

**God as I see Him**

**By Alexander Josiah Moore**

## **The Forgotten Path to Prosperity**

I've been thinking a lot lately about why our country feels so fractured, why we can't seem to find common ground anymore, and why families are struggling to achieve what their grandparents took for granted. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/07/george-packer-four-americas/619012/>" This recent Atlantic article about American fragmentation got me thinking about the deeper roots of our division, and I believe the answer lies in what we've forgotten about our own history.

Here's what really gets me: we actually figured this out before. After World War II, America built the most prosperous middle class in human history. We didn't do it by cutting taxes on the wealthy or hoping prosperity would "trickle down." We did the exact opposite. From the 1940s through the 1970s, <https://publicintegrity.org/inequality-poverty-opportunity/taxes/unequal-burden/how-four-decades-of-tax-cuts-fueled-inequality/> the top marginal tax rate was between 70-94%, and those high taxes didn't destroy our economy, they funded the infrastructure, schools, universities, and institutions that made broad-based prosperity possible.

Think about what America built during this era: the Interstate Highway System, world-class universities, research institutions that put a man on the moon, public hospitals, and communities where <https://www.newtraderu.com/2024/05/15/what-happened-to-the-middle-class-prosperity-of-the-1950s/> a single income could support a family, buy a home, send kids to college, and retire with dignity. By 1960, the average American had a standard of living three times higher than the average Briton. This wasn't socialism, it was capitalism with guardrails that ensured prosperity was shared

But something changed in the 1980s. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-we-learned-from-reagans-tax-cuts/> Reagan's tax cuts dropped the top rate from 70% to 28%, selling the promise that benefits would trickle down to everyone. Instead, we got something very different. <https://patrioticmillionaires.org/perspectives/it-is-time-we-reexamine-the-cost-of-reaganomics/> Income inequality began its relentless climb, and when Bush doubled down with even more tax cuts, [https://www.salon.com/2023/03/28/bush-cuts-have-largely-driven-national-debt-issues-since-2001-report\\_partner/](https://www.salon.com/2023/03/28/bush-cuts-have-largely-driven-national-debt-issues-since-2001-report_partner/) the national debt exploded. The Bush tax cuts alone added \$10 trillion to our national debt while concentrating wealth at the very top.

Here's the kicker: <https://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8608558/> research now shows a direct correlation between rising income inequality and political polarization. As the gap between rich and poor has widened, our politics have become more divided. This isn't coincidence, it's cause and effect. When people are struggling while watching billionaires get richer, when they can't afford what their parents took for granted, they become susceptible to anger and division.

And here's where it gets really insidious: much of the information we consume comes from media owned by those same billionaires who benefited most from these tax cuts. They have every incentive to keep us fighting about culture war issues instead of focusing on the economic policies that created their wealth while leaving everyone else behind. Whether it's social media algorithms designed to maximize engagement through outrage, or cable news channels owned by people worth tens of billions, we're being fed a steady diet of division while the real issue, wealth concentration, goes largely undiscussed.

The solution isn't complicated, but it requires us to remember what actually worked. We need to return to the tax policies that built the greatest middle class in history. We need to use

those revenues to rebuild our infrastructure, schools, and institutions. We need to remember that a rising tide only lifts all boats if everyone has a boat, and that requires intentional policy choices, not hope that generosity will spontaneously emerge from the super-wealthy.

Our divisions aren't inevitable. They're not about irreconcilable cultural differences. They're about economic policies that have left too many Americans behind while concentrating unprecedented wealth and power in the hands of too few. We've done better before, and we can do better again, but only if we're willing to have an honest conversation about what really built American prosperity in the first place.

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### **Strength in Unity**

Throughout history, strong social unity and cooperation have underpinned national success. In mid-20th-century America, for example, the highest federal income-tax rates exceeded 90%, reflecting a shared commitment to collective goals.

That era produced extraordinary achievements, victory in World War II, the Manhattan Project, the Apollo moon landings, and the rise of world-class research universities, driven by large-scale public investment and common purpose.

Modern social-science research confirms that this cohesion matters: economists report a “positive relationship between social cohesion and economic growth,” since trust and togetherness help strengthen institutions and drive innovation.

In fact, social cohesion is “not only a valuable goal in itself but also a key condition” for sustainable economic growth. In short, when people trust one another and pull together, nations grow stronger and more prosperous. By contrast, division erodes that foundation. Today the World faces intense political polarization. Scholars note a “clear consensus” that extreme party polarization leads to legislative “gridlock, stalemate, and incapacity,” effectively paralyzing Congress. In practical terms, this means fewer compromises, fewer major bills passed, and long-running feuds over narrow issues. Congress is now almost perpetually split (in fact, divided

government has prevailed about 69% of the time since the 1970s, and studies show that more polarized Congresses pass fewer significant laws.

This gridlock has real costs: national challenges, like crumbling infrastructure, failing health care systems and pandemic and defensive preparedness, go unresolved. Meanwhile, public debt has soared. The Congressional Budget Office projects that U.S. federal debt will soon surpass its record World-War-II high (debt-to-GDP over 100% by the 2030s).

In short, America's internal divides and partisan fights have coincided with mounting deficits and a sense of stagnation. Not surprisingly, analysts describe our era as one of "divided polarization", a time when cooperation is rare and democratic institutions struggle to act.

### **From Shared Progress to Partisan Battles**

In recent decades, political debate has often focused on culturally charged issues affecting relatively small segments of society. Gun control, abortion rights, and other "culture wars" dominate media cycles, even as global challenges loom large. Many observers argue that this sharp turn to narrow fights began around the 1980s. The Reagan administration's tax cuts inaugurated a long era of small-government, low-tax conservatism. Reagan slashed the top income-tax rate but did not fully cut spending accordingly. As the Brookings Institution notes, the 1981 tax cut "was huge," but it "didn't pay for itself", deficits swelled, and many promised spending cuts never materialized. Subsequent decades saw further tax reductions for the wealthy (e.g. under George W. Bush and Trump), funded by even larger deficits.

Crucially, decades of tax cuts have not delivered the broad prosperity often promised. Academic research shows that cutting taxes for high earners tends mainly to boost the fortunes of the rich, without generating extra jobs or growth. In a long-term international study of 18

advanced economies over 50 years, economists David Hope and Julian Limberg found that when governments cut taxes on the rich, “the rich get richer, while unemployment and economic growth are unaffected.” In other words, the “trickle-down” theory of expanding everyone’s wealth through tax cuts for the top has repeatedly failed in the data. Indeed, they conclude that such reforms increase income inequality without producing any gain in GDP. On the other hand, periods of higher tax rates like the 1950s and 1960s coincided with faster middle-class wage growth and strong public investments.

This ideological shift from shared sacrifice to “every man for himself” has had a political payoff. As Northwestern sociologist Monica Prasad explains, “Republicans are obsessed with tax cuts... because tax cuts are the only issue that unifies their coalition.” In practice, this has meant that Republican leaders emphasize rhetoric of liberty and freedom while advocating deep cuts in public spending on education, health care, and social programs. Critics point out the irony: policies marketed as promoting freedom often end up reducing the very public investments (schools, hospitals, infrastructure) that help give ordinary Citizens real opportunity and security.

Academics studying public policy echo this concern. When government revenue shrinks, social programs tend to bear the brunt. For example, after the 2017 tax overhaul in the U.S. (which heavily cut taxes on corporations and the wealthy), the Congressional Budget Office projected higher deficits and even cuts to Medicaid and other programs in order to hold the budget together. Meanwhile, broad measures of well-being (like infant mortality, life expectancy gaps, or child poverty) have worsened in recent years even as GDP rose. In sum, the past forty years of policy have seen a steeper drop in taxes on high incomes and modest earners, paired with higher debt, rising inequality, and underinvestment in public goods, outcomes that many experts link to partisan priorities rather than actual economic necessity.

## **The Cost of Division: Partisan Gridlock and Lost Progress**

All this plays out against an international backdrop where cohesion is more important than ever. Other major powers (China, the EU, even regional blocs like ASEAN) are able to make long-term plans and investments without the kind of gridlock that hobbles Washington. In science, education, and infrastructure, they increasingly pull ahead.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Congress, nearly evenly split between parties, struggles to pass bipartisan bills. Political scientists find that today's Congress is riddled with "legislative paralysis," which undermines government effectiveness. For example, one analysis notes that party polarization makes it much harder for any bill to clear Congress's multiple veto points (committees, bicameral votes, filibusters, etc.), so "the result of polarization is paralysis."

The practical fallout is clear: rather than investing in new generation research or global competitiveness, lawmakers squabble over polarizing symbols. Meanwhile, critical goals go unmet. This divided environment has coincided with record-high deficits, ballooning national debt, and only limited legislative achievements. (One independent study found that a polarized, divided Congress passes very few landmark laws.) In short, Humanity is devoting huge resources to contentious internal debates rather than common challenges.

## **Toward a Christian Ethos of Compassion and Unity**

Some folks have likened America to a Christian nation. If taken literally, it would imply structuring society around the teachings of Jesus. Christ's message was unmistakably one of compassion, generosity, and unity. Instead of blaming others or hoarding wealth, Jesus emphasized caring for the needy and loving one's neighbor. In His own words:



**“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** (Mark 12:31). Jesus declared this the second greatest commandment, putting our fellow humans on par with loving God.

**“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another; even as I have loved you.”**

(John 13:34). He explicitly tied unity to His followers’ identity: “by this all people will know that you are My disciples,” by their love.

**“For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; ... I was a stranger and you invited Me in; ...”** (Matthew 25:35–36). In teaching about the final judgment, Jesus identified Himself with the poor and vulnerable. Feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, and caring for the sick are, in effect, doing these acts to Christ Himself.

**“Go and do the same.”** (Luke 10:37). After telling the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus told a Jewish teacher to emulate the Samaritan’s mercy. In other words, stop quibbling over who is the “neighbor”, just love whoever needs help.

**“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”** (Luke 6:31). Often called the Golden Rule, Jesus urged us to treat every person with the basic dignity and kindness we seek for ourselves. This simple ethic can form the basis of a cooperative society.

**“Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you.”** (Luke 6:37– 38). Jesus taught that generous, forgiving hearts multiply goodness. Rather than punishing or blaming, we should pardon faults and share with those in need, trusting that blessing follows such love.

**“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”** (Matthew 5:7). He declared that showing mercy (compassion for others’ suffering) is itself a virtue rewarded by God’s mercy.

**“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”** (Matthew

5:9). Christians are called to be agents of reconciliation, actively healing divisions rather than deepening them.

**“One thing you lack: go, sell all you possess and give to the poor... and come, follow Me.”**

(Mark 10:21). To the rich young ruler who asked how to inherit eternal life, Jesus did not say “keep your wealth”, He said abandon your material security for the sake of others.

**“No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and wealth.”** (Matthew 6:24). Here Jesus explicitly warns against worshiping money. A true Christian society would not let wealth be an idol; instead, it would use its resources to serve people.

These teachings emphasize unity, humility, and care for the disadvantaged. They cut directly against exclusion and division. If people truly embraced this spirit, we would see less finger-pointing and more mutual aid. In a Christian sense, policies that feed the poor, educate all children, and promote common welfare are not optional extras but the very essence of walking in Christ’s footsteps. As the parable of the Good Samaritan teaches, the true neighbor is the one to whom we show compassion without asking qualification.

History and research alike show that unity, not division, brings prosperity and resilience. Societies that pull together enjoy stronger economies, higher trust, and greater accomplishments. By contrast, internal strife, partisan polarization, and widening inequality have stalled global progress. If we take to heart the values long associated with our nations, or with the words of Jesus Christ, we would prioritize the common good over narrow interests. Feeding the hungry, educating all children, protecting health, and forgiving neighbors are not just charitable acts; they strengthen the entire fabric of society. The evidence is clear: unity and mutual care are the

forgotten paths to real prosperity. In these polarized times, remembering those principles could help America heal its divides and live up to its highest ideals.

### **United We Stand, Divided We Fall**

Our current political problems mirror sharp social and cultural divisions within the American people. Since the 1960s the U.S. has entered “culture wars” over issues like gun rights, abortion, and LGBTQ rights. Public opinion is polarized and often mapped onto partisanship. For example, **gun control** is hotly contested: Pew reports that a **majority of Democrats** support strict limits on high-capacity magazines or assault weapons, while **Republicans are much less motivated**. On **abortion**, 63% of Americans now think it should be legal in most cases, but opinions split along demographic lines. About 73% of white evangelical Protestants favor bans (illegal in most cases), whereas 86% of religiously unaffiliated adults favor legalization. Likewise, **LGBTQ and transgender rights** are polarized: Pew finds “*sharply different views*” by party, 80% of Republicans say a person’s gender is fixed at birth, compared to 64% of Democrats who disagree. When asked if society has “gone too far” accepting transgender people, **57% of Republicans** say yes versus only 12% of Democrats.

These examples show how American citizens are deeply divided on core moral and identity issues. Researchers note that Americans even have some overlapping policy preferences (e.g. large minorities of both parties support background checks or abortion rights), but in practice only one side of each issue is politically active. These social fissures feed into politics: legislators and activists push the most extreme demands of each base. In turn, Congress’s deadlocks reflect voters’ unwillingness to compromise. As one analysis observes, Americans may share many policy goals in principle, but “*only one side [in each culture war] feels it must put the issue on the political agenda*”. Thus, our polarized voting public is reflected in a polarized government.

Cultural conflicts over guns, abortion and LGBTQ rights have become so entrenched that they now shape budgets and foreign policy (e.g. aid cuts tied to abortion politics, defense debates driven by partisan ideology). The “mirror of the American people” is seen in Washington, leaders deadlocked on issues that divide ordinary Americans.

### **The Government as a Mirror of Society**

Because voters are so divided, Congress has come to mirror those cleavages. Studies of polarization find that the congressional parties now align closely with social identities and values. When people on both sides of an issue stay home or cast protest votes rather than compromise, politicians do the same. For example, the same Carnegie study finds that **majorities of Democrats and Republicans even share some policy preferences**, but only one side pursues each issue, producing gridlock. In practice, this means legislative leaders often cater to their base’s cultural anxieties instead of seeking national consensus. For instance, during debt fights both parties believed they were protecting “their” voters, resulting in brinkmanship where “the best way to win is to hurt the country as much as you can,” according to Senate floor speeches. In other words, politics has become reflective of society’s bitter partisan and cultural identity wars. Our policymakers cannot bind up social wounds, and our people in turn reward uncompromising behavior. Political scientists warn that this vicious cycle, “hyper partisanship” in Congress combined with “inertia”, has left the legislature almost dysfunctional. The result is not just domestic stalemate but a leaderless America on the world stage: allies sense the U.S. cannot act, and rivals take advantage of our internal disunity. Thus, the very problems that limit American power abroad, soaring debt and legislative paralysis, are ultimately “mirrors” of the fractures within American society itself.

## Moral Lesson: Hardened Hearts

The pattern of self-defeating division in American public life is powerfully reminiscent of a recurring moral and spiritual warning throughout the Bible: the danger of a hardened heart. From Genesis to Revelation, a hardened heart is a symbol of spiritual blindness, pride, and the willful rejection of truth, even in the face of reason, compassion, or **divine intervention**. It is a refusal to listen, to love, and to change, a condition of moral paralysis that cripples individuals and nations alike.

In **Mark 3:5**, Jesus, grieved and angered, looked upon the Pharisees “with anger... deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts” because they were more committed to law and tradition than to mercy. They refused to allow a man’s hand to be healed on the Sabbath. This moment reveals the **inversion of values** that comes with a hardened heart: rules take precedence over people, and power is preferred over compassion. This is no different from today’s leaders who weaponize policy to serve partisan interests while communities suffer.

Similarly, in Romans 2:5, Paul warns: “But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath.” This passage emphasizes that a hardened heart isn’t just passive resistance, it’s an **active moral decay**. It leads to consequences not only spiritual but societal. Like an infected wound left untreated, hardness of heart festers beneath the surface, eventually erupting in judgment or collapse.

In the Old Testament, the motif is equally strong. Ezekiel 36:26 offers a hopeful counterpart: “I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” This symbolic exchange, from unfeeling stone to responsive flesh, this is the radical transformation

that God desires: a society driven not by ego or entitlement but by empathy and moral conviction. A heart of flesh is one that **feels, responds, and heals**.

| Symbol  | Biblical Meaning   | Modern Application  |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Heart of Stone</b>   | Coldness, pride, rigidity, resistance to truth           | Ideological rigidity, cancel culture, unwillingness to dialogue                 |
| <b>Heart of Flesh</b>   | Empathy, renewal, moral sensitivity                      | Active compassion, policy based on shared human dignity, bipartisan cooperation |
| <b>Pharaoh’s Heart</b>  | Repeatedly hardened despite plagues (Exodus 7–11)        | Leaders who double down on harmful policies even amid national crises           |
| <b>Blinded Eyes &amp; Deaf Ears</b><br>(Isaiah 6:10; Matthew 13:15) | People spiritually unable to hear truth or change course | Misinformation bubbles, selective outrage, tribalism in politics and media      |

In **Matthew 13:15**, Jesus references Isaiah’s warning about the people’s calloused condition: “For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed.” This echoes the American condition today: the rise of ideological echo chambers, confirmation bias, and political tribalism that blinds entire segments of the population from even acknowledging shared reality. It’s not just that we disagree, it’s that we’ve **lost the capacity to even hear one another**.

Contrast the Pharisees with the tax collector Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10). When Jesus approached him, Zacchaeus immediately softened, his heart opened to truth and justice. He repented, gave away wealth, and restored what he’d taken. This story reveals that even the most corrupt can change when they choose humility and listen. Likewise, **Stephen**, the first Christian martyr, cried out in Acts 7:60: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

He forgave those stoning him. His heart was not hardened by hate or injustice, but open and merciful, imitating Christ even in death. This stands in stark contrast to modern politics, where opponents are demonized, and forgiveness is treated as weakness.

### **A Nation of Stone or Flesh?**

Today's America is plagued by partisan rage, performative politics, and unwillingness to yield for the common good. Tax cuts for the wealthy persist despite rising inequality. Budget deadlines are missed over cultural battles. Legislators stall aid or infrastructure because of perceived political advantage. Citizens echo this, rejoicing in their "team's" wins, even if it worsens collective suffering. It is, as Jesus described, like a house divided against itself, **"it cannot stand"** (Mark 3:25).

A hardened heart in biblical terms leads to judgment: collapse of kingdoms, exile, spiritual silence. But a softened heart invites revival, both spiritually and socially. As Jesus taught in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9) We must ask ourselves: **Are we peacemakers, or do we cherish our animosities?**

The prophetic call of Scripture is clear. From Hosea 10:12: "Break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers his righteousness on you." This is not merely a personal command, but a national one. It's time to break up the hardened soil of our politics and hearts. Until we do, policy paralysis and cultural war will continue to corrode both our democracy and our humanity.

In the end, a hardened heart is not just a **personal failing**, it is a **national risk**. We must choose whether to remain entombed in stone or to become vessels of empathy, capable of working across differences, listening through disagreement, and sacrificing for a shared future.

“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts...” — Hebrews 3:15

## **On Nations and Kings**

The Bible speaks with great clarity about the dangers inherent in human governance, particularly in the form of kings and nations. From Israel’s very first monarchy through centuries of decline, the biblical narrative shows how political power, when divorced from God’s authority, leads to national ruin. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the **Books of Kings**, which chronicle the cyclical tragedy of corrupt leadership, idolatry, and judgment. These are not just historical accounts but living warnings, revealing timeless truths about the frailty of human systems and the supremacy of God's eternal kingdom.

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### **1. The People’s Rejection of God’s Kingship**

*“They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being King over them.”*

— *1 Samuel 8:7*

Before we even arrive at the Books of Kings, God warns Samuel that Israel’s desire for a human king is a rejection of divine rule. This foundational moment sets the tone for what unfolds across **1 and 2 Kings**, a long pattern of rebellion and decline. Kings, despite their authority, are fallible. The more they drift from God's law, the more they lead the people into spiritual ruin.

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## 2. Solomon's Rise and Fall: Wisdom Corrupted by Compromise

*“So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not follow the LORD fully, as his father David had done.”*

— *1 Kings 11:6 (NASB)*

Solomon began with unmatched wisdom, peace, and prosperity. Yet, his downfall came through **compromise**: foreign wives, idolatry, and divided loyalties. He built the Temple yet later built altars to foreign gods. His story shows how even the most gifted rulers fall when they let **power, wealth, or alliances** replace obedience.

**Lesson:** Even spiritual beginnings do not exempt a ruler from accountability. Moral drift leads to national decline.

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## 3. Jeroboam: Innovation That Led to Idolatry

*“Jeroboam said in his heart, ‘Now the kingdom will return to the house of David’... So the king made two golden calves, and he said to the people, ‘It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, Israel.’”*

— *1 Kings 12:26–28 (NASB)*

Jeroboam's political strategy was clever but spiritually catastrophic. To secure his throne, he created a counterfeit religion, complete with alternative worship centers and festivals. This single act became a recurring indictment: **“He walked in the sins of Jeroboam”** became a refrain for later kings.

**Symbolism:** Jeroboam's calves echo the golden calf of Exodus. Political control often masquerades as religion, but God sees through it.

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#### **4. Ahab and Jezebel: When Kings Abandon God Entirely**

*“There certainly was no one like Ahab who gave himself over to do evil in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife incited him.”*

— *1 Kings 21:25*

Ahab institutionalized idolatry and used royal power to steal land (Naboth's vineyard) and silence prophets. With Jezebel's influence, he persecuted the faithful and empowered paganism. His reign is a case study in **how unchecked power, when paired with spiritual rebellion, leads to oppression.**

**God's Response:** The prophet Elijah confronted Ahab directly, calling fire from heaven and pronouncing judgment. Yet, Ahab's story also shows God's mercy, even wicked kings could repent (1 Kings 21:27–29).

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#### **5. The Collapse of a Divided Kingdom**

By the end of **2 Kings**, both Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom) have fallen. Why?

*“Judah also did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but they walked in the customs which Israel had introduced.”*

— *2 Kings 17:19 (NASB)*

Political alliances, idol worship, and injustice all accumulated until the weight of sin brought collapse. The exile is not merely geopolitical, it's divine judgment. The kings failed, the people followed, and the nation paid the price.

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## **6. A Glimmer of Hope: Hezekiah and Josiah**

Amidst widespread corruption, **Hezekiah** (2 Kings 18) and **Josiah** (2 Kings 22–23) stand out as reformers. They tore down idols, restored worship, and trusted God. Yet, their reforms were temporary. The people's hearts were not fully changed, and judgment still came.

**Takeaway:** Even good leadership cannot override a people's collective sin. Only deep repentance and national humility can truly preserve a nation.

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## **Core Themes from Kings**

### **The Heart of the King Shapes the Nation**

The kings were spiritual thermostats. When they worshiped false gods, so did the people. When they repented, national renewal was possible.

### **Power Without God Becomes Abuse**

Almost every king who ignored God ended up exploiting the people, through forced labor, heavy taxation, or outright theft.

### **Prophetic Voices Are Crucial**

Prophets like **Elijah**, **Elisha**, **Isaiah**, and **Micaiah** appear as correctives, God's way of

confronting kings. In every generation, faithful truth-tellers are necessary to restrain kings from becoming tyrants.

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### **Modern Application**

The Books of Kings are a mirror for our times. Today's world sees the same dangers: political manipulation, idolatry of nation and power, persecution of truth-tellers, and moral compromise in leadership.

We are warned to:

- **Resist worshiping nations or political systems.**
  - **Recognize that no human leader is above accountability.**
  - **Value prophetic truth over popular politics.**
  - **Trust God's unshakable kingdom above all earthly power.**
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While the Books of Kings chronicle human failure, they point forward to a perfect ruler: The King of Kings. He does not exploit, deceive, or oppress. His kingdom is not based on power, but justice, mercy, and truth.

*“The government will rest on His shoulders... there will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace.”*

— *Isaiah 9:6–7*

*“This is what the LORD says:  
‘Do not learn the way of the nations,  
And do not be terrified by the signs of the heavens  
Although the nations are terrified by them;  
For the customs of the peoples are futile;  
For it is wood cut from the forest,  
The work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool.’”*  
— Jeremiah 10:2–3

### **False Prophets and Teachers**

False prophets are a recurring threat in the Bible, and Scripture consistently warns God’s people to be vigilant against deception. From the Old Testament through the New Testament, we find vivid examples of leaders who claimed divine authority but spoke lies, along with dire consequences for those deceptions. Jesus Himself reinforced these warnings as a central part of His ministry, teaching His followers how to discern truth from falsehood. Today, these ancient lessons remain urgently relevant.

Modern movements, from politicized churches to the prosperity gospel and other doctrinal distortions, echo the patterns of biblical false prophets, often with harmful results. In this article, we will explore the biblical concept of false prophets, then examine how similar dynamics appear in contemporary religious movements. Our goal is to understand Scripture’s teaching on false prophets, see how Jesus emphasized guarding against deception, and recognize modern parallels so we can stand firm in truth.

## Old Testament Warnings About False Prophets

The Old Testament establishes some of the earliest and clearest warnings about false prophets. Although the specific term “false prophet” isn’t used in ancient Hebrew, the concept is clearly described. **Deuteronomy** instructs that any supposed prophet who speaks a message in God’s name that God did *not* command, or who advocates worship of other gods, is false and worthy of the gravest punishment. This standard underscores how seriously God views spiritual deception. A true prophet speaks only what God genuinely commands, whereas a false prophet presumes to speak for God without authorization.

Throughout Israel’s history, false prophets led people into error by speaking their *own* ideas and desires while claiming divine inspiration. God lamented through **Jeremiah**: “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them... They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds”. In other words, these fraudulent prophets were not conveying God’s word at all, they were making up messages from their imagination or even occult practices, yet presenting them as “the word of the Lord.” Jeremiah and other true prophets had to confront these deceivers who whitewashed the truth. False prophets in Jerusalem kept promising that peace was on the horizon when judgment was coming; they told people what they *wanted* to hear, not what they needed to hear. As Scripture notes, the people **preferred** the pleasant lies: “*Who say to the seers, “Do not see,” And to the prophets, “Do not prophesy to us right things; Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits.*” (Isaiah 30:10). This appetite for comforting falsehoods allowed impostors to flourish and led the nation deeper into sin.

A key difference between true and false prophets in the Old Testament was the **source and motive** of their message. True prophets like Jeremiah received God’s word and spoke it

faithfully, often at personal risk, motivated by loyalty to God above all. False prophets, by contrast, spoke “visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord”. Their motive was often self-interest, popularity, influence, or financial gain, rather than faithfulness. The Bible notes that many false prophets delivered favorable messages in exchange for money or favor: *“Her prophets tell fortunes for money”* (Micah 3:11). They acted as royal “yes-men” in some cases, saying whatever pleased the king or the masses in order to gain reward. One vivid example is in 1 Kings 22, hundreds of court prophets assured King Ahab he would win in battle, but the lone true prophet Micaiah (speaking for God) predicted Ahab’s defeat and death, which is exactly what happened. The false prophets were exposed when their positive spin failed to materialize.

The consequences of false prophecy in the Old Testament were severe. Besides the prescribed death penalty in the Law, there were natural consequences: false prophets misled God’s people into disobedience, idolatry, and complacency, bringing disaster upon the nation. By heeding rosy lies (like *“No disaster will come upon us,”* as the deceivers insisted), Israel and Judah refused to repent and ultimately faced invasion and exile. False prophets thus not only courted God’s wrath upon themselves, but dragged many others with them into ruin. **Jeremiah** and **Ezekiel** both record God’s anger at these leaders who “lead my people astray, saying ‘Peace’ when there is no peace”. The Old Testament paints false prophets as dangerous frauds: liars, corrupt opportunists, and ungodly leaders who pretended to speak for God but instead encourage sin. Their fate was destruction, and their legacy was to bring judgment on those who believed their lies.

## New Testament Warnings and Jesus' Teaching on False Prophets

The theme of false prophets carries into the New Testament, where Jesus and the apostles repeatedly warn Christians to beware of religious deceivers. Jesus made this a **central focus** of His teaching ministry, frequently cautioning His disciples about coming false prophets and false teachers. In the **Sermon on the Mount**, Jesus gave this vivid warning: *“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves”*. Here Jesus paints a picture of predators who disguise themselves as harmless sheep. They appear to be godly leaders, blending into the “flock” of believers, but their true nature is dangerous. Jesus said we can recognize them **“by their fruit”**, meaning the outcomes of their teaching and conduct (Matthew 7:15–20). A good tree bears good fruit, but a rotten tree bears bad fruit, so if a prophet’s influence produces ungodliness, division, or sin, that reveals their true character.

Ultimately, Jesus warned, **every bad tree will be cut down and thrown into the fire**. Those who **mislead in God’s name face dire judgment**. In fact, Jesus envisioned that some false prophets would even plead that they did great works “in Jesus’ name,” but He will reply to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me” (Matthew 7:22–23). Despite their religious language and even apparent miracles, they were never true servants of Christ.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus stressed the importance of discernment and *guarding against deception*. When teaching about the last days, Jesus repeatedly said *“Take heed that no one deceives you”* (Matthew 24:4) and foretold that *“many false prophets will appear and deceive many people”* (Matthew 24:11). He even warned that false messiahs and false prophets would perform impressive signs and wonders “to deceive, if possible, even the elect”. This emphasis shows that Jesus knew believers would always face persuasive deceivers, some with charismatic signs or popular appeal, and He wanted His followers to be on high alert. Deception



was not a side issue for Jesus; it was a **core concern**. He compared false teachers' doctrines to yeast, a small agent that can quietly spread through a whole batch of dough. "***Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees,***" Jesus said, by which He meant **their corrupt teaching**. In essence, Jesus taught that a little falsehood can contaminate the whole community, so believers must remain watchful and anchored in truth.

The apostles continued this warning in the early church. **Peter**, recalling the false prophets of old, told believers that similarly "*there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them*". Such teachers may arise from within the church itself, distorting Christian truth from the inside. Peter noted that many will follow these false teachers, and in their greed these leaders will "exploit you with fabricated stories," but their judgment is coming (see 2 Peter 2:1–3). **Paul** likewise warned the Ephesian elders that after his departure, "*savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock*", and that even from within the church men would arise "distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them". Paul urged constant vigilance over the congregation for this reason. In his letters, Paul cautioned that in the last days people would gravitate to teachers who say what they want to hear: "*to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths*". This describes a dangerous feedback loop where audiences and false teachers reinforce each other, the people demand pleasant, self-serving messages, and opportunistic teachers supply exactly that, leading all away from sound doctrine.

The New Testament writers also identified **traits** of false teachers that mirror the Old Testament descriptions. False teachers are often marked by immoral conduct, greed, and a rejection of Christ's authority. Peter and **Jude** describe such people as arrogant, lustful, and

exploitative, comparing them to Balaam, a prophet who loved the wages of wickedness (2 Peter 2:15). The apostle **John** adds that any “prophet” who denies core truth about Jesus (such as His coming in the flesh or His divinity) is not from God. “*Many false prophets have gone out into the world,*” John writes, so believers must “test the spirits” and hold fast to the apostles’ teaching (1 John 4:1–6). In summary, the New Testament echoes the Old in warning that false prophets/teachers will arise, sometimes from within the faith community itself. They may be outwardly impressive or persuasive, but they can be known by their unbiblical doctrine, **ungodly fruit**, and exploitative ways. Jesus and the apostles consistently teach that **truth matters** and that God’s people must cling to the true gospel as taught in Scripture. Those who promote a different gospel or distort God’s word put themselves under God’s judgment, and believers who naively follow them risk spiritual ruin. These biblical lessons set the stage for understanding how these figures operate in our world today.

### **Politicizing the Faith: When Churches Become Political Prophets**

One striking modern parallel to the biblical false prophet is found in the phenomenon of *politicized religion*, churches or leaders who effectively turn faith into a tool of [partisan politics or nationalism](#). This has been especially visible in movements that mix Christianity with political ideology, often referred to as **Christian nationalism**. This ideology “marries faith with patriotism, confusing loyalty to God with allegiance to a political agenda. In such circles, religious language and symbols are used to advance a worldly political cause, and loyalty to one’s nation or party can be elevated above fidelity to the teachings of Jesus. Just as ancient false prophets blended truth with the king’s agenda, these modern “political prophets” wrap political rhetoric in biblical terminology to lend it divine authority.

**Political churches** may urge the flock to view a particular nation, party, or leader as uniquely chosen or infallible, sometimes implying that supporting that political cause is equivalent to serving God. They might cherry-pick scriptures to sanctify their platform while ignoring or twisting passages that contradict their political goals. This is reminiscent of Jeroboam in the Old Testament, who built his own sanctuaries and religious system to secure political power using religion as a means of control. Today, when churches become echo chambers for nationalism or partisan talking points, the gospel's universal call to repentance and unity can get displaced by an "us vs. them" ideology. The result is often **division** and a combative mentality, contrary to Jesus' command to love our neighbor (including those we disagree with). This directly opposes the heart of Christ's message, which is about a kingdom "*not of this world*" (John 18:36) and a love that breaks down barriers between people.

Another hallmark of politicized religion is the tendency to **distort the gospel** by blending it with civil religion or patriotic fervor. Instead of preaching salvation, holiness, and humility, political churches might preach a message of national destiny, power, and even vengeance against opponents. Jesus refused earthly political power and taught His followers to serve, not to dominate (John 13:13–17). When any church claims that temporal power or a particular nation's success is the fulfillment of Christianity, it is echoing the voice of false prophets who "*speak visions from their own minds*" rather than the true word of God. Indeed, a broad coalition of Christian leaders recently warned that Christian nationalism is a "*distortion of the gospel of Jesus*" itself. It entangles the cross with the flag in a way that can lead believers to excuse un-Christlike behavior if it's for the "right" political cause. This dangerous mixture can justify racism, oppression, or violence as supposedly godly, when in fact it contradicts everything Jesus taught.

**The consequences** of this modern false prophecy are serious. It misleads believers into equating human political agendas with God's will, which can weaken our primary allegiance to Christ. It often inflames hatred and conflict, as people come to see political rivals as enemies of God. And it tarnishes the witness of the church: non-believers who see faith hijacked for partisan ends will understandably view the faith as just another political club, not the source of eternal hope. In the end, political churches can fall into the same trap ancient Israel did when it "idolized" nations and kings, a trap that led them away from God's protection. The Bible's warning not to "learn the way of the nations" (Jeremiah 10:2) remains. **No nation or party can replace Christ's kingdom**, and any movement that claims otherwise is, in biblical terms, a false prophecy. Christians must therefore be cautious of leaders who mix the cross and the sword, and remember that our true King is Jesus, who calls us to truth and love above all earthly loyalties.

### **The Prosperity Gospel: Wealth, Materialism, and Twisting the Truth**

Another prominent contemporary movement that mirrors the false prophets of old is the **prosperity gospel**. This is the teaching that God's main desire is to bless believers with financial wealth, success, and physical well-being in this life, usually in response to their faith (often demonstrated by donations). In prosperity-focused ministries, Jesus is essentially presented as a means to an end, a ticket to personal prosperity. Described as a "*perversion of the biblical gospel*," where **Jesus is reduced to a means** for obtaining health, wealth, and power. In other words, the prosperity gospel twists the core message of Christianity (salvation from sin and reconciliation with God through Christ) into a message of worldly gain. False prophets in the Old Testament often told people what their flesh wanted to hear (peace, safety, plenty), and prosperity preachers today do much the same, promising that God will make you rich or heal every illness if you only have enough faith (and give generously to their ministry).

The **traits of the prosperity gospel** align closely with what Scripture warns about false teachers. Prosperity preachers frequently appeal to their audience's "*itching ears*," telling them positive affirmations rather than the whole counsel of God. Messages about self-denial, repentance, or the possibility of suffering are notably absent. Instead, the focus is on "claiming" blessings and achieving success. One biblical scholar notes that prosperity preachers often *quote* the Bible but "twist it to support their false theology," taking verses out of context and misapplying promises. For example, they might cite God's blessings to Israel under the Old Covenant and treat them as guarantees of financial wealth for Christians today, ignoring the New Testament's emphasis on eternal rewards over earthly riches. In effect, **God is portrayed as a divine vending machine or a cosmic Santa Claus** whose primary role is to distribute gifts and make us happy, with man's desires at the center. This flatters the listener's materialistic hopes, and not coincidentally, it often enriches the teachers, who may receive lavish donations from followers expecting a hundredfold return. The arrangement eerily resembles a get-rich-quick scheme cloaked in religious language: followers are told to "sow a seed" (give money) to the ministry, and God will reward them with wealth in return. Meanwhile, the only ones reliably rich are the preachers themselves.

The **distortions of the prosperity gospel** strike at foundational Christian truths. The Bible certainly teaches God's faithfulness to provide and care for His people, but it also warns strongly against the love of money and making earthly wealth our focus (1 Timothy 6:8–10). Jesus taught, "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth*" (Matthew 6:19) and "*You cannot serve both God and money*" (Matthew 6:24). Prosperity preaching downplays or ignores such verses. It emphasizes gaining *more* from God rather than *surrendering* to God. Suffering or trials, which the New Testament says are to be expected in a believer's life (John 16:33, 2

Timothy 3:12), are explained away as lack of faith, instead of opportunities to refine faith. It takes a vice that Scripture equates with idolatry (greed; Ephesians 5:5) and rebrands it as a form of faith. But calling it “faith” doesn’t change the reality. When a preacher constantly talks about money, luxury, and success as divine rewards, believers can be led to idolize those things over God Himself. Their hearts may end up following treasure on earth, the very trap Jesus warned against.

Importantly, many well-meaning Christians have been swept up in prosperity teachings without realizing the danger. The **appeal** is understandable: who wouldn’t want to hear that God guarantees to fix every problem and shower you with wealth? Especially for people in difficult circumstances, the promise of immediate blessings can be powerfully attractive. However, this is exactly why the prosperity gospel is so deceptive and spiritually perilous. It is a *“false gospel that makes promises for God that He has not made”*, setting people up for disappointment or even shipwrecked faith. Those who don’t see the promised riches or healing might feel God has failed them, or that their faith was somehow “not enough”, when in fact they were clinging to a **distorted message** all along.

Prosperity preaching often fosters a kind of division and elitism in the church: the “blessed” versus the “not blessed.” If wealth is seen as a sign of God’s favor, then rich believers may be esteemed as having greater faith, while the poor or sick are subtly shamed as spiritually deficient. This is opposite to the New Testament teaching that we should show no favoritism and that the poor are often rich in faith (James 2:1–5). By promoting material success as the ultimate goal, the prosperity gospel encourages believers to pursue the *“worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth,”* which Jesus said can choke the word of God in our hearts (Matthew 13:22). The prosperity gospel movement embodies many marks of the false prophets: it **distorts**

**God's word**, encourages “*the gratification of fleshly desires rather than spiritual transformation*”, and often results in leaders enriching themselves at the expense of truth.

Christians should measure such teaching against Scripture and remember that Jesus calls us to take up our cross, not pad our bank accounts. True faith finds contentment in Christ in any circumstance (Philippians 4:11–13), whereas the prosperity gospel risks tethering our hearts to perishable earthly treasures.

### **Other Movements and Leaders Diverging from Biblical Doctrine**

Beyond the highly visible trends of political religion and prosperity preaching, there are other **contemporary groups and leaders** that echo the pattern of biblical false prophets by propagating teachings contrary to sound biblical doctrine. These can range from fringe cults to mainstream sects that deviate from historic Christian beliefs. What they share is a tendency to elevate *new revelations, human leaders, or distorted doctrines* above the clear teaching of God's Word, often leading sincere people into error.

One category is **pseudo-Christian cults**, groups that use Christian terminology and claim to be Christian, but fundamentally alter core truths of the faith or center around a charismatic, authoritarian leader. History provides stark examples such as Catholicism, Jim Jones of the Peoples Temple or David Koresh of the Branch Davidians. These figures claimed prophetic or messianic status, twisted Scripture to exalt themselves, and led their followers into deadly deception. Jim Jones even had his followers treat him as a god-figure, resulting in the tragic Jonestown mass suicide in 1978. Such extreme cases show how a false prophet can completely shipwreck lives. While those are rare extremes, they serve as a warning that **any leader who demands absolute allegiance, claims exclusive truth apart from the Bible, or encourages followers to commit immoral or harmful acts in God's name is acting just like the false**

**prophets condemned in Scripture.** Jesus said that false prophets often come “*in sheep’s clothing*”, they may initially appear righteous, but “*inwardly they are ravenous wolves*”. Cult leaders often fit this description, appearing as angelic ministers of light while secretly exploiting and even destroying their flock.

Even within more established religious movements, we find instances of **prophetic claims or doctrinal deviations** that warrant discernment. The Watch Tower Society of the Jehovah’s Witnesses has a long history of making bold predictions about the end of the world and the coming of God’s Kingdom in specific years (such as 1914, 1918, 1925, and 1975), none of which came true. Each time a predicted Armageddon failed to occur, the dates were revised or reinterpreted. By biblical standards (Deuteronomy 18:22), a prophecy that does not come to pass is a false prophecy; yet leaders kept insisting new light would reveal the truth. This pattern of continual failed prophecy is a hallmark of deception.

Similarly, some groups introduce **extra-biblical scriptures or revelations** that supersede the Bible. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), for instance, bases its doctrine on additional scriptures like the Book of Mormon and teachings of Joseph Smith, who presented himself as a prophet. Many of these teachings conflict with biblical doctrine (such as the nature of God and Jesus, or the plan of salvation). According to Galatians 1:8, even if an angel from heaven should preach a different gospel, it is to be rejected. Thus, Christians regard these added revelations with great caution. While members of these groups may be well-intentioned and sincere, the movements themselves illustrate how **departures from biblical doctrine** can lead to an entirely different gospel. “Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.” Deuteronomy 4:2



In recent years, even among some evangelical and charismatic Christian circles, there has been a proliferation of self-proclaimed “apostles” and “prophets” who claim to speak new directives from God. Some affiliated with the New Apostolic Reformation and similar movements have prophesied specific political outcomes or revival dates, often inaccurately. For example, numerous prophets publicly predicted certain election results or dates for national deliverance that did not happen, causing confusion and disillusionment in their followers. This is reminiscent of the false prophets in Jeremiah’s day who confidently proclaimed “*Thus says the Lord,*” when the Lord had not sent them. When such prophecies fail, it not only undermines the credibility of those leaders, but also can shake people’s faith in God if they wrongly assumed those messages were from Him. It is vital that believers apply the biblical tests for teachers and prophets: Does their message align with Scripture? Is their life marked by godly fruit? Are their predictions accurate? Do they confess the true Jesus Christ? If not, we have strong grounds to conclude we are dealing with a false prophet or teacher, and we should distance ourselves from their influence.

Finally, some modern false teachings are more subtle, they may not have an individual “prophet” figure at the helm, but they **erode biblical truth** in the name of cultural relevance or intellectual trendiness. For instance, certain theologians or pastors might deny the resurrection of Christ, redefine biblical morality, or proclaim that all religions lead to God, directly contradicting Scripture. Though these teachers might not claim visions or prophecies, they function as false guides by **leading people away from the historic gospel** and “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). The apostle Peter warned that false teachers would even deny “the Master who bought them”, in other words, deny Jesus’ lordship or saving work, and any “Christian” message that denies Christ’s divinity, His atoning death and resurrection, or His call

to holy living is a dangerous deception. Whether the motive is to be politically correct, intellectually sophisticated, or simply popular, **those who alter the core message of Scripture put themselves in the category of false teachers** against whom the Bible so frequently warns.

### **Clinging to Truth in an Age of Deception**

From the Bible's pages to our present day, the threat of false prophets and false teachings remains a serious concern. The faces and names change over time, but the underlying pattern is the same: deviations from God's truth that *seem* appealing, whether through charisma, promises of peace and prosperity, or alignment with our prejudices, yet ultimately lead people away from God's will. The Scripture shows that even well-meaning people can be misled by smooth words and impressive signs. Often the intentions start out "good" in human terms (e.g. seeking unity, or seeking blessing), but when leaders or movements depart from biblical truth, the outcomes are destructive. When people **embrace lies, it invites moral decay**: greed is justified, divisions deepen, and the vulnerable are exploited. We've seen how this played out in Israel's downfall, and we can see echoes of it in modern movements that justify hatred, discord, or materialism under a religious veneer.

Therefore, the Bible's admonitions are as relevant as ever: *be watchful, test everything, hold fast to what is good* (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Jesus Christ urged His followers to stay **vigilant** and anchored in His teachings, because truth and falsehood can sometimes look deceptively similar. We should not accept any teaching blindly, even if it comes from a persuasive preacher or a popular movement. As the Apostle John wrote, "*Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God*". Likewise, Peter reminds us, "*since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless*". In practice, this means continually returning to Scripture, like

the Bereans who examined the apostle Paul's teachings against God's Word (Acts 17:11). It means evaluating the fruit of a teaching, does it produce Christlike love, humility, holiness, and unity, or does it produce division, pride, greed, and strife? Jesus said **a bad tree will eventually reveal itself by bad fruit**. We must have the courage to acknowledge bad fruit for what it is, even if it challenges our preconceived loyalties.

Finally, our response to all this must remain rooted in **grace and truth**. While we call out falsehood, we do so not to condemn individuals but to protect and guide one another toward Christ. The goal is not a witch-hunt for "heretics," but a community soberly aware that we have an enemy (the devil) who "prowls around" with lies, seeking to devour (1 Peter 5:8). Jesus' own warnings were always given in love, He desired that *none* of His sheep be lost to deception. In the same way, we speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), warning against what is false while extending the hope of restoration to those who have been misled.

The Bible ends with a vision of ultimate reality: **Jesus as the true and faithful Word of God**, vanquishing the ultimate false prophet and all deceivers (Revelation 19:20). In the end, truth will triumph. Until that day, every generation of believers must heed the biblical lessons on false prophets. By God's grace, holding fast to Scripture, and with the gentle guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can discern truth from error. In doing so, we protect our own souls and preserve the integrity of the gospel. Remain anchored in Christ and His word, for He promised that "*you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:32). Deviating from that truth, no matter how enticing the path, can only lead into bondage and loss. Therefore, with humility and vigilance, let us stay true and lovingly help others do the same, remembering that **God's truth leads to life, but believing a lie can lead to both spiritual and societal ruin**.

## What is the Final Judgement?

Every day we see a tension in how people deal with wrongdoing. Some are quick to shout, “Don’t judge me!” to silence any criticism. Others hurl condemnation without mercy, reminiscent of modern “cancel culture.” In this confusion, even sincere believers ask: *Are we supposed to judge others or not?* The Bible’s answer is nuanced. Scripture calls us to uphold truth and discern right from wrong, but **how we do so is vital**. God’s Word charts a path that combines moral clarity with compassion. It shows us a Judge who is perfectly just yet merciful, and it invites us, whether devout Christian or curious seeker, to a humble posture of self-examination, repentance, and grace toward others. Let’s explore what our role really is in light of God’s judgment and mercy.

### God as the Righteous Judge and Merciful Savior

Before anything else, the Bible establishes that **God is the ultimate judge**. He alone has the authority and knowledge to judge perfectly. *“For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver; the Lord is our king; He will save us”* (Isaiah 33:22). Unlike human judgments, God’s judgment is always fair and holy, tempered by His desire to save. Throughout Scripture, God’s judgment serves a purpose: to uphold justice and truth, and ultimately to **restore what is broken**. For example, in the Old Testament, God sent prophets to warn Israel of judgment for their injustice and idolatry, but these warnings were **always coupled with a call to repent and return**. *“When people or nations strayed from God’s ways, judgment came in the form of defeat or calamity — but always with a call to return”*. God’s heart was (and is) to show mercy if people humbly turn back.

The supreme demonstration of God's justice and mercy together is the cross of Christ. The New Testament reveals that **God judges sin yet offers mercy through Jesus**. Scripture says, *"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him"* (John 3:17). Jesus bore the judgment our sins deserved, so that forgiveness could be extended to us. In this sense **"mercy triumphs over judgment"** (James 2:13), not by canceling judgment, but by satisfying it in Christ and giving us a chance to repent. God *"is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9). *His* desire is that no one be destroyed by sin, but that everyone would turn back to Him and live. This mercy, however, does not mean God ignores evil. Wrongdoing still has consequences, and a final Day of Judgment is promised when all will be set right (Revelation 20:12). The hope for those who trust in Christ is that **"there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"** (Romans 8:1). God's ultimate plan is to remove evil without removing us, to save us through repentance and faith.

Understanding God's character as **both** just and merciful lays the foundation for our own stance. **We are not the ultimate judge – God is**. Yet, He calls us to respond to His righteousness in specific ways: first by examining ourselves, and then by reflecting His justice and mercy in how we treat others.

### **Personal Responsibility: Start With Our Own Hearts**

When it comes to judgment, the Bible consistently directs us to **look in the mirror before pointing a finger**. Jesus said, *"Do not judge, so that you will not be judged"*. At first glance this sounds like a blanket prohibition on judging anyone. But Jesus' meaning becomes clear as He continues: *"For in the way you judge, you will be judged... Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?"* (Matthew 7:1–5). He is

forbidding a **hypocritical, self-righteous** attitude that eagerly criticizes others while ignoring one's own sins. In fact, Jesus uses almost comical imagery – a person with a plank in their eye trying to remove a speck from someone else – to underscore our tendency to be blind to our own faults. His remedy is to **judge ourselves first**: *“first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's”* (Matt. 7:5).

So, are we to judge others, ourselves, or neither? Jesus' teaching implies **our primary responsibility is to judge our own heart and actions**. We are indeed called to exercise discernment (more on that shortly), but any correction we offer others must come from a place of humility and personal repentance. Scripture explicitly urges self-examination: *“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!”* (2 Corinthians 13:5). Rather than rushing to pronounce others guilty, we ought to regularly take stock of our own spiritual condition. Are we living in line with Christ's teachings? Are we harboring sin or unforgiveness? Such honest self-judgment is crucial, because if we discipline ourselves, we invite God's grace. As Paul told the Corinthians, *“if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged”* (1 Corinthians 11:31). In other words, **when we willingly repent and course-correct, we spare ourselves God's discipline**.

This principle applies not only personally but also communally. *“It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God”* (1 Peter 4:17). That means the Church (and by extension each believer) must hold itself to account before it casts judgment on the world. It's hypocritical to denounce the sins of society if we ignore corruption or cruelty in our own midst. Jesus reserved some of His harshest words for religious hypocrites, those who “strain out a gnat but swallow a camel” in moral matters (Matthew 23:24). We shouldn't fall into that trap. **Our role is not to set**

**ourselves up as moral judges over everyone else, but first to come under God's judgment ourselves**, to repent and be made right with Him. Only then can we see clearly to help others.

What about the oft-misquoted “judge not” command? Understanding it properly, we see that **we are neither to be condemning judges nor to abandon discernment**. We are to be repentant sinners who speak to fellow sinners with grace and truth. There *is* a kind of judging we are *not* to do: acting as if we knew people's hearts or as if we ourselves were sinless. “*Who are you to judge your neighbor?*” Scripture asks pointedly, since “**There is only one Lawgiver and Judge**”, God Himself (James 4:12). Recognizing this should make us humble. We leave **ultimate judgment** to God. Our job is to humbly align ourselves with His will, starting with our own conduct.

### **The Role of Repentance: Embracing Mercy**

If personal responsibility begins with self-examination, the next step is **repentance**. Repentance means having a change of mind and heart, turning away from sin and toward God. It's not a popular word today, but it is absolutely central in Scripture. From the Old Testament prophets to John the Baptist to Jesus and the apostles, the consistent message is: **repent and return to God**. Why? Because **this is how we escape judgment and receive mercy**. God's judgment is never capricious; it aims to wake us up to the truth. “*As I live, declares the Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live*” (Ezekiel 33:11). God would much rather see a person sorrowfully renounce evil and find life, than see that person perish in their wrongdoing.

Jesus' own mission highlighted repentance. He began His ministry proclaiming, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 4:17). He came **not** to rubber-stamp people's

sins, but to offer forgiveness on the condition that they turn from sin. His call to the woman caught in adultery was “Neither do I condemn you, **go and sin no more.**” Repentance is thus the gateway to grace. The Bible promises that *“If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us”* (1 John 1:9). But without repentance, there is no true conversion or healing. One striking biblical promise is *“if my people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear... forgive their sin and heal their land”* (2 Chronicles 7:14). This shows that when God’s people repent, He eagerly extends mercy and even restoration. The **expectation of the reader (and every person)** is to respond to God’s warnings with a change of heart, not stubborn pride.

It’s important to grasp that God’s kindness is meant to lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4). If you sense guilt or conviction about something in your life, that is actually God’s mercy toward you, an invitation to turn back before worse consequences come. For believers, repentance isn’t a one-time action but a continual posture. We live in a spirit of humility, ready to admit wrong and align ourselves again with God’s ways. This ongoing repentance keeps our conscience clear and our fellowship with God intimate. For seekers, repentance might sound heavy, but it’s essentially coming home to the God who loves you. It means dropping our defenses and excuses, and accepting the grace that Jesus made possible. **Our role here is straightforward: when confronted with our sin, either by Scripture, conscience, or others’ correction, we are to repent rather than resist.** That is how we escape judgment. As Jesus warned, *“unless you repent, you will all likewise perish”* (Luke 13:5). The good news is, the moment we do repent, heaven rejoices and mercy flows (Luke 15:7).



And what of God's judgment when we repent? Time and again, the Bible shows that **genuine repentance moves the heart of God from anger to compassion**. Consider ancient Nineveh: when that wicked city heeded Jonah's warning and repented in sackcloth, "*God saw their deeds... and relented concerning the calamity*" He had threatened (Jonah 3:10). The judgment was averted. In our lives, too, while unrepented sin carries a fearful expectation of judgment, repentance opens the door to God's pardon. Therefore, rather than dread God's judgment, we should see it as a loving Father's discipline meant to steer us back to life. "*God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness*" (Hebrews 12:10). The proper response is a contrite heart. **Repentance is how we, the judged, fall into the arms of divine mercy.**

### **Why Call Out Sin if Jesus Forgives?**

At this point a fair question arises, especially for those exploring Christianity: *If Jesus forgives sins, why do Christians and churches still speak out against sin?* Why not just focus on forgiveness and "not judge" anyone? The answer is that **forgiveness is never a license to continue in sin**. Jesus forgives in order to *free* us from sin's power, not to affirm that our sins weren't so bad. Sin is spiritually deadly and often socially destructive. Out of love, it must be addressed. **We call out sin for the same reason a doctor points out disease, not to gloat or shame, but to urge a cure.** In the spiritual family of believers, the Bible actually commands loving accountability: "*If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him*" (Luke 17:3). Notice that rebuke and forgiveness go hand in hand. The goal of calling out someone's wrongdoing is ultimately that they repent and experience the joy of forgiveness.

Openly naming sin can be uncomfortable in our "live and let live" culture, but Scripture says "*Better is open rebuke than hidden love*" (Proverbs 27:5). In other words, gently correcting

someone's harmful behavior is a greater act of love than a silent apathy that leaves them in danger.

In the early church, this kind of loving confrontation was taken seriously. The Apostle Paul instructed Timothy that unrepentant leaders in the church must be corrected publicly “*so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning*” (1 Timothy 5:20). Public accountability served both to bring the sinner to repentance and to warn others not to take sin lightly. Similarly, Paul scolded the Corinthian church for tolerating blatant immorality in their midst; their failure to discipline it was actually unloving and harmful to the whole community (1 Corinthians 5:1–6). Paul's counsel was to address the sin firmly for the sake of the person's soul and the church's integrity. This wasn't done in a spirit of malice, but with hope that the individual would be saved in the end (1 Cor. 5:5).

Even outside the church, there are times when Christians must speak up about sins that harm others, social evils and injustices. Jesus identified Himself with the poor and oppressed, and the prophets constantly exposed the sins of nations: corruption, exploitation, violence. To remain silent in the face of evil is neither loving nor faithful. **“Have no fellowship with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them,”** Paul writes (Ephesians 5:11). That means Christians shouldn't participate in or wink at wrongdoing, but instead shine a light on it. For example, if there is abuse, racism, fraud, or any such “darkness,” a follower of Christ is called to **lovingly** confront it, not ignore it. This benefits the community and honors God's justice.

However, **the purpose of calling out sin is not to condemn people to hopelessness**; it's to lead them toward healing. Think of the Old Testament prophet Nathan. When King David committed a grave sin (adultery and arranging a murder), God sent Nathan to **publicly** expose

David's sin through a story and prophetic word. David was cut to the heart, confessed, and was forgiven (2 Samuel 12; Psalm 51). David still faced consequences, but because his sin was brought into the open, he was able to repent deeply and find mercy. Had Nathan said nothing, David might have continued in self-deception, and the rot would spread. In the same way, the church today sometimes must address sin in its own ranks publicly, not to destroy reputations, but to uphold truth and invite repentance that leads to restoration. It is precisely **because** Jesus forgives that we want people to know they **need** His forgiveness. If we pretend that destructive behaviors are okay, we are depriving people of the chance to recognize their need and turn to Christ.

Yet, this must be done with a redemptive spirit. The Bible lays out a process for confronting sin that starts privately (Matthew 18:15-17) and only becomes public if a person refuses to listen at earlier stages. The end goal is always that the person **“may be won over”** and reconciled, not humiliated. So yes, we still call out sin, but not to elevate ourselves or act as moral police. We do it under God's direction, with tears in our eyes and prayer in our hearts. **In a world where “truth” is often subjective, Christians are to lovingly uphold God's definition of right and wrong, all while extending the same grace we ourselves have received.**

### **Righteous Discernment vs. Hypocritical Condemnation**

How can we tell if we are exercising **righteous discernment** or sliding into **hypocritical condemnation**? Jesus gives us a clear standard: *“Do not judge by outward appearance, but judge with righteous judgment”* (John 7:24). Righteous discernment means evaluating things by God's truth, with a desire to help, whereas hypocritical judgment is based on pride, anger, or superficial metrics. Several principles help us distinguish the two:

- **Check Your Motive: Discernment** is driven by love and a hope for redemption.

**Condemnation** is driven by self-righteousness or a desire to feel superior. Before confronting someone or issuing an opinion, we should ask, “Am I doing this to help them and honor God, or just to vent anger or elevate myself?” The difference in motive is often evident in our tone. A loving discernment is sorrowful about someone’s sin; a hypocritical spirit takes secret pleasure in another’s downfall. We are warned that *“judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy”*, a sobering reminder to correct others only with a merciful heart.

- **Examine Yourself First:** As emphasized earlier, Jesus requires us to address our own sins before we address others’ (Matthew 7:5). If I am harshly judging someone for a sin I am equally guilty of, that is the textbook definition of hypocrisy. Paul wrote, *“you have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for you who judge practice the same things”* (Romans 2:1). We lose moral credibility and invite God’s discipline when we do this. Righteous discernment, on the other hand, comes after self-examination. It says, “I too am a sinner saved by grace; let’s help each other overcome this.” There’s a humility in that approach that is totally absent in hypocritical condemnation.

- **Align with God’s Word:** Righteous judgment is **according to God’s standards, not our personal biases**. We must be careful not to label something as sin just because *we* dislike it, nor to excuse something God calls sin because we happen to like it. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for judging by human standards and missing the “weightier matters” of God’s law, *“justice, mercy, and faithfulness”* (Matthew 23:23). To judge rightly, we need to know God’s Word and let it inform our sense of right and wrong. Hypocritical judges often “major on minors” or apply a double standard. For example, one might condemn

others for petty issues while ignoring one's own greed or pride. Jesus called this *"straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel."* True discernment has a consistent standard, God's standard, applied first to ourselves and then to others in truth *and* love.

- **Aim for Restoration:** Perhaps the greatest difference is that **hypocritical condemnation seeks to punish or ostracize**, whereas **righteous discernment seeks to correct and restore**. Galatians 6:1 instructs, *"if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently,"* and immediately adds, *"but watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."* This single verse captures both the call to help our brother or sister *and* the warning to remain humble (for we too could fall). If our intention in "judging" someone is to bring them back to what is good, for their sake, then we are likely on the right track. If our intention is to assert our own moral high ground or to shame them, we've gone off course. Righteous rebuke is an act of love; hypocritical judgment is an act of pride.

In summary, **discernment** is a necessary virtue, we need to distinguish good from evil in our lives and communities. Jesus wants us to use wise judgment about teachings, behaviors, and situations (see Matthew 7:15–20 where He tells us to discern false prophets by their fruits). But **condemnation** in the sense of passing final judgment on someone's soul or worth has no place in our hearts; that role is God's alone. We do not write people off as hopeless or irredeemable; nor do we pretend we are above temptation. Instead, we speak truth with empathy, always aware that "but for the grace of God, there go I." A practical checkpoint is this: whenever we must take a stand against a sin or confront someone, we should do so **with a posture of humility and grief, not glee**. Think of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem as He pronounced its coming judgment (Luke 19:41-44), or Paul writing *"with tears"* about those who live as enemies of the cross (Philippians

3:18). Their hearts were broken even as they spoke hard truth. Ours should be too, if we are exercising righteous judgment.

### **A Faithful Posture in Today's World**

What does all this look like in practice, especially when we encounter moral failures, whether in individuals, the church, or society? A **biblically faithful posture** today will stand out from both the harshness and the laxity we often see around us. It's a posture marked by **humility, courage, and hope**.

- **Humility and Self-Awareness:** When we hear of someone else's moral failure, our first response should not be gossipy delight or instant rage; it should be sober self-reflection: *"Lord, keep me from falling. Is there any of that in my heart?"* The Bible cautions, *"Let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall"* (1 Corinthians 10:12). A faithful Christian knows they too are susceptible to sin. This guards us from a prideful dogpile when another stumbles. Instead, **we grieve** that sin has marred another life or witness. We pray for them. We examine if we in any way contributed to a culture that allowed it. For example, if a church leader is exposed in scandal, a humble congregation will ask, "Did we put them on a pedestal? Did we ignore warning signs?" Such humility doesn't excuse the sin, but it refuses to adopt a stance of "I'm better than them." It remembers Jesus' words: *"He who is without sin, cast the first stone"* (John 8:7). We drop any stones of smug condemnation, and instead take up prayers and, when appropriate, loving counsel or rebuke.
- **Commitment to Truth and Justice:** Humility does not mean passivity or turning a blind eye. In fact, true humility submits to God's standards zealously. Thus, a faithful posture

means we **do not whitewash or minimize evil**, even when it's "our side" or someone we like who is in the wrong. Whether it's a prominent pastor's misconduct, a Christian institution's cover-up of abuse, or corruption in government, we do no one favors by pretending everything is fine. **Love rejoices with the truth** (1 Corinthians 13:6). In the Old Testament, the priests were told not to show favoritism or be afraid to speak the truth, *"for judgment belongs to God"* (Deuteronomy 1:17). In our context, that means we must be willing to hold even our own communities accountable. If a fellow believer or leader is found in sin, a faithful posture is to pursue appropriate discipline and restoration, rather than denial or dismissal. If our society calls evil good, we must gently **"shine as lights"** by holding out God's better way (Philippians 2:15). This can include civic action, for instance, advocating for the oppressed, reforming unjust practices, voting our values, always with a spirit of **service, not self-righteousness**. Remember, biblical prophets often spoke hard truths to those in power, but their goal was to bring their nation to repentance and alignment with God's righteousness, not to grab power for themselves. In the same way, our truth-telling today should be motivated by a desire to see **healing and justice**, not by a desire to win arguments or crush opponents.

- **Mercy and Restoration:** The true test of a righteous posture is how we treat people **after** the truth comes out. Do we extend mercy to the repentant? The church is called to be a community of forgiveness and second chances (with proper wisdom). Paul, after instructing the Corinthian church to discipline a sinning member, later urged them to **forgive and comfort him** once he repented, *"so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow"* (2 Corinthians 2:7). What a beautiful balance: they had taken the sin seriously, but they also eagerly reaffirmed their love when the man's heart changed. In

our context, when someone owns their failure and seeks to make amends, we should be the first to embrace them and help them rebuild. This might mean practical support, accountability partners, counseling, whatever facilitates genuine restoration. On the flip side, if someone persists in evil and refuses correction, a faithful posture may require creating distance or enforcing consequences (for example, removing a leader from authority to protect others). Even then, our hope for eventual repentance remains. We never cease to pray for redemption.

- **Patience and Perspective:** When facing the moral failures of *institutions* (say, a denomination or a government body), change often comes slowly. A faithful posture doesn't descend into cynicism or despair. Instead, it clings to the long view of God's sovereignty. We labor for reform where we can, because it's right, but we recognize that ultimate justice awaits Christ's return. This keeps us from burning out or resorting to unrighteous methods to achieve "justice now." James 1:20 reminds us "*the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.*" So we temper our zeal with patience. We also avoid blanket condemnations. For instance, if one church leader fails, we don't conclude "all churches are frauds." We grieve that one has tarnished Christ's name, even as we remember that **Jesus, the perfect Judge, will one day vindicate His Church and right every wrong.** This hope allows us to persevere in doing good, even when evil seems momentarily to win.
- **Civic Relevance – Salt and Light:** Finally, it's worth noting that when we live out this balanced posture, it has a profound positive impact on society. In a culture oscillating between moral relativism and vicious judgmentalism, a community that embodies **both** moral clarity **and** mercy is a breath of fresh air. Jesus called His followers the "salt of the



earth” and “light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-16). Think of how much our world needs flavorful preservation and gentle illumination. When believers refuse to join unjust mobs (literal or virtual) and instead speak with reason and compassion, we model a better way. When we acknowledge wrongs openly but also extend grace, we show the world a picture of God’s own heart. This doesn’t mean the world will always applaud us, some will still cry “intolerant” when we uphold biblical standards, and others will call us “weak” for forgiving. But over time, genuine love and integrity are hard to deny. Some will be drawn to Christ by the way we handle crises and controversies differently. They’ll notice that in our communities, justice and mercy kiss. They may even say, like the pagans said of the early church, “See how they love one another.” That love includes loving enough to speak truth, and loving enough to forgive.

In the end, our role in judgment is a call to **holy discernment wrapped in humble love**. We are not to be either self-righteous judges or apathetic bystanders. Rather, we recognize God alone as the perfect Judge and submit ourselves to Him. We take sin seriously, starting with our own. We repent and seek God’s mercy, and then we become channels of that mercy to others. We discern right from wrong through the lens of Scripture, and we hold one another accountable as family, always aiming to restore. We call out evil where it is found, but not with glee or malice, with the longing to see **people and systems healed** and aligned with God’s goodness. We forgive as we have been forgiven, and we defend the truth not to win debates but to win souls. This posture is not easy, but it is Christ-like.

Jesus Himself embodied it perfectly: He could thunder “woe” to hardened hypocrites, yet He wept over the lost. He did not shy away from declaring God’s standards, yet He drew near to the contrite and lifted them up. He is our model. If you are a believer, He invites you to follow

Him in this balance of **“truth with love, justice with mercy, and discernment with grace”**. If you are a seeker, know that this is the kind of community Christ intends, one where **sin is acknowledged and dealt with, but grace has the final word**. May we all, by God’s grace, cultivate this posture in our lives. In a world full of both darkness and unforgiveness, may we shine the light of a Judge who died to save, a Savior who is *“full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). Let us live out humble discernment, so that in us people can see a reflection of God’s own heart: **holy, just, loving, and merciful**.