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The church as an instrument of God's voice on issues of morality in the light of the changing times

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I would like to preface my presentation by saying: "I hope to stimulate a conversation rather than propose a final statement on the issue".

I would also like to stipulate I believe that just as God does not change, the foundational moral values He has given do not change. However, the changing times give us the responsibility to seek His discernment on present issues and challenges. That being said...

We live in an era where most things that were considered foundational are now considered relative. Truth, morality and ethics are now viewed through the eyes of changing times, circumstance and the public good or harm. These categories cover the values which we live our lives both personal and public.

1. How then do we as the Church respond to changing times, moral absolutes, ethical requisites in a world that is multi-cultural, multi-religious and at the same time individualistic and agnostic? How do we stay true in a world where truth has become relative?

A. We first start with a definition. According to the Oxford dictionary **Morality is: "Principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behaviour."**

Every society has chosen principles, which guide or govern their behavior and actions. This then gives ground to laws that they follow in their homes and in civil society. The laws then punish what is considered wrong.

However, in many western societies the concept of what is right or wrong has been rendered relative to personal beliefs and values. This gives rise to children being taught to find their own way.

B. The Church must address these issues

"Jesus taught rules, commands, and morals as central to being one of his followers. One only has to read any of the gospels to see Jesus taught a lot about what is right and what is wrong. He taught of our need to love others and God, our need to forgive others, our need to be holy. He made moral statements like this, "If you love me you will keep my commands" (John 14.15). Teaching obedience to the commands of Christ is also commanded to the Church by Christ in Matthew 28.18-20, "And Jesus came and said to

them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.** And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Jesus has commanded us specifically to teach others to obey **everything** he has commanded. This is a command to teach his rules and the moral code he taught. In order for the church to be faithful, it must teach these things."---Rev. Levi Secord, Riverview Baptist church, St. Paul, MN

2. What is our Foundation?

A. Scriptural Standards

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:

Fear God and keep His commandments,
For this is man's all.
For God will bring every work into judgment,
Including every secret thing, whether good or evil."(*The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ec 12:13–14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.)

"Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the King."(*The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Pe 2:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.)

"It is actually reported *that there is* sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! ²And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. ³For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. ⁴In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁵deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

⁶Your glorying *is* not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. ⁸Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.

Immorality Must Be Judged

⁹I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. ¹⁰Yet *I* certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.

¹²For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? ¹³But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "*put away from yourselves the evil person.*" (*The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Co 5:1–13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.)

"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil;
Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness;

Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"(The New King James Version. (1982). (Is 5:20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.)

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹²teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, ¹³looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.

¹⁵Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you." (The New King James Version. (1982). Titus 2:11-15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson)

B. The Ten Commandments as Foundation

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (DECALOGUE) Ex 20:2-17; Deut 5:6-21

I am the Lord your God, you shall not have strange gods before me.
God, as our creator, wants us to love him above all else.
You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
God's name and all things dedicated to him should not be misused or treated lightly.
Remember to keep holy the Lord's day.

God wants us to dedicate specific periods of time to him since worship is of the greatest importance.

Honour your father and your mother.
The family is the basis of society. Respect and obedience is due to parents and other lawful authorities.

You shall not kill
To destroy or harm human life, made in God's image, is a rejection of God's gift, the person and society.

You shall not commit adultery.
Marriage is the only legitimate context for sexual acts. Adultery violates this sacred bond and destabilises families.

You shall not steal.
Personal property is needed for human well-being. Stealing is an attack on personal and civic life.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
To lie or attack a person's reputation is an attack on human dignity. It is an injustice in itself and leads to further wrongs.

You shall not covet your neighbour's wife.
To desire what is evil is itself evil. Impure thoughts corrupt our minds and can lead to immoral actions.

You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.
God wants us to make full use of the gifts he has given us, not to crave possession of the gifts of others instead.(Catholicfaith.org.uk)

C. The Commandments form the foundation for the following categories:

Spiritual

Physical

Ethical

3. Letter vs. Spirit

"But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter." (*The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 7:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.)

4. Jesus Model

"For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." (*The New King James Version*. (1982). (John 13:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson)

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:" (*The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Pe 2:21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.)

"But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. ³ Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, ⁴ they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. ⁵ Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" ⁶ This they said, testing Him, that they might have *something* of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with *His* finger, as though He did not hear.

⁷ So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." ⁸ And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ Then those who heard *it*, being convicted by *their* conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest *even* to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. ¹⁰ When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

¹¹ She said, "No one, Lord."

And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." (*The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 8:1-11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.)

As we see, God has set forth in scripture and modeled through Jesus Christ our Lord a blue print for morality. If we believe that God does not change and His word does not change but endures, we must also embrace and teach His moral foundations. In the same breath however, we must view and address the issues in light of grace and the spirit of love. As we see these qualities merge in Christ let them also be manifest in the Church.