THEY SAY, “THERE ARE NO MORAL ABSOLUTES”

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INTRODUCTION

Man is a moral being, therefore, he possesses a sense of “ought.” All people realize that there is a sense of “ought” in mankind. Whether one is a Christian, an Agnostic, or a declared Atheist, he realizes that man is a “moral” being. The Atheist would argue it is “unethical” for a person to steal from him, destroy his property or take the life of one of his loved ones. He has a sense of morality. But, how does man determine “moral rightness” or “moral wrongness”?

A thought needs to be inserted here—the very fact that “human morals” are discussed demonstrates the truth that humans are vastly different from animals. Animals have instinct, but are amoral—they have no morals. It is not a crime for an ape to “steal” a banana from its neighbor. The ape is never brought before a tribunal of his peers and sentenced to five years in a penitentiary for his immoral and/or unethical behavior. Also, a human is not charged with reckless driving and manslaughter for intentionally running over and killing a snake that was crossing the road. Why not? There is a vast difference between humans and animals. Now, since animals do not possess morality, from whence did humans obtain this sense of ought? If evolution were true, then man had to develop the sense of ought. But to develop the sense of ought, he had to first recognize the need for the sense of ought. In other words, he, in essence, had to say to himself, “I ought to develop a sense of ought.” By the very fact that we are discussing “morals” is itself a valid argument against natural evolution.
SOME SAY MORALS ARE
SUBJECTIVE AND SITUATIONAL

Since humans possess morals, pertinent questions must be asked: “What is the standard for morals?” “Are there moral absolutes, that is, an objective standard for morals that says something is right or wrong based on that objective standard?” Or, “Are morals based simply on human desires and experiences?” Regarding “Ethics,” the *Humanist Manifesto II* states:

Fourth: We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is *autonomous* and *situational*, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest ... Sixth: In the area of sexuality, we believe that intolerant attitudes, often cultivated by orthodox religions and puritanical cultures, unduly repress sexual conduct. The right to birth control, abortion, and divorce should be recognized. While we do not approve of exploitive, denigrating forms of sexual expression, neither do we wish to prohibit, by law or social sanction, sexual behavior between two consenting adults. The many varieties of sexual exploration should not in themselves be considered “evil.” Without countenancing mindless permissiveness or unbridled promiscuity, a civilized society should be a *tolerate* one.²

An online statement/question posed to an internet site, “Ask.com,” with an answer given in reply, demonstrates how many are saying there are no moral absolutes. Although the reply given in the quote is poorly written, it does illustrate the way many in the world think. Note the following exchange:

Gerald P. asks:

Some people claim that all moral requirements are absolute, but surely "Do not steal" is not. If my children are starving and the owner of the only food available refuses to sell me any, or to help me feed them, even though he or she has plenty, I would steal and I don't think I would be doing anything wrong. Hence not all moral requirements are absolute. Which one's are, which aren't, and why?

Jennifer in part answers:

There are no moral absolutes. There are not many absolutes any of us are sure of for that matter. You cannot ignore the fact that when something is done one way here it is done another way
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there. The world is different all around, hence, no absolute [sic]. Mankind tries its best to find structure and stability—these are the reasons for many institutions: government, marriage, power, ownership, don't forget these are man-made, they are not some invariable consequence [sic] of nature or existence—they do change, will change, and have changed—many and often. Being a human our objectives are to preserve our existence, hence, we don't like death, so the humanistic [sic] option is not to do it; but don't confuse this with a "moral absolute," but rather understand it for what it is—a form of cooperation. Just remember, even Newton thought space was absolute until Einstein came along and prove [sic] it wasn't. Like many things in this world/life, everything is relativistic. It's all relative.

Those who claim absolutes I feel are closed-minded and inflexible. They wish to put all their eggs in one basket and to ignore all others. This deifies [sic] the essential beauty of the human experience, of life itself. You have one chance, one time on this Earth—it's all that we have and there are so many wonderful things to see an [sic] experience. Laws, and cooperative rules formed by society are good to adhere to, but you can see for yourself—in you [sic] example about stealing food—how things are relative. A starving man's need to eat food for survival is a perfect example of how things are not absolute, because the game changes for his needs to survive. You can find example likes this all throughout life.

And in response to the Christian above who thinks one should not steal under such dyer consequesnces [sic] should be ashamed of herself. That is not Christian at all. I hardly doubt God would prioritize ownership of food over some starving person's life; and further, if that person has food, and knows of someone starving, they [sic] should grant them [sic] that food for free. Don't forget the bible was made by a simple society at that time. Simple rules are enforced that have too many loopholes. This is a fundamental [sic] err [sic] in all religions I believe. Whenever you state something as "certain" there is bound to be a problem with that.  

If one rules God out of the equation in deciding moral issues, he is left with only humans as the standard. But that poses more questions: “Which human is to decide?” “What if the majority of humanity disagrees with that human’s decision?” “Are we to allow the majority to set the moral standard?” If so, “Which majority?”

Norman Geisler explains:
Protagoras, an ancient Greek philosopher, claimed that “man is the measure of all things.” Understood in the individual sense, this means that each person’s own will is the standard for what is right and wrong. The morally right thing to do is what is morally right to me. What is right for me may be wrong for another and vice versa.

The most obvious criticism is that this view implies that an act is right for someone, even if cruel, hateful, or tyrannical. But this is morally unacceptable. Second, if this theory were put into practice, society would be rendered inoperative. There can be no true community (com—unity) where there is no unity. If everyone did as he pleased, chaos would result. Finally, this theory does not tell us which aspect of human nature should be taken as the measure of all things. It is simply begging the question to claim it is the “good aspects,” for that implies some standard of good beyond humans by which we can tell what is good and what is evil in human nature or activity.4

Since there are problems with allowing each person to determine the standard of morals and ethics for himself, what about allowing the majority to determine what is right? Mr. Geisler continues:

One way to avoid the radical individualism and ethical solipsism of Protagoras’ position is to use the human race as a whole as the standard for good. In this way the part does not determine what is right for the whole, but the whole determines what is right for the part. In brief, mankind is the measure of all things.

In response, it should be noted first that even the whole race could be wrong. Whole communities, like Jonestown, have committed mass suicide. What if the vast majority of the human race decides that suicide is the best “solution” to the world’s problems? Should dissenters be forced to conform? Second, the human race is changing, as are ethical practices. Child sacrifice was once more commonly approved, as was slavery. Hence, we say the race has a better expression of values. But “better” implies a “best” by which the progress is measured.5

It should be obvious that the Humanists’ statement—“Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction”—is not true. If Ethics is autonomous (self-governing, self-ruling), the only way a person could ever be unethical or immoral is if he disobeyed his own rule(s). If one takes the position that the majority is the standard, then it stands that the whole world could never be
immoral as long as it follows its own standard—no matter how “far out” that standard is (including suicide, et cetera). The universal flood of Noah’s day is a clear example how the whole world can be wrong!

In Jennifer’s reply to Gerald, she stated: “There are no moral absolutes.” One might ask Jennifer if she is “absolutely sure?” Also, the Humanist Manifesto states: “While we do not approve of exploitive, denigrating forms of sexual expression, neither do we wish to prohibit, by law or social sanction, sexual behavior between two consenting adults.” We ask: “By whose standard do they ‘not approve’ of certain actions?” “Is there an objective standard which says those ‘exploitive, denigrating forms of sexual expression, would be absolutely wrong?’” (emphasis added). If they are absolutely sure of their position, then there has to be an absolute standard which is affirming moral absolutes! If there are no absolutes, then they cannot be absolutely sure that “exploitive, denigrating forms of sexual expression” are absolutely wrong!

FRUITS OF BELIEVING
“THERE ARE NO MORAL ABSOLUTES”

There have been times in human history when men have acted as if there are no moral absolutes. There have been times when men have indeed practiced that morals and ethics were autonomous and situational. Even people who were supposed to be God’s people have practiced the philosophy of autonomous authority. The Bible itself records such a time. During the period known as “the Judges,” the Bible declares: “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Jgs.17:6). The same words are repeated at the end of the book—“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Jgs. 21:25). Similar words are also stated in Judges 18:1. The book of Judges covers a period of time when there was much chaos and confusion for God’s people. In fact, this period of history is known as “the dark ages of the Bible.” Why was there so much chaos and why is this period of history known as “the dark ages of the Bible?” It was because every man was doing that which was right in his own eyes. Evidently, they practiced the Humanists’ concept, i.e., that ethics are autonomous and situational. Adam Clarke observed: “When a man’s own will, passions, and caprice, are to be made the rule of law, society is in a most perilous and ruinous state.”
Our society is suffering from the “no moral absolutes” philosophy. This is seen in the many divorces, abortions, and sexual perversions in our country. Our country was founded upon Christian principles and was once called “a Christian nation.” Most of our founding fathers believed in the Bible, and many of us can remember when the Bible was taught and upheld in our public schools, right along with the starting of the school day with the “Pledge of Allegiance.” Unfortunately, we have allowed much of the “no moral absolutes” philosophy to eradicate much of that for which we once stood. Instead of the Bible being openly allowed, as well as encouraged in our classrooms, now it has come under attack. At the same time, the teaching of evolution is allowed and encouraged. Steve Rudd states that the effects of Humanism are:

A. Evolution is fact
B. There is no God
C. The Bible is a myth
D. Antagonistic towards all other religions
E. Eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die
F. "If It Feels Good Do It"
G. Man answers only to himself
H. No absolute truth or right and wrong
I. Man becomes self righteous
J. General unwillingness to follow authority
K. Sexual freedom, homosexuality, easy divorce
L. Suicide, abortion and euthanasia encouraged
M. Situation ethics: "lying is Ok if you need to"
N. Children are rebellious (Spanking children is outlawed as a form of discipline)
O. Take the "lock" from wedlock—Increased Divorce rate (If marriage partners are unhappy, divorce)
P. Materialism and acquisition of wealth

The effects of “no moral absolutes” in our society, as well as in the Lord’s church, are explained in an article entitled, “Moral Relativism or Scriptural Absolutes.” The complete article states:
In our postmodern age, the philosophy of total indulgence in sensual pleasures has become the societal norm. Television, movies, video games, and books espouse moral relativism (which teaches that there is no absolute system of morals or ethics). Television shows such as *Friends* teach that lying, stealing, and sexual promiscuity are normal and ethically acceptable—as long as you get what you want. “Just do it!” is the catchphrase of a popular, and therefore fashionably desirable, shoe marketed primarily to teenagers and college students. With this kind of pressure from the entertainment and fashion industries, it is easy to see why moral relativism is such a prevalent way of thinking. The results, though, are evident in the decadence of humanity in our postmodern world. Legalized murders bear new and acceptable names such as “abortion” and “euthanasia”; sexual perversions enjoy favored status; lying, stealing, and cheating are fully acceptable under our new “enlightened” way of relativistic thinking—get whatever you can, however you can, whenever you can, because life is short and you only go around once.

However, this idea is not confined just to contemporary society. Moral and ethical relativism has spread even into the realm of Christianity, causing faithful men and women to question scriptural absolutes and abandon clear biblical teachings. The Christian exegesis has shifted from “the Bible says,” to “I just feel this in my heart and therefore know it to be true.” Elders no longer execute scripturally mandated discipline, preachers cease to teach the truth and preach only what is commonly acceptable, and those who teach moral and scriptural absolutism are branded as legalistic, judgmental, and narrow-minded.

If this is the case, then the inspired writers themselves were legalistic, judgmental, and narrow-minded, because absolutism is clearly taught throughout the Bible! Paul wrote:

> [F]or when Gentiles that have not the law do by nature the things of the law, these, not having the law, are the law unto themselves; in that *they show the work of the law written in their hearts*, their conscience bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them (Romans 2:14-15, emp. added).

The Gentiles did the things required by God’s law, not because they had received any specific written code, as the Jews had, but because *there exists an absolute system of morals and ethics*. God established this system, which has continued from the
Creation until now. God’s absolutes cannot be superceded by man’s will without drastic consequences, as the world around us bears witness. This same principle of moral absoluteness is see [sic] in scripture, because the Bible contains definite teachings that are not open to man’s personal feeling and interpretation:

And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19-21, emp. added).

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matthew 7:21-23).

When God speaks, it is not for man to interpret via his own feelings what God has said. There is an absolute system of teaching, just as there is an absolute set of morals—both are defined by God, and as such are not open to postmodernism’s relativistic way of thinking. Perhaps the most sobering thought in this is that by these absolutes we are judged and by these absolutes we are either confirmed or condemned. It is not by our own feelings, but by what God has established from the beginning in the form of moral and biblical absolutes.

In a time when the world around us says, “Just do it,” those of us who are Christians should not be swept away by moral or scriptural relativism. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8), and as imitators of Christ, we should continue to teach absolutes that are the same yesterday, today, and forever.

**GOD’S MORAL STANDARD IS OBJECTIVE AND ABSOLUTE**

In stark contrast to the *Humanist Manifesto*, the Word of God declares: “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Pro. 14:12). That which “seems” right (subjective) unto man ends up being the “ways of death.” When flying an airplane, a pilot knows that he must trust his instruments (objective
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standard), and not simply fly “by the seat of his pants” (subjective standard). He may or may not be flying in the correct direction, but he does not know for sure, unless he is correctly following his instruments. Likewise, Jeremiah declared: “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23).

The Bible affirms that ethics is not “autonomous and situational.” Man is not governed by his own will and desires, but by a higher Being Who has established the direction in which man should walk. Paul affirmed:

But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:13-17).

Man, who guides himself by his own subjected standards, waxes “worse and worse.” In contrast, the Scriptures are profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness. The man of God is complete and thoroughly furnished unto all good works by means of the Scriptures (the objective and absolute standard).

While some say that the Bible was written in simple times and was good for that era only, God affirms that His Word continues forever. The Psalmist stated: “For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven” (Ps. 119:89). Man does not need a new Gospel for a new age. Man’s basic needs and desires have not changed. Man still needs the same physical essentials of life such as food, oxygen, clothing and shelter. His physical needs are still being met the same way as always. Only the styles have changed. He has not “out-grown” his need for food, oxygen, et cetera. Similarly, man’s moral needs are the same as those who lived in the time when the Bible was written. The Word of God is all sufficient to meet man’s moral needs. Mankind still has the same problems with temptations of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (cf. 1 Jn. 2:15-17). The Word of God still informs
man how to overcome these temptations (cf. Mt. 4:1-11; Jas. 4:7, et cetera). God’s Word was not only written for those in the first century. It was penned for all generations. Jesus said: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Mt. 24:35). Likewise, Peter wrote:

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you (1 Pet. 1:23-25).

Does one really think that God is incapable of communicating with His creation, giving man an absolute standard by which he is to be governed? Not only is God capable of giving man such a standard, He has given such in the form of His written Word—the Bible. The problem is not in God’s ability, nor His willingness to communicate such to mankind—the problem is that mankind many times does not want to submit to God’s standard. Paul wrote: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Tit. 2:11-12). God’s grace has appeared (i.e., it has been revealed). It teaches us. But, what does it teach us? It teaches us that we are to deny ungodliness and worldly lust and that we are to live soberly, righteously and godly in the present world. There is an objective, absolute standard as to how we are to live morally. One day, God will call us to account as to how we have responded to His Word. In fact, we will be judged by that very objective standard. Jesus said: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (Jn. 12:48). On the Day of Judgment, man will not be successful in trying to defend his behavior based on his own subjective thoughts. Jesus warns:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Mt. 7:21-23).
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Jesus has an objective, absolute standard by which He shall judge the world. Obviously, all in the world are expected to adhere to the same absolute standard. Regarding the judgment, Paul wrote: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). There has to be an absolute, objective standard by which man’s deeds done in his body (“whether it be good or bad”) are judged.

CONCLUSION

Jesus contrasted man’s sayings with the truth. He stated: “Ye have heard that it was said,” then He said, “But I say unto you” (Mt. 5:27ff). Likewise, men today may say, there are no moral absolutes, but God says: “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Pro. 14:12). The way one can know “right” from “wrong” is by going to God’s inspired, all sufficient revelation, the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). There is an absolute “truth” which is knowable and doable. Jesus said: “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn. 8:32). John wrote: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God” (1 Jn. 5:13).

Jesus’ question to His apostles, as to whom men thought He was, illustrates the principle of human speculation versus Divine revelation. Some said Jesus was Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist or one of the prophets. But, when Jesus asked, “But whom say ye that I am,” the Bible says, “And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:15-16). The Word of God then records: “And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Mt. 16:17). Peter knew who Jesus was, not by human speculation, but by Divine revelation from the Father. What man thinks about Jesus does not change the reality of who He is. He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, whether one believes it or not. He absolutely is the Son of God. Man should believe it, but believing it does not make it true. We do not make the truth, the truth by believing it, we believe the truth, because it is the truth.
ENDNOTES

1 All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.


1 Moral Absolutes
<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid’20071213093005AAqEPP8>


5 Ibid.

6 *Adam Clarke Commentary*, Comments on Judges 17:6, E-Sword.

7 Steve Rudd; *Humanism: The Atheist’s Religion*;
<http://www.bible.ca/tracks/b-humanism-is-religion.htm>

8 A.P. Staff, “Moral Relativism or Scriptural Absolutes”? Apologetics Press. 