

# Why Is Moral Relativism Wrong?

Eric V. Snow, sermonette, November 14, 2009, UCG, Ann Arbor, MI

In his recent best selling book, “The Reason for God,” the Presbyterian pastor Timothy Keller, quotes one young artist, Chloe as saying, “A ‘one-Truth-fits all’ approach is just too confining. The Christians I know don’t seem to have the freedom to think for themselves. I believe each individual must determine truth for him- or herself.” If a friend, family member, neighbor, or co-worker in the world said something like this to you, how would you respond? Let’s narrow this down some more. In today’s world, many secular people claim to be skeptical of moral truth. They say they are moral relativists. They assert one culture’s or religion’s values or beliefs aren’t better or superior to another’s. They proclaim that there are no moral absolutes, that what’s bad for one person to do may be good for another. First of all, can human reason itself refute moral relativism? But more importantly, what does the Bible itself have to say about each man doing his own thing?

S.P.S. Today we will see that both the Bible and common sense deny moral relativism.

Since this is so much part of the world's thinking, Christians should be ready to clearly deny such thinking when their friends, family, and co-workers challenge them.

Judges 17:5-6

True, this statement seems to be only descriptive. After all, God didn't originally want Israel to have a king. But plainly in context it shows God doesn't approve of people doing whatever they feel like doing. When Israel and Judah had good kings, such as Josiah and Hezekiah, then the people obeyed God's law on average much better than when there were no judges leading Israel. Between the times of strong judges, Israel fell into idolatry and lawlessness.

Now, can uncalled people in the world know whether there are moral absolutes? What does the Bible teach?

Romans 2:12-15

Natural law theory: There is a moral law in nature that can't be evaded, even by those ignorant of the Bible's teachings. Even pagan gentiles who knew nothing about the Bible have

a conscience. They know some things are right and others are wrong based on their human reason and cultural traditions. True, this moral sense isn't reliable. It can be easily perverted. But people know there are limits.

C.S. Lewis, "Mere Christianity," p. 19: "Men have differed as regards what people you ought to be unselfish to—whether it was only your own family, or your fellow countrymen, or everyone. But they have always agreed that you ought not to put yourself first. Selfishness has never been admired. Men have differed as to whether you should have one wife or four. But they have always agreed that you must not simply have any woman you liked."

General problem with such claims: "There are no absolutes" is an absolute statement without exceptions. Therefore, it is self-refuting. Similarly, if "all is relative," then is that statement included? Suppose a skeptical liberal says, "All is relative" is true in every place at all times under all circumstances. Isn't that an absolute truth then? Think about later carefully if you need to, like liar's paradox.

Most people will admit to being moral absolutists if challenged about other beliefs they have.

Normally, their moral relativism is only a tool to evade some teaching of the Bible, especially about sexual morality. But it proves much too much for their purposes, so it has to be rejected. They shouldn't use a philosophical "shotgun" in order to blow out part of God's law when they should be reaching for a "rifle" instead.

For example, suppose someone says, "Tribe X in New Guinea has sex outside marriage, therefore, we can too." Well, if Tribe Y in Brazil's jungles oppresses women, can we do that also? When South Africa had apartheid, did that mean legal segregation in the South was OK? There's child marriage in Iran, so does that mean we should allow adult men to marry 10-year-old girls in the USA? (Ayatollah Khomeini was 28 when he married a 10 year old).

Actually all liberals still believe in moral absolutes. They just have a shorter list of requirements. What liberal would deny, "Racism is immoral in all places at all times"? Or how about this one: "It's always wrong for the rich to oppress the poor"? You can't morally judge and condemn others if you deny moral absolutes: You can't judge and condemn someone for being racist if you're uncertain racism is immoral, etc.

Wouldn't the feminist leader Gloria Steinem agree that "To oppress women is immoral in all places at all times"? Feminism is a system of moral absolutes: Honor killings, child marriage, Chinese foot-binding, and female genital mutilation always wrong. (Ask for details after services if interested).

Under the Raj, British rule in India, the British suppressed the Hindu custom of suttee. Suttee was the practice of widows killing themselves by throwing themselves on the fires burning up their dead husbands' bodies. In 1860, the British finally got the rulers of three Indian states to outlaw formally suttee, slavery, and female infanticide. Even as late as 1926-28, the Raj sent around political officers and groups of soldiers from village to village in order to free slaves and get village chiefs to stop sacrificing children. (Lawrence James, "Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India," pp. 326-327, 414). In these areas, when the British imposed their superior moral values forcibly upon the Indians, could any liberal really complain? Our Western or Christian values really can be better than theirs. That isn't ethnocentric, just the truth.

“Judo-argument” for proving your opponents believe in moral absolutes also. Think about their arguments’ organization, but change the examples they use. Plug in something instead about neglecting the poor, racism, genocide, Hitler and the Holocaust, or oppressing women in other countries. Use the values that they themselves believe in strongly. Then watch how they react. For example, suppose someone says, “It’s intolerant to morally judge and condemn sex outside of marriage since other cultures do it.” Here’s a good reply: “So then, is it intolerant to morally condemn racism since other cultures practice it?” Or, “Do you morally judge and condemn other people’s intolerance in other cultures?” Suppose someone says, “Since nothing is always right or wrong, it’s narrow-minded [or close-minded] to believe that lying is always wrong.” So then, try out this response on them: “So then, since nothing is always right or wrong, it is narrow-minded [or close-minded] to believe that genocide is always wrong?”

[**Skip?**: “It’s ethnocentric to say your religion is better than someone else’s.” But in other civilizations, such as China’s and Islam’s, most people have no problem saying their culture is better than everyone else’s, including ours. So then, are secular liberals’ beliefs morally

superior to China's and Islam's when they say "Ethnocentrism is wrong"? (See Keller, pp. 12, 74-75). God as judge and forgiving God ideas of Christianity offend different cultures: Who is right then? Germanic warrior code vs. forgiveness (i.e., justice not imposed), but likes God as judge. Are secular Western people right to invert the two, and to like a forgiving God, but not a judging God then?]

Acts 17:30-31

God now commands everyone everywhere to repent and to obey the same law: HIS law. Natural law can't be escaped, since people who deny moral absolutes are soon often morally judging and condemning others. The Bible makes the truth far more clear than what unaided human reason alone can figure out on its own. All moral confusion will end one day.

**So in conclusion**, we should clearly proclaim to the world that we believe in moral absolutes. Both the Bible and common sense agree that some behaviors are always right and others are always wrong. We can be absolutely sure that moral relativism is absolutely wrong.