

The Moral Glory of God

Ps 119:1-16

NO SPITTING

There was an interesting story this week from Enfield in north London because some of the local councillors want to ban spitting in public places. I was quite surprised to find out that it wasn't banned because I can remember seeing a lot of No Spitting signs when I was a boy because it was quite normal for pipe smokers to spit. But over the years it died out but it has become more common again because spitting is more common from some eastern European countries.

Most people don't have any problem with that particular rule because spitting is regarded by most as a dirty habit and as the sign says, spitting is a health hazard whether that be just spitting or spitting things out on to the pavement.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

Our lives are characterised by rules and regulations. Here are just a selection we find when we are out and about. How much are they kept and how much are they ignored? Some are, some aren't.

I can remember when we go to some caravan sites that all you ever see are signs that say don't do this or don't do that. On the continent a lot of people ignore them out of spite to the owners! The Caravan Club on the other hand don't have many rules – they just expect people to act like civilised human beings and signs usually have the words please and a reason for doing so.

RULES ARE MADE TO BE BROKEN

We have a thing about rules and regulations. In fact there's this old saying. Rules restrict us and the more unreasonable we think they are, the less the chance that we think will get caught, or if we think the consequences are not significant, then we ignore the rules. If people think that if they are not going to be brought to account, then they will break the rules. And that happens doesn't it?

We live in a society that doesn't like rules, where conventional wisdom – ideas that suit our society – rules. The same is true of personal and community morality. So things that were once regarded as no-nos are being regarded as moral and OK in our present generation – promiscuity, same sex relationships and marriage, euthanasia. It is a society where everything is OK as long as we don't hurt anyone else.

WHO MAKES THE RULES?

So what determines how moral we are? Who makes the moral rules? In a land like ours where God is barely recognised, there is still no shortage of morality. It's just that the rules are decided by people, not God. Actually the most moral government on earth is that of China (a self-professed atheist regime). Some would even describe the government as "prudish." Pornography and many other forms of immoral behaviour are severely limited and punished in China, in a manner the West would never countenance.

Actually, nothing is needed for morality other than rules. Those rules can be culturally imposed or privately imposed. It can generally be said that all people are moral: all of us have rules and expectations for our behaviour and for others around us.

But where does the whole idea of moral rules come from? If you are a Christian this morning, you know where our moral rules come from. They were put there by our Creator God. We are made to have a moral sense – a sense of right and wrong. Why should anyone have any rules at all if there is no God – apart from blatant self-interest. Why should we be responsible to or for any other person and for society? Yet it is all built in us.

So who's making our rules? If it is God who has made us and given us a conscience and therefore an innate morality that allows us to relate to others and to Him, then surely our morality isn't determined by the norms of our culture and society, but determined by the nature of the Creator Himself?

We have been exploring the whole subject of the glory of God recently. I stated in the first sermon that in my experience, when we understand what God is like, it changes us. It changes our outlook on life, it changes our relationships. When we perceive God's glory, their universe gets bigger, our understanding of God gets bigger, and we get smaller, and so do all the problems and pressures of life.

Experiencing God's glory has a profound effect on God's people. And knowledge and experience of the glory of God isn't reserved for people who achieve a spiritual level, it's for all who know and love Jesus. I put this slide up at the time.

WE CAN EXPERIENCE THE GLORY OF GOD

We can experience the glory of God. It isn't a secret, in fact it's written large. It's written in creation, it's written in the Bible, and it's recorded in God's actions in Christ. Last time we looked at God's glory in creation, this time we are going to look at God's glory as we understand His moral perfection.

Creation is something we can see and feel and through it we can understand our creator God. However moral perfection is all about relationships – how we relate to one another and to God. And if we are made in the image of God, then our moral actions therefore should reflect what He is like. And what God wants us to understand is that His glory isn't just reflected in what He's made but in what He's like. But how can we understand what He's like?

GOD'S WORD

Here's the answer: God's word. Specifically, God's amazing nature is actually most typified in His Law and that's embodied in it's shortest form in the Ten Commandments but that's only part of the revelation of God's ways throughout the Bible shows us just how amazing He is! Not just as a creator, but in his moral perfection, His wisdom, His ability to know all things (omniscience), His love.

That's where Psalm 119 comes in. It's the longest chapter in the Bible. We had a flavour of it in the verses we read. It's 176 verses on one subject: the law of God. Why all this excitement about God's commandments?

AN UNATTAINABLE GOAL?

One of the main reasons many people who aren't Christians have a problem with the Bible is that they look at the Bible and find the law absolutely unattainable. "I can't be like that!" they say. "I'm far too bad to be a Christian". How many times have you come across that?

But stop and think. Rather than seeing the moral perfection of God as a stumbling block,

look at it another way. What an amazing world it would be if people did fully and completely keep the commandments. There would be no violence, no cheating, no lying, people would respect one another – the world would change to be an amazing place. The world would reflect the wonder and glory of God because it would reflect what He is like. Isn't He amazing – what a vision for the world! That's why the Psalmist was so captivated by the Law. He saw the potential in what God had given, that reflection of His nature that could make people different.

VERSES

*Happy are those whose lives are faultless,
who live according to the law of the LORD.
2 Happy are those who follow his commands,
who obey him with all their heart.*

More importantly, the law is part of God's covenant with people. It's not just intended to give us the rules for moral living, but is an assertion of covenant. God makes promises to His people. God never breaks promises. We are recipients of the New Covenant. The amazing thing about God is that He never breaks His side of the bargain. He can be relied on absolutely: even if we break our part and He knew we would just as we know that we will: the psalmist said, With all my heart I try to serve you; keep me from disobeying your commandments.

BE HOLY AS I AM HOLY

God is a holy God. He's different – that's what holiness means. He's different to us. He's holy and says to His people “be holy as I am holy.”

We are called to a morality that isn't determined by our society, however laudable it may be, but one that's based on the word of God. Nothing more reflects the glory of God than a people determined to be holy. Let me read a few more verses in Psalm 119:

VERSES (2 slides)

*How can young people keep their lives pure?
By obeying your commands.
10 With all my heart I try to serve you;
keep me from disobeying your commandments.
11 I keep your law in my heart,
so that I will not sin against you.
12 I praise you, O LORD;
teach me your ways.*

The final thing I want to say this morning is that one of the most amazing things about the glory of God is that He has chosen to know us personally. He hasn't given the law for society generally, but for each of us in particular, so that we can utter those personal words “teach me your ways”. For me that's the glory of God. That He's interested in me. It's as much a source of wonder to me as the depths of the universe.

GOD'S WAY NOT AN UNACHIEVABLE GOAL

And we have a God who wants us to experience His glory, not just in His amazing creative power, but in His moral nature too. He calls us to be holy as He is holy. He doesn't give that to us as what a non-Christian would see as an unachievable aim, but as something to

grow into as believers.

Last Sunday evening we considered these words of Paul's: *We ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will, with all the wisdom and understanding that his Spirit gives. Then you will be able to live as the Lord wants and will always do what pleases him. Your lives will produce all kinds of good deeds, and you will grow in your knowledge of God.*

Do you want to experience the glory of God? Then, we should stop walking the world's way in the world's morality, however good that might seem, and start to walk according to what God gives us in His Word. It's not unachievable, but it's a process and God gives us that wisdom, understanding – that knowledge of His will – and power by His Spirit so that we may shine as stars in a dark world. Through it we will experience the glory of God in quite unexpected ways and bring that glory to people who need to know Jesus too.

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