

## Is Morality Simply A Social Convention?

Some people suggest that morality is nothing more than social conventions handed down from one generation to another. Parents, grandparents, schools, churches, along with the influences of the various media, combine to "educate" the individual on the conventions of behavior within a given society. Thus, they say, we find that there is great variation among societies, differences in values, all equally valid, and no basis for judging one inferior to another. There is some truth in this, but only some. Certainly we do train up children in the way they ought to go. "Johnny, I've told you a hundred times, don't talk with your mouth full!" "Johnny, I've told you a hundred times, don't punch your little sister." Both of these are admonitions of a mother teaching values to her son. But, the one is a social grace, the other is an act of morality. Both are taught, but only one is universal. It might be nice not to talk with one's mouth full, but it is imperative that one not punch his sister. The one is a suggestion or custom, the other is a universal "ought."

The same is true among nations. We drive on the right side of the road. The British drive on the wrong side. Oops! I mean the left side. You see, by social convention I think the British are wrong. They think they invented driving and are right when they drive left. Who is to say? Some want us to believe that morality is like that. But, can we say the same thing about murder, rape, pillage, hate, pedophilia, and an endless list of abuses to mankind? Do we want to say that you like rape and I don't like rape, who is to judge? Do we wish to make these vices simply matters of human convention? Not if we have any hope for mankind. C. S. Lewis wrote:

If no set of moral ideas were truer or better than any other there would be no sense in preferring civilized morality to savage morality, or Christian morality to Nazi morality.

He was writing at the time of World War II when Nazi Germany was spreading by violent aggression across the whole of Europe. Great Britain was one of the few nations left to resist, surviving largely by the buffer of the English Channel. Nazism was harsh and cruel, ferreting out any resistance to their sovereignty, assigning opponents to concentration camps, redefining humanity, and killing anything that did not fit with their world view. Lewis was stating that there were two distinct world views that held two vastly different moralities. Both were not right.

Mankind has always had to deal with right behavior, or more exactly, wrong behavior. There have always been men that through their selfish behavior have damaged or dominated others. When the abuse becomes evident and "good men" possess the means, the evil is addressed, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. It is an ever-present problem. It is an inescapable responsibility laid upon mankind because there is an overriding Presence that leans upon our consciences. This Presence tells us that something is wrong, that it must be addressed, that we cannot sit idly by. Sometimes we would rather not deal with the problem; sometimes we wish the problem would simply go away; sometimes one

thinks it is time to act now and another thinks it is not. But sooner or later, if mankind is to survive, we has to react to the wrong and attempt to "right" it. Why? Because a Real Morality truly exists. Again, Lewis writes:

The moment you say that one set of moral ideas are better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other.

We may differ on what we think people "ought" to do, but the fact that we suggest that our ideas are better than yours, gives evidence that there is a standard of conduct that exists apart from our own being. We simply think that our ideas conform to the ideal better than yours. The variety of opinion is not evidence of morality being a social convention, but a lack of knowledge of the Morality Giver. If we just knew more about the True Morality, mankind could live in much closer harmony. This has been our appeal from the beginning, come join us in this journey to God.