

WORLD RELIGIONS AND OTHER BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

CLASS 5: MORALISM & HUMANISM

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The goal of this series is not just to look at all the religions which are out there, but to look at what others believe and how it has infiltrated the church.
- There are many subtle beliefs which have come into the church and have been believed and practiced without regards to their origin or consequence.
- As we look through these various beliefs and systems which are put in place, it would benefit us to notice why they came about, when they came about and what is the overall goal.
- It is by having a better understanding of where people are coming from and where they think they are going that Christians can show them the ultimate truth of Jesus Christ.
- Just like Paul, we can go to the unsaved world, not agreeing with them but acknowledging their desire for religious or spiritual things.
- **Acts 17:22** “So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.’”
- From this observation, Paul was able to show them who the true and living God was.
- From the onset, it is vital to understand that one cannot be “reasoned” into heaven.
- It is not upon their agreement with you that their standing before God will change from enemy to friend.
- We know that the only truth which can rescue people from their sin is the truth of the gospel.
- **Here is the schedule for the upcoming lessons:**
 - March 2nd: Introduction and New Thought / Progressive Christianity
 - March 9th: PNG Mission Update
 - March 16th: Deism (God exists but is more of a clockmaker than an involved God)
 - March 23rd: New Age Movement / Eastern Mysticism / Animism
 - March 30th: Universalism / Annihilationism (all are saved and there is no hell)
 - **April 6th: Moralism / Humanism (as distinct from religion)**
 - April 13th: Hyper-dispensationalism / ultra-dispensationalism / KJV only
 - April 20th: Resurrection Sunday Celebration–No Class

INTRODUCTION

- These two different views, moralism and humanism, are both derived from common beliefs or ideologies, looking at:
 - The capacity of natural man to understand good and evil intrinsically (within themselves) or through societal or cultural norms and practices
 - Viewing natural man as autonomous, rational, and moral agents.
- Though these systems would distinguish themselves from any form of religion, there have been serious, and dangerous, implications of these views within the church.
- Because of that, we need to understand what these views are, how they came about, their potential effects on the church, and how God’s word speaks to them.

WHAT IS MORALISM?

- Moralism is commonly defined as “the practice of morality, as distinct from religion.”¹
- On the surface, moralism doesn’t seem to be much of a threat.
 - To say that we should seek the help others, preserve life, or just generally “do good” can seem, at face value, to be something we all would be on board with.
 - Everyone, on some level, has a moral standard that they would claim to hold.
- However, the key to understanding this in our discussion is not so much the practice of morality, but rather in the definition of morals (i.e. good and evil).
 - “...moralism is often taken to denote a morality that *has no links to God* or to the orders of creation but that, as practical reason, *defines good and evil on its own.*”² (emphasis added)
 - All of this to say, as we say we should seek to do good and avoid doing evil, the question, then, is raised, “**By what standard?**”.

A Secular View on the Origin of Human Morality

- In a secular view of moralism/morality, it was a process that spanned over millions of years of evolutionary growth and development.
- While this would have begun with ideas of “inclusive fitness” (an innate sense of helping one’s own kin) and a general sense of reciprocity (i.e. you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours – mutual benefit), it has been fitted through the paradigm of evolution.

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/moralism.html>

² <https://carm.org/about-ethics/what-is-moralism/>

- This is understood, generally, as a development of the role of collaboration for survival, a structure of cultural “norms”, and an overall emphasis on “ ‘we’ before ‘me’ “.
 - Recently a new approach to looking at the problem of morality has come to the fore. The key insight is a recognition that individuals who live in a social group in which everyone depends on everyone else for their survival and well-being operate with a specific kind of logic. In this logic of interdependence, as we may call it, if I depend on you, then it is in my interest to help ensure your well-being. More generally, if we all depend on one another, then we must all take care of one another.³
- A secular moralist would understand that, 6 million years ago, our ancestors primarily only sought after self-interest, then, as our ancestors evolved and sought better sources of food, there came a need of joint efforts to hunt, which eventually led to cultural practices and norms, roles assigned to ensure the survival of all.
- In today’s understanding of morality, it is, generally, viewed as “the actions of a person who takes into account in a sympathetic way the impact the actions have on others”⁴
- Overall, it is an emphasis on morals as the innate structure and values that are derived from a species need to survive.
- With this, the constant that moralism comes back to, in a secular view, is that these principles are, primarily, subjective and developed through human reason:
 - People have moral values; that is, they accept standards according to which their conduct is judged as either right or wrong, good or evil. The particular norms by which moral actions are judged vary to some extent from *individual to individual and from culture to culture* (although some norms, such as not to kill, not to steal, and to honor one’s parents, are widespread and perhaps universal), but value judgments concerning human behavior are passed in all cultures.⁵ (emphasis added)

Moralism’s Effect on the Church

- While moralism began as a uniquely secular theory, there has been growth in what is now known as “Religious moralism”, which can be defined as “an emphasis on proper moral behavior to the exclusion of genuine faith.”⁶
- Many would see this in line with legalism (emphasizing an adherence God’s law to achieve both salvation and sanctification), however the distinction lies in that religious moralism is not tied to God’s word, but to a collective idea of right and wrong from any set of beliefs.

³ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-origins-of-human-morality/>

⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK210003/>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <https://www.gotquestions.org/moralism.html>

- Looking to Christianity, a moralist would simply view the Bible as a book of stories and lessons to instruct in moral behavior, and to please God, we must simply live a moral life (don't lie, cheat steal, etc.).
- This has spread, along with the idea of deism, to produce concepts such as “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism”.
 - This term was first developed in 2005 in the book, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, and is essentially a compilation of beliefs held by American teenagers (even some that would claim to be Christians).
 - This produced the five following core beliefs:⁷
 - A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
 - God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
 - The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
 - God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
 - Good people go to heaven when they die.
- While this (seemingly) brings God and the Bible into the mix, this belief is still essentially based upon man's ability to do good, man's definition of good, and a misrepresentation of the God of the Bible.
- “In our own context, one of the most seductive false gospels is moralism. This false gospel can take many forms and can emerge from any number of political and cultural impulses. Nevertheless, the basic structure of moralism comes down to this—**the belief that the Gospel can be reduced to improvements in behavior.**”⁸ (emphasis added)
- Think, for a moment, through some of the implications of this idea:
 - Moralism really does become a false gospel.
 - Why does man need a Savior if they have the capacity to be moral in themselves?
 - Why seek repentance and faith in Christ if my ultimate goal is just improved behavior?
 - How do we interpret the Bible objectively?
 - How do you even define concepts like “truth”, “good”, and “evil”?
 - How can someone be told that their interpretation/application of the Bible's “moral code” is right or wrong if it is rooted in individual belief or cultural norms?
 - How do we think through parenting children?
 - How do we think through topics so prevalent today as abortion, LGBTQ+, etc.
- Again, the question that is raised with moralism is, “**By what standard?**”

⁷ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Moralistic-Therapeutic-Deism.html>

⁸ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-moralism-is-not-the-gospel-and-why-so-many-christians-think-it-is/>

WHAT IS HUMANISM?

- Similar, in essence, to moralism is the idea of humanism.
- Some definitions (sourced from the American Humanist Association⁹):
 - **Humanism** is a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism or other supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good. (American Humanist Association)
 - **Humanism** is an approach to life based on reason and our common humanity, recognizing that moral values are properly founded on human nature and experience alone. (The Bristol Humanist Group)
 - **Humanism** is: A joyous alternative to religions that believe in a supernatural god and life in a hereafter. Humanists believe that this is the only life of which we have certain knowledge and that we owe it to ourselves and others to make it the best life possible for ourselves and all with whom we share this fragile planet. A belief that when people are free to think for themselves, using reason and knowledge as their tools, they are best able to solve this world's problems. (The Humanist Society of Western New York)
- While moralism highlights the standard of living, forming of right and wrong through experience and cultural/social norms, humanism highlights the ability of man to meet that standard,
 - Humanism emphasizes the rational capabilities of man
 - Humanism holds to natural, ethical values derived from human need and a pursuit of individual happiness as the driving force of seeking a good, moral life.

Secular Humanism

- Secular humanism really began to take shape out of the 18th century Enlightenment, and it continued to flourish through 19th century freethinking.
- It was brought into formalized thought in 1927 with the forming of the Humanist Fellowship, drafting the first iteration of the Humanist Manifesto in 1933.
 - Currently on its third iteration, the Humanist Manifesto serves as the main document outlining the beliefs of secular humanism.
 - This document includes the following ideas¹⁰:
 - Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis.

⁹ <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/definition-of-humanism/>

¹⁰ <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto3/>

- Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change.
 - Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience.
 - Life’s fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals.
 - Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships.
 - Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness.
- Again, this emphasizes the rational capabilities of man, finding fulfillment in “doing good” for mankind, which is derived from man and nature, and is completely devoid of God.
- Along with the manifesto, the American Humanist Association has developed the “Ten Commitments” of Secular Humanism, which include¹¹:
 - **Altruism** - “I will help others in need without hoping for rewards.”
 - **Critical Thinking** - “I will practice good judgment by asking questions and thinking for myself.”
 - **Empathy** - “I will consider other people’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences.”
 - **Environmentalism** - “I will take care of the Earth and the life on it.”
 - **Ethical Development** - “I will always focus on becoming a better person.”
 - **Global Awareness** - “I will be a good neighbor to the people who share the Earth with me and help make the world a better place for everyone.”
 - **Humility** - “I will be aware of my strengths and weaknesses, and appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of others.”
 - **Peace and Social Justice** - “I will help people solve problems and handle disagreements in ways that are fair for everyone.”
 - **Responsibility** - “I will be a good person—even when no one is looking—and own the consequences of my actions.”
 - **Service and Participation** - “I will help my community in ways that let me get to know the people I’m helping.”
- In summary, secular humanism holds that mankind is part of an uncreated, eternal nature, and its goal is man’s self-remediation (through rational capability, innate moral goodness, and a self-found desire to see good prevail) without reference to or help from God in any way.
- Much like moralism, though, the concepts of humanism have begun to find inroads into the church.

¹¹ <https://americanhumanistcenterforeducation.org/ten-commitments/>

Christian Humanism

- While secular humanism would emphasize man's rational capability to discern and do good, finding self-fulfillment and excluding God entirely, Christian humanism "teaches that liberty, individual conscience, and intellectual freedom are compatible with Christian principles and that the Bible itself promotes human fulfillment—based on God's salvation in Christ and subject to God's sovereign control of the universe."¹²
 - Christian humanism really represents an effort to bring together Christianity and humanist principles, usually couched in the realm of philosophy.
 - Christian humanism often emphasizes scholasticism (applying man's natural logic and reason to theology) and applying Christian principles to various areas of life.
- Christian humanism takes many steps in the right direction:
 - Viewing human dignity and value as a result of man being created in the image of God (Gen 1:27)
 - Seeing God's word as the standard for truth and morality.
 - Understanding the need for man to be in a saving relationship with Jesus Christ
 - Seeking to glorify God, ultimately, and not self
- HOWEVER, some areas that are still affected by the beliefs of secular humanism and philosophy are:
 - Though man's heart is corrupt, man's capacity to reason was not affected by the fall. Therefore, man can reason his way to God. (trichotomy – man in three parts: body, soul, spirit)
 - This tie to philosophical principles and areas, such as scholasticism, would dilute what Scripture states regarding the depravity of man.
 - "...the Scholastics were not so much seeking truth as they were trying rationally to organize a body of accepted truth so that truth, whether it came by faith from revelation or by reason from philosophy, might be a harmonious whole..."¹³
- So, Christian Humanism falls short in its anthropology.
- An example of this today is the **Church of Humanism**, which stands as a voice for Christian/religious humanism:
 - Our philosophy of life is based on a deep faith in the values of reason, love, and intuition and a call to conscience that relates particularly to issues of justice, freedom, and peace. We greatly value the study and the application of humanistic psychology and philosophy, and we take inspiration from the wisdom of Martin Buber, Erich Fromm, Hannah Arendt, Carl Rogers, Karen Horney, Stanley Krippner, Wilhelm Reich, and other pioneers in the field of human relations.¹⁴

¹² <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-humanism.html>

¹³ Earle Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, p. 228.

¹⁴ <https://churchofhumanism.org/index.php>

A BIBLICAL EVALUATION OF MORALISM/HUMANISM

- We need to examine some of the key tenants of moralism and humanism through a Biblical lens.
- Regarding Moralism:
 - **Morals can be understood without God/the Bible:**
 - **Matthew 19:16-17** - *And someone came to Him and said, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” And He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good;*
 - Jesus is clear: there is only One who is good, and that is God. God, by His very nature, is the source and arbiter of what is good.
 - Not only that, but God is an objective source of goodness, in that He is unchanging (James 1:17 – there is no variation or shifting shadow).
 - God is the unchanging standard of good and evil, not man/culture/society.
 - **Man has an inherent sense of right/wrong:**
 - **Romans 2:14-15** - *For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them...*
 - The question is not, “does the natural man know right and wrong?”. Rather, it is, “what is the source of that understanding?”
 - Scripture is clear: God has written His word on our hearts, and in this context, Paul is saying that this is true of **all men**, through the faculty of their conscience (though affected by sin).
 - While moralism holds that an innate desire for a common good, survival, or collaboration dictates moral behavior, Scripture reveals that God, in His grace, has written His law on the hearts of every man.
 - It is from this that man knows that murder, theft, lying, etc. is wrong and should be punished.
 - **(Regarding religious/Christian moralism) Man can appease God through improved behavior:**
 - **Ephesians 2:8-10** - *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*
 - Moralism cannot replace the gospel.
 - It is only by the grace of God, through the person and work of Jesus Christ and His righteousness credited to us by faith, that man can be saved.
 - While we are created for good works (Eph 2:10), they cannot save.

- Regarding Humanism:
 - **Natural man is capable of and responsible to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good.**
 - **Romans 1:18-32** - *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness...For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened...And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding...*
 - A key principle to understand as we observe humanism (whether secular or religious/Christian humanism) is the idea of **total depravity**.
 - This is a biblical concept understanding that **ALL** aspects of man (inner and outer) have been completely corrupted by the fall and sin.
 - Man cannot think or reason in a way that is not affected by sin. Therefore, as Paul would say in Romans 3:10-11, there are none who are righteous or that seeks for God.
 - **Man is a part of nature, relational by nature, and find meaning in relationships.**
 - **Genesis 1:27** - *God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*
 - Mankind's value, worth, capacity and need to live in relationship with others are all implications of being made in the image of God.
 - This is not something that developed through man's reason over millions of years, but it is what is inherent within them as image-bearers of God.

CONCLUSION

- Moralism and Humanism, in their secular forms, seek to elevate man, while disregarding or intentionally removing God, as it pertains to the development of moral standards and the overall purpose of mankind.
- An acceptance of these belief systems completely disregards the truths of God's character as the objective standard for understanding good and evil, man's condition apart from God, the authority and sufficiency of God's word as the objective source of truth, and can even hinder the spread of the true gospel message.
- We must remember that moralism and humanism cannot save. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can.