

Episode 7

Morality and Duty

Introduction. I recently watched a TV series set in the old West. In that series a lawman was pursuing a very evil man who liked to burn children alive. He caught up with the man just as he was preparing to burn two newly kidnapped children. The lawman was able to kill all the gang members, but the head of the gang was only wounded and got away.

The moral question. I thought to myself: the lawman was now presented with a certain moral choice. They were in a barren wilderness, far away from the closest town. If the lawman continued to pursue the evil man, he would have had to leave the two kidnapped children in the wilderness to die. The moral question he faced was: should he pursue the evil man to put an end to any future child burning, or should he first get the children to safety, and then perhaps resume his pursuit?

The obvious answer. For any normal minded human being the answer to this question is obvious. He should first take care of the children. Morally he could not just leave the children to die in the wilderness. In such a situation his highest duty was clear; he must first save the children.

Our innate ability to recognize right and wrong. Why is this answer obvious to anyone who considers it? It is obvious because our human minds have an innate ability to recognize right and wrong, and to choose our highest duty.

What is the origin of our moral sense? Where does this moral sense come from? Certainly, it does not come from the natural world that we know through our physical senses. Our experience in the material world gives us only a knowledge of *facts*, (such as we will be burned if we touch a hot stove), but not of what we *ought* to do in a moral situation.

Personality gives us the ability to recognize the moral level. If the natural world is devoid of moral values, where does our ability to recognize moral values come from? This innate power of mind to recognize our moral duty derives from the fact that God has bestowed upon us his great gift of personality. And personality is characterized by morality, awareness of our relationship with all other personalities. As we may have been told as children in times of selfish action, “You are not the only person in the universe!”

The emergence of moral awareness in human personalities. As personalities we are able to discern levels of better and worse conduct and to choose between them. No animal can make such a choice. Non-personal animals lack the awareness of the moral level. But human personalities are endowed with moral intuition, the realization of duty, and the free will to perform this duty. This moral insight, this ability to recognize right and wrong, is latent in human personalities and usually emerges in a child at about the time they approach their sixth birthday.

The child's first moral conflict. Early on in a child's life he comes to realize that there is such a thing as right and wrong, and that he must make moral choices. Moral choosing often involves moral conflict, and the first conflict in the child's mind is often between the urges of egotism and the impulses of altruism. We have the right and duty to care for ourselves, but we must also recognize that other persons have rights also, and that we are morally obliged to recognize their rights as well as our own.

Our first moral impulses are positive. The first moral impulses of a normal child's mind are positive and have to do with justice, fairness, and impulses to be kindness. Children become negative because they were so taught. As we grow and nurture our early moral awakenings our recognition of our duty becomes ever clearer. By maintaining loyalty to our moral obligations, we strengthen our sense of duty and develop a genuine moral character.

The source of moral values in the universe. The endowment of personality carries with it the ability to discern not only causes in the physical world, but also to intuitively recognize its duty in higher world of mind-reason. But what is the source of this higher world of moral values? The answer is God. Jesus taught that God, our loving heavenly Father, is a good and righteous God. He is the source of moral law in the universe.

Loss of faith in God brings moral relativism. In today's world many have lost faith in God, and without a belief in God they no longer recognize a transcendent morality to be obeyed. In such a situation modern secularists and humanists are left to decide for themselves what they will recognize as good and bad, right and wrong. This moral relativism leaves them with no moral anchorage in the midst of a rapidly changing world. This lack of faith in God and therefore a God ordained morality is destructive to both individuals and civilizations; it is one of the great problems of modern times. As never before in the world's history we need to observe our moral compass and depend upon the spiritual guidance and stabilization of sound religion, the religion of Jesus.

Challenges to making right moral choices. In making moral choices we must take care to properly discern our true duty, because our choosing between right and wrong, good and evil, is influenced not only by the keenness of our moral nature, but also by such influences as ignorance, immaturity, delusion, distortion, confusion, and lack of proper perspective. In such cases we may choose the lesser over the greater because of our failure to discern our true good. If we should choose to completely ignore our moral duty we will find ourselves living on a subhuman animal level. A sense of guilt will follow such a refusal to recognize and perform our moral duty.

Jesus taught and demonstrated the ideal morality. In our development of moral character, we should look to Jesus as our ideal. In his childhood and as a young adult he demonstrated that family life is our highest human duty but made it plain that family life must not interfere with religious obligations. He taught morality, not from the nature of man, but from the relation of man to God—the child-father relationship. He taught that our love for God and His children constitutes our supreme duty. We demonstrate our loyalty to this supreme duty by our love and sincere worship of the Father, and by the loving service we render to our brothers and sisters in the flesh.

Do what is right. As God’s morally conscious child my part is to choose to “do what is right” in whatever circumstances I find myself. When we choose a right moral judgment by an act of the free will, such a decision constitutes a primitive religious experience. No animal can make such a choice. Such moral acts are characterized by the highest intelligence and involve the choice of superior ends as well as moral means to achieve these ends. The highest moral choice is the choice of the highest possible value, and always this is to choose to do the will of God—“your will be done.”