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The Failure of Moral Relativism

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We reap what we sow (Gal 6:7). That's a biblical principle that we don't like to face.

We have been told for so long that morals are relative, that there is no ultimate right or wrong, that we need to do what makes us happy, that we have lost sight of the fact that ideas have consequences.

We want to blame politicians. We want to blame guns. We want to blame people across the aisle. We want to blame various hate groups. We want to blame just about anything, but without ever looking at ourselves in the mirror and owning up to the principle that we are reaping what we sow.

Now we can no longer afford to gloss over the doctrines that have brought us to this precarious position in which we now find ourselves. This has become obvious in many recent events, but most notably in the "me too" movement and in the all too prevalent school massacres. Something is wrong. We know its wrong, and we can no longer get by with teaching that morals are only relative matters. That ship has sailed.

Racism is unmitigated evil. Sexual harassment is heinous. It is evil. These dehumanize and dishonor. They shred the dignity of all involved and make us little more than brute beasts without hearts. As C.S. Lewis put it so well:

"In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful."*

Let that sink in. Why then? Why is racism evil? Why is it so wrong to sexually harass another? Why is it evil to oppress the weak? Why? If we cannot provide legitimate answers, then all we can do is shout personal preference and continue to be frustrated by our failure to understand why the world is as it is. The heart has been removed, but we still expect it to beat.

Moral relativists, staying consistent to the teaching, cannot answer the above questions in any meaningful way. They might say, “Because we should never mistreat another human being,” or “Doing something against the consent of another is immoral.” Yet that doesn’t answer the question. It just proves the point that he is not consistent with his morally relativistic views, and it kicks the can down the road further. Why should we never mistreat another human being? Why is doing something against the consent of another immoral? Who says, and why should it matter?

The same can be said of murder. While most people would not defend murder, the problem for moral relativists still stands. Why is murder wrong? Because government says so? Because society says so? Because you say so? Why does any of that matter if, in the end, we just cease to exist and become part of the rubble of the universe, never to know another thought again?

I’m not saying that unbelievers cannot be moral. They can be, and they often are. What they cannot do, however, is argue for moral relativism and consistently live by that standard. Everyone has lines they don’t think others should cross, but without a set standard, those lines are arbitrary and subjective. What these recent issues have demonstrated once and for all is that moral relativism is a failure. It is dead. Never again can someone argue that harassment is evil then turn around and argue for moral relativism with any kind of credibility.

What’s wrong now is that we are collectively reaping what we have been sowing for so many years. People are trying to do what makes them happy. They are living by their own standards. They are doing what is right in their own eyes, and that sounds eerily familiar to the reader of Scripture (cf. Jud 17:6; 21:25). People are aghast at the story of a man offering his concubine to evil men, who rape and kill her. The man cuts her up and sends her pieces throughout the land; the whole episode is sickening and difficult to read. How can the Bible contain such a story? Because it illustrates in a most poignant way what the book of Judges was conveying. Everyone was doing right in his own eyes. And here we are, products of the doctrine of moral relativism, wondering why our world has reached such a low point. We are reaping what we have been sowing all along. We are cutting up the members of a dead culture and wondering where to send the pieces. We are sick, and we know not where to find healing. Keep blaming others. Keep blaming guns. Keep blaming government. We aren’t getting it. What will it take?

It’s also now time that we recognize that we have all been part of the problem. Make it personal. I have contributed to the problem through my own selfishness and sin. I—we—have played the hypocrite right along with the rest of the world, and it’s time that we quit pointing fingers at others and see our own complicity. We have loved the world while professing love for God, and in so doing we have destroyed our own credibility. Does that make us defensive? If so, may God help us.

There is precedent for this recognition in Scripture. Though ancient Israel and America are hardly to be compared, there is still the principle in play that we have rebelled against God. Daniel, though we think so highly of him, still included himself in the prayer for his nation:

“To us, O Lord, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.” (Dan 9:8-10)

Is there an answer to any of this? Yes, there is, but people still don't want to hear it. Hearing, they don't hear or understand. Sometimes I don't want to hear or understand because of how effective culture has been at dismissing what's ultimately important. Since God has been so effectively pushed out of the arena of legitimate public discussion, those who offer the solution are seen as part of a fringe element. One day, I pray, we will come to our senses and realize that we have been wallowing around in a pig pen for far too long, filling up on the food of the swine. It is time to get up and come home to the place where our Father is still gazing in our direction and awaiting our return. He will run to us if only we'll come to Him. There shall be no excuses, no attempts to downplay evil, no efforts at self-justification. We stand before God bare, unhidden from His sight, and allowing His powerful Word to pierce us to the division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, judging our thoughts and intentions.

Herein is the gospel. The good news is still here. When the world has finally gotten fed up enough with evil, the message of the gospel will still be here, crying out to be heard, longing to be applied. “We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:20-21).

Forgive us, Oh God! Forgive me, Oh Lord! We are not worthy—I am not worthy—to be called your sons. Heal us, and we will be truly healed. Restore us to You!