

WotW Week 2 - Message Outline

MAIN IDEA: Right and wrong isn't something we decide, it's something God does.

TEACHING TEXT: ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." Genesis 2:16-17 NIV

WHAT DO WE WANT STUDENTS TO KNOW? Morality is an objective reality that we discover. Not a subjective thing that changes based on our feelings or societal norms. What is true, good, and right is constant because it is based in the unchanging character of God. That doesn't mean morality is always simple or easy. It can be challenging and complicated, depending on the circumstance, to know the difference between right and wrong, but we can find good answers to difficult moral questions by looking to God's character and His commands.

WHAT DO WE WANT STUDENTS TO FEEL? Confident that the way God asks us to live is better, truer, and more beautiful than any other way. Challenged to take seriously our calling to trust and obey God, even when it's difficult.

WHAT DO WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO? Trust God's character and obey His commands.

THE OUTLINE

TENSION: Why do people so often do what's wrong instead of what's right? According to my five year-old-son, at least for him, it's because he didn't know it, or he just didn't want to. I appreciate the honesty of my five year old, because I think his answers are true for all of us. We do what's wrong because we don't know what's right, or, we just don't want to do what's right.

When Jace was younger, he didn't know what electrical sockets were. So, being a curious little baby like he was, he wanted to investigate by sticking his fingers in the socket. We all know that's not okay, but, because he was a baby, he didn't. Until he did. And, I vividly remember him getting to the point where, once he was old enough to know it was wrong, he is standing right next to an outlet, holds his hand out, looks at me, smiles, and tries to jam his finger in there!

Why do we do what's wrong instead of what's right? It's either because we don't know what's right, or we just don't want to do what's right. Now, what does all of that have to do with anything? We're in part 2 of a message series called *War of the Worldviews*, where we are looking at some of the most popular worldviews, systems of belief, in our world, and learning how they pale in comparison to the goodness, truth, and beauty of Christianity. This week, the main idea is this: **Christianity is better, truer, and more beautiful than relativism.**

Relativism is the idea that truth and morality *change* based on the beliefs of people and society. It's the idea that you have your truth, I have my truth, they have their truth, but there's no real "the truth". And, that right and wrong changes based on what people believe. What might surprise some of you, is that this worldview, relativism, is the dominant belief system of most young people today. In fact, **65% of Gen Z agree that "many religions can lead to**

eternal life.” // 63% of Gen Z agree that “what is morally right or wrong depends on what an individual believes.” (Barna Group)

That means the majority of your friends and peers, and likely a lot of you, believe in relativism. The problem? That means you disagree with Jesus. Because Jesus made it really clear that He is the only way to eternal life. **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** John 14:6 NIV. And, that we don’t get to define right and wrong, He does. Jesus said, **“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”** John 8:31-32 NIV

TRUTH: Now, what I’m going to say next is really important so I want you to lean in, because **You can say you’re a Christian with your words, and show you’re a relativist with your actions.** If you were here last week, then this should sound familiar to you. And I’m saying it again because it really matters that we understand what it really means to be a Christian. **For example, some of you would say that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, but you’re having sex with your boyfriend or girlfriend, and even though you know it’s wrong, you keep trying to justify it. Some of you say you follow Jesus, but when you’re around that group of people you really want to impress, you lie to make yourself look better and convince yourself it’s okay because you’re not really hurting anyone.** Christianity isn’t just about believing this stuff is true, it’s about living like it’s true. Not just believing God exists, but following Jesus with our whole lives. Because it’s only when we live according to His truth that we actually experience the goodness and beauty He offers. And that’s why, for the rest of this message, we’re going to look at the very first instance in Scripture of humans rejecting God and attempting to redefine good and evil, right and wrong, on their own terms.

We’ll be starting in Genesis 2, right after God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, formed the first human out of the dust of the ground and breathed life into him, and placed him in the garden of Eden, as a caretaker over creation. And, God only gave Him one command:

16 And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” Genesis 2:16-17 NIV

He could eat from any tree in the garden, except for one. Adam was given more than he would ever need, but as we’ll soon see, it still wasn’t enough. Shortly after this, God creates a partner for Adam, the first woman, Eve. And, together, they lived in the garden, walking with God in the cool of the day, and living in harmony with God, each other, and all of creation. The last verse in this chapter tells us they were both naked, but they felt no shame. Which is a weird way to say that things were so good, that even though they were completely vulnerable, they were also totally secure. But, this wasn’t going to last. Because, in the next chapter, we witness an event known as the Fall, when humanity first sinned against God, and creation was thrown into chaos.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?” Genesis 3:1

The serpent, the devil in disguise, appears to the woman, and with a clear agenda. To get her to doubt God's character so that she will disobey His commands. So he asks a question, "Did God really say, you must not eat from any tree in the garden?" It's subtle, but even in the wording of this question, he is trying to convince Eve that God is holding out on her. That he doesn't have her best interest in mind. And, the devil does the same thing to us. **Did God really say it's wrong to drink that or smoke that? Did God really say you can't have sex until you get married? Did God really say you shouldn't watch that show or listen to that music?** The devil is still using the same strategy. He wants us to doubt God's character so that we will disobey His commands. St. Ignatius wrote this: **"Sin is my unwillingness to trust that what God wants for me is only my deepest happiness," St. Ignatius.** Because if we don't actually believe that God wants what is best for us, that He loves us and cares for us more than we can imagine, then, it's only a matter of time before we think we have to take matters into our own hands.

2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" Genesis 3:2-3 NIV

It's a small detail, but it makes a big difference. When Eve repeats the command, she actually makes it more restrictive than what God actually said. God never said don't touch it. He said don't eat it. Can you see it? The devil's plan is working. Eve's view of God is getting narrower and more controlling. So, the devil keeps pressing in.

4 "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:4-5 NIV

God is holding out on you. He doesn't want you to be like Him. He doesn't want you to know good and evil. He wants you to stay small and ignorant. But none of that's true. Because Eve was already like God! She was already made in His image! She already knew that it was *good* to follow God and *bad* to eat from this tree. But, the devil's trick worked.

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Genesis 3:6-7 NIV

The serpent convinced Adam and Eve to doubt God's character so that they would disobey His commands. They didn't do the wrong thing because they didn't know what was right. They did it because they wanted to. So, you might be wondering, why would they trust the devil more than they trusted God? That seems crazy. But, I don't think that's what happened. They did what they did not because they trusted the devil more than they trusted God. They did it because they trusted themselves more than they trusted God. The devil was just telling them what they already wanted to hear. He set the ball on the tee. They're the ones who swung the bat.

And, he is still doing the same thing to us.... HOOKS...

APPLICATION + CONCLUSION: From the very beginning, his goal and his strategy have been the same. To get you to doubt God's character so you will disobey His commands. Either by making it unclear what the right thing to do is, or by convincing you that if it "feels good" it must "be good." So, what do we do when we are faced with a difficult decision, one where we may not even know what the right thing to do is, or we think we know what it is, but we aren't sure that we really want to do it?

- 1. Be honest about what you really want.** All of us are biased. We have things we want. And, if we don't slow down enough to recognize our biases, then we will be ruled by our biases. It's these baked in assumptions and preferences that can cause two people to hear the same facts, watch the same video, or read the same Bible, and walk away with wildly different interpretations. We find what we're looking for. So, be honest about what you are hoping to find.
- 2. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.** When Jesus was prepared to leave the earth, He told His followers that He would send the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit would *guide us into all truth*. On our own, we're not great at seeing the truth. That's why we need God's help.
- 3. Look to Jesus for the answer.** Open up your Bible to the gospels, the four accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. Read what He said. Examine what He did. Even if He doesn't address the situation or question you're trying to answer *directly*, He probably has a lot to say that should inform how you think about it, if you've got the eyes to see it and the ears to hear it. From there, look through the rest of the books of the NT and see what they have to say. Because those authors were inspired by the Spirit of truth to write what they did so that we could know, with confidence, how we're meant to live, what is right and wrong, as followers of Jesus.
- 4. Ask the Holy Spirit to change you.** Once you've found the truth, it's time to live it. Which, on our own, is anything but easy. We need the power of God. So ask God to give you the strength and the courage to trust His character and obey His commands.
- 5. Repeat the process.** Every time you are faced with a difficult decision, when you aren't sure what the right thing to do is, go back to the beginning and walk through these steps. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Now, if that feels like too much, I'm going to make it as simple and easy as I know how: **Read the Bible more days than you don't. // Be at church more weeks than you aren't.**

Because, I promise you, throughout your life you will be faced with hard choice after hard choice, where the answer won't be easy to find, and doing the right thing may cost you. But, if you are willing to do the work, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to know what is true and live like it's true, then you will experience the goodness and beauty that Jesus offers. Because Christianity is better, it's truer, and so much more beautiful than anything else the world offers.

"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:31-32 NIV