

## What Defines Moral Behavior? (Part II) God-Driven Direction

**Proverbs 2:6–7:** *6 For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. 7 He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity.*



Morality can be a tricky thing. For the most part, humans do want to behave in a moral fashion. The tricky thing is figuring out how to actually define what qualifies as moral behavior and what does not. As Christians, this task of defining is supposed to be easier than for most, because we have God’s word as our clear foundation for our moral principles. We say it’s “supposed to be easier” because Christianity has demonstrated for thousands of years that claiming the name of Christ is far from a guarantee of moral behavior. So, what are we supposed to do with this? How do we take what God has clearly given us in His word and live it

daily? How do we handle it when fellow Christians see aspects of God’s moral principles in a different light than we do?

Recap  
Recap  
of Part I

In our last episode, we laid out the groundwork for how morality is defined in our world today. Much of what we said came down to two phrases that identify what drives an individual’s moral stance:

(Source: [Objective vs Subjective Morality: The Moral Disagreements](https://www.believeinmind.com), believeinmind.com)



### Subjective morality:

“Subjective morality refers to moral judgments and values that are based on personal feelings, opinions and perspectives... Subjective morality acknowledges that beliefs can vary between individuals based on their own experiences, cultures and circumstances.”



### Objective morality:

“Objective morality means establishing moral rules and judgments that are universally valid and not subject to individual biases or preferences. Objective moral truths exist independently of what any particular person or group believes.”

As Christians in our current sinful state, we fall into a category that mixes both of these approaches. Our challenge is to learn how to submit our human **subjective morality** to God’s **objective morality**.

We want to create an “objectively subjective” approach. This means we want to base our thinking on what comes from above so we can process our imperfect thinking through God’s objective standards. This raises our subjective human thinking and actions higher and closer to God’s **objective morality**.

*How do we do this?*

We must first look up to get God’s guidance, and then ask ourselves where we stand and how we should apply it.



**We will look at five points from the Scriptures that help us do this:**

**CREATING AN OBJECTIVELY SUBJECTIVE APPROACH:**

**1. ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE DIFFERENCES IN OUR INDIVIDUAL WORLDLY BACKGROUNDS FUNDAMENTALLY INFLUENCE HOW WE ARE ABLE TO ACCEPT, EMBRACE AND FULLY FOLLOW THE CLARITY OF GOD’S OBJECTIVE MORAL COMPASS.**

We all see through the lens of our personal biases, our natural tendencies to see things one way or another.



The Christians in Corinth came from a very pagan culture. Idol worship was fundamental to their lives.

**Enter Christianity into this pagan world, and the fact that idols have nothing to do with God and spiritual power. They are an abomination:**

**1 Corinthians 8:1:** *Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. (We know the truth! There is no more bondage to these foolish idols!) Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.*

Even though this discussion is going to be concern over literal food, Paul starts with the shared principles of knowledge and love as a baseline, but with love being the more important.

Paul is setting up foundational teaching regarding morality and mutual respect. He reasons us through the **objective morality** from above, dealing with the subjective reality of humanity and our different perspectives.

**First, Paul will present the clear **objective morality** from above that Christians are bound to ascribe to:**

**1 Corinthians 8:4-6:** *4 Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, 6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through him.*

Knowledge can be dangerous if applied out of context. Paul will go on to caution that all in the brotherhood had not reached the same level of maturity needed to embrace the truth of one God and one Lord.

In Paul’s day, Gentile cities had large temples devoted to many different gods. In addition to worship feasts held at the temples, priests would daily offer meat to the idols. (Never once did an idol actually eat the meat offering!) This meat would eventually be sold in the markets near the temples (possibly at a reduced rate since it was “used” meat) or served in temple restaurants.



**What if I'm served this meat at my neighbor's house? Would it be a sin to eat it?**

**1 Corinthians 8:7-8:** *7 However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. 8 But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.*

The act of eating or not eating of the food is not the problem. The problem is eating against our conscience. We violate our conscience when we do something we THINK is not right. Paul is saying, *“It’s okay if you struggle with this! It is okay if your actions and thinking are not perfect as you work through this. You have to grow into it!”* God understands that human beings have subjective minds. This is an important baseline for understanding how to build this “objectively subjective” approach.


Imagine how difficult this would be for a Corinthian Gentile who grew up in a society saturated by pagan gods and rituals, and where eating at temple festivals would have been an important part of this ancient society to build friendships and political ties.

They might say, *“I know the idol isn’t real, so it’s technically just meat, but I used to worship that idol. I can’t even get close to anything having to do with it now that I worship the true and only God! To me, eating that meat would be a compromise!”*

**Now Paul focuses on the challenges for those who can fully embrace the objective truth of idolatry and separate themselves from their former idolatrous lives:**

**1 Corinthians 8:9-11:** *9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol’s temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? 11 For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.*

Paul’s position: We don’t want our brethren devastated after eating idol-offered meat by thinking they have dishonored God. We don’t want to hurt someone because their conscience is sensitive along a certain line. We worship Jesus. If someone sees us eating this meat, they might get the wrong idea and think Christians can worship other gods in this indirect way. Therefore, don’t mislead them by eating it.

You have the right and ability to eat it. There’s nothing wrong with it; it is just meat. Yet he says, *take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.* If we do not take care, our liberty based on our knowledge can ruin someone weak in faith. He plainly calls it a SIN when we lead others toward actions their consciences are not ready for! 

**He is illustrating that knowledge easily brings arrogance!**


**1 Corinthians 8:12-13:** *12 And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.*

Patience is an important quality we must have to support and encourage the brethren. But it's not always easy.

**SIN** ↗

The sin is not the eating of the meat; it is in the hurting our brother. The meat is just meat (there's the knowledge), so only eat it if no one is around who will be stumbled by it. Christian liberty is led by love. Love looks out for others. Just because we CAN do something doesn't mean we should. Put another way, sometimes it's better to DO right than to BE right.

The core of this discussion is to do the right thing from an objective, godly perspective. We want to honor God.



**FINE-TUNING OUR PERSONAL MORAL COMPASS:**

As imperfect human beings, our subjective minds are easily and often influenced by our individual backgrounds. It is one thing for us to accept this challenge for ourselves, and another thing to embrace and have compassion for it in others.

? How often do I stop and think about where my brother or sister may be struggling? How often do I actively support them in those struggles?

We are usually aware of what we ourselves are capable of in exercising Christian liberty and what we cannot do without violating our own conscience. But are we just as aware of how others are affected by what we do with our Christian liberty, and how our actions help alleviate or increase their struggles?

This is a real lesson in learning about and appreciating our fellow disciples. How can we truly love the brotherhood if we don't know them?

**This is a good start. How do we continue our attempts to live by God's standards when dealing with those who don't have such deeply pagan backgrounds?**



While our previous example focused on allowing one to overcome their own questionable background, our next example focuses on those of us who came from a more advantaged background. While Jewish Christians had a strong foundation in the Law of Moses (Christianity was built upon the Law of Moses), they quickly found out they would also need to rise above their past.

Let's recall how God opened the door for Gentiles to be called to Christ through the Apostle Peter. His vision before being guided to Cornelius foretold a major issue that would challenge Jewish Christians moving forward.

**Peter’s vision:**

**Acts 10:11–15:** *11 and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, 12 and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. 13 A voice came to him, Get up, Peter, kill and eat! 14 But Peter said, By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean. 15 Again a voice came to him a second time, What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.*

This was quite the paradigm shift for the Jewish believer converting to Christianity because the Jews believed things were ceremonially clean or they weren’t. The creatures in the *great sheet* were definitely unclean! Peter tells God, *By no means Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.* God clearly was telling Peter it was time to go higher than the Jewish Law.

This vision opened the door for those Jews who were called to Christ to be released from the restraints of the ritual Law. God had clearly stated His **objective morality** for ALL disciples of Christ to follow. He appointed Peter to let all Jesus’ disciples know that Gentiles were to be accepted into the church.

Why was Peter chosen? Because he had the voice others respected. God gave him this vision so he could see what was to come. God helped Peter to bring his subjective understanding of the Law to the higher level of His plan for the inclusion of the Gentiles in the church.

*How do we do this?*



**CREATING AN OBJECTIVELY SUBJECTIVE APPROACH:**

**2. ACKNOWLEDGE THAT EVEN WHEN WE HAVE A BACKGROUND THAT IS BLESSED AND RIGHTEOUS, WE WILL STILL HAVE TO RAISE OUR MORAL CONSCIOUSNESS HIGHER BY BEING OPEN TO ALL THAT CHRISTIAN LIBERTY OFFERS.**

We will next focus on **Romans 14** which deals even more deeply with the same issues from a different perspective.

*(Source: Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Whole Bible) Romans 14... is designed to settle some difficult and delicate questions that could not but arise between the Jews and Gentiles respecting food and the observance of particular days, rites, etc.... The converts to Christianity were from both Jews and Gentiles. There were many Jews in Rome; and it is probable that no small part of the church was composed of them. The New Testament everywhere shows that they were disposed to bind the Gentile converts to their own customs, and to insist on the observance of the peculiar laws of Moses.*

Why were the Jews “disposed to bind the Gentile converts to their own customs”?

For centuries they and their forefathers had been taught the Law with its rituals was the pathway to God. We can’t blame them for having that paradigm. The Apostle Peter was shown this was no longer the case.



**Romans 14:1-2:** *1 Now accept the one who is **weak** <770> in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. 2 One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is **weak** <770> eats vegetables only.*

**Weak:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #770 *astheneo*; to be feeble (in any sense)

This is not necessarily a physical weakness. For example, the Law was “weak” in relation to Christianity because it couldn’t give the people permanent life the way faith in Jesus could. Paul is talking about people who are *weak in faith*. He is simply acknowledging that faith isn’t equal in all circumstances with all individuals at all stages of their life.

By acknowledging where our faith is weak and relying on our own subjective thoughts, we can turn to God’s word and learn from His objective standard. With this focus, our subjective approach can rise up higher to meet that standard. This will help us develop patience with those who are going through their own process of strengthening their faith.

**Paul will now be blunt. Even though some have feeble faith it is not an excuse to minimize them!**


**Romans 14:3-4:** *3 The one who eats is not to regard with contempt (to write off) the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. 4 Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

From these verses, it appears both Jewish and Gentile Christians had begun to judge each other regarding dietary practices. Both groups were struggling to adapt to the new ways of Christianity; the Jews because the Law was no longer relevant, and the Gentiles because of lifelong familiarity with their former pagan culture and its traditions. This tension between the two groups came to a head around the propriety of eating meat formerly offered to idols. Paul warns them not to treat the opposite group with contempt, for God has accepted both.

It is easy for those of us who understand Christian liberty to look down on someone who is struggling with contempt. It is also easy for those who are struggling to judge those who are, in their opinion, too liberal in their interpretation of liberty.

Neither one is right! There can be resentment and pushback on both sides of the issue as we each address the process of fine-tuning our moral compass by raising our subjective viewpoint on morality to God’s higher level.





**FINE-TUNING OUR PERSONAL MORAL COMPASS:**

Humanity grows comfortable with what they are exposed to. When called to Christ, we are called out of that comfort and into the clarity of God's objective morality.

Am I willing to put my own comfort aside and replace it with God's clarity?  
Am I willing to give others the space to raise their level of clarity up towards God's objective morality as well?

*Never look down on someone unless you are helping them up. — Anonymous*

Are we willing to reach across to someone who may be struggling and say, *It's okay*. By the same token, if we are the one struggling, we should look at the more liberal brother and say, *It's okay, I accept that what I am struggling with doesn't bother you*. We must continue to communicate through our challenges with each other.

Paul is teaching us in **Romans 14** to create an objectively subjective approach. We must reach up first to what comes from above. We then take what we have to offer, raise it up and let it change, develop and meld into God's **objective morality**.



**CREATING AN OBJECTIVELY SUBJECTIVE APPROACH:**

**3. ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WHATEVER OUR BACKGROUND, OUR CONSCIENCES WILL BE DRAWN TO GOD'S OBJECTIVE MORALITY WHEN WE ARE CALLED. THIS DRAWING IS A PROCESS OF CHANGE.**

When we are called, our hearts ask, *What will You have me to do?* We are looking up to see what God wants of us. We need to acknowledge that we are all in that same boat but coming from different perspectives.

**Paul now shows the “weak in faith” (those who are wrong on some things) are still acceptable to God:**

**Romans 14:5:** *One person regards one day above another; another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.*



**Why would God accept someone if we KNOW they're wrong?**



He accepts them (and us, because we are not perfect either) because they want to be right in God's sight. They want to raise up higher, but they are starting in a disadvantaged position. This is the beauty of God's mercy and God's grace. This is the beauty of the example Jesus gave us. He hung out with the sinners— with the ones who were wrong. Why? Because he saw that in their hearts they wanted to be right before God.

**God understands our subjective challenges!**

**Romans 14:6:** *He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.*

Both are doing the best they can, giving thanks to God! But what if they are wrong? They are trying to be right in God’s eyes. The beauty and the absolute relief is that despite our being wrong, God sees our desire to be godly because He can see our heart.

While our knowledge may be a little muddled, our consciences can be clear if we are honoring God!

The Apostle Paul is teaching us that even though we can be wrong in some cases, God sees the heart and knows we have growth potential.

**Romans 14:7-8:** *7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 8 for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.*

In the verses before, it was about eating and giving thanks or not eating and giving thanks. Here in these verses, it is about living and giving for the Lord or dying for the Lord. No matter what, Paul is looking at Christians on both sides of potentially contentious issues and saying both sides can be pleasing to God.

He is also warning us to embrace our brothers and sisters who are working to honor God, even if their methods don't agree with ours. This is a beautiful picture.

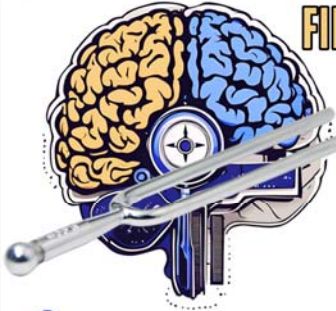
Let’s go back to **verse 5** where it said *Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind*—this is talking about our conscience. There can be a danger in using the excuse of “conscience” to continue with sinful behavior. Humans are great at justifying and compartmentalizing by convincing ourselves that this or that behavior is okay. Eventually our conscience isn’t even tweaked.



Once we settle into saying, *Well, it’s my conscience and I’m okay with doing this*, we have settled into rejecting God’s **objective morality** and being comfortable in our own subjective look at the situation.

We have stopped reaching up. We have stopped stretching ourselves to be better. We have to realize that while this is where we are, this is not where God wants us to stay.





**FINE-TUNING OUR PERSONAL MORAL COMPASS:**

As imperfect humans, our best vision of things can be cloudy because of our experiences, preferences and traditions. It is easier to see this happen to others even while it may be happening to ourselves. When we see others striving for God's objective perspective, we need to learn respectful tolerance.

? How well do I give others the right to be right before God, even if I think they are wrong?

There's a danger in rejecting others who don't think like we do. We need to develop not just tolerance, but godly, respectful tolerance.

Different circumstances and the same conclusion. We are to be cautiously aware to recognize the sincere dedication of our brotherhood!

**Are we saying that we should always give other Christians encouragement no matter what they say they believe?**

NO! Nothing could be further from the truth! We are not free to do whatever we want. On the contrary, we are to be alert to hold them up and encourage them towards the highest standards of God's **objective morality** that we and they are capable of. This becomes a challenge of always putting aside convenience and replacing it with focused conviction to do God's will.

When we give into the things that are convenient, like our conscience deciding we're okay, we lose our focused conviction on what is higher than our subjective judgment. If our conviction "settles" at where we are comfortable, then our conviction needs to be reworked—we need to always reach higher.

This is why we keep talking about creating an objectively subjective approach. We need to objectively look up to God first and His moral principles given to us in Scripture, then ask, *Where am I? How can I reach up higher and higher?*

*How do we do this?*



**CREATING AN OBJECTIVELY SUBJECTIVE APPROACH:**

**4. ACKNOWLEDGE THAT OUR RECOGNITION OF AND ENCOURAGEMENT FOR ONE ANOTHER MUST ALWAYS HAVE A FUNDAMENTAL ATTACHMENT TO GOD'S CLEAR AND OBJECTIVE MORALITY.**

If this is not our lifeline, we better cut the line we have and throw that one out.

This is important because we are confronted with these moral questions, little and big, throughout our entire day.

**Do we look for a convenient way out, or are we driven by a deeply-convicted, objective belief that comes from God?**

**Romans 14:9–12:** *9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. 10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt?*

Judging and contempt are the easy, convenient ways out. It is easy to write somebody off or to judge them by thinking, *This is just where they are; too bad about them.* This is not remotely close to a proper Christian attitude.

*For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For it is written, AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD. 12 So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.*

Whichever side of whatever issue we are on, don't judge or write off those on the other side! The bottom line is we ALL will ultimately stand before God. In **Romans 14**, Paul is showing us that though we might have great conviction, whatever side of the issues we are on, God does the judging. We don't. We must make sure to stay in line with the **objective morality** Paul keeps showing us and guiding us towards.



**Here is what it looks like to replace acting in a convenient way with acting in a convicted way:**

**Matthew 5:7–9:** *7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

There's a difference between peacemaking (reconciling parties who are at odds) and peacekeeping (those who preserve the peace at all costs). Some churches today struggle with this. In their quest for unity and inclusion, their "come as you are" invitation without having to change might be encouraging people to stay comfortable in their sins.



This is not about someone's conscience taking them down a certain road, so we should just let them go. If our consciences don't have a sense of God's **objective morality**, we need to grow out of where we are and into where we need to be.

This is ALL about how we act. Peacemaking seeks to solve issues versus just keeping the peace at all costs.

**Blessed are the peacemakers, because this the culmination of what our Christian lives should look like:**

**Galatians 6:1–3:** *1 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*

These scriptures outwardly tell us that everybody is not okay. When someone falls into a sin, they may justify it, rationalizing it in their own subjective mind. But, if we see this happening, as a fellow Christian we should reach out to help. *Bear one another's burdens. If anyone is caught in any trespass, we don't judge them or look at them with contempt; we reach out to help them reach up higher.*

## Jonathan's Experience

I personally struggle along these lines. I grew up in a church system and struggled with some of their doctrinal teachings, which in my opinion misrepresented God. So, to this day I have to be very careful not to judge those who have been taught false unscriptural beliefs. I don't want to be negative towards them because it's the system that's accountable before God. Love must override my personal feelings.

This is hard because Jonathan walked away from all that and he can't understand them staying in these false doctrinal teachings. Yet, when we see individuals who are sincere, we look at them in love. That is what Jesus did and does and what we are called to do.



THE PERSONAL BATTLE INSIDE

This comes down to the personal battle inside—the battle between the passion we feel on an issue and the principle behind the issue. It is easier to follow emotion. We often mistake our passion for principle even if we are right. This is a danger. We must constantly evaluate our subjective weakness and work on correcting it by applying God's objective clarity. We must remember to keep looking up.

### We can see the ideas of principles versus passion here:

**Romans 14:13–15:** *13 (Principle says:) Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. 14 I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; (Passion says:) but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 (Passion says:) For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. (But principle says:) Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.*

When we have principle and passion, remember compassion. Passion can easily override compassion, but we need to turn the tables and have our compassion override that passion. We might be 100 percent right in what we are convicted by, but when someone else doesn't see it that way, we need the capacity to respectfully recognize their journey.



But we do have to be careful when it comes to especially deep moral issues. We cannot be indifferent to sin.

### The passion of judging others creates stumbling. Principled encouragement makes way for growth (watch again for principle versus passion):

**Galatians 5:16–17:** *16 But I say, walk by the spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.*

We can have the knowledge—we can be correct—but we still have to apply it in the way that best honors God. Our own passions and ego can get in the way. Just because we might be right does not mean our passion will appropriately communicate that right perspective.

## Rick's Experience

This is a personal example that happened several years ago. It was a very difficult experience to work through.

There was one of the brotherhood who was in a situation where they were in a very, very sinful circumstance. I love the individual very much as a Christian and was angry at what was happening. But I realized that my anger wasn't going to help them. I called them and asked if I could visit and traveled a distance to see them.

I sat with them and we went over what was happening. They basically told me they believed they were right before God. I said, "Really?"

Now, understand, my blood was boiling because it was wrong before God. The scriptures are abundant. I took a breath, because you have to have compassion, and took my Bible and slid it across the table and said, "Show me. If you are right before God, show me in the Book. I'll wait."

The individual started to sweat and stutter and stammer. I looked at them and said, "Come on, we both know it's not in there. We both know there is something wrong here. But I want you to understand, I am on your side. I want you to be able to stand up again, but you can't go on like this. You need to make a decision."

As I pulled my Bible back and we finished the conversation, I asked the person to give it some thought and that I would get back to them in a couple days to see where they were. But I said again, "I am with you in being godly."

It was a real exercise of holding back what I really felt and to reach out and be loving, kind and compassionate in drawing them back to a standing position instead of falling into sin. It ended up they did draw back and turned the table. They were apologetic. They realized their mistake and changed their direction by God's grace.

**Paul now brings us to the practical lesson of caring for those with whom we disagree. He is telling those on both the right and wrong sides to adjust:**

**Romans 14:16–19:** (NIV) *16 Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the holy spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. 19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*



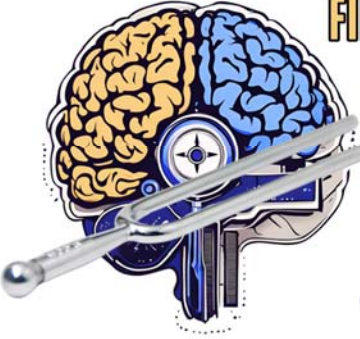
These are beautiful texts. Sometimes what we think is right can be *spoken of as evil*. Why would a “good thing” we do be construed as evil? Because of the way we treat others who see things differently. We can present the goodness and purity of God’s word in such a way that it beats people over the head and does damage. Judgment and contempt contaminate our strongly-held righteous positions.



**Subjective morality and emotion can easily misguide our caring actions!**

**Ephesians 4:29,32:** *29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

The Scriptures pour out this kind of advice—*no unwholesome word, be kind and forgiving*. We cannot give up on morality, but we need to be kind, forgiving, helpful, hopeful and working along with others so we can grow together.



**FINE-TUNING OUR PERSONAL MORAL COMPASS:**

Our interactions with other Christians, while in an earthly environment ought not to be driven by our humanity. On the contrary, we are given many tools to transform our communications to be in accordance with Godly morality.

❓ The question is, am I paying attention?

**Key Takeaway:**

*Even though I may be right, how do I glorify God without harming someone I think is in the wrong?* It has to do with compassion! The message is simple and clear. Always have our thoughts and actions based on the immovable and objective principles of God.

**All of this sounds difficult! How can we focus ourselves on doing what needs to be done in the way it needs to be done?**

This is always the big question. To find the answer, we simply need to follow the right path and gather up the right details. As Paul begins to wrap up this incredibly important teaching, he points out the cold, hard facts of the most important things that can make or break our brotherly interactions and fellowship.

We have been given clear guidance in how to treat our brethren and those in the world. If we apply it, we can begin to rise above our emotions to create an objectively subjective approach to our brethren. How do we move from where we currently are to implementing the lofty morality of God in a way that will honor Him?





**CREATING AN OBJECTIVELY SUBJECTIVE APPROACH:**

**5. ACKNOWLEDGE THAT BECAUSE WE ARE SUBJECTIVE HUMAN BEINGS, OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BROTHERHOOD CAN EASILY GO WRONG. OR IF WE APPLY THE RIGHT DEDICATED EFFORT, IT CAN BE BLESSED AND GO RIGHT.**

Again, we go back to, “Just because we can doesn’t mean we should.” **1 Corinthians 6:12** says, *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable.* Christian liberty isn’t “anything goes,” but the problem is our interpretation of it is subjective; “me” gets in the way. The Law was black and white: *Do this, don’t do that.* The law of liberty seems much grayer. Your liberty decision might be different than mine. Who’s right? The emphasis should not be on judging, but on how we treat one another.

The Old Testament Law was simpler, but the Jewish leaders took that objective Law and made it subjective. They corrupted it by adding rituals and interpretations that were not given to them by God. They were constantly arguing with Jesus about this. Jesus essentially told them, “*You’ve made the objective Law of God, subjective.*” So, though the Law was clearer, it was still easily corruptible. We need to learn from those Jewish leaders—our own Christianity can be easily corrupted.

This all comes down to our actions. Paul just brought us the lesson on how to truly care for one another and now he brings lessons relating to the potential results of how we interact. We are either subjectively divisive or objectively decisive!

Beware the word “subjective,” as it often denotes a negative result.



**Here is the apostle’s explanation:**

**Romans 14:20–21:** *20 Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. 21 It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.*

The Apostle Paul is saying to put people first while we maintain that highest **objective morality**.

When Paul says *Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food*, he does not mean the meat or the day or anything else. He is talking about the brother or sister. **THEY** are the work of God.

Any sense of condescension or competition can make expressions of our scripturally correct perspectives become scripturally damaging actions! We can be scripturally right but can use that knowledge in an incorrect way to hurt others. The apostle is spending an entire chapter in Romans saying, *Beware, we all need to improve on this.*



**An example of well-meaning divisive action corrected in a decisive manner:**

**1 Corinthians 3:4-7:** *4 For when one says, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are you not mere men? 5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.*

The Corinthians were starting to become “groupies” of different Christian leaders, causing divisions within the church. Instead, we are all to be unified around following Jesus rather than individual church members.

This is a lesson in stepping back and seeing the bigger picture. It was nice that the Corinthians appreciated Paul and Apollos, but they were just servants of God Almighty. The Corinthians’ first love and loyalty should have been to God through Jesus, not other men. Again, it’s about seeing the big picture. We are all but small cogs in the powerful machinery of the body of Christ. We play a small role and we need to see the significance of the rest of those who are around us.

Are we working for that body or for our own agenda? How deeply and honestly have we evaluated our own subjective tendencies relating to standing for godly **objective morality**?



**MIRROR QUESTION**

*Are there flaws in how I express what I believe and what I stand for?*

This question reveals areas where we can grow into Christ and out of ourselves. We can gain in objectivity and put away the subjective piece.

No one is perfect. The truth is we are all faulty. **Patience** and **love** are two character traits that need to be front and center. These are key words along with **compassion** that summarize this lesson.

As we finish **Romans 14**, we see the Apostle Paul now urging all who may be involved in one of those “*I stand for right principles and you stand in compromise*” arguments, to seriously check the foundation of their own individual faith to be sure of its source. Look at our own motivations and how we present our point of view.

**Romans 14:22-23:** *22 The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.*

*Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.* How might we condemn ourselves if we approve of something? By the way we present it to others. Our interaction can be condemnatory, diminishing them through condescension or impatience or a sense of superiority on our part.

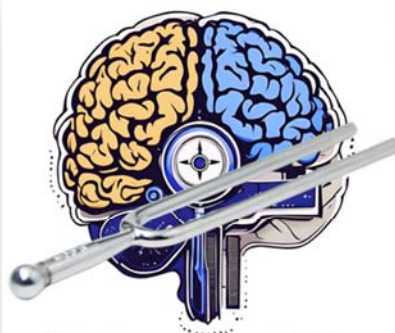
When experiencing these situations, we can react in a way that our spiritually and morally-correct stand becomes detrimental to ourselves and others. We keep repeating this because the Apostle Paul keeps repeating it. He repeats it because it is important, but also because it is natural for us to fall into this.



Are we humble enough to be guided by the highest spiritually-objective morality no matter what the personal consequences might be? Are we standing strong enough to say, *Whatever comes to me, let it come! I will stand in my little subjective place for that which is higher than I am. I will grow into something better.*

**Philippians 4:4-8:** *4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.*

The Apostle Paul in Philippians tells us to let our gentle spirit be obvious. We should wear our gentle spirit as the jacket on the outside of our lives. *Be anxious for nothing.* Put our requests to God *with prayer and supplication.* Give thanks! Think on those things that are good, righteous, wholesome and upbuilding. That is what brings us to the place where we can have a much more **objective morality** because we are drawing from above instead of drawing from ourselves, or from below or from someone around us. Our subjective thinking needs to be challenged with God's objective principles and His morality.



### Fine-tuning Our Moral Compass:

Humans, be they Christian or not, are subjective beings. While our ability to adapt to our circumstances is a good thing, we, as Christians, need to do that adapting in clear harmony with God's objective moral principles. This challenge is well worth the effort!

❓ How well am I rising up, taking and embracing this challenge, knowing that by so doing I will glorify God?

Isn't this the most important thing? When we look at the whole thing, is it more important to be "right," or to give honor to our heavenly Father? We all know the answer, but how do we live the answer? How do we take the answer and put it into a position where it begins to dominate our thinking?

It starts by planting the small seeds of compassion, love and humility, then allowing them to grow so our interactions with each other will not be based on "*I'm right; you're wrong.*" They will be based on the fact that we are brethren in Christ, and we want to have fellowship together and to grow into Christ alongside each other.

This is God's **objective morality** for the body of Christ.

**So, what defines moral behavior?  
For Rick, Jonathan, Julie and Christian Questions...  
...Think about it!**

*All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.*



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### Bonus Material and Study Questions

#### Recommended additional study:

##### Ep.1025: Should We Be Peacemakers?

*The transformative value of peacemaking in daily life*

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1025-peacemaker/>

##### Ep.1181: Is It Ever Right to Judge Your Brother?

*Determining the what, when, how and why of appropriate judgment*

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1181-judging/>



Parents and Bible class teachers, continue your studies on this topic with these short, animated videos for kids at ChristianQuestions.com/YouTube:

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**There is a continual work involved in the binding of our faith and morality to truth. Here are a few more scriptures that guide us in that direction:**

**Isaiah 5:18–23:** *18 Woe to those who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood, and sin as if with cart ropes; 19 who say, Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it; and let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come to pass, that we may know it! 20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight! 22 Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine and valiant men in mixing strong drink, 23 who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the rights of the ones who are in the right!*

**Matthew 7:11–14:** *11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! 12 In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the prophets. 13 Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*



**Matthew 7:21-23:** *21 Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons, and in your name perform many miracles? 23 And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.*

**1 Kings 9:1-9:** *1 Now it came about when Solomon had finished building the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all that Solomon desired to do, 2 that the LORD appeared to Solomon a second time, as He had appeared to him at Gibeon. 3 The LORD said to him, I have heard your prayer and your supplication, which you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built by putting My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. 4 As for you, if you will walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances, 5 then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David, saying, You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel. 6 But if you or your sons indeed turn away from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, 7 then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them, and the house which I have consecrated for My name, I will cast out of My sight. So Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. 8 And this house will become a heap of ruins; everyone who passes by will be astonished and hiss and say, Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house? 9 And they will say, Because they forsook the LORD their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and adopted other gods and worshiped them and served them, therefore the LORD has brought all this adversity on them.s*

**Romans 11:33-36:** (NRSV): *33 O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 34 For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? 35 Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return? 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.*

**Romans 2:12-16:** *12 For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; 13 for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. 14 For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, 16 on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.*

### **A final example of the need of humanity to have higher, external guidance – God’s own people sin!**

(Source: Bible Commentary by J. Vernon McGee) **ISRAEL GUILTY BEFORE GOD:** *Out of the heartbreaking experience in his own home, Hosea now comes to speak to the nation—and he knows how God feels about them. ... God has said, "They have sinned. They have played the harlot and been unfaithful to Me." Now God is going to bring them into court, spell out certain charges against them, and prove those charges. The message of chapter 4 is that Israel is guilty of lawlessness, immorality, ignorance of God’s Word, and idolatry.*

**Hosea 4:1-4, 6 (NRSV):** *1 Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel; for the LORD has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land. 2 Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed. 3 Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing. 4 Yet let no one contend, and let none accuse, for with you is my contention, O priest. 6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.*

# Study QUESTIONS



## Ep.1351: What Defines Moral Behavior? (Part II)

See:

<https://christianquestions.com/society/1351-moral-behavior-part-ii/>

1. In your own words, define objective and subjective morality. Give two examples of each.
2. As subjective human beings, what process do we need to do to bring us closer to God's objective morality?

**Acknowledge: *Differences in our backgrounds influence how we follow God's moral compass.***  
**(1 Corinthians 8)**

3. What was the objective morality concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols? (verses 1-6)
4. What was the subjective morality concerning these things? What were the former idol worshippers struggling with? (verses 7-8)
5. How can having Christian liberty cause us to become arrogant or otherwise sin? (verses 9-13)

**Acknowledge: *Even with a blessed and righteous background, we still must raise our moral consciousness.*** (Romans 14)

6. Why would the Jewish Christians think the Gentile Christians needed to follow Jewish customs?
7. In what areas do you see your faith is relatively "weak"? How can this be overcome? (verses 1-4)
8. Where do you see your faith as strong? Is it hard to be patient with others in this area? Explain.

**Acknowledge: *We are all drawn to God's objective morality though we have different backgrounds. We are all in the process of change despite coming from different perspectives.*** (Romans 14)

9. How can God accept someone who is so wrong in their thinking? (verse 5-6)
10. Have you had some muddled thinking on issues in the past? How were you honoring God even though your thinking was not straight with God's objectives?

**Acknowledge: *Our recognition of and encouragement of one another must be in accordance with God's clear and objective morality.*** (Romans 14)

11. What do you have in common with the brother or sister who believes differently on an issue? (verses 9-12)
12. How should we act towards that brother or sister? (Matthew 5:7-9, Galatians 6:1-3)
13. Which is better, peacemaking or peacekeeping? Why?
14. What is the danger in having passion and conviction for your position? How can we take a moral stand yet be an encouragement to one who disagrees? How can a good thing seem evil? (verses 13-19, Galatians 5:16-17)

**Acknowledge: *Because we are subjective human beings, our relationships with the brotherhood can go wrong or be blessed and go right.*** (Romans 14)

15. Why does the Jewish Law seem more black and white than the grayness of the law of liberty? Explain how this is true or not. How can we learn from the ancient Jewish leaders? (1 Corinthians 6:12)
16. What must we put first when dealing with others? What is "the work of God" we must NOT tear down? Have you ever condemned yourself in presenting a correct viewpoint? Explain. (verses 20-23)
17. How are you embracing the challenge of reaching toward God's moral objective? How can you improve?