

## RELATIVISM

### YOU ASKED FOR IT (PART 8)

Two men had an argument. To settle the matter, they went to a judge for arbitration. The plaintiff made his case. He was very eloquent and persuasive in his reasoning. When he finished, the judge nodded in approval and said, "That's right, that's right." On hearing this, the defendant jumped up and said, "Wait a second, judge, you haven't even heard my side of the case yet." So the judge told the defendant to state his case. He too was very persuasive and eloquent. When he finished, the judge said, "That's right, that's right." When the clerk of court heard this, he jumped up and said, "Judge, they both can't be right." The judge looked at the clerk of court and said, "That's right, that's right." Like the judge in our story, we live in a culture that considers everything to be right, as long as you sincerely believe it. You believe that; I believe this." Fine, we're both right. That is called relativism.

Relativism is the position that all points of view are as valid as any other points of view and that the individual is the measure of what is true for that person. That is the result of a steady decline in the thinking of our nation. In the early 1900's, morality existed in America. The people in America stated "Certain things are right and certain things are wrong, and I know why." The 60's and 70's declined into a time of immorality. The philosophy became, "Certain things are right and certain things are wrong, but I don't care." In our day, we have plunged downward so that the philosophy now is, "There is no such thing as absolute right and wrong." It is left to the individual to decide what is right and what is wrong for him. We need to be reminded of proverbs 14:12, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."

## THE BASIS FOR ABSOLUTE TRUTH

Where do you get the idea of absolute truth? Absolute truth is totally dependent upon the fact that "God" exists and that the Universe was created purposefully. If everything is by random chance, then there is no absolute right and wrong, no morals of any kind. But if we have a Sovereign Creator, He has the right to decide truth.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER WHAT SOMEONE BELIEVES?

It matters what you believe because what you believe shapes your life. And what you believe does not have to be true in order for it to affect you. If you're camping in the mountains and believe that you hear a mountain lion pawing around outside your tent, your heart will start racing. Adrenaline will shoot into your system.

Your muscles will tense up, and you will be in emotional turmoil over something that isn't even true.

Psychologist Chris Thurman wrote, "Truth is the road map for negotiating the difficult challenges of life. Without it we get lost, and we develop emotional problems that tell us we're lost. We often settle for things that are not truth at all because they are usually easier. But truth is the only road to emotional health. There is no other path."

Jesus said the same thing about two thousand years earlier. In John 8:32 he said, "When you know the truth, the truth will set you free."

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## **THE PROBLEM WITH RELATIVISM**

### ***1. RELATIVISM FORCES US TO LIVE WITH UNCERTAINTY***

That's because you are never really sure about what is right, and what is wrong. Relativity leaves us drifting in a sea of uncertainty without an anchor. How am I supposed to live my life? How do I define whether I have value or have accomplished anything of value?

### ***2. If there is no absolute truth, we are forced to accept contradictory "beliefs"***

In the movie "Oh, God," John Denver asks George Burns (who is playing God) "What about Jesus? Was he your son?" George Burns says, "Yes." There is a pause, and Mr. Burns continues: "And so was Buddha. And so was Mohammed..."

George Burns was verbalizing what many Americans think—that all religions are good in their own way. They all lead to God, and it's not so much what you believe that's important, but that you're sincere in your beliefs.

Biblically, there is a problem with that because Jesus claimed He is the only truth and only way to God – that no one can come to the Father except through Him. On the other hand, Islam claims that Christianity is false. So, how can they both be true? Mutually exclusive viewpoints cannot both be true. One must be right and the other wrong. Joel Smith of the Wellspring Community Church has observed: The differences are too deep to conclude that all religions lead to the same destination. I suspect that people who support such a view have never really examined where the different faith groups diverge. A god who would devise such a system (where all religions are acceptable) is either: A liar, telling one group 'This is the way' and another group 'That is the way.' Or he's schizophrenic. He has a multiple personality disorder. One day he's Shiva, the destroyer. Another day he's Brahma an impersonal force pervading the universe. The god you get depends on what day you bump into him."

### **3. If there is no absolute truth, there is no basis for morality**

If there really are no moral absolutes, then there is no way to judge Hitler or Saddam or Stalin as evil. They were simply following the truth they believed in. John Leo in U.S. News (7/21/97) quoted a professor Robert Simon of Hamilton College in Clinton, N.Y. as reporting that "10 to 20% of his students... acknowledged the Holocaust but couldn't bring themselves to say that killing millions of people was wrong. One student told Simon, 'Of course I dislike the Nazis, but who is to say they are morally wrong?'"

What do we do with those who believe it is their right to sell their children to sexual slave traders? Or the person who decides that people over the age of 60 no longer have the right to live? Or that a child who is born with some kind of birth defect is not fit to live? If there are no moral absolutes, then no one can give a judgment call as to the right or wrong of anything.

## **TRUTH ABOUT TRUTH**

### **1. Truth Is Universal.**

*Exodus 20:12-16 lists 5 of the Ten Commandments given to us by Moses.*

*12 "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*

*13 "You shall not murder.*

*14 "You shall not commit adultery.*

*15 "You shall not steal.*

*16 "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.*

These basic commands of God are true in any culture or in any generation. For example, when would it be right for someone to come into your house and murder your wife or children? When is adultery right? When would it be right for someone to steal from you? When would it be right for someone to bear false witness against you in court so that you are put in jail for the rest your life for something that you did not do? Truth, by definition, has to apply to everyone, or it's not true.

### **2. Truth is changeless**

*Psalm 19:9, "The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous."*

*Psalm 100:5 says, "His truth endures to all generations." Truth that is absolute never becomes obsolete. What was true a million years ago will be true a million years from now.*

When Lloyd C. Douglas, author of *The Robe*, was a university student, he lived in a boarding house. Downstairs on the first floor was an elderly, retired music teacher. Douglas said that every morning they had a ritual they would go through together. He would come down the steps, open the old man's door, and ask, "Well, what's the good news?" The old man would pick up his tuning fork, tap it on the side of his wheelchair, and say, "That's middle C! It was middle C yesterday; it will be middle C tomorrow; it will be middle C a thousand years from now. The tenor upstairs sings flat, the piano across the hall is out of tune, but, my friend, that is middle C! "The old man had discovered one constant reality in his life, one "still point in a turning world." The Holy Scriptures are our "still point" in a turning world. If you build your life on them, you will be able to live with confidence, no matter how quickly the world changes around you.

### **3. Truth Is Objective**

Truth is not determined by majority opinion. What's true is true, whether anyone believes it or not. The world was round even when everyone believed that it was flat. It doesn't matter one bit what the majority of people think. For example, the Mormon church is getting bigger each year, and the Methodist church is getting smaller. Does that mean the Mormons are right and the Methodists are wrong? No. Truth is not a matter of majority opinion. It is a matter of revelation from God.

### **4. Truth Is Verifiable.**

It can be proven to be true. When we say we believe the bible to be the word of God, we're not saying that because it sounds good. We're saying the bible is the word of God based on facts they can be proven true through research. The same is true with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### **(WING CLIPS) Case for Christ - Fulfilling Prophecies**

Lee finds out that the chances of Jesus randomly fulfilling the messianic prophecies was one out of a trillion, trillion, trillion... **Themes:** Prophecy, Evidence, Truth, Understanding, Logic

### **5. Truth Works.**

Here's an example.  $2+2=4$ . That statement is not just an untested theory. It is a formula that is put to the test billions of times every day, and every single time it works. If I have four apples and I give Johnny two apples, I will, without fail, have two apples left. We know the statement  $2+2=4$  is true because it works. In the same way, following God's word works.

*1 Kings 2:3, "and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go,"*

*Joshua 23:14, "Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed."*

What those scriptures are saying is that God's word works. If God promises to bless you for doing something and you do it, you can count on blessing. On the other hand if God tells you not to do something, and you do what he told you not to do, you can count on failure.

Seventy-three million of us in America are baby boomers, born between 1948 and 1964. That's close to one out of every three people in America. Our entire generation was brought up on the best-selling book, *Dr. Spock's Baby Book*. Dr. Spock expressed his opinions about what he thought was the proper way to raise children which were contrary to what the Bible taught about raising children. Years later, Dr. Spock, then in his seventies, held a press conference and said, "Oops. I was wrong. That's not the best way to do it. I'm sorry. Never mind." An entire generation was raised on a style of parenting that studies later confirmed just didn't work. On the other hand, truth works. It doesn't work some of the time. It works all of the time.

## **5. TRUTH IS NARROW**

*Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."*

Jesus is speaking of 2 roads, the road of truth that leads to eternal life, and the road of error that leads to judgment. One of those gates (the truth) is narrow, and the way of error (the path to hell) is wide. Truth is exclusive; it can't be mixed with anything else. And error is very tolerant. It embraces all kinds of ideas and philosophies.

In the movie *Jurassic Park - The Lost World*, a young scientist was relating the facts of an experience, and was confronted by an attorney. The scientist defended his story by saying, "It's the truth." The attorney responded, "Your version of it". What the scientist said next was classic. He said, "There aren't any 'versions' of the truth." He was right. There is only one truth, and it is narrow.

## **COMMITMENTS TO BIBLICAL ABSOLUTES**

Knowing that truth is absolute is not enough. We must be committed to it.

### **1. I must commit myself to seeking the truth.**

If I don't know the truth, then I'll make decisions based on something other than the truth. I guess the real question is, "how much truth do we want to live by?" Are we willing to live by a cup of truth, or would we rather have a glass of truth? Maybe you would rather have a pitcher filled with truth. Whatever the case, one thing is for sure. Truth is not going to just suddenly form in your heart while you're sleeping at night. You are not going to wake up every morning with anticipation for what you have learned through the night. If you want truth, you must seek it, and to the extent that you seek it, to that extent you'll find it.

### **2. I must commit myself to living the truth.**

Truth is not something you have for knowledge sake alone. It's something you practice and apply. I know how to start my car, but if I never put the key in and turn it, that car is not going to go anywhere.

### **3. I must commit to sharing God's truth with kindness**

*Romans 2:4 says, "...God's kindness leads you toward repentance."*

Arguments, proofs, and logic will not convince people to turn to God in repentance. Demonstrating kindness, love, and mercy toward people will. We need to abide in Christ every day and seek His wisdom for what to say and how to act when people seem upset by our "intolerant" views.

### **4. I must commit myself to transferring the truth to the next generation**

Did you know that out of the millions of Americans, today somewhere around 25% are under 18 years of age? What kind of world are we leaving them to live in? Obviously, we only know what we are used to having. We have lived our lives with wonderful freedom that most of the world has never known. For a long time we have been relatively safe, but all that is quickly changing. There has been a tremendous change for the worse in our nation since I was growing up, and those changes are not randomly happening.

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

What that verse is saying is very simple. If a nation lives by God's righteous laws, God exalts that nation. On the other hand, a sinful nation will eventually live in disgrace. There was once a famous French man who came to visit America a couple of centuries

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ago to find out the source of its greatness. After having traveled across the nation, he came to this conclusion. He said, "America is great because America is good. If America ever ceases to be good, it will cease to be great." And that is exactly what we're seeing happening in our nation today. Our disregard of God's laws is removing his blessings from us. What kind of world are we leaving for our children? If things continue to go as they have been going in the last few decades, I'm afraid that the picture is not very pretty, and there is only one thing that will turn things around-heartfelt repentance from God's people.

*2 Chronicles 7:14, "if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."*

For a nation that has gone astray and has called evil good and good evil, this is the only hope that we have. We must acknowledge God's word is being absolute truth. We must live by it, and we must share it with others and in the process and ask God for mercy.