

# The Basis of Morality

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On what basis shall society decide what laws to implement for its citizens? By what rationale shall a nation decide to prohibit or allow certain behavior?

Or, perhaps we have the cart before the horse. Should there be laws governing moral behavior *at all*? The more extreme libertarians among us, and an increasing number in the mainstream, seem to think that morality should be free from regulation. In fact, “You can’t legislate morality” is a commonly voiced sentiment.

In so saying, some people mean: “A law won’t make people *want to do* what is right.” And that is true. A law might make someone conform to an acceptable standard through fear of retribution, but even that can be overridden by hatred, greed and other powerful motives to lawlessness.

By what authority can society impose certain regulations of behavior and punish its citizens for violations thereof? Various rationales have been used to justify certain laws. Among them:

*Consensus:* What do most people desire? How does the majority stand on certain issues? But this begs the question: What basis or standard will individual citizens use in selecting or influencing representatives or in directly voting on certain proposals? What if the majority of Americans – whether they agree or disagree with the practice – vote to legitimize homosexual marriage? Will the *right* thing have been done?

*Societal Harm:* Others will deem certain behavior unacceptable due to the effect it has upon society as a whole, financially, medically or otherwise. Of course, this invites debate in ascertaining the nature and degree of such harm (viz., the debate on euthanasia).

But at the end of the day, there are some things that are wrong no matter how many people vote for it or whether there is a measurable detrimental effect upon anyone. They are “*wrong*” because our Creator prohibited the behavior, most likely recognizing it to be overtly damaging or insidiously corrosive to the human condition.

We no longer have the expectation that America’s laws will mirror divine standards. In fact, our lawmakers are called *representatives* because they represent their constituents and vote in reflection of their will. If the collective heart of a culture becomes corrupt, its laws will eventually reflect that impurity. “*The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so*” (Jer 5:31).

What should the Christian do when he sees the foundation of his culture eroding before his eyes? Picket? Petition? Vote? While some potential for good may come through civil channels, more effective perhaps is to “*let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify you Father in heaven*” (Mt 5:16). If God’s word remains the basis of morality in His people, then perhaps the high tide of godly influence will lift all the boats in the harbor.