
"Is the Bible Always Right?"
(Psalm 119:137-144)
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October 1, 2017

(Psalm 119:137-144)

¹³⁷ You are righteous, LORD,
and your laws are right.
¹³⁸ The statutes you have laid down are righteous;
they are fully trustworthy.
¹³⁹ My zeal wears me out,
for my enemies ignore your words.
¹⁴⁰ Your promises have been thoroughly tested,
and your servant loves them.
¹⁴¹ Though I am lowly and despised,
I do not forget your precepts.
¹⁴² Your righteousness is everlasting
and your law is true.
¹⁴³ Trouble and distress have come upon me,
but your commands give me delight.
¹⁴⁴ Your statutes are always righteous;
give me understanding that I may live.

One of the foundational beliefs of our society is that morality is relative. What does that mean? To believe that morality is relative means that what is moral (or what is right or wrong) for one person isn't necessarily right or wrong for another person. Each person or each society determines that on their own. Our society calls that tolerance. In fact we Canadians pride ourselves on the fact that we are one of the most tolerant, accepting countries on the planet, and to a certain degree that is true.

Now, to be intolerant is to hold the opposite view. If you believe that moral standards are universal then you are considered intolerant. What does that mean? Well, you will be labeled by the so called tolerant that you are intolerant if you believe that if something is right or wrong, it is right or wrong for all people, in all places, all the time. It is not sometimes right or wrong. We don't accept the statement that it's okay that something is right for you, but it's not right for me. It is either always right or always wrong.

I think there are several problems in trying to be a moral relativist:

First, you may find that you pride yourself in being so tolerant, in being a moral relativist, but if you dig a little deeper, you'll discover that you're not really as tolerant as you think you are. How so? Well for starters, because you yourself are intolerant of those you call intolerant. If you were a true moral relativist, if you truly believed that each person gets to decide their own morality, then you are required by your own standards of tolerance, to accept even the intolerant. Let me give you an example. Just this week Conservative Party MP Rachel Harder was appointed to chair the women committee. She happens to be pro-life when it comes to the issue of the unborn. I was briefly listening to a conservative radio program this week and the guests on the panel were shocked at this appointment, even refusing to use the phrase pro-life, but constantly called her anti-abortion. Our country of tolerance couldn't tolerate a pro-life woman to a position that champions women. That's actually quite intolerant. Sadly, to be tolerant in Canada means, I'm tolerant with you as long as you agree with me.

Secondly, in reality, society cannot operate on a morally relativist platform. You cannot have a system of justice. If you took moral relativism to its ultimate outcome it would lead to anarchy. Think about it even on a personal level. You cannot cry "foul" when a perceived injustice or wrong is done to you, if you are a moral relativist. For the other person it might be okay to do what you think is morally unacceptable. As well, a moral relativist wouldn't be allowed to look at the behavior of other cultures and place any sort of judgment. Is it okay that some cultures believe that women aren't allowed to drive, aren't allowed to go to school? Not a person in this room or in this country would say that that would be okay. But you are making a moral judgment which you cannot do.

In fact, a day doesn't go by where we aren't making dozens of moral judgments. In every realm of life moral judgments are being made. You and I make moral judgments every time we use the words should or ought. *Let's say you're hiking a trail in a provincial park and all around you are trees and leaves and sky and rocks and water. It's simply pristine. And then as you take the next bend, you come across a pile of trash. Empty water bottles, energy bar wrappers, and beer cans. What would any good Canadian person say? People should not do that! That ought not to have been done! In fact we use stronger language than that, some of which we wouldn't utter in church. We start resorting to name-calling, we're calling down curses upon them.*

So, you see, we are always making moral judgments. It's impossible not to, but if you're a moral relativist, on what basis are you making your judgment? What is your standard of right and wrong and why should it be superior to my standard? You see, a moral relativist really has no grounds to claim superiority. For example, Is 'right', what the majority says is right? Is 'right' who the most powerful person says is right? We can all see how history has shown us the dangers of this view. The majority of the western world in the 17 and 1800s saw the African slave trade as being morally right and the people in power also determined by law that it is right, but we all know, looking back at history that that was one of the most evil and wrong and wicked things. Even Christians fell into this terrible sin, but it was Christians who first championed and later overturned the laws and finally abolished slavery.

Now, you might be thinking that up to now that I've been only speaking to non-Christians, but Christians are guilty of this too. Of course all Christians would admit that they are not relativists, but many, maybe even most Christians, are soft-relativists. We hold absolute morals on most issues, but on other issues we're not so sure. So, let me help you discern where you might be at. You might be not be sure about a certain issue because it's so complex so you haven't formed a judgment on the issue like war, or poverty, or the prison system, or the role of government, or education, or the freedoms and limitations of our law enforcement, or sexuality, and on and on. There are tons of subjects that we just don't know enough about to make a decision. That's not what I mean by being a soft-relativist.

A soft-relativist is this. On the big issues or your pet issues or the issues you are passionate about, you are absolutely certain that this is the way it has to be, that there can be no alternate view. But then on other moral issues you believe we can agree to disagree, that you and I could hold different views and both of those views could be right. I think there are a lot of Christians who are soft-relativists. For the Christian that's a position we should really try avoid. It's one thing to say that you just don't know yet, but it's a completely different issue to say that well for this topic, I think we can both be right. The same argument would apply to soft-relativists. How do you know which are the positions that are absolute and which are the positions that are relative? Who decides? You? Well, then it just comes down to your view versus my view and we're back at the original relativist's dilemma. Does that make sense?

As well, the issue of morality and deciding on which morality or whose morality you'll follow, at least for the Christian person, is an issue of Lordship. Why do we want some areas of our lives to be morally permitted? Because we want to sin. Why do I want to believe that it's okay to cheat a little on my taxes? Why do we want to believe that sleeping with my boyfriend or girlfriend is okay so long as we love each other? Why do we want to believe that its okay to hold a grudge if the offense was big enough? Why to all those things? Because we want to justify our sin. Because we want Jesus to be Lord in some areas, but not Lord over all areas. We like Jesus' lordship when it lands us a fat raise or gets us into the prestigious program. Oh we love Jesus' lordship then. But when Jesus lordship says, give ten percent of your income to the church, or to forgive the person's who's offended you, then we have some hesitation. That's why the question of morality, the issue of relativism is a Lordship issue.

For the Christian, our morality comes from God and that morality is spelled out in the Bible. And we must remember that God's morality is both positively and negatively stated. By saying there are positive and negative aspects to God's morality is not saying that there are good parts and there are bad parts. Rather, what we mean by that is that there are things we must do, the positive, and there are things we must never do, the negative. Both the positive and the negative, all of God's morality is good, because God is good, because God's commands, his morals were given to us for our benefit and for the flourishing of our lives, it's for our joy. Let me restate the first two questions and answers of the Westminster shorter catechism:

Q1: What is the chief end of man?

A1: Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

Q2: What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him?

A2: The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him.

Now that's a pretty hefty intro for today's passage. Let's turn there. This passage will help us understand the never-changing, always-true nature of God and his word. The word that we see repeated over and over in this passage is the word **righteous**. Let me show you:

137: You are righteous, Lord.

138: The statutes you have laid down are righteous.

142: Your righteousness is everlasting.

144: Your statutes are always righteous.

Well, we can see just from the repetition of this word that this is the main point of this passage. This passage is trying to teach us that God and his word are righteous, not just back then, not just for one group of people, but they are always and for all peoples righteous.

What does that word mean? The word 'righteous' can also be translated as right or just. Imbedded in this word is an ethical or moral standard. In fact the origin of the Hebrew word means "to be straight" or "to be a norm." To be a norm means to be a standard. Just as a unit of measurement like a centimeter or an inch. That's a norm, that's a standard. In construction, everything is based on that norm. Sports, the size of a field, the size of a ball, the curve in a stick, all based on a norm.

This psalm is saying that there is an ethical norm, a moral norm, a standard. It's telling in no few words that moral relativism isn't the way.

This passage first and foremost tells us that morals are rooted in God. Before he says anything about the laws or the rules of God, he first establishes something about God. He confesses that God is righteous, which means that God is moral. In fact Christians believe that God is the only morally upright being in the universe. We believe that God acts morally, rightly all the time. Christians believe that God can do nothing that is immoral or unrighteous. Why? Because God is holy. To be holy means to be righteous. To be holy is to be without sin. To be holy means to be completely 'other' from everything else. Everything else is unholy, only God is holy. That is why God says to us, "Be holy for I am holy." Because everything and every person that God touches becomes holy.

This is so important is because the water is only as good as the source from which it comes. Unless the source is pure, the water down-stream will remain contaminated. God is holy, God is moral, God can do no wrong, He can never sin. And at the same God is the creator. As the creator he alone carries the right and authority to determine, as he sees fit, what is right and wrong. Friends, when you have an issue with God's morality, with his commands, you have an issue with God himself. You are saying that he made a mistake. You are saying that you know better. You are claiming to have the higher vantage point than the creator of the universe, the creator of morality. That's quite the presumptuous and arrogant position to claim to have.

Here's how I would argue this. Can you accept that it makes logical sense that there is one God who is creator of all? Does not the law of causation ultimately take us to this point? Second, can accept that God created us as moral beings, so this implies that he himself is moral? Third, if in fact God is the creator, the creator of moral beings, which makes himself a moral being, then does it make sense that he alone possesses the right to determine what is moral?

If you can accept this about God, then confessing the rest really becomes quite simple. If I know for certain that God is righteous, that I can confess that "The statutes that you have laid down are righteous" and that "Your righteousness is everlasting" and that "Your statutes are always righteous." This is the commitment, the confession that all Christian people must make. You can't say that God is the one and only true God and at the same time say, that **most** of his commands are right. You cannot say that God is the one creator or moral humans and at the same time say that morality depends on the situation.

If we truly believe in the one true God, here's what you'll do. With great delight and joy you'll say, "Your laws are right!" With unshakeable confidence you'll confess, "They are fully trustworthy." Even if your life was threatened, as were many of the 16th century reformers were, you'll boldly say, "Your law is true!" You'll look at the wonderful, marvelous, incomprehensible word before you and say, "Every word in this book is the word of God for all humankind. It is true in every way. It is without error. In this book are hope and life and breath."

If that's your confession, then what will happen? Well, here's what will happen. Trouble will come your way. Trouble will come in the form of unemployment. You start trimming the fat, get rid of the excesses. Still no job. You're going to burn through your savings. Still no job. You're identity, especially as a man, as a provider, will take a hit. And through it all you'll turn to this book and you'll confess verse 140. "Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them." You'll turn to "Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." You'll read, "Sell all your possessions and give to the poor, and then come and follow me." You'll read, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight."

As is the case for some of our members, a serious illness like cancer or a having a child with a serious disability, you will go to scripture and read, "My grace is sufficient for you." "All things work for the good of those that love God and are called according to his purpose." "If God is for us who can be against us." "We are more than conquerors." "Even though I walk through the darkest valley I will fear no evil for you are with me." And you'll weep and your faith will fluctuate. There will be dark days and there will be better days, and you'll go to the Word, and then when you come to verse 140, you too will be able to confess, "Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them."

All of you are aware of Bill Kim who was recently diagnosed with leukemia and just finished his first round of grueling chemotherapy. Jennifer, his wife shared with us that in the midst of his incredible suffering, she read to Bill Psalm 23. She read out loud verse 1, "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing." She said that she couldn't read any further and started to cry. Bill then asked, why are you crying. To which she answered, "It's Psalm 23". And Bill just nodded his head.

What do we see happening in both these examples—to the unemployed, to the sick person? They are testing the word of God. Here's what they know. I know God is real. I know God is good. I know God has given me his word. I know his word is true. I know his word is good because God is good. I know all of this because I've tested it in the laboratory of suffering. That's what the psalmist is going through and that's what God's people go through. What about you? Are you going to the word? What about your children? Are you telling them to go to the word? Are you showing them that in this book, and only in this book can we find hope and life?

There's a song that we'll be singing in just a moment written by Louisa M. R. Stead. She's most well known for her simple but deeply profound hymn, 'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus. The story behind this famous hymn goes like this.

According to the story: It was a beautiful sunny day. Louisa M. Stead, her husband, and her daughter Lily, decided to go for a picnic on Long Island Sound. While having their picnic, they heard a scream. It was from a young boy and Mr. Stead ran to the rescue. Louisa Stead and young Lily watched helplessly as Mr. Stead and the boy drowned. Their troubles were not over yet, however, and without her husband, Mrs. Stead became very poor and destitute. Yet God never left her. He provided for her always and she and her daughter made it through. Louisa learned to trust God, and thus the words to the song 'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus.' Shortly after this incident, Louisa and her daughter Lily moved to South Africa where they became missionaries.

Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just to take Him at His Word
Just to rest upon His promise,
Just to know, "Thus saith the Lord!"

**Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!
How I've proved Him o'er and o'er
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus!
Oh, for grace to trust Him more!**

I'm so glad I learned to trust Him,
Precious Jesus, Savior, Friend
And I know that He is with me,
Will be with me to the end.
Oh, how sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just to trust His cleansing blood
And in simple faith to plunge me
'Neath the healing, cleansing flood!

Yes, 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just from sin and self to cease
Just from Jesus simply taking
Life and rest, and joy and peace.

The name Jesus is sung 25 times in this song, but I want to draw your attention to the chorus.

**Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!
How I've proved Him o'er and o'er
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus!
Oh, for grace to trust Him more!**

That's what you and I are called to do. Prove to yourself, over and over that Jesus, and his word can be trusted.

Let's pray.