

June 10/11, 2006

Reward and Judgment

Psalm 58

Pastor Bryan Clark

**Do you indeed speak righteousness, O gods?
Do you judge uprightly, O sons of men?
No, in heart you work unrighteousness;
On earth you weigh out the violence of your hands.
The wicked are estranged from the womb;
These who speak lies go astray from birth.
They have venom like the venom of a serpent;
Like a deaf cobra that stops up its ear,
So that it does not hear the voice of charmers,
Or a skillful caster of spells.
O God, shatter their teeth in their mouth;
Break out the fangs of the young lions, O LORD.
Let them flow away like water that runs off;
When he aims his arrows, let them be as headless shafts.
Let them be as a snail which melts away as it goes along,
Like the miscarriages of a woman which never see the sun.
Before your pots can feel the fire of thorns
He will sweep them away with a whirlwind, the green and the burning alike.
The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance;
He will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.
And men will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous;
Surely there is a God who judges on earth!"**

(Psalm 58, *NASB)

A couple of weeks ago we reminded ourselves that according to the Scripture, the role of government is to protect or promote good and to punish evil. But what do you do if those who have been given the charge of promoting good have themselves become corrupt?

Several years ago there was an article in *Newsweek* that I thought was very insightful. The title was "Right and Wrong in Washington," subtitled "Why do our officials need specialists to tell them the difference?" The writer says:

You want to know what old is? Old is being able to remember a time when people were their own "ethics officers." I mean, where did we get this "ethics officer" business, anyway? Since when do grown men and women who presume to hold high government office and exercise what they think of as "moral leadership" require ethics officers to tell them whether it is or isn't permissible to grab the secretary's behind or redirect public funds to their own personal advantage? People in Washington don't say, "The Devil made me do it" anymore. They say, "I asked the ethics office and they said it didn't fall within the category of impermissible activity." Or, more frequently, when there is a flap about something that has already occurred, they say, "We have directed the ethics office to look into it and report back to us in 60 days." Good old "60 days"—for something that your ordinary, morally sentient person wouldn't need 60 seconds to figure out."

- *Newsweek*, February 13, 1995, p. 88 - "Right and Wrong in Washington: Why do our officials need specialists to tell the difference?" by Meg Greenfield

There's great truth in that, but it isn't a new problem. David struggled with the same problem thousands of years ago and writes about it in Psalm 58. It really helps us to know: How do we respond when those in authority are unfair or unjust and we suffer the consequences of that?

Most of these psalms here in the 50s are written by David, and most of them have the little writing, the superscription, that tells us the background of the psalm. This particular one does not, but it would almost have to be the time when Saul was king and David was fleeing because Saul wanted to kill him. We're told again it's a song; there's a notation for the choir director—"set to **Al-tashheth**"—which is a Hebrew word that means "do not destroy." It was probably a tune or a certain style of music. We're also told it's "**A Mikhtam of David**"—which is a Hebrew word that means to engrave. What that basically means is this is a psalm you need to engrave on your heart in order to live a godly life in a fallen world (that's how I would put it).

In verses 1 and 2, David defines the problem.

Do you indeed speak righteousness, O gods? Do you judge uprightly, O sons of men?
(Psalm 58:1, *NASB)

When he refers to "gods" there—small 'g'—it's a word that typically in the Old Testament refers to government officials; oftentimes it refers to judges. Now, a judge in the ancient world is not necessarily the same as a judge today. They did decide the law and right and wrong, but it was much more than that. They had significant political power, maybe more like a governor in today's economy.

When David says, "**Do you indeed speak righteousness,**" what he means is, "speak up for righteousness"—which is what the word means. He's saying, "Your responsibility is to promote good and punish evil. Do you speak up when people are treated unfairly? Do you speak up when people are treated with injustice? Do you judge uprightly—meaning, when you do act, do you do the right thing?" So he's asking the question of these government leaders, "Do you speak up when injustice is done, and when it's time to act, do you do the right thing?"

Well, we don't have to guess about the answer. Verse 2 is right to the point: "No, you don't."

No, in heart you work unrighteousness; on earth you weigh out the violence of your hands.

Now, there are leaders and judges who make decisions purely on the basis of incompetence. Maybe in their heart they want to do the right thing; they're just simply incompetent. But that's not the case here. David is going out of his way to say, "The reason these people are doing what they're doing is because they have evil in their hearts." He says, "**in your heart you work unrighteousness,**" which means, "that's your motive, that's what's in your heart, that's who you are." When he says, "**On earth you weigh out the violence of your hands,**" the phrase "weigh out" means you plan it, you plot it, you calculate it. The intent of your heart is to do evil—that's your agenda. It's very easy to stand before a camera and say the right things and have a big smile on your face, but what happens behind the scenes? Is it motivated by a personal, selfish, unethical agenda?

When we think about, *How do we apply this psalm to our lives?* part of it could be in the realm of government—those people that affect our lives, that are driven by their own personal agendas, driven by immorality, driven by things that are in opposition to what God wants. But really, you could broaden that out to anyone who is in a position of authority over you that has the opportunity to do good, has the opportunity to do the right thing, has the opportunity to deal with injustice and

unfairness, to make lives better, but chooses instead to use that position of authority to promote something that is hurtful, that is unfair, that is unjust. So if you have anyone in your life that's in a position of authority that makes your life miserable because of unethical or unjust things, that fits the basic theme of this psalm.

In verses 3-5, he gives a description of what is really the core issue. He says:

The wicked are estranged from the womb; these who speak lies go astray from birth.

(v. 3)

This is defending or promoting the biblical view of what we call "original sin," and that basically means that all people are born sinners. People are not born good and do bad things because of the environment. People are sinners from birth. The Bible says that we all are enslaved to a sin nature; that's what defines us. Paul says in the New Testament, "We were by nature children of wrath. We were by nature enemies of God."

This is actually one of the main separating points of worldviews. There are those who believe that man is ultimately good and his environment makes him bad. According to this Scripture, man is ultimately evil, and it's only Jesus that makes him or her good. So he's saying that this is all the way from birth, from the womb. This is what's in their heart. This is what drives their behavior and their decisions. It doesn't mean that every person is evil and wicked in behavior, but it does mean that that's in the core, in the heart of every person. It shouldn't surprise us when people are unethical. It shouldn't surprise us when people are unfair. It shouldn't surprise us when people get power and it corrupts them. That really shouldn't be a surprise to us.

G.K. Chesterton once said that the doctrine of original sin is the one philosophy that can be empirically validated through 3,500 years of human history. What he meant by that is it's really hard to question that truth because throughout history it's been validated over and over again—people are evil. That's why we have governments, that's why we have law enforcement, that's why we have wars, that's why we have jails and prisons. If people weren't ultimately evil, we wouldn't need any of that. But every culture that's ever lived has had to have that because that's the bent of humanity. And it's only the power of Jesus that breaks the bondage of that sin nature, eradicates it, and replaces it with the very nature of Jesus.

Verse 4:

They have venom like the venom of a serpent; *[using the imagery of a snake, a venomous snake]*

If you take verse 3 and the first part of verse 4 together, it would be like trying to have a rattlesnake as a friend, as a pet. You know, you can pick that snake up and hold it a time or two and you may not get bitten. But eventually it is going to strike—that's its nature, that's who it is. And it's venomous and it will do damage.

He says:

Like a deaf cobra that stops up its ear, so that it does not hear the voice of charmers, or a skillful caster of spells. (vs. 4b-5)

It was very popular in the ancient Near East to be impressed by these snake charmers. Most of them came out of Egypt and they would tame these powerful cobras. And what David is saying is, "These corrupt leaders are impossible to tame, they're impossible to control. It's

like a cobra that's deaf." Now if you know anything about snakes, you need to know that David's not giving a science lesson here; he's just trying to make a point. Snakes really don't hear; they feel vibrations. And it's not the music that charms them, it's the movement of the charmer that actually mesmerizes them. But really his point is: These corrupt leaders are impossible to tame; they're out of control.

Verses 3, 4, and 5 are simply saying that ultimately there is an evil within every person, and until it is changed by the power of Jesus, it lurks there. So we shouldn't be surprised by selfish, unethical, unjust behavior.

Several years ago we were in Washington D.C., and Ashley and I went to the Holocaust Museum. If you've never been there, I would highly recommend it. But it's a very sobering place, and as we walked through it, one of the things that struck me were all the pictures of these young Nazi soldiers—16, 17, 18 year-old teenagers—who had been caught up in this movement and were part of the destruction. When you exit the museum, you're not in the frame of mind where you say, "Okay, what's the next tourist attraction?" You're in the frame of mind where you have to kind of sit down and recover before you can go on. So that's what we were doing. We were sitting there and we were watching some of the people come out, and I said to Ashley, "You know, the interesting thing is the overwhelming majority of these people that come out are convinced in their mind that these Nazi soldiers were monsters and that we are nothing like them. But that just simply isn't true. That evil apart from the power of Jesus lurks within us all."

If you were to go to the University of Nebraska campus and gather all of those students today and you were to take them back to Nazi Germany in that time period with those influences and those social factors and everything that was happening, the overwhelming majority of those would go with the flow and would perpetuate the same evil they did. They weren't monsters. They were just young men who got caught up in this movement. And there is an evil lurking within us that can only be removed with the power of Jesus.

When you think about that, it causes us to recognize that we need to be very wise in who we partner in business with, in whom we marry, in whom we trust with our lives. Because those who have not experienced the life-saving power of Jesus are enslaved to their sin nature, and that will manifest itself until there is a radical change, and we need to understand that. It shouldn't surprise us when evil emerges.

In verses 6-9, David is responding emotionally to the injustices, to the unfairness of it all. He says:

O God, shatter their teeth in their mouth [*he's a little bit upset here*]; **break out the fangs of the young lions, O LORD.** (v. 6)

Now we would say, "That doesn't sound very spiritual." Well, there are a couple of things you have to think about. First of all, what David is responding to is the injustice in the world. These leaders who are supposed to be the protectors of good are actually abusing the people through their practices, and that angers David. It angers God. There is a place for righteous anger, and that is what David is feeling here.

But you also have to just look at the imagery. What he's talking about is a lion. Now, when we talk about a lion, there's probably—maybe nobody—here this morning that has ever actually feared for your life because a lion was about to pounce on you. But in the ancient Near East, the lion was a common predator. As a matter of fact, they lived in fear of lion attacks all the time. So it was a very powerful imagery. The force of the lion is in its teeth—its ability to tear its victim to shreds.

So what David is actually asking here is that God would render the lion powerless—that He would shatter his teeth so he has no ability to carry out his carnage.

Verse 7:

Let them flow away like water that runs off; (v. 7a)

He goes from an image of a lion to water. If you take a bucket of water and you pour it on your driveway, the immediate effect is that there's great power in that. If there are bugs or something on the driveway, it immediately washes them away. But then it's gone, it's over, it's done—that's the imagery here. David is saying, "God, just wash them away like water." Water has the power to wash something away and immediately, then, it's gone. And that's David's prayer, "God, wash these people away—that immediately they're gone and it's over and new people are put in their place."

When he aims his arrows, let them be as headless shafts. (v. 7b)

In other words, he is saying, "Take the point off. It may bruise, but it won't kill. We're rendering their weapons ineffective."

Let them be as a snail which melts away as it goes along, (v. 8a)

You do feel like the energy of David's emotion kind of decreases as he vents here a little. You start with a ferocious lion...now we've worked our way down to a snail. And you kind of imagine maybe a snail's going along, and he's looking at it and he's saying, "God, make them like that." If you've ever watched a snail move along, it kind of leaves this wet, gooey substance behind. Now, I realize I'm using very technical, scientific terms here, but that's what it looks like. And it looks like he's just melting away. He's not, but that's the imagery, and David says, "Make them like these snails; they just melt away as they go."

Like the miscarriages of a woman which never see the sun. (v. 8b)

He's saying, "God, it would be better if these people were wiped out before they were even born. Imagine if Adolf Hitler would never have been born, how many lives would have been different. And that's what he's saying, "God, can't we just wipe these people out before they even see the light of day and they never really take a breath?"

Verse 9:

Before your pots can feel the fire of thorns He will sweep them away with a whirlwind, the green and the burning alike.

Now, I'm using the New American Standard. If you have a different translation, verse 9 may look very different from that. There's a lot of confusion as to what verse 9 actually means. The New American Standard is taking the translation that it has to do with taking a pot and you take all these dried thorns, which they would light and use to make a fire, and then it would heat up the pot and the pot would cook the food. The imagery is: "God, wipe away the fire before it has the chance to even heat up the pot, before it has a chance to do any damage." The second part of verse 9 is clear. Whatever the imagery is, the last part is saying, "Just wipe them away before they can have their effect."

Verses 6-9 are really David processing emotionally how he feels about all this. It's not hard to relate to what he's saying. If you have people that are in positions of authority over you, and because of their evil heart, because of the injustices and unfairness, they've made your life miserable, there's a certain emotional reaction where you feel like David and you'd like something done about it. The problem is really: How do we process those emotions in a constructive way?

I've mentioned several times over the last few months that we need to really give thought to how we respond to the injustices, the unfairness, the political climate of the day. I think it's very important to monitor your input and assess how that affects you emotionally. If you find yourself getting wound up, if you find yourself getting emotionally disturbed to the point where you're likely to spout off at somebody, you need to be very careful with that because it's very inconsistent with our mission to introduce people to Jesus. There's nothing wrong with the news and talk radio and all of that stuff. What you need to assess, though, is: How does it affect you? If it's got you in emotional turmoil every day, you need to monitor that. There's only so much of that I can take before I start to feel the level of frustration, and I'm likely in the wrong moment to vent it on my neighbor or to somebody else, and that makes it very hard to turn around and tell them about Jesus.

So what do we do? I mean, what do we do with these emotions that we feel are valid emotions because of the injustices and immorality and unfairness in our culture? Well, that's what David helps us with in verses 10 and 11.

The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. (v. 10)

When we see that word "vengeance," it tends to be a very negative term in our culture. But the term actually means just to correct the scales. It means to settle accounts; to make things right. It doesn't necessarily mean getting even. Ultimately, one day God will come on the scene and God will do the right thing. God will establish that which is just and right, and the tables will be turned and God will be fair. The phrase "**He will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked**" was a very common phrase in the ancient Near East. It just meant total victory. God isn't going to win a partial victory. God will win a complete victory, and right will be right and wrong will be wrong, and accounts will be settled. But that's still future, and we wait for that day.

And men will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth!" (v. 11)

At the end of the day, when God as the Judge steps on the scene and He rights the wrongs and ultimately rewards the righteous and punishes evil, people will draw back and say, "Wow! There is a God who is the ultimate Judge, and right is right and wrong is wrong." And we need to remember that.

When we vent our frustrations on people, what does that change? How does that change anything? It just makes everybody angry and upset. But how do we live a godly life in a fallen world, where many people in positions of authority are unfair, and they do administer injustice, and it all gets very frustrating? What we have to remember is that one day the Judge will settle accounts, and nobody's getting away with anything. Because in this world, it does seem like crime pays. It does seem like evil prospers. It does seem like people can lie and cheat and steal, and they make it work for them. If you're in business, you're well aware of the fact that some people don't play by the rules. They lie, they cheat, they deceive, and it seems like they win, and it's very frustrating.

But what the psalmist is saying is, “Hey, nobody’s getting away with anything—just remember that. There will come a day when the Judge will appear and He will deal with righteousness and evil. He will reward those who do right and He will punish those who do evil, and the records will be set straight.” Until that day, we need to not get distracted by those things and stay on the mission, which is introducing people to the life-changing power of Jesus.

The psalm is fairly simple and to the point, but it struck me this week how politically incorrect it is. We live in a world that is dominated by a philosophy known as relativism. In essence, relativism is saying there are no absolute truths, there is no absolute morality, that everything is up for grabs and we’re free to define right and wrong ourselves.

But that’s not what the psalm says. The psalm makes the case that there’s right, there’s wrong; there’s just, there’s unjust; there’s fair and there’s unfair. And at the end of the day, the Judge will appear and He will declare that which is right and that which is wrong.

Now if that’s the way the game is going to be scored at the end, it seems to me that it would be wise to play the game according to those rules all the way along. But that’s certainly out of step with the idea of relativism. Just to help you understand what we mean when we say “relativism,” I want to read you an illustration out of a book called *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air*. If you’re interested, I would highly recommend this book by Francis J. Beckwith and Gregory Koukl. The writer tells this story:

A perfect example of this comes from a conversation I had with an assistant in a doctor’s office. While she prepped me for an examination, I decided to get her opinion about the nature of morality.

“Can I ask you a personal question?” I asked. She paused in her work, uncertain how to respond. “I’m reading a book on ethics, and I want to know your opinion about something.”

“Oh,” she said, “Okay.”

“Do you believe that morality is absolute, or do all people decide for themselves?”

“What do you mean by morality?” she said.

“Simply put, what’s right and wrong,” I answered.

We talked back and forth for a few minutes, and it became evident to me that she was having a difficult time even comprehending the questions I was asking about moral categories. I thought maybe a clear-case example would make the task simpler, a question with an obvious answer, such as: Who is buried in Grant’s tomb? or: How long was the Hundred Years War?

“Is murder wrong?” I asked. “Is it wrong to take an innocent human life?”

She waffled. “Well...”

“Well...what?”

“Well, I’m thinking.”

I was surprised at her hesitation. “What I’m trying to find out is whether morals, right and wrong, are something we make up for ourselves or something we discover. In other words, do morals apply whether we believe in them or not?”

I waited. “Can we say that taking innocent life is morally acceptable?”

“I guess it depends,” she said tentatively.

“Depends on what?” I asked.

“It depends on what other people think or decide.”

I’ll make this really easy, I thought. “Do you think torturing babies for fun is wrong?”

“Well, I wouldn’t want them to do that to my baby.”

“You’ve missed the point of the question,” I said, a bit exasperated. “I may not like burned food, but that doesn’t mean giving it to me is immoral. Do you believe there is any circumstance, in any culture, at any time in history, in which torturing babies just for the pure pleasure could be justified? Is it objectively wrong, or is it just a matter of opinion?”

There was a long pause. Finally she answered, “People should all be allowed to decide for themselves.”

In reflecting on this conversation, I realized that I would never want this woman on a jury. I would never want her as a social worker, as an employee of a bank, as a teacher, as any kind of medical practitioner, or in any branch of law enforcement. I would not want a person who thinks like this in any position of public trust.

Sadly, this woman’s view of ethics is repeated time after time in every level of society. In reality, if she was awakened in the middle of the night by the plaintive screams of a young child being tortured by her neighbor next door, I’m sure she would be horrified by the barbarianism. Her moral intuitions would immediately rise to the surface and she’d recoil at such evil. In a discussion of the issue, however, she seemed incapable of admitting that even this egregious wrong was actually immoral.

My conversation with the doctor’s assistant shows how muddled a person’s thinking can become after a steady diet of moral relativism.

- *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air*, Francis J. Beckwith & Gregory Kould, 1998, Baker Books, pp. 34-35.

If you have many discussions on ethics with people around you, you are aware that this conversation is not unusual. There are a lot of people that feel this way. As a matter of fact, according to one poll, 70 percent of Americans feel this way—that there is no absolute truth and there is no such thing as absolute morality. Two out of three Americans believe that. That same poll indicated that 88 percent of evangelical Christians believe that the Bible is the Word of God and accurate in all its teachings. Now that doesn’t surprise us—88 percent of evangelical Christians. But the poll also revealed that 53 percent of those evangelical Christians do not believe there is absolute truth or absolute morality—half of evangelical Christians.¹ What that tells me is there is a lot of confusion and there’s a lot of the belief system of the culture that has seeped into the thinking of Christians in ways they probably don’t even realize.

Relativism is what we call an “ivory tower philosophy.” What we mean by that is: It’s one of those things that is discussed in a classroom, but nobody lives that way. The part of relativism people like is this idea that if God’s rules cramp my lifestyle, I’m free to change the rules so I can live the way I want to live. Now, I think most Americans buy into that and they live that way. But relativism goes far beyond that, with implications that most people don’t think about. As a matter of fact, just to make the point, there’s a chapter in this book called “Relativism’s Seven Fatal Flaws,” and I want to go through five of these flaws.

Flaw: *Relativists can’t accuse others of wrongdoing.* If you actually believe the theory of relativism, then you cannot say anything is right and you cannot say anything is wrong. It’s all up to the individual. Therefore, we can’t say anything is wrong. You cannot say if someone vandalizes your car, “That was wrong.” You cannot say if someone molests your child, “That was wrong.” You cannot say if someone breaks into your house and steals your property, “That’s wrong.” There just is no basis for right and wrong.

Now do you know anybody that lives that way? The professor is in the classroom teaching relativism on the campus, but on his way out to the parking lot he is mugged and somebody steals his wallet. What will he do? He will say, “That was wrong.” And he will call the police and he will expect justice. Nobody lives that way. The reality is if relativism is true, we have no basis by which we can say what Adolf Hitler did was wrong. There would be no reason for jails, for law enforcement or for prisons, because we’re making moral judgments and they don’t exist in a relativistic culture.

Flaw: *Relativists can't place blame or accept praise.* Now that's an interesting one. We have one of the most whiny, blamey cultures imaginable. But technically, 2/3 of the people in America can't blame anyone for anything because blaming is a value judgment. It's a form of condemnation, and if relativism is true, you can't do that. It's nobody's fault. You can't make that moral judgment. But not only can you not blame, you cannot receive praise because praise is a value judgment. There is nothing worthy of praise if there is no moral reality. It's funny because relativists love to get behind the camera and love to receive the accolades of the culture, which is a form of praise. It's saying, "That was praise-worthy." But in a morally neutral culture there is no such thing. There is nothing to condemn and there is nothing to praise.

Do you know anybody that lives that way? If there is something deep within your heart that says there's got to be right and wrong and there's got to be that which is worth condemning, and there's got to be that which is worthy of praise, then you have to reject relativism. You have to say, "It's not true. I don't believe it."

Flaw: *Relativists can't make charges of unfairness or injustice.* This is the one that actually made me think of this psalm because everything about the psalm is saying, "This isn't fair, this isn't right, this isn't just." The only way that claim can be made is if there is a sense of a moral standard that has been violated. But a relativist can't say anything is unfair or unjust, because those moral standards don't exist.

We live in a culture where people think they have a sense of entitlement: *I deserve more*. They complain about everything. But if you're truly a relativist, you can't do that. There is no entitlement—you don't deserve anything—because that assumes a certain moral standard. You can't complain about anything—nothing's unfair, nothing's unjust—because that implies some level of standard.

If there's anything in your heart that identifies with Psalm 58, and you say, "Yes, there is such a thing as unfairness, as injustice, then you have to reject relativism and you have to say, "It's not true."

Flaw: *Relativists can't hold meaningful moral discussions.* This is an interesting one. If you really hold to the belief of relativism, you have nothing to say because you believe that you cannot impose your morality on anyone else. So when there is a discussion on moral realities, to be consistent with your theory, you must be quiet. And yet these people spout off all the time. They're in front of a microphone all the time telling everybody else how to live. Technically the only people who qualify to enter into a public discourse about public morality are the 1/3 of people who believe that there is absolute truth and absolute morality. The relativist must remain silent to live consistent with their theory.

The last one: *Relativists can't promote the obligation of tolerance.* Relativists talk about tolerance all the time, but you can't do that. Tolerance is a moral virtue. What they say is, "Tolerance is the high road. It's the moral obligation." But wait a minute, there is no such thing. There's no such thing as virtue. There is no such thing as moral obligation. A relativist can't promote tolerance because that's making a value judgment, and you don't believe that.

The author summarizes it this way:

What kind of world would it be if relativism were true? It would be a world in which nothing is wrong—nothing is considered evil or good, nothing worthy of praise or blame. It would be a world in which justice and fairness are meaningless concepts, in which there would be no accountability,

no possibility of moral improvement, no moral discourse, and it would be a world in which there is no tolerance.

Moral relativism produces this kind of world. The late Dr. Francis Schaeffer's remark could well apply to relativists, who "have both feet firmly planted in mid-air."²

The reality is nobody lives that way. What they do take of relativism is this idea that if God's rules are cramping my style, I'm free to change the rules. And we convince ourselves God's okay with that.

But that's not the message of Psalm 58. The message of Psalm 58 is there is right and there is wrong, and one day the Judge will appear and will reward that which is right and will judge that which is evil, and accounts will be settled.

As your pastor, I can't think for you. I can't live your life for you. I can't make your choices. But as your pastor, I can warn you that one day when you stand before the Judge, it will not be a standard of relativism. It will be a standard of absolute right and wrong, and if that's going to be the standard when you stand before God, then I would implore you to live according to that standard today—because God clearly defines there is right, there is wrong, there is good, there is evil, and that is the standard that will ultimately prevail.

Our Father, we're thankful that You are good and You're gracious. But You're also a God of justice and righteousness, and one day You as the ultimate Judge will hold court and people will be held accountable for how they have lived their lives. Right will be rewarded, evil will be judged. Lord, help us to understand that it is hard to live neck-deep in a culture of relativism and not be affected by it. It's easy to begin to compromise and to think we somehow have liberty to change the rules. Lord, for each one of us here, convict us of areas of sin. Convict us where we have stepped over the boundary, that we might live lives that are upright and pleasing to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

¹ *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* by Gene Edward Vieth, Jr. (Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway Books), 1994, p. 16.

² *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air*, Francis J. Beckwith & Gregory Koukl 1998, Baker Books, pp. 61-69.

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Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
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