

The Dark Side of Morality

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

Many people do good and honorable things in the name of morality. They are moral people, and they do good things in their own eyes. Still, they fall short of God's standard for goodness. Morality is vitally important to the preservation of national entities as it maintains the law and stability in the human conscience. The governments of communities, cities, and nations would be ineffective without the role of morality in society.

There is, however, a dark side of morality. It is revealed through attitudes of judgment and stubbornness where morality exists apart from the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. It operates on the basis of the letter of the law without the life of the Spirit, and that can only bring death (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Too often, the dark side of morality is found among Christians when morally "good" people pass judgment and circulate evil reports about a

brother or sister who has sinned. Instead of helping, they end up hindering the work of Christ by causing unnecessary wounds and division.

This booklet will show that the sin issue for everyone was dealt with once and for all at Calvary. With Christ as our focus, we can operate consistently with a spiritual morality that not only seeks and saves the lost, but also covers, edifies, restores, and redeems believers in the midst of their worst failures.

Chapter One

WHEN MORALITY IS NOT SPIRITUALITY

“And as we tarried there many days there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus.

“And when he was come down to us, he took Paul’s girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy [Spirit], So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

“And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.

“Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

“And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

“And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem” (Acts 21:10-15).

When Paul decided to return to Jerusalem, he was going against the will of God. Paul was told several times not to go to Jerusalem. He had orders to go to Rome (Acts 19:21), and the church there desperately needed him. His intentions were good, even noble. Yet, by doing what seemed right in his own eyes, Paul was set up for unnecessary suffering.

First, the Holy Spirit forbade Paul to go to Jerusalem. Then, the disciples in Syria told Paul “through the Spirit” that he should not go up to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4). Next, in Caesarea, at the house of Philip, the prophet Agabus warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Finally, his local church told him not to go. Not only was he warned through the Holy Spirit, but also he was told what would happen.

The Spirit was moving; people wept and begged him not to go. But Paul answered, “Why do you weep and break my heart? Can’t you see that I’m ready to be bound and even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus?” Paul didn’t get the point! The point was not his willingness to die but his willingness to obey God’s will; and it was not God’s will for him to go

(Acts 21:4-14).

Sentimentality: The Subtle Deception

A lot of Christians have sentimental relationships and they call it “love.” They put their preferences ahead of the leading of the Holy Spirit. Even when choosing a place to serve God, they may reason, “Oh, I love that place so much. I’ll go there!” We are to go into all the world, but only when and where God tells us to go, and God was telling Paul, “Don’t go to Jerusalem.”

The apostle to the Gentiles would not listen to his fellow Christians. The Holy Spirit was speaking to Paul through many different ways, saying, “Don’t go! Do not go to Jerusalem. If you do go, you will be bound and turned over to the Romans and placed in prison.” But Paul would not be persuaded.

“And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done” (Acts 21:14). You couldn’t tell him anything at this point. He was stubborn. There was a separation between Paul and his fellow believers in the Body of Christ.

What Are We Celebrating?

“And when we were come to Jerusalem, the

brethren received us gladly” (Acts 21:17).

The classical Greek text reveals that when Paul arrived in Jerusalem, the people welcomed him, received him, and gave him a party. But, what was happening with Paul is what several outstanding scholars call “the dark side of morality.”

Because of sentimental emotionalism, the apostle Paul, a great man of God, disobeyed the Holy Spirit and members of the Body of Christ who told him not to go to Jerusalem. He had taught that we are not justified by the Law but by grace through faith (Galatians 2:16; Romans 4:11; 3:20-24). He had just been in Corinth and had written a beautiful letter to the believers in Rome, where he was supposed to have gone.

Paul went to Jerusalem and took a Nazarite vow (see Numbers 6; Acts 21:23-26), which the Spirit forbade him to do. The members of his own team tried to keep him from going there, but he would not be persuaded. He said it broke his heart to disobey them, but he still disobeyed.

James, the Lord’s brother and the head of the church at Jerusalem, felt that following the Old Testament law of Moses was the good thing to do. Some believers there went to the temple every day, and Paul went in with them. So the

church received Paul with much celebration.

This lesson is so important because it exposes the dark side of morality. The apostle didn't do anything morally wrong; however, he disobeyed God to reach his brethren after his own flesh, even though he was told absolutely not to go there.

One of the major assaults on believers living in the dark side of morality is to cause them to forget doctrine. Paul forgot the doctrine that only recently he had written by the Holy Spirit. Also, Paul had become proud because of his emotional sentimentality toward the Jewish people. God's grace was the answer for them, not the Law. And what Paul did was to go against the amazing grace of God.

From Hypocrisy to Rebound

The Galatians were a people who wandered from France into Asia Minor. Many Galatian Christians believed that by circumcision a person is saved. They received false teaching that said salvation is in Christ *plus* circumcision. In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul rebuked them for believing this. But then *he* fell into a similar sin of adding good works to the totally finished work of Christ. Paul honored the Nazarite vow

and the Mosaic law, even though he had received the revelation that the Law was fulfilled in Christ, and in fact, that the Law is fulfilled in us by Christ (Romans 8:4; 10:4).

Paul left what he knew, what he had taught, and what the Holy Spirit had revealed to him in Arabia. He began to live by the letter of the law instead of living by grace through faith in Christ. He agreed with a crowd that wanted to use him to reinforce their position on the Law, and as a result, he ended up in prison in Rome.

It wasn't just the religious Pharisees that did this to Paul. These were Christians who refused to accept anything different from the Mosaic law. They had accepted Christ, yet they were self-righteous, highly moral hypocrites.

After he was saved, Paul visited James (see Galatians 1:18-19), and he also visited Peter for fifteen days. Paul liked Peter and James, but James was legalistic. Paul was manipulated by flattery, and then he did all the things James suggested he do in Jerusalem. Thankfully, both of them did rebound.

Eventually, Paul realized that in his error, he had caused confusion and division among new believers everywhere. He thought, "My God! I went against Agabus. I went against my own

disciples who were being told by the Holy Spirit to tell me not to go to Jerusalem.” Later, in Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul received and wrote the revelation of the pastor-teacher and the value of being hid in Body of Christ.

Standing by the Man of God

Second Timothy 4:11 tells us that Luke went to be with Paul in Jerusalem. Later, another group followed him. Here is the principle: Paul disobeyed God; he clearly disobeyed the Holy Spirit, yet many of his followers obeyed the doctrine he had taught them. They didn't leave him, they did not forsake him, and they did not criticize him. They never said a negative thing about him. Luke went to him first, then others went to help him—even when they knew he was disobeying God's call.

Do you know why they stayed by him? They turned the situation over to God. Their attitude was “All right, God, you said he was not to go. But he's going. We turn him over to You.” A study of isagogics, the historical frame of reference of that time, indicates that there was not one word of gossip against Paul—not one word of it in the Scriptures. And there was not a single criticism of Paul.

Please understand that Paul's sin was not a serious matter of immorality. If it had been, the church would have been obligated to follow scriptural measures to prevent others from being infected. But in fact, Paul thought he was doing a "good" thing. The problem was not with his motives; they were "good." Plain and simply, Paul was disobedient to the expressed will of God.

The Holy Spirit spoke four different times, telling Paul not to go. Still, he went, but not one of the faithful Christians in the church went against him. Instead, they stood by him and honored his office. Now, that is a real church. Paul was still their pastor-teacher, and he was still God's man. God would correct him, but God would also bless him in spite of his mistake. While he was being held captive, he would write the "prison epistles" of Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon.

Chapter Two
ACCUSATIONS,
MANIPULATIONS,
AND ERRORS

Many Christians would have judged Paul's mistake from the dark side of morality, though what was going on wasn't immoral. And as Christians, we often operate from the dark side of morality. We are not immoral, but we do things on the dark side of morality. Let me illustrate it.

Let's say that you were planning to go away for the weekend. The still, small voice of God touches your heart and you perceive that it may not be His will. Yet, you continue with your plans, convinced that God is leading you. Then, a friend that you trust says to you, "I believe God is saying that you should not go to that place on this particular weekend." Without knowing what was already said, a pastor comes

up and says, "You know, I don't feel right about you going there this weekend." He has never said anything like that in his life, and he has never invaded your privacy, but the Holy Spirit told him to say it. Next, two women come up and say, "We have never said anything like this before, but we just don't feel good about your going there this weekend."

Four people who haven't said anything to each other have now told you not to go, but you say, "I'm going anyway. Think of all the good that can happen there!" Though you are a believer-priest who stands before God and not men, chances are you are operating in the dark side of morality.

Judge Not: Rules to Live By

The dark side of morality is also revealed when a true Christian fails and the person who didn't fail attacks him. Let's say that a person falls into immorality, and he is very ashamed of his failure.

If you are a person without that weakness, you may be apt to be the first to judge that sin. But if you do not go alone to the one who has failed, and if you verbally attack him before others, then the dark side of your morality is worse

than the immorality of the accused. Why? We are instructed to turn it over to God. If someone does something against you alone, you are to go alone and beseech him with a heart of compassion (Galatians 6:1). Do not go to anyone else, and do not judge (Matthew 7:1-2), or you will be judged.

There are questions anyone who is accusing another needs to consider: Is it true? Were you there? Do you know everything about the circumstances? Did you go to that person alone? Memorize these things and you will be set for the rest of your life if anyone says anything against you or any other believer.

The dark side of morality accuses people who fail instead of helping them to get up. If we see a brother overtaken in a fault, we are not to tell anyone; we are to help him up.

The joy of the Lord is our strength, and if we are not abiding in God's kingdom, our countenance testifies against us on the witness stand in heaven where the devil is accusing us (Isaiah 3:9; Proverbs 17:22; Proverbs 15:13).

Morality has many dark sides. It is the husband declaring to the wife, "I am the head. That's what the Bible says." But before the Word of God ever teaches that the husband is the

head, it teaches that the husband is to lay down his life and love his wife the *same* way Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it. Once he has that right, a man can use the authority of his headship as necessary. Otherwise, he is living in the dark side of morality. He knows the letter, but not the spirit of that doctrine.

Getting Your Way the Wrong Way

The dark side of morality can also be seen when a wife manipulates her husband out of his headship. Sweetly, tenderly, graciously, kindly (but professionally!), she says, "Honey, what would you think if we were to do this?" and it's wrong all the way, but her husband says, "Well, let's pray about that. I don't think we should do that, and this is why. But I appreciate your idea."

So she lets it go for a day, and then she says, "Well, what if we do *this*?" saying the same thing, only in a different way. She is not mean or hateful, just clever and conniving. It is professional manipulation from the dark side of morality.

A student may say in public, "Thank God for our Christian school," a day after he was smoking pot. He says it just in case someone finds out. Some people may even think there is a

revival going on because of that young person's "spiritual" confession. Of course, we thank God that he stood up, but in that case, it is the dark side of morality in action. Still, there is hope. Revival *is* happening. But remember that even the apostle Paul backslid terribly against the Holy Spirit and His counsel.

Problems in Ministry

When a pastor doesn't study for his messages, he is backsliding—even if what he tells you is true. His sermons are shallow, something that he heard from someone else, something that is warmed over, and he doesn't say anything fresh. He is serving old manna because he didn't prepare to preach, and he is backslidden. That is the dark side of morality.

A pastor should study—study until his eyes get red. People tell me I look tired sometimes. Of course, I do! You try getting up at 4:30 a.m., studying, driving to the office and studying more at 6:30 a.m., and see if your eyes don't get red! First Timothy chapter five tells preachers to study and labor in the Word and doctrine.

Keep Your Eyes on Christ: The Light of Life

Keep in mind what we learned from the

early Christians. First: The members of his church allowed God to deal with Paul.

Second: They loved him and never criticized.

Third: They did not compromise—they told him that the Spirit said, “Don’t go.”

Fourth: Luke went with him immediately, and ultimately the others joined him because they loved him so much.

Fifth: God worked it all together for good anyway, even though he disobeyed.

The most important thing to remember is that when Paul disobeyed God, the Christians he disciplined still obeyed everything that he had taught them.

Another thing is that they didn’t put their focus on Paul, examining his character or his motives. They loved Paul, but their eyes were on God. Not one verse in the Bible says we are to fix our eyes on a man. Just keep your eyes on Jesus Christ and trust Him for the outcome.

If someone does something against you or if he compromises cardinal doctrines and causes people to stumble, go to the person alone and keep it private. Make him accountable to the truth, but keep your eyes on God and keep obeying the truth that you have been taught, even if the other party is not right at the mo-

ment. What a lesson that is! Keep your eyes on God (Hebrews 12:2).

Paul's people did not cast him aside. Paul had already taught his people not to do what he was doing—being double-minded. He had a sentimental attachment to the Jewish people, precious sacred people who are part of the “whosoever will may come” crowd. When they get saved, they become members in particular in the Body of Christ. But Paul needed to hear from God and discern His will.

Chapter Three

ENTER INTO THE LIGHT OF LIFE

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Christ died as our substitute. This means that when we sin, the sin has already been judged, and Jesus Christ has already paid for the sin. John 7:24 calls this “righteous judgment.” It is never our sin that judges us.

The unsaved have not had their sins forgiven, even though they have been paid for. Revelation 20:13 tells us that the unsaved will be judged *not* for their sins but by their “good” works according to human viewpoint and the evil they have done. Their sins, like those of the whole world, were paid for, but they are not forgiven because they have not received the Savior.

In the Church of Jesus Christ, there is a dark side of morality at work that equals self-righteousness. There is also comparative or relative

righteousness. In other words, many Christians will never truly forgive certain kinds of failure, especially in areas of immorality.

I thank God that morality preserves nations and can save marriages that exist without God. But morality does not save the soul, so it is only pertinent when it is under spirituality.

So many Christians have a form of morality that excludes grace, excludes mercy, excludes unconditional love, and excludes divine forgiveness. Their moral standards exclude divine patience and instant recovery through rebound as an attitude toward one who has fallen. Therefore, it is self-righteousness.

The Totality of Forgiveness

When we sin, we acknowledge the sin that has been paid for and we name the sin precisely (*homologeō*). That simply means we are to confess the sin to God by saying, “My God, I lusted,” or, “I lied.” By the way, a moral person who lives in the dark side of morality is always lying against the Holy Spirit because he does not acknowledge what God says about his morality—that “all your righteousness is as filthy rags” (Isaiah 54:6).

Certainly, when we sin and do not want to

get right with God, we are disciplined for (a.) grieving the Holy Spirit (b.) quenching the Holy Spirit (c.) being out of fellowship, and (d.) the natural result of reaping what we sow in the flesh. Yes, there are areas of discipline. But get this straight: Our sins are not the issue.

Our sins have never been and never will be the issue. They cannot be, because they have all been paid for on the Cross. I will reap what I have sown in my body if I abuse drugs or alcohol. If I smoke cigarettes, I will reap what I have sown in my lungs. That is the natural effect of the law of sowing and reaping. It is not judgment for my sins, however, because Jesus was the acceptable substitute paying for *all* sins.

Therefore, because He was our substitute, we have the absolute assurance that sin will never again be the issue. Still, when I grieve the Holy Spirit by living in the flesh, that becomes an issue, due to the natural process of sowing and reaping.

This is why the Bible teaches us to “judge righteous judgment.” If you look at someone and say, “Well, he got what he deserved” and you mean regarding punishment for his sins, you are wrong. But if you mean that he reaped what he sowed, you are right (see Galatians 6:7-

8). "In whom [Jesus Christ] we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14).

Victory over Natural Thinking through Doctrine

Worldly people can be moral, naturally speaking, if, for example, they don't steal, if they don't covet their neighbor's wife, and if they do not bear false witness. Many nations have a form of morality that protects the freedom of person, property, and personal rights, and thank God for the places where that exists. Still, it is not spirituality.

Many marriages get by on the moral side of religion but they do not have abundant life on the spiritual side of Christianity. If I have spiritual morality according to God's viewpoint, I will give others the grace that I have received; I will forgive as I have been forgiven; I will love as I am loved.

Some people operate in the moral law of relative righteousness that follows their own code of self-righteousness. This spirit plagues churches, grieves the Holy Spirit, quenches the Holy Spirit, and robs people of true redemption, absolute grace, absolute forgiveness, absolute love, absolute restitution, and opportunities for

reconciliation.

Deal with Failure through the Process of Rebound

Don't misunderstand this: Failure should be dealt with, resolved, and reconciled with God's grace. The process of rebound includes confessing any known sin to God and being persuaded to let God take over. But there has been a destructive pattern at work for years in Christian churches, and it is the reason that people in these places do not have cognitive assurance, cognitive love, cognitive forgiveness, and cognitive confidence in redemption.

If I am moody today, I am not living in the power of God—I am living in the dark side of morality and I am not spiritual at all. If I want to destroy myself because of circumstances, then I am not executing the spiritual life of God at all. Worrying is mistreating God's creation. Moods directed at yourself are not just directed at you; they are directed against God's creation. This is a serious matter.

Perhaps you have real issues to deal with in your home. But when you belittle your spouse and become a nag, you won't find a solution. You need a solution, and you must do some-

thing, but take a divine solution by using your spiritual life. Use God's solutions, and don't live in your own relative righteousness in the mad race for superiority through self-righteousness. For many, the attitude is, "I am better than you are; I am a morally superior being." But in fact, that person's spirituality is nonexistent.

Self-righteousness always justifies itself and finds the other party guilty. Self-righteousness lies to itself, therefore it also lies to the Holy Spirit who lives inside every believer. When you lie to yourself, you deny what is right and the Spirit cannot operate. First He becomes grieved, then He becomes quenched, and except for positional truth, your life is like that of an unsaved person.

There is a better way! Our deliverance, as our salvation, comes by receiving. Why not accept God's provision and have all your needs met in Him (Philippians 4:19)?

CONCLUSION

There was Paul, the greatest man of God who lived (after Jesus Christ), and he was doing every kind of wrong thing. He wasn't immoral, but his morality was not under spiritual light. In fact, it was a carnal morality—the dark side of morality.

When Paul disobeyed God, he disobeyed the Word of God. Any time we disobey God, we are disobeying the Word. And the reason we are disobedient is because we do not really believe what the Word of God says.

We are to live by *every* word of God, and that includes the words, “It is finished!” and “No condemnation!” Thank God, we only need to be turned in the direction of His Cross. Delight in this great salvation and be a vessel that reveals the light of the Spirit of God.