

Series: The Elephant in the Room  
Part 2: Relative: how to be tolerant without surrendering to moral relativism  
Jeff Kennedy / April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Moral relativism/cultural tolerance is an intellectually and morally \_\_\_\_\_ system.

Definitions and Differences

- **Cultural Morality and Tolerance:** "Moral truth comes from the individual; it is \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. And those who deny that are \_\_\_\_\_."
- **Biblical Morality and Tolerance:** "Moral truth is grounded in the \_\_\_\_\_ of God and the foundation for moral duties are the \_\_\_\_\_ of God. Moral truths are \_\_\_\_\_, existing \_\_\_\_\_ of our subjective feelings, personal preferences, or situation. As believers, we respectfully disagree with those who deny our belief in objective truth and morality."

First Conviction...

1. Moral relativism/cultural tolerance is a \_\_\_\_\_ philosophy.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ moral truths (facts) and duties do \_\_\_\_\_.

- Basic morality
- Intrinsic value
- Revealed "oughts"

3. Sinful people have rejected \_\_\_\_\_ morality.  
(Rom 1:18-30)

Takeaways:

**Intro:** Ex. 1-The city of CDA, ID, threatened to arrest two ordained Christian ministers who ran a ministry called “The Hitching Post”—a parachurch organization where people could come and be married. **According to the lawsuit filed in federal court, the ministers were told they had to “either perform same-sex weddings or face jail time and up to \$1,000 fine.”** It seemed like, at the time, that the entire city and town came against them labeling them bigots and homophobes and all kinds of stuff.

**Stats:** Dave Kinnaman in his book *UnChristian*—documents the prevailing attitudes among Millennials—those between the ages of 18-35, he states that the majority of young Americans, up to **90%, tend to perceive the Church today as an isolated, bigoted institution** that is out of touch with the modern world. Our morality is perceived to be old fashioned and obsolete for an ever increasing “tolerant” and accepting society.

The view of morality prevalent in this society is called *moral relativism*—**the belief that morality is fluid, based on the needs and preferences of individuals.** Moral relativism leads to *cultural tolerance*—a politically correct version of tradition tolerance that has reigned supreme for 2 centuries in America.

**Transition:** In this 2<sup>nd</sup> message in the EITR series, we’re going to address the issue of truth and tolerance. Can we be tolerant and also believe in the existence of objective moral facts and truths?

**Thesis:** *Moral relativism/cultural tolerance* is an intellectually and morally bankrupt belief system. Biblical morality and Christian tolerance is a better model for our society and culture.

### **Definitions and Differences (same slide in Propresenter)**

- ***Cultural Morality and Tolerance:*** “Moral truth comes from the individual; it is subjective, personal and situational. And those who deny that truth is subjective, personal, and situational are intolerant bigots.”
- ***Biblical Morality and Tolerance:*** “Moral truth is grounded in the character of God and the foundation for moral duties are the commands of God. Moral truths are objective, existing independently of our subjective feelings, personal preferences, or situation. As believers, we respectfully disagree with those who deny our beliefs in objective truth and morality.”

**There are two areas of disagreement here:** First—the objectivity of the moral truths and duties. And secondly, the definition and approach to tolerance. These moral facts and obligations exist independently and are not contingent on whether we like them, prefer them, or even know about them.

**As believers we are to be understanding and respectful of individuals who do not share our views. But acceptance of the individual doesn't mean approval of all truth propositions.**

**Moral relativists and peddlers of politically correct tolerance see it differently.** They believe, as we do, that every person is free to hold individual beliefs about morality. But they go a step further to say that if *we don't approve of all truth propositions being equally valid then we are prejudiced haters.*

Here's what Thomas Helmbock who was the executive vice president of the national Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity said a few years back,  
**"Tolerance today is that every individual's beliefs, values, lifestyle, and perception of the truth claims are equal...There is no hierarchy of truth. Your beliefs and my beliefs are equal, and all truth is relative."** Thomas Helmbock, Exec. Vice President of the National Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity.

**Today in our society, if you want to have power over some group you disagree with,** all you have to do is successfully label it "bigotry." Prejudice and intolerance are the ultimate sins of American culture and a sure path to becoming anathema in our PC society.

But at the end of the day, it isn't helpful to just label people bigots and haters. You have to give defensible arguments for your position. It shuts down the conversation.

**Transition:** Let me give you **3 reasons why Moral relativism and cultural intolerance is an intellectually and morally bankrupts position.** Then we'll turn to Paul in Romans in an attempt to understand how we got here...then I want to give you 3 solid takeaways for engaging with the our culture that has gone mad with sin.

**First Conviction...**

**1. Moral relativism is a self-refuting philosophy.** Obviously, Helmbock's claim that "There are no absolute's and all truth is relative" is an absolute truth assertion. It's self-refuting, **but wait it gets worse.** If there are no objective moral truths, and all morality is subjectively and personally determined, then I am not morally obligated to believe that statement. So then labeling someone you disagree with on a moral issue as a "bigot" or "hater" has no foundation—you've just admitted that there are no moral imperatives and then told me I'm a bigot because I don't feel obligated to affirm your value system.

Do you see how this stuff only cuts one way? In their favor!

**Moral relativism/cultural tolerance** is a self-refuting philosophy. If it's true then it's false. It's a foolish point of view.

**Scripture:** Paul in Rom. 1:22 states that “Although they claimed to be wise they became fools.” In context Paul is referring to the wise men, philosophers of this age who have abandoned the knowledge of God in favor of the false idols of the world.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Conviction...

**2. Objective moral truth and duties do exist.** So this 2<sup>nd</sup> conviction takes it a step further. In our human experience we do apprehend the existence of universals that are always true in every culture. How do we know this?

- **Basic morality (Universals)**

If moral relativism is true, then they should necessarily be tolerant of every point of view—including the murders, rapists, and sex-traffickers—who often justify their actions based on personal, subjective, and the situational.

- **Who are we to say that the value system of the Nazis when they killed 6 million Jews was wrong?**
- **Who are we to say that the value system of Hutus who committed Genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda?**
- **Who are we to say that the sex traffickers in Thailand who lure these helpless and poor children in with the promise of jobs and a better life—only to enslave these precious little girls is wrong?**
- **Isis and their wanton destruction and persecution of any Muslim or Christian who doesn't agree with their radical ideology? If morals are relative and determined by the individual, subjectively, personally, then we have no objective foundation with which to assess anyone's moral activity. And that is moral madness. It's crazy!**

**But the reason why we perceive universal morality is because Human beings have...**

- **Intrinsic Value**

On moral relativism, no one can have intrinsic worth and value, because there is no God external to our experience, and there are no truths imposed on us by this external agent, and there are no fixed moral obligations embedded in the human heart.

- **Illus. Terri Bevers—a fitness instructor who got to church early one morning and discovered that a crazy person in a full police riot gear had broken into the church—and she was found later bludgeoned to death. Something inside me just said, “That is wrong.”**

But we believe God has made us in his image and this gives us warrant and justification for a fixed set of ethical standards. Just consider the difference between the Humanist manifesto of value and worth and the Declaration of Independence.

(Same Slide for following quotes).

### **United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

**“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”**

### **Declaration of Independence**

**We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.”**

The difference between these statements is God and thus an objective foundation for these human dignities and rights. God. He is the foundation for the existence of the intrinsic worth and value, the sense of morality and ethical duties toward one another.

**But not only do we apprehend the existence of universals, that humans have intrinsic value...**

- **Revealed “oughts” in Scripture**

Mt. 25; Phil 4; Mt. 28 and the preaching of the Gospel to the nations. Ministry and service (Eph. 4; Rom 12). Kindness and thoughtfulness (Rom 1; 1 Pet. 3:15).

The Christian value system is the best the world has ever seen. It has led to untold good in the world:

- The establishment of hospitals, schools, and mercy missions globally.
- The collection of aid for destitute and devastated areas of the world—the Christian church has given more to fund the causes of mercy around the world than any organization in the history of humanity.
- The stand for equal rights under the law. Christian morality mandates that we not discriminate against the civil rights of anyone based on race, gender or religion. We are called to accept people wherever they are but acceptance does not mean approval. Just because we are tolerant of you doesn’t mean we have to embrace your views.

There are moral absolutes—there are objective moral “oughts”—obligations that we have toward one another. And we know this intuitively, we practice it universally, and God claims it Scripturally.

And now we’re going to turn to the Scriptures.

## Romans 1:18-30

Let's turn to Romans 1 to see how we got here. 3<sup>rd</sup> conviction...

**3. Sinful people have rejected common sense morality. And that includes ALL of US!**

### Romans 1:18-30

This passage reveals that mankind is guilty and Paul gives us 5 actions we've taken and 4 consequences.

#### 5 Actions

- suppression of the truth about God: What can be known—His basic attributes, Eternal power and divine nature.
- depreciation of God's glory
- neglecting gratitude
- deny the obvious
- abandoned knowledge of God

## The Result: celebration of the inconceivable

#### 4 results

- God's wrath without excuse (1:18-20, 24): God has given us up...Given us over to the very thing we crave and demand. And as a result...
- Reasoning became futile (1:21a)
- Hearts became foolish (1:21b-22)
- Minds became depraved (1:28)

### **1:29: hopeless depravity is the end result.**

- Greed
- Envy
- Murder
- Strife
- Deceit and malice
- Gossip
- Slanderers
- God-haters
- Insolent
- Arrogant and boastful
- Entrepreneurial sinners
- Disobedient to parents
- Thoughtless and willfully stupid
- Unfaithful
- Loveless
- Merciless and pitiless

- We have known the moral right—God’s righteous decrees; we continue and approve and celebrate anyone who breaks the moral law of God.

When we reject what can be known about God in **creation**, when we reject what is obviously true—God’s moral law implanted and imprinted on the human **conscience**, when we disavow the light of God’s truth in **Christ**—we are left cognitively broken—our mental faculties are literally not functioning properly—a broken factory produces contaminated products (salmonella), and those thoughts are corrupt, and it leads and results in

Paul refers to God’s **consequence** training as “wrath” and wrath is defined (3 times) in the passage as “God giving us up...” to that thing we crave, to that futile, broken way of thinking.

Sometimes the only way God can speak to us is through our pain—pain of our own making—the inevitable consequences for wrongdoing. Only then, when life has crashed in around us, when our paper card house falls and collapses—sometimes it is only then that we are open to the truth.

C.S. Lewis once stated that **Pain is God’s megaphone to a dull and hardened heart.**

**Takeaways: Here’s how you and I can be (traditionally) tolerant and still stand on the truth.**

**If it is true, as we believe, that moral relativism and cultural tolerance is a bankrupt belief system...if it’s true that there is an objective anchor for the truths and moral values we believe in...then this should be our approach...**

**First, don’t judge (Rom. 2:1-5)** Passing judgment is God’s job. Preach the truth and embrace our need for Grace and mercy. Our invitation to a messed up world is not a self-righteous snarky judgmentalism—our invitation is “Hey guess what? We were as lost you are. We invite you to come and join the fellowship of the broken—people broken by gossip and theft and lying and all the rest. Come join this fellowship of repentant sinners who are turning away from sin with God’s help and his Spirit.”

**Second, be patient.** The dishonored father waited patiently for the prodigal son to come to his senses and return and repent. And so should we.

**Thirdly, be the messenger or pray for a messenger**—pray that God will send that wayward family member or boss or friend—pray that God will send them a prophet whom they can accept. Someone who will speak the truth in love at just the right time.

***Fourth, be the friend of sinners.*** While we don't want to compromise our faith or normalize sin in front of our kids, we do want to be a light in the darkness.

**Illus. Flash light.** Every lamp washes out in the blazing light of the sun. You can't be a light in the light. You can only shine the light in the darkness. If no one is accusing us of being friends of sinners then we aren't doing it right. If we get too cozy with isolationist separatist Pharisees, we will find ourselves in opposition to the very Christ we say we trust for salvation. Because he was a friend of sinners and a mortal threat to religion.

I've gotten a lot of questions—specific ones about “do I go to my family member's gay wedding etc.” All I can do is give you this guiding principle.

Don't do anything that cause you to compromise your stance for the truth or your conscience as a believer.

***But short of that...do everything you can to be a light in the darkness.*** You can be a model of the Gospel in your dark world.

Be tolerant of others' beliefs and claims, but stand on God's truth.