

Mere Christianity

Session 5.2

1. The Law of Human Nature (Chapter 1)

- a. By simple observation we witness appeals to a moral standard heard in everyday conversation by people of all walks of life and in every age group or education level.
 - i. "How would you like it if someone did the same thing to you?"
 - ii. "That's my seat, I was there first!"
 - iii. "Give me a bit of your orange, I gave you a bit of mine."
 - iv. "Come on, you promised."
- b. These statements are not an appeal to have someone yield to the speaker's **personal preferences**, but rather are an appeal for the other person to observe a **real standard** that both people already know about.
- c. Seldom do we hear a response from the other party such as, "To hell with your standards!"
- d. Instead, the objecting party typically responds with a reason why the agreed-upon standard should not apply to him in this situation.
 - i. "If you only knew what kind of day I had."
 - ii. "Possession is nine tenths of the law."
- e. In nearly all cases both parties seem to acknowledge the existence of a real moral standard.
- f. The debate is actually over how to properly **apply** the same objective standard.
- g. Quarrelling occurs when one party appeals to the other party's obligation to a real moral standard which must be observed.
- h. Just as all bodies are governed by physical laws such as gravity (which they can't disobey), we find that human beings are also governed by a real moral law, even if they choose to disobey it.

2. All human beings in all cultures and at all times know the moral law.

- a. Differences in understanding or application are minor and do not disprove the existence of the moral law.
- b. Is there any culture where a soldier running away in battle to leave others to fight in his place is considered an honorable action?
- c. Is there a culture that celebrates a man who regularly cheats and injures the very people who were kindest to him?
- d. Is there a culture where selfishness is admired and encouraged by others?
- e. A person or a nation may claim that honoring agreements is not a moral requirement, but they nearly always demand that you honor your agreement to them even if they would like to break an agreement with you.

3. There is a real, objective moral law (right and wrong) even if people are mistaken about them.

- a. Just as people sometimes get the wrong answer in mathematics, the fact that people misapply the moral law does not prove its nonexistence.
- b. The true and correct answer does not change in either case.
- c. People make excuses for bad behavior, but they rarely discard moral standards altogether, especially when they want others to obey them to their own benefit.
- d. Humans only offer excuses for their bad behavior which do not match an objective standard.

- e. No human offers an excuse for properly complying with the moral standards (“I apologize for not stealing your wallet when I had the chance.”).

4. Chapter 1 conclusion:

- a. First, human beings all over the earth have a curious idea that they *ought* to behave in a certain way, and they really cannot get rid of this idea.
- b. Second, human beings do not in fact behave in the way that they ought to and *know* that they have broken an objective moral law.

5. Chapter 2: Objections.

- a. Moral law versus instinct.
- b. There is a difference between having an instinctual impulse and a feeling that it would be right, good, or moral to take some action.
- c. When instincts compete with or contradict one another, we need something else, something higher, to determine which action we ought to take.
 - i. Herd instinct activates when a cry for help is heard.
 - ii. Self-preservation also activates when offering help would put us in danger.
 - iii. These opposing instincts need an objective arbiter that judges between the two instincts to determine which course of action should be followed.
 - iv. The moral law provides the solution (even if we fail to obey it). Helping another person is what we ought to do even if it involves risk of injury, death, or lawsuit.
 - v. The moral law is compared to the sheet of music that instructs a musician which notes to play on a piano; instincts are merely the keys available on the piano by analogy.
- d. The moral law cannot be merely an instinct for it instructs us on which of the competing instincts to follow based on a higher moral standard.
- e. No instinct is inherently good or inherently bad. They just are.
- f. Often these human instincts require encouragement to work properly when a competing instinct would suppress taking action.
- g. Alternatively, at certain times humans must suppress an instinct when following the instinct would be immoral.
 - i. Love
 - ii. Patriotism
 - iii. Fighting
 - iv. Sex
- h. The moral law is like an orchestral conductor that promotes or repressed instincts so that they are only followed when it is good, proper, and moral to do so.
- i. The most dangerous thing we can do is to setup one impulse as the one to follow at all costs.
- j. For example, an overemphasis on love of humanity may lead to breaking agreements or faking evidence at trials. Such actions could result in cruelty and treachery in the name of love.

6. The moral law is not just a social convention instilled on children by adults.

- a. The multiplication table (mathematics) is true whether a person is taught it or not.
- b. The multiplication table could not be different simply because people do not like it.
- c. The moral law is not the same as a nation deciding which side of the road cars should drive on.
- d. The moment we say that one set of moral standards is better than another set found in society or history, then we are acknowledging that there is a real standard of morality that one nation or society more nearly matches than others by comparison.

- e. The standard that measures the moral standards of a culture or religious system must be the real or true standard that all systems are partially conforming to.
- f. For example, New York is a real place with objectively measurable qualities that may or may not match whatever someone thinks about New York personally.
- g. Witch trials example.
 - i. The morality is the same even if beliefs have changed over time.
 - ii. Putting people to death who you genuinely believe are killing or tormenting people though witchcraft is not immoral.
 - iii. Not putting witches to death when you know they have no power to kill or torment is certainly not a change in moral standards. Rather, it merely recognizes facts about witches that may not have been understood in time past.

7. The moral law is not simply concerned with what a man does, but also with what he ought to do.

- a. Moral laws or standards only apply to man, no other object or life form has this same naturally occurring requirement.
 - i. No one expects rocks to behave differently than what they do, even if a specific rock is not particularly useful for an intended purpose.
 - ii. Electrons and molecules have certain properties and behaviors, but they are not constrained by not doing what they “ought” to do.
- b. Mankind uniquely behaves differently from all other objects. We seem to know what we ought to do and often make excuses when we fail to do so.
- c. Unwanted human behaviors are not just a matter of convenience or preference.
 - i. A man occupying a favorite seat on a train because he arrived first is inconvenient.
 - ii. A man who moved your bag when your back was turned so as to sit in your favorite seat is not just an inconvenience, he has committed a moral offense against you.
 - iii. We rightly blame the second man for moving our bag to sit in the seat we occupied; the first man is just as inconvenient, but he is not to be blamed for a moral transgression.
 - iv. A person who accidentally trips us is not guilty of violating the moral law; a person who tries to trip us is guilty of a moral breach even if a trip/fall did not occur.
- d. Obeying the Moral Law often costs us more than not obeying it.
 - i. Not cheating on schoolwork when it would be easy to do so and get a better grade.
 - ii. Not pursuing every sexual impulse no matter how strongly the urge may be.
 - iii. Keeping promises you would prefer to break.
 - iv. Telling the truth even when it makes you look foolish.

8. Chapter 4: What lies behind the moral law?

- a. “The Law of Human Nature, or of Right and Wrong, must be something above and beyond the actual facts of human behavior.”
- b. There is a real moral law which man did not invent but men know they ought to obey.
- c. Science, while useful, cannot answer all questions.
 - i. Why is there a universe?
 - ii. Why does the universe keep going on in the manner that it does?
 - iii. Why is there a Moral Law that all humans know about?
 - iv. The one thing in the universe that we have the capacity for the greatest insight into is man. We are humans and this gives us an “insider” view unlike anything else we can observe.

- v. Unless the Power behind the universe reveals itself, mere observations and scientific endeavors will never tell us anything about the Power behind the Moral Law.
- vi. The Power that created the universe could not be contained in or by the universe, just as a builder or an architect could not act as a door or wall of a house he built.
- vii. If this Power wanted to communicate His existence to us, He would have to put something inside us that reveals His presence and His will to us.
- viii. When we look at ourselves, this is exactly what we find – a presence of a real Moral Law that could not have come about by human will or reasoning.
- ix. When we examine ourselves personally, we find an actual Moral Law at work within us that prompts us to behave in a certain way.
- x. The Moral Law operating within us is often contrary to our own will and desires.
- xi. The Power behind the Moral Law seems to be directing the whole universe and yet operates inside of every human urging us to do right.
- xii. The same Power makes us feel uncomfortable and responsible for disregarding these moral standards.
- xiii. This Power would seem to be like a mind with a will and preferences regulating human behavior.
- xiv. It seems absurd to think that matter – atoms and molecules – could ever have a moral preference that could influence human behaviors the way the Moral Law does.

9. Chapter 5: We have cause to be uneasy.

- a. It seems time to admit (both 70 years ago as well as now), that society has chosen the wrong path by rejecting God and the Moral Law.
- b. There seems to be no valid substitute for the Moral Law governing our collective actions.
- c. When a person doing math realizes that a mistake has been made, it would be unreasonable to keep going with the false hope of getting the right answer in the end.
- d. Instead, the most reasonable thing to do is to go back to the start to avoid making the same mistake again.
- e. There is nothing progressive or noble about refusing to admit that a mistake has been made regarding attempts to reject or disobey the Moral Law.
- f. The text thus far has not gone so far as to endorse any religion, much less the God of the Bible and Christianity.
- g. Information we have about this Power behind the universe and the Moral Law.
 - i. The universe has both incredible beauty and design, but it also seems dangerous. Thus, attempting to understand this Power from observing the universe is not likely to yield meaningful results.
 - ii. Because the Moral Law is undeniable, efforts to understand it may tell us much more about the Power than any attempts to discover information from the material universe.
- h. The Power appears to be intensely interested right conduct, fair play, unselfishness, courage, good faith actions, and truthfulness among all human beings.
- i. Because of the Moral Law we find in ourselves, we should be able to conclude that this Power is itself “good” and that it genuinely prefers good conduct over evil conduct.
- j. “Good” in this sense is not to be understood as indulgent or weak on moral offenses; the Moral Law this Power has given is hard as nails to the one who observes it.
- k. One part of us as human beings really agree with the standard the Power has set:
 - i. We are all naturally opposed to acts of greed and trickery being committed against us.
 - ii. We are all naturally opposed to being exploited by another person.

- iii. We are all naturally against being victims of acts of violence, murder, rape, child abuse.
- l. However, we also find in ourselves an innate desire for the Power to make an exception in our own case to let us off this time (though we may be far less willing if we are the victim).
- m. If the Power is objectively “good” and always prefers to have the Moral Law observed, then we might properly conclude that this Power hates most everything human beings do.
- n. This puts humanity in a terrible fix.
 - i. If the universe is not governed by a Power defined by absolute goodness, then all of our efforts to survive are hopeless. Total suppression of the Moral Law would collapse society.
 - ii. If the Power behind the Moral law does exist, then we are making ourselves His enemies every day by our disobedience to the Moral Law. This also seems hopeless (without understanding how we can be made right with the Power).
- o. Simply put, we cannot live without the Moral Law in operation. We should also be supremely terrified when we understand that this Power unquestionably disapproves of our conduct.
- p. “Goodness is either the great safety or the great danger – according to the way you react to it. And we have reacted the wrong way.”
- q. It is from this basic understanding of the Moral Law that Christianity begins to offer the answers to this great Moral Law dilemma.
 - i. It promotes repentance with the promise of forgiveness.
 - ii. Once we acknowledge that we have gone against the Moral Law – even just once – we understand that we are now natural enemies of the Moral Law Giver.
 - iii. Thankfully, He has offered mankind a means of forgiveness for our transgressions.
 - iv. Its only when we are sick that we will take the medical advice of a doctor. Those who do not know they are sick are not likely to accept painful and costly treatment.
 - v. Acknowledging that we have become God’s enemies by our immoral conduct is the first step towards being made right with Him.
- r. The solution of Christian doctrine.
 - i. God Himself became a man to save man from transgressions against the Moral Law.
 - ii. The God-Man, Jesus Christ, met the demands of the Moral Law on our behalf.
 - iii. In the long-run Christianity offers unspeakable comfort, but it begins in truly understanding the inescapable predicament that man has found himself in.
 - iv. If we seek comfort without truth, we will gain neither in the end. Wishful thinking will not result in comfort or the avoidance of the consequences of violating the Moral Law.