God’s Absolute Standards

What is right?

Most humans ask the question, “What is right?” There are many answers people give to this question, but there is only one correct answer: Things are right only when they conform to God’s nature and character. God Himself is the final absolute standard or measuring stick of rightness.

Because God is perfectly right in nature and character, what He defines as right could not help but be right. So what He defines as right is right and what He defines as wrong is wrong. God has revealed what is right and wrong in His written Word. ¹

God’s Word is right

Psalm 33:4 shows God’s Word is right in His eyes: “For the word of the Lord is right…”

2 Timothy 3:16 records God’s written Word instructs us in righteousness or in what is right: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” The Bible truthfully records the errors in teaching, practice and morals of many different individuals and groups. But this does not mean the Bible itself teaches and supports any errors.

Job 42:7-8 records God was very displeased when certain people spoke of Him in terms that were not right. This is why right teaching about God is very important.

Things right in God’s eyes

One key Hebrew word used throughout the Old Testament is the word “yashar” meaning “1. straight, stretched out (opposite of crooked and bent) 2. level (path) 3. right, correct (thing) 4. right, fitting person 5. just, righteous 6. what is right” ² “Yashar” is used many times throughout the Old Testament in expressions such as “right in God’s eyes” or “right in the sight of the Lord”. ³ These phrases emphasise right and wrong is defined by how God defines it.

Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25 both emphasise there are ways of living that seem right to humans, but the final result will be death. Proverbs 14:12 warns: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” But Hosea 14:9 says all God’s ways are right.

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¹ Sadly many humans question God’s treatment of themselves, just as Job did. But in Job 40:2 and 7-8, God emphasises that created humans are not really in a justifiable position to judge whether He is perfectly right or just in all His thoughts, feelings and actions.
² Holladay, page 148.
God’s absolute commands and absolute exceptions

About many issues, God has *absolute* standards of right and wrong. These absolute standards are found in His absolute commands and His absolute exceptions to some of His commands. These exceptions relate to circumstances in which He commands or says He permits humans to do something which is contrary to one or more of His commands.

In relation to God’s commands, the word “absolute” has a number of meanings. It can refer to:

(i) something which has no exceptions and which applies to all of human history. Examples of this are God’s command to multiply and fill the earth and His commands against homosexuality and eating uncooked meat with blood in it. In Genesis 1:28, God commanded Adam, Eve and their future descendants to multiply and fill the Earth. God repeated this same command later under the Noahic Covenant (see Genesis 9:1).
Food poisoning, the spread of dangerous infectious diseases and death can result from eating uncooked or partially cooked chicken, fish or other meat with blood remaining in it. In ancient times, many pagan groups used to eat uncooked or partially cooked meat or drink blood. For example, the favourite drink of the Spartans contained animal blood.

(ii) something which has no exceptions to it but applies only to a certain time period or covenant of God. An example of this is God’s command in Leviticus 25:12 that a wife, who grabbed the genitals of a man who was fighting with her husband, would be punished by having her hand cut off. This command did not apply before and does not apply after the Mosaic Covenant period. A second example is God’s command in Leviticus 21:9 that if a daughter of a Levitical priest committed sexual immorality, she had to be burnt to death. This command only applied under the Mosaic Covenant.

(iii) something which has God-ordained absolute exceptions to it but does not permit any man-made exceptions to it. An example of this is God’s command against murder found in Genesis 9:5-7 and Exodus 20:13. Note Genesis 9:5-7 and Deuteronomy 13:10, 17:5, 21:21 and 22:24 record that under the Noahic and Mosaic Covenants, God made capital punishment as an absolute exception to His command against murder. But God does not accept the killing of deformed infants at birth or gladiator fighting as approved exceptions to His commands against murder.
All of God’s absolute commands and exceptions are recorded in His written Word.

Changes of commands under God’s various covenants

God gave absolute commands under the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic and New Covenants, but not under the Davidic Covenant. Some of God’s commands are absolute under all God’s covenants, while others are absolute only under one or some of His covenants.
Under the Abrahamic, Mosaic and New Covenants, God commanded that humans under these covenants walk blameless or in integrity before Him (see Genesis 17:1, Deuteronomy 18:13 and Philippians 2:14-15). Under both the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, God commanded that all boys be circumcised (see Genesis 17:1-14 and Leviticus 12:3). But under the New Covenant, God does not command believers to be circumcised (see Galatians 5:2-6).

Under the Noahic Covenant, God commanded that all humans could eat any animal, bird or fish (see Genesis 9:2-3). This included pigs and some other animals and birds which under the Mosaic Covenant in Leviticus 11:1-47, God commanded the Israelites not to eat. Under the New Covenant, God revealed that New Covenant believers did not have to obey the Mosaic Covenant commands about not eating certain animals, birds and fish (see Acts 10:9-16, Colossians 2:16 and Hebrews 9:6-12).

Many of God’s commands apply under more than just one of His covenants. For example, nine of the Ten Commandments from the Mosaic Covenant are repeated in the New Testament as applying to New Covenant believers. These nine commands are about worshiping only one God, not making or worshipping images, not taking the Name of the Lord in vain, honouring your father and mother, not committing murder and adultery, not stealing, not bearing false witness and not coveting.

The Sabbath command is the only one of the Ten Commandments not recorded in the New Testament as applying to New Covenant believers.


Some of God’s absolute commands under the Old Mosaic Covenant do not apply to believers under the New Covenant. Examples of these are the Mosaic commands about the Sabbath, dowries for brides, the Tabernacle, animal sacrifices, grain offerings, the High Priest, the Levitical Priesthood, not eating foods like oysters, prawns, crabs, mussels, ham and pork, men not clipping their beards nor cutting the sides of their hair, the stoning to death of rebellious sons, the celebration of the annual feasts of Israel, the Year of Jubilee and not wearing clothes with mixed fabrics (see Exodus 20:8-11, 22:16-17, 35:4-39:43, Leviticus 1:1-9:24, 11:1-47, 19:27, 21:18-23, 23:1-44, 25:8-17 and Deuteronomy 22:11).

Colossians 3:16-17, Acts 10:9-16 and Hebrews 8:1-10:18 reveal all the other abovementioned Mosaic Covenant commands do not apply to believers under the New Covenant. Over the centuries, many Christians have wrongly believed God commanded them to obey some or all of the above Mosaic Covenant commandments.

**God’s absolute commands on human hearts and consciences**

Romans 2:15 records God also reveals His absolute commands to humans through their hearts and consciences: “who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their
conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.”

The Bible does not say whether the Law on human hearts and consciences is God’s two love commands and/or the Ten Commandments and/or some other commands recorded in the Bible. But whatever the case, Romans 2:15 shows that God has revealed some of His absolute commands to:

(i) humans living prior to the time God first gave the Mosaic Covenant to the Israelites. Genesis 26:5 records what Abraham did: “because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.” Abraham obeyed God’s absolute commands prior to the Word of God being written. We do not know whether Abraham knew these commands through his conscience and/or by the revelations of the Holy Spirit.

(ii) all believers and unbelievers among Israelites and non-Israelites living during the times of the Mosaic and New Covenants.

About some issues, God has no absolute commands

In Romans 14:1-12, Paul reveals that God does not have absolute commands about some issues. For example, in His written Word, God does not teach believers in different countries to have exactly the same types of foods, clothes and houses.

God’s absolute exceptions

Note also that some of God’s absolute exceptions to His commands changed from the Mosaic to New Covenants. For example, in God’s commands about marriage under the Mosaic Covenant, He permitted Israelite men to marry two wives, have slave second-class wives called concubines and to be divorced more easily than under the New Covenant (see Exodus 21:7-11, Leviticus 19:20, 21:15, 24:1-4 and Matthew 19:3-9).

Under the New Covenant, God does not permit believers to have two wives nor have concubines. Matthew 19:3-9, 1 Corinthians 7:2-16, 9:5, Ephesians 5:28-33, 1 Timothy 3:2, 3:12 and Titus 1:6 all refer to New Covenant believing men having one wife each.

The dreadful sins of adding or subtracting from God’s Word

In Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32, Proverbs 30:5-6 and Revelation 22:18, God gives strong warnings about two serious sins. These are the sins of:

1. adding to God’s written Words and commands
2. taking or subtracting from God’s written Words and commands.

In Deuteronomy 4:2, God commands: “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.”
In this verse, God emphasised that the only way we can assure we obey God’s commands exactly as He intended is we never add any man-made laws to His commands and we never make any man-made exceptions to His commands.

In Deuteronomy 12:32, God stated: “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.” Here God shows that the way to carefully observe what He has commanded us is to not add or take away from His commandments in even the slightest way.

Proverbs 30:5-6 declares that if we add man-made commands and teachings to His Word, He will one day rebuke us very strongly: “Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He reprove you, and you be found a liar.”

Over the centuries, many Christians have sinned greatly by adding man-made commands and teachings to God’s Word. In recent years, many liberal Protestant, Evangelical, Charismatic and Pentecostal churches have sinned severely by subtracting from God’s Word by opposing some of the teachings of the Bible and/or making their own man-made exceptions to God’s commands for New Covenant believers and/or claiming that some parts of the New Testament about homosexuality, women and other issues are not God’s Word but only reflect ancient Jewish or Roman culture.

A New Testament warning

In Revelation 22:18-19, God warned: “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

God warns that He would punish those who added or subtracted from the Book of Revelation. These verses are another confirmation of what an extremely serious sin God regards adding to or subtracting from the commands and teachings of His Word.

Noble goals which are not right

1 Chronicles 13:1-12 demonstrates God’s people can have noble aims, but unless what they are doing is right according to His revealed Word, disaster can end up resulting. These verses refer to King David’s fine aim of bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. Verse 4 reveals that in response to David’s request, the rest of God’s people decided it was right in their eyes to bring the Ark to Jerusalem: “Then all the congregation said they would do so, for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people.”

Verses 7-8 show David and the people of the Lord celebrated with all their might before the Lord in praise and thanksgiving: “So they carried the ark of God on a new cart from the house of Abinadab, and Uzza and Ahio drove the cart. Then David and all Israel played music before God with all their might, with singing, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on cymbals, and with trumpets.” They had an equivalent of a modern praise, worship and music convention. Everyone participated with great motivation and emotion.

They probably thought they were having a national revival with the Holy Spirit “falling”. But note verses 9-10 show instead of great revival, judgement fell on one of these
zealous praisers: “And when they came to Chidon’s threshing floor, Uzza put out his hand to hold the ark, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzza, and He struck him because he put his hand to the ark; and he died there before God.”

Uzza died because he disobeyed the revealed will of God under the Mosaic Covenant found in His written Word. Numbers 4:15 commanded that only those Levites who were descended from Kohath, Levi’s son and who had sanctified themselves, could carry God’s Ark. 1 Chronicles 15:1-28 and 16:14-42 show David later successfully had the Ark brought into Jerusalem in the exact right ways God had commanded in His Scriptures. The Israelites also shouted and played music to the Lord, David whirled before the Lord. But this time, their praise, worship and music was accompanied by obedience to the written Word of God.

All humans think they are right

Proverbs 21:2 shows humans generally tend to think their ways are always right but God is the final judge of whether their actions are right: “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts.”

As Proverbs 12:15 shows, humans who are fools in God’s eyes imagine wrongly that their behaviour is right: “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes…”

Outward denial but indirect admission

Modern humanistic Western society proudly will not openly admit the tendency in human nature to think and do wrong. But many of their practices indirectly admit this leaning towards wrong in humans. For example, a promise is not enough. Instead, we need a contract to force others to be honest. Laws are not enough. We need thousands of police and various punishments to enforce them. The payment of fares is not sufficient. Instead, tickets have to be given, inspected and collected.

Old Testament Judeans opposing what God’s prophets said was right

Isaiah 30:10 refers to the people of Judah demanding God’s prophets to stop telling them what was absolutely right in His eyes. In Hebrew, the word “right” in this verse is “nakoah” which means “straight, right, straightness”. The Jews wanted to hear only prophecies of success, abundance, prosperity and miracles, even though they were refusing to turn from their sins.

Isaiah 30:10-11 records: “Who say to the seers, ‘You must not see visions’; and to the prophets, ‘You must not prophecy to us what is right, speak to us pleasant words, prophecy illusions. Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy

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4 Proverbs 16:2 says similar things. It is crucial that God’s New Testament commands and/or Ten Commandments be preached to unbelievers so they can see they have done evil in His sight, are unrighteous and are under a sentence of condemnation to eternal punishment according to His just judgements and therefore need a Saviour – Jesus Christ (see Romans 3:20, 7:7, 7:13, Galatians 3:24 and 1 Timothy 1:8-10). One of the reasons so much modern evangelism is ineffective is because it does not tackle the problem stated in Proverbs 16:2 and 21:2. As a result, many unbelievers never feel convicted of sin, guilt and eternal condemnation and therefore feel no need of a Saviour.

5 Brown, Driver and Briggs, page 647.
One of Israel.’” These people did not want preaching that confronted them with God’s perfect holiness and with the importance of aiming to live a right life by His grace.

No absolutes in Sodom

The Bible records the tragic results when people totally abandon God’s absolute moral standards. Genesis 19:4-9 reveals all the men of Sodom and Gomorrah desired to rape Lot’s two visitors. After Lot rebuked them, these intended rapists responded in the same way many people in modern Western countries do. They condemned Lot for judging their intended actions as wrong.

The Sodomites believed there were no absolute rights and wrongs about rape and homosexuality. The Sodomites sounded so self-righteous in their lecturing of Lot for him daring to judge the rightness or wrongness of their intended rape. They were not going to put up with any “discrimination” from Lot.

Genesis 19:9 shows every young and old Sodomite male threatened to do great physical harm to Lot for saying their proposed actions were wrong and for daring to try to deter them. The majorities in many countries today are moving step-by-step in the same direction of having no absolute morals but punishing those who aim to obey God’s absolute standards.

Emphasis on right and wrong in the New Testament

Acts 4:19, 8:21, Ephesians 6:1 and Colossians 4:1 emphasise the importance of right and wrong under the New Covenant. Acts 4:19 refers to something being “right in the sight of God”.

Ephesians 6:1 says: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” This verse speaks of it being “right” for young children to obey their parents. The only God-ordained exception to this would be if a parent commanded his or her child to do wicked things contrary to the Bible’s teachings. The Bible teaches that our submission to God comes before our submission to God-ordained human authorities (see Exodus 1:15-21, 1 Kings 22:13-14, Daniel 3:1-30, 6:1-28, Acts 4:13-20 and 5:27-32).

The New Testament emphasis on God-defined absolute rights and wrongs is also seen in His usage of the Greek words “adikia” and “adikeo”. “Adikia” means “injustice, wrong, iniquity” and is translated “unrighteousness” or “iniquity”. God defines “adikia” or “unrighteousness” as whatever is contrary to His absolutely right nature and character.

1 John 5:17 shows God describes sin as being everything wrong in His eyes: “All unrighteousness is sin…” Romans 1:18 reveals God is angry with every wrong in the lives of unrepentant unbelievers: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” Romans 2:8 speaks similarly.

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6 Perschbacher, page 7.
7 The word “adikia” or forms of it are used in Romans 1:18, 1:29, 2:8, 6:13, 2 Thessalonians 2:10, 2:12, Hebrews 8:12, 2 Peter 2:13, 2:15, 1 John 1:9, 5:17 and in a few other verses.
In the original Greek New Testament, the word “adikeo” means “do wrong, be in the wrong, do wrong to someone, treat someone unjustly”. Colossians 3:25 reveals God will in future judge by His absolute standards of right and wrong: “But he who does wrong will be repaid for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.”

Hebrews 12:13 states: “And make straight paths for your feet…” In the original Greek, the expression “make straight paths for your feet” means figuratively “to live or behave in strict conformance to a predetermined model for behaviour”. God has predetermined absolute right and wrong standards for the behaviour of New Covenant believers.

Because as New Covenant believers, they are not under the Mosaic Covenant and Law, some think God has no absolute standards for their behaviour. How deceived they are!

**The foolish modern philosophy**

Many modern Western intellectuals say, “I am certain there are no absolute rights and wrongs.” But in what a foolish contradiction they believe! They are really saying, “It is absolutely right that there is nothing absolutely right”.

**Tragic decline and backsliding**

One of the tragedies of recent years has been the spread of non-Christian views of absolute truth and absolute moral rights and wrongs among many of those claiming to be born-again Christians in the United States.

In his research, pollster George Barna found 52% of American Evangelical Christians in 1991 and 62% in 1995 said there is no such thing as absolute truth. In 1998, Barna found 66% of American so-called “born-again” Christians said there is no such thing as absolute moral truth. They did not believe there are any absolute rights and wrongs.

It is little wonder that in the United States, many who preach watered-down versions of the Gospel and teach mixtures of worldly situational and godly Biblical ethics, can lead large congregations and have well-supported television ministries. These preachers are supported by thousands or even millions of so-called “born-again” Christians whose attitudes to Biblical moral absolutes are in opposition to God and His written Word.

**Bible Study Questions**

1. Who is the absolute standard of right and wrong?
2. What is our source of knowing God’s absolute standards of right and wrong?
3. Discuss what the phrases “God’s absolute commands” and “God’s exceptions” mean.
4. What does 1 Chronicles 13:1-12 demonstrate to us about some noble human aims?
5. Which New Testament verses reveal God teaches many absolute rights and wrongs?

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8 Forms of the word “adikeo” are used in Acts 7:24, 25:10, 1 Corinthians 6:7, 6:8, 2 Corinthians 7:2, 7:12 (twice), Colossians 3:25 and Philemon 18.
9 Bauer, page 17.
10 Louw and Nida, page 507.