

Supplement for Theology 101-04 Foundations of Christian Theology
Transition from foundation to Application: A Rationale faith Confronts
Relativism

(the following is based on the lecture presentation of Gregory Koukl of
the Christian apologetic organization called “Stand to Reason”)
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[where you see brackets, you have my supplemental comments]

I. Introduction:

- A. A working definition of relativism: *“Things are true only in respect to an individual’s point of view (personal preference).”*
- B. This IS the spirit of the age.
- C. Many Christians are dreadfully unprepared to give an answer to this.
- D. However, it is also easy for us to go along with because the message of “tolerance” is popular and we all want to be liked, we all want people to think of us as being accepting of others.
- E. If you are NOT “tolerant” today, you are considered to be one who contributes to “hate.”
- F. There is a fundamental lack of courage within the Christian Church today.
- G. The Gospel is offensive enough, but we dare not take the offense out of the Gospel! [Gal. 5 speaks of the “offense of the cross,” the Bible makes definitive assertions, that is, it represents truth; that which is antithetical to falsehood. This by the way is consistent with basic logic: e.g. The Law of (Non-) Contradiction (A is not non-A).]
- H. Psychological confidence not enough! Many Christians are confident in the pew, but beat-up in the world.
- I. If our goal is to “please people” then we are giving into relativism.

II. The Nature of Truth:

- A. [Age of reason/Enlightenment] at least acknowledged the existence of truth.
- B. Post-modernism, however, has moved away from this conviction. There is no objective truth.
- C. It is interesting, however, to actually hear someone make the claim: “There is no truth!” We ought ask, “Really, is that true?!”

- D. This claim is broadly accepted, but almost completely unexamined.

III. [Relativism makes a popular, but false claim:]

- A. It suggests that there is such a thing as being “morally neutral.”
- B. Leading relativists consider it tyranny when others place their views on others.
- C. But this is based on a false presumption: That there is such a thing as morally neutral ground, therefore “I don’t judge you, you don’t judge me.”
- D. But even those who advocate such a thing practice intolerance! (Do you see how?)
- E. All laws [rules, values and guidelines] force a moral view-point and it claims what is good for all people to follow.
- F. So in truth, the only person who is actually morally neutral is the person who is completely silent. As soon as you open your mouth, you surrender neutrality.

IV. Three Different Types of Relativism:

- A. Anthropology/Descriptive Relativism: Different cultures have different morality; every culture has different moral rules. “Morality” is a function of the culture. Relativism is affirmed here! There is no objective morality.
 - 1. Thus neither culture A nor culture B are correct (in terms of objective truth). But this is a logical fallacy called non-sequitur [“it does not follow” (In logic, a conclusion or inference that does not follow from the premises). It could be in other words that neither culture is correct, that both cultures in this particular case are wrong.]
 - 2. Here actual facts [states of affairs] and values must be distinguished.
- B. Conventionalism/Society-Says Relativism:
 - 1. Right and wrong is socially dictated.
 - 2. Popular opinion establishes truth.
 - 3. However, the problem here is that there is no such thing as an a-moral society.

4. The society itself becomes its own standard. So morality Often becomes a matter of what is legal.
5. But what is legal does not equal what is actually moral.
6. Nazi's were following orders, does this make murder right?
7. There is no over-arching moral principle here.

C. "I Say"/Individual-Ethic Relativism:

1. Most radical
2. Most deeply entrenched
3. Seven Fatal Flaws:
 - #1: Relativists can never say something is wrong or wicked.
 - #2: Relativists cannot complain about the problem of evil.
 - #3: Relativists can't place blame or accept praise.
 - #4: Relativists can't claim anything is unfair or unjust.
 - #5: Relativists can't improve their morality, since they deny a standard.
 - #6: Relativists can't have a moral discussion. There is no best or good thing.
 - #7: Relativists can't promote the "moral" observation of tolerance.

V. Tactics for Dialog with a Relativist:

A. Show How Relativism Commits Suicide:

1. Ask "Why not?"
2. Then they will push their morality on you.
3. They say there are no moral rules, but they will find themselves pressing a moral rule on you [self-contradiction]

B. Press Hot Button:

1. Make moral intuitions come to surface

C. Force Tolerance Issue:

VI. Only two possible options:

- A. Moral objectivism
- B. Moral relativism