

# Right and Wrong: A review of recent surveys on values and religion

## Introduction

*Which of the following would be morally acceptable under the Mosaic Law?*

- ▶ Completely harvesting your field
- ▶ Raising beefalo
- ▶ Entering the promised land, planting a fig tree, and eating the fruit three years later
- ▶ Shaving your sideburns
- ▶ Eating lobster
- ▶ Getting an \$850 phone reading from Sylvia Browne

## The values survey

On *May 7-10, 2009*, the Gallup organization conducted random telephone interviews with 1015 adults 18 and older, and surveyed them on their views on the moral acceptability of fifteen activities. In each case they were asked, regardless of whether they thought the activity should be legal or not, did they consider it morally acceptable, or morally wrong.

	<b>acceptable</b>	<b>wrong</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Divorce	62	30
The death penalty	62	30
Buying and wearing clothing made of animal fur	61	35
Gambling	58	36
Medical research using stem cells obtained from human embryos	57	36
Sex between an unmarried man and woman	57	40
Medical testing on animals	57	36
Having a baby outside of marriage	51	45
Gay or lesbian relations	49	47
Abortion	36	56
Cloning animals	34	63
Suicide	15	80
Cloning humans	9	88
Polygamy, when one husband has more than one wife at the same time	7	91
Married men and women having an affair	6	92

### **Surprise? Shock?**

- **More people are sure that cloning animals is wrong than think abortion is wrong**
- **Nearly half of those polled believe homosexuality is morally wrong in spite of mass promotion of this**

## **How moral values are determined**

Where do we get our ideas of right and wrong?

- Personal feelings (Prov. 14:12)
- Values passed down from parents – but we feel our parents were wrong about some things
- Societal norms – Which part of society? Which society? Does a practice become right or wrong when a majority begin thinking it is right or wrong?
  - o Was doctor-assisted suicide wrong in 2001, and now right because 51% of survey respondents said it was acceptable?
  - o Will wearing fur become morally wrong in another six or seven years, when a majority think it is?
- Human philosophy/self-help – Different philosophies contradict each other, how do we determine which is correct?
- God – He knows best, because He made us

## **The categories of moral issues**

Sexual conduct - yellow

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Morally acceptable</b>	<b>Morally wrong</b>
	%	%
Sex between an unmarried man and woman	57	40
Homosexual behavior	49	47
Polygamy, when one husband has more than one wife at the same time	7	91
Married men and women having an affair	6	92
- Not many undecided		
- The Bible directly regulates nearly every aspect of sexual conduct		

Value of Human life - green

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Morally acceptable</b>	<b>Morally wrong</b>
	%	%
The death penalty	62	30
Medical research using stem cells obtained from human embryos	57	36
Abortion	36	56
Suicide	15	80
Cloning humans	9	88
- Several issues where a significant number are undecided.		
- Difficult issues that are often personal and painful for those who are affected by them		
- The Bible directly addresses several of these, and gives principles that inform us on those that it doesn't mention directly		

Animal rights - pink

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Morally acceptable</b>	<b>Morally wrong</b>
	%	%
Buying and wearing clothing made of animal fur	61	35
Medical testing on animals	57	36
Cloning animals	34	63

Are these Bible issues? The Bible does not speak of these issues, but the Bible does teach us principles related to animals, including the relative value of human and animal life, the relationship of man to the animal world, and principles for governing our actions toward animals.

Outcome-oriented behavior – blue

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Morally acceptable</b>	<b>Morally wrong</b>
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	%	%
Divorce	62	30
Gambling	58	36
Having a baby outside of marriage	51	45

- how you are viewed tends to depend on how well you do it
- the real right and wrong of the behavior is determined by some other root action or attitude

## Training our conscience by God word

### *Mosaic Law*

- ▶ **Completely harvesting your field (Lev. 19:9) Leave the corners of the field for the poor to harvest**
- ▶ **Raising beefalo (Lev. 19:19) No interbreeding with animals of another kind**
- ▶ **Entering the promised land, planting a fig tree, and eating the fruit three years later (Lev. 19:23-25) They were to wait until the fifth year**
- ▶ **Shaving your sideburns (Lev. 19:27) Don't shave the sides of your head**
- ▶ **Eating lobster (Lev. 11:10-11) Food from the water must have fins and scales**
- ▶ **Getting an \$850 phone reading from Sylvia Browne - (Lev. 19:31) do not regard mediums and spiritualists**

How would you know what is right and wrong in these situations if it were not revealed?

***Heb 5:12-14 - those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil***

### ***Psalm 119:97-105***

Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word. I have not departed from Your judgments, for you Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than

honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

### **Psalm 19:7-11**

The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure enlightening the eyes; The fear of the Lord is clean enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover, by keeping them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them is great reward

## **Why Christians must Defend the Truth**

- The world needs dedicated Christians to be vocal about issues of right and wrong
  - o Christians have the truth
  - o Christians are not just promoting a tradition, but what is best for all men and women
  - o Christians will promote the truth in the best way possible (Matt. 7:12)
  - o If Christians are not the light and salt of the world, the world will grow darker and more morally distasteful (Matt. 5:13-14)

## **Which Direction is your part of the world heading?**

	May 8-11, 2008	May 7-10, 2009	Change
	%	%	Pct. pts.
Buying and wearing clothing made of animal fur	54	61	7
Sex between an unmarried man and woman	61	57	-4
Having a baby outside of marriage	55	51	-4
Abortion	40	36	-4
Gambling	63	58	-5
Medical research using stem cells obtained from human embryos	62	57	-5
Divorce	70	62	-8

- It is unusual for this many issues to show a significant shift within a single year (In the previous seven years, only six issues showed this much change)
- Every issue polled that a showed significant was in the direction of Biblical morality
  - o Fur??
  - o It was the first clothing approved by God – Gen. 3
- These are very encouraging trends
- We could ask, what is causing this trend
  - o The wide-spread preaching of Biblical values throughout our society?
  - o The convincing example of Christians in every community?

- An economic downturn that is causing people to reevaluate their moral commitments?
- Abortion
  - Not only is it significantly less acceptable
  - It is even more significantly more unacceptable
    - There are much fewer undecided
    - Those who were undecided are deciding against abortion
  - For the first time since the question has been asked, more people in America identify themselves as pro-life than pro-choice
  - But our government appears to have a policy of increasing the moral acceptability of abortions
    - Reversing previous policies and sending millions of dollars to other countries to fund abortions
    - Over thirty years ago, when Medicare was implemented, tax-payer funding of abortion was explicitly excluded to prevent the moral difficulty of Americans being forced by their government to pay for acts that they consider morally wrong.
    - Currently considering:
      - Mandating abortion to be covered by health insurers
      - Subsidizing those abortions with tax funds
      - Eliminating the ability of doctors and hospitals to refuse to perform or refer abortions if they believe it is morally wrong

## **In discussing moral issues with others, perhaps the following statistics would be helpful to think about:**

- 71% say that moral values in America are getting worse
- 76% of Americans identify themselves as Christian
- 57% of Americans say that religion can answer all or most of today's problems
- 38% have attended religious services in the past week. About 6 in 10 attend at least once a month.
- 61% belong to a church or synagogue
- Most people believe traditional values should be promoted.
- On most divisive issues, most people are personally conservative. Though about half in this year's survey considered homosexuality morally acceptable, only a very, very few would consider it themselves or encourage it in others. Similarly for having a baby outside of marriage, doctor-assisted suicide, and abortion

## **Helpful Scriptures:**

- Prov. 24:10
  - We might think that it is a difficult circumstance to live in a time when many of the moral values that were taken for granted a few years ago are now in question, or have been rejected by our society.

- We are not living in the most adverse conditions morally speaking, not even of our time, much less of all time. Nevertheless, upholding the truth and refuting error takes effort.
  - Society today does not need weak Christians, it needs strong Christians, very badly
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- Prov. 25:26 - If we are weak Christians we can actually hinder the cause of Christ
  - Prov. 24:24-25 - Which category will we be in. Will we approve or tolerate wickedness in our home? Our family? Our workplace? Our circle of influence? Or will we rebuke it?
  - Prov. 24:11-12 - God will judge us by our deeds, including whether we pay attention to all those suffering the consequences of a society with corroded moral values.

### **Invitation:**

The solution to moral darkness is the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is in the image of God – 2 Cor. 4:4