

Thomas J. Centrella

# MORALITY

*for Catholic Students*



Seton Press

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# Chapter 2. The Standard of Morality

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

LIVING A MORALLY GOOD life and doing God’s Will are inseparable. The **moral life** is the path by which we walk toward God or walk away from God. If we sin, we walk away from God. If we repent and follow His commands, we walk toward God. In Him, and only in Him, can we find true fulfillment and happiness.

The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for (*Catechism*, 27).

If we claim that we want to do God’s Will, yet we are not obedient to His Commandments, we cannot be in fellowship with Him. Our Lord said, “I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15). However, this friendship is **not** unconditional; we are his friends **only** if we are **obedient** to Him: “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:14).

All our actions should be directed toward doing the Will of God. Every action in which we are obedient to the Will of God is a good action; every action in which we are not obedient to the Will of God is a bad action. If we are not accustomed to following God’s Commandments, then doing so may seem burdensome to us at first. However, the more faithful we are, the more we will eventually become like His Son, Jesus Christ, and the more joy we will find in doing His Will.

## The One Thing Necessary

But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42).

The **standard of morality** by which moral good and evil are measured is the Will of God, and ultimately God Himself. God is Goodness itself, Truth itself, and Love itself. **God does not change**: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Therefore, the standard for what is morally good versus morally evil is **absolute** (unchanging and universal), **not relative** (changing according to the situation).

Moral good and evil are **objective** (universally the same for all persons, times, places, and cultures). Moral good and evil are **not subjective** (relative to one’s own personal preferences or philosophy, the historical period in which one lives, the part of the world where one lives, one’s culture, and so on).

Human acts, that is, acts that are freely chosen in consequence of a judgment of conscience, can be morally evaluated. They are either good or evil (*Catechism*, 1749).

Doing the Will of God is the “one thing necessary” (Luke 10:42). It is the **guiding principle of the moral life**. By following this principle, we will, by God’s grace, attain the **ultimate goal of morality**: happiness through union with God in Heaven.

## The Ultimate Goal of Morality

“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

All people, regardless of their situation, agree on one thing: they want to be happy. However, there is great disagreement on *how* to attain this happiness. Many people fall into sin because they try to find their happiness apart from God. When they do, the result is always the same: misery and *unhappiness*.

God created us, and we are meant to live and act in fellowship with Him. That’s how we are designed. That’s who we are. It is impossible for us to be happy if we are not united with



*Christ in the House of Martha and Mary,*  
by Jacopo Tintoretto

God. Fish are meant to be in water, plants are meant to be in the ground, and human beings are meant to be in fellowship with God.

**The ultimate goal of morality is happiness through union with God in Heaven.** If we remain in fellowship with God, we will ultimately be happy with Him in Heaven. If we do not remain in fellowship with God, we will not be happy. **True happiness comes only from union with God.** God wants us to succeed, and He gives us the grace we need. In order to remain in fellowship with Him, we must cooperate with this grace and live a morally good life.

## The Meaning and Purpose of Life

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27).

Because God created man to be in fellowship with Him, the ultimate **meaning and purpose of life** is to know, love, and serve God, so that we may be happy with Him in Heaven. We must strive, with God’s help, to fulfill this purpose above all else.

God created man to be free and happy. When man uses his freedom to seek the truth and do good, he enjoys more freedom and greater happiness. When man abuses his freedom and seeks his happiness apart from God, he ends up losing both, and he becomes a slave to sin. In order to fulfill the purpose of our existence, we must surrender ourselves completely to God and His perfect Will.

Man’s search to understand the meaning and purpose of life can find its answer only in God. He created us. We are the work of His hands. We belong to Him. We are here to do His Will. Until we make a genuine commitment to obey the Will of God in all things, we will never truly be happy. **Only in faithfully doing God’s Will can we find true meaning and happiness in our life.**



## The Perfect Model: A Faithful Son

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

In the Gospel, we see the perfect model of one who is completely faithful to the Will of God: Jesus Christ. His obedience to the Will of the Father is not the servile obedience of a hired hand. It is the willing obedience of a faithful Son, Who truly *knows* the Father and *wants* to do His Will.

Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34).

Jesus Christ is both God and Man. He is one Person, a divine Person, but He has two natures: human and divine. Therefore, He has *two* wills: His human will and His divine Will.

As God, He is one substance with the Father and coequal to Him. As Man, He has completely surrendered His human will to the divine Will.

And he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed, “Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:41-42).

As a faithful Son, Jesus Christ perfectly fulfills the Will of the Father and gives glory to His Name.

“I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do; and now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made” (John 17:4-5).

The more we become like Jesus, the more we too, as adopted sons and daughters of God in Christ, can surrender our will to the Father and give glory to His Name.

He who believes in Christ becomes a son of God. This filial adoption transforms him by giving him the ability to follow the example of Christ. It makes him capable of acting rightly and doing good. In union with his Savior, the disciple attains the perfection of charity which is holiness. Having matured in grace, the moral life blossoms into eternal life in the glory of heaven (*Catechism*, 1709).

Just as living a morally good life is inseparable from doing the Will of God, **the spiritual life is inseparable from the moral life**. If we think we are “spiritual,” yet we do not obey God’s Commandments, we are fooling ourselves, and we are not truly in fellowship with Him.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, yet He came down from Heaven and was obedient to the Father in all things. If we, mere human beings, wish to attain happiness, we too must humble ourselves and be obedient to the Father in all things.

Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

The saints in Heaven, through their prayers and the example of their holy lives, can greatly help us in our efforts to be faithful sons and daughters of God. In particular, Our Blessed Mother can help us to live a morally good life in fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Through her perfect example of obedience and charity, her powerful intercession, and her maternal love, Mary can show us how to humbly accept the Will of the Father in all things and be like her Son, Jesus Christ.

## The Faithful Son

One of the parables of Jesus concerns two sons who are asked to work in their father's vineyard (Matthew 21:28-32). The one son says that he will go right away, but then never follows through with the work. The second son at first states that he will not go, but then thinks better of his decision and decides to do the will of his father.

There is a story in the Bible about the prophet Jonah that is similar to the story of the second son in this parable (Jonah 1-4). When God told Jonah to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh, Jonah did not want to go. In fact, he set out in the opposite direction, west toward the seacoast, rather than east toward Nineveh! However, God stopped Jonah in his tracks by means of a large sea creature. After that ordeal, Jonah reversed course and completed a successful mission to the great city of Nineveh, in faithfulness to the Father.

We may draw hope from this account of Jonah. If we are not heading in the right direction, it is not too late to turn our life around. Like Jonah and the second son in the parable, we can change our direction and begin to do the Will of Our Father.



*Jonah Thrown into the Sea, by Peter Paul Rubens*

## Chapter 2 Review

**Matching:** For each statement, select the letter of the best term from the list below. There are more terms listed than there are statements, and no term can be used more than once.

A. Will of God	E. natures	I. Jesus Christ	M. will of the majority
B. happiness	F. persons	J. moral life	N. meaning and purpose of life
C. absolute	G. bad	K. the world	O. freedom from morality
D. subjective	H. man	L. autonomy	P. standard of morality

1. The \_\_\_\_\_ by which moral good and evil are measured is the Will of God, and ultimately God Himself.
2. The ultimate goal of morality is \_\_\_\_\_ through union with God in Heaven.
3. The standard for what is morally good is \_\_\_\_\_, not relative.
4. The perfect model of one who is completely faithful to the Will of God: \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The \_\_\_\_\_ is the path by which we either walk toward God or walk away from God.
6. The \_\_\_\_\_ is to know, love, and serve God, so that we may be happy with Him in Heaven.
7. Doing the \_\_\_\_\_ is the guiding principle of the moral life.
8. Our Lord Jesus Christ has two \_\_\_\_\_: human and divine.
9. Every action in which we are not obedient to the Will of God is a \_\_\_\_\_ action.
10. Moral good and evil are objective, *not* \_\_\_\_\_.

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**True or False: Write *True* or *False* for the following statements.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Through her perfect example of obedience and charity, her powerful intercession, and her maternal love, Our Blessed Mother can show us how to humbly accept the Will of the Father in all things and be like her Son, Jesus Christ.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. To be in fellowship with God, we do not necessarily have to obey *all* of His Commandments, but we must have faith in Him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. True happiness comes only from doing what makes us feel good about ourselves.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. The one thing necessary to fulfill the meaning and purpose of our life is to follow our dreams with all our heart.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Our Lord Jesus Christ has one will that is both human and divine.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. The moral life and the spiritual life are two separate, unrelated ways through which we may be in fellowship with God.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Only in faithfully doing God's Will can we find true meaning and happiness in our life.
- 

**Multiple Choice: Write the letter of the best answer in the space provided.**

18. God is \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. Goodness itself
  - B. Truth itself
  - C. Love itself
  - D. All of the Above
  - E. None of the Above
19. If we wish to find meaning in our life and the happiness we are searching for, we must \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. Be financially successful
  - B. Make a name for ourselves in the world
  - C. Eat right, stay fit, and have three square meals a day
  - D. Have a rewarding career
  - E. Faithfully do the Will of God in all things
20. Living a morally good life and doing the Will of God are \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. Mutually exclusive
  - B. Relative to the times
  - C. Optional
  - D. Inseparable
  - E. All of the above
21. Like Our Lord Jesus Christ, we too must \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. Be poor
  - B. Lead others
  - C. Humble ourselves and be obedient to the Father in all things
  - D. Perform miracles
  - E. All of the above
22. When man uses his freedom to \_\_\_\_\_, he enjoys more freedom and greater happiness.
- A. Build up his self-esteem
  - B. Seek the truth and do good
  - C. Have fun
  - D. Work
  - E. Do whatever he feels like



*Jonah Cast Up by the Whale*, by Claude-Joseph Vernet

23. The standard of morality is all of the following, **except** \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. Relative
  - B. Universal
  - C. Unchanging
  - D. Objective
  - E. Absolute
24. Jesus Christ said that we are His friends \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. If we do what He commands us
  - B. Unconditionally
  - C. Only when we get to Heaven
  - D. Never
  - E. None of the above
25. Jesus Christ \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. Has two natures and two wills
  - B. Is the Son of God
  - C. Is both God and Man
  - D. All except A
  - E. All of the above