



# SESSION ~~two~~



## *We're Good, Right?*

As Christians, we talk a great deal about the dangers and pitfalls of relativism—the idea that all views of truth are equally valid. Often, we're fearful of relativism because we jump to an exaggerated, all-or-nothing definition of hyper-relativism. When left unchecked, this extreme form of relativism produces moral subjectivism—rendering “truth” meaningless.

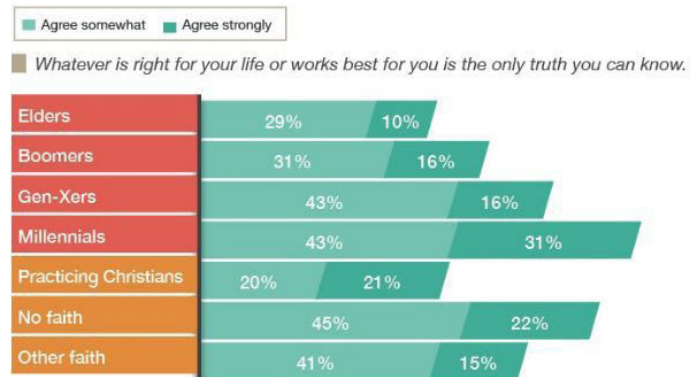
On the other hand, we need some form of relativism. Relativism is an unavoidable reality. When something is “relative,” it is contingent or dependent—upon something else. Our entire Christian faith, for example, is dependent upon whether Christ's resurrection actually occurred (1 Corinthians 15:17). Is Christianity true? It depends on the historical actuality of this event. It depends on the reliability of the first witnesses and the credibility of the biblical account.

Despite all of its flaws, relativism also reminds us that we are the created—not the Creator. We are not the ones who determine truth – God does. Truth is relative to God, the author of Truth. The dividing line of relativism, then, is what truth is dependent upon. Is truth relative to the individual? Societal structures? A political party's platform? A nation's founding principles? Or is truth relative to the Creator?

According to Barna Research, the source of truth is as confusing as ever in our present day and age. According to the graph to the right, 41% of practicing Christians believe truth is relative to what “works” best for the individual.

### MORALITY AND TRUTH

(% among U.S. adults, by generation and faith segment)



Barna OmniPoll | July 3–9, 2015 | N=1,237

As Christians, we know truth comes from God. At the same time, understanding what is true can be difficult. After all, if the process were easy, all Christians would agree on everything! When we err on the side of extreme absolutism all the time, we create systems of authoritarianism (with strong central power and limited freedom) and fundamentalism (with strict, literal interpretation of scripture). Conversely, when we err on the side of extreme relativism all the time, we create subjectivism (where knowledge is merely subjective and that there is no external or objective truth).

As Wesleyans, we tend to take the middle ground between these two extremes. While holding to some absolute truths, we also recognize we don't know everything there is to know. Since we are not the authors of truth, we are limited in our human understanding. We're all on a journey of discovering and identifying God's truth in the world.

## Watch Session Two Video

*Dr. Hank Spaulding III is the associate campus pastor at Mount Vernon Nazarene University. He has a Ph.D. in Christian Ethics and teaches theology and Pauline classes. His book entitled The Just and Loving Gaze of God with Us was published this year and examines Paul's political theology.*

- In the video, Dr. Hank Spaulding discussed several positive things regarding relativism. Have you ever thought about relativism as a good thing? How can listening to different perspectives be beneficial to us as believers?
- What is one specific belief or idea you once had, but then later changed your mind? What factors caused you to consider it in a different light (an experience, study of Scripture, conversation, etc.)? Was this difficult for you? If so why?
- As Wesleyans, we believe all truth is God's truth. How does this idea give us freedom as believers? How might this idea also complicate the discussion at hand?
- Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. How did Paul navigate the difficult issue of eating food that had been sacrificed to idols? In what ways can we adopt Paul's tone and attitude in our own conversations today?
- While it can be useful, relativism—especially hyper-relativism—can also be a hazard. In what ways have you personally experienced an exaggerated form of relativism today? What dangers did it create?
- How might extreme relativism be attractive to us when we talk about sin? What are the dangers of this?
- How can we cultivate humility when it comes to our negotiable beliefs (i.e., the beliefs that, no matter how strongly I may feel about them, are not the things that would make or break my faith)? How can we show charity—or be generous—with others who might disagree with us?

## Closing Prayer

Spend a minute in silence asking God to bring to mind any personal opinions that are not aligned with God's truth. Ask the Holy Spirit to make these thoughts clear. Next, spend an additional moment in silence considering the ways we have failed to exhibit love and kindness in controversial conversations. Ask for God's forgiveness and grace to model Christ's example in our relationships.

For Further Study:

*Who's Afraid of Relativism?* By James K. A. Smith // *The Reason for God* by Timothy Keller  
*The Sin of Certainty* by Peter Enns // *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be* by Middleton and Walsh

