

A Warning to Us All Relativism

by Mark Woodhouse

Mark Woodhouse's sermon warns against the dangers of relativism and emphasizes the necessity of absolute truth in Christianity.

Duration: 41:08

Scripture: Joshua 24:14-24, Matthew 6:33, Romans 1:25

Topics: "Relativism"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by reading from Joshua chapter 24, emphasizing the importance of fearing and serving the Lord in sincerity and truth. He warns against the dangers of humanism, which is the worship of the creature rather than the creator. The preacher also shares a humorous anecdote about Charles Spurgeon, a well-known preacher who used his ministry income to build an orphanage. The sermon concludes with a mention of the preacher's appreciation for the support and condolences received for his mother-in-law, and a reminder to always be grateful to the Lord.

Transcript

I want to express our appreciation as a family for the sentiments and for the flowers and so on that were sent to my mother-in-law. Almost made me feel bad for all the mother-in-law jokes I've told. Almost.

Rich was mentioning Charles Spurgeon. Charles Spurgeon was quite a character. He actually used much of his ministry income to build an orphanage for orphans in London and was constantly, wherever he went, he was taking up collections for his orphans.

And there's a story recounted about Spurgeon that he went to one ministerial conference and because this was his habit, they all knew that they all expected him to take up a collection for his orphans and they had agreed ahead of time that they were not going to give. You know, this was not an appropriate time. So, of course, Spurgeon got up and he took off his hat and he passed it around in a collection for his orphanage and when it came back empty, he looked down into the hat and he closed his eyes and prayed and said, my lord, I thank you that this group of skin flints at least return my hat.

But that's the kind of humor that Spurgeon had. He was quite a character. Recently, we have heard about humanism and the problem of humanism.

There was a little bit of discussion both from the platform and in other venues about what humanism is about and why it's such a serious problem. Romans 1.25 talks about those who worship and serve the creature rather than the creator. That's what humanism is all about.

This idea of serving the creature and worshiping the creature rather than the creator. And it's certainly a threat. It is a delusion, a deception in the hearts of the unsaved.

And we in the church are not particularly susceptible to that ourselves because we know that we are creatures of a creator. But there are other dangers to us as Christians and I would like to look at another one this morning as we consider a passage of scripture that is familiar to us. But I'm going to ask you to stand up and read this as we consider this warning to all of us who are inside the body of Christ.

This is Joshua chapter 24, starting at verse 14. We'll read through verse 24. Now, therefore, fear the Lord, serve him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the river and in Egypt.

Serve the Lord. And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the river or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

So the people answered and said, far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods. For the Lord our God is he who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed. Then the Lord drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land.

We also will serve the Lord, for he is our God. But Joshua said to the people, you cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God.

He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then will he turn and do... I guess we missed the end of that. And the people said to Joshua, no, but we will serve the Lord.

So Joshua said to the people, you are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord for yourselves to serve him. And they said, we are witnesses. Isn't it interesting? Now, therefore, he said, put away the foreign gods which are among you and incline your heart to the Lord God of Israel.

And the people said to Joshua, the Lord, our God, we will serve and his voice we will obey. Thank you. Let's look to the Lord in just a word of prayer.

Our father, this morning, we ask that as we consider this important subject, this important warning to our hearts, we ask that you would help us to see clearly where there might be areas in our lives and in our fellowship where these things are a problem. We thank you that your word is clear, that you have not disguised the truth, and that it is easy for us to understand. And we ask that you would help us to apply it to our lives this morning as we study it together.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you.

Please be seated. Notice that Joshua said, you cannot serve the Lord. Isn't that interesting? Here he's telling them they need to serve the Lord.

And he turns around and says, you can't serve the Lord. You make the choice, but by the way, you can't serve the Lord. And what he was saying was your condition is such that in your present state, you are incapable of serving the Lord because he is a holy and a just God, and you are not holy and you are not righteous.

And so they had to make a choice. Now, there were a lot of choices they could have made. Because in the land they were dwelling in, there were other occupants who believed other things, who made other choices.

And in many cases, those choices had been brought into Israel and among the people, and they had corrupted themselves by taking other beliefs, those of the nations around them, those nations whom they had displaced and would have and should have completely eliminated from the land of their promise. But they didn't, and consequently, they had choices and were making poor choices. And Joshua says to them, you cannot serve the Lord in that condition.

And then they pricked to their hearts, say, we will serve the Lord. We will, and we will be witnesses to this covenant that we're making with the Lord. Now, the situation in which Israel found itself is not an uncommon one.

In fact, it's very common. It is a situation that we come up against every day in our lives. Men and women have choices that they can make.

Christianity is not the only choice. Christianity is not the only thing that they are being assaulted with. It is not the only belief system with which they are familiar.

And over and over again, they are exposed to other alternatives to the claims of Christ, and many are making poor decisions. And they are following after some of those things. There was a recent study in 1984, 1994 by the Barna Group about this concept of what do you believe? And one of the statements they asked was very interesting.

It was a statement, there is no such thing as absolute truth. And the question was, what percentage of Americans do you think, American adults, agree with that statement? There is no such thing as absolute truth. In other words, I have choices I can make.

And I can choose this, or I can choose this, and there's no real ramifications of the two because there's no absolute truth. And when they did this study, they found out that a shocking 72% of Americans agreed with that statement, that there is no such thing as absolute truth. Now Israel had made similar choices.

They had gone away from the God of Israel, they had gone away from the God who had brought them out of Egypt, and they were following after other beliefs, other gods. And that's why Joshua gave them that alternative. And yet here we find that in our society, we have men and women doing the very same thing.

Believing that there is no source of absolute truth, and consequently they are free to make whichever choice they choose. Unfortunately, the concept that there is no absolute truth defies logic. Because there has to be something that's true and something that's false.

Now this belief that there is no absolute truth has a name to it. And we'll talk about that in just a second. But even though they may logically realize that there has to be something true and something false, they still believe that there is no absolute truth, no source of absolute truth.

Now those of us who went through the Truth Project have seen this. We were exposed to this at the very beginning, the idea of veritology, that word that was coined specifically to talk about what is true. The same question that Pilate asked when he was faced with the very epitome of truth, the personification of truth, Jesus Christ himself.

And yet he said, what is truth? And we all have to make that choice. We all have to determine what is true. Now fortunately we have some reference materials that can help us.

We look at the word of God and we understand that the word of God is truth. That God is the source of truth, that Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. But there are others around us who are making other choices and who don't see the compelling consequences of those other choices that they are making.

And so they believe this consequence or this statement that there is no such thing as absolute truth. And this concept is called relativism. So we talked about humanism.

We see that in the world around us. We also need to recognize this thing called relativism. The idea that what's good for me may not be good for you.

And what's true for you might not be true for me. We see it all around us and not only in our society are we asked to acknowledge it, we are asked to affirm it. We are required sometimes by our employers, sometimes by our society, sometimes by our friends to not only acknowledge that they have a choice to make, and they do, but to affirm the choice that they've made.

And to let them feel good about the choice that they've made as if it were the right choice, as if it were a choice that was acceptable to God. But it is not. So this idea of relativism basically is wrapped up in this kind of a statement.

What is right for you may not be right for me. In other words, I don't want you to tell me what's right and wrong. That's the essence of what's being said, isn't it? And I don't want anybody to tell me what's right and wrong.

I don't want there to be any standards that I have to live up to. I want to make my own choice. Does that sound familiar, vaguely, like Genesis chapter 3? I don't want God to set a standard for me.

I don't want him to tell me what I can eat and what I can't eat. I want to make my own decision about what's right and wrong. So I'm going to go to the knowledge of good and evil.

I'm going to eat of it so I can make my own decisions. That's the problem that existed from the very beginning of creation. And we still have it around today.

I want to decide that for myself. Now the problem is that not only do we see this in the society around us, but we are beginning to see it again in the church. We are seeing the same problem of relativism moving from the secular society around us into the church.

And we are being deluded by this concept that I can make that choice for myself. Now if we looked at a typical statement of a relativist, it might look something like this. If you believe that Christianity is right for you, that's fine.

I'm glad it works for you. I just happen to believe something differently. But I'm not going to say that you're wrong.

And the implication in there is, so don't you say that I'm wrong. Right? I'm going to make a choice what I believe. And I believe something differently than you do.

And that's fine for you. I'm glad you believe that. I'm glad it works for you and so on and so forth.

But don't tell me that's what I have to believe. Because I want to believe whatever I want to believe. And if I want to believe in atheism, I want to believe in evolutionism, I want to believe in a philosophy that doesn't hold me accountable to anyone, don't you tell me that I can't do that.

Or that that's wrong. So the relativist really is trying to escape. He is trying to move away from any kind of an accountability.

And consequently to live his life the way he wants to live his life. And that's the essence of what relativism is. And the motivation behind it.

But when you look at what he says, this might be right for you, but it's not right for me. I'm glad it works for you, but I've got other beliefs. Basically they're saying something like, let's see, vanilla ice cream tastes better to you, but chocolate tastes better to me.

As if there is no more import to the choices that they make in their beliefs than their opinion about what ice cream tastes better. Hopefully we see a difference here. Hopefully we realize it's not a matter of opinion, it's not a matter of what you like or don't like, what you prefer or don't prefer.

It's a matter of truth. And dealing with the issue of what is true. Now many times in our lives when we come across truth, it hurts.

It smacks us in the face. It convicts us. It forces us to realize that there are things going on in our lives that ought not to be going on in our lives.

It forces us to recognize that we've made some bad decisions that we need to change in our lives, or that our behavior needs to change, or that our relationship with someone needs to change, or that there's sin in our lives that need to be taken care of. That's what truth does. And that's why the relativist doesn't want to have anything to do with it.

Because he doesn't want those consequences in his life. When we think about logic, and one of my favorite classes to teach is a class in logical analysis, which I teach in the spring, and I think I've mentioned this a few times to you. I love logic.

I love thinking logically. I love watching students learn to think logically. There was an old program on television when I was growing up called The Paper Chase, and it was all about this professor at Harvard Law School, played by John Houseman.

And all these students would come into his classroom, and he would teach them how to think logically. And at the beginning and during the prologue of the episode every week, he says, You come into my class with skulls full of mush, and you leave thinking like a lawyer. I like to delude myself into thinking that happens in my logical analysis class, that these students come in with no concept of how to think logically, but by the time they leave, they're at least able to analyze arguments, they're at least able to communicate in a way that is logically consistent.

And the foundation of logic, there are four laws. And we'll just talk about two of them this morning. The first one is the law of non-contradiction.

And the law of non-contradiction says you can't have two statements that are contradictory to one another and then both be true at the same time. If one is true, the other one must be false, and vice versa. That's the law of non-contradiction.

And the second of those four laws, actually it's the fourth law, but we're just looking at it secondly, is the idea of logical inference. That we should be able to look at a statement, look at the truth of a statement, and make a logical inference about other things that must also consequently be true. And if we can't do that, we have no way of thinking beyond the statement itself.

So when you look at relativism, you find that it is internally inconsistent. And it's interesting because in order for relativism to be true, it has to be true for both parties, doesn't it? I mean, it does. It has to be true for both parties.

It cannot itself be relative. The relativist can't say, well, relativism is good for me, but absolutism is good for you, that's okay. He can't do that.

Those are the opposites, and they can't both be true at the same time. If he says what's relative, you know, what is okay for me is not okay for you, and what is okay for you is not okay for me, he's applying the same thing to both parties. Saying we have to both be relativistic.

But relativism doesn't allow for one person to be absolute and another person to be relativistic. They're contradictory. They cannot both be true at the same time.

And so the relativist himself makes an absolute. He says relativism must be absolute. Everybody has to believe it.

Everybody has to be relative or else, not relatives, but relative in their thinking or else nothing works. So he doesn't allow for someone to not be a relativist, which is a contradiction, an internal contradiction of the whole system. Plus, if you can have two contradictory statements that are both true at the same time, you can't draw any logical inference from them.

And so the relativist can't say what you believe is okay for you and what I believe is okay for me, and let's draw some conclusion out of this. Because there's no conclusion that can be drawn. Because if two contradictory things are both true, then there is no way to draw any kind of a logical inference.

And so relativism itself is internally inconsistent. It falls apart, as does any other philosophy other than a biblical worldview. So it shouldn't surprise us that we see that, but the relativist doesn't see that.

He doesn't understand that he's grasped onto something that in itself can't possibly work. On the other hand, we who know the Word of God and who understand that truth comes from God also should understand that truth is exclusive. That if one thing is true, nothing else that is contradictory to that can be true.

That's that first law, the law of non-contradiction. So if indeed Christ is the only way to heaven, then there cannot be any other way. Because truth is exclusive.

If it's true that Christ is the means to reconciliation with God, then it must be false that any other means can bring reconciliation to God. Truth is exclusive. If one statement is true, then by the law of non-contradiction, every other contradictory statement must be false.

And we know that, but the relativist doesn't. He doesn't look at it that way. He cannot do that.

Because the minute he acknowledges that truth itself exists and truth itself is exclusive, then he has no choice but to believe it. And he doesn't want to believe it. He wants to make his own choices.

Now what does it mean for us who are believers? And we understand that truth is exclusive. Then when we look at the statement of Jesus Christ who says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me.

That is an exclusive statement, isn't it? He says there cannot possibly be any other way to get to God. Because if what I'm saying is true, then I have just excluded every other possible means of salvation. I have excluded every other possible means of logic, of logical choice.

I have excluded every other possible choice you can make. And I have restricted you to one exclusive means of being reconciled to God. So when the relativist says, well, I'm glad that Christianity works for you, but I've decided to believe something else, our response ought to be, but if Christianity is true, there is nothing else.

Because if Christianity is true, and the exclusive claims of Christ are true, there is no other belief system that can possibly bring you any kind of merit. So we need to understand this. This statement that is in John 14.6, we quote it all the time.

But do we really understand the implications of it? Because if we do, if we understand the exclusivity of this statement of truth, then we would naturally be following up by telling everybody we know. There's only one way. It doesn't matter whether you want to choose your own way.

You don't have a choice. The choices have been eliminated. There is only one way that you can be reconciled to God, and that's through the person of Jesus Christ.

So for us, relativism outside the church, and looking at our philosophy of what we believe for salvation, it should be pretty clear. We get accused as believers of being, or as Christians of being narrow-minded, and we are. And we are necessarily so, because the claims of Christ are exclusive.

They exclude every other possibility. So we should be proud. Well, not proud.

We should be pleased that we are called narrow-minded, because that means we're doing and believing and demonstrating what we should be demonstrating in our lives, that Jesus Christ is indeed the only means of reconciliation to God. Now, those who choose relativism often make the associated mistake of

assuming that all they have to do is believe hard enough in what they believe, and there will be some merit to that, right? I mean, if they acknowledge that they believe something differently than we do, and that what we believe is working for us, then they must assume that there's some way that what they're believing can be working for them. And usually that way is sincerity.

If I just believe it hard enough, if I am just focused on this one thing, even if I'm wrong, if I'm believing it and I'm acting on it and I'm living my life according to this, then somehow God is going to recognize my sincerity, and there will be some merit in my activity, even if I'm believing the wrong thing, even if I'm going in the wrong direction. That's what the relativist is counting on, that God will somehow recognize his sincerity even if he is sincerely wrong. We know the word of God tells us that's not the case.

That it is not our works that demonstrate our sincerity that brings merit with God, it is just the opposite. It is our faith in Christ that results in works that can be seen by others, as we saw clearly in our study of James not too long ago, but not the other way around. Our sincerity in believing the wrong thing has no merit with God whatsoever.

And so the relativist has to understand that if he makes a different choice, even though he might put his whole heart into following that choice, he is still damning himself to an eternity apart from Christ and away from God. His sincerity is not enough. Is sincerity enough? Absolutely not.

The relative will say, truth is what you sincerely believe. In other words, my belief has some impact on whether something is true or not. Now how silly is that? Truth isn't determined by our belief.

Truth is determined by what is true. And we either believe what is true or we choose not to believe what is true. But our belief doesn't make it true.

Sincerity is definitely not enough. Truth has nothing to do with belief. Isn't that interesting? Just because I believe something doesn't make it true.

And just because I disbelieve something doesn't make it false. My belief has no impact whatsoever on the truth or falsity of the object of my belief. And consequently, even though I may believe sincerely, and I may act on that belief, and I may be dedicating my life to that choice that I've made as to what I'm going to believe, it has no impact whatsoever on the truthfulness of what I've chosen.

The only thing that determines truth is God. And if I choose to believe with all my heart something that God says is false, I'm not going to make it true by believing in it. And I'm not going to gain some merit from God by believing in what is false.

Now, let's talk about Christianity. Those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ find ourselves in a situation where we clearly recognize that relativism outside the body of Christ is wrong. We run up against it.

We talk to those who believe in it. We talk to those who have made other choices and want us to affirm the choices that we've made, or that they've made, rather. And we can't do that, can we? We cannot say, well, I'm glad that Buddhism isn't working for you, and I hope you're really successful in it.

We can't say that. Because we know that Christianity is exclusive. And we cannot affirm the merit or the value of this other person sincerely believing in what is wrong and what is false.

We have to do just the opposite. We have to say, I'm sorry that you've made a choice to believe something that isn't true. Because your life is going to be expended in sincerely following after falsehood.

Now, if you really want to know what is true so that you can believe in it, I'd be glad to share that with you. Because God has shared it with us in His Word. But I'm not going to affirm what you believe and tell you that it's okay that you believe this.

Now, we face that same thing in the area of sexuality. All the time we face that. Not only are we to accept this person who has chosen a homosexual lifestyle, we are required by our society to affirm that choice, to make them feel good about that choice.

The truth of the matter is, if we love them the way we should, our highest goal should be to bring them to Jesus Christ, and He will reveal to them the sin in their lives. But it is not for us to affirm a choice that they've made that's leading them away from Christ, that's leading them away from the truth, that is causing them to expend their lives in an activity that God finds abhorrent. We can't do that.

But we can love them. And we can treat them as those for whom Christ died, and we can bring them to Jesus Christ. And we should.

Now I want to take a look at a different passage of Scripture for a moment. 1 Corinthians chapter 5. Because in 1 Corinthians we find the Apostle Paul addressing a church that has allowed relativism to get into their midst. They've allowed it to creep in from outside.

The studies that have been done about societal norms in the church unfortunately demonstrate that in most Christian churches, that is nominally Christian churches, whatever is happening in society is usually reflected in the church about seven years later. It takes about seven years for the degradation, the degrading of truth in the outside world to make its way into the church. And that's what we find here in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. Although we would never say that I have a choice as to what I believe in order for my salvation, we do say I have a choice as to what I believe I can do or I can't do, or what's right for me to do as a Christian and what's not right for me to do as a Christian.

And that's called relativism. It's relativism within the confines of Christianity that has to do with our behavior rather than our beliefs. And we see that here in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. Let's read it together.

I'll put it up on the screen. I'll just read it to you here. It's actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles that a man has his father's wife.

Hmm. Isn't that interesting? Paul, who is not at Corinth, is talking about a reputation that has been disseminated about these Corinthian Christians. And the reputation is that they have allowed something into their midst that everybody else recognizes as being wrong.

I mean, if everybody else didn't recognize it as being wrong, why would the reputation have spread, right? I mean, if somebody's doing something good in a local church, do you hear that in all the other churches? Well, Paul sometimes praised churches for the reputation they had. But in this case, it's a reputation for doing what is wrong, for tolerating sin. And the reputation is such that it's come to the ears of Paul, who isn't even in Corinth.

And his confusion or his disdain, if you want to put it that way, is not that this sin took place. It's that it's being tolerated in the church. That these brothers and sisters in Christ haven't done anything about it.

They haven't condemned this individual. They haven't tried to reconcile him to Christ. They haven't tried to cause repentance in his heart.

They have accepted what he's doing. And the reputation has spread that these Christians are tolerating sin. And not just any sin.

A sin that even the Gentiles wouldn't put up with. So what's happened here is this group of believers in Corinth have somehow come to the conclusion that this thing which everybody knows is wrong is okay for this one individual. I mean, he can do that.

He can make that choice. We're not going to tell him it's wrong. And that's called relativism.

And so we have an example here of relativism moving out of the secular world into the church and beginning to affect the believer's understanding of truth. What does God permit? What does God not permit? What does God call sin? And what does God not call sin? And what this man was involved in was clearly sin. And yet the believers had decided that it was tolerable.

Not only had they considered it tolerable, they had affirmed it. You know how we know? Because he was still in their midst. They had basically said by their behavior, we accept you in this behavior.

You're still part of us. This is okay. And Paul says, this is not okay.

He goes on to say, and you are puffed up and have not rather mourned that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. And then he goes on to say, I'm not there, but I've already judged. I've already looked at this and discerned that this is sin.

I've already recognized that this is something that you should have recognized as sin, and you should have done something about it. And he goes on to encourage them as to what they should do. But you notice how relativism had crept into this church in Corinth? Now, it's not just this one instance we have.

There were other problems in Corinth. There were problems with the way they met together to worship the Lord, to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Some of them would say, it's okay for you to just come and take the bread and wine, but for me, I'm going to come and I'm going to have a feast, and I'm just going to feed myself.

And if you can't do that or you choose not to do that, that's okay for you, but for me, this is what I'm going to do. That's relativism. And it had crept into the church, crept into the church, and was tainting their effectiveness for Jesus Christ and their testimony for Jesus Christ.

Now, it not only creeps into the church, it also creeps into our lives. Why didn't the church do something about this, man? Why didn't they see this for what it was and see the necessity of doing something about it? Because they had allowed themselves to abandon the absolute standards of God, and they had adopted a relativistic perspective on sin. Instead of saying, this is what God says, this is what you're doing, it does not agree, we need to do something about this, repent, confess your sin, turn away from it.

They didn't do that. They had adopted a relativistic perspective on sin, and unfortunately, it happens to us as well. Avoiding relativism is not the same thing as legalism.

Legalism, we hear that word thrown around a lot, way too much. Because if an assembly or a group of believers decides we are going to live after the pattern that God has given to us, and we expect that others are going to do that too, that's not legalism. That's called faithfulness to the scriptures.

But if we start to say, look, we've got these other things that we want you to do that aren't particularly biblical, but they show piety and they demonstrate that you have some concern for Christ or whatever it might be, whatever we attach to those extra things, and we say, you have to not only live according to scriptures, you have to do these other things too, that's legalism. But that's not what we're talking about. We're not talking about a choice of relativism or legalism, we're talking about a choice of relativism or faithfulness to the word of God.

We're not talking about going into legalism. But this church had made the choice to abandon the absolute standards of God and to accept what was not a standard of God. Following God's standard is not legalism, it is faithfulness.

As I mentioned, legalism is adopting our own standards that go beyond God's specific direction in his word and then requiring others to hold these new, more restrictive standards as if they were God's own. This is the very thing that Jesus condemned in the Pharisees. The Pharisees had their laws, they called the sayag, the fence.

And in order not to violate Moses' law, they had established all these other laws to surround the law of Moses, and they said, well, if we don't violate any of these, we certainly won't violate the law of Moses. And that's okay, that's a perfectly fine individual decision to make. If I don't live this way, and if I don't allow myself to go this far, then I will never go far enough in order to violate the law of God.

That's okay. You can make that choice on your own. But when you start requiring someone else to live by the standards that you set that go beyond the principles of God's word, that's legalism.

And that will destroy the fellowship in a church. It will destroy the joy in a fellowship, because God doesn't require that of us. Now what about us? Do we ever get to the point where we take a relativistic view of sin? And I think if we're honest, we would look at our own lives and say, well, if I'm tolerating any sin in my life, I would have to say yes, I've taken on a relativistic view of sin.

Because if I didn't, if I held to the standards of God, absolutely, then I would not tolerate that sin in my life. But if it's there and I haven't done anything about it, I know better than the Corinthian Christians. Because somehow I have allowed myself to set aside what God requires, and I've allowed myself to make my own decision about what is good and what is evil, about what I will tolerate and what I will not tolerate.

And it's easy for us on an individual basis to become relativistic on our view of our own sin. Or maybe it's within the family. Maybe there's something going on in our families.

Maybe it's a loved one. And we have allowed ourselves to tolerate what's going on in their lives, even though we know that it's absolutely wrong. And as a result of that, we have become relativistic, because once we tolerate it here, we have to tolerate it here.

I mean, you can't have fellowship with this family member who's doing this, living in sin in this particular manner, and then condemn somebody else who's doing the same thing, can you? And so relativism creeps in. And we take a relativistic view of sin, and we find ourselves abandoning the absolutes of God. The Corinthian Christians were not unique.

They were basically us, maybe on a different level. Maybe to a different degree, maybe about things that were much more obvious, but in our own lives, we need to be very, very careful. Do I hold to the standards of God in my own behavior? Or have I allowed myself to slip? Have I allowed his standards to be dropped so that I can make my own decisions and I can live the way that I want to, even within Christianity? Because if I have, then I have become relativistic.

And it's just as wrong for me as a Christian as it would be for the unsaved person who decides to abandon Christianity and go some other direction because they want to make up their own mind and sincerely believe something that God says is wrong. So it's a challenge to us. We recognize it in others.

We recognize its foolishness in others when it comes to salvation. But are we as honest in our own lives? Are we as honest looking at our own behavior, at our own sin, to find it silly, to find it untenable, unworkable, unrighteous? That's the way God sees it. Heavenly Father, we thank you that we have this example in 1 Corinthians 5, that we can see clearly in this extreme example what perhaps we tolerate in our own lives in a smaller way.

Help us to learn to abhor relativism, to, as the Apostle Paul says in Romans 12, to abhor that which is evil and cling to that which is good, that our lives might be characterized by very clear adherence to your principles. Not to go to the legalistic side, but to be faithful and consistent in our understanding of what you require of us and in living our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit in concert with your principles. Help us not to be relativistic.

Help us to see things clearly through your eyes so that we can see our sins the way you see our sins and so that we can repent and confess and keep our lives clean before you so that we are fit vessels for you to use in your service and that we may bring you the worship and the glory that you deserve. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/21/SID21981.mp3>

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