**Moral Authority**

*Is there a standard of morality? If so, what is it? Does Christ’s authority reach beyond the work and worship of the church into my individual life?*

**Introduction**

1. When speaking about authority in spiritual matters, do we acknowledge that such reaches beyond the work and worship of the church to our individual lives?
   1. **1 Timothy 3:15** – Paul wrote Timothy that he might know about proper conduct in the church. What does this mean?
      1. **Luke 17:20-21** – Kingdom (church) is within you – rule of God in the hearts of even individual Christians – Christians make up the church. (Not simply collective conduct, but individual conduct – when assembly is left, you still remain a member of the church.)
      2. **Colossians 3:17** – Whatever we do… only work and worship of the church? (**v. 16** – singing in worship)
         1. **Colossians 3:18-23** – Wives, husbands, children, fathers, bondservants – individual positions.
         2. The Christian does not simply have a submissive role to authority in the matters pertaining to the church as a collective whole, but individually.
   2. Authority in spiritual matters reaches further than the work and worship of the church. **Each individual Christian is to live their lives in an authorized manner in matters pertaining to morality.**
2. **What or who is the moral authority? Is there such a thing? How are we to live our lives from day to day? What standard are we to appeal to, and submit to in matters pertaining to morality?**
3. **Christians need to be careful that the Moral Authority they appeal to is THE legitimate Moral Authority.**
4. False Sources of Moral Authority
5. Feelings
   1. If it feels good, it must be right?
   2. **Acts 17:18** – Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered Paul in Athens.
      1. **Epicurean** – followers of the Greek philosopher Epicurus.
      2. Epicurus taught, and Epicureans believed, in a materialistic world view where life’s highest aim is gratification.
      3. “Pleasure, ἡδονή, not duty was the substance of this philosophy. The means to attain it was called virtue. This was a doctrine which could not produce anything but selfishness and sensuality when men put it into practice.” (Lenski’s Commentary on the New Testament, Acts 17:18)
      4. Thus, if it feels good to one, one has the moral authority to practice such, or attain such.
   3. **Feelings are not the moral authority:**
      1. **Galatians 5:16-17** – The matters pertaining to the spirit are contrary to the matters of fleshly desire. (Christ says, “These carnal desires are not authorized.”)
      2. **Romans 8:5-8** – The matters pertaining to carnal pleasure/feelings are enmity against God, and cannot be subject to Him.
6. Conscience
   1. Our conscience has been given to us by God as our authority in morality?
   2. **Romans 2:14-15** – The Gentile’s law of conscience?
      1. **Idea** – Some, even among our brethren, have taught that this verse refers to an innate moral law placed within the conscience of man by God.
      2. **Primary reason for this false doctrine** – To suggest that only Christian’s are amenable to the Law of Christ. Those who are not Christians are only amenable to the law of their conscience – the innate moral law. Therefore, Christ’s law on marriage-divorce-remarriage does not apply to them, and they can stay in their adulterous marriage after they obey the gospel.
      3. **Context and meaning:**
         1. **Romans 2:1** – Jews are as guilty as the Gentiles when they practice the same things they’re judging about.
         2. **Romans 2:12-13** – Only the doers of the law are justified.
            1. **(v. 14)** – Gentiles don’t have “the Law” (OT), but do the things in the law – “nature” (“a mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature” – Thayer).
            2. **(v. 15)** – The law is NOT written on their conscience, the WORK of the law is – they observed the Jews, and practiced what they observed.
            3. **Conscience** – merely bore witness – accusing or excusing.
            4. **Idea –** their conscience was their guide as it was TAUGHT by what they observed in the Jews.
         3. NOTE: Not ALL Gentiles – some did not even retain God in their knowledge **(cf. Romans 1:28).**
   3. **The conscience is not the moral authority:**
      1. The conscience can only be a guide as it is taught by the moral authority.
      2. **Acts 23:1; 26:9; 1 Timothy 1:13** – Paul lived in good conscience, but was wrong.
      3. **Jeremiah 10:23** – the way is NOT IN MAN HIMSELF.
      4. **Proverbs 14:12** – the conscience’s way may be death.
7. Friends/Peers
   1. As long as it is not opposed to the way of thinking and living with those closest to us it is acceptable?
   2. **2 Corinthians 10:12** – The false apostles Paul dealt with led their lives in this way, and were not wise.
   3. **Rehoboam rejected the advice of the elders, and heeded that of his peers. The result was the revolt of Jeroboam and Israel against Rehoboam and Judah.**
   4. Many, if not most times, the advice, and moral direction of our peers is misguided and wrong. Regardless, it is not the standard of morality.
   5. **Our friends/peers are not the moral authority:**
      1. **Isaiah 55:8-9** – God’s thoughts and ways transcend that of man’s.
      2. How can those on the same inferior plane as you be the moral authority?
8. Preachers/teachers
   1. God gave us preachers and teachers to tell us what is right and wrong. Whatever they say is the moral authority?
   2. **2 Timothy 4:3-4** – Why do they do this? So they can feel safe in doing what they want, because the preachers/teachers say it is okay, or don’t say it is wrong.
   3. The work of preachers/teachers – **Ephesians 4:11-13** – to edify by teaching matters of “the faith” (Standard) and Christ.
   4. **Preachers and teachers are not the moral authority:**
      1. Of the Pharisees – **Matthew 15:14** – some teachers are blind, and lead the blind into a ditch.
      2. **Matthew 7:15-16** – Some teachers are wolves – false teachers.
9. Society
   1. The society we live in determines what morality is, and is therefore the moral authority?
   2. **Titus 1:12-13** – The morality of the Cretan society was to be rejected by Christians living in Crete.
   3. **Society is not the moral authority:**
      1. **Romans 12:2** – Christians are not to be conformed to the world around them.
      2. **Matthew 7:13-14** – The way the majority (or society) goes is the wide way which leads to destruction.
10. Nature
    1. Mankind is merely another facet of this natural world. Therefore, if it is in nature, it is moral for man to do the same?
    2. **2 Peter 2:12-14** – The false teachers Peter dealt with lived like “natural brute beasts.”
    3. Idea:
       1. Man is no different than the animal world, therefore, those things which occur in the animal world make up the moral authority/standard.
       2. Monogamy – not in the animal world, so open marriages and premarital serial fornication is moral?
       3. Heterosexuality – animals are found practicing homosexual acts, therefore heterosexuality is not the moral standard? (**cf. Romans 1:26-27** – not natural – even in the animal world – animals just have no restraint)
    4. **Nature is not the moral authority:**
       1. **Genesis 1:26** – man is made in the image of God. Not animals.
       2. **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14** – Man is governed by a moral standard which animals are not subject to.
11. The Moral Authority
12. Christ
    1. Christ was given ALL authority – **Matthew 28:18**
       1. This does not just mean authority over everybody everywhere, but authority in ALL MATTERS.
       2. **Cf. Colossians 3:17** – “Whatever” is all encompassing.
       3. **Cf. 2 Corinthians 10:5b** – all our thoughts are to be captive to the obedience of Christ.
13. The Apostolic Doctrine
    1. Christ’s delegated authority – Christ sent His apostles into the world to bear witness of Him, and to proclaim His word – **John 15:26-27; 16:12-15** – With the help of the HS, they would know, and speak Christ’s will, which is the Father’s will.
       1. The writing of the apostles is the commandment of Jesus – **1 Corinthians 14:37**
       2. They proclaimed the whole counsel of God – **Acts 20:27**
       3. The 1st Century Christians continued in their teaching for guidance in spiritual truth, including matters of morality – **Acts 2:42**
    2. For answers to questions pertaining to morality, WE MUST turn to the NT as the Moral Authority. This is the standard of morality we are to submit to if we wish to see heaven.
       1. Abstinence from sexual immorality – **1 Thessalonians 4:1-8**:
          1. **(vv. 1-2)** – Commandments from the Lord.
          2. **(v. 3)** – Abstinence from sexual immorality.
          3. **(vv. 4-5)** – Controlling yourself, not giving yourself over to lust like the rest of the world.
          4. **(v. 7)** – We are called to holiness.
          5. **(v. 8)** – To reject such is to reject God.
       2. Don’t walk like the Gentiles – **Ephesians 4:17-24**:
          1. **(vv. 17-19)** – “in the Lord” Paul testifies not to act like the world any longer – the Gentiles.
          2. **(vv. 20-21)** – You have not learned such conduct from Christ.
             1. Note: learned, heard, taught.
             2. This was through the apostles – **cf. Ephesians 3:3-4**
          3. **(vv. 22-24)** – Put off the former conduct – immorality – renewed mind in the gospel, and put on the new holy man.
       3. **If we appeal to this, THE moral standard, we have the answers to questions concerning:**
          1. Modest dress and behavior (dancing, dating, etc.).
          2. Alcohol consumption (social drinking).
          3. Gambling.
          4. Etc.

**Conclusion**

1. Christians must be careful to always appeal to THE Moral Authority – Christ Jesus.
2. It does not matter what direction the world turns. Our standard of living is found in Christ.
3. Imitate Paul **(cf. 1 Corinthians 11:1) – cf. Galatians 2:20**