

International Association of Biblical Counselors (IABC)

New York State November 2011 Newsletter

A popular bumper sticker reads “God said it...I believe it...that settles it”. While this sentiment sounds potentially accurate, Christians are to judge all things (1 Corinthians 2:15). But, what do bumper stickers have to do with Biblical counseling?

With each quarterly newsletter, we desire to stimulate your thinking regarding one of the Affirmations and Denials presented by the International Association of Biblical Counselors (IABC). This newsletter focuses on Article III, C; our bumper sticker; and realistic interaction with counselees.¹

Affirmation

We affirm God’s word as the voice of God to us today.

Denial

We deny that there are other voices of God (“truths”) other than God’s Word.

Often, our mindset echoes the bumper sticker, rather than the above affirmation and denial. For example, consider Joe or Josie.

Joe studied psychology in university. He learned that he suffers from depression, and as a good student, he worked with a psychiatrist to find the best prescription to keep him functioning. Recently God saved him, and now he enjoys church and reading the Bible, but when things get bad, he calls his doctor for the prescription that gives him a vacation from dealing with problems. He doesn’t believe God’s Word holds what he needs.

When things get tough at work, Josie has panic attacks. Her heart rate escalates, her neck breaks out in a rash, and she’s short of breath. Sometimes, when her boss is treating her particularly badly, she literally gets sick and throws up. She doesn’t believe there’s anything she can do about it unless her boss changes.

Both Joe and Josie think, “God might have said it, but unless I believe it, it doesn’t settle it.” A discerning look at this mindset quickly reveals strong roots in modern relativism.

What is relativism? Webster’s Dictionary makes it clear that relativism precludes the possibility of absolute truth, as “a view that ethical truths depend on the individuals and groups holding them.”² Relativism has become more and more prevalent in our society. How do we know? The commonly accepted point of view that holds “there are many paths to God” evidences acceptance of relativism. From there, it’s natural to accept an eclectic (combined) manner of

¹ Please note that the names or circumstances in this article do not refer to real people, but are compilations of real encounters.

² “Relativism.” Merriam Webster. Merriam Webster, n.d. Web. 11 Nov 2011. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/relativism>>.

prescribing hope for intrapersonal and interpersonal struggles, from troubled inner responses to problematic interactive responses.

Relativism that intertwines religion and psychology feeds Joe's reaction when his biblical counselor calls him to learn to think biblically (2 Corinthians 10:5). He responds with, *"You must be taking God's Word out of context. I've been to school and studied psychology, and I've learned that I have a diseased mind which cannot take thoughts captive."*

What's our reply? Is it: "Ah, yes. Pardon me. I hadn't known. Here I've been fiddling with something less than the highest truth. Why don't you help me.?" Absolutely not! The Bible supports its own identity as the source, indeed, the only source, of absolute truth. A true Christian will always fall in line with God's word. And biblical counselors must teach both themselves and their counselees not that "God said it...I believe it...that settles it", but rather that "God said it. That settles it." They must stand behind Psalm 119:160, "The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgements endures forever."

Our job is to affirm God's word as the voice of God to us today, to bring God's solutions to bear in the face of the problems facing our counselees. When we deny that there are other voices of God ("truths") other than God's Word, we can expect opposition. Biblical counselors often have opportunity to respond well to comments like Josie's: *"You're talking about the Bible, but I'm here to talk about real life. You don't know what kind of pressures I experience. Sure, I see where the Bible tells me to put off anxiety, but what about my physical symptoms?"*

And so, our discussion of absolute truth and relativism quickly raises the question of Scriptural sufficiency/authority. Do we truly deny that there are other voices of God ("truths") other than God's Word? Whether the "other voice" is the voice of real life experience, or the voice of academia? (Not to deny the necessity of excellence. Biblical counselors need to be scholars above the other voices. We must rightly divide God's Word! Are you a growing theologian?)

The culture in which we live espouses a view that truth is relative, and therefore kernels of truth can be found in other different systems of belief. However, relativism, even from a worldly and philosophical standpoint, is self-refuting! The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy has this to say about relativism:

"The claim that truth is relative is, by the relativist's own lights, only true **????there was a break here I can't follow the flow of thought** relative to some frameworks and it may be false relative to others. Hence, it is argued, the relativist cannot account for the status of his own claims...truth is the Achilles' heel of relativism...many philosophers have agreed that the view is self-contradictory or self-refuting...It is quicksand all the way down. The metastasis is total. The meltdown is complete."³

Dare we combine truth with error? We are more than fools if we do. More importantly, God has given us very clear words on relativism (truth can come from various sources) and religious eclecticism (truths can be combined). God's gives a scathing response to false prophets who claim to speak truth, when in fact they speak lies. In Jeremiah 23:31, the living God says "Therefore behold, I am against the prophets," says the Lord, 'who steal My words every one

³ (67&68)

from his neighbor. Behold, I am against the prophets,' says the Lord, 'who use their tongues and say "He says."'

God gives us very clear teaching on the absolute truth of His Word. His Word is the tool to discern what's at root of heart issues (Hebrews 4:12). His Word is the paradigm for courage and success (Joshua 1:8-9). His Word equips us when used in relevant ways (2 Timothy 3:16-17). His great and precious promises provide everything we need to respond to intrapersonal (inner man) and interpersonal (in relating to mankind) issues (2 Peter 1:3-4).

Biblical counseling is on the move in NY. Through God's work in Biblical counseling rooms, not only at Faith Fellowship Church but also other churches and counseling centers, God's Word is changing lives. Through God's work in Biblical counseling training, God's people are being called to think well about compassion, and to become equipped as biblical counselors. We dare not waver. Deny systems that give credibility to other voices as truth. Faithfully hold up God's word as the voice of God to us today.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy on Relativism

“Although relativistic lines of thought often lead to very implausible conclusions, there is something seductive about them, and they have captivated a wide range of thinkers from a wide range of traditions” (1)

“Relativistic themes have also spilled over into areas outside of philosophy; for example, they play a large role in today’s ‘culture wars’. Some strains of ethical relativism even pose threats to our standards and practices of evaluation and, through this, to many of our social and legal institutions.” (1)

“Relativistic arguments often begin with plausible, even truistic premises...only to end up with implausible, even inconsistent, conclusions” (1)

“The claim that truth is relative is, by the relativist’s own lights, only true relative to some frameworks and it may be false relative to others. Hence, it is argued, the relativist cannot account for the status of his own claims” (32)

“Truth is the Achilles’ heel of relativism...many philosophers have agreed that the view is self-contradictory or self-refuting” (67)

“Relativists always face the occupational hazard of sawing off the limb they are sitting on, but with strong truth-value relativism they seem to cut down the whole tree” (67)

“Plato’s argument against strong truth-value relativism is typically said to go like this: either the claim that truth is relative is true absolutely (i.e., true in a non-relative sense) or else it is only true relative to some framework. If it is true absolutely, all across the board, then at least one truth is not merely true relative to a framework, so this version of the claim is inconsistent...On the other hand, if the relativist’s claim that truth is relative is only true relative to his framework, then it can be false in other, perhaps equally good, frameworks. And why should we care about the relativist’s (perhaps rather idiosyncratic or parochial) framework?” (67)

“In short, there is no fact about whether there are frameworks, about what frameworks are, about what is true in any particular framework, about what framework anyone has, about what anyone even thinks his own framework is like, or about anything else. It is quicksand all the way down. The metastasis is total. The meltdown is complete.” (68)

The Bible on Sufficiency of Scripture

“I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ How long will *this* be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed *they are* prophets of the deceit of their own heart, who try to make My people forget My name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal.

“The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream;
And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully.
What *is* the chaff to the wheat?” says the LORD.
“*Is* not My word like a fire?” says the LORD,

“ And like a hammer *that* breaks the rock in pieces?

“Therefore behold, I *am* against the prophets,” says the LORD, “who steal My words every one from his neighbor. Behold, I *am* against the prophets,” says the LORD, “who use their tongues and say, ‘He says.’” (Jer. 23:25-31)

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” (2 Tim. 4:3&4)

“The entirety of Your word *is* truth,
And every one of Your righteous judgments *endures* forever.” (Ps. 119:160)