

# INTERACTIVE SUNDAY #5

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Today, I will respond to two questions I have received from congregants.

## **1. Is America becoming secular?**

Let me first offer a definition: The word secularism is taken from the Latin word "*saecularis*" meaning worldly or earthly, as opposed to such terms as religious or supernatural.

In general, it is a system of thought that limits itself to human existence here and now in exclusion of man's relation to God here and hereafter. In short, it is the practical exclusion of God from human thinking and living. Secularism asserts that God is unnecessary to a full life.

Secularism is the "weeds among the wheat," spoken of by Jesus, that spoils the harvest and will be with us until the end.

America has always been secular, because it was not founded as a religious nation; that is, it was not designed to be governed by one religion. It was founded, however, by many religious people, most of them Christian (though many different stripes and flavors of Christianity).

The battle between secularism and faith has always existed in America. Our Founding Fathers did a phenomenal job of providing for the preservation of faith in American society through our Constitution and the Bill of Rights. But secularism will fight to the very end, as the Bible predicts. Each generation must contend with it.

This battle seeks to undermine and change the Constitution, not because its ideas are archaic and obsolete, but specifically because its ideas are rooted in the Bible's revelation of God and His creation. The Constitution does not embrace much of the current "political correctness" and the "broader," "wiser," "progressive" aims of our day.

Is America losing its religious base? Only if you listen to the views of secular reporters, statisticians, and theorists. Is you search for it, the news of a growing, thriving church in America and around the world is available.

Take our little church as one example. We are small in number, but have earned a respectable reputation in our City and County as being positively involved and helpful. Right here in our local community, we have provided food programs, met people's financial needs, sponsored aid to single moms, victims of domestic violence, alcoholics and drug addicts.

Beyond that, we helped to bring relief to those who experienced natural disasters, funded childhood education and ministry training, helped to break the cycle of poverty through feeding programs and micro-businesses, to establish new and updated medical facilities, built homes for the displaced, and sponsored orphans in group homes.

Last year, we gave away more than 18% of our income to help others and advance the Kingdom of God.

And we continue to attract and develop a diverse group of believers, across ethnic, economic, educational, and generational lines. In the three decades that I have served here, scores of people have passed through our ranks to become solid Christian business people, teachers, nurses, ministers and missionaries. This has been a rich resource of healing and foundational training.

A church doesn't have to be large to be effective (and a person doesn't have to be wealthy or prestigious to make a positive difference).

But to be fair, some modern American religious views and practices have veered away from Scripture, even denying the truth that freed us, and given secularists ammunition against the church because of our misbehaviors.

Tragically, most of our public education has adopted a secular position as its basis, removing Bible reading and prayer shortly after World War II, and open dialogue is generally discouraged as "offensive" to some.

As a result, many young parents themselves have received no religious training, and consider that to be the most enlightened and appropriate way to raise their own children, so they might be free to "choose for themselves what they want to believe."

Pardon my sarcasm, but what else should we NOT tell our kids in order to preserve their freedom? Should we avoid dictating to them what foods are healthy? Should we let them discover good hygiene on their own? Should we avoid teaching them good manners so they can relate to others as they see best? Should we refuse to encourage the giftedness we see in them, lest we misdirect them to a path they would not have chosen to follow? Should we allow them to select their own friends and friendship activities without comment or restriction?

Why is it only religion that is "subject to extreme bias"? Why is religious training off limits, as prejudicial and overriding a child's will?

Wherever God is being removed, or ignored, or replaced in our society, secularism is creeping in and growing up, and bearing its tragic fruits.

What are the fruits of secularism? With thanks to Father Paul Duffner, I mention four...

*For the individual:* removes the sense of responsibility to God, leaving only concern for man-made laws, and either observing them or using them according to one's self-interest.

*For the family:* robs the family of its sacredness, beginning with the marriage of parents, and including the procreation of children. Self-sacrifice has gives way to self-indulgence. The pursuit of pleasure replaces the pursuit of holiness. And juvenile delinquency abounds.

*For education:* When something is omitted from public education, the implication is that it is not essential to the end or purpose of education. Moral values divorced from religion, become simply a matter of public opinion and social convention.

*For the church:* produces a growing religious indifference, which Jesus defined as "love growing cold." Instead, Christ's message is to live in you—in the way you live, and in the way you refuse to live.

Those who wish to make secularized public education obligatory for all criticize non-public education as divisive. But all differences are not divisive. The differences that are harmful are those which divide people in such matters as good citizenship, patriotism, and concern for the common good.

The answer to creeping secularism is to popularize Biblical theology once more by thoroughly living the Gospel and ardently preaching its truth, in the context of compassionate relationships.

## **2. I work out; I do yoga. Are we supposed to do yoga as Christians?**

Stretching is good for every body. That aspect of yoga is helpful, not harmful.

The word, "yoga," comes from the Sanskrit, meaning "union." Its English equivalent is the word "yoke" or "harness." There are a great variety of yogas, arising, perhaps 2500 years ago, from Asian polytheist religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Texts describing yogic practices began to appear about 1500 years ago, though most are from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Yoga includes physical, mental, and spiritual practices, all aimed at *moksha*, also described as "liberation" from the otherwise endless cycle of reincarnations into "nothingness." A personal Savior is not part of that equation, nor is fulfillment of purpose, but only escape from hardship.

In its modern forms, it is a system of self-realization—an idea which is foundational to all New Age thought. It does not search for answers of origin, and ignores the issues of right/wrong and sin. Rather it seeks only to unblock and release all “human potential” through mindfulness, presuming that everything that is humanly possible is good and right and should be pursued. (This is a sophisticated version of “If it feels right, it must be right,” or, “If it feels good, how can it be bad?”)

Without naming Jesus Christ, or attacking Christian thought directly, the ideology behind yoga simply ignores Him as unnecessary and is silent on the concepts of sin and righteousness or atonement and relationship with the Creator. Instead, it will refer to things that seem to “inhibit” or “diminish” human capacity.

Just such ideas, unfortunately, are often expressed by those who teach various forms of yoga. The fact remains that apart from Jesus Christ, “human potential” is self-destruction, no matter how healthy, how intelligent, or how rich we become. Without the Savior, the world, and all that is in it, will perish.

We do not “add” Jesus Christ to our lives, nor give Him “a place” among our other pursuits in life. With Christ, it is either all or nothing; He is Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all. While we all experience gaps in this pursuit, due to our unconverted flesh, this is clearly the goal and expectation.

Should Christians practice yogic stretches? Sure, as long as you keep your Biblical values clear and avoid antichrist theories about chakras and energy currents and other elements of self-realization and non-biblical meditation.

Better yet, practice Christian yoga!

*Matthew 11:28* Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

What is Jesus’ yoke? It is what He elsewhere calls “my commandment”: “*This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you*” (John 15:12). And, “*This is my commandment: Love each other*” (John 15:17).

Do that, and you’ll discover the greatest peace and fulfillment in the universe!