

Moral Guide

2 Timothy 3:1-5, 14-17

February 10, 2019

There is a Christian research organization called the Barna Group. It is a company that provides various important analyses of our culture. David Kinnaman is the President of the company. Based on his research, David Kinnaman points out that Christianity used to be the moral norm in the United States, but that is no longer true. He says that a new moral code has replaced Christian core values. The new moral code consists of six tenets or ideas:

One, the best way of finding yourself is by looking within yourself. Your identity is to be found in yourself. The Bible tells you that you are God's creation and you are to find your identity in the Lord. But no, the new moral code tells you that you are your own person. You are to find your identity by looking within yourself.

Two, people should not criticize someone else's life choices. No matter what other people do, you are not to make any judgment on that. You are to accept their life choices. So we become somewhat indifferent about what people do.

Three, to be fulfilled in life, to find satisfaction in life, you should pursue the things you desire most. Whatever you desire, if you think you can do it, go ahead and do it.

Four, the highest goal of life is to enjoy it as much as possible. Life is short. You only live once. Do whatever you want. Have as much fun as you can. You are to enjoy your life as much as you can.

Five, people can believe whatever they want, as long as those beliefs don't affect society. What people believe is their own choice, as long as it does not affect the world or community we live in. Let them believe whatever they want to believe. In other words, don't try to change people. Don't try to make other people believe what you believe. Don't evangelize.

Six, any kind of sexual expression between two consenting adults is acceptable. One form of sexual expression is not necessarily more acceptable or

moral than others. As long as two individuals agree, it doesn't matter what they do.¹ This can create all kinds of problems.

Anyway, these are the core concepts of the new moral code in our society according to David Kinnaman.

When you look at the Scripture we read today, we find a striking similarity between the description of the last days and our society today. The Bible says, "There will be times in the last days, when people will become lovers of themselves, lovers of money, 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 – having a form of godliness but denying its power."² It sounds like America today, doesn't it? Not just America, but present world.

We are living in a society that faces a moral crisis. Regardless of age, education, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, religion, and political ideology, a majority of Americans agree with the idea that we are facing moral crisis. About 80% of American adults agree.

However, when it comes to what determines right and wrong, people disagree quite a bit. About 57 percent of American adults believe it is a matter of personal experience.

About 65 percent of American adults believe right and wrong are determined by one's upbringing, family, cultural, educational and religious upbringing.

It is interesting that still a large portion of the American population believe that the Bible provides the absolute moral truth that can be applied to all people in all situations. However, more people rely on their own reasoning power or conscience to determine right and wrong rather than relying on the biblical teaching. Two-third of American adults put their own moral reasoning or conscience above God's wisdom or biblical teaching.³ Two-third of American adults believe that they have better judgment than God's guiding wisdom.

Our conscience or moral reasoning is mainly the result of our upbringing. More often than not, our conscience is the voice of our parents and the voice of our

¹ <https://onewsnw.com/culture/2016/05/29/us-barna-survey-goodbye-absolutes-hello-new-morality>.

² 2 Timothy 3:1-5a.

³ <https://onewsnw.com/culture/2016/05/29/us-barna-survey-goodbye-absolutes-hello-new-morality>.

society. From our childhood we have learned that certain behaviors bring us rewards, and certain behaviors bring us punishments. That is how our conscience is formed and developed, and then our education, religion, and various life experiences contribute to the formation of our values and conscience.

But these core values and conscience are not set in stone. They constantly change as we learn more and have more experiences in life. Since it is somewhat fluid, although it will take some time, it can go in either a positive or negative way. It is very possible that our conscience can be corrupted because of what we learn and what we experience. If it is corrupted, we are not going to know what is right and what is wrong.

What we really need is the objective standard of reference outside of conscience, something that can guide our conscience.

This is why Bible study and meditating on the Scripture is so important. As we deepen our relationship with the Lord the biblical teachings and the influence of the Holy Spirit will continue to guide our conscience.

The Bible says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”⁴

The biblical truth is what guides our conscience. So, I want to encourage you, especially young people, to read and study the Scripture.

In the meantime, I want you to have some practical tools to make good decisions. Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969), was the pastor of Riverside Church in New York City many decades ago. He once preached a sermon called, “Six Ways to Tell Right from Wrong.” It was wonderful and challenging sermon. In that sermon, Rev. Fosdick provided a very helpful guide to determine what is right and wrong. Here are his insights:

One, submit the question, submit what you are doing to the test of common sense. Ask yourself, “Is my action or decision reasonable given the circumstances?”

Two, submit the matter to the test of sportsmanship. “Is this the way you want to be treated?” Jesus once said, “In everything, treat people the same way

⁴ 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

you want them to treat you, for this is the Law of the Prophets.”⁵ So no matter what you do, always ask yourself, “Is this the way I want to be treated?”

Three, submit the question to the test of your best self. “Does this show the best of you? Does it really show your true character?”

Four, submit the question to the test of publicity. “Is this something you would be willing for other people know?” Is this something you want other people know about you?

Five, submit your question to the test of your most admired personality. “What would be his or her reaction to this? What would be the Lord’s reaction to your behavior and decision?”

Six, submit the question to the test of foresight. “If you do this, what would be the consequence? What else can happen? What result will it bring?”

We know we are living in a troublesome time. It requires our fortitude and sound morality. So, I urge you to be grounded in the Lord and his word, so that our conscience and actions may always be guided in the right way.

⁵ Matthew 7:12.