

THE END OF RELATIVISM

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There are many questions which the September 11 attack on our nation has brought to people's minds. One recurring question seems particularly difficult to answer. The question is, "If the people who attacked us believed that they were serving God, how can we call their attack evil?"

In our pluralistic society we have lived by the saying, "What's good for you is good for you, and what's good for me is good for me." In other words, each person becomes his or her own determiner of good and evil. There is no absolute standard. Somehow, that thinking fell apart as we watched thousands of people murdered simply because they worked in a building that was symbolic of capitalism.

The terrorists might have thought that they were earning their way to heaven, but does that justify of their actions? Were their actions good because they were done in faith? Prior to September 11 we might have said that what they did was good for them but evil for us. That leaves us, though, with the difficulty of having to acknowledge that the murderous act performed by the terrorists was good in some way. Our sense of morality just won't accept that. Our moral sense cries out that this was an evil act and that there was nothing good or noble about it.

We can, and ought to, say that the terrorists' act was evil and wrong. Just because they sincerely thought that they were pleasing God does not mean that their actions were good. No matter how good they thought their actions might be, those actions were evil, nonetheless.

The reason we can call their actions evil is because it is not sincere faith or zeal that makes an act right or wrong. Right and wrong are determined for all of us by other means than ourselves. There is another standard by which all human acts are judged.

So where does that standard come from? If I make up my own standard and the terrorists make up their own standard, what right do I have to say that mine is better than theirs and that they must adhere to mine? I can't. The only way to make a determination between right and wrong is if someone else sets the standard. If the standard is set by someone bigger than both of us, then we both must adhere to that standard whether we like it or not and we will both be judged by it whether we like it or not. In other words, true morality cannot be relative, it must be absolute and apply to everyone.

The true and living God has revealed himself as the creator of all peoples; a triune, righteous God who himself establishes what is good and evil; a God to whom all people from all nations must give an account, and by whom they may be saved. Ultimately, then, whether what I believe is right or wrong or what the terrorist believes is right or wrong is irrelevant. It is what God thinks that counts.

It is not the sincerity of our belief that matters but whether our beliefs are based in truth as revealed by God. I can only judge the terrorist act as wrong if God judges it as wrong. The terrorist can only judge his act as right if God judges it as right. So, then, we are both accountable to God. The only way a society can exist is if it has moral standards by which it operates. And the only way the interaction between two different cultures can be judged is if someone outside, and above those cultures is doing the judging. That person is God - the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Imagine what life would be like if, when Johnny hauled off and slugged his brother Tommy, Dad responded by saying to Tommy, "I'm sorry Tommy. You might not have thought that getting slugged was right, but Johnny did so we just have to let him do it." You would have a family in total chaos and misery. That is what life is like without a righteous God who determines what is good and evil.

The horrific acts of September 11 have, indeed, revealed relativism and pluralism to be bankrupt systems. It is only by looking to God that we can identify those terroristic acts as evil. It is only

by turning and trusting in Him that we will get any salvation and peace. May God grant us grace to know him through his Son that such peace would abound for all peoples both now and forevermore.