

# **The Courageous Christian**

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# Dare To Be a Daniel

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here is an old Puritan hymn (based on the apocalyptic Old Testament book of Daniel for the less-than-biblically literate) we grew up singing. Perhaps you recall it:

Dare to be a Daniel, Dare to stand alone; Dare to have a purpose firm, Dare to make it known.

In a famous essay written just after World War II, George Orwell, in one of his great punchlines, suggested, “to bring this hymn up to date one would have to add a ‘ Don’t’ at the beginning of each line.”

He was talking about the timidity of modern people, thinkers and doers alike, in relatively safe circumstances, to be quiet about dishonesty. Doesn’t intelligence require truth-telling? But then in the first sentence of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell himself wrote satirically: “It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.”

In our present-day Chinese-induced viral pandemic, which started with colossal lies from the East, perhaps it is time to get to the essential truth.

Our brilliant global elites over a number of decades made a dangerous Faustian bargain with the Communist Party of Beijing. The deal was supposed to bring them into the capitalist fold and yield greater international order.

Instead, it has led to this tragedy. We were told untold economic benefits would make them “good democrats,” as we outsourced our jobs to them. Clearly, they are not, and the Communist deception continues unabated.

In a word, we were conned.

Isn’t it time to pull ourselves from the swamp of political correctness, the lies of advertising, and a near-total bureaucracy that has consumed so many secular people, especially academics and media pundits?

Global poverty, we were likewise told, is the greatest challenge of our time. Many still believe investments in education to be an essential part of the solution to this grand challenge. Despite spending \$2.3 trillion on development assistance over the past 50 years, as William Easterly reminded us in *White Man’s Burden: Why the West’s Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*, failure abounds.

Easterly writes:

In foreign aid, Planners announce good intentions but don’t motivate anyone to carry them out; searchers find things that work and get some reward . . . Planners apply global blueprints; searchers adapt to local conditions. Planners at the top lack knowledge of the bottom, while searchers find out what the reality is at the bottom. Planners never hear whether the planned got what it needed; searchers find out whether the customer is satisfied.

So, we ask as searchers, might it be time for leaders, for philanthropists, for business executives, for politicians of all stripes and locales, and for the citizenry at large, to lead where others fear to tread? Donald Trump has been willing to go there. Why not follow his lead? Dare.

To rethink ways forward, not in some new plan or phony U.N. “millennium goals” but merely by utilizing the magic of the market and the well-known reward of good old American entrepreneurship and innovation?

## **Toward a New Economy of Thrift**

If we ask those questions in the light of the considerations raised in this present corona crisis, then we are surely guided to thrift, as a much-needed virtue and as an illustration of the true meaning of spiritual capital, of our American aspirational can-do-ism. Thrift, in its Old Norse origin, meant literally “to thrive.”

How can we thrive again?

I have tried to show the place of thrift and thriving in a theological worldview as well as its effects in generating an economy of stewardship rather than of consumption. Thrift serves as a link between spiritual investment and material reward. And the reward is not merely an increase in productivity and delayed gratification but care for others, for the environment, and for future generations.

An economy of thrift is one that bears the imprint of the legacy from which it springs. It is one that answers both to the demand that we conserve the earth’s resources, and to the demands of philanthropists, that we care for the poor. It is an economy that shows the effect of reinvesting capital, namely, and perhaps most importantly, to conserve the permanent things.

In place of that economy, however, we have seen the emergence of the economy of transient and consumable things, too many of which were made cheaply and by slave labor in China. I would side with those critics of the consumer society who have seen the fragmentation of the family, the loss of commitment, and the growth of short-term pleasure-seeking as its most evident effects.

I agree with them that, even if in some attenuated economic theory, the consumer society is capable of self-perpetuation in a continual orgy of stale delights, it will provide only an impoverished life to its members. It will be a life without (the pursuit of) happiness, because without solid virtues, a life in which the old ideas of duty, sacrifice, and responsibility have no place, love is dethroned from its place in the center of things.

The remedy for this state of affairs is not more state action, more welfare programs, yet another congressional bailout, and more interference and regulation from above in the workings of the market. The remedy comes from below, in the reinvestment of all forms of capital. It comes from people once again taking charge of their own lives, seeking to live as those Calvinist Scots of the 17th century lived, in a state of responsible stewardship over all resources within their control, saving for the future, spending on others in need, and living a life of goodwill and piety, according to the law of God, not some left-wing “Green New Deal” or WHO political edict.

## **Restoring Republican Virtues**

Perhaps today, together and by leveraging our minds, we can achieve a new revolution in ethical thinking and doing. That’s if we, as the prophets of old suggested, dare to be Daniels. Thrift and its sister virtues, if truly embraced and followed, if fueled and lived, if tied to all the other moral virtues, would, without doubt, lead to greater human flourishing.

In fact, as the American Founders intended, Benjamin Franklin especially, those virtues would supply us with unprecedented benevolence. The disposition to do well would emanate from an inclination to be charitable and, in the end, would be a gift from generosity. All of this would occur if the virtues became less forgotten and, instead, found new favor and life among us all.

That is the opportunity of this hour. And there is abundant evidence that Americans everywhere are stepping up, lending a hand, volunteering, and contributing, as they always have.

Their renewal would perhaps be best activated if we in this unusual period of respite and solitude, like the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, simply took time and came to appreciate again what he called, the “dappled things”:

Glory be to God for dappled things—For skies of couple-color as a brindled cow;For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim; Fresh-fire coal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings. . . .

All things counter, original, spare, strange; Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?) With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change: Praise him.

Source: <https://amgreatness.com/2020/05/02/dare-to-be-a-daniel/>

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## The burden of self-righteousness

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It's fair to say that, except in rare circumstances, the Church is no longer the moral conscience of our culture. This comes with some benefits. If you've ever been immersed in Christian culture, you'll remember how annoying it can be to have your moral life constantly monitored. It's all the more annoying if that culture is new to you. For example, my high school was far from Christian, with its nihilistic culture of drug use, depression, and even, on some occasions, suicide. So, when I went to Bible camp and Bible college afterwards, I was culture-shocked. I found myself in a setting where the reality of hopeless teenage existence was ignored for the sake of rules about tattoos and hair length.

Of course there are different cultures of self-righteousness to be found abroad as well. I remember the time I traveled to Jerusalem. The narrow streets were jammed with people buying spices and trinkets. Christians, Jews, and Muslims all had their little corners, while curious Westerners like me stumbled around knocking stuff over. I managed to find myself an English companion that first day, and we decided to go out for a beer. Not really understanding Islam at all, he walked over to a couple of Muslims and asked where the nearest bar was. Needless to say they were not impressed. It was the perfect example of culture clash as my English friend — not fathoming that other cultures actually believe that everyone should follow the same rules — continued to say, “Yeah, I know that you don't drink, but could you tell us where we could go so we can drink?”

As someone familiar with Christian sub-culture, their disgusted looks were quite familiar.

Self-righteousness is no longer the preserve of religious people these days. One of the benefits of Christianity losing its prestige is that we are now painfully aware that self-righteousness is a human problem. What else are we to make of the craze for online lynching? A man shoots a lion in Zimbabwe and, next thing you know, his dental practice is ruined, and he's being hounded at home. The slightest politically incorrect faux pas today means that our livelihood can be taken away; our lack of privacy due to online-everything means that our words are constantly monitored, judged, and punished. Political positions posted on the “bumpers” of Facebook and Twitter are primarily badges of membership, not invitations to debate. And, if we don't flash the right signals or use the right jargon, we will find ourselves socially in Siberia. “Judginess” is everywhere.

The troubling thing is that such self-righteousness is a sign of a total lack of self awareness. In the parable of Luke 18:9-15 the tax collector prays, “God, have mercy on me a sinner,” while the Pharisee prays, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector.” What differentiates these two spiritual types is that the self-righteous person is not self aware; the self-righteous person, unlike the “tax collector,” will not apologize to God or to man. The self-righteous person does not even seem to know that there is anything to apologize for. Yet this is dishonest because, deep down, maybe in his subconscious, he's compensating for something. And what is the self-righteous person repressing? The fear, indeed perhaps the certainty, that there is no such thing as forgiveness. He will not, therefore, apologize because he does not believe in forgiveness. And, tracing this back to the Lord's Prayer, he does not believe in forgiveness because he will not forgive others.

If the self-righteous person is forced to apologize, it will not be in recognition that he is wrong. No, he will only apologize for the sake of expedience in order to make the consequences go away. This seems to be the only form of repentance our culture knows at the moment.

Such apologies are always formulaic, but that doesn't seem to matter. For the social pressure to "apologize" is always intended to make the person submit and conform to the herd. Until that time, the public shaming will be relentless.

Needless to say, conformity is not the same thing as forgiveness; it is the opposite. Conformity means breaking someone, mastering someone. Forgiveness means giving someone a fresh start. It means reintegrating them in society and making things whole again. If we were interested in what is effective, I believe forgiveness beats shaming and conformity hands down. Yet it is the narrow road; it is difficult.

So where forgiveness cannot be imagined, any self-respecting person will not apologize, since he thinks the shame and conformity that comes with apologizing would destroy his dignity. For some people, then, rightly or wrongly, there is a kind of nobility in not apologizing. To apologize would mean that they are worthless, and why would you admit that? (See Peter Leithart's interesting observations on scapegoats.)

Let's be honest, in a world that can't imagine forgiveness, some people become pariahs: the pedophile, the racist, the wife-beater. No doubt this "untouchable" class has changed from Jesus' time (robbers, evildoers, and tax collectors), but we still think that certain types of sins put some people beyond the pale — and not without good reason. But the judgment here is that they aren't just guilty. More often than not, it is that they have themselves become junk — intrinsically worthless.

The popular social worker, Brené Brown, makes a distinction between guilt and shame. Guilt is when you think that you've done something wrong, while shame is when you think you yourself are worthless. This is an insightful distinction, but the line is blurry in a culture without forgiveness. The knowledge of our own guilt leads us and others to think we are rubbish.

The major difference Christ brings into the world, then, is the reality of forgiveness: "Father, forgive them," Jesus says from the Cross. Christ makes it possible for us both to apologize and to receive a sense of dignity. For, without Christ, we are lost in a world of shame. Those who want us to apologize want us to submit to them, they want to break us. It was only Christ, though, who was broken by us. Being God, he could have crucified us; instead, he himself was crucified to make us whole. His forgiveness gives us our dignity back.

When we have been granted dignity, we can admit our guilt before God without doubting his fatherly love for us. If he sent his Son to die for us, we are worth it — tax collectors, pedophiles, murderers. Because we can trust God in this way, forgiving others as we are forgiven, we take a great big step towards self-awareness and away from the pharisaic mind set.

One last point about self-righteousness: We all have that Pharisee deep down inside of us, tricking us into becoming the judge of others. Even the act of identifying self-righteous Pharisees can be pharisaic! We therefore must become simple, judging no one. Remember the prayer of the tax collector who beat his breast and cried "God, have mercy on me a sinner." This simple prayer, repeated over and over again, sparked a religious renaissance in eighteenth-century Russia that carries on to today. Refusal to judge, acknowledgment of God's mercy, and honesty about one's own guilt are the beginning of self-awareness, which brings freedom from the burden of self-righteousness.

My small recommendation, then, is to take up this simple prayer of humility as your own. Repeat it a few times when you wake up and a few times when you go to sleep. Whenever you have a spare moment in the day, say that prayer under your breath: “Jesus, have mercy on me, a sinner.” You will find that the more you say it from your heart, the less you will be able to judge others, the less anxiety you will have about your own worth, and the less worry you will have about a guilty conscience. Without this kind of prayer, we are all just Pharisees.

Jeff Boldt’s other posts may be found here . The featured image is “ Barbie’s house, featuring Atlas ” (2011) by Quinn Dombrowski. It is licensed under Creative Commons.

Source: <https://livingchurch.org/covenant/2015/09/17/the-burden-of-self-righteousness/>



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## Christians' political opinions are supposed to be unpopular

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Christians should not be afraid of taking unpopular political positions says Niall Gooch

Christians beliefs are supposed to be out of touch with contemporary society (whether that means first century Palestine, early medieval Europe, nineteenth-century Africa or twenty-first century China).

Their beliefs are supposed to seem weird and ridiculous to outsiders. Non-believers finding Christianity offensive or alienating is a feature, not a bug.

"If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first," Jesus says to the disciples (John 15:18). "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracise you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man." (Luke 6:22)

St Paul teaches that "The cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18)

There is something in authentic Christianity to upset and challenge everyone. For conservative-minded people there is the radical scepticism about wealth and property and bourgeois respectability, the emphasis on mercy and forgiveness rather than ritual and social correctness, and the insistence that those on the fringes of society are just as precious to God as pillars of the community.

For the more liberal-leaning folk there are those irksome and demanding restrictions on sexual expression and personal freedom, the stark warnings about sin and judgment and right doctrine, and the affirmation of hierarchy and divine authority.

TS Eliot puts it this way in Choruses From The Rock VI:

Why should men love the Church? Why should they love her laws?

She tells them of Life and Death, and of all that they would forget.

She is tender where they would be hard, and hard where they would like to be soft.

She tells them of Evil and Sin, and other unpleasant facts.

It always surprises me, therefore, how much Christians fret and wring their hands about how the rest of society sees them.

Obviously in any walk of life where you are trying to persuade people of something, it is worth thinking about how you are perceived and how effectively you are communicating a message. But the aforementioned fretting is very often focused not on how Christians communicate, but on what they communicate, that is to say there seems to be a fairly widespread lack of confidence in the actual content of the faith, rather than uncertainty about how best to present that content. Compare, for example, these two statements:

"It is hard to understand the traditional Christian teaching on sex and marriage. We should think about whether there are better ways to explain it".

vs

"People seem to find Christian teaching on sex and marriage very hard to accept. Maybe we should just change it, or at least de-emphasise or downplay the hard bits, so as not to upset people".

They are very, very different statements. I do wish people would be more clear about which of them they are making when they raise concerns about perceptions of Christianity.

Almost by definition, it tends to be those on the revisionist/liberal end of Christianity who most lack confidence in the content of Christianity, and particularly the moral content. It seems to me that a great problem faced by liberal Christianity is to retain distinctively Christian ethical commitments in the public sphere. For example, I have read quite a lot of arguments by Christians who are pro-choice on abortion, and there doesn't seem to be very much to distinguish them from the generic pro-choice secular arguments. They tend to uncritically adopt the jargon and assumptions of non-religious pro-choicers, with a few vaguely Christian concepts thrown into the mix to add a sort of religious garnish.

Liberal Christianity is a somewhat vague term; but for now I take it to mean those forms of Christianity which lay heavy emphasis on individual reason and experience as means of discovering truth, maintaining a general posture of scepticism or even antagonism towards historical orthodoxy and practice, especially regarding sexual morality. Liberals tend to be heavily influenced by academic and intellectual trends in the world outside the Church, such as equality feminism, sexual liberation, form criticism, or critical theory. They are very often critical of conventional "God-talk" and can be uneasy about the straightforward assertion of miraculous and/or supernatural happenings (and yes, of course #NotAllLiberals etc.).

My problem with much of liberal Christianity today is that it is a tamed Christianity, neutered and silent on the issues where Christian convictions are most beleaguered and despised: the sanctity of life, the importance of marriage, the rights of Christian conscience. Yes, it speaks with a strong prophetic voice on issues like peace and social justice. But as a priest acquaintance of mine once said, who is against peace and justice? Are people really risking anything personally, socially, culturally, or politically by standing up for what I will reluctantly call the "leftish" Christian stuff?

Liberal Christianity is neutered and silent on the issues where Christian convictions are most beleaguered and despised

In 2016, Christians are not being driven out of business because they support a Palestinian state, or because they oppose bombing Syria or cuts to welfare. People don't, by and large, lose friends or jobs or social status for having those beliefs. People are amused and irritated and bored by socialist clerics – but the real vitriol, contempt and ridicule is reserved for those who stand up for Christian orthodoxy on sexual morality, in particular abortion and gay marriage.

To refuse to attack the idols and entrenched anti-Christian practices of a society is a kind of cowardice, and the Church has often fallen into this trap. To name just a few examples: over the centuries Christian churches have failed to challenge slavery, racial bigotry, religious sectarianism, tyranny, violence, rigid class systems, gross inequality and systemic discrimination against women.

To quote Martin Luther: "Also it does not help that one of you would say: 'I will gladly confess Christ and His Word on every detail, except that I may keep silent about one or two things which my tyrants may not tolerate, such as the form of the Sacraments and the like.' For whoever denies Christ in one detail or word has denied the same Christ in that one detail who was denied in all the details, since there is only one Christ in all His words, taken together or individually."

Jesus gave very clear warnings about losing "saltiness", that is the clarity and savour and distinctiveness of Christian teachings. It is sometimes said in support of changing longstanding Christian teachings on personal morality that "the Holy Spirit is doing a new thing". I will say only

this: it seems curious to me that the Holy Spirit's new thing regarding sexual morality and the sanctity of life should so closely resemble the dominant moral views of the current year, and that it should have been detected only in Western countries just at the time when adherence to the "old thing" is starting to bear significant personal, professional and social costs for Christians.

Niall Gooch blogs at [niallthinksandwrites.blogspot.co.uk](http://niallthinksandwrites.blogspot.co.uk) , where this blog first appeared

Source: <https://www.premierchristianity.com/Blog/Why-Christians-political-opinions-are-supposed-to-be-unpopular>

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# How to read the news with discernment

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The Swiss theologian Karl Barth once advised young theologians “to take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.” What Barth was recommending was that his students read the news with biblical discernment.

Biblical discernment is the skill of understanding and applying God’s Word with the aid of the Holy Spirit to separate truth from error and right from wrong. Biblical discernment is therefore not only a habit needed to develop a biblical worldview, it is a primary reason for developing a biblical worldview and has the practical effect of helping us to live.

Recognizing and rejecting false teaching is an essential element of biblical discernment, as well. As Paul tells us, “Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil” (1 Thess. 5:20-22). But too often Christians limit discernment to the teachings within the church and overlook the catechism they are receiving from the culture. This is especially true when it comes to consumption of news media.

There is much more to discernment, though, than simply avoiding false teachings, as Sinclair Ferguson explains in his book *In Christ Alone* :

True discernment means not only distinguishing the right from the wrong; it means distinguishing the primary from the secondary, the essential from the indifferent, and the permanent from the transient. And, yes, it means distinguishing between the good and the better, and even between the better and the best.

## How to develop discernment

“How is such discernment to be obtained?” asks Ferguson. “We receive it as did Christ himself—by the anointing of the Spirit, through our understanding of God’s Word, by our experience of God’s grace, and by the progressive unfolding to us of the true condition of our own hearts.” Ferguson is clarifying that, as with most spiritual disciplines, biblical discernment contains both a passive and an active element. We must rely on our union with Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But we also must develop our understanding of Scripture and our ability to make critical judgements about how to apply what we learn.

Let’s look at a few necessary steps for developing the skill of discernment when reading the news:

Consider what you believe about the news. Which is more important to us, God’s Word or the news? What if someone were asked to determine that answer by observing our habits? The uncomfortable truth is that we often spend far more time reading news articles than reading the Bible. And we spend more time watching news programs than actively acquiring wisdom. How would your life differ if you changed your news consumption habits to develop wisdom and understanding?

Understand that “news” is a product for consumption. The term “news” is most commonly used in our daily lives to mean information about current events that is delivered to the general public by the news industry. The news industry produces one product but sells two: they produce news content

that they sell to news consumers (i.e., you), and they package the attention of news consumers (again, you) that they sell to others (usually advertisers but sometimes nonprofit donors).

For the news industry, you are both a consumer and a product. But in the age of social media you have also become a free distributor. Your friend who daily shares the content of a cable news show on Twitter and Facebook is essentially an unpaid intern working for Fox News or MSNBC. That means most of us are an unofficial part of the media and will be held responsible to God for how we use the news to promote or degrade the understanding and truth.

Unfortunately, many of us don't even bother to read the news we share. As philosopher Michael P. Lynch has noted, current research estimates that at least 60% of news stories shared online have not even been read by the person sharing them. We can't be discerning if we are spreading a product that we have not even taken the time to evaluate.

Guard your mind. You may consider yourself an "independent thinker," but if you are a news consumer, you're conditioned to "think about" whatever issues the news industry has decided you will think about that day. This is especially true if you engage on social media outlets like Twitter, where a recurring joke is to ask, "What are we upset about today?" Most of us, if we are honest, use outlets like Twitter as a shortcut to find out what agenda the news industry has set for the day.

Christians don't need to believe the news industry has nefarious motives to find this agenda-setting function troubling. Whether we are getting our news from Fox News or NPR, the picture of reality being drawn by the news industry is not likely to match the reality produced by our Creator. The Bible commands us to set our minds on things above, not on earthly things (Col. 3:2), which is impossible to do when we're tuned into around-the-clock "headline news."

Consume less news. Most news products are the mental and spiritual equivalent of junk food. By consuming less of it, we won't necessarily improve our health, but we can limit its negative effects on us. But what if we miss something? The late media theorist Neil Postman offers this response:

If you are concerned that cutting down your viewing time will cause you to "miss" important news, keep this in mind: each day's TV news consists for the most part, of fifteen examples of the Seven Deadly Sins, with which you are already quite familiar. There may be a couple of stories exemplifying lust, usually four about murder, occasionally one about gluttony, another about envy, and so on. It cannot possibly do you any harm to excuse yourself each week from thirty or forty of these examples. Remember: TV news does not reflect normal, everyday life.

News is for reading, not watching. If you are an American, you likely get your news in the worst way possible—through the medium of video, specifically television news. Studies show that more than half of adults in the U.S. get news from TV. We can improve our ability to discern the news by shifting our habits of consumption and obtaining the bulk of our news in printed form (including online text), listening to radio news sparingly, and avoiding TV news like it's spreading a plague.

The primary reason for developing this preference is the way each medium communicates information. TV has a lower informational density than a newspaper. All the words spoken in an hour of TV news could fit on a single page of a newspaper, says Postman, so TV viewers are getting much less news content than newspaper readers. Postman also notes, "The grammar of images is weak in communicating past-ness and present-ness" and prefers change rather than stasis. That's why, says Postman, violence finds its way on television news so often—it is a radical and attention-grabbing form of change.

Arm yourself against "fake news." Almost everyone in America agrees that so-called "fake news" is a problem. A study by Gallup and the Knight Foundation found that 73% of Americans say the spread of inaccurate information on the internet is a major problem with news coverage today, more

than any other potential type of news bias. But there is less agreement on what the term means. So, let me offer my own definition: Fake news is information about current events that is distributed as news but has no concern for the truth; its purpose is only to motivate a particular form of acceptable thought.

The reason fake news has become so common is because there is a strong demand for it. And it isn't the fake news of those we disagree with that we should be worried about but the news from those on "our side." We all want to believe, especially when it comes to politics, that our preferred ideas, policies, and politicians are so obviously superior as to be above reproach. But for Christians, the priority must always be the truth. Truth must even take precedence over our political objectives. As Francis Schaeffer once wrote, "Christian values . . . cannot be accepted as a superior utilitarianism, just as a means to an end. The biblical message is truth and it demands a commitment to truth."

Pray for guidance. We should ask God to open our hearts to his Word and allow us to see any specific issue clearly. We should also continuously pray, as did the psalmist, "I am your servant; give me discernment" (Psa. 119:125). For every minute we spend consuming news products, we should spend a minute in prayer about how we discern the news. And if you don't have time for that much prayer, you don't have time to be wasting with the news.

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# Faithful Disobedience

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Christian Living

## Faithful Disobedience

The pastor of Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, China was recently arrested on allegations of “inciting subversion of state power.” Anticipating his arrest, Wang Yi drafted a letter to be released should he be detained for more than 48 hours. Unfortunately, his prediction came true, and he was arrested. Fortunately, his letter was released. I say it was fortunate because it was incredibly encouraging to my soul to read (and, I suspect, for many other believers who read it).

I’m honored to have a brother in Christ like Pastor Yi, who has the courage to stand up for his Christian convictions in light of a government that opposes Christianity. He writes :

Precisely because none of my words and actions are directed toward seeking and hoping for societal and political transformation, I have no fear of any social or political power. For the Bible teaches us that God establishes governmental authorities in order to terrorize evildoers, not to terrorize doers of good. If believers in Jesus do no wrong then they should not be afraid of dark powers. Even though I am often weak, I firmly believe this is the promise of the gospel. It is what I’ve devoted all of my energy to. It is the good news that I am spreading throughout Chinese society. I also understand that this happens to be the very reason why the Communist regime is filled with fear at a church that is no longer afraid of it. If I am imprisoned for a long or short period of time, if I can help reduce the authorities’ fear of my faith and of my Savior, I am very joyfully willing to help them in this way. But I know that only when I renounce all the wickedness of this persecution against the church and use peaceful means to disobey, will I truly be able to help the souls of the authorities and law enforcement. I hope God uses me, by means of first losing my personal freedom, to tell those who have deprived me of my personal freedom that there is an authority higher than their authority, and that there is a freedom that they cannot restrain, a freedom that fills the church of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. Regardless of what crime the government charges me with, whatever filth they fling at me, as long as this charge is related to my faith, my writings, my comments, and my teachings, it is merely a lie and temptation of demons. I categorically deny it. I will serve my sentence, but I will not serve the law. I will be executed, but I will not plead guilty.

This is a man who has the big picture - an eternal perspective - in mind. His mission is clear: to proclaim the gospel. No matter the circumstances that surround him, he is fixated on his goal. Like the apostle Paul, Pastor Yi is also concerned about the spiritual health of his captors. He continues:

Those who lock me up will one day be locked up by angels. Those who interrogate me will finally be questioned and judged by Christ. When I think of this, the Lord

fills me with a natural compassion and grief toward those who are attempting to and actively imprisoning me. Pray that the Lord would use me, that he would grant me patience and wisdom, that I might take the gospel to them. Separate me from my wife and children, ruin my reputation, destroy my life and my family - the authorities are capable of doing all of these things. However, no one in this world can force me to renounce my faith; no one can make me change my life; and no one can raise me from the dead. And so, respectable officers, stop committing evil. This is not for my benefit but rather for yours and your children's. I plead earnestly with you to stay your hands, for why should you be willing to pay the price of eternal damnation in hell for the sake of a lowly sinner such as I? Jesus is the Christ, son of the eternal, living God. He died for sinners and rose to life for us. He is my king and the king of the whole earth yesterday, today, and forever. I am his servant, and I am imprisoned because of this. I will resist in meekness those who resist God, and I will joyfully violate all laws that violate God's laws.

I encourage you to read the entirety of this letter . It's a sober reminder of the forces that are against us. Despite the fact that we live in a culture that is hostile to the gospel, it's definitely not as severe as it is in China. Should our government ever get to where China's is, I pray that I - and believers everywhere - would be as courageous as Pastor Yi to stand for the truth.

Source: <https://www.str.org/w/faithful-disobedience>



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# Christians Don't Live in Fear

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I've been having a conversation on our Facebook page with a man who objects to my post "Christians Don't View Jesus as a Means to an End." He insists Christians are motivated only by the "carrots and sticks" of Heaven and Hell, despite my explanation.

I think the conversation is helpful for understanding why we often hear people (usually atheists) accuse Christians of "living in fear." Of course, as Christians, we know we've been freed from the kind of fear they're talking about; we're not living in it. What do we have to fear? If Christ died to secure our salvation while we were His enemies ( Rom. 5:10 ), "much more, then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him" ( Rom. 5:9 ).

We know we have "an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for [us], who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" ( 1 Pet. 1:4 ). As Paul explains in Romans, we are completely secure, for "these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified" ( Rom. 8:30 ). If you have been justified by faith in Christ, you will be glorified with Him in the end. How do we know this? Because "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" ( Rom. 8:32 ).

So what do we have to fear? "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns?" No one, says Romans 8:33-39 - not as long as Christ is interceding for us at the right hand of God ( Rom. 8:34 ), and that is forever ( Heb. 7:23-25 ).

## Adopted by God

As I explained in "Christians Don't View Jesus as a Means to an End," Christians follow God and seek to be like Him not because we're using Him as a tool to avoid Hell, but because we've been changed into people who love and desire Him.

We've been adopted by God, which means our relationship with Him is no longer that of a Judge and criminal; now the relationship is that of a Father and child. Of course we don't want to disobey God; we respect Him as a child rightly respects his father, knowing that "those whom the Lord loves He disciplines," and that "God deals with [us] as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?...He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness" ( Heb. 12:5-11 ).

But the discipline of a good father is obviously quite different from the wrath of a good judge, and the kind of "fear" a child has of disobeying a good father is quite different from the "fear" a criminal has of a good judge. In both cases, the fear results from the goodness of the authority figure, but there is clearly a qualitative difference between a child's "fear" of the discipline of a loving father (i.e., a deep respect and desire to please that's motivated by the child's love for the father and undergirded by the security of the familial relationship) and the "fear" a criminal has of a just judge (i.e., a fear of facing judgment for his crimes, motivated merely by a desire not to suffer). Despite

the fact that a Christian's position is analogous to the first, the kind of "fear" people accuse us of is the second.

I think I understand why this confusion exists among atheists and other non-Christians. You have to remember that they are on the other side of the fear divide from Christians, and they are seeing God from a completely different angle - His judging wrath rather than His loving discipline. They have not yet been adopted by the Father through faith in Christ; their relationship to God is still that of criminal to Judge, so they can hear only warnings of Hell. And if the Facebook conversation is any indication, they hate the concept of the Christian God as Someone who has the power and authority to execute the perfect justice of His wrath against those who commit moral crimes.

## **Why Some Only See Carrots and Sticks**

Why can some people only see carrots and sticks in Christianity? Because God's righteous wrath against the evil of sin is threatening and ugly to them. They think our God is evil and undesirable, so they can't see any other reason for following Him other than carrots and sticks. But the reason why Christianity is not all about carrots and sticks is that Christians view God as desirable. This undesirable/desirable divide is the root difference between non-Christians and Christians, and one's view of God can only change from the first to the second by a work of the Holy Spirit.

I have, in the past, explained the gospel to people who were so focused on their anger against God's wrath that they literally could not comprehend what I was saying. They just kept returning again and again to the idea of God's wrath and couldn't see past it. And they hated Him for it. As I've written before,

This is as far as atheists see into Christianity - an unforgiving, impossibly high moral law enforced by a fearful Judge. They accuse us of "living in fear," and they want no part of that kind of life.

Those who see God only in this way assume that everyone else sees Him through the same lens, and that, therefore, Christians must be submitting to this ugly God merely out of necessity - in order to avoid a punishment and gain a reward. They can't imagine anything else. They certainly can't imagine being motivated by desire for this God. They're unable to see the love of God or the peace we enjoy with Him. They're unable to see Him as He is, though the truth is there for all to see.

## **The Truth about Our Good God**

And here is the truth about our good God: "God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ...so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" ( Eph. 2:4-5 ). He is the reward we seek, this God of perfect justice and self-sacrificing love. And this is the kind of love we see: "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" ( Rom. 5:8 ). Jesus died for His enemies. He displayed His love on the cross for all to see who will submit to seeing ( by the power and grace of God ), and no enemy is beyond His power to save. But the vitriol against God in the Facebook conversation is another reminder that "with people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" ( Matt. 19:26 ).

(For more on the topic of how Christians view God and why we seek to live good lives that honor Him, see " Free to Say We've Sinned " and " Answering an Objection to Grace: Why Not Sin? ")

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