

# Living the Right Way

Ephesians 4:1; 4:17-5:21; Exodus 20:1-2

Throughout the world, people generally believe there is a “right way” to live and behave.<sup>1</sup> People generally accept some form of “ethics” (moral principles that govern a person's behavior).


1. What do you think motivates (influences) people to “do what is right”?

2. In general, how do people know what is right and wrong?



## God's Will

The Bible teaches that God is the One who determines what is right and wrong, and this truth should directly affect our motivation to “do what is right”!


 Paul wrote to Christians, “Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” (*Ephesians 5:15-17, NIV*)

## Our Need to Understand

The term “God’s will” often refers to God’s gracious purpose and plan, including his purpose and plan in Jesus Christ (*Ephesians 1:5, 9, 11*).<sup>2</sup> “God’s will” can also refer to God’s “desired will” – that is, what God wants his people to do, especially with regard to their moral behavior. In *Ephesians 5:15-17* (quoted above), “the Lord’s will”<sup>3</sup> refers primarily to God’s moral will.

Christians should seek to understand God’s moral will. But it is also important to understand God’s purpose and plan in Jesus Christ (the gospel).<sup>4</sup>

3. How is understanding God’s moral will related to understanding God’s gracious purpose and plan in Jesus Christ? Why do we need to understand “the gospel” (the good news of Jesus Christ) in order to understand how we should live?<sup>5</sup>

 “I therefore<sup>6</sup> ...urge you to walk (*live your life*) in a manner worthy of the calling<sup>7</sup> to which you have been called.” (*Ephesians 4:1, ESV*)



<sup>1</sup> Even moral relativists believe there are ‘right ways’ to behave, though they claim ‘what is right’ is relative. And while they deny moral absolutes, they preach ‘tolerance’ as if it were an absolute. Their position lacks foundation.

<sup>2</sup> We may say that *Ephesians 1* talks about God’s ‘determinative will’ (what God has done, is doing, and will do) while *Ephesians 4-6* talks more about God’s ‘desired will’ (what God wants his children to do).

<sup>3</sup> ‘Lord’ typically refers to Jesus Christ in *Ephesians*. But whether ‘the Lord’s will’ refers to ‘the will of God the Son’ or ‘the will of God the Father,’ the difference is insignificant here.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, a basic understanding of the gospel is needed to *become* a Christian (a follower of Christ).

<sup>5</sup> Understanding God’s purpose and plan in Christ is needed to put our lives (including our moral behavior) in proper perspective. While the world would certainly benefit if everyone lived according to Christian ethics, the purpose of Christianity is not merely ‘good behavior!’ A relationship with God is the basis of the ‘good behavior’ that God desires. The gospel provides the way into a relationship with God. The gospel provides the foundation, motivation, ability, guidance, and power for living the right way.

4. Read Ephesians 4:22-24.<sup>8</sup> According to these verses, why should Christians “live the right way”? What do we need to do?
5. Read Ephesians 5:8-10. According to these verses, why should Christians “live the right way”? What do we need to do?
6. What practical steps can we take to better understand “what the Lord’s will is” and “what pleases the Lord” in the various areas of life, including the specific issues we face?

### *Keeping Things in Order*

Though we seek to live in a way that is “pleasing to the Lord” (*Ephesians 5:10*), we cannot earn God’s acceptance by our good behavior. We cannot earn salvation by our good works, but good behavior should be the “fruit” (result) of our salvation as new creations (*see Ephesians 2:8-10*).<sup>9</sup>

### *The Ten Commandments*

The “Ten Commandments” (recorded in Exodus 20:1-17) reflect the moral will of God.<sup>10</sup> We will use the Ten Commandments as a general outline for this study series.



Read Exodus 20:1-2. God reminds His people of who He is and what He has done for them. We need to ask: How should I respond to who God is, and what He has done for us?

### *Reflection/Application*

- Review this lesson and ask yourself these questions: What is the basis and motivation for my ethics (moral principles and practices)? How do my ethics compare to God’s moral will?
- Read Ephesians 4:17-5:21 as a sample of God’s moral will. Ask God to show you where you need to change, and commit to change by His grace. If you are not a Christian, the first step is trusting in Christ as Lord and Savior. Then God can renew and change you by His Spirit.

<sup>6</sup> ‘therefore’ (or ‘then’) points back to Ephesians 1-3, which reveals God’s gracious, saving purpose and plan in Jesus Christ (1:5, 9, 11). In response to what God *has done, is doing, and will do* in Jesus Christ, Christians should respond by living their lives in the right way.

<sup>7</sup> ‘calling’ – God has ‘called’ believers into a new life according to his grace. The benefits of the new life include God’s forgiveness (1:7), salvation (1:13: 2:5, 8), every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3), the indwelling Holy Spirit (1:13-14), adoption into God’s family (1:5), and the riches of his glorious inheritance (1:18). Believers are called to be holy (1:4), to do good works (2:10), and to praise God for his glorious grace (1:6, 12, 14), among other things.

<sup>8</sup> ‘created to be like God’ – refers to being like God (*or* like Christ) in a moral sense so that we can glorify God. ‘In Christ’ believers are renewed and ultimately conformed to the likeness of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:16; Rom. 8:29-30). In a similar passage in Colossians 3, Paul grounds his moral instructions on the facts of the gospel, particularly Christ’s resurrection. Likewise, Paul’s moral instructions in Romans 6 and 8 are grounded in the facts of Christ’s death and resurrection, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the reality and significance of our union with Christ through faith. Understanding the facts of the gospel is needed to understand and apply the Bible’s moral instructions.

<sup>9</sup> No matter how ‘good’ we are, we still fall short before the holy God. However, the good news is God graciously accepts us on the basis of the righteousness of Christ if we are united with him through faith.

<sup>10</sup> The Ten Commandments and the Law were given to Moses and Israel at a specific time in the history of God’s people, and are part of the *Old Covenant*. Theologians disagree on how the Ten Commandments relate to Christians, who are under the *New Covenant*. See the book *Five Views on Law and Gospel*. In any case, the moral will of God is reflected in the Ten Commandments, and God’s moral will transcends the written Law. In the New Testament, God’s law is written on human hearts, which is connected to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (*Jeremiah 31:31-34*).