



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

CANA
JOURNAL



authority

issue 7 | spring 2026



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A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

In meditating on the concept of authority, I find myself dwelling on “Master and Man”, a short story by Leo Tolstoy. The story follows a wealthy businessman and his servant who trek through a deadly blizzard just so the businessman can make a deal in the next town over. Suffice it to say that, even after numerous warnings and instances of getting lost, the servant continues to follow his stubborn master’s command.

Our lives are full of hierarchies. Some people have authority over others and those with authority in one sphere find themselves at the behest of another in a different sphere. Some authorities are not up to us to decide, like our parents, or our boss at work; some are, such as the various opinions, ideals, and people we put on a pedestal in our lives. Either way, these structures of authority mold our lives on an intimate level, yet we barely pay it a second thought in our everyday lives. You do what your boss says—but what does it mean for the senior to have authority over the junior? How should authority be used? How should I respond to one abusing their authority over me? Should I simply sit and comply, like that servant in the blizzard?

In this issue, University of Chicago students from various Christian traditions wrestle with these very questions. Works of poetry and prose, fiction and non-fiction, meet here to tackle the idea of authority, what it means to possess it, and what it means to serve. May this issue encourage other Christians, and, to the nonbeliever, may it portray an unexpected hope amidst the chaos that seems to lurk around the corner every day.

Marco Conde
Editor-in-Chief, CANA

Logical Fallacy Necessity

By Louis DiModica

Appeals to authority are ubiquitous. Despite their numbering amongst “logical fallacies” in freshman English textbooks, invoking the credentials of some “other” remains a necessary component of human thought. Without appeals to authority, life as we know it would collapse. For the university student, citing others in an essay is an apparent example. Argument by coalescence of credentialed, distinguished quotations—“Plato said,” or “Augustine said”—pervades academic discourse. Citations protest as if to say, “Don’t just trust me! Trust this old guy, he said it first.” The Chicago Manual of Style, with its obligatory bibliographic footnotes that facilitate easy reference to those ever-present authorities, seems to have been made precisely for this rhetorical style.

Beyond academic writing, ap-

peals to authority persist. I appeal to the authority of Google Maps to direct me to a new place, the authority of a cookbook when making a new recipe, or the authority of a coach when starting a new exercise regimen. If none of these actions are new to me, my appeal to authority has changed, but not disappeared. The GPS, cookbook, and coach are now internal: my memory guides. I’ve walked this route before and arrived at my destination, cooked this meal before and satiated my hunger, performed this exercise and my physical health has improved. Regardless of the particular authority, every activity—novel or mundane—makes its appeal.

Understandably, an appeal to authority is inevitably a matter of trust. I trust that Aristotle knew more than me about philosophy, and my belief (which happens to be fairly prevalent) explains

my invocation of his authority. The same could be said for Cicero and rhetoric, Aquinas and theology, Bach and music, or Einstein and physics. I read the initials “Ph.D.” after someone’s name and think, “Oh, she must know what she’s talking about.” I trust that the sun will rise in the east tomorrow; after all, it always has. On the surface, each of these authorities seem credible in their own domain.

But reflection leads me to wonder: why should I trust these sources? I find that behind each trust lies another. I trust great thinkers because their acceptance persists across time—but why trust human opinion? I trust the Ph.D. because of her credentials—but why trust the institution that bestowed them? I trust the sun will rise in the east—but

why trust my experience? Every appeal to authority leads to another.

One illustrative example is the contemporary news landscape. Claims of “fake news,” misinformation, and bias abound. I just want to know what’s going on. Who should I trust? Democrats listen to CNN, Republicans to Fox News. Individuals tune in to their favorite podcast. But have we ever stopped to ask why those sources should be trusted?

My investigation leads me to an online media bias chart, published by a company where reviewers compare articles on the same topic across media outlets to assign ratings on bias and veracity. But who is checking the checkers? Unwillingness to blindly trust one news source or

Every appeal in authority leads to another.



1

● **Jettison
authority
entirely**

2

● **Instill
authority in
humanity**

3

● **Place
authority
outside
humanity**

another led me here: am I now to blindly trust the rating agency? If I search for another institution, one to check them, I only kick the can down the road. Avoiding infinite regress requires a final authority. Who is the arbiter of truth?

This question cannot be the sole responsibility of the philosopher. Have you ever considered why you think what you think—and then asked again? Keep going and eventually you hit bedrock: appeals to authority cannot be infinitely dependent; the chain of trust ends somewhere. To escape the illogic of infinite regress or circularity, the human condition necessitates a final, independent Authority. Whether you notice it or not, you already have one. The question is, “Who?”

Answers fit into three silos. One option is the post-modernist. He laughs: arbiter of truth? Please. Whose truth, mine or yours? What even is “truth” but a social construct? From this vantage point, authority itself is the problem; jettison authority, and the problem of infinite regress vanishes with it. However, the post-modern view collapses on multiple fronts. It is self-refuting: “there is no absolute truth” is itself an absolute claim. It is morally untenable: is rape really wrong, or is it merely unfashionable in our current culture? And it is existentially implausible: no patient wants a post-modernist for a doctor. If you are dying, you want the cure—not whatever you happen to call a cure, but the medicine that actually works. Post-modernism fails because human beings cannot live with-

out real authority and real truth.

Thus, why not instill authority in humanity itself? If we cannot escape authority, let us enthrone our own faculties and appoint Reason and Experience our judges: if a claim survives critical scrutiny, experiment, and debate, we will call it “true” and submit belief and action to its verdict. “Give us time and method,” modernity says, “and we will give you knowledge solid enough to stand on.” Yet the project, though admirable, falters. Great minds disagree; predispositions filter experience. Regress lurks: I trust Reason—but which reason, whose system, which conclusion? Even if achieved, does consensus create reality? I trust Experience—but are my senses finally reliable, or merely persuasive? Though disguised, modern

confidence shows itself for what it is: another faith commitment, another authority. The regress remains.

A third option is to place authority outside humanity rather than within it. Postmodernism dissolves authority and modernity relocates it in the human subject, but transcendence insists that authority must come from beyond the subject altogether. God is not one authority among many but the source from which all legitimate authority derives. Scripture is not a helpful opinion but the standard by which to weigh every other claim. If God has spoken, then we do not invent, negotiate, or assemble truth—we receive it. Reason is servant rather than sovereign, Experience a witness rather than judge. Truth persists, not because of anything we have done, but by the authority of Him who is.

Everyone, in practice, lives by some final authority—desire, culture, science, skepticism, fill in the blank. Keep asking “why?” long enough, and you will find your god, whatever sits at the bottom of your chain of trust. The crucial question is not whether we trust, but whom.

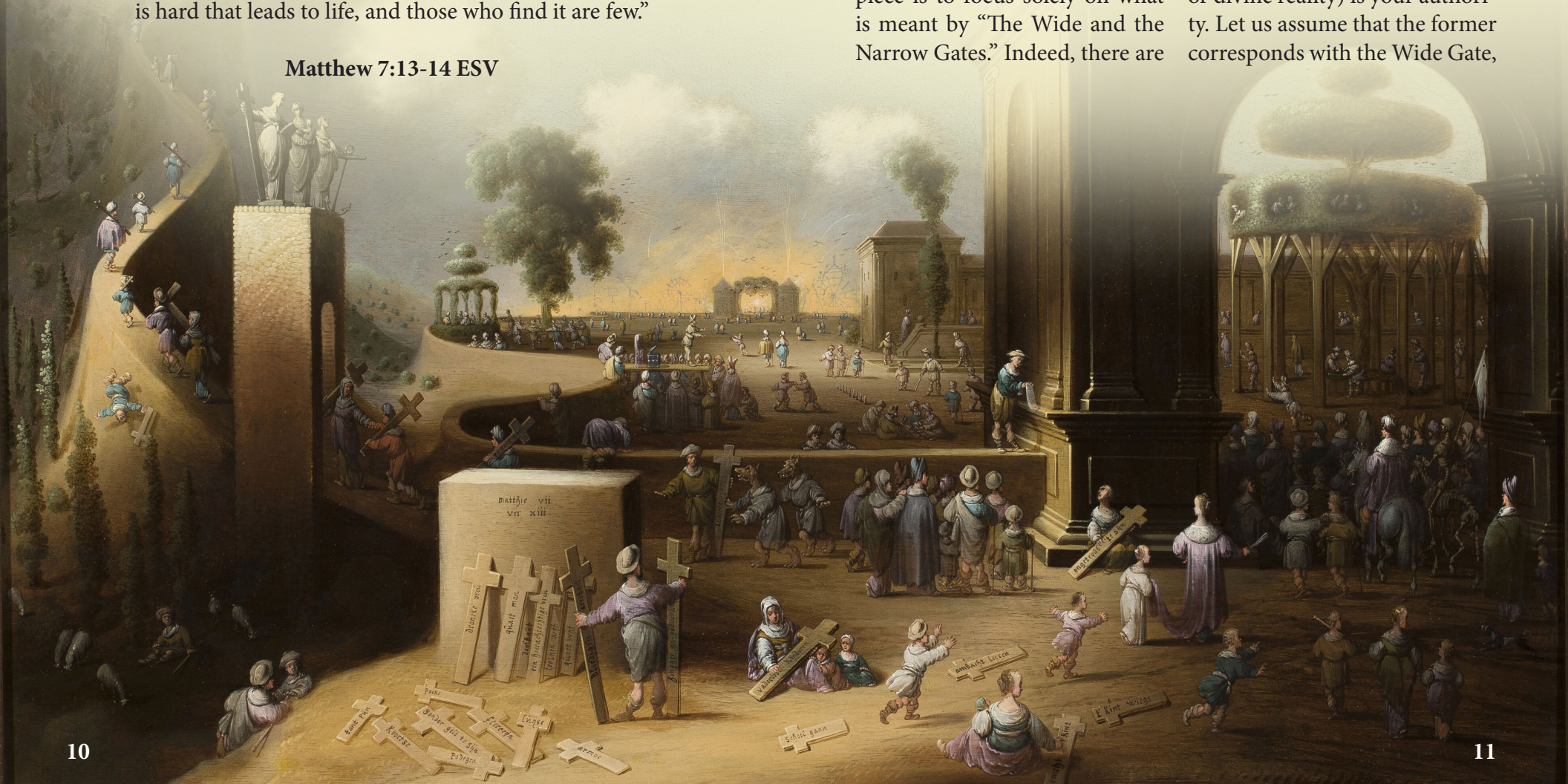
The Wide and Narrow Gates

By Tyler Shinn

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

Matthew 7:13-14 ESV

These verses present us with a dichotomy with eternal implications: Will we choose the wide gate, which guarantees destruction? Or will we choose the narrow gate, which is the path to eternal life? Let us put aside those consequences for this essay. Let us also put aside the veracity of the claim that the narrow gate is superior to the wide one. My intention with this piece is to focus solely on what is meant by “The Wide and the Narrow Gates.” Indeed, there are many ways to conceptualize the difference between them, but I propose that through this dichotomy Christ is asking a deceptively simple question: Who will be your authority? Not only does He pose this question, but He also presupposes that there are only two possible answers: either Man is your authority, or God (not necessarily the Christian God, but some transcendent or divine reality) is your authority. Let us assume that the former corresponds with the Wide Gate,



and the latter with the Narrow Gate. With this interpretive lens in mind, let us explore how the two biggest philosophical options in America today – secular Western philosophy and Christianity – answer the question: Who will be your authority?

Now, the whole of Western moral philosophy can be summarized as one big struggle to answer this question of authority. Allow me to explain how this is: Firstly, it seems clear that the question that all moral philosophers try to answer is the following question: “What is the meaning of life?” Plato says that it is to emulate “the Good.” Aristotle says that it is to have happiness, or *eudaimonia*. The Existentialists, to oversimplify their view a bit, say that it is to live out the meaning which you create for yourself. But behind that question lies an even more fundamental question: “To what should we orient our lives around?” Plato, Aristotle, and the Existentialists, in all of their answers to the meaning of life mentioned above, have in mind some end, some *telos*, towards which we should orient our lives. Implicit in those ends is an authority which these philosophers urge us to submit to.

Therefore, in the end, all of moral philosophy aims to answer the question of authority.

Historically, there have been two main ways to answer this question. C.S. Lewis, in *The Abolition of Man*, lays out these two methods very clearly: From the birth of philosophy in Greece to the time of the Enlightenment, “the cardinal problem of human life was how to conform the soul to objective reality, and the solution was wisdom, self-discipline, and virtue.” But from the time of the Enlightenment to the present day, “the cardinal problem is how to conform reality to the wishes of man, and the solution is a technique.”

Clearly, the second method is much more explicit in making Man the authority. The seeds of this fact are present in the skeptical arguments of Montaigne, the pragmatic science of Bacon, and the empirical arguments of Hume, Locke, and Berkeley. They are developed in Kant’s Copernican Revolution and in the phenomenology of Husserl and Hegel. Finally, the fruit of this fact blossomed with the Existentialist philosophies of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus,



which are still very popular today. What connects the ideas of all these men is the overarching belief that Man is the source of epistemic, moral, and personal authority. There is no need to submit to anything, because no purely objective truth exists in this world, or if it does exist, it is utterly unknowable. Therefore, you get to choose your truth, because the only truths that exist are those formed by Man’s consensus or by Man’s instinct. Thus, you yourself are the arbiter of your own destiny. Man himself is man’s authority.

Let us now turn our attention to the wisdom of the ancients – those pre-Enlightenment thinkers who believed that life should be lived in obedience to a cosmic authority. Unlike the moderns,

they admit that there is a transcendent reality for us to conform to. So it seems as if they are making God – or at least some idea of the transcendent or divine – their authority. But even this “God” is derived from Man, because it is built around the arrogant assumption that we can know, through human reasoning, what God’s will for us is.

Plato’s metaphysics was built on a Theory of Forms. Aristotle’s ethical system was built around *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing. The Stoics built their philosophy on *arete*, or excellence in virtue. The Epicureans built their philosophy on *ataraxia* and *aponia*, or the pleasure of mind and body. Boethius’s consolation was an abstract and impersonal “God of the philosophers.” In

summary, all of them constructed tidy metaphysical systems of their own ingenuity to explain the intentions of the divine to man. These philosophers claim to “speak for God” by telling men that they know what Man’s good is. This would be all well and good if they knew God personally, or perhaps if they were God. But this is not the case. Rather, they are trying to explain the will of an omniscient God with their powers of natural Reason, as Plato’s cavemen might try to explain what a man is by shadows on the wall. So, contrary to the idea of conforming to a transcendent authority, the wisdom of the ancients consists merely in conforming to Man’s idea of the transcendent. Man, once again, is man’s authority.

Let us pause here to soak in where we are. It seems that neither the moderns nor the ancients can bring us to the narrow gate, since both of them derive their authority from Man. The moderns do this explicitly by making Man the arbiter of his meaning. The ancients did this implicitly by “speaking for God” in their elaborate metaphysical systems. But the question remains: Who can bring us to the narrow gate?

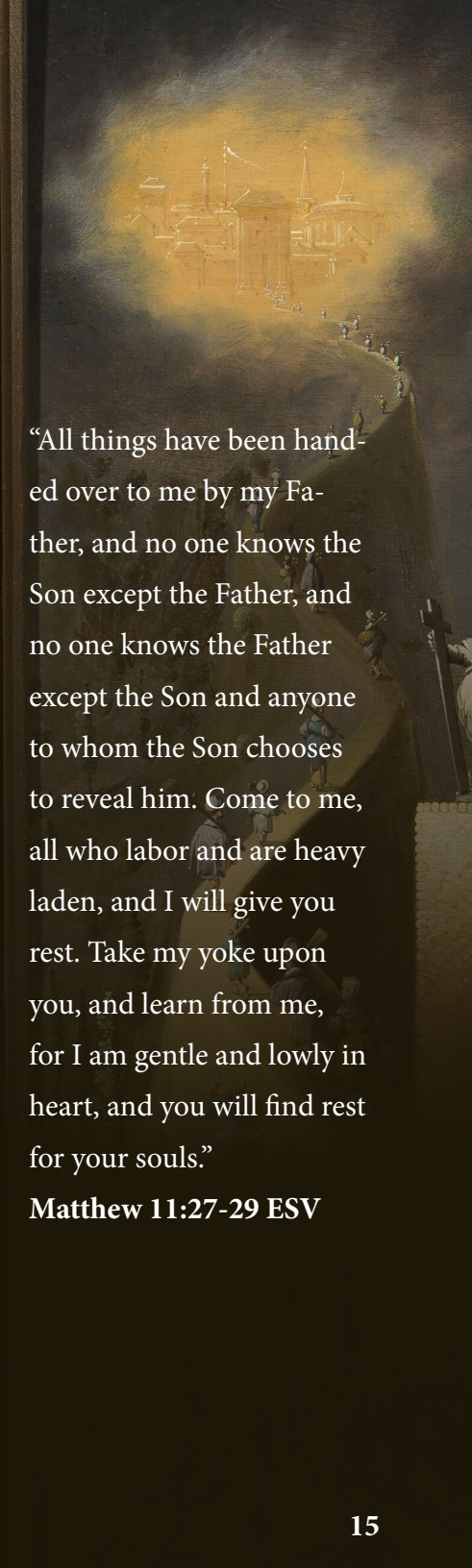
“[H]ear from your master your true condition, which is unknown to you. Listen to God” (Pascal, *Pensees*, emphasis added).

If the story of Western philosophy reveals that – no matter if we consider the wisdom of the ancients or of the moderns – Man is the authority of men, then only by listening to a Higher Power can we enter through the narrow gate. But we could only listen to Him if He revealed Himself to us; how could finite Man understand an infinite God otherwise? This is exactly where Christianity claims to offer a solution. Christianity claims that God revealed Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Nowhere is this clearer than in John 1:18: “no one has ever seen God; God the only Son, who is at the Father’s side, he has made himself known” (ESV).

Through the person of Jesus Christ, we are called to humbly submit ourselves to His authority (Luke 9:23). This is what separates the Narrow Gate of the Christian Gospel from the Wide Gate as portrayed by the wisdom of the moderns – Man must submit to another, and not rule himself.

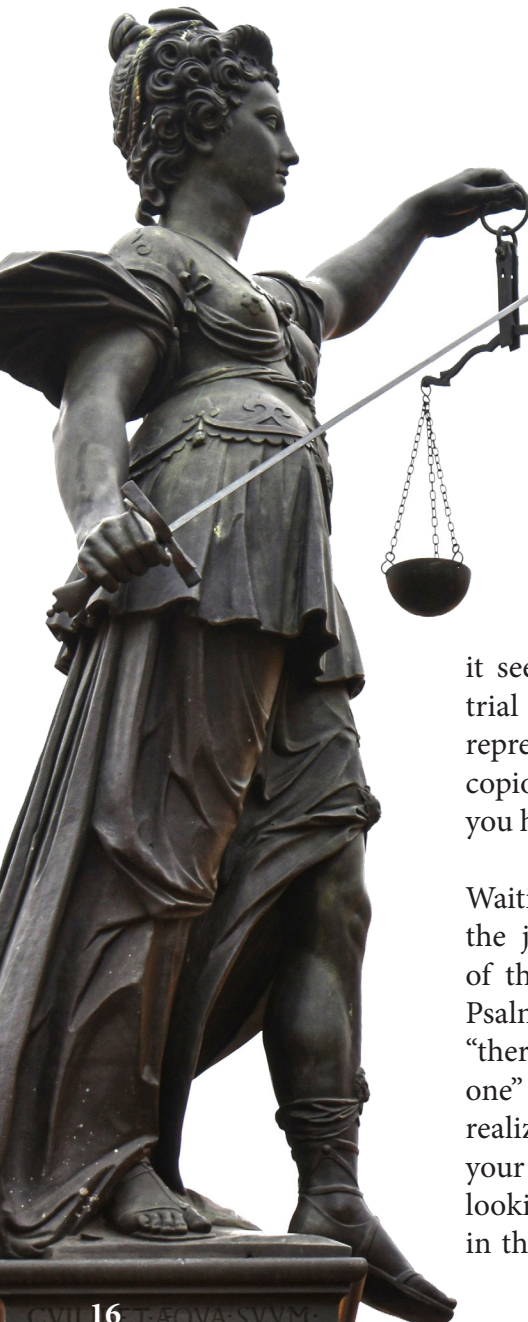
Through the person of Jesus Christ, we are called to listen to God, rather than speak for Him. That is why Jesus Christ, being God, says quite bluntly: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6 ESV, emphasis added). This is what separates the Narrow Gate of the Christian Gospel from the Wide Gate as portrayed by the wisdom of the ancients – Man must listen to God’s special revelation about Himself, and not Man’s explanation of Him.

Through the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself has finally become our authority. Through Him only do we enter by the Narrow Gate. And He made this possible by becoming one of us, by becoming a man, through the Incarnation. “Incredible that God should unite Himself to us” (Pascal, *Pensees*), the skeptic might say. Christ responds with a personal invitation, open to all:

A painting depicting a steep, rocky mountain path leading up to a city or castle perched on a peak. The scene is illuminated by a warm, golden light, possibly from a setting or rising sun. Numerous figures are seen along the path, many carrying heavy loads on their backs or shoulders, suggesting a journey of labor or pilgrimage. The overall mood is one of arduousness and hope.

“All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Matthew 11:27-29 ESV



Not Guilty!

By David Flanagan

Imagine you are seated inside the holy courthouse of God, awaiting your time of judgment. As you prepare your case, a multitude of questions rush before your mind: How will you deliver your argument? Should you get an attorney? What evidence will be presented against you? Recalling your numerous charitable endeavors, it seems almost self-evident that this trial will be short and quick. You will represent yourself, simply citing your copious good works as proof for why you have earned your way into heaven.

Waiting for your turn to appear before the judge, you decide to read some of the courtroom documents. In the Psalms, King David clearly states that “there is none who does good, not even one” (Ps. 14:3; 54:3). Coming to this realization, you begin to second guess your chosen method of defense. While looking through previous proceedings in this court, searching for one which

may be of assistance to you, the case against Job seems to draw your attention. He is a righteous man about whom God says, “There is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil” (Job 1:8; 2:3). If anyone could win such a litigation as yours, it would be Job. Upon investigation you find that, despite his apparent righteousness, the prosecution managed to build quite a strong argument against him. Satan, serving as the Accuser, has tricked Job into providing a defense for himself. As a result, the judge finds Job to be speaking “by words without knowledge” (Job 38:2) and proceeds to ask him a series of questions so impossible that anyone would be declared a fool for even attempting to answer them. Continuing to read about this case, you find four straight chapters of unanswerable questions, such as “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” (Job 38:4) or “Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?” (Job 38:33). For fear of being interrogated in such a way, you’ve decided to reconsider the plan of defending yourself before God, thus beginning your search for a defense attorney.

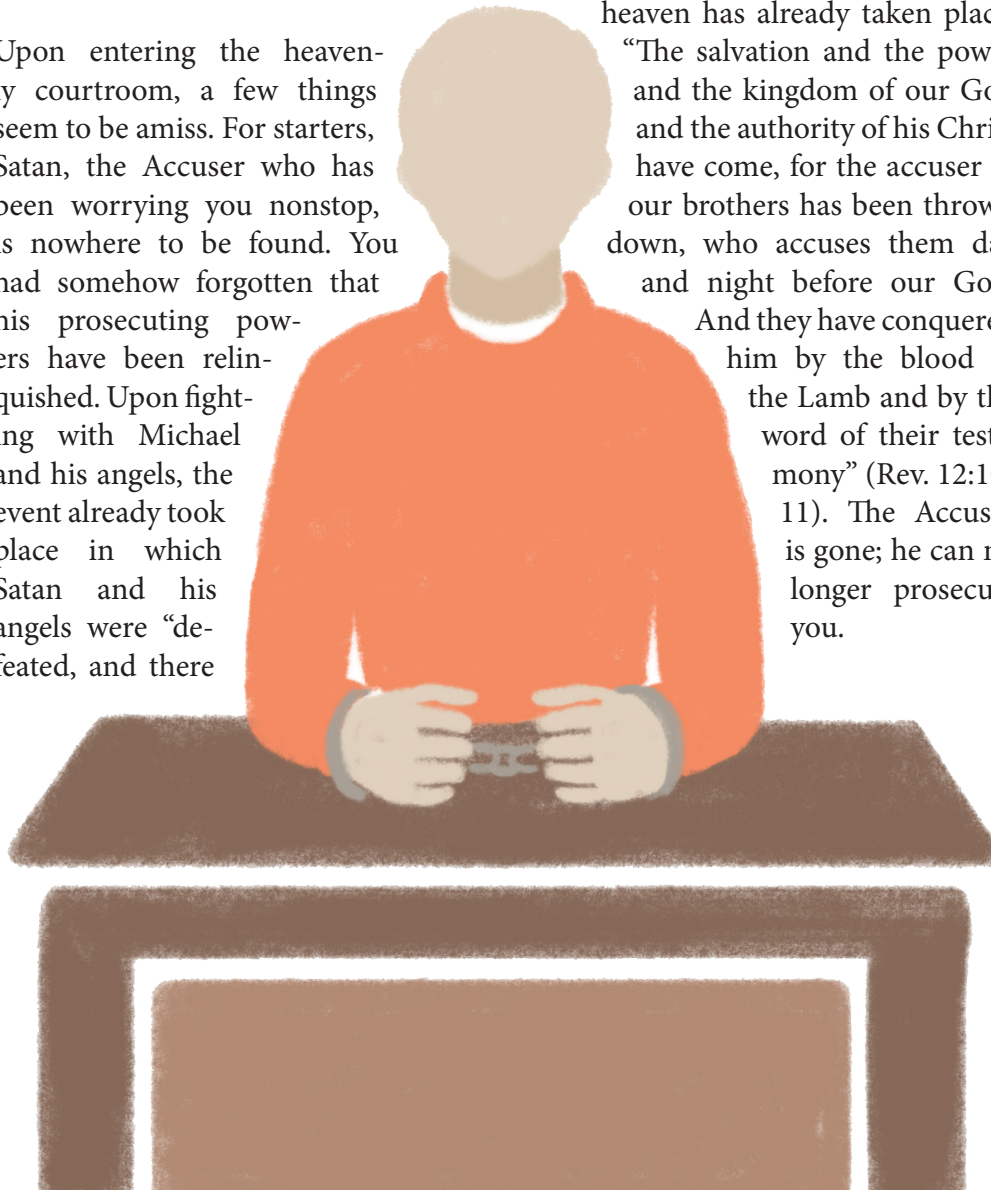
Who should you go with? Have any cases even been won before? Researching, you come across the instance of Joshua and Zerubbabel successfully defending their mission to rebuild Jerusalem. Being permitted to peer into the courtroom during this trial, you see “Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the LORD said to Satan, ‘The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?’ Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Remove the filthy garments from him.’ And to him he said, ‘Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments’” (Zech. 3:1-4). Possessing a newfound understanding of courtroom procedure, you realize that two things must take place in order for a case to be won: (1) the Accuser must be rebuked and silenced and (2) one’s garments, symbolically representing their iniquities, must be made pure and clean, unstained by sin.

The feeling of desperation is set-

ting in. Despite your good deeds, which you previously planned on presenting before the judge, your vestments are utterly filthy and wretched. You are covered from head to toe in smut, sewage, and sludge--the stains of which it would be impossible to remove. However, this problem is secondary and irrelevant if you cannot first find a way to silence the Accuser. Who can do such a thing though? You need the angel of the LORD. Confused about who this mysterious being could be, you search for someone else, anyone who could speak with such power and authority. You remember that "when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you'" (Jude 9). However, this information seems to be almost useless, since you know just as little about Michael as you do about the angel of the LORD. Due to this lack of comprehension concerning these two angels, you frantically seek for another to defend you. Given that Michael was fighting for the body of Moses--a man who knew the Law better than anyone--it appears logical to beseech him as your advocate. In a

last-ditch effort, you resolve to call upon Moses as your defense attorney, hoping that he will be able to prove you innocent through exploitation of some caveat in the Law. You've made your decision, and just in time. Your name has been called; the time of your judgment has come.

Upon entering the heavenly courtroom, a few things seem to be amiss. For starters, Satan, the Accuser who has been worrying you nonstop, is nowhere to be found. You had somehow forgotten that his prosecuting powers have been relinquished. Upon fighting with Michael and his angels, the event already took place in which Satan and his angels were "defeated, and there



was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him" (Rev. 12:8-9). The war in heaven has already taken place.

"The salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (Rev. 12:10-11). The Accuser is gone; he can no longer prosecute you.

If it is not Satan casting judgment upon you, why is the table of the prosecution not empty? You made the decision to put your faith in Moses, believing that your works would prove you righteous according to the Law, yet he is now seated adjacent to you, serving as the prosecutor in this case rather than as the defense attorney. Quickly sifting through the Gospel of John, hoping that you may find some way to redeem yourself from this lethal blunder, you come across a man named Jesus who claims to be the human incarnation of God. While being persecuted by the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus warned them of the same problem you now face, saying, "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope" (John 5:45). All signs should have pointed you towards Jesus, yet somehow you failed to recognize them. Who else could the angel of the LORD be? Who else could give out the authority to rebuke Satan? Who else could have conquered the Accuser, leading to his being thrown out of heaven? For "how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man?

Then indeed he may plunder his house” (Matt. 12:29). Satan was a strong and formidable man, powerful enough to present accusations against Job as well as against Joshua, the high priest. Assuredly he wouldn’t give up his authority without a fight, but who is stronger than him? The blood of the Lamb is evidently the only thing strong enough to defeat him. By the power of the Lamb, the Accuser has been conquered, rebuked, silenced, and cast out of the heavenly courtroom altogether. Recognizing that Moses--now serving the role of the prosecution--is no longer a feasible option for defense, who better to call upon as your advocate than the Lamb himself?

Although the first problem has been solved, with the Accuser having been thrown down into Hell, Moses still has quite a strong case built up against you. Seeing as your good works cannot possibly cover for your transgressions, the case appears hopeless. Not knowing what to do, you decide to beg for mercy, just as Job did when he declared, “Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6). Pleading for a new defense attorney, you submit a request

for Jesus Christ, who is already in the courtroom and “seated at the right hand of Power” (Matt. 26:64). Luckily, he sees the wretched and pitiable state which you are in and agrees to inherit your case.

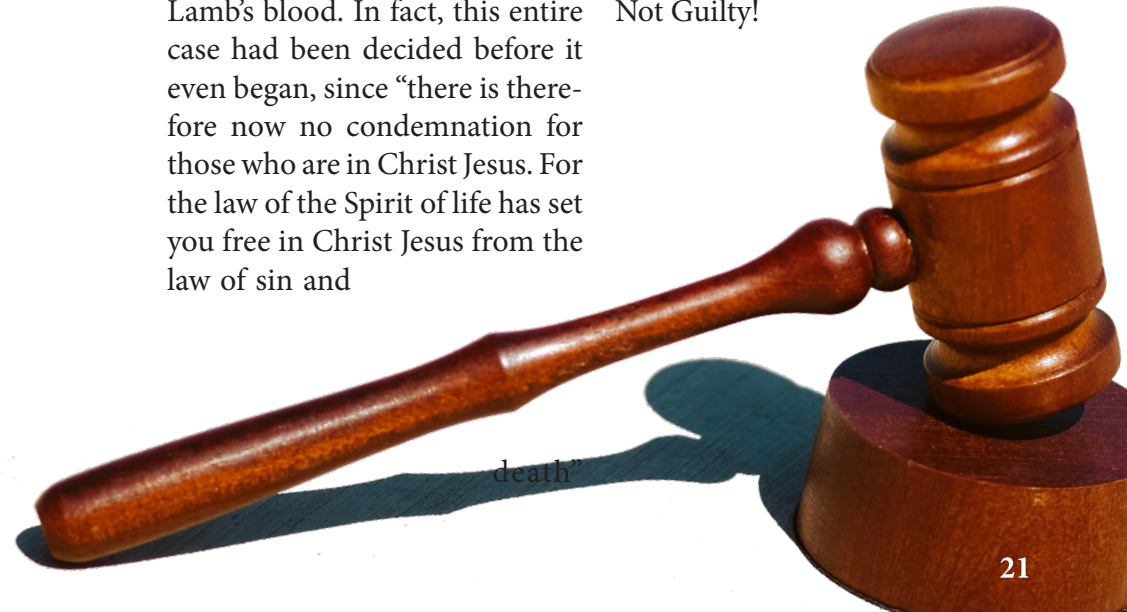
Numerous accusations are cast against you, far too many to count. Growing nervous, sweat begins beading down your face. How can you possibly be found innocent? The case is hopeless; you cannot win. A punishment must be served. Being sanguine and unwilling to concede, you recall glancing through a document which said that “if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2). But how could he possibly win this case? The prosecution is simply too strong! Following the conclusion of the arraignment, while you are feeling despondent and beginning to accept the inevitability of defeat, your lawyer provides the following line of defense: ‘Your honor, these sins have already been punished. I paid the penalty on the cross and it would be unjust to penalize the same offense twice.’ The charges are

dropped. Just as you are about to rejoice, you remember that your garments must still be cleansed before you can be deemed worthy of entering heaven. Once again you ponder, how can this be done?

Still, your wise attorney has the answer. It seems counterintuitive, but you resolve to trust in him nonetheless; after all, he’s never lost a case. What your lawyer does is unequivocally incredible. Despite being covered in stains which even the strongest of bleaches could not remove, Jesus has taken your “robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14). Both criteria, silencing the accusations of the prosecution and cleansing your garments, were accomplished simultaneously by the Lamb’s blood. In fact, this entire case had been decided before it even began, since “there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and

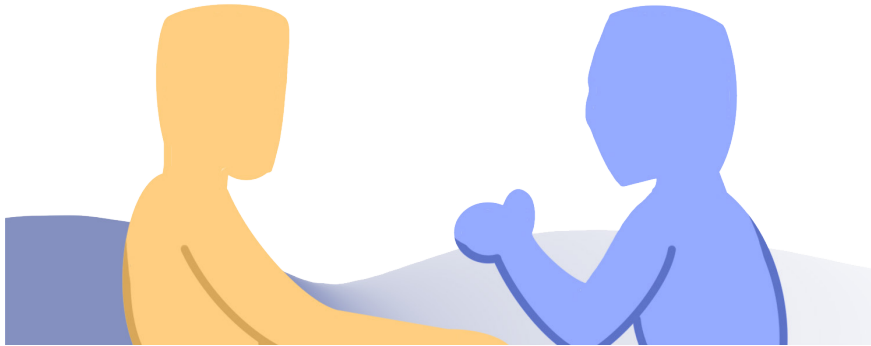
(Rom. 8:1-2). It all makes sense now. Upon invoking the name of Christ, you were not even being held under the law of sin, which leads to death, the one for which you meticulously prepared a defense. Condemnation can no longer be cast upon you who have put your faith in Christ Jesus to serve as your defense attorney.

How is it that he has never lost a case though? Why, he said himself that “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18). At this you can do nothing but marvel, kneel, and offer your praises before him. For to the Lord “every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance” (Isa. 45:23). The jury of one has convened and their final verdict is in: Not Guilty!



Understanding the Other Side

By Courtland Hare



The most important part of the Christian faith is faith itself. Theology and church history are important, but without faith they are merely fields of study. After all, faith in Christ is what saves us (Ephesians 2:8).

When I came to an elite university, I expected that practicing my faith publicly would invite people to challenge me. I am always open to a good discussion, and it's this openness that has attracted a number of atheist and agnostic people. Some are opponents of Christianity who seek to dismantle my beliefs and explain why accepting "science" is more

noble. Others simply want to understand my reasoning.

Regardless, these discussions tend to follow a typical script. After having many of these conversations, I have found that it is often better to set aside my personal experiences and testimony and instead try to put myself in the other person's shoes. I attempt to understand their desire for proof and their acceptance of contemporary worldviews. In this essay, I will examine the most common questions I receive and provide answers that tend to resonate with non-believers.

How Did We All Begin?



The first question an atheist or agnostic person usually asks is something along the lines of how everything began. Typically, this question is followed by an explanation of natural processes and a reference to the Big Bang theory as the origin of the universe. This is often used to suggest that religion is outdated because we now have logical explanations.

I certainly agree that science effectively explains many happenings in the world. However, I often remind people that it was actually a Catholic priest who introduced the Big Bang theory in 1931. Many people are surprised to learn this.

Then I ask a few questions: What caused the Big Bang? How did time begin? And when it comes to living things, how did the first single-celled organism come to be? Furthermore, how did a single-celled organism become a multicellular organism? These questions about the creation of

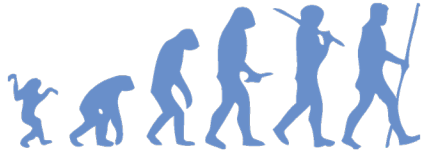
the world and of humanity are still unanswered by science.

This exchange often affirms agnostic individuals in their curiosity and sometimes leads atheists to consider the possibility that something beyond us may have caused these events. Science can be seen as the beautiful explanation of God's work. Imagine that humanity left Earth and a new group of humans arrived thousands of years later. They might discover complex AI robots. These humans would likely determine that the robots exist because of computer code—just as we have determined that living things exist because of DNA. They would also see earlier versions of AI systems and computers that improved over time, just as we see fossil records of creatures less suited for their environments than those living today. But then an obvious question would arise: Who coded the computers? The people who lived before them of course. Likewise, what created human DNA? Something before us.

Was it the Christian God? Perhaps. But at the very least, we can often agree that it was something. From there, we can begin

to dive deeper.

What About Evolution?



Another question that almost always arises is: “What about evolution?” Based on carbon dating and transitional fossils, it seems clear that animals have evolved over time. But the Bible says that God created them.

This is actually my favorite question to discuss because it was something I personally struggled with. I remember studying biology while preparing for my Confirmation. At the time, I felt—as many people do today—that evolution and the Genesis account of creation were mutually exclusive.

A few years later, I decided to read Genesis more closely. To my surprise, the order of creation began to make more sense to me. Biblically, the animals of the sea came first, followed by creatures of the sky, then animals of the land, and finally humans. Interestingly, this mirrors the general

order described by evolutionary theory.

Additionally, the serpent in the Garden of Eden was cursed by God, losing its legs and being forced to slither on its stomach. According to evolutionary biology, snakes did in fact once have legs. How would the writers of Genesis have known this thousands of years ago? Were they aware of transitional fossils deep in the sediment that would later help support this idea? When explained at a high level, the general framework of evolution is surprisingly compatible with the order of creation in Genesis. If anything, this can be seen as affirming the truth of Genesis rather than contradicting it.

Why Would a Just God Allow So Much Suffering?



At this point, someone might respond: “Your arguments make some sense, but why would a loving and just God allow so

much suffering?” This question has long challenged Christians and often gives critics of Christianity the upper hand because it is difficult to navigate. When asked this question, I usually respond with another question: Do you know the purpose of our life on Earth? Most people do not have an answer.

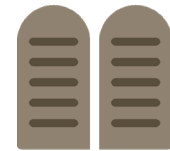
From a Christian perspective, the purpose of life on Earth is to choose whether we want to spend eternity with God or separate from Him—heaven or hell. Before the world was created, angels lived in communion with God in heaven. That is, until the story of Lucifer and his pride. Lucifer desired to be greater than God and rebelled against Him. Heaven is a place of perfection. To maintain this perfection, the citizens of heaven must be in communion with God, unlike Lucifer. To ensure this, we on earth must use our free will to choose God, despite giving into our temptations that lead us away from him.

In this difficult world—one that Scripture tells us would contain suffering (Genesis 3:17–19)—we are faced with temptations and struggles. Choosing Christ despite these temptations demon-

strates that we truly desire God. If we choose God in hardship, we will certainly choose Him in paradise (1 Peter 1:6–7).

Even on a secular level, without variability or the unknown, what would life be? It is not exclusively religious to say that without bad experiences we would not understand what good truly is. If you were designing a world where choices had to be made and emotions existed, would everything be predictable?

What About God’s Rules? Aren’t They Unjust?



In my experience, what most fuels anti-Christian sentiment comes down to three things:

1. People justifying wrongdoing in the name of Scripture.
 2. Misunderstandings about Old Testament versus New Testament laws.
 3. God’s commands conflicting with human desires.
- First, there have certainly been

corrupt members of the Church who acted selfishly or abusively. That is not of God, and Scripture clearly condemns such behavior. Christianity is following Jesus. For example, historically some used the narrative of Noah cursing his grandson, Canaan, to a life of servitude to argue that certain groups were divinely predestined for slavery (Genesis 9:25). This was able to justify oppression and slavery within societies. However, Jesus directly countered such hierarchies by commanding his followers to love others as he loved them, establishing a standard of radical equality that makes the ownership of another person impossible (John 13:34)

Second, people often ask why Christians eat pork or point out that people were once stoned for certain transgressions. I explain that this reflects a misunderstanding of Christianity. I educate them about the New Covenant, and share John 8:7 (NCB). “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” The Old Covenant included the ten commandments and 600 more rules, strictly and formally telling Jews how to live righteously. The New Covenant is

Jesus, offering salvation as a free gift through faith, rather than a reward for following a checklist of rules. This is why Christians are no longer bound by the civil or ceremonial laws of the Old Testament (Hebrews 8:13). So, when many non-Christians pull rules they deem “unjust” from the old testament, they are simply misunderstanding the theology.

Third—and perhaps most importantly—many people become frustrated because the Bible condemns behaviors that bring pleasure.

Personally, I find it extremely difficult to be a good Christian, and I make mistakes constantly. If I had it my way, I would make following God easier and perhaps add some theology permitting things I enjoy.

But ultimately, whether we agree with God or not has nothing to do with whether He exists. If God truly exists, whether or not we personally agree with His commands does not change their truth. If God is real, then what He says is real, and we must follow Him.

As children, we often could not

understand why a reasonable bedtime was good for us. It conflicted with our desires, yet it was for our benefit. As adults, we enjoy the freedom to make our own choices, especially when those choices seem harmless. But God possesses infinitely greater knowledge than we do, making his commands infinitely more informed than our reason. Just because we disagree with His commands does not mean He does not exist.

Conclusion

A famous quote by an unknown source: “For those who believe no explanation is necessary. For those who don’t believe, no explanation is possible.”

The remarkable thing about faith is that Christianity cannot be proven with absolute certainty

on paper—nor can it be definitively disproven. Yet believers often feel in their hearts that it is completely true.

Many nonbelievers will accept nothing less than absolute proof. For this reason, I have learned to set aside my personal experiences with Christ and my testimony when engaging in discussion. Instead, I try to understand the perspective of the other person.

I ask myself: through their experiences and their values, how might they begin to understand faith in Christ? I encourage any reader discerning belief to first acknowledge the need for a creator. This world is too beautiful and complex for it to exist without design. I then encourage you to learn about Christ and his prophecies. If you let him in, you may be pleasantly surprised.

**“For those who believe,
no explanation is necessary.**

**For those who don’t believe,
no explanation is possible.”**

Solace

By John Brownridge

I could tell something was wrong when I walked into the house. Mary greeted me with a smile, sitting with her legs crossed in my office chair beside the couch. “Hi, honey, how was your day?” She spoke slower than usual.

“It was good. You should have heard what Basil was on about today...” I sat next to her and told her about Basil’s latest ramblings as I racked my brain to decipher what I could have done wrong. It had been a long day — I had woken up too late to eat breakfast, so I had to accept my stomach’s grumblings until lunch time. Then I went out with some of the guys to Potbelly’s, where I was subjected to Basil’s latest theory on the identity of the antichrist. Even with a full stomach and two beers, I was exhausted. Still, I had to stay extra hours after the workday to plan my crew’s next project.

“Michael Jordan?” Mary said, chuckling. “The basketball player?” As she laughed along, she maintained eye contact with narrowed eyes and tilted eyebrows.

“Nah, he was talking about the actor. Something about Sinners being demonic, I guess.”

“Well, that’s Basil for you,” she said. “Anything else interesting happen today? How is your planning coming along?”

“It’s going,” I said with a shrug. “I think we’re going to need more guys whenever we start. The area is pretty large, and we’re going to have to get moving if we’re going to make the winter deadline. I keep asking—” Mary’s smile was waning. I wished that I had more time to piece it together. “I’m sorry, honey. Are you okay?”

“I was listening. Keep going.”

“I’ve yapped long enough. What’s bothering you?”

She shook her head softly. “I want you to finish.”

“There’s not much more to tell. My requests to expand the budget got denied.” She was holding back tears. I stood up and put my hand on her shoulder. “Seriously, though, are you okay?”

She took a breath before answering. “Do you remember how my side was hurting a couple of weeks ago?”

Ohh, I thought. “Your doctor’s appointment was today, wasn’t it?”

“It was.”

I paused. As her mouth began to quiver, I could feel my own tears welling. “Well, how was it?”

“I have cancer.”



There was no time to be tired in the weeks that followed. At first, I thought I could take some time off to support my fiancée, but the first round of chemotherapy was only halfway covered by insurance. I worked from sunrise until sunset and then came home to cook dinner and watch something on TV with Mary. We hadn’t gotten much time to watch the movies on her list before her diagnosis. Now I made sure to at least attempt to get through one every night. She never lasted longer than 45 minutes, anyway. After helping her to bed, I would research as much as I could about liver cancer. I kept a notebook of drugs, doctors, procedures, the progression of the disease, and any other information I could find. At a certain point, I felt like I was repeating notes, so I made a habit of looking for new research every day and bringing it up with our doctor at the beginning of each visit.

Apparently, the diagnosis had come too late; her liver began to deteriorate in the presence of the tumor, which evolved faster than our doctors had predicted. My heart rate refused to settle during my hours awake. As much as I tried to distract myself at work, approaching project deadlines did nothing for my nerves.

“You know,” Basil said one day, “you and Mary ought to come

to church sometime.”

“I don’t know, man,” I said. Mary and I were both vaguely Christian, but we each had reason to be distant from church life. “I’m not sure we really need some guy telling us to blame the devil for our problems.”

“I guess not,” said Bazil. “For me, blaming the devil has always been easier.”

“Is your church the one that fills your head with stories about the Obamas turning into lizards?”

“Nah, man, I figured that one out myself.” We shared a laugh briefly. “Seriously, though. Our pastor is great, and he gives good advice. I’m sure you’ll like him.”

“I’ll think about it,” I said, looking back at my laptop screen. “Now get back to the crew. Your break is not for another 20 minutes.”

“Yes, sir,” he said with a goofy smile.

“How would you feel about going to church?” Mary said a couple of days later, while we were watching Black Panther.

“You know Bazil said the same thing to me the other day.” Mary smiled, so I reminded her that he was the same guy who thinks lizard people roam the Earth.

“A broken clock is right twice a day,” she replied. “It’ll be good for us to reconnect with God, don’t you think?”

“It’s not like He went anywhere.”

“Yeah, you might be right,” she said with an exaggerated sigh. It was her trump card; now there was no use for my protest. We both knew that I would grant her request.

Mary’s spirits recovered soon after her diagnosis. After the two weeks, she got back to joking around. She was given paid time off as soon as she told her lab director, which gave her time to dedicate to her neglected hobbies. In the time I’ve spent working, she’s become a master potter, guitarist, and has recently begun writing poetry. Even though her condition was getting worse, she seemed to grow in acceptance. It was either that, or she was hiding it from me. We rarely talked about the cancer, even distracting ourselves with new music reactions on the way to and from the doctor’s office. When she graduated to the wig stage of chemo, I shaved my hair with her and withstood frequent jabs from her about the shape of my head. If someone didn’t know she was sick, they might have thought

that her life had taken a positive turn.

I was glad she was doing well, because I couldn’t stop myself from becoming sour. I got snappier with my crew at work and with the doctors at appointments. The added hours of work didn’t do enough to cover our bills. I hoped at first that if I could be on top of my research and find the best doctors, and make as much money as humanly possible, that I could bend the cancer to my will. Each ultrasound proved me more wrong. When I spent time with Mary at the end of the day, my head pounded as I imagined a future without her. Every time I said goodbye to her in the morning, a pain carved deeper into my chest, and it never went away.

Mary bought new dresses to wear to church. I decided to use up an extra pair of work clothes. The first time we went, we sat with Bazil and his wife. The pastor preached a sermon on the book of Job, a story I remembered vaguely from my childhood. We liked it enough that we made a routine out of going. I could see Mary taking the lessons with her into her week, as she constantly sent reminders to me in quotes from the sermons. Eventually, we met the pastors and told them about our situation. Mary convinced me to accept donations from the congregation, which helped with our expenses more than we expected. We began to incorporate nightly prayers into our daily routines, and recently, reading and discussing Bible verses on our own. I guessed that I was finally living that good Christian lifestyle that my father was always telling me about.

There came a time when Mary was too weak to attend any services. We settled for the online services and allocated extra time for our prayers. Now I had to take time off. When she had the energy, she would write poetry, but much of the time she spent asleep. She was now somewhere on a long list of donor recipients for a new liver.

Lord, I said one night, holding her hand in a prayer, tell me what I need to do so that Mary can be healed. I’ve worked as hard as I can and gotten her the best care money can buy. I have come to you in repentance and remained faithful. We’ve done everything correctly, and she’s still sick! What do I need to do to get her the liver that she needs? Please, Lord! I’ve done everything I can do, yet I feel powerless! With the last line came a realization. In the story of Job, God appears with a great expression of his power. In his great power, he restores Job’s fortunes because Job has remained faithful. *Lord!* I fell to my

knees and raised my hands to the sky. *I renounce control over Mary's health to you. In your great transcendence, grant Mary life. I am powerless because you have all of the power.* I felt the pain that burned through my chest dissipate as I closed the prayer. My heart slowed to its normal place, and my headache vanished.

It all came back after she passed away. First, my anger was with God, then with myself for ever thinking that it would turn out okay. The Christian thing just never seemed to work.

"Why don't you come to church again?" Basil asked. In the middle of winter, we were finally on the last day of construction. We sat, drinking beers on the roof of the apartment across from our job site. Our completed building stood out at the end of the block, with its bright red bricks and freshly planted lawn. It was the first step in an effort to revitalize the neighborhood, to be followed by significant work on the surrounding structures. As much work as I put in, I preferred to look at the older buildings. It was pretty, but it was lifeless and empty.

"I only went because of Mary."

"Pastor Ricky has been asking about you, you know. He wants to help."

"What can he do?"

Basil shrugged. "Pray over you, I guess."

"I really don't think the whole prayer thing works, man."

"You might be right," said Basil. "I really wanted to see Michael B. go home without an Oscar."

I mustered a laugh. "I just don't understand how you can believe in a God with so much power, that leaves us to suffer."

"I mean, he suffered too, right? Jesus prayed for God to pass his cup."

I



transferred my gaze to the people on the street. An old man hobbled onto the steps of a next-door building. I remembered talking to him when my team cut a power line at the beginning of January. When I asked if he needed anything, he only requested prayer. "I have my people to go through it with," he had said, nodding towards his neighbors who were yelling at my employees down the road.

"How do you feel now that she's gone?"

At the end of her life, Mary rarely prayed for her own deliverance. Instead, she thanked God for the good in her life and asked for strength in His presence. She would tell me to lighten up after prayers, that they canceled out the happy ones. I shared her solace once, on her deathbed, when it was too late for her to appreciate. I felt a remnant from it now as I thought of Christ's suffering. "I felt empty."

"Felt?"

"I don't know anymore."

Basil stood up and offered me his hand. "I gotta get going," he said. "Take care of yourself, man."

"Alright then," I said, completing the dap. It was easy to decipher what Mary would want me to say. "I'll see you on Sunday."



The Law of Man VS The Law of God

By *Caedmon R.T. Sethupathy*



In Romans 13, the Apostle Paul writes extensively on the relationship between earthly rulers and their subjects. At first glance Paul is quite supportive of kingly authority, stating “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established” (NIV, Rom 13:1). A surface-level reading would suggest that Paul advocates for Christians to bend the knee to despots, no matter the

gross immorality of their actions. Paul builds on the above injunction by concluding that “Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities...as a matter of conscience,” (Rom 13:5) which appears to imply that there is a moral imperative to follow, obey, and respect our political leaders.

Such a literal interpretation is appealing in its simplicity, but begs the question: What are we to do if the authority of man and

that of God is in conflict? If all earthly rulers have truly been established by God, then one of several possibilities must be true: Either all earthly rulers are in perfect alignment with God, God makes a mistake in accidentally selecting immoral human leaders, or God knowingly establishes immoral leaders and supports their reign. The first possibility is clearly implausible since Nero (Roman Emperor at the time of Paul’s writing) actively persecuted Christians, going so far as burning believers at the stake and sacrificing them to wild animals in gladiatorial amphitheaters. The mass slaughter of his worshippers seems highly unlikely to have been God’s preference and thus it is difficult to argue that worldly rulers are always in perfect moral alignment with the divine.

There have been a myriad of other events throughout human history (e.g. the Holocaust) whose guiding principles were antithetical to the Gospel. We cannot accept the suggestion that Hitler operated according to God’s wishes, for then we would have to discard the notion of an omnibenevolent deity. Therefore, human rulers must be fallible

and thus capable of falling out of step with God.

The second possibility outlined above (God makes a mistake) seems similarly flawed. If God were to make a mistake then he would no longer be perfect, thereby violating the biblical claim that “As for God, his way is perfect” (2 Sam 22:31). Since God must be without fault, he cannot mistakenly select rulers only to later realize their moral failings.

We are thus left with the third possibility. Perhaps God supports the reign of evil figures purposefully. This interpretation also leaves us with very difficult moral quandaries. We know God to be omnibenevolent, and the maintenance of a corrupt and/or sinful regime seems hardly the work of a sinless being. That said, all humans are filled with sin and thus whoever God chooses as a leader must be erroneous and ungodly at times; even the great King David coveted a married woman and killed her husband (2 Samuel 11-12). Even so, this argument is still somewhat strained. If God chooses sinful human leaders out of necessity (given that all humans are sin-

ful), then we would expect him to select the most godly and devoted amongst us for public service. Unfortunately, the entirety of human history would suggest otherwise. It is difficult to imagine a less godly character than Nero, or for that matter, Mussolini, Pol Pot, Stalin, Hitler, etc... Many of history's strongest tyrants actively removed themselves from God's presence and commands. Consequently, it appears unlikely that God actively selects and upholds sinful regimes as a necessary evil since many regimes are led by deeply wicked individuals who could be easily replaced by more Godly alternatives.

For these reasons, I think it is implausible to suggest that the simple and "obvious" interpretation of Paul's message is correct. Christianity was barred by Roman law at the time and therefore if Paul were truly advising us to obey our worldly ruler in all cases, we would have to give up Christ. Instead, we should note the context of Paul's address. As the famed theologian N.T. Wright points out, "Christians, who were regarded as the scum of the earth in Rome at the time, must not get an additional reputation as trouble makers.

No good will come to the cause of the gospel by followers of Jesus being regarded as crazy dissidents." It therefore makes sense that Paul primarily discusses only more banal crimes such as tax evasion (Rom 13:6) without referring to the issues upon which Christians must take a moral stand. Paul often argues elsewhere in his letters for Christian resistance to the Roman sta-

**“Christians,
who were regarded
as scum of the earth
in Rome at the time,
must not get an
additional reputation
as troublemakers.”**

tus quo (Rom 12:2, 2 Thess 1:4-5, 2 Tim 3:12), but in this isolated instance, he instead chooses to focus on the importance of obeying all reasonable laws so that Christians are not perceived as uniformly quarrelsome against authority. Acquiescing to Roman authority on most subjects had the added benefit of making Christian dissent more surprising and news-worthy, which would undoubtedly increase the

budding religion's profile and aid in evangelism.

Additionally, Paul claims that "The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Rom 13:1). The above passage appears to be a redundant emphasis of the passage quoted at the beginning of this essay, which begs the question: why does Paul insert this statement at all? While quite speculative, I conjecture that it may be possible to interpret Paul's statement to mean that if an authority exists, then it must have been established by God. But this is not necessarily equivalent to the statement that all rulers are established by God. Possibly, not all human authorities "exist" in any real sense, and their authority is a sham since it is not rooted in God. Then, every authority which exists must be God-ordained, but many human leaders may not be genuine authorities at all, but charlatans who claim power without any divine mandate. Even if this interpretation is correct, Christians should still of course follow all laws compatible with our values and morals. However, if the government is not divinely ordained, then, potentially, it has no real authority and so any immoral laws they prescribe cannot

be binding for Christians.

Whatever Paul's intention in Romans 13, it is clear that the surface-level literal interpretation cannot be accurate. Romans 13 applies to our politics today more than ever. Major political candidates and public servants present themselves as infallible authorities who merit the citizenry's blind faith. Such leaders must be opposed by ethical civil disobedience, just as Christians refused to deny their God even unto Roman execution. But we as Christians are simultaneously called to pick our battles wisely. Fighting over every small political issue with which we hold some disagreement, or worse yet, swinging towards total anarchy, cheapens the moments when we do choose to disobey worldly rulers. We are called to contribute to our nation as productive citizens, spreading the good news (Matt 28:16-20), paying taxes, and generally following the law. But, if man's law ever contradicts that of God, we are to side with our Savior rather than the fallible human despots and tyrants who rise to public office.

False Grounds of Authority under God's Sovereignty

By Nikko Wheeler

Throughout history, thinkers have examined the link between God and authority. For example, in the ancient East, emperors ruled under the “Mandate of Heaven”—Heaven only approved their reign if they were virtuous and just. In contrast, more recently in the West, monarchs claimed the “Divine Right of Kings,” believing their authority came directly from God and that they were accountable only to Him. However, neither perspective on the relationship between God and authority is correct. Instead, God’s appointment of an individual to authority is not earned by virtue or works, nor is the position intended to be held with free rein. Rather, the Bible and biblical theologians challenge both traditional views and assert

that God appoints all governing authorities in his sovereignty, according to his justice and mercy.

To clarify how biblical texts challenge these traditional perspectives, consider the Apostle Paul’s writings, which undermine the idea of the “Mandate of Heaven.” For example, in his letter to the church in Rome, Paul notes that “there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Rom. 13:1–2, ESV here and after). This principle is further illustrated by an event detailed in the Gospel of John. After being arrested, questioned, and tortured, Jesus is brought back before Pontius Pilate for further questioning. After Jesus remains silent, Pilate responds: “You will not speak to me? Do



Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests at the Temple of Heaven, Beijing

you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.” (John 19:10–11)

Like Paul, Jesus affirms that God appoints all governing authorities, disproving the idea that authority is earned. With that authority, Pilate falsely indicts, persecutes, and ultimately crucifies Jesus—the perfect, blameless Son of God.

Pilate’s treatment of Jesus further exemplifies that, contrary to the “Divine Right of Kings,”

rulers can and do err against not only God but also their subject. In other words being appointed by God is not *carte blanche* for rulers. To expand on this, Irenæus later clarifies that God appoints rulers and adapts them in *Against Heresies*:

“... for those men who are at the time placed under their government. Some of these [rulers] are given for the correction and the benefit of their subjects, and for the preservation of justice; but others, for the purposes of fear and punishment and rebuke: others, as [the subjects] deserve it, are for deception, disgrace, and pride; while the just judgment of God, as I have observed already, passes equally upon all.” (Book V, Chapter XXIV)

So, while God appoints authority in his sovereignty, he appoints good rulers in mercy and bad rulers in justice. Good rulers are never earned; wicked rulers are ultimately deserved.

Yet in his grace, God does not leave us with only wicked rulers. Because Jesus obeyed God’s will and submitted even to such rulers, God vindicated his perfection by raising him from the dead. Therefore, as Paul notes of



*The coronation of
Charles VII of France*

Jesus in his letter to the Philip-
pians:

“God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:8–11).

However, Paul is merely para-
phrasing Jesus’s teaching about
himself. Jesus declared his exal-

tation as the ultimate authority
over everything after his resur-
rection, stating and command-
ing of his followers:

“All authority in heaven and on
earth has been given to me. Go
therefore and make disciples of
all nations, baptizing them in
the name of the Father and of
the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
teaching them to observe all that
I have commanded you. And
behold, I am with you always,
to the end of the age” (Matthew
28:18-20).

Given that we live almost 2,000
years after Jesus made this state-
ment—two millennia filled with
the rise and fall of empires, great
revolutions, and two world wars,
with a third seemingly on the
brink—it is understandable not
to feel like our perfectly good
king Jesus is in charge. He is,
after all, “at the right hand of
God” (1 Peter 3:22) until he re-
turns. Yet, we would do well to
remember that he is there “with
angels, authorities, and powers
having been subjected to him” (1
Peter 3:22). Thus, he continues
to reign and influence the world,
even when not visibly present.
In light of Jesus’s reign, as we
continue to deal with terrible

regimes, raging tyrants, and bad
leaders in positions of authority,
let us not use the “Mandate of
Heaven” as an excuse to revolt
or the “Divine Right of Kings”
as a reason to seek power for
ourselves. Instead, let us pray to
God: acknowledging his sover-
eignty, petitioning for justice un-
der wicked rulers, and pleading
for mercy in the appointment
of good ones. Let us encourage
those inclined toward right rule
to become godly leaders, looking
to the Bible as their teacher:

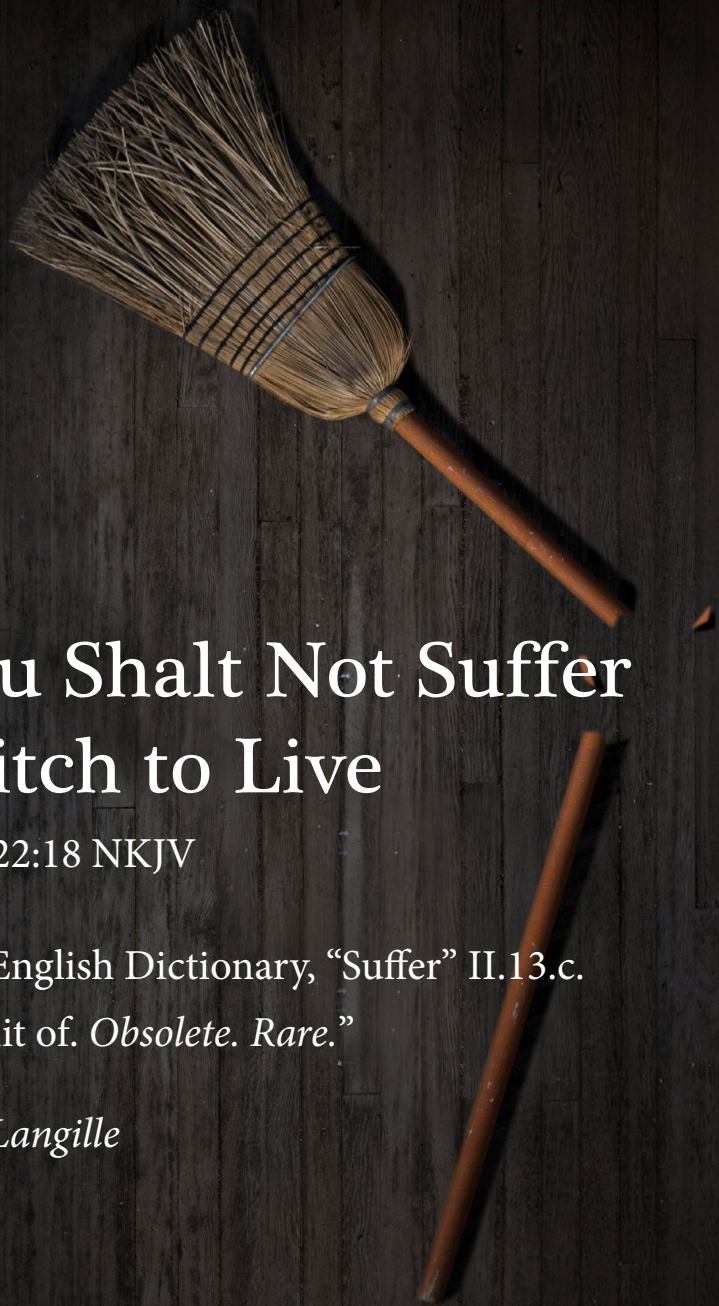
“that he may learn to fear the
Lord his God by keeping all the
words of this law and these stat-
utes, and doing them, that his
heart may not be lifted up above
his brothers, and that he may not
turn aside from the command-
ment, either to the right hand

or to the left.” (Deuteronomy
17:19–20)

Let us, then, commit ourselves
to imitating Jesus’s leadership,
actively preparing for his return,
and anticipating with hope the
day when he will reign as the
world’s One True King of kings
and Lord of lords (Revelation
19:16). Until that day, may we
serve faithfully, trust in his sov-
ereignty, and long for his perfect
justice and mercy to be fully re-
vealed.

**“that he may learn to fear the Lord
his God by keeping all the words of
this law and these statutes,
and doing them,”**

from Deuteronomy 17:19 ESV



Thou Shalt Not Suffer a Witch to Live

Exodus 22:18 NKJV

Oxford English Dictionary, “Suffer” II.13.c.

“To admit of. *Obsolete. Rare.*”

By *Kati Langille*

You should not admit a witch to live. That is Exodus 22:18. It is the verse by which the Salem witch trials were carried out in 1692 in Salem Village. It is the verse by which the judges of the Court of Oyer and Terminer justified their extreme tactics, pressing one man, Giles Corey, to death because he refused to suffer the sovereignty of the court. Pressing is a torture tactic in which a person is placed underneath an increasingly heavy load, usually with large stones, until they admit of something. At the time, there was no legal statute which allowed torture in Salem Village. Corey died by pressing because he knew if he admitted the sovereignty of the court, he would be tried and condemned. He could not suffer that, but he could suffer pressing.

In thinking about Biblical Authority, I find my mind wandering to the courts of America, and their reading of the law, oftentimes by the letter and often in service of the most extreme results. This was true in 1600s Salem and 1800s Missouri and is true in modern Los Angeles. What does this authority reflect in us as a nation and what does it say about us that we follow the letter of the law so vigorously?

The question I hope to examine in this essay is whether the Levitical Law is best served by following it to the letter and whether Christ’s fulfillment of the Law is a form of reading the law by the spirit and not the letter.

The Levitical Law is a vast expanse of “do’s” and “do not’s” from the book of Leviticus, the third book of the Old Testament in the Bible. It was delivered from God to the Israelite people via Moses as he organized Israelite society after their Exodus out of Egypt. It includes, but is not limited to, descriptions of how and what to sacrifice for different sins, prohibitions against certain foods, instructions for marriage and relationships, guidance against the mixing of fabrics, rules for carrying out justice against murderers and thieves, and so much more. It is a fairly comprehensive list of laws, especially in terms of the section on offerings and atonement. Chapters 1-7 outline all of the different kinds of offerings, their content, their purposes, and whether or not they can be consumed afterwards and by whom they can be consumed. There are a lot of details, but it was vital that for the people to be cleansed of wrongdoing, the priests had to carry out these

offerings correctly, perfectly in alignment with these laws. This was so much so true that there is even a part of the law that addresses overcompensating, just in case. Leviticus 5:17-19, in the section of the Trespass Offering, reads: "If a person sins, and commits any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord, though he does not know it, yet he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity. And he shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish from the flock, with your valuation, as a trespass offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him regarding his ignorance in which he erred and did not know it, and it shall be forgiven him. It is a trespass offering; he has certainly trespassed against

The stakes of being a witch were high to a society because one witch could undo a village's salvation.

the Lord." Even if someone was unsure as to whether they had sinned, lest they have to bear the brunt of their action, they ought to bring a sacrifice to the priests and receive atonement. This is

the significance of and the risk of not following the law.

In Salem, following the letter of the law led to the torture of Corey by a court of whose authority he had not suffered the existence. Salem's court of Oyer and Terminer, often cited as an extreme example of fervid Biblical rigidity, believed they followed the Bible to the letter. However, the real issue is not whether the witch should be admitted life, but whether one can be proved a witch at all. In the case of Salem proofs of witchery were based not in religious dogma but in prejudice. The Hammer of Witches, a treatise on witchcraft, was a manifesto against women. The law of Exodus 22:18 was too important to mess up. One was a witch until proven otherwise, lest the grave mistake be made of allowing someone to live. It was this law and order ideology in which black and white were the only two extremes and good versus evil was the stakes of every decision that led to the Salem Witch Trials.

The Hammer of Witches takes an overall negative view of women. It cites Ecc. 25:22-23: "There is no head worse than the head of a snake, and there is no anger

surpassing the anger of a woman. It will be more pleasing to stay with a lion and a serpent than to live with an evil woman." One of the reasons for the evil of women makes me laugh. It is that the tongue, a churchman, and a woman cannot be lukewarm. They are either highly evil or

Biblical authority is often approached with this mindset: the grave mistake, as we see it, would be a lack of punishment rather than a lack of grace.

highly good. This opinion came from doctors at the time, people with knowledge and authority and learning. Since a woman has this intemperant nature, if she is possessed by a demonic spirit, she is super bad, not just regular bad. Women had the potential to be associated with the devil and eternally damned and capable of damning others through their corruptible natures. The stakes of being a witch were high to a society because one witch could undo a village's salvation. Women are not totally bad though. Heinrich mentions Deborah,

Judith, and Esther as examples of good women, and cites Ecclesiastes 26:1: "The husband of a good woman is blessed. For the number of his years is double." The Hammer of Witches uses scripture to back itself up. It takes quotes from many books of the Bible and uses theologians to prove that women are prone to extreme evil. It is dangerous to let that evil lie. According to Heinrich and theologians like Aquinas, Women are shaped towards faithlessness. Being made of Adam's curved rib, they are naturally bent and twisted. They are like children and have reasoning that is small and petty. The word femina, female, is "fe," "minus," or less faithful. The Bible and theological thought both surround Heinrich's argument, but do not permeate it. Nevertheless, chances cannot be taken when it comes to following God and avoiding sin. If women seem more evil, it is safer to assume they are. Biblical authority is often approached with this mindset: the grave mistake, as we see it, would be a lack of punishment rather than a lack of grace.

American history is littered with a lack of grace. This is true not just in Puritan New England, but in the Midwest of the 19th cen-

tury. Our history is one of not only following the letter of laws too closely, but following the letter of unjust laws. It is not interesting to write that slavery was a grave and inhumane injustice. However, what is interesting is the way that laws so closely enforced the practice. Sometimes to be inhumane is the law and what people fear is the presence of grace and true justice. During the 19th century, police forces patrolled Black Americans and checked their papers, even

inspections of plantations. Being awake at night on a plantation was reason enough for a slave to be whipped by one of these policemen. It was a super important job as these counties lived in terror of insurrection. Even though there was little to do during a patrol shift, patrolers would still find a way to occupy themselves at the expense of any enslaved person. The law's letter here made it apparent that the worst outcome would be an uprising of Black Americans,

Grace has gone missing.

free Black Americans, to ensure the order of society. In Missouri, slave hunters were given this office. Who was and was not a citizen or a person according to the letter of the law was closely policed. Missourians appointed slave hunters by the county. They could serve multiple consecutive terms, so those with a desire to perform the job or those desperate enough for the small wages it paid could have easy access to prolonged, fairly unbridled power. It was their job to travel the country and make surprise

enslaved or free. For this reason, Black Americans were, and many would argue still are, policed and patrolled tightly without any cause. This seems to me to be another type of witch hunt, one more lasting in its effects, and yet not dissimilar to Salem. It was motivated by a fear of not following the law, and there was no justice in the law or grace or mercy in its application.

Grace has gone missing. More than 170 citizens of the United States were detained in 2025

due to involvement in protests or their presence at ICE raids. Justice Brett Kavanaugh of California told Los Angeles citizens that "If the officers learn that the individual they stopped is a U.S. citizen or otherwise lawfully in the United States...they promptly let the individual go." At least 170 citizens were arrested by ICE in the first 9 months of Trump's second term. ICE agents may detain those they suspect of having entered the United States illegally. They cannot detain citizens.

was thrown to the ground on her way to work. She was told she interfered with the arrest of an "illegal immigrant," that her arm hit an ICE agent in the face. She says that in the "scene" where the ICE agents were, "they were ready to attack and chase." I wonder about the interpretation of the letter of American law in comparison with how Christ interpreted the Levitical law. Was it within the letter of that law that Christ could come as a scapegoat for all of the sinners? It may have



50 out of the 170 held were Latinx. Andrea Velez, detained in Los Angeles after an accusation that she assaulted an ICE agent, was released. Before her release, however, she went an entire day without receiving water. She spent two days in a detention center. This is not the experience of every one of the 170, but it is Andrea's experience. When arrested, she asked the agent for his ID, his badge number, and if he had a warrant. He told her she did not need to know those things. Velez is a citizen who

been in the spirit of the sacrificial offerings of Leviticus, but it certainly is not there in direct quotes. Without that alternate interpretation of the law, as some today might see it, there would be no hope for man.

Christ in many ways is like Giles Corey. He died rather than allow a system that condemns all. He interpreted the law in spirit, through applicable grace. Christ, condemned by one court, vindicated all of those held under the Levitical law of the Old Testa-

ment. Calling the crucifixion a deviation from the law might be sacrilege. Paul calls it a fulfillment of the law in Galatians 5:6. He is writing to the Galatians about their following of the Levitical Law, warning them that they can never fulfill it fully. He cautions them, lest they begin to think that they can fully justify themselves through adhering to good and evil binaries, always choosing good and thereby choosing their salvation, earning their salvation, for themselves. He writes that “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Galatians 5:14, NKJV). By this he means that all of the laws that the Jewish people used to adhere to so closely cannot be superseded by the simplicity of the spirit of those laws which culminated in Christ’s teaching and sacrifice. Nothing could be greater than what Christ did, to die for his creation, and by doing this he loved his neighbor as, better than, himself. No amount of circumcision or animal sacrifice will ever fulfill the law in the way that Christ did. No act of human atonement, no matter how within the boundaries of the law it is will do any longer. Christ, in the spirit of the law, perfects the law, and every other human attempt

will fall short.

In Acts, when Paul tells of his conversion story to the crowds and masses of Jerusalem, he speaks about the mercy and grace that he was shown by Ananias, a man who was called by God to help Paul when he was still Saul, an enemy to someone like Ananias who was a practicing follower of the Lord. Acts 22:6-21 is Paul’s account to the people of his conversion and redemption. He speaks highly of Ananias, calling him “a devout man according to the law,” but we know that Ananias was no longer following the law so strictly because he was a follower of Christ. Here, after Paul’s conversion, he refers to the law, the Levitical law I have discussed, as something which is followed, even by someone like Ananias who no longer performs the acts of ritual sacrifice and atonement that once would have been required of him in Jewish society (Acts 22:12 NKJV). Furthermore, Ananias, though he knew that Paul had done great wrong and evil to those whom he viewed as his family in the Lord, still healed Paul. He, in the Old Testament sense of the word, would have had the just right to take retribution for what Paul had done, but he instead “said to

me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’” and healed Paul through the working of the Spirit (Acts 22:13 NKJV). Paul learns the meaning of the law first hand and learns that it is only fulfilled in Christ, through grace, the true spirit of the law.

The examples outlined in this essay are far from exhaustive and far from totalizing. I cannot give a comprehensive look at American legal policies throughout the entire 250 years of the country in one small paper. I think that my point remains, grace should

be sufficient for all of us because grace fulfills the spirit of the law in a way by-the-letter legalism never does. Perhaps a one-to-one shift, where every American law is fulfilled by Christ’s sacrifice makes little logistical sense. However, I think that the historical examples which I have chosen show the necessity of grace and the imperfection of the letter of the law, demonstrated most fully in Christ’s need to die for us all.



Argos

By Marco Conde

After untold years of toil, strife and
Pain, when the rightful true King at long last
Walked those stone steps, hiding his face, who saw
Through that disguise, past bowed back and well-worked
Hands? Through a disguise of divinity
Only Argos could see. Loyal hound in
Body and soul, for after all those years
Sitting on those steps, watching as others
Forgot, as others carried on, waiting
For a master known only a mere glimpse.
And yet from that glimpse, there he sat, upright,
At attention, as his King first left.

Moons passed, and Argos sat, straight-backed and proud.
Still in a world of movement, silent in
A torrent of noise, eyes horizon-bound
Watching for the day, when out from the shine
Where the sea meets sun, his master would burst.
Upright he stood, regal and eager, for
His King's return.

The other dogs ran, basking in their youth
Eyes darting to every thing that trembled
Under the sun. In vain they tried to coax
Argos, the King's hound, no longer a pup.
But move him they could not, for to that spot
His King cast a final gaze, and when He
Returned, there He would find him. Run and play?
How could he? When he knew not the hour of
His King's return.

Years would pass, and that dog would stay, there on
Those steps a young hound no more, but an old
Sickly cur no longer able to stand
Upright, so from there he lay, scorned and mocked.

For superior Man, in the years since
The King's departure, had forgotten Him.
They sneered, "He must be dead, yet this dog waits!
Poor creature, so lowly in mind he thinks
His King is still out there. How pitiful!"
They turn to one another and snicker.
"He still waits, on the authority of
A dead man, chained to those steps by his own
Feeble mind!"

And yet the dog waited, with simple mind
Of hope, that one day, on that horizon,
His King would return.

Years more passed, the last of that cur's strength gone
He had given it all, his youth, his prime
And his age, all to wait. His presence no
more brought any laughter for the people.
All they felt now was ire, at this gross
Creature, for so much time had passed, they had
No memory of that king. All they saw
Was a wretch: blind, sickly, and vile, a
Sore on the steps of that noble palace,
Whose Name they had forgotten.

Forgotten they had, for when that Beggar
Stepped on those steps, his air of filth akin
To that hound, no one else paid him any
Mind, other than to scorn him, and yet that
Hound, so mighty once and now so frail, turned
Up his nose, and with his frail, limp body
Wagged his tail. For though blind, no longer fit
to watch the shine, From that horizon he
Knew, in his heart, that his King had returned.

And it was as if his spirit cried out:
Nunc Dimittis, let thy depart, for as
That King laid his hand on the poor pup's head
And whispered, **"Thank you my beloved friend.
My good and faithful servant. Thank you for
Waiting,"** that pup's heart would finally rest.
And ever since, of all mankind and beast
no greater servant has there ever lived.

THE NICENE CREED

We believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of one being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
and to life in the world to come. Amen.





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