

Spiritual Relativism

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As we consider the topic of discipleship in the Christian community, a dominant motif that we need to have a good grasp on is the concept of spirituality. Both the secular world and the Christian church have their own ideas of what spirituality is. The postmodern secular world tends to think of spirituality as an innate part of human existence, whereas Christianity holds a much different, biblical view of spirituality. I think that the world's definition of spirituality has some truth to it, or else perhaps so many people would not believe it. However, it is fundamentally wrong at its core and especially in its denial of spiritual absolutes. In fact, in secular spirituality the only absolute seems to be the idea that everybody is spiritual, a claim that has no basis or authority on which to stand.

Based on the class discussion and lecture concerning the use of the Hebrew word *ruach* used in the Old Testament, it becomes apparent that there is some sort of spiritual side to every human being. The fact that "God... breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7, NIV) coupled with the foundational, biblical belief that all human beings are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) seems to ascribe to human beings the possibility of a deeper level connection with the Creator, and with one another, than the rest of the so-called animal kingdom.

Additionally, in evangelism the idea has been promoted that every person has within them something of a "god-shaped void" which longs desperately to be filled. Although this idea can be easily glazed over by most secularists, their actions speak louder than their words. If this theory were true, then we would expect them, in spite of their denial, to themselves pursue some kind of fulfillment beyond the physical and psychological realms, and that is exactly what many of them are doing. This brings me to my next point because, once they adopt their own ideas about spirituality, their denial of

Christianity and of the Christian God shifts focus from a denial of the spiritual to a denial of spiritual absolutes.

In “spiritual” secularism, the former tendency to deny the existence of spiritual things has been replaced with a sort of spiritual relativism. In other words, to get around the idea of the God of the Bible secularists are trending away from claims that spirituality is imaginary, infantile, or inane and are adopting a sort of godless, inherently human view of spirituality that is as unique to the individual as fingerprints and DNA. The fundamental problem with this view of spirituality is that it, like other forms of relativism, has no ground on which to back up its claims.

The argument that human beings tend to pursue a spiritual or religious aspect of their existence is not sufficient to support a spiritually relativistic presupposition. Instead, it could just as easily follow that such a universal spiritual hunger is evidence for the existence of one spiritual absolute—God. If that is the case, if God is real, then the secular spiritualists miss the biggest and most vital part of what it means to be spiritual. For secular spirituality, the existence of a personal, sovereign God would mean that all bets are off.

So, how does spiritual relativism compare to what we as human beings already know about the world? In the world of physics, we know that there are physical absolutes. The law of gravity, for example, gives us approximately 100% confidence that what goes up, if it goes unobstructed and unassisted, will always come down. We know that matter cannot be created or destroyed (the First Law of Thermodynamics) and that everything, if left to itself, tends toward disorder (the Second Law of Thermodynamics). From Psychology we know that if we put garbage (negative thoughts, pure amusement, abusive situations, etc.) into our minds, we get garbage out in the form of bad (unethical, unprofitable, harmful) behavior.

Therefore, we know for certain that if we leave our homes untended for decades then they are going to fall apart, and if we constantly think that we cannot achieve

anything that even remotely resembles success then we will never be successful in our endeavors. These facts of life have been proven time and time again; indeed, they are somewhat timeless. Since we in postmodern Western society are now willing to admit to the existence of spirituality realities, would it not follow that there would be spiritual absolutes and laws for us discover, such as those we know exist in both the physical and psychological realities? Why should we expect spirituality to be any different from any other kind of reality?

So then, it is the secular view of spirituality that becomes imaginary because it has absolutely no correspondence to reality as we know it. Furthermore, secular spirituality can be demonstrated to be infantile, since it attempts to construct a relatively new paradigm on the faulty foundation which is disproven by the new paradigm. Finally, secular views of spirituality are inane because of the absurdity of the above two as well as secular spirituality's dependence upon another baseless theory—relativism.

How does all this help us as Christians? Not only is the existence of the human spiritual drive (the “god-shaped void”) a potentially good apologetic, but also the fact that spiritual reality would have to, in some way, resemble or correspond with reality as we know it is quite possibly an even stronger one. So, when discussing the matter of personal spiritual growth, maturity, and conditioning, it logically follows that such spiritual fitness would resemble other types of self-conditioning and growth such as physical fitness and psychological wellness.

In both physical fitness and psychological wellness, there are clearly defined positives and negatives, good and bad, and right and wrong ways of developing one's own physical strength, speed, agility, intellectual capability, social behavior, occupational competency, etc. Therefore, just as in personal physical, psychological, emotional, social, occupational, academic, and artistic growth and development (just to name a few), there must exist one correct, probably challenging, ultimately beneficial, process-oriented means of growing and developing oneself spiritually. This is the foundational presupposition on which Christian spirituality stands.