

Rockpointe Community Church: Position Paper on Biblical Morality

Adopted by the Elders on August 3, 2015

Introduction

There are certain foundational moral values, rooted in the very person and character of God, which were present from the very beginning of His Creation. These moral values are important for followers of Jesus Christ to uphold in order to have a rightly-aligned relationship with our Creator and to properly reflect His Church.

Although the following list is not intended to be comprehensive, it includes some of the most fundamental moral questions with which humans in all cultures have wrestled throughout history. The Bible gives definitive answers to these questions that transcend human culture and opinion. Below are concise summaries of what Rockpointe Community Church believes those answers to be, based on an honest reading of Scripture and the experience of the Church throughout history. As a Christian community, we are committed to teaching and living these Biblical moral principles as an expression of faith in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Humility, Compassion, and Forgiveness

Any expression by fallible men and women of God's truths and moral laws must be made in the context of humility. Church leaders and committed believers too often make one of two mistakes: either they express moral laws without recognition of their own failings and without compassion for those who have transgressed those laws, or else they are too aware of their own fallibility to have the courage to identify moral failures for what they are.

Many quote Jesus' words, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matt. 7:1) out of context to suggest that no one has the right to identify the actions of others as morally right or wrong. That interpretation ignores what Jesus continued to say immediately thereafter: "For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (Matt. 7:2-5.)

The proper application of this teaching for the believer is to begin with a recognition of, and repentance for, one's own failings. Once we correctly identify God's moral standard that applies to a given behavior, we must be sure to apply it to ourselves first. Once we do that, however, we are able to instruct others in the same principle, with an attitude of gentleness and love. (1 Peter 3:15.) Indeed, it is an act of love—not condemnation—to lead others out of error and into truth. (James 5:19-20.) All believers are commissioned to make disciples and teach others to live as Jesus taught us to. (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8.) And it is only through living as Jesus taught us to do that we can experience the full, abundant joy that God means for us to have. (John 10:10.)

Therefore, Rockpointe Community Church is committed to upholding and teaching these and other truths of the Bible to all people, as the faithful have done throughout history and as the Bible commands. We will always strive to accomplish this in a spirit that is both bold and humble, seeking always to glorify God by leading each other deeper into discipleship and devotion to Jesus Christ.

Truth

Fundamental to any belief, moral or otherwise, is the question of whether or not it is true. We believe that God is the source and creator of all reality, whether physical, spiritual, or otherwise. Likewise, moral laws and values exist because they reflect the nature and character of God, and therefore have an absolute, objective basis that transcends mere human opinion or cultural norms. It is no coincidence, however, that human individuals and cultures throughout history have expressed a preference for truth over deception. For example, we require witnesses in court to tell the truth, and we feel betrayed when others lie to us.

We believe the 66 books of the Holy Bible to be a trustworthy and uniquely authoritative source of truth. The Bible claims, and has demonstrated itself throughout history, to be the very Word of God. Its content was revealed to human authors through the inspiration of his Holy Spirit. This means that the Bible is a collection of books *from* God, not merely human thoughts *about* God. One of the fundamental traits God reveals about himself is that he is unfailingly true, honest, and trustworthy; he does not lie or deceive (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2). Therefore, these Scriptures are true and without error.

As described in the Bible, Jesus revealed himself as being God's Word in the flesh, and as being co-equal with God the Father. (John 14:7.) He is therefore the very personification of truth itself. Through his death and resurrection, he offered himself as the only way by which humanity can reconcile itself to God. (John 14:6.) He explained to Pontius Pilate that "this is the reason I was born, and

for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” (John 18:37.) To those who believed his message, Jesus said, “if you hold to my teaching, you really are my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32.) Jesus did not leave room for multiple, subjective opinions about God’s identity or about how humans can become right with God.

God further reveals truth about himself through the physical universe that he created. The Book of Genesis tells us that God spoke the universe into being, and that all he made was “very good.” (Genesis 1:31.) Throughout Scripture, God is referenced as the Creator of “the heavens and the earth”—everything that exists. Because God is truth, his trustworthiness is revealed through what he created. Speaking poetically, David wrote that “the heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.” (Psalm 19:1-2.) Paul wrote that “ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.” (Romans 1:19-20.)

God encourages us to examine and verify the truth of what he has revealed. One of King Solomon’s proverbs was, “It is God’s privilege to conceal things, and the king’s privilege to discover them.” (Prov. 25:02.) Later in Scripture, we are encouraged to “test everything [and] hold on to what is good.” (1 Thess. 5:21.) Unlike the writings central to many other belief systems, much of what the Bible teaches is stated as historical fact that can be tested and verified. (Luke 1:1-4; John 20:31; 1 Cor. 15:17-20.)

Therefore, in all contexts, we should uphold truth, as opposed to lies or deceit, as a moral value derived from God’s very character.

Human Life

The Scriptures have much to teach us about God’s design and intention for our lives, and about how highly he values each person.

First, we see that, out of everything God created, human life is uniquely sacred and valuable. The Bible tells us that, from the beginning, “God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Gen. 1:27; Matt. 19:4.) We are his “delight” (Prov. 8:31), and he made us “a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned [us] with glory and honor.” (Psalm 8:5.) Because we were made as reflections of his image, God views any attack on innocent human life as an attack on God himself.

(Gen. 9:6). Even after humans sinned and collectively rejected God's authority, "God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." (Rom. 5:8.)

Second, God has made clear that our uniquely valuable humanity begins from the moment we are conceived. God makes no distinction in our humanity based on whether or not we have yet been born. David sang that God "created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." (Psalm 139:13-14.)

Throughout our time in the womb, we are people capable of being known by God, and he ordains our lives before we are ever born. (Psalm 139:16; Isaiah 49:1; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:44.) For this reason, God views the destruction of unborn life just as severely as he does the taking of any other innocent human life. (Exodus 21:22-25.)

Third, the physical gender given to us by God is an inextricable part of who we are and of how we express his glory. Both genders have equal value and dignity in his eyes (Gal. 3:28), and each reflects his image. (Gen. 1:27.) But God has created each of us with one, and only one, physical gender—male or female—which is an intricate part of His good creation (Gen 1:31; 1 Cor. 12:18.) When Jesus condemned divorce, for example, he did so based on our created nature as biological males and females. (Matt. 19:1-9.) Similarly, Paul identified the sin underlying sexual activity outside of God's design as being a "suppress[ion] of the truth [about what] God has made"—including the bodies that God made for us. (Romans 1:18-27.) As such, Scripture recognizes no distinction between physical and psychological in the assignment of gender. Although the effects of sin on creation have resulted in physical deformities and psychological difficulties that can impact some individuals' perception of gender, we believe that gender is a God-designed attribute with which we are created, and not a matter of personal choice.

Fourth, humanity enjoys a place of special honor and responsibility in his creation. He made us ruler over the works of his hands and gave us authority over all the other animals on earth. (Psalm 8:6-8.) We have the responsibility to exercise this authority wisely, being good stewards of creation, and God treasures each of his creatures. But God values human life above that of any animal. (Matt. 10:31.)

Human Relationships

God designed humans to be relational—first and foremost with him, but also with each other. For each type of relationship of which we are capable, he has ordained certain boundaries of what is holy, proper, and healthy. As his

creations, we honor God and benefit ourselves when we remain within those boundaries that he has established. We also come to know God more completely when we are in right relationships with each other, because God has designed every aspect of human existence to point us back to him.

Jesus highlighted the inseparability of our relationships with God and with people when he said, "'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." (Matt. 22:37-40). Through the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus went on to show that everyone we encounter is a "neighbor" who we should treat with love. (Luke 10:25-37.)

Friendships are an important aspect of human life. The people we associate with exercise significant influence over our lives, leading us either toward or away from the path that God intends our lives to follow. So the Bible warns us to be careful about whom we choose to call our friends. (Prov. 12:26; Prov. 13:20). Within a friendship, we are called to exercise loyalty (Prov. 27:10), encouragement (Prov. 27:17), and forgiveness (Prov. 17:9)—all of which helps us better understand God's character. Jesus personified each of these characteristics in his life, which helps us understand what he meant when he called his disciples his "friends." (John 15:13-15.)

The relationship between parents and children is also sacred. One of God's first commandments to his people was to "honor your father and your mother," (Exodus 20:12), a principle that is repeated often in Scripture. (Prov. 20:20; Matt. 15:3-6.) Likewise, parents have a responsibility to love, teach, and discipline their children, (Prov. 13:24), and a parent experiences joy or sadness as a result of their child's choices. (Prov. 15:20). In these and other ways, we gain insight into the love God expresses for us when he identifies himself as our Father. (Psalm 68:5; Isaiah 63:16; Malachi 2:10; 1 Cor. 8:6).

Of course, the most intimate way in which humans can relate to each other is sexually. It should come as no surprise, then, that God has established firmer boundaries around our sexual conduct than any other form of relationship. From the beginning, God created marriage to be a union between one man and one woman. After showing Adam, the first man, that no other creature was a "suitable helper" for him, (Gen. 1:18, 20), God created Eve, the first woman, to be his companion. God then pronounced that "for this reason"—that is, the reason of their inherent, God-designed suitability for each other—"a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24). Scripture also makes clear that marriage serves God's

intention that humans “be fruitful and multiply,” (Genesis 1:28), producing “godly children.” (Malachi 2:15.) The institution of marriage is also implicit throughout Scripture, such as in God’s commands regarding parents and children. Therefore, only in the context of monogamous, heterosexual marriage were humans designed to join together sexually.

Although we see examples throughout Scripture and history of individuals who have deviated from this command, the Bible never condones such behavior. To the contrary, both adultery and every other form of extra-marital sexuality are consistently condemned throughout the Bible. (Ex. 20:14; Lev. 18; Prov. 6:24-35; Rom. 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-10.) Jesus reaffirmed this view of marriage, teaching that men and women should not join in physical union until marriage, and that marriage should remain—with only very limited exceptions—a permanent, monogamous bond. (Matthew 19:4-6). Even in the course of explaining to new Gentile believers that they were not burdened by the Jewish traditions and customs of the Old Testament, the first Church nevertheless warned them to “abstain ... from sexual immorality.” (Acts 15:29.)

The reason for these repeated, consistent warnings is clear: sexual relationships have unique power over us as individuals. Sexuality is a wonderful gift that can and should be expressed within marriage, for the benefit of both partners. (Song of Songs; Prov. 5:15-20; 1 Cor. 7:5.) When expressed in a manner contrary to God’s design, however, sexual relationships can do physical, emotional, and spiritual harm to us individually, as families, and in relationship to God, as nothing else can. Paul warned: “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.” (1 Cor. 6:18-20.)

Jesus and his disciples also made clear that the human institution of marriage is designed to reflect the nature of God’s relationship with humanity. Several of Jesus’ parables depict himself as the bridegroom and his church as the bride. Paul instructs husbands to love their wives “just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” (Eph. 5:25-27; 2 Cor. 11:1-3.) Even the “profound mystery” of a man and wife uniting as one flesh is a metaphor for “Christ and the church.” (Eph. 5:31-32.) By daily submitting our sexuality to the sacred institution of marriage, we gain insight into the fierce passion, sacrificial love, and unshakeable commitment that God has for us.

Conclusion

This Position Paper is intended to summarize the Biblical doctrines to which our community subscribes on the subjects of truth, human life, and human relationships. Of course, these are not the only moral values taught by the Scriptures, nor are the summaries given in this paper a substitute for in-depth Bible study on these subjects. These are, however, some of the most pressing and hotly debated topics of the day, both in society and within the Church.

Therefore, acting in obedience to our calling as Pastors and Elders to be the spiritual shepherds of our community (1 Peter 5:1-2), we have published this paper in order to erase any doubt over what our community believes, and to equip our members to stand boldly for God's word. It bears repeating, however, that the Bible commands us to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), not in arrogance or condemnation, in keeping with our mission to lead all people to become fully devoted followers of Christ.

"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Cor. 13:14).