works. I never really understood how important this factor is until I took my psyche training and learned about session boundaries – the boundaries around a session – you know, free and protected space, where there is no judgment; a set beginning; and a set ending. All that helps people function in therapy, because they know exactly what the rules are.

So anyway, the secularists point to all these well established characteristics of the human mind and they conclude that it is possible to be good without God. A person can look around and understand that in the end it is better to tell the truth, and not to take other people's stuff, and to be monogamous. And they think that it is all just built in. That's just how people are and it doesn't have anything to do with God.

So what I want to ask you now is, where did the good rules come from? Well, we said that you can just figure it out. But we would say, “Well, they come from God.” And that is true, isn't it? We know that that is true. But it just isn't quite that simple. And if you just give that answer – “they're from God” – well, that's good for a kindergartener, but it's not good enough for a teenager, who is facing some very sophisticated arguments in class.

Let's go to Romans 2.

Rom. 2:13 – *For it is not those who hear the law that are righteous in God's sight, but it is those that obey the law who will be declared righteous.* So there are some boundaries, right? The law. *Indeed, when the Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing or even now defending them.*

So what is this scripture saying? Well, in a way, it's kind of saying what the secularists say about how people get the law. It's built in. They say that it is just because people evolved that way. We say that God put it there. But to say that people, who are not Christians, do not have godly morals, that contradicts this scripture. Paul said that there were people – Gentiles – who, back then, was everybody except for Israelites – do by nature things required by the law. So, even though they don't have the law to look at in the synagogue, they have the law written inside in their hearts.

We can look at all the things that we just talked about – not stealing other people's stuff, not committing adultery, not lying – all of those things – and we know that those are, pretty much, part of every society. So Christians are not the only ones with morals and consciences, are they? No.

I'm working with a teen who describes herself as “the girl without shame.” She told me that the other day. She has not grown up religious, but she realizes there is something wrong with her. And she has observed that other people feel guilty and ashamed when they do what she does. But she knows that she doesn't and so she can't figure out what is going on. So there is somebody, who is not religious, who can look at how everybody else acts and realizes, “Oh, there is something wrong with *me*, because I don't have the same moral compass that other people have.”

If we tell our children that we're the only ones who know right from wrong, the only ones who are good, “Everybody else is in rebellion against God,” if everytime we use the word *atheist* and we put godless in front of it, or psychologist and put godless in front of that, godless teachers, godless scientists – we kind of run everybody down – they're going to go to school and they are going to run into people who don't believe in God who treat them with great respect and who are kind to them, who tell them the truth, and who have excellent morals when it comes to some things. And they're going to read the brain research that shows that the human mind has a place in it for morality. Of course, we just read that that is true in the Bible, didn't we? It confuses them, because we don't really tell them exactly how it is working. Everybody has the law written in their hearts – at least part of it.

I work with a number of therapists who are not religious. And I can tell you – because I worked with them on cases together – they think it is terrible and harmful when children are in rebellion against parental standards. They think it is terrible when people are dishonest or promiscuous or addicted – just like I do! And they do what they can to help people live in a way that is more moral.

In our society – just as another example – people who have no conscience – who have no operating standard that they go by – that they feel guilty about, if they break – those people in our society are considered mentally ill. And that’s true. The Bible says the same thing. If you look with me in 2 Timothy 3, verse 1, Paul said to Timothy:

2 Tim. 3:1 – *But mark this, there will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves – no empathy for others – lovers of money, selfish, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.*

So, if we want to help our children make sense of what they see at home and at school, we have to read these scriptures to them. And we have to let them know that even the people in the world would realize somebody described this way has a problem. But one of the things we want to ask is, “Who wrote the law in our hearts?” How did that get there? Well, that’s where the secularist...they don’t really have a solid answer for that. I guess they say, “It just makes sense,” or “We evolved that way,” or whatever. But our position – and we don’t have to be ashamed of this – is that when we learn that there is a place in the brain reserved for morality, we can know that it didn’t evolve, but was created that way. And we can know that boundaries work for human beings, because God is like that, and He made us that way, too.

Another thing to think about and to talk to our kids about is that the Christian position is that human civilization all started in the same place – *with* God. There was one set of rules in the beginning. And that was God. We can take them to 1 John 3:4, where John said, “Everyone who sins breaks the law. In fact, sin is lawlessness.” And then we can march them over to Genesis 4 – right at the beginning of the Bible – where it says, “And the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?’” So it is possible to do things that are right already. ”And if you do not what is right, sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must master it.”

So John says that sin is breaking the law. And God tells Cain that he can sin. So there was a law in effect back then – a set of standards by which people were to operate. Even though there was no written set of rules that we can see in the beginning – there may have been, but we don’t have record of it – we can know that everybody knew what the rules were – because God explained it to Cain. Cain knew it was wrong to harbor hatred toward his brother.

So we believe that humans all had their starting point there. They had the same rules in common. We know that people have moved *away* from God, but He wrote the law in their hearts, so that even atheists and people who worship other gods still have the basics in their heart – a place in the brain for morality, a need for boundaries. And that is why you can meet some really kind atheists – I know some – and agnostics. They don’t run around on their mates because they believe that that would be destructive to both of them and their children. They don’t cheat on their taxes, because they don’t want to have to lay awake at night worrying about whether the IRS is going to find them out. They don’t lie

to people because they want to be trusted. Makes sense, doesn't it? So, if we don't explain that God wrote the law on everybody's heart, they're going to be confused.

Another thing to think about is our society that we live in. There's been a lot said about this lately. We live in Western society. And that is also called Judeo-Christian society, because there is a Judaic and Christian foundation for it. All of our founding principles and laws have their foundation in the Bible – well, at least, most of them. Killing is against the law – is one of the Ten Commandments, also, isn't it? Bearing false witness is one of the Ten Commandments – called perjury in our legal system.

It even goes down to much more mundane things. I was watching a show recently about the bear situation in the city limits of Anchorage, Alaska. This year a lot of grizzly bears have come into town – into the city parks – and even into the subdivisions – walking the streets in the subdivisions in broad daylight. Very dangerous. And they explained that, in the years the salmon run is late, the bears get hungry and eat garbage and, sometimes, people. They were talking about what they did about it. One of the things they suggested was: we could move all the hiking and bike paths away from the river, because the bears are down by the river where they usually catch fish. So they have some concern for the bears. But they also mentioned that they treat every bear attack as a crime. And they try to find out which bear did it. They even have a bear DNA database and all that so they can match the DNA and try to find the culprit. So they're trying to take care of both the bears and the people. That's pretty much standard in our society.

Where does that approach come from? Well, let's go to Deuteronomy 22:4. It says:

Dt. 22:4 – *If you see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen on the road, do not ignore it. Help him get it to its feet.* So help him take care of his donkey and help him. We need to take care of each other and we need to take care of our animals. Same approach as they're doing in Anchorage, really. There are lots of other scriptures like that – to show that we should take care of animals and other people.

I can remember, when I was a small child, my dad told me to take my bike off the walkway that led up to our porch so that nobody would trip over it. He said that it was our responsibility to keep people that came to our house safe. Where does that come from? Deuteronomy 22, verse 8.

Dt. 22:8 – *When you build a new house make a parapet around your roof so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from the roof.* You're supposed to take care of people on your property. That's a biblical law and that's a part of Western principle of law. That's why people get sued sometimes. We know that it has kind of gotten out of hand now, because, sometimes, you can't even take care of your property against burglars and marauders, because if you do hurt them, then they are going to sue you. But anyway, it's still a principle.

Freedom. Our nation was built around the idea that God created all human beings free. "Freedom was an unalienable right," it said. And yet, as I mentioned earlier, a significant number of people *owned* other human beings. And, by contrast, Paul talked about our

freedom in Christ to use our gift and to learn directly from God. So, there's that principle of freedom in Christ the founding fathers knew from the Bible – that people were inherently to be free. So they wanted to make a nation where people would be free. That was a reaction to the way they had been treated in England.

So the Christian position is that all the morals that everyone holds originally started with God – the beginning of it. The vestiges of that are good in the world. But I want to ask you another question. The has, because of the problems with the practice of religion, tried to separate morality from religion. And since God gets lumped in with religion, He gets separated off from it, too. We say it all started with God. And those who leave God out of the picture focus on being good to each other. And pretty much, throughout human history, morals have been about taking care of self and others. Be a quality person. Be a good person. It's possible to be a good person without God. And, in a way, that's not an illusion or untrue. It can and does happen. But there is a missing piece. What about being a good person to God? What about that?

The last six of the Ten Commandments are the foundation of how to treat others and ourselves, but what about the first four commandments that teach us how to treat God? Can a Christian even be a good person without that? Well, I think the answer to that question is no. I don't think it's possible to be a quality person if you're not good to God – if you're a Christian. And that's why it is so sad when I hear kids, who have grown up in the church, say, "I'm quitting because I think it is enough just to be a good person." Well, how can you be a good person if you leave God out?

Matthew 22, verse 36.

Mt. 22:36 – *“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

So it's not good enough to just obey the second six. The first four have to be there, too, if you're really going to be – in Christian terms – a moral person. This is something many of us in the Church of God have failed to teach our kids. And that's why some of them think it is possible to live godly without God.

We've talked about – in our culture – obeying God a lot, but we haven't talked about *loving* Him. And anytime we focus on one part of God's word and then ignore others, we always wind up with a problem. We are supposed to obey God so that we don't get in trouble, but *more* because we *love* Him. We love God because He has forgiven our sins. Jesus became a slave to death so that we could live. And we're supposed to become slaves to Him because we're so *grateful* for what He's done for us. We *love* God. And that's why we obey Him.

So how do we show love to God? Well, we worship only Him. We don't take His name in vain – in other words, that's how we show respect. We don't make any images of Him

because He's so great He can't be contained in any image or icon. And we keep His Sabbath – that is, we fellowship with Him.

I was talking to a lady two years ago at the Feast of Tabernacles, and she was telling me that she and her husband went through a crisis of faith and they had to reevaluate their beliefs. She said she wondered if it was really necessary to keep the holy days as strictly as she first thought. And while she was thinking about this, she remembered that she was frustrated about her adult children because they didn't want to come together for Thanksgiving. She very much wanted to have a family gathering. While she was thinking about that frustration, she made the connection with festivals, and she realized that God wants us to come together with Him on these days. It's a family gathering. That's a pretty high-level spiritual connection to make. It's not something that we *have* to do – some arbitrary rule God has laid down – a litmus test of obedience for us – but a time of drawing closer to God – something that He very much *wants*.

It reminds me of that movie, *Fireproof*. I hope you go see that, if you haven't. The guy was telling his father that his wife didn't spend any time with him, that she didn't respect him, that she didn't talk to him, or, when he talked, she didn't listen. And as he was speaking, he realized he was treating God exactly the same way. Pretty intense observation about his own relationship with God.

Of course, what is totally ironic to me is that most of mainstream Christianity has drifted away from how to treat God, even. They make images. They take His name in vain. And they don't keep the Sabbath. Then they wonder why they're losing all their kids. That's what happens when you forsake the God you claim to worship.

So, if we want our children to come to love God, they need to hear us *talk* about why we love God. We need to explain to them that it is not good enough just to treat other people well, but we have to treat God well, also. We need to tell them the family stories about how God called us, about how He saved us from our sins, about how He has blessed us, about how He's taken care of us and built a hedge about us. Instead of going off to play computer games, we need to sit around the fireplace in the family room on Friday nights and rehearse the blessings and the guidance from God. Our kids need to hear us express gratitude.

Do you remember the Gadarene demoniac? After Jesus freed him from the hell he was in – of demon possession – he was so grateful he wanted to follow Jesus. But Jesus Christ told him to go back home and tell everybody what He had done for him. Our kids need to hear about that from us so that they can look to God, and look forward to God working in their lives and believe. They need to know that when they encounter a kind and moral atheist, even though they don't know it, the kindness and the morality comes from God – not only because God started it all, but also because God has written the law of morality in everybody's heart. And the big piece they miss is about being good to God.

Well, that's a bit about where morality comes from. Next time we will see how God causes morality to develop in us as we grow up. I'm going to give you fair warning now.

Some of us are going to find that we got stuck along the way and, even though we're physically mature, morally we may still be babes in need of growing up some more.