

## THE “AS LONG AS” PHILOSOPHY FOR MORAL CHOICES

As we come into 2018, I believe that the greatest challenge facing Americans today is to reclaim our moral compass based upon what God wants for our lives. Unless this country does a radical about-face now, without further delay, and turns back to God’s Word as the basis for making moral choices, our freedoms and our past way of life will become a thing of the past. And when I think about the dire state of affairs that exists all around us, I am reminded of a man who looked about at all of the things that were going on in the world around him. And he saw murder, senseless violence, child abuse, abortion, sexual immorality and a thousand other signs of the darkness that lie in the heart of humanity. And he knew that he had to make a choice. Would he cave in to the morality of the world around him, or would he follow a different source of morality—one that is certainly not of this world? Now this man could have just as easily lived in this country during our day—because the things that he saw going on around him were not really any different from the things that we see going on around us. But this man wasn’t from around here. He was not even from our time. In fact, the world that he gazed upon with all of its evil was a world that existed over 3,000 years ago. The world hasn’t changed much in the past 3,000 years. Solomon was truly correct when he said there is nothing new under the sun.<sup>1</sup> But this man wasn’t Solomon. This man came along well before Solomon—because this man was named Joshua. He was the same Joshua who accompanied Moses as they had approached the Promised Land and looked upon the debauchery that defined the Canaanite people. And he could begin to see that his own people, the Israelites, were on the verge of choosing the same kind of debauched lifestyle that was practiced all around them in the Canaanite world. So what would Joshua do when faced with the moral choices of his day?—the choice between following God’s Word and His moral imperatives, as opposed to the morality offered by this world?

Joshua didn’t beat around the bush. He didn’t vacillate one way then the other. He turned to the evil world around him and boldly cried out: “But if you refuse to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve . . . But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD.” Joshua 24:15 (NLT) Unless Americans today start voicing this same choice as Joshua, our country’s future will grow darker and darker until finally the light of morality will go completely out—and with it our entire social structure will collapse. As terrible as that may sound, it is absolutely the truth.

Yet, there are many today who will tell you that the choice that Joshua made could work 3,000 years ago, but it’s just not a viable choice today. They will contend that Joshua operated under moral principles that are no longer relevant in the year 2018. Rather, they’d claim that modern people are free to live under different principles than ancient people did way back then. The problem is that such

people lack any well-rounded sense of history and are quite ignorant of just how much they are like those same Canaanites and those faltering Israelites who chose a path of destruction—a path so very different from that of Joshua. And this raises some critical questions for us to consider. Specifically, how will you go about making your moral choices this year, and all the years to come for that matter? Will we stand by silently while a growing host of people argue that we live in a world that is so different from Joshua’s that the Bible is no longer relevant in the twenty-first century?

As Christians, we cannot afford to do that and still call ourselves followers of Jesus Christ. Rather, we must insist upon God’s Word as the basic framework for moral living in our society today. The compass for our morality is not provided in the Eastern religions, like Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism or Shintoism. And it surely is not found in the vague and hollow morality offered by what is loosely referred to as New Age Spiritualism. In fact, the lack of morality in America isn’t bound up an erroneous reliance upon any of these “religious” worldviews. People today are not so much guided by alternative religious or spiritual philosophies, as they are led by a very self-centered personal philosophy. It is a philosophy that is easy to state and it goes like this. They tend to articulate it this way: “I can make whatever moral choices that I want to as long as it does not hurt someone else.” You might call it the **“as long as” philosophy**. This “as long as” philosophy is rampant among our young people today—and seems to have been adopted by so very many older ones as well. It sounds so simple, so new and so refreshingly free. Yet, the reality is that it isn’t so simple; it’s not at all new—it’s been around since the time of Adam and Eve. And it certainly doesn’t produce any refreshing freedom into the lives of those who practice it. Rather, it is a philosophy that stifles and enslaves those who pursue it. In the end, it can bring only sadness and pain. Let me tell you why that is so.

If anyone tells you that they can do whatever they want to as long as it doesn’t hurt someone else, they are assuming two things. First, they assume that they have the moral capacity, independent of God, to decide what is hurtful. And second, they assume that personal choices that may be hurtful solely to the person making the choice (and not anyone else) are not immoral. The reality is that they are wrong on both points. As to the first point, they do not have any moral compass that is independent of God. Scripture tells us that it is God who instills a moral conscience in them in the first place.<sup>2</sup> And their “as long as” philosophy really provides no moral compass at all. It is not telling them how to make moral decisions. It’s only stating that there are obvious risks involved in making bad moral decisions. What their philosophy is really saying in truth is something like this: **“I can do anything I want to as long as what I do doesn’t explode in my face and hurt me or somebody else.”** The reality is that making bad

moral decisions always ends up exploding in your face or in the face of someone else. Bad moral decisions have consequences and those consequences are always harmful.

It reminds me of a very tragic boating accident that happened a few years ago along the Rappahannock River. A man who was at the helm of his 23-foot Chaparral bow rider pleasure boat was speeding along at a fairly brisk speed. One of the problems was that he was doing this not long after the sun had gone down and it had gotten dark. Yet his family members and friends, who were passengers on that boat, were all laughing and having a good time as they rushed through the cool night air. They had just departed from Charlie's Tiki Bar at Windmill Point where they had eaten dinner. Before leaving, they paid a \$388 tab that included 55 drinks spread among five adults. As they passed the Norris Bridge at Grey's Point, they had about a 30 minute boat ride back to their cottage near Belle Isle State Park in Lancaster County. As this man later admitted, he had apparently imbibed his fair share of those 55 drinks that were consumed back at the bar. But hey, he may well have thought, "There is nothing wrong with this 'as long as' it doesn't hurt someone else." You see, under the "as long as" philosophy, it's OK to cruise along in a boat at night on the Rappahannock River while the boat's captain is intoxicated as long as it doesn't hurt anyone. But, as I indicated earlier, this philosophy does not give any objective standard to measure the morality of committing such an act in the first place. The problem is that the conduct in question may not hurt someone the first time or the second or the third, but that doesn't have anything to do with whether or not that conduct is good or evil from a moral perspective. The fact that no one got hurt the first, second or third time when engaging in conduct such as this speaks only to matters of chance, not to morality. But what ***does*** it tell us when eventually someone gets hurt? Well, it clearly shows to us that it was never morally permissible to begin with.

Now I don't know whether this was the first, second, third or whatever time that this man piloted his boat in the dark while being intoxicated. But I do know that it was the last boat ride for one of his passengers. You see, there was a 25 year old school teacher from Henrico County named Amanda Brady that wouldn't be riding anymore boats. And the reason for that is that this man, in his intoxicated state, drove that boat into one of the steel channel markers that is permanently affixed to pylons that rise out of the river. Despite the fact that this channel marker's bright red light was pulsing in the darkness, somehow he just didn't see it. Apparently, the man hadn't explained his "as long as" philosophy to this channel marker because it didn't move out of the way. And when his boat hit this very stationary marker, Amanda Brady was killed and nine other passengers, including four children, were seriously injured. Months later, in February of 2011, he pled guilty to six felonies including manslaughter for operating a boat while intoxicated. During his sentencing, the Commonwealth's

Attorney made reference to previous episodes involving this man's "drinking and partying,"<sup>3</sup>—incidents that do not come as any surprise to me, in light of the fact that the cabin where all the drinking and partying had taken place is only about 200 yards of the one we visit from time to time near the little village of Lively, Virginia.

The point is that any kind of "as long as" philosophy provides no moral guidance to live by, except to say that you should keep doing whatever you want until you or somebody else gets hurt. Of course, those who are attracted by that kind of philosophy don't have a religious problem as much as they have a mental one. In addition to a pastor, they might consider seeing a psychiatrist without delay because they are surely a danger to themselves and all those around them. And we can see the tragedies that result from this horrible philosophy all around us. Maybe it's the man or woman whose affair outside of their marriage didn't hurt anyone ***as long as*** no one else found out. But, someone else did find out and it caused them and their spouse and children nothing but heartache and pain. Or how about the young person who became a parent without ever marrying a spouse—yet he or she never got down to the serious business of being a father or mother to their child. They never took the time to establish a real home to make a family. Like the man driving the boat through the darkness, they loved their partying lifestyle that brought them pleasure. They weren't hurting anyone—except that lonely child who yearned for a parent to guide them and to love them. And they weren't fooling anyone either—the children of such parents find out pretty quickly that their father or mother is not any more mature than they are. And then there is the individual who just loves to do their drugs—meth, crack, alcohol, whatever. Their "as long as" philosophy told them ***as long as*** it didn't hurt someone else their highs were all that mattered. I guess they couldn't see the tears of their concerned family members and friends through their stoned stupor.

And that's the problem—when people claim that they can do anything they want as long as it doesn't hurt someone else, I wonder if they ever take the time to consider how their actions ***do*** affect others.<sup>4</sup> Do they ever look beyond the immediacy of the moment to reflect upon the long term impacts of their moral choices? That fix of heroin today—how might it affect the birth of their child a year from now? Or what about the eyes of young children when they witness parents or older role models making such illicit moral choices—what example will they imitate?

And so what example do we have in all of this? Our example is Christ. And what example did He give us? Well in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus gave a very clear example. He, the Master, knelt down and washed His disciples' feet. He ***served*** them. And then Jesus told them: <sup>14</sup> **"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet."** <sup>15</sup> **I have set**

you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” John 13:14-15 (NIV) We cannot serve one another by hurting one another—and that is all any “as long as” philosophy can do.

Nevertheless, as long as the world has existed, the world has been content to cling to its “as long as” philosophy—and all of the moral choices it entails. This philosophy treats the world as if it is one’s personal playground. But the world isn’t a playground; it’s a spiritual battlefield.<sup>5</sup> And if you want to survive in it, the rules of the playground will not get you through—certainly not in any eternal spiritual sense. God makes the rules. Those who reject his moral rules and choose to play the game of life by their own rules will ultimately lose the game. When making moral choices, we need to consider Joshua’s declaration very seriously. As for you and your house, what will it be? Will you choose to serve the Lord by making the choices that His Word demands? Or will it be your own personal morality—as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone, will you just do as you please? The latter would be a tragic choice.

Jesus had a way of cutting to the chase when it came to how we are to make the right moral choices in life. He made it really simple by saying, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” John 14:15 (NKJV) There are a lot of drunken sailors out there speeding around in the darkness. They are disasters waiting to happen. Don’t be one of them. Let God’s Word—His divine morality—be the rule of your house and guide your moral choices this year and in the years to come.

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church  
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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor ©2018

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<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:9 (AMP) The thing that has been—it is what will be again, and that which has been done is that which will be done again; and there is nothing new under the sun.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 2:14-15 (NLT) <sup>14</sup> Even Gentiles, who do not have God’s written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. <sup>15</sup> They demonstrate that God’s law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Chillemi, “Parents who lost daughter forgive boat operator,” Southside Sentinel, <http://www.ssentinel.com/index.php/news/article>, May 11, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Rick Wade, “As long as it doesn’t hurt anyone else,” <https://probe.org/as-long-as-it-doesnt-hurt-anyone-else/> February 8, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 6:12 (HCSB) For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.