



## Whose Voices Are You Listening To?

**Galatians 5:17:** (NASB) *For the flesh sets its desire against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.*



Technology brings the world to the palm of our hand. This means we are bombarded with voices. Worldly voices of opinion, anger, politics, perspective, ego, trends and personal interpretations of morality. If we have technology in our life, it is virtually impossible to completely shut these voices out. On the other hand, we have the voice of God through His word and through His people. This voice is powerful, but quiet. It is relevant, but subtle. It is nourishing, but it seems outdated. It is transformative in a very positive way, but it is also laughed at as out of touch. How do we identify the voices around us and then intentionally choose those we will listen to?

Eve set the first example of listening to a voice other than God's in the Garden of Eden. Her fateful conversation with Satan set a sinful trend for heeding that which is contrary to God's will.

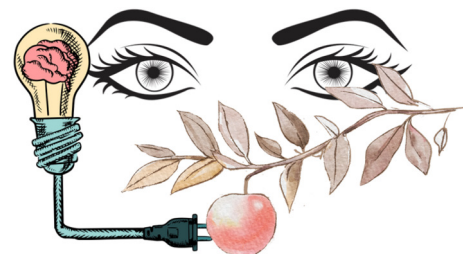
### First, Satan baited Eve:

**Genesis 3:1-6:** (NASB) *<sup>1</sup>Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, indeed, has God said, you shall not eat from any tree of the garden? <sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, from the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; <sup>3</sup>but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.*

Everything was perfect until someone contradicted God.

### Next, Satan "enlightened" her with a massive lie mixed with some truth:

*<sup>4</sup>The serpent said to the woman, you surely will not die! <sup>5</sup>For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*



This "enlightenment" was a challenge and a deception.

### Eve was now refocused on the wrong message:

*<sup>6</sup>When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise...*

### Eve's new focus led to a decision to walk away from God:

*...she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.*

Both Satan's and Eve's voices are present. She was listening to her own voice, which was based on the voice of Satan. The two voices were contrary to God. Adam and Eve's choice was fundamentally wrong. They violated the basic moral principle of listening ONLY to the voice of God.

For us, that same moral premise exists today - we are required to listen only to God's voice through His written word. This includes the voices of those who stand for His will and His plan.



In this case, whose voice dominated this decision to sin? Satan's! Satan seemed logical and drew her attention subtly. We have to ask ourselves, are we listening to Satan without even realizing it? And then do we add our own voice to make it a chorus?

**Many times in Scripture, God warns His people to heed ONLY His words and precepts. Here is one example:**

**Proverbs 6:20-23:** (NASB) <sup>20</sup>My son, observe the commandment of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother; <sup>21</sup>Bind them continually on your heart; tie them around your neck. <sup>22</sup>When you walk about, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk to you. <sup>23</sup>For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life.

God's word can be all around us and influencing us in every part of our life if we choose it to be that voice of influence. These warnings were constantly given to counter the power of other voices of sinful influence.

To work through this dilemma, let's look at three things:



We will quote from an article about the deceptively powerful influence of electronic media.



We will see how Jesus responded to the scribes and the Pharisees who exercised their power and voices to corrupt the nation of Israel. They had a powerful and influential voice. It was corrupting those who were listening, even though it was disguised as being godly.



Most importantly, we will look at scriptural solutions to the serious challenge we face of being surrounded by ungodly voices.

First, an introduction to the research:



**"moral disengagement"**

We are going to reference a term called "moral disengagement." Moral disengagement is a cognitive mechanism (the way the brain works) that detaches our internal moral standards from our actions, allowing us to engage in unethical behavior without feeling distress. A common example is how video games require a player to practice moral disengagement when killing is required to advance in the game. It reduces the discomfort we feel from the dissonance of a situation.



(Source: Ron Tamborini Allison Eden Sujay Prabhu Nicholas David Bowman [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314732168\\_Morality\\_and\\_Media\\_Effects](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314732168_Morality_and_Media_Effects))  
...Moral standards are learned by witnessing the co-occurrence of behaviors and consequences associated with them. Repeatedly viewing rewards and punishments associated with specific behaviors leads individuals to develop standards of behavior. These self-sanctions encourage individuals to enact behaviors that are consistent with internal moral standards and to inhibit behaviors that are inconsistent. However, through moral disengagement individuals may overcome the inhibitory effects of self-sanctions.



In other words, we each have self-imposed moral standards, but we can observe, listen and follow things that contradict those standards. Circumstances can inhibit what we would normally say or how we would normally act. Suddenly we are listening to a voice that is not the voice we originally were listening to. The brain finds ways to make us comfortable with these choices. Our normal standards are replaced by what is vile.



We will review the final attempt of Jesus to get the scribes and Pharisees to see the errors of their ways in Matthew 23. Do what they say, but not what they do! We will review the principles behind seven of the eight “woes” Jesus spoke to the Pharisees. Then we will apply their behaviors to our current-day voices that subvert truth and righteousness.



**Check out our CQ Kids videos:**  
**WHO WERE THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES?**  
[christianquestions.com/youtube](http://christianquestions.com/youtube)



We will suggest scriptural solutions.

(Source: Ron Tamborini Allison Eden Sujay Prabhu Nicholas David Bowman  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314732168\\_Morality\\_and\\_Media\\_Effects](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314732168_Morality_and_Media_Effects))  
 Moral disengagement is described primarily as a cognitive process (a thinking process) that is facilitated by seven mechanisms. Each of these mechanisms involves rationalization, either in a motive capacity (i.e., before engaging in an act) or in a reactive capacity (i.e., after performing an act).

1. The first mechanism to help our brains and our hearts disengage from morality is: dehumanization (i.e., referring to or thinking of victims as being less than human)

This is a serious malady. Matthew 23 is the last attempt from Jesus to get the scribes and Pharisees to see the error of their ways. Before this, he had many debates and discussions; he answered their questions but got nowhere. He was getting close to the point of crucifixion, and this was his last-ditch effort to say: *Look at what you are doing!*

By their teaching and example, these men made sure they were in a position to take financial advantage of the vulnerable. They covered this with an appearance of piety.



Matthew 23:14: (NASB) **Woe to you**, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.

**NOTE:** Even though this verse is not in the oldest manuscripts, we are including it here since it appears in Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47. This indicates the thought is genuine.



The Pharisees did not treat the widows as equals; they treated them as gullible sources of income. They were picking on those who could not take care of themselves and the Pharisees had the nerve to do that in the name of God. We are connecting **dehumanization** to this example.



Does our world have opinionated voices on various controversial subjects filled with **name-calling** and **vitriol**?

There has been much psychological analysis of the Holocaust and what allowed so many ordinary people to act in such horrific ways, even by just turning a blind eye to what was going on.

Quoting from the 2011 book named, *Less Than Human*, by David Livingstone Smith: “Thinking sets the agenda for action, and thinking of humans as less than human paves the way for atrocity. The Nazis were explicit about the status of their victims. They were subhuman, and as such were excluded from the system of moral rights and obligations that bind humankind together. It is wrong to kill a person, but permissible to exterminate a rat. To the Nazis, all the Jews, Gypsies and others were rats: dangerous, disease-carrying rats.”

How evil! This idea of treating someone as subhuman is separating them as “the other” and has gone on throughout history and opens the door to cruelty and genocide.

In politics, opponents are routinely dehumanized, which means it is okay to treat people disrespectfully. After all, “He is an idiot,” “She is delusional,” and “They are all unpatriotic morons who do not care about the facts.”



We need to understand the value of looking at this and ask ourselves: *Am I doing the same things that happened in Nazi Germany?* Of course, we say NO. But are we on the same road? Maybe we are not at the same exit, but are we on the same road? Are we going down that road of looking at people who are on the other side and thinking of them as less? Are the voices we are hearing encouraging us to look at them as less?



### Scriptural guidelines for hearing the right voices:

Matthew 5:43-45: (NASB) <sup>43</sup>You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. <sup>44</sup>But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.





If we love our enemies, we cannot possibly go down the road of dehumanizing. We cannot possibly go down the road of name-calling and vitriol. We are talking about loving them selflessly the way Jesus loved his enemies. This is how to counteract all of that negativity. This is the kind of voice we want to listen to.



### Listening to the right voices:

A godly voice is not condemnatory or belittling of others as it realizes that we are all sinners and we all need God's grace and the ransom of Jesus. When we hear any voice belittle or dehumanize another, we must intentionally stand against it!

Standing for godly principles only begins to happen when we dedicate ourselves to knowing those principles.

**Not belittling someone else sounds like it should be easy.  
What about things that are more subtle?**

The further we develop this question of identifying the voices we listen to, the more we will realize that none of this is easy. When we grow accustomed to certain things, eventually they no longer show up on our warning radar. The worldly voices around us need close INTENTIONAL attention.

It is one thing to tell ourselves that we should pay attention, but too often we get a glazed-over look, and things we are exposed to all the time become less objectionable. We need to INTENTIONALLY pay attention so we can ask ourselves if we SHOULD be focusing our attention on any particular voice.

(Source: Ron Tamborini Allison Eden Sujay Prabhu Nicholas David Bowman  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314732168\\_Morality\\_and\\_Media\\_Effects](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314732168_Morality_and_Media_Effects))

**The second mechanism for moral disengagement:**

### 2. Minimizing, ignoring, or misconstruing consequences of actions

Let's return to the scribes and Pharisees. By their teaching and example and as part of their job, the Pharisees were dedicated to draw new converts to follow them.

**Instead of humbly bringing those new converts before God, they brought those converts to the brink of destruction.**

Matthew 23:15: (YLT) **Woe to you**, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye go round the sea and the dry land to make one proselyte, and whenever it may happen - ye make him a son of Gehenna twofold more than yourselves.

While the intention to convert the Gentiles about them was a good thing, the Pharisees perverted the path to God. They were only about their agenda of power, and it did not matter who might be misled.





Does our world get so caught up in their agenda that consequences to others become irrelevant?

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We had a listener email us at who was very distraught:

Jessica: "These last five or so years politically have made me a little ashamed to call myself Christian because I don't agree with a lot of the right-wing ideas, but I don't agree with all the left wing either. We have all become so afraid to speak our mind or the opposite... ready to pounce on anyone who does (by "cancelling" them) that I feel like we are all doomed, and it's only going to get worse and worse. I feel scared for my young kids and almost feel like maybe it was selfish of me to bring them into this world. It's spinning so out of control. I know God is here and in control and that in the grand scheme of life and all of time this is just a moment, and the world has been much worse off in the past but it feels so dark. My goal is to stay in my happy place, do good and what I can for the people around me, be a good mom, wife and friend but also keep my head down and out of conflict and that doesn't seem right either. My daughter is four and is going to start asking questions about all these things, and I want to be wise and not waiver with my response."

We appreciate Jessica opening up to us. The various factions are screaming and demanding their rights, even if those rights impede on someone else's. We are faced with issues unheard of in previous times.

See: <https://nypost.com/2021/12/09/penn-teammate-speaks-out-against-transgender-swimmer-lia-thomas/>

A current issue as an example is a transgender swimmer at the University of Pennsylvania's swim team who is shattering school records. This person competed as a male for three years and is being allowed to compete as a woman, anticipated to break national women's college records set by Olympic gold medalists. In demanding transgender rights, the biological women competing know they will lose no matter how much work they put into their training.

Those who oppose this say the integrity of women's sports is being destroyed and it is unfair to biological females. Those who support this say athletic ability varies and there is no evidence that playing on a team of their gender identity affects the sport. Those who participate in sports get better grades and have higher self-esteem, so it is better for kids and young adults to participate.



See: <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/policy/issues/transgender-exclusion-sports>

As of 2020, there is now legislation (Idaho's Fairness in Women's Sports Act) requiring transgender student-athletes to compete in the sport conforming to their gender assigned at birth. The American Civil Liberties Union sued to block its enforcement.

We can say "just rise above this," and "do not let it bother you," until it affects our daughters or granddaughters, or on the flip side, our transgender family member who just wants to swim. What happens when our family or friends are "living the headlines"?



I am not in this situation, but if I had a grandchild who was in this situation (having a male grandchild swimming as a female while going through transgender reassignment surgeries), I would hope that I would be able to sit down and talk through this whole situation in terms of the biology of the male body versus the biology of the female body. It is a proven fact that men naturally have more endurance and are stronger in general, especially if they are athletes. The question I would have to ask my child or grandchild: Is it inherently fair to the others competing to do this? I get that the transgender young person wants to be treated fairly as well, but are they treating the others in this competition fairly? I would hope that I would be able to talk to them about fairness in the bigger picture. But there is no question about it - this is a hard thing to handle.



#### Scriptural guidelines for hearing the right voices:

**1 Corinthians 3:4-6: (NASB)** <sup>4</sup>For when one says, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are you not mere men? <sup>5</sup>What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. <sup>6</sup>I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.

We can be on different sides of issues and still strive to find harmony. In the transgender issue, harmony is trying to treat everyone fairly and with respect. This may be hard, but it is not impossible. Just because we do not get our way does not make the situation unfair. In the early days of Christianity, there were factions and they had to rise above their differences to find the higher good.



#### Listening to the right voices:

A godly voice will always draw others to God and never draw them to some poor representation or skewed perspective of who God is. Whenever we hear a voice that draws to some agenda or practices that are not of the highest order, run the other way!

Labels and headlines are not reliable. Most headlines do not tell us what is in an article - they just get us to read it. Most labels do not tell us what is behind the person - they just get us to pay attention. We need to be careful.

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The third mechanism quoted for moral disengagement:

### 3. Attribution of blame (i.e., blaming the victim for the transgressor's action)

By their teaching and example, the scribes and Pharisees took the sacred things from God and *reinterpreted them as mere details* of spirituality.

This took the focus off of God and placed it on things:

Matthew 23:16-17: (NASB) <sup>16</sup>**Woe to you**, blind guides, who say, *Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.* <sup>17</sup>*You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?*

(Source: Bible Commentary, Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, Jamieson, Fausset and Brown: This is a striking expression of the ruinous effects of erroneous teaching. Our Lord, here and in some following verses, condemns the subtle distinctions they made as to the sanctity of oaths -- distinctions invented only to promote their own avaricious purposes.)

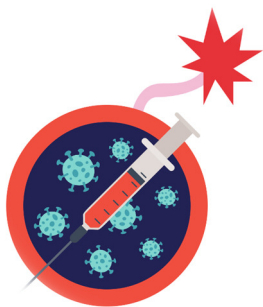
The Pharisees created distinctions that did not need to exist to make themselves appear more powerful and religious than the average person. The Pharisees blamed the people for not living right, but they kept changing the rules! And they did it in the name of God. They manipulated the details of truth to show their self-proclaimed superiority in knowledge and action.



Does our world place  
personal thought  
over big picture facts  
as a way to place the blame of  
ignorance or heartlessness  
on those they oppose?

We are going to say a word that will trigger people on one side or the other. We will call it a “trigger bomb.” INCOMING! Vaccines.

Do we look down on people on the other side and blame them for what is happening? We each have our own firm idea of whether or not to take the vaccine for Coronavirus, and the people on the other side are quite simply wrong. There is fear on both sides. Each side has their own experts, doctors and scientists giving opposing facts. To mandate vaccines or you lose your job or cannot go to a restaurant is repulsive to many who say their liberty is being trampled on, and it is all a governmental conspiracy of control. Give an inch here and what is next? Others say this is a public health issue, not personal liberty issue. We mandate wearing seatbelts in cars. The government has to step in and keep us from hurting ourselves and those around us.







Are vaccines a dangerous medical experiment or the greatest public health advance in the history of medicine? Is it immoral and not loving your neighbor if you do not get vaccinated? That is what the Archbishop of Canterbury said recently, and on Twitter his statements were called an “utterly divisive, coercive, hateful rant.”

Our personal opinions on issues like vaccines and mandates get us in trouble when we start to degrade, dehumanize and point blame. These are big issues, and the voices behind the issues are loud, convincing and littered with inaccuracy.

We cannot get to the point where we are stooping to name-calling and even hatred - even if it is just in our own minds and we never actually say the words out loud.



Our internal voice can affect us as much as external voices - we have essentially created another godless voice to listen to. As Christians, we are not even supposed to be *thinking* hurtful things about someone else.

Can we be so tied up in these voices we are listening to that we lose sight of scriptural principles? We are supposed to represent what is higher. **But what is “higher” in this case?**



**The fact that there is a human being on the other side of this issue is higher.** Whether we agree with them or not is not important. We should care about the fact if they are trying to communicate with us.

We can do this by making an attempt to hear what they are really saying and thinking. We should listen to their sources of information in order to learn and see if we can accept their point of view. If we cannot accept it, it is okay. If we listen with respect to try to absorb what they are saying, we may get the same respect in return. But we have to wait our turn - this is a back-and-forth endeavor where we can change the dialog by changing our attitude, by being an actual Christian. It is about equality, putting things on the table and loving that person enough to work through the differences together.



### Scriptural guidelines for hearing the right voices:

**Galatians 5:13:** (NASB) *For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*

We cannot use that great privilege and freedom we have in Christ to batter our brethren! This privilege of liberty in Christ can be a club or a welcoming handshake. Which approach would cause Jesus to bless us?



### Listening to the right voices:

A godly voice will never override or overgovern another's freedom of conscience. Instead, it will show what true God-honoring actions look like. Whenever we hear a voice that boxes others in with misrepresented commands from Scripture, we need to soberly consider the source and act accordingly.



Even if another's conscience is skewed, we want to be a godly voice that shows complete respect and communicates with them, as we might have some influence for their good. We must remember that beating somebody down never helps them to stand up.

It is a serious matter to be a voice that draws others away from God. We need to think before we speak.

**Obviously, many voices can lead us astray.  
What about the voices of "moral justification"?**

Human beings want to be right, and we do not want to have to change to do so. We all have the challenge of looking at ourselves and determining how much of our behavior is to make us look right in our own eyes versus making us right in the eyes of God. Facing this can be a massive challenge requiring humility and change.

(Source: Ron Tamborini Allison Eden Sujay Prabhu Nicholas David Bowman  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314732168\\_Morality\\_and\\_Media\\_Effects](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314732168_Morality_and_Media_Effects))

The fourth mechanism of moral disengagement:

#### 4. Moral justification (i.e., providing reasons for immoral behavior)

By their teaching and example, the scribes and Pharisees led others towards an outward show of compliance and godliness based on small details they made to appear large and important. This took attention away from those things that actually showed a God-honoring heart.



**They led others away from God:**

**Matthew 23:23-24:** (NASB) <sup>23</sup>**Woe to you**, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. <sup>24</sup>You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

*Strain out a gnat and swallow a camel* - Jesus is using sarcasm here.

The Pharisees were so worried about the tiny little things in the Law (straining out the gnats) like giving a tenth (tithing) of their spices to the priests, that they ignored the really big transgressions (swallowing unclean animals whole) against the spirit of the Law in their own lives (like neglecting *justice and mercy and faithfulness*)!

The Pharisees took great pains to show themselves as fulfilling the Law in extraordinary detail, when in fact they were putting on a show to hide the destructiveness of their lifestyle.

#### 4. Moral justification (i.e., providing reasons for immoral behavior).

There is a psychology involved with immorality.



Watch out for these telltale issues that can be used to justify our actions:

- One unethical act opens the door to other unethical acts. It is a slippery slope because sin begets sin.
- There is a small price to pay as a cost of doing business.
- The end justify the means.
- We do not believe what we are doing is wrong.
- Human beings like to help each other. When we help others, we do not see what we are doing as unethical.

For example, here in the United States, we test car emissions. If your car fails, it is too polluting to stay on the road. A study by Harvard Business School found that between 20 and 50 percent of cars are passed that really failed. You have a better chance of passing if you drive a Honda Civic than an expensive car like a BMW or Ferrari. The testers, who earn a modest salary, feel empathy for the Civic drivers, committing fraud not because they are greedy but because they are nice.



(See: <https://www.npr.org/2012/05/01/151764534/psychology-of-fraud-why-good-people-do-bad-things>)



Now that we understand more about moral justification, let's ask a question relating back to the Pharisees when they worried more about the gnats than swallowing whole, unclean camels:



**Do our spiritual leaders  
preach to others  
the way things ought to be  
while at the same time  
live according to  
a different standard?**

Point to nearly any Christian sect, and we have all seen the headlines of the sexual abuse, the extramarital affairs, the misappropriation of funds and general corruption in leadership. Prosperity gospel preachers bully the faithful into donating their last dime in order to support the preachers' luxury cars, homes and boats. It is disgusting.

**But what can we do when there is so much corruption in church leadership?**

The faithful Christian wants to do what is right, but who do we listen to? Every leader will be flawed by virtue of them being human.



**If we are not hearing the voice of God appropriately where we are worshipping, then we need to go someplace else where we can find it.** We should not stay where the word that is being told to us is contrary to the word and will of God. This might be hard to do, but it really is a simple decision.



### Scriptural guidelines for hearing the right voices:

**Philippians 3:17-19:** (NASB) <sup>17</sup>Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. <sup>18</sup>For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, <sup>19</sup>whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

We may not be in a position to call them out, but we can be in a position to walk away. If we profess to be true Christians following the will of God, there cannot be a watering down or rationalization of His word. If we are following the will of God and what we are being taught is contrary to biblical principles (meaning, does not match what we find in the Bible), we need to rethink our next steps.



### Listening to the right voices:

A godly voice is not only living the humility it wants you to live, it is providing a marked example of what true discipleship looks like. Whenever we hear a voice that boasts dramatic and humble service we need to look elsewhere for our spiritual guidance.

Whenever we hear a voice boasting about the drama of its humility, something is not right. *Look at how humble I am! Follow my great example of humility!* Did Jesus ever boast of how humble he was? No. Instead he lived a life of service, which showed true humility.

(Source: Ron Tamborini Allison Eden Sujay Prabhu Nicholas David Bowman  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314732168\\_Morality\\_and\\_Media\\_Effects](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314732168_Morality_and_Media_Effects))

### The fifth mechanism of moral disengagement:

#### 5. Euphemistic language (i.e., describing an immoral act in softer language)

Once we blur the line, we can never really be sure if we have crossed it or not.

By their teaching and example, the Pharisees hid what they did and why.



**Outwardly they looked like they were squeaky clean and God-honoring, but inside were the stains of their dark and selfish plans and purposes:**

**Matthew 23:25-26:** (NASB) <sup>25</sup>*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.* <sup>26</sup>*You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.*



Tricia asks: Jesus sounds pretty strong and condemning in these “woes.” Shouldn’t we do the same by condemning people?

We need to consider whether we are feeding a voice or attitude that wants to beat down those with whom we disagree. These are harsh criticisms, but we are not in a position to judge hearts like Jesus was. Jesus not only had a right to be hard on them, he had a responsibility to do so. The Pharisees were the spiritual leaders of the Jewish





nation and were leading the Jews *away* from God. This was a final effort by Jesus to bring this favored nation, who just would not listen, back to God.

The Pharisees showed themselves to the people as living their lives with deep appreciation for the Jewish Law. But in fact, they were corrupt leaders with *ungodly intentions and agendas - inside they were full of robbery and self-indulgence.* What a condemnation!



In our social media world,  
do we present ourselves  
as living the dream  
when in fact we are not?  
Do we stimulate  
**competitiveness and jealousy**  
as a way to feel better  
about our broken selves?

Thinking about euphemistic language (i.e., describing an immoral act in softer language), the freedom of immorality is built into the fabric of our advertising, cable and streaming television shows and social media. Sinful acts are normalized and accepted. Personal accountability is not held as the standard.



And again, we are more likely to blur those moral lines with people we like.

Everyone wants to do what they want, but no one wants to be judged for it. Social media is a strange animal. On one hand, we are free to portray ourselves any way we feel like (even if it is all smoke and mirrors or outright lies) where nothing is really shocking anymore. Yet on the other hand, the social media crowd mercilessly bullies what they do not like and is judge and executioner.

Are we allowing what we see and hear in the media to influence where our right and wrong lines are going to be drawn? Will we listen to those voices that say, "It's really no big deal"?

What are we allowing our ears to be attuned to? We are attuned to whatever is around us all the time. Social media is especially a problem because it makes us believe in a fantasy world that seems real and enticing, but is it right? Is it godly? **Is my voice beginning to sing in harmony with the social media**



**chorus?** If it is, then the voices we are listening to - including our own - are leading us deeply astray. We need a clear perspective. Using scriptural guidelines are the key to making this work.



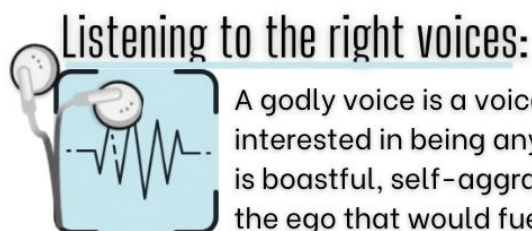
Learning to handle "situation ethics" in light of biblical principles



### Scriptural guidelines for hearing the right voices:

**Galatians 6:6-9:** (NASB) <sup>6</sup>The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him. <sup>7</sup>Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. <sup>8</sup>For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the spirit will from the spirit reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup>Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

**God is not mocked!** We cannot grow weary of doing good. How is God mocked? We can mock God through our words or actions. If our words or actions *do* mock God, there is judgment for that in the future. We will be held accountable to make right those things we did in a wrong way. As Christians, we must be especially careful of what we are listening to, what we are thinking about and what we are repeating. Those voices can lead us away from God and not towards Him.



A godly voice is a voice of truth and encouragement and is not interested in being anything else. Whenever we hear a voice that is boastful, self-aggrandizing or competitive, we need to consider the ego that would fuel such messages. Is that the input YOU want?

Think about what we want - do we want to listen to those who are boastful or competitive, or are we interested in hearing a voice of truth and encouragement? Which will be best for us?

Obviously voices that are peppered with ego are also peppered with damaging messages. Stay away from them!

**Are the voices we listen to telling us to embrace the responsibility we have for our life or hide from it?**

As Christians, it always seems to come down to two things:

1. *Being responsible* for what we think, do and say
2. *Being humble* while we accept that responsibility

This can be a never-ending challenge because we as imperfect humans would sometimes just let this go. After all, no one will know, right?

(Source: Ron Tamborini Allison Eden Sujay Prabhu Nicholas David Bowman  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314732168\\_Morality\\_and\\_Media\\_Effects](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314732168_Morality_and_Media_Effects))

**The sixth mechanism of moral disengagement:**

## 6. Displacement or diffusion of responsibility (i.e., placing responsibility on others)



By their teaching and example, the Pharisees were self-serving hypocrites whose appearance was that of godly men, but they were in fact godless in their desires and actions:

Matthew 23:27-28: (NASB) <sup>27</sup>**Woe to you**, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. <sup>28</sup>So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

(Source: Albert Barnes' Notes on the Whole Bible) Sepulchers were therefore often whitewashed, that they might be distinctly seen. Thus "whited," they appeared beautiful; but within they contained the bones and corrupting bodies of the dead. So the Pharisees. Their outward conduct appeared well; but their hearts were full of hypocrisy, envy, pride, lust and malice - fitly represented by the corruption within a whited tomb.

Jesus was clear: Dressing up the outside does not change the inside. In their actions, the Pharisees were children of Satan as they pursued what they themselves wanted.



Do our social media examples promote things they live by that are deadly to us, under the guise of acceptability and aspiration?

(See: <https://newsnetdaily.com/tiktok-diagnostic-videos-let-some-teens-think-they-have-rare-mental-disorders/amp/>)

Teens and young adults are using TikTok videos to self-diagnose mental illness like borderline personality disorder, bipolar disorder and multiple personality disorder. These are being viewed hundreds of millions of times, reinforcing that they have these issues when they really do not. A recent Wall Street Journal investigation showed that TikTok's algorithm can tell how long you linger on a video, and then shows more and more of the same reinforcing content, making it difficult for mental health workers to treat the actual problem.



### Warning for teenagers:

Mental health issues are so complicated that professional help is often needed. If our listeners have teenagers going down this road, please consider seeking immediate help.

(Source: <https://blog.malwarebytes.com/awareness/2021/09/facebooks-own-research-reveals-the-harm-that-instagram-can-inflict>) Research conducted by Facebook revealed that Instagram makes body image issues worse for about one in three girls; that teenagers blame Instagram for increases in the rate of anxiety and depression; and that one in five teenagers said that Instagram makes them feel worse about themselves. It was also revealed that a



percentage of female teens in the US and UK have suicidal thoughts over what they see on Instagram.

In Facebook's 2019 research report, it found that 14 percent of boys in the US had said that Instagram made them feel bad about themselves. The following year, they found that 40 percent of teen boys experienced negative social comparisons.

As computer scientist Dr. Cal Newport said in his memorable TED Talk, *Why you should quit social media*, social media is designed to provide a constant flow of small, intermittent rewards, just like a slot machine. Newport says, "It's one thing to spend a couple of hours at a slot machine in Las Vegas, but if you bring one with you, and you pull that handle all day long, from when you wake up to when you go to bed: We're not wired for that."

In other words, the "voice" of social media is so loud that people cannot function without it.

Those in positions of influence allow their influence to be damaging. These are voices our friends, family, church members - everyone is hearing! Is this a voice we should pursue, or is there something higher? We need to always look higher.



### Scriptural guidelines for hearing the right voices:

Ephesians 5:2: (NASB) *and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.*

Love has nothing to do with social media. It is all based on popularity and making money. We are supposed to *walk in love* and look to draw people higher because we care about them and not for what they can pay us.

Romans 8:6-8: (NASB) *<sup>6</sup>For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace, <sup>7</sup>because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, <sup>8</sup>and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

*The flesh...does not subject itself to the law of God - it does not even know how. The flesh is broken. We need spirituality to draw us to a higher level and have a positive influence on those around us as well. It is time to turn the volume off on all these voices and pull those around us up higher.*



### Listening to the right voices:

A godly voice is a voice that rings true to discipleship and reflects a genuine character from the inside out. Any voice that has a ring of self-service or worldly peer pressure is not godly, but is, in fact, sin-driven. Such voices should not be entertained!

We need to *make the choice* to not entertain a voice that does not represent our God, His word or its principles.

(Source: Ron Tamborini Allison Eden Sujay Prabhu Nicholas David Bowman  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314732168\\_Morality\\_and\\_Media\\_Effects](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314732168_Morality_and_Media_Effects))

Finally, the seventh mechanism of moral disengagement:

7. Exonerative comparison (i.e., favorably comparing one's moral violation to those of others)





**By their teaching and example, these men proclaimed themselves righteous above their fathers:**



**Matthew 23:29-33:** (YLT) <sup>29</sup>**Woe to you**, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and adorn the tombs of the righteous, <sup>30</sup>and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. <sup>31</sup>So that ye testify to yourselves, that ye are sons of them who did murder the prophets; <sup>32</sup>and ye - ye fill up the measure of your fathers. <sup>33</sup>Serpents! Brood of vipers! how may ye escape from the judgment of the gehenna?

It is not by accident that Jesus called them **serpents**. Satan the beguiler and liar was represented as a serpent in the Garden of Eden. The Pharisees were SO self-righteous that they saw themselves as better than their forefathers in their ability to heed the words of God's prophets. Yet, they would soon crucify their Messiah!



**Are we judging the past as irrelevant and full of failure while we, by our decisions and adoption of personal morality, destroy the very fabric of the goodness of humanity?**



Here is another “trigger bomb” depending on your opinion on this topic - the toppling of statues. There are big debates all over the world about the rewriting or covering up of history, or trying to right the wrongs of history by tearing down statues representing people or ideas that are no longer valued when viewed through the lens of today.

Those in favor of removing statues say they glorify the wrong ideal and are a painful reminder of the past. There are other people who would better represent progress and diversity. In the United States, many of the statues in contention represent our painful past of slavery during the Civil War.

Those in favor of leaving the statues say removing them does not change history, but it does censor it and starts to remove it for the next generations, even if the past is complicated. To judge historical characters with today's social values is not appropriate. Statues do not cause racism or communism or any other “ism” and can be used as learning tools about contentious issues. (One excellent solution is to keep such statues in a museum, preserving history and stimulating important conversations.)

**The big question:**  
**Who gets to decide which parts of history are worth remembering?**



There is a reason why we do not see statues of Hitler. We can understand why a Black person would not want to see a statue glorifying a civil war general who fought to enslave their ancestors as they walk to the grocery store every day. This is offensive.

On the flip side, just this month, a monument in Hong Kong was removed under a Chinese city crime ordinance. It was dedicated to victims of the Tiananmen Square pro-democracy movement where an unknown number of civilians were killed in 1989. Most here in the United States would consider the whitewashing of that event to be dangerous to civil liberties.

Whatever side of the issue we are on, we have to ask: How am I, in my actions, attitude and secret thoughts, glorifying God when I present my opinion? When presented with the opposite opinion, do I love that person, seek to talk with them and try to understand them, seeking mutual respect?

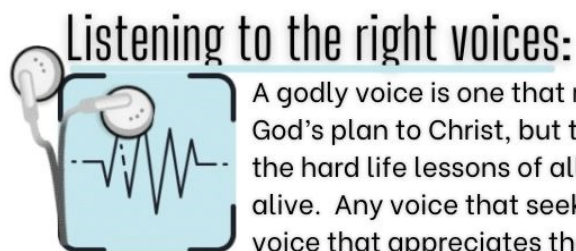


### Scriptural guidelines for hearing the right voices:

Galatians 3:23-24: (NASB) <sup>23</sup>*But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.* <sup>24</sup>*Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.*

We are grateful that the Bible shows us even the ugly parts of people. If all the mistakes in the Bible were not recorded, we would not have all the lessons we need. Bad things play a part in God's plan, as it is how we learn now and will be a touchstone of remembrance in God's future kingdom.

When we look at the heroes of faith, we see their flaws and failures as well as their triumphs. We see how they were blessed by God. We learn from their mistakes.



A godly voice is one that not only appreciates the history that led God's plan to Christ, but truly honors it as well. Such a voice absorbs the hard life lessons of all God's faithful heroes and keeps them alive. Any voice that seeks to alter the past by burying it is not a voice that appreciates the magnitude of God's plan.

Just to be clear, what voices **SHOULD** we be listening to? We should be listening to the voice of God as presented to us in Scripture, and to those who truly serve Him. If other voices are using scriptural principles and the morality the Scriptures show us, those are good things. Let's make sure all of our listening is done with the idea that God be glorified in whatever we let into our brain.

If God cannot be glorified by the voices we are letting in, then those voices should exit immediately.

**Listen for the voice of Jesus in your daily life. Those that do not find that voice now will find it later:**

John 5:28-29: (NASB) <sup>28</sup>*Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice,* <sup>29</sup>*and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.*



Every man, woman and child will get to hear the voice of Jesus and then have an opportunity to make right the things they did not make right in this life.

We look to the Scriptures and biblical principles. We put them in front of us, behind us, around us, in our pockets, in our books, on our computers and phones, so that wherever we go, whatever we do, we hear the voice of God. Get rid of the voices that are hurtful, painful and sinful!

*So, whose voices are you listening to?  
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!*

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.



Join us next week for our podcast on January 3, 2022  
Ep. 1211: Is the Devil in the Details of Your Life?

### Bonus Material and Study Questions

Putting the pieces of the quoted article together:

Moral disengagement is described primarily as a cognitive process that is facilitated by seven mechanisms:

1. Dehumanization (i.e., referring to or thinking of victims as being less than human)
2. Minimizing, ignoring, or misconstruing consequences of actions
3. Attribution of blame (i.e., blaming the victim for the transgressor's action)
4. Moral justification (i.e., providing reasons for immoral behavior)
5. Euphemistic language (i.e., describing an immoral act in softer language)
6. Displacement or diffusion of responsibility (i.e., placing responsibility on others)
7. Exonerative comparison (i.e., favorably comparing one's moral violation to those of others)



Each of these mechanisms involves rationalization, either in a motivative capacity (i.e., before engaging in an act) or in a reactive capacity (i.e., after performing an act). It is important to note that (1) moral disengagement occurs in order to reduce negative affect or negative cognitions associated with the realization that one's behavior will violate or has violated one's self sanctions and (2) the effect of moral disengagement is expected to be situational or temporary rather than permanent.

Here are several scriptures that clarify what voices we should be listening to and what they sound like:

### God spoke to His people through the Law and throughout the Old Testament:

**Deuteronomy 6:1-9:** (NASB) *<sup>1</sup>Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it, <sup>2</sup>so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. <sup>3</sup>O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. <sup>4</sup>Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! <sup>5</sup>You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup>These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup>You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. <sup>8</sup>You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. <sup>9</sup>You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

**Proverbs 3:1-3:** (NASB) *<sup>1</sup>My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; <sup>2</sup>For length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. <sup>3</sup>Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.*

**Proverbs 7:1-5:** (NASB) *<sup>1</sup>My son, keep my words and treasure my commandments within you. <sup>2</sup>Keep my commandments and live, and my teaching as the apple of your eye. <sup>3</sup>Bind them on your fingers; Write them on the tablet of your heart. <sup>4</sup>Say to wisdom, you are my sister, and call understanding your intimate friend; <sup>5</sup>That they may keep you from an adulteress, from the foreigner who flatters with her words.*

### Several New Testament texts that highlight the fight to only listen to the voice of God through scripture and His people:

**Galatians 5:16-26:** (NASB) *<sup>16</sup>But I say, walk by the spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>For the flesh sets its desire against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the spirit, you are not under the Law. <sup>19</sup>Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup>idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup>envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup>Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup>If we live by the spirit, let us also walk by the spirit. <sup>26</sup>Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.*





**2 Timothy 4:3-5:** (NASB) <sup>3</sup>*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,* <sup>4</sup>*and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.* <sup>5</sup>*But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

**Galatians 3:1-5:** (NASB) <sup>1</sup>*You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?* <sup>2</sup>*This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?* <sup>3</sup>*Are you so foolish? Having begun by the spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?* <sup>4</sup>*Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?* <sup>5</sup>*So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?*

### **The introduction to the woes Jesus pronounced upon the Pharisees:**

**Matthew 23:1-7:** (NASB) <sup>1</sup>*Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples,* <sup>2</sup>*saying: The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;* <sup>3</sup>*therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.* <sup>4</sup>*They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.* <sup>5</sup>*But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.* <sup>6</sup>*They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues,* <sup>7</sup>*and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men.*

**Christian Questions Weekly Newsletter**

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# Study QUESTIONS

## Ep. 1210: Whose Voices Are You Listening To?

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1210-voices-influence/>

See:



1. What was Satan's technique in his temptation of Eve? How did he change her focus? What did she now see that she had not seen before? Have you experienced this subtle change in focus where now something becomes a temptation that was not before? How can we learn from Eve's example? (See Genesis 3:1-6, Proverbs 6:20-23)
2. What is *moral disengagement*? How does this influence our internal, self-imposed moral standards?
3. What is *dehumanization*, and how did it influence the morality of the Pharisees? What are some modern examples? How can we use God's voice to keep from employing this type of thought? (See Matthew 5:43-45, 23:14, Mark 12:40, Luke 20:47)
4. What makes *minimizing the consequences of our actions on others* dangerous? How can we ensure we have the correct perspective? (See Matthew 23:15, 1 Corinthians 3:4-6)
5. How can *attributing blame* manipulate us into immoral thinking? What can we do to snap out of this line of thinking? How can we be a good influence on someone who is following their conscience, but their conscience is faulty in some way? (See Matthew 23:16-17, Galatians 5:13)
6. Why is *moral justification* so insidious? What are some of the common telltale issues we use to justify our actions? What can we do when our church leadership is engaging in moral justification? (See Matthew 23:23-24, Philippians 3:17-19)
7. How can *euphemistic language* make interpreting the line of morality and immorality difficult? How does social media encourage this? How can we combat it? (See Matthew 23:25-26, Galatians 6:6-9)
8. Why is important to *correctly assign responsibility*? How can this help us maintain Christian morality? (See Matthew 23:27-28, Romans 8:6-8, Ephesians 5:2)
9. What is the danger in using *exonerative comparison* to justify our actions? How can we appropriately learn from past mistakes? Do you see yourself as better than others, possibly because of your superior understanding of God's word? Is this dangerous? (See Matthew 23:29-33, Galatians 3:23-24)
10. What can we learn from the woes of Matthew 23:14-33? To which voices are you listening? What do/will you do to verify that you are surrounding yourself with godly voices? (John 5:28-29)