

Friday, August 21, 2020

SERIES: REWRITING JESUS

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: An Interview with Greg Koukl (Pt. 2) “Stand to Reason”

Here now is Pastor Nat with special guest, Christian Apologist, and Author, Greg Koukl:

NC: Today, I am here with a special guest author and President of Stand to Reason, Greg Koukl. Greg, thanks for joining us today.

GK: Yeah, I'm glad to be here. In case people didn't catch the last episode, or maybe they just want to hear a little more about you, tell our listeners and those watching a little bit about yourself and about Stand to Reason.

GK: Well, Stand To Reason is an organization that trains Christians to think more carefully about their convictions. And our goal is not just to pass information on. We don't want to tell you just what to think. We want to teach you how to think. But we're thrilled to be able to do what we do, and it's more needed now than ever before. The culture's getting incredibly hostile to Christianity, and people have seen, just in the last four or five months, how things have heated up. And there's a lot of ideas that frankly, people do not - a lot of Christians do not - understand that are in play right now, that are driving the circumstances that we're facing. And this is why it's important to be schooled a little bit in the world of ideas, because ideas have consequences. And so part of our job is to help to educate Christians, prepare them for that.

NC: Well, and you've studied apologetics, you've studied philosophy. I'm just curious, how did those impact your life and your walk with Christ?

GK: I became a Christian in 1973 - so it's almost 47 years or something like that, if my math is correct - and in that time, I learned about apologetics very early on, and that gave me a huge content base that was really good. It's hard to explain the impact, the wonderful impact, the benefit for me, that my training in philosophy has had - specifically the philosophy of religion and ethics. So that was my emphasis. And I simply could not do what I do now with the level of effectiveness I have, if it weren't for that training. So I'm all for training in philosophy. It's not philosophy that's the problem. As we talked about before, it's the philosophies of men that are contrary to Christ.

NC: Well, you've no doubt taken this education and your understanding of the Bible, and you've used that to strengthen believers around the world, and also to reach nonbelievers. And one of the ways you've done that is by offering books. You wrote a book called, *Tactics*, which we talked about in our last episode. You also wrote another book called *The Story of Reality*,

which is a fantastic book, a book that is great to hand out to people, both believers and nonbelievers. And to be honest, I found non-believers eat it up, because it actually gives an accurate picture of the way things really are. And I think it's just a great resource, but you also wrote a book called *Relativism*. And the subtitle cracks me up: *Feet Firmly Planted in Midair*. And I think it's just such a great word picture, but what is *Relativism* all about?

GK: Well, there are different, in a certain sense, species of relativism, but relativism has to do with the nature of truth; it has to do with what we mean when we say something is true. All right. The classic definition of truth is - I'll give it to you - but it's called the correspondence theory. And so I'm throwing philosophy at you, but everybody knows this classic definition is: A thing is true, if the thing you say is true, actually is so. If I said, I am on the program with Nat right now, and I am, then that's true. And if I said, I'm not on the program and I am, then that's false. Actually, Aristotle put it this way: If you say that it is, and it is, or you say that it isn't, and it isn't - that's true. But if it is and it isn't, or you say that it isn't, and it is - that's false. So, I mean, you think, Oh, Aristotle got credit for that - I could have done that. You know, it's simple. It's what everybody means when they say that: Are you telling the truth? You know, "Yeah. This is the truth". This is what they mean; this the common garden variety definition of truth.

Okay. But, you know, since the Enlightenment, the people have monkeyed with this word. Okay. And so when it came to certain areas, like religion or morality, people thought, well, look, you can't know the actual facts about those things. You can know the facts about science and the world, but you can't know the facts about morality. That's different. That's in a different category. You can't know the facts about God and religion. I mean, kind of, how could you know that? And they're thinking, because they can't put them in a test tube, as if science is the only way they know things. But most of the stuff they know, that anybody knows, they don't know by science, they know by other means. And so we have different ways of knowing. Okay. And what relativism is, is it takes the word truth, and it says that the word truth doesn't mean that your beliefs match up with the way the world is; where truth means your beliefs match up with your beliefs. I actually never put it that way, but I think it's a good way of stating it.

NC: Just remember where you were when you did it; it was on this show.

GK: There it is. Mark it. Alert the press, right? And somebody, you might say, well, that's kind of crazy. Well, it is kind of crazy, but this is what people mean, when they say that's your truth. You have your truth, they have their truth. In other words, you have your opinion, you have your belief. So it's true for you. Now notice that in the first case, the definition of truth depended on the circumstance, the objective world, that world out there. You know, "Is grass green?" "I don't know. Let me look. Yep". Not mine. All right, then it's not true in my case, but it may be true in your case, and notice the difference of whether it's true or false depends on the grass in question. All right. But in relativism, the truth is not dependent on the object - the grass in this case, this illustration - that would be objective truth. The truth is dependent on the subject, the individual. And as long as this subject believes it, it's true.

Okay. So relativism has always depended on the mind of the subject. And therefore, by the way, a person's relativistic beliefs can never be false, as long as they believe them. If they're true for them, that's all, but they could change their mind tomorrow. And then the new belief is true for them, [right]. It's a way of trying to keep, of individuals keeping at bay, ideas that they don't like,

that might apply to them, like moral claims. “Well, abortion's wrong”. “Well, it's wrong for you, but not for me”. Okay. Well, in an objective sense, it's either right or wrong. I'm not going to argue that point right now. I'm just simply saying, that it's either a good thing or it's a bad thing. But if you relativize it, then it's just up to the individual. And so then, you don't look at the abortion. You look at whether what a person believes, and that's all you can say, and look how effective it is to now short circuit the conversation.

And this is the way people view morality impulsively in our culture now. Especially, this was a big change during the sixties when I was growing up, and now it's kind of embedded in the culture. And that is, when it comes to moral claims, especially moral claims against people: “You shouldn't be doing that”. “Oh yeah. Says who? Your grandma?” You know, kind of thing. [Yeah]. And so they don't want to accept your moral judgments against them. They think that's bad. You know, “You shouldn't be doing that”. The irony though is, notice what I just said. They don't want to accept your moral judgments because they're relativists, which means morality is up to the individual, because they think that's bad. Well, wait a minute, that's an objectivist kind of claim. You can't say, you know, there is no more morality. That job's for everybody, and you shouldn't push your morality on me, because that's like saying there are no more moral rules. Here's one. You know?

And so anyway, I hope that was a reasonably accessible, short description of relativism. But the key here is relativism is when truth is dependent on the subject, the individual person, and objectivism is when truth is dependent on the object itself - out there, not in here. Okay. [Right]. And objective claims are either true or false. But subjective claims are neither true nor false, ultimately; they're just true for the individual. So if I say, “Haagen-Dasz butter pecan ice cream is delicious”, well, that's true for me, but it may not be true for you. I'm not talking about the ice cream. I'm talking about me right now, when I make that statement. And that's kind of, that's what relativism is.

NC: I think that's really helpful. But unfortunately, relativism has grossly impacted people from all different influences, especially Christianity. You know that many Christians are becoming more relativistic every day [that's right]. And so one of the questions I get often as a pastor is, “Okay, what is truth?” Which you've defined truth as I would just put it, as that which corresponds to reality; that which really is. But often I get the follow up question of, “But how can you know that it's actually true, objectively true?” How would you answer that question?

GK: Well, we have tools to accomplish that. We have the ability to test the world, to find out whether claims are true or not. And we do this all the time. I mean I got an email 15 minutes before our podcast. And it had a link to you, to this show. Now that email was a claim. The claim was this link will take me to the show. Well, is that true or false? I don't know. Let's see. Bang, bang, bang, zip, zip, zip. There you are. Okay. I guess it was true, because here I am. All right. And so the very, very simple illustration of that is so simple. One can easily miss the profundity of it, because that's an example of a truth claim being made, and then testing it. And we discover it's true.

Now this happens all the time with all kinds of different things. And we have faculties, like sensory faculties, that allow us to test the world. We also have mental faculties that help us to test things that are not physical. Okay. And this is where morality comes in. You know, that rape is wrong is not something that's just a matter of opinion. All one has to do is countenance it, and

if he's mentally healthy, he realizes that this is true [right]. That it is wrong to torture babies for fun. "Oh, I don't think so". Really? If you don't think it's wrong to torture a baby - that's not your truth - all right - you've got to get help. [Yeah]. You know, something's wrong if you don't see that.

So there are rational truths. We use rational reasoning a lot. If I said that, if A is bigger than B, and B is bigger than C, then I know that A is bigger than C - that's a transitive relationship. It's like you don't, "Well what is your argument?" Well, you know, if all men are mortal, and Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal. "Really? Prove it". Well, that is the proof, so those are what I'm referring to now, are things that are just built into our minds.

We have faculties that allow us to figure out the truth. Now, those aren't perfect. And so this is why we have, we do these things in community, and we knock our reasons back and forth. You know, like a person who tells me that you can't know the truth - that statement itself is a claim to know something true, that you can't know it - which we think - wait a minute - that's contradictory. You know, that's a problem. And we call it the suicide tactic, by the way. So the fact is, we are truth seekers by nature. And we have faculties that if we're careful in employing them, we can figure out much of what is true, not just in the physical realm, but also in the non-physical realm.

NC: Greg, we're talking about your book, *Relativism*, a great book, and you just unpacked relativism, and you also unpacked truth. And I think it's pretty humorous, because I mean, it's so blatantly obvious, I think, to so many of us, when we simply look at it honestly. But in your book, you talk about three different versions of relativism. You talk about *society does relativism*. You talk about *society says relativism*, and you also say, *I say relativism*, [Right, right]. Would you take just a few minutes and unpack those, but also give us your assessment of those from a Christian worldview?

GK: One addition I want to make to my comment before - all of the discussion about agenda right now is based on relativism. I mean, people are very familiar with this. All right. Gender dysphoria: So is that person a male or a female? Well, that depends. It depends on what? It does not depend on their genitals. That's the objective state of affairs. They have relativized all that. It depends on what they believe. And if they believe themselves to be female today, then they're female. And if they believe themselves tomorrow to be male, then they're male tomorrow, okay. Notice the truth is inside of them. So there's a contemporary example of how relativism is affecting our thinking on things.

Some people are convinced - back to your question now, proper - some people are convinced that morals are in fact relative. There is no big system of morality that applies to everybody. It's just a matter of individual or cultural preference. And what they'll say is: "Look at here's one culture that does one thing. And to them, it's right. But for us, it's wrong". When the British went to India and colonized India, those in India had a practice called *sati*, and that meant that when the husband died, the wife was burned on the funeral pyre of her husband. She went out too, okay. Now this was barbaric to the English, but it was totally acceptable to those in India. So, people will look at that and say, "Well, see, don't you see how morals are relative, because one culture believes one thing and another culture believes another? Therefore morals are relative to

the culture”. Okay. The problem with that view, is that suggests that whenever you have a disagreement about a fact, then there is no truth about a fact. All right. So let me give you a good example of this. There's a time that people believed the world was flat. I guess there's some people who still believe that. And there are people who believed the world was like a globe. Okay. Now, because some people believed that it was flat and some people believed it was a globe, does that mean the world had no shape? I mean, it's crazy. [It is]. All this tells you is that there are differences of opinion. It doesn't tell you that no opinion is right. So that's the core mistake of *society does relativism*. It's a look at different societies that do different things, and the conclusion is that must mean relativism is true, when it doesn't mean that at all - just there's differences of opinion.

Society says relativism is a little different view. And this is the view that states, “Well look, this is what our society has decided is good for us.” And so, when we say something is right and wrong, all we are saying is that the society has set up a set of rules, and they've agreed to follow it, to have civilization basically. So this is similar to a kind of a social contract understanding. Now, different cultures, just like I just cited, have different agreements about what's right and wrong. And so you have different contracts, but you are obliged to do what your culture tells you to do. All right. So you do what society says to do. And so the locus of the truth of morality is in the culture. Now that's a type of relativism, because the culture here is the subject. Okay. We're not talking about any rules outside. We're just talking about what people decide at the moment. Okay. Well, the difficulty with this, is that it's really counterintuitive when you think it out a little bit. Think of Martin Luther King - Martin Luther King campaigned against racial injustice 50 years ago. And the reason he campaigned against it as a moral reformer, is because the status quo - what society was saying - he was saying was wrong. And this is true with every moral reformer, slavery and William Wilberforce, and all kinds of different things - even contemporary things - the status quo is wrong, is what people are saying, and that we have to change it. Now, if society says relativism is the right way to go - then you can't oppose the majority. Because if you oppose the majority, you are wrong, by definition; the majority determines what's right. You're wrong by definition.

So look, if the society is racist, and that's what everybody kind of agrees to, well then, they're right. Okay. And Martin Luther King turns out would be the bad guy, because he's going against the grain. Now that's wildly counterintuitive. That's called the reformer's dilemma. And you think, well, that can't be right. Well, you're right. It isn't right. Because sometimes the minority is correct, but the minority can only be correct, if there's a set of rules that are outside of people, that the minority is championing, and the major group of people are fighting against. Okay. And this is of course, a lot of what's happening right now in our culture, in the last couple of months, you know: the claim that the majority has been wrong and that the minority is right. Okay. I mean, the minority view, it turns out to be minorities, also ethically, in this particular case; I'm just telling you the dynamic, I'm not agreeing or disagreeing with it. I'm just telling you the dynamic. And unless you see that dynamic, you can't assess it, what this dynamic is. You can't assess it. Notice that if the minority is correct, the minority view is correct, that means they have to be drawing on a higher principle above them, and outside of humankind, just making up the rules. Okay. If they're going to draw on a higher principle, where did that come from? So if you have somebody that's arguing against the majority, based on a moral point of view that's higher, and that person is an atheist, they're talking nonsense. Where are you getting this rule that you're

trying to impose on the majority? Okay. Because if there is no God, it's just majority rules, or the most powerful rules. All right.

So we talked about *society does relativism*, which is really an observation that is meant to prove relativism is true, just because there's differences of opinion. We talked about *society says relativism* - that's a little different, because that says you ought to do what your society says. But of course, sometimes there's the majority is wrong; you know, just because it's legal doesn't mean it's right.

The next one is one, most people are familiar with. And that is what I call, *I say relativism* or *individual relativism*. And *I say relativism* is just, "Well, if I say it's right, it's right for me". That's it. So what about abortion? What about premarital sex? What about homosexuality? What about gender confusion? What about this, that, and the other thing, all the things that are going on right now? "Well, it's up to me. I get to decide", okay. The truth of the matter, whether it's right or wrong is relative to me - it's up to me.

Now I just want to make kind of a spiritual observation here, and that is what all of these debates are about right now. They're not about what they're about. They are about something else. They're about who is in charge - the creature or the Creator, the Potter or the clay? And the clay is saying, "I'm in charge, I'm in charge. I'm in charge. I'm going to do it the way I want to do it. And that is *I say relativism*: nobody else gets to tell me what's right or wrong for me.

But of course, the people who are saying that, think about it. Nobody who advances relativism wants anybody to be a relativist towards them. [Right]. Because what if racism is true for the people who believe in it? So what's your grounds of complaint now? Well, that's not right. All of a sudden now they're not relativists anymore. And by the way, you'll see this all the time, Nat. You'll see people jumping back and forth, and back and forth; being a relativist when it suits them, being an objectivist when it suits them, but they're not consistent. Okay. And so when we stand back and we see the game, we see what's going on; now we can make assessments. And that's the assessment I gave you a few moments ago: who's in charge? That's what the battle really is about. This is a spiritual battle. This is a rebellion of individuals, abetted by spiritual forces, who are confusing people, and letting lies permeate the culture. If we have the truth, we can see the lies.

NC: Yeah. And it becomes really frustrating with believers, because believers should know better. You know, they do have the Word of God as their guidebook - you know, God has spoken and it's very clear. Now for a nonbeliever, it makes sense, because, guess what? They are their own god. They are enemies of God. They're running the opposite way. But for believers, it becomes very frustrating [I agree] to see them go down a path that they were clearly redeemed from. And that's where I think your ministry is helping people see clearly, and our aim as well here at Back to the Bible, to bring them back to the Bible.

And so our listeners and those watching today, we want to encourage you: pursue truth. You will not be disappointed. Pursue truth, and it will continually point you back to Christ. And where's the source of truth for the believer? Right in God's Word. Greg, thank you for joining us today.

GK: Well, I really enjoyed it, Nat. Thank you so much.