Live Not By Lies

all church study

Introduction to the Series "Live Not by Lies"

Everybody has opinions, and some of those opinions are different. That's always been true for people. And it's definitely okay to have different opinions on matters like what ice cream flavors are the best or what car feels the best to drive. However, we're sometimes told that all opinions on all matters are equal. This leaves people to pick and choose whatever worldviews they find most pleasing to themselves as opposed to ones that line up with what's true. Some people go so far as to claim that we're in a "post-truth era," one where the whole notion of "facts" is outdated.

Nevertheless, for Christians, our worldviews and our actions are to be rooted in the Scriptures. That is tough to do when we're bombarded with ideas that may sound good but, in reality, conflict with the truth presented in the Bible. It's especially difficult when our fellow Christians are expressing ideas that they think align with the Bible but, upon closer inspection, actually contradict it.

This guide for our message series, Live Not by Lies, will allow you and your group (perhaps a church small group, your friends, or your family) to dive deeper into the Bible. We want you to learn how to navigate claims that run contrary to the truth. By doing so, you can let God's word be the foundation and guiding light for your life. Having a correct outlook will enable you to live out your faith in a way that honors God and lifts up others around you.

The Biblical Text

We begin each guide with the text from Scripture. We believe all discussions about the truth God has revealed to us should begin with his inspired Word. So, we encourage you to read the text carefully even if the verses are ones you are already familiar with.

Equip

The questions presented in the "equip" section of each guide are designed to help you read the biblical text carefully. By doing so, you can figure out the meaning of the passage. Some questions might lead to obvious answers, but others may not. What is important is that the questions force you to slow down and consider the text beyond just a quick and cursory reading. It also provides the basis for an informed discussion on biblically rooted ways to apply the text, as the next section covers.

Note that, at the end of each guide, we have included thoughts about the Equip questions. These thoughts do not cover every possible answer, nor do they claim to be the best possible answers. However, they can help guide you if you feel puzzled by a certain Bible passage.

Encourage

The “encourage” questions aim to move you from understanding the text toward applying it to your life. These questions will begin this process by asking you to reflect on your life as it was, as it is, and as it could be in relationship to what the Bible passage teaches. By prompting you to think about your life in the light of what Scripture teaches, you can be encouraged to be open to God’s transforming work in you.

Enthuse

In the “enthuse” section, we ask you to consider a specific way that you can apply the truth of Scripture to your life that week. This always begins with prayer to God and seeking his guidance. In many cases, we then ask you to reflect on how it went when you sought to live out what God was calling you to do.

Something to Consider

Finally, the “something to consider” section provides you with a devotional reading from one of the writers behind this study. The devotionals aim to present you with both thoughtful and personal insights on the topic. Our thoughts and stories may help you to live out the Scripture passages as well.

3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.
4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.
On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.
5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.
2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (NIV)

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Lie #1

Sex (romantic love) is all of love/the best of love.

1 Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” 2 But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. 3 The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 I say this as a concession, not as a command. 7 I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

8 Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. 9 But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

10 To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. 11 But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

12 To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

15 But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. 16 How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?
1 Corinthians 7:1-16 (NIV)

11 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. 12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.
1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (NIV)

EQUIP

Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-7. In the first verse, Paul brings up an axiom the Christians in Corinth had created as an extreme way of steering clear of sexual sin: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” What does Paul prescribe, instead of total abstinence, for the Corinthian Christians who struggle with sexual temptation?

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Read 1 Corinthians 7:8-16. Following Paul’s general guidance on avoiding sexual temptation, how does Paul direct each individual group (married, unmarried, widowed, believer, and nonbeliever) to deal with this issue?

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Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. In what ways does Paul speak of himself were he to “not have love”?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-13. How does Paul describe love in this passage?

ENCOURAGE

Reading a passage like 1 Corinthians 7:1-16 might lead modern people to the conclusion that the biblical view of sex and love is too strict or too prudish. However, as Paul noticed, the Corinthians went stricter than anyone could imagine. They determined that if sexual sin is problematic, then sex should legalistically be avoided altogether. Instead, Paul brings a more measured approach. Sex is not bad; it is good in the right context. It is also not the most important aspect of life. Putting care for others over gratifying our own desires is the higher moral. How can Paul’s teaching impact the way you approach not only romantic relationships, whether you’re married or not, but also platonic relationships with others?

Paul’s description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 is so famous that it’s difficult to escape a wedding ceremony without have heard it read aloud. But the passage is not about romantic love. It’s about Christ-centered, biblically rooted love. Consider which aspects of your life you find yourself routinely living out the kind of love Paul describes. Additionally, consider which aspects of your life or within which relationships you struggle to love in the manner this passage describes.

ENTHUSE

The church in North America, in recent history, has unfortunately elevated romantic love to a higher level of importance than it ought to be, even though the church rightly champions romantic love within the confines of occurring between one man and one woman for life. According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 7, biblically rooted marriage is not the pinnacle of Christian faith. And yet, because of its unintended elevation as such, many people mis-prioritize this aspect of life. People may feel like sub-par Christians for remaining unmarried, or they may decide to throw out the church's teaching on marriage altogether. Furthermore, others might think, since they managed to get married and stay married, they've already achieved the highest form of love and are unaware of the fact that they might be lacking in the love Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13. This week, ask God to help you consider your approach to and understanding of love and ask him to help you better align it with the teaching of Scripture. Ask him to help you better live it out in whatever relationship spaces you occupy. Journal below about what you learn and what you're doing in light of your newfound understanding.

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SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

By Timothy Peace

When I began dating Angie, my wife now of over fifteen years, we were only seventeen years old. At that time, we were in our junior year of high school, and soon after, I began to work for a shoe store in the mall called Finish Line.

One of floor supervisors, basically an assistant manager, was a good looking, tall, and hulking dude who, let's face it, tended to attract the ladies. And he knew it. Not only did he know it, but he also had two distant relationships with two different women in two different states at the same time. And he wasn't shy talking about it.

One evening, a weeknight, where customer traffic was light, this manager and I were the only two employees working in the store. It was roughly 8 PM, only an hour before the store would close. The mall was relatively empty, except for two young ladies that kept walking past our store entrance, looking in, and giggling to each other.

Eventually, after their third or fourth pass at the store, one of the young ladies walked in the front and left the other at the entrance.

My manager and I both suspected she was coming to talk to him, but to our mutual surprise, she approached me and asked if her friend, the one that waited outside the store, could have my number. I politely declined and told her I already had a girlfriend. They left and didn't make another pass by our storefront.

Watching the exchange and beside himself in shock, my manager approached me and asked, "What are you doing? Why didn't you get her number?"

I responded, "Because I love my girlfriend."

My manager asked me, "How do you know what love is?"

And with my Sunday-school-best conviction, I replied, "Because of Jesus."

Over the course of my time with this manager, he started attending church, got baptized, dumped both girlfriends, and eventually met his wife.

But that's not the point.

The point is that I acted on my love for Angie by saying no to doing something that would have been hurtful to her. Love "does not insist on its own way" and "does not rejoice in wrongdoing."

We don't often think of the small ways we can act in love. In fact, we might not always even think much of our actions. Truth is, in that moment at Finish Line, I just did what was right without thinking much of it. I had no idea that it might have impact on my manager, nor did I think about the fact that I was already making a commitment that I'm still committed to today with my wife.

When Paul speaks of love superseding all the other marks of spiritual growth that many people tout, he does so because those forms of spiritual superiority might look the part, but it is the love of Christ, the selfless love the Christian is called to, that actually carries the most power.

EQUIP THOUGHTS

Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-7. In the first verse, Paul brings up an axiom the Christians in Corinth had created as an extreme way of steering clear of sexual sin: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." What does Paul prescribe, instead of total abstinence, for the Corinthian Christians who struggle with sexual temptation?

This passage is often overlooked by Christian communities that overemphasize the need for Christian people to get married. The social and cultural context of the passage is overlooked all the more. First, Paul, being a Christian who still identifies as a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5), assumes the traditional view of marriage that was common within the Judaism of his day and out of which he came. In this context, the rule for marriage was for one man and one woman to remain married until one of them dies, and that marriage is not to be broken or torn apart by sin. This does not mean every Jewish person lived up to that ethic, because we know Pharisees debated Jesus about whether divorce was permissible by the law (Mark 10:2-12). Still, the one man and one woman view of marriage was the rule in Judaism, and it was assumed by Paul, Jesus, Peter, James, John, and so on. Thus, the Corinthians prohibition against sexual relations of any kind, even within the confines of marriage, had to be corrected by Paul.

What's more astounding is that, at this stage of Paul's life, he is single and wishes others were like him (1 Corinthians 7:6-7). Nevertheless, he knows people, and he knows that some will not be able to live the celibate life. So, rather than agree with the Corinthians' idea of outlawing sexual relations, he encourages those who must fulfill that urge in their lives to do so within the manner that would please God, that is, within marriage as defined by the religious convictions of Paul and those like him.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:8-16. Following Paul's general guidance on avoiding sexual temptation, how does Paul direct each individual group (married, unmarried, widowed, believer, and nonbeliever) to deal with this issue?

When you read 1 Corinthians 7:8-16, you might be wondering why Paul seems to have so many commands that are contingent upon the life circumstances of the people he's addressing. However, if you follow Paul's logic in each individual address, you'll see a theme: devotion to the Lord and to his mission. This is because the goal of Christian faith is not marriage, but devotion to Jesus. If one's non-married state will cause them to sin, they should marry. But if they can remain unmarried, that is good because they can devote all their being to the cause of Christ.

Furthermore, Paul nuances the discussion about divorce. He never says anyone should divorce or that it is okay to do so in this passage. That said, he does assume that someone might find themselves in a state where they could be divorced, or they might be married to a non-believing spouse who could choose to ditch the marriage. Paul does not tell people to remarry if their spouse leaves. Instead, they are to continue to be faithful to their marriage with the hope that their relationship can help the nonbeliever come to faith in Jesus. If a believer is left by a non-believing spouse, they should simply remain unmarried and devote themselves to the cause of Christ.

Today, this view can feel radical to us, even Christians, when divorce is so prevalent in our world. But the goal here is not to heap shame on others or feel self-shame. Instead, the text is meant to help us see that our devotion to Jesus far outweighs our marital status. That truth from Scripture can be very freeing and burden lifting, even if it's challenging for almost all of us to grasp.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. In what ways does Paul speak of himself were he to "not have love"?

Paul concludes in these three verses that all the things people might consider to be signs of spiritual growth or spiritual superiority are mere noise if love is lacking. This passage is often recited at weddings, and because of that, people gloss over the force of the text or misunderstand it altogether. But the love Paul speaks of is not romantic love. The love about which he speaks is the love of Christ. He'll go on to describe it in the next set of verses, but it's important to stop and realize that much of what we deem as important in church or in our own spiritual journey is not of primary importance according to Paul. Instead, what's most important is love.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-13. How does Paul describe love in this passage?

Paul describes love as "patient… kind… not envious… not boastful… not arrogant… not rude…" and so on. In many ways he does not just describe what love is, but also what it is not or does not do. This is a challenging concept for our modern approach to the word "love." We often think of love as an emotion or a feeling. In reality, love is a verb: an action. You don't just speak of love or feel love; you do love. And, again, not in the romantic sense, but in the way you show kindness, patience, or rejoicing in the truth. Often, we even say we love God, but according to the New Testament, we show our love for God in the way we act toward others. That isn't works based religion: it's just backing up what you say with what you do.

Lie #2

Being safe is being right with God.

1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! 11 Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.
Romans 5:1-11 (NIV)

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.
James 1:2-4 (NIV)

EQUIP

Read Romans 5:1-11. Paul tells the church in Rome how amazing life is for the Christian because of God's grace. How does faith in Jesus give peace to the Christian?

Read James 1:2-4. James explains how life as a Christian will have moments of suffering and trials. What does it look like to still have peace during the hard times? How can this "testing of faith" mature a person's faith?

ENCOURAGE

Being safe is the number one priority for most people, but as Christians, we are called to go and make disciples. As we read the Bible, we see that this task can lead to some difficult situations on many levels: physical, emotional, and spiritual. That thought of potential suffering or hurt is enough to make anyone hesitate or rethink their decision. Do you sometimes hesitate to share the gospel because of the struggles and anxiety that might result from professing your faith? If so, why do you think you experience this fear?

God doesn't want us to be unwise in our actions. He doesn't want us to purposefully put our lives in danger. For instance, Paul wisely chose to flee from Iconium because people in that city were planning to kill him (Acts 14:5-6). But God doesn't want us to stay in a bubble and never take a chance because of the potential backlash we may receive for sharing the gospel. What would it look like for you to share the good news with people you know in a way that's not reckless, but rather wise and discerning?

ENTHUSE

God never promised that the life of the Christian would be an easy or safe one. But the promise of our reward in Heaven is what makes all the pain and suffering worth it. This week, take time to pray and ask God to give you the wisdom and courage to put your faith into action even when it's difficult. Also ask for his strength to help you through any hardships you may be dealing with. Use the space below to write about a difficulty you're facing now or afraid of facing, then consider how God can transform it into an opportunity to grow.

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SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

By David Rimarski

We all want to be safe and secure. When you look on the back of produces, inside of the instruction booklet, and on different labels, you can find warning signs that the company puts on there to keep its consumers safe from things that could happen if the product is used incorrectly. Although that can of AXE Body Spray says not to use near a flame, many of us have tried or thought about trying to spray it over a lighter to make a fun little fire show. But hopefully, most of us have never tried figuring out what happens if we stick it in the microwave. For the most part, we want to live our life free from any serious dangers that could hurt us physically or emotionally.

But if we try to avoid every possible danger in life, we can stall the spread of the gospel. We don't want to bring up our faith because our world today is so sensitive and hostile towards Christians, so we keep quiet to avoid the hurt that could come from speaking the truth. I am not familiar with any instance in the Bible where God blessed someone for running away from their potentially dangerous calling. Actually, it was the opposite. Jonah ran away from God calling him to Nineveh, so he sent him a terrible storm! In the parable of the talents, the master calls the servant who hid the money a wicked and worthless servant, but praises those other two who went out and did what the master ordered.

It's only when we obey God and live like Jesus that we honor God. That can be intimidating when we realize Jesus' life wasn't safe. His words and actions brought him pain, persecution, and some of his own best friends betraying him. The way he lived didn't bring him safety, but it brought honor to God and salvation to all!

Our mission is to go and make more disciples, which isn't always easy and safe. In Matthew 10:16, before sending his disciples on a mission, Jesus tells them that he is sending them like sheep among wolves. I don't know if you have ever put sheep around wolves before, but it's not pretty for the sheep—it's downright dangerous! Evangelizing will put us into potentially dangerous situations. While God never says anything about our faith being safe, he does say that we won't be alone during out times of trials and suffering. At the end of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:20, Jesus says he will be with us to the end of the age. That gives me some relief to know that, during all the stress and conflict that comes with being a Christian, I won't have to do it alone.

God calls us to be on a mission for him, not to be a hermit and hide away from all the pain and conflict in the world. So let us get back on the path that God has set out for us. Let us understand that we are sheep being sent out among the wolves. Let us remember that, with God with us, who can stand against us? To live is Christ and to die is gain! Go out and show the love of Jesus to those around you.

EQUIP THOUGHTS

Read Romans 5:1-11. Paul tells the church in Rome how amazing life is for the Christian because of God's grace. How does faith in Jesus give peace to the Christian?

Since we're all sinners, we do not deserve to be in God's presence. But Christ died for us even while we were still sinners, so now we have been reconciled to God. Since we have been rescued from death itself, we have a reason to hope in all circumstances. In fact, by overcoming hardships with the support of the Holy Spirit, we can have even more hope in God's power.

Read James 1:2-4. James explains how life as a Christian will have moments of suffering and trials. What does it look like to still have peace during the hard times? How can this "testing of faith" mature a person's faith?

These verses, translated as two sentences in the New International Version of the Bible, make some bold claims. James believes that we should have joy in the face of hardship because we can rest assured that such trials produce perseverance, which is the ability to love God and have hope in all situations. Such strength helps us mature in our faith since we won't be led astray by just any problem we face.

Truth is a matter of opinion

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

28 Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. 32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.
Romans 1:18-32 (NIV)

22 Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 23 Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. 24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.
2 Timothy 2:22-26 (NIV)

EQUIP

Read Romans 1:18-23. According to Paul, how has God made himself known? In what ways have many people rejected God's truth?

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Read Romans 1:24-32. Here, Paul explains that God allows people to live with the consequences of adhering to lies. What are the many ways our lives could be affected when we reject parts of the truth God has revealed to us?

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Read 2 Timothy 2:22-26. What does Paul tell his apprentice Timothy to do when faced with false teachers who oppose the truth?

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ENCOURAGE

Some Bible passages, such as Romans 1:29-31, provide long lists of sins that people commit when they stray from God. When reading lists like this, it's tempting to wag our fingers at other people or society as a whole rather than examine ourselves. But the fact of the matter is, we have all turned from the truth at various points in our lives and committed sins because of it. Consider what has happened in your own life whenever you've exchanged God's truth for lies. Based on the warnings God has provided us, what are various reasons why you need to remain grounded in his truth rather than follow your own desires and understanding?

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In 2 Timothy 2:24, Paul tells Timothy that "the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful." That is a difficult task when it appears that somebody else is placing their own opinions over God's truth. It's an even more difficult task if someone else believes that you're placing your own opinions above God's word! We may be tempted to avoid the subject rather than discuss it. Or we may allow our anger to stir up an aimless fight. How can you contribute to a constructive conversation, one that recognizes truth does exist, when disagreements arise concerning God's word?

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ENTHUSE

Ultimately, you will struggle to have any sort of constructive conversation about the truth of God's word if you cannot distinguish between your own opinions and the truth God has revealed to us. This week, pray that God will help you to accept that some of your views are indeed opinions. But God has revealed many facts, facts that are not for us to decide. So, also pray that he would help you stand firm in all the truth he has revealed—not just bits and pieces of it. In the space below, take time to write about a personally-heated topic that might lead you into the "foolish and stupid arguments" Paul warns against. How can you better root yourself in the truth and kindly share it with others?

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SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

By Bobby Miller

Back when I was in high school, I dove into all sorts of topics with my lunch table buddies, stuff ranging from homework to video games. Sometimes, the topic veered into philosophical territory, which was dangerous ground since most of my friends were nonbelievers. In many cases, I had rebuttals to the false ideas they mentioned at our lunch table. For example, one guy claimed that something's only really true if it can be proven through math or science. Well, I pointed out that his statement was self-contradictory. There's no scientific experiment or mathematical proof that can show something's only true if it's proven through math or science. He didn't bring up the idea again.

Another friend of mine subscribed to the lie we're talking about this week. He often claimed that all truth is relative, so nothing's certain. Well, as I let him know many times, that's self-contradictory too. If you say there's no absolute truth, then you're basically saying, "It's an absolute truth that there is no absolute truth." That doesn't cut the mustard.

Unfortunately, none of my nonbeliever pals ever gave themselves to Christ, even though I knew how to counter most of their falsehoods pretty darn well. Sometimes, I'm tempted to wonder if I would have won them over to Jesus if only I'd "played the game better." Maybe they would have embraced Christianity if I'd kept coming up with wise rebukes, if I'd never allowed the topic to change when they felt philosophically cornered, or if I'd recommended specific books for them to read.

But as we discuss the notion of truth, it's important to remember what we as humans are actually like. The fact of the matter is, we're not robots programmed to accept the best answers possible after being presented with information. Instead, we're a mixture of heart, intellect, spirit, and more. What I'm saying is, if somebody's heart isn't open to God, I don't believe all the proof in the world will force them to believe in him. So, we need to accept that, while we should have an answer for why we have faith in God (1 Peter 3:15-16), our arguments don't turn people into Christians. We can help them on their journeys by answering their questions or offering useful resources, but God's the one who opens hearts and plants his Spirit in people. When it comes to sharing truth with others, we have a role to fulfill while trusting God's plans.

One essential way we can help lead seekers toward Christ is by being rooted in the truth ourselves. Most of us reading this guide probably don't buy into the idea that all truth is relative. But maybe, just maybe, we're inclined to compromise with the truth that God's revealed to us, especially the truths that disturb us. Perhaps we don't like the idea that we're supposed to pray for people in power (1 Timothy 2:1-4), so we'd rather spend our time mocking the government officials we disagree with. Perhaps we think there are some people we should never forgive, despite Jesus' teachings about mercy (Luke 11:4), so we make no attempt to let go of old grudges.

Well, the temptation to water down God's truth to better match our own opinions has existed since the dawn of time. The entire Bible details many, many people who typically liked the idea of God protecting them, but not so much the idea that they had to worship him alone. The so-called compromise of worshipping God alongside idols led to terrible consequences for ancient Israel. And in New Testament times, the false idea that Jesus plus law-keeping was the only way to be made right with God plagued many churches, despite the apostles' frequent warnings against the heresy. Today, we face similar temptations whenever we want to gloss over parts of the Bible that bother us.

How, then, do we combat lies permeating our society if people claim most truth is nothing more than a matter of opinion? It all begins by being rooted in the truth ourselves: the truth God has revealed to us through his Spirit, through his church, and through his word. If you find yourself doubting the Bible, don't panic and assume you're a failure as a Christian. Instead, be willing to seek support from other believers. Perhaps books such as The Case for Christ and The Case for the Real Jesus by Lee Strobel could help you out, as could works like C. S. Lewis's famous Mere Christianity. Or maybe you also need to confide in a Christian friend about the doubts you're having. Pray that God would show you the steps you need to take.

Whatever the case, I can say with certainty that interacting with God's word regularly and praying to him consistently can help build a firm foundation, one that won't be swept away by popular lies.

EQUIP THOUGHTS

Read Romans 1:18-23. According to Paul, how has God made himself known? In what ways have many people rejected God's truth?

God has clearly shown that he is all-powerful and divine because all people can see how intricate, large, and magnificent his creation is. Yet, many people have made wicked decisions. As Paul explains, refusing to glorify God or give thanks to him leads to a darkened heart, which in turn leads to foolishness. Rather than go to God for healing, wayward people instead worship idols, such as ones that look like animals, to indulge in their own desires.

Read Romans 1:24-32. Here, Paul explains that God allows people to live with the consequences of adhering to lies. What are the many ways our lives could be affected when we reject parts of the truth God has revealed to us?

There are numerous consequences for exchanging the truth about God for a lie. When we turn from God, the possible outcomes include sexual impurity, greed, jealousy, violence, hatred, arrogance, dishonesty, foolishness, disloyalty, and more. These stem from a lack of reverence for God, who himself is love, the love needed to wash away these sins.

Read 2 Timothy 2:22-26. What does Paul tell his apprentice Timothy to do when faced with false teachers who oppose the truth?

Paul suggests that sticking with people who are sincerely seeking to serve the Lord with "a pure heart" can help a person remain rooted in the truth. When confronted by people who have distorted the truth, Timothy isn't supposed to get into petty arguments with them. Rather, according to Paul, he should instruct these people lovingly, hoping that they will repent and accept true teaching.

Lie #4

Church is for me.

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.
Acts 2:42-47 (NIV)

19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
Hebrews 10:19-25 (NIV)

EQUIP

Read Acts 2:42-47. What did the early church look like after the Holy Spirit indwelled believers at Pentecost? What elements in this passage sound appealing to you, and which ones sound difficult to you?

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Read Hebrews 10:19-25. Based on this passage and Acts 2:42-47, how does the Bible describe the meaning and purpose behind the church?

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ENCOURAGE

We live in a consumer-minded world. We choose the food we buy, the restaurants we eat at, the type of car we drive, and so on—all based on what's in it for us. How can this mindset interfere with living out the purpose of the church as described in the passages above?

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A fruitful and healthy Christian community attracts people to Christ. In your faith walk, what are some ways that you've seen the church draw people to Jesus? How might you be able to help the church draw more people to Jesus in the ways that you've seen?

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ENTHUSE

The model of the first church was simply meant to be less about us as individuals. Instead, it's all about God, and it's for the sake of others. This week, pray that God would help you see one way you can more deeply involve yourself in the mission of this community. Perhaps you can contribute something special to the church at large or to your small group, like your time and skills. If you feel powerless, remember that the Holy Spirit has empowered all believers to achieve his purposes. Discuss your ideas with another family member, group member, or church member. They may have suggestions, or they may want to get involved in the same way as you! Use the space below to write about how this process goes.

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SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

By Aaron Adams

We all have our personal preferences. In fact, that's normal! We each have our own preferences when it comes to the food we like, the music we listen to, the movies we watch, and the list can go on and on.

In many ways, it's not inherently wrong to have preferences, even when it comes to church. We will not agree completely on how, exactly, every part of the church should function. And that's okay! But we can't let our disagreements compromise the mission God's given us. We must caution ourselves not to become blinded by our preferences and miss out on the things that God is doing through his local church.

The essential questions that we must ask include:
"Is God being glorified?"
"Are we fulfilling the Great Commission?"
"Are we serving and loving our community well?"
"Are we caring for those within the church well?"

There will be times when God will call us to set aside our personal preferences for the good of the Kingdom. There will be disagreements. But we should never stop being the church, the community of believers meant to draw people to Christ.

EQUIP THOUGHTS

Read Acts 2:42-47. What did the early church look like after the Holy Spirit indwelled believers at Pentecost? What elements in this passage sound appealing to you, and which ones sound difficult to you?

Believers in the early church committed themselves to learning more about Jesus by listening to what the apostles taught about him. It wasn't just about gaining knowledge for the sake of knowledge, though. These early Christians carried out Jesus' teachings by supporting everyone in need, even if they had to sell their possessions. This also wasn't a one-time deal. The passage says they met together every day. With the joy they shared together, it's no wonder that other people found this community appealing, leading to more and more people joining and being saved.

Read Hebrews 10:19-25. Based on this passage and Acts 2:42-47, how does the Bible describe the meaning and purpose behind the church?

These passages make it clear that our relationship with God isn't meant to be only a one-on-one private relationship. Instead, it's supposed to involve a community of believers following Jesus! Our faith in him allows us to grow closer to him and one another because we have a shared hope. In our time together, we can support one another to carry out good deeds that are in keeping with our Lord's will.

Lie #5

Limitations are evil/wrong.

1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky 16 as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. 17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. 18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.
Philippians 2:1-18 (NIV)

EQUIP

Read Philippians 2:1-4. What is Paul's desire for the congregation he is writing to? What are the specific commands he gives for them to fulfill this goal?

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Read Philippians 2:5-11. Paul tells believers to have "the same mindset as Christ Jesus." How does he describe Jesus' mindset in this passage? In what ways did Jesus embrace limitations?

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Read Philippians 2:12-18. According to Paul, practically speaking, what does it look like to "continue to work out your salvation"?

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ENCOURAGE

A limitation is any restriction on what you can do. Everyone has many limitations. Some are physical, some are imposed by the government, and others occur within our families and other relationships. The most vital limitations are those mandated by God. Are there any limitations you have a lot of trouble accepting? Why do you think they are a challenge for you?

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ENTHUSE

This week, take time to pray and ask God how you can better accept limitations, seeing them through his eyes. Also, ask him to help you to interact with others in a way that reflects Christ-like humility. For instance, is there someone in your life that you just can't seem to get along with? Consider how you can have a civil conversation with that person—then do it! Remember that the goal isn't total agreement, but rather love rooted in humility. Come back to this space and reflect on how that conversation went and how God helped you to grow through it.

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SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

By Bobby Miller

Loving parents place limitations on their children, like telling them to do their homework even if they'd rather be playing. Sure, the kids might whine and complain when they can't do whatever they want, but parents know that the long-term benefits of effective rules far outweigh the short-term happiness a child might get from unruly behavior. Likewise, God gives us boundaries that might not seem like much fun, such as telling us sex must be kept within marriage, but they're ultimately for our good.

Some effective limitations, though, are ones we impose on ourselves. For example, if you've struggled with alcoholism in the past or are afraid of becoming an alcoholic, you may choose never to drink any booze at all. In this case, you've developed a helpful boundary for yourself. But the Bible never mandates teetotalism for everyone, so it would be a bad idea to judge people who don't need to follow the same restrictions as you, to disdain people who can drink in moderation. At the same time, someone who can drink in moderation should never flaunt their freedom in the face of somebody who can't have a glass of wine every now and then. So, we should respect the fact that different people have different limitations. (If you would like to study this topic more, consider reading 1 Corinthians 8, where Paul taught his audience how to exercise their freedoms in a way that respected other believers.)

The issue of limitations becomes particularly murky, though, when we delve into territory where the Bible doesn't give commands that are as precise as we'd like them to be. We may hit situations where we firmly believe that other people should be imposing firmer boundaries on themselves for not only their own sakes but also the sake of others. Or it could be the other way around, where we firmly believe people are advocating for limitations that aren't in line with Scripture.

One such topic that people argue about is how to respond to COVID.

With a deadly virus spreading around, many people disagree about what boundaries to set and who should be setting those boundaries in the first place. In this time of reflection, I'm not asking you to come up with the solution to everything involving COVID-19: that's not the job God has given you. Instead, I'm asking you to consider how you can be civil even to someone who completely disagrees with your views. Yes, someone who completely disagrees about what limitations people should follow themselves and what limitations the government should place.

Loving people like that isn't easy! I've got to admit that I wasn't happy when I heard that one branch of my family tree refused to compromise even the slightest bit regarding how to meet for Christmas in the midst of COVID, resulting in one less holiday gathering last year. But, no matter what, they're still family, ones to love every bit as much as the ones I agree with. That's the kind of love God wants to spread through his Holy Spirit.

If you can love your neighbor even in the midst of sharp disagreements, then maybe people will see that you're a child of God, shining as bright as a star in the midst of dark times full of division. This week, no matter what conflict you're facing, remember that the two greatest commands aren't to win every argument and impose your views on everybody else. The two greatest commands are to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. Go and do exactly that.

EQUIP THOUGHTS

Read Philippians 2:1-4. What is Paul's desire for the congregation he is writing to? What are the specific commands he gives for them to fulfill this goal?

Paul wants the believers he's addressing to show that they have accepted God's love and compassion by loving one another and being unified. A person should not try to get to the top of the proverbial ladder through selfish ambition, but rather be humble by looking out for others first. By putting aside their own self-centered interests in favor of a unified mission led by Christ, the people could give Paul even greater joy.

Read Philippians 2:5-11. Paul tells believers to have "the same mindset as Christ Jesus." How does he describe Jesus' mindset in this passage? In what ways did Jesus embrace limitations?

Paul believed Jesus was the ultimate example of humility. Jesus had the exact same status as God himself, but he did not cling to the advantages that this status would bring just to make his life easy. After all, becoming a human meant setting aside all sorts of privileges. His selfless, obedient mindset manifested itself most clearly in how he obediently died a criminal's death through crucifixion, all for our sake. By limiting himself, by refusing to take the easy way out even though he had the freedom to, Jesus obeyed God throughout the entirety of his ministry. This humility actually opened him up to true glory, a glory in which God has honored Jesus above everyone and everything else.

Read Philippians 2:12-18. According to Paul, practically speaking, what does it look like to "continue to work out your salvation"?

Paul wants believers to continue carrying out God's will. Specific ways they can do this begin with having the right attitude, one without bickering or grumbling. By obeying God, believers glorify his name, showing the world that they can be a light in the darkness thanks to the power of the Spirit. To hear that the church he planted is continuing to thrive would make Paul proud, prouder than anything else possibly could. He could rejoice, and the congregation could rejoice as well.

Lie #6

Paint people with a wide brush.

9 At that time I said to you, “You are too heavy a burden for me to carry alone. 10 The Lord your God has increased your numbers so that today you are as numerous as the stars in the sky. 11 May the Lord, the God of your ancestors, increase you a thousand times and bless you as he has promised! 12 But how can I bear your problems and your burdens and your disputes all by myself? 13 Choose some wise, understanding and respected men from each of your tribes, and I will set them over you.”

14 You answered me, “What you propose to do is good.”

15 So I took the leading men of your tribes, wise and respected men, and appointed them to have authority over you—as commanders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens and as tribal officials. 16 And I charged your judges at that time, “Hear the disputes between your people and judge fairly, whether the case is between two Israelites or between an Israelite and a foreigner residing among you. 17 Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of anyone, for judgment belongs to God. Bring me any case too hard for you, and I will hear it.” 18 And at that time I told you everything you were to do.
Deuteronomy 1:9-18 (NIV)

23 These also are sayings of the wise: To show partiality in judging is not good: 24 Whoever says to the guilty, “You are innocent,” will be cursed by peoples and denounced by nations. 25 But it will go well with those who convict the guilty, and rich blessing will come on them.
Proverbs 24:23-25 (NIV)

1 My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.
James 2:1-9 (NIV)

EQUIP

Read Deuteronomy 1:9-18. God’s promise to grow the Israelites into a people “as numerous as the stars” created a practical challenge: there were too many people for just one person to lead. So, leaders were appointed for the people. How does God, specifically in Deuteronomy 1:16-17, charge the leaders (judges) to govern the people?

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Read Proverbs 24:23-25. According to these proverbs, how does being impartial, rather than showing partiality in judgment, lead to blessing rather than a curse?

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Read James 2:1-9. How does James describe what it means to show favoritism? Why is it problematic for a believer to show favoritism?

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ENCOURAGE

Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, the issue of showing partiality and favoritism is a recurring theme, as evidenced by the passages above (Deuteronomy 1:9-18, Proverbs 24:23-25, James 2:1-9). The issues of favoritism and partiality lead to various potential problems: legal problems, relational problems, and ethical problems. Consider an experience where favoritism helped you out or one where it harmed you. What were the circumstances, and how do you view that situation in light of the passages we've read?

In the James passage specifically, it appears that the antidote to favoritism isn't color-blindness, class-blindness, or any other way of viewing everyone as equal. In this passage, the issues of class and wealth are present, and James does not deny that there are rich people and poor people. Instead, the antidote to favoritism is to care for people and give them the dignity they deserve as human beings. What can it look like for you to treat all the people in your life with dignity?

ENTHUSE

One way favoritism can really trip us up is that we over-generalize and assume things about people and their character simply by virtue of how they look, where they're from, what their economic status is, or what their political persuasion is. Doing this not only fails to truly allow yourself to know individuals holistically, but it also tempts us to sum them up and send them away. This week, ask God to change your way of viewing people, no longer with the biases you might carry, but viewing them and treating them with dignity. Such a view can change the way you talk to people and the way you talk about them. Ask him to help you enact this new perspective with someone specific in your life. Journal about your experience below.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

By Timothy Peace

One of my favorite comedians is Jim Gaffigan. He recently put out a Netflix special called Comedy Monster. On it, he makes a remark that there was a point when he was younger where he realized that he wasn't high up in the "looks" department, and it was at that point he knew "he was going to have to make jokes to get by."

I remember when I had a similar realization. When I was in seventh grade, I tried out for the basketball team at Amelia Middle School. Throughout all of the exercise drills, scrimmages, and so on, I had a hunch that I wasn't the best athlete on the court. In fact, I knew I was far from it.

The problem, though, was that I wanted to fit in, just like everyone else. And there was no better way to fit in, at that time and place, than to make the team. Sadly, that dream crashed on the first cutdown day. To the coach's credit, he brought each guy in, one on one, face to face, to tell them whether they were moving on or getting cut. I didn't make it past the first cutdown. I'm not a comedian like Jim Gaffigan, but I knew at that moment that I'd have to figure out something else to get by.

Sadly, it seems the world hasn't moved beyond the haves and have-nots way of life that even existed in the time of James. Because of that, we all feel like we have to have something in order to be something or mean something to somebody. This, of course, can lead to favoritism. People longing to be known and others longing to be known by the people who are known.

The beauty of the Christian faith, however, is that Jesus doesn't play favorites.

Instead, Jesus lays down his life for each of us to show us our worth.

The challenge for the follower of Jesus, then, is not to continue the game of haves and have-nots, but to look at people and treat them in the same manner Jesus would.

With Jesus, I don't need to find something to be, such as a star athlete, to get by. And because of Jesus, I should no longer look at others based on whether they have or have not.

EQUIP THOUGHTS

Read Deuteronomy 1:9-18. God's promise to grow the Israelites into a people "as numerous as the stars" created a practical challenge: there were too many people for just one person to lead. So, leaders were appointed for the people. How does God, specifically in Deuteronomy 1:16-17, charge the leaders (judges) to govern the people?

As observed in the question itself, this passage from Deuteronomy discusses a good problem to have. That God needs to appoint leaders over the people is a sign that the people have indeed grown into a multitude as he promised at the outset in his call to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). Still, this growth demands greater numbers of leaders. It can also allow for organizational turmoil and greater chance for moral and ethical issues that need to be resolved. So, in this case, the issue of favoritism is more about unbiased judgment in legal circumstances rather than everyday social concerns. Still, the issue of partiality is equally as important in this aspect of life as it is in others.

Read Proverbs 24:23-25. According to these proverbs, how does being impartial, rather than showing partiality in judgment, lead to blessing rather than a curse?

Simply put, if you treat the innocent as guilty, and the guilty as innocent, you will, as a society or people group, have a big problem on your hands. Again, as in the Deuteronomy passage, the issue of partiality here is within a legal framework. Still, having a right perspective and an impartial view of people can make the group as a whole better off because people are treated justly.

Read James 2:1-9. How does James describe what it means to show favoritism? Why is it problematic for a believer to show favoritism?

In this passage, James does not deny that there are rich people and poor people. Instead, his issue with favoritism is that the rich are prioritized to the detriment of the poor. In James' view, the poor are just as valuable to God as the rich (and, in the letter, he says that the rich in this community have been mistreating the poor). When one favors one class, group, or race of people over another, they no longer are looking at people from God's perspective, but from a sinful and fractured human perspective.

Jesus did NOT rise from the dead.

1 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. 11 Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in turn: Christ, the

firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.
1 Corinthians 15:1-28 (NIV)

EQUIP

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. What does Paul describe as the foundation of the gospel (the good news)? On what basis does he believe it?

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Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-28. Based on Paul’s words, why is it essential to believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

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ENCOURAGE

Can you remember the first time you realized the significance of Jesus’ resurrection? What did it mean to you then? Has its meaning to you changed over time?

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Jesus' resurrection is crucial to the Christian faith, as the passages in this guide explain. While it can be a source of hope for those who accept it, it can also be a source of anxiety for those who doubt its reality. Have you had to overcome times of doubt in the past? If you have, how did you do so? How can you continue to ground yourself in the truth to continue overcoming doubts?

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ENTHUSE

In knowing that the resurrection is foundational to our faith, it's safe to say it should not be a well-kept secret by the church. How would you explain Easter to someone who asks you, "What's Easter all about anyways?" Pray that God would open your eyes to the answer. After taking time to consider it, write down your answer here. If there's someone in your life who needs to hear what Easter is all about, then ask God to give you the courage to share it with them.

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SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

By Aaron Adams

Life, in many ways, is full of doubts and questions, right? And... I think that's perfectly normal! Believe it or not, I even think that having doubts and questions in our Christian faith is normal too. When we think of the resurrection, a man (Jesus) who was crucified, died, and then rose fully back to life days later, it can cause us, and many others, to question if that's actually possible.

For some, the resurrection is why they believe in the power of God. For others, the resurrection is the breaking point in their faith, the reason why they don't believe. Having faith in the things that we can't always see with our eyes is hard. But I think it's so worth it! Without the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, we don't get to experience the saving grace of God. I thank the Lord for Jesus!

EQUIP THOUGHTS

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. What does Paul describe as the foundation of the gospel (the good news)? On what basis does he believe it?

Paul believes that Jesus died for the sins of humanity, just as the Scriptures (which, at the time, consisted solely of the Old Testament) predicted. Jesus didn't stay dead, though. He rose from the grave! In fact, he appeared to many people to show that he had risen. He even appeared to Paul despite his history of persecuting early Christians. Jesus' appearance to Paul showed just how gracious he is. That gives us hope that we've been saved!

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-28. Based on Paul's words, why is it essential to believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

Some members of the church in Corinth weren't so sure that the dead could be raised. As Paul tells those believers, that's rejecting the good news altogether! "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead," he explains. By doing so, Jesus has shown that he can conquer the ultimate enemy: death itself. We, too, can experience this resurrection.

What I do today is nobody's business.

1 Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. 4 Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, 5 for each one should carry their own load. 6 Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor. 7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. 9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.
Galatians 6:1-10 (NIV)

EQUIP

Read Galatians 6:1-2. Paul uses words like "restore" and "gently" when talking about correcting a person caught in sin. What is the benefit of taking this approach in correction?

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Read Galatians 6:3-6. Paul is addressing the Jewish-Christian leaders who were saying that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised and follow every Old Testament law to the letter. Not being able to keep the law themselves, they would boast about their successes compared to the Gentiles. What does Paul say believers should do instead?

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Read Galatians 6:7-10. The general application on this text is talking about reaping what we sow. How we use our possessions, what we do with our time, and how we act point to whether we are living in the flesh or living in the Spirit. Actions can be hidden from others, but nothing can be hidden from God. What are the results of living by the Spirit, and what are the results of living by the flesh?

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ENCOURAGE

Consequences are a part of life. Our world today wants us to think that we can avoid the consequences that come with our actions as long as no one else knows about what we're doing. We know God sees everything, though, so there is nothing about us we can hide from him. Have you ever tried to hide your sins from God rather than confess them? What were the results?

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We are not meant to go through life alone. This is the same for our faith. As Paul says, we are to "carry each other's burdens." This can be a difficult for a number of reasons. Perhaps we don't want to confess our sins to anybody else. Maybe we're having trouble finding people we can trust. Perhaps we're afraid of asking someone else to take on our burdens with us. Maybe we don't want to risk "making things awkward." Whatever the case, we're meant to find people we can rely on for help. What would it look like for you to find somebody you can confide in? If you already have at least one person you can confide in, what steps might you be able to take in order to support one another more deeply?

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ENTHUSE

We all have resources that we can sow in our life and in the lives of others. Time, energy, money, and so on can be used for the greater good. Where we spend, or sow, shows us whether we are investing in the flesh or the Spirit. Spend some time this week and pray to God for the strength to reject the flesh and begin to spend more of your resources living in the Spirit. Write below about various changes you can make to reflect better priorities. Also, be willing to share your concerns with someone you trust, and be willing to listen to their concerns as well.

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SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

By David Rimarski

“It’s none of your business!” Have you ever said that to someone who confronted you about a personal problem, or someone who noticed that you weren’t your usual self? When we don’t want to face the consequences of our own actions, we tend to clam up and hide it all.

Why has it become such a hassle to be open and honest with each other? Do we fear the judgment of our friends and peers? Do we not want to admit we were in the wrong? Do we think that we are the only ones dealing with a sin issue? Those people in our life who want to see us grow and succeed are there for us when we are struggling with something. We should try our best to find friends and family that we trust with our struggles so we can have someone to keep us accountable and on the right path with God. It could be your parents, siblings, small group leader, preacher, best friend since third grade, or anyone else who you trust. We are not meant to travel with Christ alone. We are meant to be surrounded by our brothers and sisters as we live like Jesus.

“But what if I don’t have anyone like that in my life?” or “What if I’m not ready to open myself up to anyone?” The good news is that we all have someone close to us that already knows everything there is about us. He is God! God is always there for us when we are in need. If you need someone in your life that will keep you accountable and love on you as you work through your sins, ask God in prayer. If you are not ready to admit your sins to someone yet, who better to come clean to besides God? I can’t think of anyone better to pour your heart out to than him. He knows all there is to know about you, and he’s ready to forgive you.

But have you admitted your wrongs to God? Have you asked him to take the burden from you and help you through your struggle? It can be freeing to lay out all you have on God because he can take it. He is bigger than anything we can throw at him. Plus, no one wants to see you succeed more than God does.

Our world may want us to think that it is always better if no one knows your flaws—all they need to see is your "perfect" Instagram life. But that is no way to grow into a better person. We all have things that are holding us back from being better. So why not have someone carry that burden with you? Don't think you are alone in this world; you have brothers and sisters that love you and want what's best for you. You also have a God who you can always lean on in your darkest moments. Have others help you go from sowing in the flesh to sowing in the Spirit so when the day comes, the harvest will be fruitful and eternal!

EQUIP THOUGHTS

Read Galatians 6:1-2. Paul uses words like "restore" and "gently" when talking about correcting a person caught in sin. What is the benefit of taking this approach in correction?

When we catch someone sinning, we shouldn't turn it into an opportunity to drag the other person down or to brag about our own righteousness. Instead, we should use it as a chance to carry someone else's burden by helping put them on the right path. What, exactly, this process looks like will be different based on the situation at hand, but Paul's words make it clear that we're supposed to act in love. Such a love for others helps us truly fulfill Christ's laws.

Read Galatians 6:3-6. Paul is addressing the Jewish-Christian leaders who were saying that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised and follow every Old Testament law to the letter. Not being able to keep the law themselves, they would boast about their successes compared to the Gentiles. What does Paul say believers should do instead?

First, anybody who brags about their own righteousness needs to step back and realize they're deceiving themselves. Next, they need to be willing to analyze their own lives, seeing whether or not their actions live up to God's will for his people. Then they will be able to figure out how they can better fulfill their responsibilities. They can then share this knowledge with other people, even those who have instructed them in carrying out God's word.

Read Galatians 6:7-10. The general application on this text is talking about reaping what we sow. How we use our possessions, what we do with our time, and how we act point to whether we are living in the flesh or living in the Spirit. Actions can be hidden from others, but nothing can be hidden from God. What are the results of living by the Spirit, and what are the results of living by the flesh?

Paul bluntly states that living for the pleasure of your own flesh will ultimately lead to eternal destruction. On the other hand, living to please the Holy Spirit will lead to eternal life. With this truth in mind, we should never back away from opportunities to please God. As Paul explains, we please God when we do good deeds for all people. If we don't give up on doing good for God and others, we will reap an amazing harvest.

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