

12-20-2020 advent 4 LOVE

Love is Always Right notes from Josh McDowell

Today I want to share with you the one moral absolute that the Bible teaches us - One? You say, there are many moral absolutes - indeed, but they all stem from the one. And that is love.

Jesus said Mat 22:37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'

Mat 22:38 This is the first and greatest commandment.

Mat 22:39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

Mat 22:40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

It concerns me that we seem to think we can pick and choose who to love. It concerns me that we don't want to love our enemies. It concerns me that we think Christianity has gotten soft by loving and preaching love.

Love - the greatest commandment according to Jesus; to love God with heart soul mind and strength and the second is like it.
Love your neighbor as yourself.

What I want to show you today is that the Bible contains one irreducible moral absolute. I also want to show you that this moral absolute applies not only to Christians but to everyone.

Love is a universal moral absolute. To love is always right. To not love is always wrong.

We may think right and wrong are as clear as can be to us. But sometimes they are no clearer to us than to the world at large. The western world is no longer guided by objective truth, honesty,

moral purity and the golden rule - look how people are living.
Times have changed

Josh McDowell has a recent historic description of attitudes toward Christianity.

Until the 1960s America was predominantly Christian. Church attendance was socially acceptable. Belief in God and the Bible was widespread. Public prayer occurred at football games, school commencements and town council meetings. Judeo Christian values were considered right. Opposing values were considered wrong.

Around the sixties, America changed. We seemed to grow apathetic toward the church, the claims of the Bible and the social values derived from them. Church attendance declined but Christians were still tolerated. The Genesis creation was seen as a myth, the resurrection a fable and the Christian lifestyle a crutch for weak minded people

In the 90s we found an anti- Christian era. No more was it live and let live. No longer was it apathy toward Christian beliefs but rather antagonism. We were not under attack for what we believed but for failing to accept the values and lifestyle choices of others even when they are in conflict with Scripture. Where have we gone in the new millenium? Here we are in 2020, and we are more confused about right and wrong and loving one another than ever. After 9/11 we saw what seemed to be an immediate gathering of goodwill and love for one another throughout our country. Now, after all of the national and world wide disasters, we've also seen the country pulling together for those in distress. The question is, can it, will it last. Is it simply banding together against those seen as the bad guys, or helping because we see on tv the horrible situations and feel guilty for a few moments. Is it empathy with those around us, or is it truly an understanding of loving those around us without question?

Do you have difficulty accepting the reality of moral absolutes in life? Or is everything relative?

Skepticism regarding absolutes is recorded as long ago as 500 years before Christ but most recently it was popularization by Joseph Fletcher's situation ethics of the 1970s.

To Fletcher morality was not static but relative to each situation. He taught In every moral situation do the loving thing , and yet in his mind the loving thing was not absolute but relative.

He explained that in some situations, adultery, stealing and even killing could be the higher good.

Much of society today says that no moral absolutes exist to govern human behavior and yet think about it. You can't deny the existence of absolutes without using an absolute. It's like saying never use the word never.; or it's always wrong to say always. In reality there is no way to avoid absolutes.

Once we admit that certain things are right and certain things are wrong , once we admit there are absolutes, where do we look for them? Who determines right from wrong? Are there different standards for different cultures?

Absolute truth is an objective standard, something outside ourselves. When something is right it is right for all people in all places under all conditions. Absolute truth does not change from person to person or from place to place. Right and wrong is timeless, truth remains constant and dependable.

Where do we find absolute moral and ethical guidelines that are right for all people all time and all places ?

We who are Christians go to the Bible

Absolute truth is not primarily an ideology or heartless moral code.

It is first and foremost a person - Jesus said I am the ... truth. Particular attitudes and actions are right because they reflect God's nature others are wrong because they do not.

For those who don't believe in God or the Bible, all we can do is reason with them. If there is an absolute law, which most will agree with, there must be an absolute law giver.

How do we know most people agree there is an absolute law? They may not admit it but look at their actions, look at what they say.

Moral principles are very similar from people to people. This similarity has prompted a number of thinkers to reduce all common moral principle to one basic moral absolute, - one right thing to do. German philosopher Immanuel Kant called it the categorical imperative, the right thing is what you could will everyone to do under the same circumstances. Ask "Do I want the guideline behind my action to become a universal law. At the heart of this imperative is an irreducible moral law. Always treat people as and end in themselves never as a means.

Martin Buber a 20th C. Jewish philosopher also held as a moral absolute that people should be treated as an end and not only as means. We must sustain a person to person relationship not a person to thing relationship.

Both of these principles , as you may have noticed resemble the golden Rule - (Luke 6:31 NIV) Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Luke 6:27 "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
 Luke 6:28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat

you.

Luke 6:29 If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.

Luke 6:30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.

Luke 6:31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Luke 6:32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them.

Luke 6:33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that.

Luke 6:34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full.

Luke 6:35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

Or from our passage today in Matthew:

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor^[b] and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

We can also see what others believe by what they expect, how they expect to be treated defines their own moral belief system, letting someone else in your expectations.

Simple observation of human nature indicates that all people everywhere hope and expect to be loved. Everyone wants to be

treated with fairness respect courtesy and honesty. The Golden Rule simply summarizes what human behavior and personal expectations convincingly witness. Since we expect to be loved we ought to love others.

Before telling the parable of the good Samaritan Jesus was asked who "is my neighbor". The parable indicates that any person whose need we are able to meet should be considered our neighbor - more than that ,a neighbor is anyone who is in need of love.

Love is the irreducible and moral absolute. Love is the neighborly thing to do -

Remember the words of Jesus after the parable of the good Samaritan- Go and do likewise