

Auntie's Attic

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Photo by Kathy Monnens

Dear Auntie,

I have been a church goer for many years and clearly learned right from wrong, but it seems to me that people don't know right from wrong these days, as if anything goes. How do I teach my children what is right?

Signed, Confused

Dear Confused:

I understand your frustration. It seems like many people seem confused distinguishing right from wrong. Most people instinctively want to do the right thing, but how do they know what is right. Right is defined in Webster's Dictionary as: *"speaking, acting, or judging in a way that agrees with the facts or truth."* So according to the definition then, if I want to try to do the right thing then I should focus on facts to know the truth in order to act in a righteous manner. So what is righteousness?

Righteousness is defined in Webster's Dictionary as: *"acting in a morally correct manner; correct by divine declaration. Acting in accord with divine or moral law; free from guilt or sin, morally right or justifiable decision."* Based on these definitions the source of the standard

of righteousness is the Divine. The Divine is God. Therefore, as I see it, God's moral law is the underpinning to righteousness and moral authority.

The word righteousness can be misunderstood because many people correlate the idea of righteousness to those who are self-righteous. But this correlation creates a negative connotation of righteousness. A self-righteous person believes that everything he or she does is done with right motives and therefore *assumes* authority based on this presumptuous belief. In contrast righteousness is living a life in truth. Moral authority is a by-product of righteous living.

The Bible states, *"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people."*¹ Jesus Christ is the perfect example of a righteous person and He exuded moral authority. Because Jesus lived a righteous life He spoke with authority and many people believed and followed Him.²

Just as Jesus Christ did, a righteous person will project moral authority because of his righteous lifestyle. It is not presumptuous. If I want to be right then I must live in the truth. But how do I know what is truth? Jesus Christ identified Himself as Truth.³ So if truth is the benchmark or standard by which to assess right from wrong then I need to follow the moral authority of Jesus Christ because He is Truth. I am reminded in 2 Timothy that the Bible is my handbook of truth and source upon which to make this assessment.

*"The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is **true** and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is right. It is God's way of making us well prepared at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone."* (2 Timothy 3:16-17, *The Living Bible*)

In order to do the right thing I am responsible to know what the Bible teaches so that I am equipped to do good. The Bible reminds me that when I act in a morally correct manner God is glorified.⁴ If what I choose to do brings glory to God then I can be sure that I have done the right thing in that circumstance. Therefore, God's moral principles need to be the standard from which I choose to set my moral compass and if I live my life around truth then I will be on the path of righteousness.

I grew up learning that the United State of America, the country of my origin, was founded upon solid principles. Our country's founding documents provide that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are the moral basis by which we govern ourselves. These documents affirm that all people have an inherent right to liberty. To be realized it requires that people are good to one another. It requires righteousness. This system of government attracts people from all over the world.

Yet today I wonder if our nation's people have lost their way. The government seems to have shifted its purpose away from serving its citizenry to governing its citizenry, allowing voices of dissent, immorality, lawlessness and intervention to take foothold in attempts to re-define our country's standard of righteousness. Presently a minority are trying to deceive and bully the majority in an effort to redefine this country's cultural moral standards. There are those who wish to undermine America's founding principles by opposing its constitutional laws. They want to re-define what is good and right and presume that their standard is right.

I think however that, to your point, the majority can no longer remain complacent or apathetic. The Constitution as the guiding standard is effective only when righteous people adhere to its guiding principles which were built on the Biblical moral ethic of truth and justice.

Instead, people of honor need to remain steadfast and work together towards righteousness - when the collective function in a just manner, morality is restored. It is impossible however, for a group to be collectively righteous without each individual of the group being righteous. How is this attained?

May I use myself as one example. Jesus instructs me through His Word to be active in my efforts to pursue the path of righteousness so that I can stand up against deception. For a time in my life I lost sight of the significance of maintaining a historical perspective of the moral ethic of my country. Indeed we are not a perfect nation. Many mistakes have been made in the name of righteousness. Nonetheless, throughout history America's efforts to help other people and nations remain second to none; often being the first to render humanitarian aid during catastrophes. America has rebuilt nations after defeating them at war; granted continual financial aid to struggling countries in an effort to do what is morally righteous. Trying to do the right thing and serving others is in our country's fabric.

By these actions and many more I am reminded by what I have learned from history that America was built on a biblical moral ethic regardless of what the naysayers try to make me believe. This moral ethical standard is the one in which Jesus spoke of with such authority – arguably the same standard that became the foundation of principle that fostered the most creative, productive and just nation in history.

So if you want to teach your children what is right then may I suggest you use a platform of Truth. *Truth* motivates us to first humble ourselves and follow Jesus Christ's lead because righteousness and justice are the foundation of His teachings--allowing us to recognize dissenters and better discern their intentions.⁵ Jesus Christ as a man of love and truth is our example of true humility and servitude to others.

The Bible also encourages us that if we suffer for doing the right thing then we can have a positive impact and silence the talk of those who oppose righteousness.⁶ To accomplish this we embrace our responsibility to do the right thing. If I humble myself as Christ did for example, and encourage others to do likewise then I can influence the ethics of my nation and overwhelm the naysayers with right actions. If I dedicate myself to live by God's moral standard then I can be part of what is *right* in our culture. The task seems overwhelming as I am but one person without a voice. But if I do nothing then nothing happens. It starts with me the same way it starts with you.

The Bible teaches us to pursue truth and righteousness.⁷ To accomplish this we can rest in Jesus' promise that if we ask, seek, and knock He will be there for us and help us pursue these attributes in our lives.⁸ In my experience I have found that the best way to pursue a righteous life based in truth is to obey Jesus Christ's ultimate call to action: Love. Jesus said that I must love my neighbor as myself.⁹ Right actions then are those motivated by love: love demonstrated with everyone whom we meet.

The Bible teaches that God will judge all nations in righteousness and govern with justice:

"He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice. The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you." (Psalm 9:8-10)

If we seek justice than it is incumbent upon us to diligently try to do the right thing so that we may stand in truth at the time of judgment. If we hope to be a positive influence we must be bold and stand true to God's moral underpinnings. We must understand these principles as our own personal foundation in the same manner that history teaches about the principles that founded America. This is how I think we can establish righteousness for ourselves within a group.

I have learned that if I humble myself to live under divine standards then with love and integrity I will stand upon solid moral authority to influence my culture for good as a natural byproduct.

...certainly something to ponder...

¹ Proverbs 14:34: *"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people."*

² Mathew 7:28-29: *"When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."*

³ John 14:6: Jesus said: *"I am the way, the **truth** and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*
Jesus also said in Luke 21:33: *"And though all heaven and earth shall pass away, yet my words remain forever **true**."*

⁴ Psalm 23:3: *"...He restores my soul, He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake..."*

⁵ Psalm 89:14: *"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; mercy and truth go before your face."*

⁶ 1 Peter 2:20: *"For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men."*

⁷ Ephesians 6:14: *(The Living Bible) "But to do this, you will need the strong belt of truth and the breastplate of God's approval." (New King James Version) "Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness."*

⁸ Mathew 7:7: *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."*

⁹ Mathew 22:37-38: *"Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it; Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'"*