

Specious

I learned a new word a few days ago: specious. I was reading an article, and they talked about a particular worldview as being specious. At first, I thought perhaps that the author meant that the worldview was special or unique, but I began to sense, as I read further, that the word meant something entirely different. I had to look it up, and I discovered that specious means, “superficially plausible, but actually wrong.” In other words, something that is specious looks like it could be right but upon further study, it comes evident that it is wrong.

In the insect world we sometimes find specious species. There are a number of insects that look remarkably like leaves, so much so that we probably wouldn't see them as insects even if we looked right at them. Of course, it only takes a second to discover that the insect is not a leaf at all. It is a specious insect because it appears to be something that it is not, and the truth can be revealed through further examination.

Examples of specious things in creation are quite wonderful, but when it comes to ideas, they can be quite dangerous. Take, for example, the idea that working seven days a week is advantageous. By working that extra day, it is argued, we can get more done, and when we get more done, we get paid more, and when we get paid more, that is to our advantage. This argument is specious on so many levels, but, from a biblical perspective, it becomes completely false. We well know that all that we have is provided to us by God. If we dispute that, consider where we live. Farmers in Canada, for example, generally are reasonably prosperous. Farmers in many places in the world are among the poorest in their countries. The reason that any of the farmers among us are doing so well is because God has placed them here in Canada and has given us the conditions favourable to good crops, markets that will buy them and prices which allow us to live and even live well. Any one of us could have been born in a different country, worked as hard or even harder than we do now and yet live on the brink of poverty. In this and many more examples, we discover that God is the one who provides for us. Thus, while we are called to work, we do not expect that it is our efforts that make us rich, but, rather, God's blessings on those efforts. It is specious, therefore, to say that working seven days per week will be to our advantage. We could try it, but unless God provides, we could find ourselves more worn out, grumpier and even poorer than when we took a day off.

We hear all sorts of ideas that seem plausible at first but prove to be completely erroneous upon closer examination. A former prime minister (Pierre, the father of Justin) said that in matters of sexual activity what goes on in the bedroom should not be our concern. That sounds plausible. How can we say that someone's moral decision that leads to activities that are completely hidden be our concern? Their acts don't affect us, do they? Sounds plausible, even logical. But consider the devastating effects of the sexual revolution that has been gaining ground for the last 60 years. It is a proven fact that repeated sexual encounters without commitment result in people who cannot keep commitments. What went on in the bedroom now affects the lives of children in their living rooms and kitchens. Mr. Trudeau's reasoning proves to be specious.

One other example: there are many parents who would say that if their teenagers are going to drink, they would prefer that they do so at home perhaps even with their friends. Thus, they provide opportunities for their underage youth to drink, sometimes heavily, and often fairly regularly. It sounds like the parents are protecting their children from harm. Isn't it better to create a safe environment in which to drink rather than have them run the roads under the influence of alcohol? Creating a safe environment sounds like the right thing to do. But that argument, too, is specious. Many studies have shown that the undeveloped brain (brains of humans are not fully developed until the individual reaches the age of 22 or 23) is very negatively affected by alcohol, especially if the person engages in binge drinking, which is defined as 3-4 drinks per evening. Memory loss, loss of ability to make sound decisions, and a general reduction in the ability to think are seen, to one degree or another, in every person who binge drinks before their brains are fully developed. Studies show that the effects seem to last about a month, but it is uncertain if the undeveloped brain is permanently disabled when exposed to alcohol before it is fully developed. An argument that seems plausible (we are protecting our children) turns out to be false as those same children are given the opportunity to inflict temporary or perhaps permanent brain damage on themselves. This reasoning by parents is a specious as well.

What we discover is that God's commands counteract specious reasoning. While it is not always evident how God's ways are right, we can be assured that they are not specious. In other words, God guides us toward a particular way of living because it is good for us. Sometimes we discover why through good scientific study, but sometimes the reasoning behind those laws is unknown to us. Someday we might understand but until we do, it is better if we simply obey. But we had better make sure that if we make an argument for something that while it might sound plausible, it cannot be refuted. While we are special in God's eyes, by his grace, we should never find ourselves to be specious.

Pastor Gary