

Set 3 - Lecture 5

(0:07 - 6:15)

In this lecture we want to look at C.S. Lewis' work, *The Abolition of Man*, and his look at this issue of relativism and look at it from that angle. We've looked at it before a little bit more philosophically and the kind of issues that are involved in the charges that that new atheists have made that religion is evil. We want to look at C.S. Lewis who wrote a number of years ago on these issues because he's so articulate in the way that he puts it to be able to look at it from a different angle.

I think with these issues it's often good to go back over it a few different times in order to understand it more profoundly. C.S. Lewis deals with some of the same issues but also some different issues from a different slant. So let me give you first of all some introductory things on this whole issue that I didn't cover earlier and then we'll look at Lewis' argument.

Let's start out with a word of prayer. Lord we thank you for this time where we can come together and think deeply. Thank you for your servant C.S. Lewis who spoke so articulately in the past about these things and I pray that we might be able to learn from him and better be able to articulate, defend, and live our faith in this culture.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. In the culture we certainly do have a very relativistic society.

There's a culture wars with traditional values as opposed to people that hold a different set of values. One particular illustration of this is a book by Alan Bloom called *Closing of the American Mind*. In this particular book he made a very interesting argument because in American universities they tend to perpetuate an idea of openness.

It's a kind of endless openness. You're not allowed to actually come to conclusions. You're more supposed to be open to every particular view that's out there.

But as Bloom pointed out, this endless openness leads to a kind of closeness by strange consequence. The closing of the American mind to ever arriving at anything really true. Now you would think that the purpose of opening your mind is actually to sooner or later arrive at a conclusion, but that's not allowed in our, in quotes, tolerant society.

GK Chesterton puts it very concisely along these lines. He said the purpose of opening the mind, as in opening the mouth, is to close it on something solid. Very concise way of stating it.

I mean it's a good purpose to have openness and really listen and be fair. Consider various alternative views, but sooner or later you have to or need to make decisions if you're not going to spiritually or intellectually speaking starve to death. There's a little poem I came across by Steve Turner called *Creed* that puts this whole relativist thing in our society very concisely.

That's what he says. We believe in Marx, Freud, and Darwin. We believe everything's okay as long as you don't hurt anyone to the best of your definition of hurt and to the best of your knowledge.

We believe in sex before, during, and after marriage. We believe in the therapy of sin. We believe that adultery is fun.

We believe that sodomy is okay. We believe that taboos are taboo. We believe everything's getting better despite evidence to the contrary.

The evidence must be investigated. You can prove anything with evidence. We believe there's something in horoscopes, UFOs, and bent spoons.

Jesus was a good man just like Buddha, Muhammad, and ourselves. He was a good moral teacher, although we think his good morals were bad. We believe that all religions are basically the same, at least the one that we read was.

They all believe in love and goodness. They only differ on matters of creation, sin, heaven, hell, God, and salvation. We believe that after death comes the nothing, because when you ask the dead what happens, they say nothing.

If the death is not the end, if the dead have lied, then it's compulsory heaven for all, excepting perhaps for Hitler, Stalin, and Genghis Khan. We believe in Masters and Johnson. What's selected is average.

What's average is normal. What's normal is good. We believe in total disarmament.

We believe that there are direct links between warfare and bloodshed. Americans should beat their guns into tractors, and the Russians, or he just kind of dates this, or other people might be sure to follow. We believe that man is essentially good.

It's only his behavior that gets him down. This is the fault of society. Society's fault of conditions.

Conditions are the fault of society. We believe that each man must find the truth that is right for him. Reality will adapt accordingly.

The universe will readjust. History will alter. We believe that there's no absolute truth, excepting the truth that there is no absolute truth.

We believe in the rejection of creeds. So it's a very interesting, provocative statement by this Christian writer who puts the creed of the relativists in an amusing fashion, but it's got a significant amount of truth to the way he puts it. Notice that last statement.

We believe that there's no absolute truth, excepting the truth that there is no absolute truth. This is often, this observation is sometimes mocked, or it's realized that this is true within the society, but there is something that's actually contradictory about this assertion that there's nothing absolute, because that statement itself is an absolute statement. There are certain statements that, right at the very root of it, are self-contradictory.

For instance, Gorgias, Greek philosopher, said that all statements are false. What's the problem with that? If all statements are false, then the statement that all statements are false is false. So that we're led to that kind of consequence.

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And the statement that there are no absolutes is probably not as easily seen to be so, but it's an absolute statement. It's equivalent to saying, I hold to the truth that there are no truths. Or it's wrong to say that there's anything wrong.

(6:32 - 22:00)

So you can see, quite obviously, that there's a, what's going on here is a self-accepting fallacy. They're leaving out, they're not thinking about the implications of their statements on themselves. And even though it's often quickly passed off by philosophers or made a joke, I've seen it made a joke in certain films, that many philosophies had to be given up in the past because somehow or another their foundational assumption turned in on itself or was self-refuting.

And I would suggest that even though you don't need to be obnoxious with it, it's sometimes good to press it just a little bit, gently and lovingly, but nevertheless, get people to think about the contradictory nature of that statement, that there are no absolutes. And get them to think a little bit about it. I had a professor, Dr. Gerstner, that would in lectures sometimes, I remember one time we were debating something, he would play a cult member and then we'd raise questions and discuss and try to deal with his objections.

And one time he said to what we said, no, no, no, that will never do. And so we left that objection and continued on. At the end of three hours, he said, well, what's the answer to your question? And he said, what's this? And he said, well, we said that.

And you said, no, no, no, that will never do. And basically he said, you are right, but you should have at least gently pressed home that particular truth. And sometimes we need to do that.

If people pass off quickly that which is to the core, we shouldn't so easily, if it's a valid observation, so easily let it go. If it's appropriate to make. You have to decide whether it's appropriate or not in each particular case.

Well, the issue of relativism does lead to the rather strange situation that everybody's right and nobody's right. But this is very problematic. It essentially reduces truth to taste.

Now, we don't essentially argue about taste. Like you might be firmly convinced that chocolate ice cream is the best ice cream and someone else might agree that pistachio ice cream is the best ice cream. But we don't have knock down drag out arguments about what is best because we know that they're matters of taste.

We don't regard matters of taste as matters of truth. Yet in many ways, this idea of reducing religious statements or ethical statements to matters of taste is like that. And certainly there are some cases where it cannot be matters of taste.

Let me just give you one instance. If God exists, the God of the Bible really exists, then no amount of unbelief will make him cease existing. If God does not exist, then no amount of belief will make him exist.

And we could take a number of other ideas such as life after death or that kind of thing and make the same kind of observation. That even though there's an attempt to reduce issues of truth to issues of taste, certain states of affairs like God's existence and many other things must either be or not be. And your attitude towards it has very little, if any, importance in settling whether it's true or not.

In the end, I believe that there are only three options about the nature of reality. And I discussed this in a chapter in True Truth, if you wish to refer to it. That reality is non-contradictory or reality is contradictory or reality is non-contradictory in some ways and contradictory in others.

Like for instance, the law of non-contradiction says A is not non-A at the same time in the same relationship. You cannot both be there and not be there at the same time in the same relationship. This chair cannot both be there and not be there at the same time in the same relationship.

Throughout history, believers in Christ and people that believe in the Bible have maintained the law of non-contradiction. That God cannot both exist and not exist at the same time and in the same relationship. That when God reveals himself to be holy, God cannot both be holy and not be holy in the same time, the same relationship.

They believed about reality and about God that reality is non-contradictory and God is non-contradictory. If God could embody within himself contradiction, then we could say that God is holy and God is not holy at the same time and in the same relationship. Or God is good and not good in the same time and in the same relationship and so on throughout all the attributes.

In other words, if reality is contradictory, then we can know nothing about reality. If God is contradictory, then we can know nothing about God. I haven't fully illustrated that, but I've given you enough, I suppose, that you can think about that a little bit.

I've given you a couple illustrations along that line. There is a view that says the reality is essentially contradictory. That's more the Eastern religious perspective that we'll look at later with regard to the New Age movement.

They would say that in the end all is one and they'd also hold to the principle of non-distinction, that there are no real distinctions in the world, including the distinction between what is true and what is false and also the distinction between what is good and what is evil. They say in the end this idea of distinction, that I exist as distinct from you or I exist as distinct from this chair, is maya or illusion and so they in the end would argue that reality is contradictory and again we'll illustrate that more in a later talk. But there's a strange hybrid in the modern culture and I don't know if anybody has really tried to justify it.

There were a couple philosophers in Thomas Aquinas' time that used this strange idea of double truth, but it didn't last very long because it's not very satisfying, but implicit in our society are things along these lines. Somehow reality is non-contradictory in math, science and technology, but contradictory in religion and ethics. Religion is non-contradictory in math, that two plus two equals four and not five.

Reality is non-contradictory in science, like the law of gravity proves to be pretty irresistible. Unless you're Superman, you don't want to leap from the top of a tall building in a single bound or there's a rather powerful force that will bring you down. So reality is very non-contradictory in science and technology and in technology you're not going to drive your car from here, Washington DC, to Pittsburgh unless you put some gas in the gas tank.

That's the way technology works and various other aspects. We don't like a mechanic who tells us as they look at our car that I don't know the problem and there's no way to know it. There's no way to fix this car.

We think that yeah, if there's technology there's a way to fix it. That technology is that way. So reality is non-contradictory in math, science, and technology, but somehow people in our society believe reality is contradictory somehow or another in religion and ethics.

So that even despite the fact of contradictory religious beliefs that only differ on matters of creation, sin, heaven, hell, God, and salvation, as Turner says, and many other things that are exactly contradictory statements made about each one of those things, that somehow or another they can all be true or equal. And same thing with regard to ethics, that whatever is true for you is true for you, whatever is true for me is true for me. Somehow reality can be contradictory in the area of religion and ethics.

That's a rather strange hybrid and I think it deserves some kind of argument or justification for how this can be so. That's just a question that I raised and you can go back to true truth and see that developed a little bit further. C.S. Lewis has a powerful argument for the existence of truth and the problems with relativism, although he doesn't really use that term as he discusses things, and it really was rooted in his conversion.

Basically when he was a non-believer or an atheist, he used the argument from the existence of evil as a powerful argument he felt against God's existence. And it was the problem of evil might be stated this way, God is all-powerful, he could eliminate evil, God is all good, he would eliminate evil, evil is not eliminated, therefore there is no such God. And so he would argue along those lines with every Christian that he met and pass off any kind of objections or answers that they would give as kind of missing the obvious problem or the strength of his argument.

We're going to address that argument later in this series. But Lewis started to understand that one part of his argument that was essential to a strong form of his argument was saying that there was really evil in the world. Now he could have argued that evil was just his own private notion, but then the strong form of his argument would be out.

But if there was real evil in the world, then he needed some kind of standard by which he could judge it to be evil. And he realized as an atheist, viewing the universe in a very grim, meaningless fashion, that he had no basis to say that there was anything really evil or good. And thus by putting forward this argument, he in a way moved himself towards the existence of God.

He had to either give up his statement of evil or maybe his atheism. And in the end, he gave up his atheism in part for, there are many different reasons for that, but in part because he believed that there was evil and good and a sufficient standard which he found in God by

which to judge something to be evil and good. Then he wrote a book later on in life called *Abolition of Man*.

Now it's not an easy book to read. People have done it as part of study groups and I've read it a couple different times in the past and it's a little bit dense, especially unless you sit down and figure out what's going on here. But it's very profound if you end up going through it.

He gave this talk to a group of teachers there in England and I wonder how they understood it or how well received it was. I mean it's a very profound book. In fact, Lewis said that *Abolition of Man* was his most important book.

And that's a very interesting thing because he felt that at the very root of being able to put forward the gospel is people understanding that there is sin in the world. But if they believe that sin or evil is just a matter of their own preference, they're not going to look for the cure for sin unless they believe that sin exists or evil exists. So that at the very root, a kind of backdrop for the gospel is understanding that there really are objective values that are present.

In any case, in *Abolition of Man*, he sets it out according to three chapters. So first one is the *Men Without Chests* and we'll get to that image in a second. And the second one is the *Way* and the third is the *Abolition of Man*.

In the first one, he kind of lays out the question and talks about the problem that he finds within the society. In the second chapter on the *Way*, he deals with the inconsistency of people that claim to give up a basis for ethical standards. And in the third, *Abolition of Man*, he looks at the fruits of this denial in society and he thinks the consequences could be dire.

In any case, let's just lay out a little bit of the introduction to this argument. He presents to these teachers the idea of a book, which he calls the *Green Book*. He doesn't name what the book is.

We could later talk about what it was. And he has a couple made-up names of the authors that do it, *Gaius* and *Titius*. He makes up these names as people who put forward these ideas.

But they start out their textbook for students with the idea that the waterfall is sublime. And look at the nature of that statement. Now the question is, is there anything really beautiful or is beauty just in the eye of the beholder? And the authors of this *Green Book* say that values such as this kind of statement about beauty, but also they suggest that it goes along the lines of truth and goodness as well, that values appear to be saying something very important when in reality they're only saying something about our feelings.

These statements of what's objectively true appear to be saying something important. But really all they're doing is giving us the state of our emotions. It's a kind of emotivism that I talked about in the previous lecture.

And this kind of statement though bears its fruit down the road. If you hear this over and over again in your textbooks and in your school studies, in public schools, in grade school,

junior high, high school, college, this kind of suggestion being made, it can become rooted in you without even being argued into your thinking. Here's what he puts it.

It's not a theory they put into his mind, but an assumption which ten years hence, its origin forgotten and its presence unconscious, will condition him to take one side in a controversy which he has never recognized as a controversy at all. In other words, what he's picked up in this kind of statement, that it's only saying something about our feelings and that there's nothing really objectively the case about truth, goodness, or beauty, that it's implicit. G.K. Chesterton puts it in a slightly other way.

He says education is implication. You remember not necessarily what is explicitly said in your favorite lectures. You maybe can remember a few quotes, but you often remember what is implied in what is said.

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You could probably restate in other words what they were saying. You picked up the implications, the things they got most passionate about, the things that they cared about most. They have somehow or another impressed themselves upon you, have become part of your assumptions as a result of listening.

And what Lewis is arguing is that education does that too. This assumption that there are no objective moral values, it's just a statement with regard to your feelings, becomes an assumption without even being argued. There may be no arguments given for relativism, but it becomes an assumption through which you view life.

So when people raise the idea that there's something objectively true, you don't necessarily have an argument against it. You just have the assumption that somehow or another it's wrong. You've taken a side in the position without even really being argued into it.

It's implicit. And that's what Lewis says is often the problem in the educational system. You pick up what is implied in what is said.

It also causes the problem, another problem he has with this kind of statement, that it only says something about our feelings. In some ways it trivializes emotions and desires. It's only about our feelings.

And he feels that emotion is an important part of ethics. He would involve both the mind and the emotion, or a statement of the value, truth, as well as the feeling about it, are important. In fact, he thinks that in the end, even upholding his position, that feeling is something to be nurtured.

Emotion is something that's good. He said, for every one pupil who needs to be guarded from a weak excess of sensibility, there are three who need to be awakened from the slumber of cold vulgarity. The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles, but to irrigate deserts.

A right defense against false sentiments is to inculcate just sentiments. So that some people might have too much emotion, but too many people have too little feeling about the issues that are there. In fact, you don't want to discourage feeling.

True education, classical education, he argues, is an education of loves and hates. Some objects merit approval or disapproval. True education is not only of the mind, but of the emotions.

Aristotle, for instance, argues that the aim of education is to make the pupil like or dislike what they ought to like or dislike. Plato in the public says a student ought to be taught to hate the ugly and give praise to beauty. Plato and others say that the head, the mind, is to rule the belly, the feelings, through the chest, and that is the spirited element.

Now the chest might mean passion, certainly might mean also conscience, that there has to be something through which the head can govern or rule over the emotions, and that's what he calls the chest. He calls it the spirited element, perhaps the idea of conscience is present there. The problem that Lewis argues in the modern culture is that it produces men, and I suppose women too, without chest.

In a sort of ghastly simplicity, we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chest and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst.

We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful. So we eliminate this ability to judge things, and then we are in despair about the kind of culture that we have, and maybe deplore the nature of character, the nature of what's going on within our society, but in many ways it's because we've removed something very significant from people's understanding and really from their feelings as well. Second chapter is called The Way, and in that chapter he makes the argument that these relativists, although he doesn't again use this term, these relativists appeal to absolutes.

They seem to know better than they say that certain things are true or not, or certain things are good or not. The way I would put it is that even though many people are relativists and multiculturalists, somehow they view this idea of multiculturalism as being a good thing, and I would as well, but at least wonder about on what basis would they say so. They would also argue, and I would agree with them, that racism is wrong, but on what basis, having given up the idea of objective standards of good or evil, on what basis can they say that racism is a bad thing.

Or certain feminists argue that the oppression of women is bad, and I certainly would agree with them, but on what basis can these feminists say that this oppression is bad or evil. Even Derrida, that says, as we saw in the previous lecture, that he wants to eliminate the idea of the transcendent signified, this kind of objective standard, this kind of infinite reference point, this kind of sense to the world that comes from outside the world, even though he wants to eliminate such things, he argues that the whole purpose of his methodology of deconstruction, which is getting down under a text and judging it or addressing it in a critical fashion, the whole purpose of this process of deconstruction, the central drive of postmodernism, is justice. He says deconstruction is justice, but I would ask him, hasn't he just given up all ultimate basis or all ultimate standards for justice, and giving up his transcendent signifier, so that there's a profound inconsistency right at the heart of his system.

The reason for his probing text is to see whether there's racism or sexism or ethnocentrism in the text, but, and I guess he assumes that these kinds of things would be bad, and it's in the interest of justice, but he's given up any standard by which we can judge anything to be just or unjust. In a similar way, Lewis argues that the writers of this green book, this book on education, he argues that they have values which are unacknowledged. For instance, they write books on education.

(28:49 - 39:51)

They approve or disapprove of certain ways of doing things. They try to communicate that which is good for society. Here's the way Lewis puts it, even though they may abstain from calling something good and instead use such predicates, they change the words a little bit to say that these things are necessary or progressive or efficient, that would be a subterfuge.

They could be forced in debate to answer such questions as, necessary for what? Or progressing towards what? Or affecting what? In the last resort, they have to admit that some state of affairs was, in their opinion, good for its own sake. In other words, their skepticism about values is on the surface. It's for other people's values.

And about the values current in their own set, they're not nearly skeptical enough. A great many of those who debunk traditional, or as they would say, sentimental values, have in the background values of the room which they believe to be immune from the debunking process. Now, on the one hand, you could appeal to instinct.

But the question would be, why should we obey instinct? And the question is, which instinct? The higher or lower instinct? But I think in the end, there's no ultimate standard by which they can judge something to be right or wrong, because they've given up that kind of standard. You could, in this case, push these relativists to the logical conclusion of their false assumptions. For instance, journalist Arthur Kessler interviews a Japanese Buddhist.

And here's what Kessler says, you favor tolerance towards all religions and political systems. What about Hitler's gas chambers? Buddhist, that was very silly of him. Just silly, Kessler says, not evil.

Buddhist, evil is a Christian concept. Good and evil exist only on a relative scale. Certainly, the atheist also believes that there are no absolutes, no ultimate standards by which we can judge things.

And people from an Eastern religious perspective, as well, also argue that there are no ultimate standards. But that's profoundly problematic. And he says, in the end, it would lead to a pretty disastrous circumstance.

And he says, in *Abolition of Man*, the third chapter, he argues that this consequence, that there is no evil, or there's no duty and no good, leads to rather disastrous consequences. G.K. Chesterton once said that people have given up on the idea of original sin when it's the only doctrine of Christianity that can be empirically proven. Just open up your eyes and look out at the universe and you see what's right or wrong.

But on the other hand, once you've denied that there is anything good or evil, then it leads to the condition that's all too easy to happen, where people in the society, the conditioners,

then create the conscience. You can have a social engineering that's all too easily brought into being. He says that the fruits of this philosophy of relativism are all too clear.

He says, I'm very doubtful whether history has shown us one example of a man who, having stepped outside of traditional morality and attained power, has used that power benevolently. We often hear the argument that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. And especially with those who lack any kind of absolute value, then look at what could happen.

They have no restraints or breaks upon the kinds of decisions that they make. And he points out some of the fruits of relativism. Say, for instance, with regard to Nazi, Nazism and Hitler.

For instance, I came across this, Ravi Zacharias points out that at Buchenwald, one of the Nazi concentration camps, there was a sign that was written there that says, I desire to create a generation devoid of conscience, imperious, relentless, and cruel. He drew his ideas from Friedrich Nietzsche, who said that the place of the Superman is to create their own values, to sail their ships in the uncharted seas, to really put forward their own will to power, ultimately. And that will to power could be exerted in whatever way they want.

And essentially, Hitler was following Nietzsche's ideas of the Superman. And that led him to the idea of the super race. He said that Hitler gave a copy, he gave a set of Nietzsche's books to Mussolini as a gift.

He kept a copy of *Thus Sprach Zarathustra* on his bedside table, very shaped by Nietzsche's ideas. And the Nazis killed some 60 million, or six million. A similar relativist perspective in Marxism.

Stalin killed some 60 million. Pol Pot in Cambodia, some three million, although numbers vary a little bit in terms of the estimates. But nevertheless, look at the evils that have happened to these relativistic philosophies of Nietzsche's perspective and Nazism, and then the whole Marxist perspective that's very relativistic.

There's a great book out there by Paul Johnson called *Modern Times*. And one theme that runs throughout the book is looking at various societies that are very relativistic in terms of their moral perspective, and looking at the consequences of what that's allowed to happen at various points in their history. It's fascinating because he not only looks at the West, but he looks at Eastern societies, or really throughout the world.

Various societies that lack that kind of a strong ethical standard and what's happened as a result. So I really encourage that you read what he said there. I would suggest that, as Lewis argues, when it comes down to it, there are only two real choices.

To either conform your desires to truth, or conform truth to desire. In fact, the way he puts it, in slightly different words, is to conform your soul to reality, or conform reality to the wishes of men. Here's what he says in this last chapter on abolition of man.

He says, there's something which unites magic and applied science, while separating both from the wisdom of earlier ages. For wise men of old, the cardinal problem had been how to

conform the soul to reality. And the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue.

For magic and applied science alike, the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men, and the solution is a technique. So you get one of those two choices. Either there is a reality out there, and the object of our lives is to conform our soul and our being to the nature of that reality.

Or the other alternative that many people in the society have taken, whether atheism, post-modernism, I would suggest as we'll see later, Hinduism, Buddhism, neo-paganism. The ultimate idea is to subdue reality to our wishes. That there's no objective reality out there to which we have to conform.

And so you can really conform the truth to our desires in the end. I think I illustrated that in an earlier lecture, so I'm not going to do it again here. Lewis suggests that the danger of seeing through things is that there's in the end nothing left to see.

He says in *Abolition of Man*, but you cannot go on explaining away forever. You'll find that you've explained explanation itself away. You cannot go through seeing through things forever.

The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. It's good that the window should be transparent, because the street or the garden beyond it is opaque. But how if you saw through the garden too? It's no use trying to see through first principles.

If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To see through all things is the same as not to see.

Very vivid, I think, picture and illustration. Well, what do we do when we are faced with people who hold to these kinds of values that I've talked about earlier in terms of relativism and in terms of what Lewis has to say? I would suggest that there are various things that you can do. First of all, you can use a personal analogy.

You have to really listen to people and see what they really care about. For instance, Chuck Colson tells about a time when he was on television on one of the talk shows with a nationally known interviewer. This person had kind of laughed or ridiculed when he mentioned the idea of absolutes.

Afterwards, they went off into a back room and had a conversation where Chuck Colson used a number of the arguments similar to the ones that we used and more with this man. He was finding he was getting nowhere. This person had a strange resistance.

Afterwards, Chuck said, well, it seemed like he felt that if he acknowledged what Chuck had to say, he'd become something of a fundamentalist in the worst possible picture of what that would mean. He found a personal analogy. He knew this man well enough to know that he liked to sail.

He said, using this illustration, he said, well, do you like to sail? He said, yes. Do you sail at night? Yes. Well, how can you sail at night? Well, you use the stars.

He said, oh, I get what you're saying, that we need some kind of fixed points by which we can orient ourselves. That's a different matter from fitting into some box that we have. So perhaps this idea of having these fixed points that allow us to focus and that are not endlessly shifting by which we can really orient ourselves in this crazy world.

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Perhaps that's a good thing to realize. And in many cases where you need to find a personal illustration, you've got to listen long enough so you can find what that person cares about. Or if you have a friend, you might know what they really care about.

(40:04 - 40:19)

And it would really matter if the thing that they cared about most were to be undermined by their relativist perspective. For instance, some people care about the environment. And that's a good thing from a biblical perspective.

(40:20 - 42:05)

But why would they get so passionate about either good environmental policies or bad or evil environmental policies if there's no such thing as good or evil? Now, why be so concerned about it? So that if the thing that they care about most would be undermined by their perspective, if it's just a matter of arbitrary personal preference as to whether I have a particular environmental policy or not, then who says that it matters? So if you take the roof off, so to speak, and find the area and that person's life that they most care about, they might care whether this standard is removed. They might not care about it generally speaking, but they would care about it in the thing that they hold in the most passionate way. I suggested earlier, too, that if someone's very open, you can use a more direct form of argument.

But if the person is closed, you could use a more indirect form of argument. And I'll just give you a couple illustrations of a more indirect form of argument. Like, for instance, one of the indirect forms of argument that Jesus used with closed people is parables.

And a parable is not just a nice story, at least in the way Jesus uses it. It can be used as a mirror to allow people to see themselves. Like in the Old Testament, you have the story of Nathan and David.

(42:07 - 42:48)

Nathan knew David had committed murder and adultery. Murder of Uriah and then adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. And so Nathan went to David and he didn't want to confront him directly, so he used a parable.

He said there was a rich man and a poor man. The rich man had many sheep, poor man had one sheep. And when the rich man had a dinner party, he didn't kill one of his many sheep, he took the poor man's only sheep and killed it and had it for dinner.

And Nathan, David was outraged. He says, where is this man? We've got to do justice here. And Nathan said, you are the man.

(42:49 - 43:23)

So he used that parable as a means for putting up a mirror in front of David's eyes to be able to see himself more clearly. Well, Jesus does this all the time. He does it in the parable of the prodigal son, where the parable of the prodigal son has two sons.

The prodigal son, who goes away and then comes back with real sorrows, received back into the family. But then it's a parable about the second son too, the elder son. And the parable is unfinished.

(43:24 - 44:33)

Jesus told this parable of the two lost sons to the Pharisees and Sadducees who objected to him receiving sinners, tax collectors and prostitutes and that kind of thing, into his midst. And the question was, it's an unfinished parable. Are you going to be like the father in the community that welcomed back the prodigal son and rejoiced that this one has come back? Are you going to be like the elder son who stays out? And is the elder son going to actually come in to the banquet and welcome his brother back into the fold? Who are you going to be? Are you going to be like the father in the community? Are you going to be like the elder son? I mean the elder, yeah, the elder son.

So it puts up the mirror on the face of the person that he's telling the story to. Or the parable of the good Samaritan is also, so it's not just a nice story, it's used as a weapon in controversy. So the lawyer is raising a question about how do you get eternal life? And then the question comes down to who is my neighbor? And there was a big raging debate about that in Jewish circles.

(44:33 - 50:22)

Sometimes people said that the Gentiles and unbelievers, heretics, were not your neighbor. And so if you would find them in a ditch, you would just leave them there because they're not your neighbor. And so the question is, who's my neighbor? And Jesus tells a story of the good Samaritan.

And of course you have the three characters, the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan. And the priest and Levite leave this man and walk by, keeping their distance, and leave the man on the side of the road. And then the Samaritan comes along and picks him up, binds his wounds, takes him down to an inn, leaves enough money to cover the man's expenses until he's well, and then later says, I'll come back and pay the rest at a later point.

And Jesus essentially asks the question at the end of the parable, who proved to be the neighbor to the one in need? And of course the answer is what? The Samaritan. But the lawyer, listening to the story, can't even get out the word Samaritan because Samaritans were so hated. He says, the one who shows mercy.

And Jesus says, go and do likewise. Now you could have been arguing that very heavily debated question within Judaism about who's my neighbor and that debate could still be going on. You have people making their points from one side or the other.

But if you tell this parable that has only one obvious answer, and you say go and do likewise, the debate's over. Now I imagine that lawyer either received the message and changed his view or perhaps went away even more frustrated than before. But the parable is used as a weapon in controversy to allow that person to see themselves more clearly.

I would suggest not only Jesus' parables could be used for that purpose, but you might make up your own little parables, as Nathan did, that could allow people to see more clearly where they are in a particular area. And so you don't have to just endlessly debate things. You have provocative ways of saying things that are short of doing, short of just arguing back and forth.

For instance, I had a person that I was talking to that was a relativist and really didn't believe that there was anything good or evil, but yet we had read, she had read a book that I'd also read called *People of the Lie* by Scott Peck that really argues that all sin is essentially life-taking. Not just murder itself, but like for instance when you criticize somebody, like a young child or an adult even, you can often find them wither. Sometimes you see it very easily and their face falls or you just see in their spirit that they are really hurt by that kind of criticism.

So it takes away life from that person that hears that criticism. So we both read and we talked about that. Talked about some of the illustrations he uses in the chapters that are very graphic and unforgettable about some of the stories where it seems like on the surface certain family dynamics are okay, but when you look beneath the surface they're horrifying, you know, make your skin crawl as you look at the implications of what's going on in these cases.

And so I just, I not only looked at *People of the Lie*, but I mentioned the quote that I just used earlier, people have given up on the idea of original sin when it's the only doctrine of Christianity that can be empirically proven, and she laughed. And we kind of left it there with both that little quote and the analogy from *People of the Lie*. And four months later she called me out of the blue and said, you know, she wasn't wanting to beat around the bush or be involved in small talk, she said, I've been thinking about this whole idea of sin for four months, I can't get it out of my mind.

Now she hadn't been fully persuaded by it, but it was something that was getting under her skin. She couldn't avoid that idea because on the one hand she believed that there was something wrong. On the other hand she realized that she had no basis to say so in her own system.

I would suggest another way that you can approach it is by using irony. There was an article one time in *Crisis Magazine*, and there was a little section in it called *A Skirmish in the Culture War*, and the way it went was along these lines. It said, at many private dinners these days, when the conversation sooner or later turns to abortion, overpopulation, contraception, gay rights, women priests, or any one of the many other sex and gender issues that inflame the passions of our time, the Catholics, and this is a Catholic magazine, but also Protestants could make the same kind of observation, Catholics present may sooner or later be turned upon.

The friend reports that at such dinners, when he may be the only believer present, he adopts an ironic mode of response. It always works, he says, to bring to light a desperate longing among modern people to be told that their own current passions are mistaken and destructive. If my friend's dinner questioners accuse the church of backwardness, he agrees, even asserting that the church should begin to teach young children that there are no sexual

sins, that everything is permitted, that their Christian duty is free experimentation into every nook and cranny of sexual possibility.

(50:23 - 51:57)

All this, he says very quietly, as if without irony and in a calm and ecumenical tone. However, when a devilish spirit arises in his breast, he sometimes adds quietly, Woody Allen understands natural law better than the Pope does. To use Woody Allen's quote, what the heart wants, the heart wants.

When my friend finishes speaking, there is dead silence. It's not the route his dinner companions want the church to take. If it did, who would be left to hold the line, any line, for their children? My friend's conclusion is the following.

What your fellow dinner guests actually want is for you to defend in public what they want. They want the pleasant feeling of being more progressive than now while having you defend what they do not dare defend but absolutely count on. That's a pleasure you must never, ever allow them to indulge.

It would take some guts and perhaps some style to be able to pull that off at a dinner party. I don't know that I've ever been in that situation where that's been an appropriate thing. But it is at least another one of these more indirect ways that you can approach things.

So there are various forms such as questions and parables and the personal analogy and perhaps even irony. That can be a very effective way of short of argument, bringing some of these kinds of issues home. Well, I think we'll stop at that point and we'll leave it open to questions.