

## Is My Christian Judgment Tainted by Bias? (Part II)

**James 1:19-20:** *19 This you know, my beloved brethren.*

*But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;*

*20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.*



In Part I, we laid a foundation for understanding and managing harmful biases. One primary lesson we learned was that we ALL, no matter who we are and what our background is, are biased. While this is an uncomfortable truth, it is a necessary realization, for a true Christian is to strive to overcome any and all fleshly inclinations. We also learned that this

overcoming is no easy task. Just because we may be able to point out a personal bias does not mean we are on a path to dismantle it. On the contrary, often times recognizing our biases can make us very self-protective. In this episode, we will continue to uncover specific ways that our biases show themselves and specific scriptural principles to deal with them. This also is not easy!



### Our working definition of bias is:

An inclination or outlook that prevents an unprejudiced consideration of a matter.



**BIAS BOWS TO NO ONE!**

It is proud and self-protective. Each time we introduced a bias, we included a warning:



**BIAS BRINGS, FEEDS AND MANIFESTS SELF-PROTECTIVE NARROW-MINDEDNESS AND BITTERNESS!**

As an example, we saw the Pharisees being more concerned with keeping the status quo of their position in the context of the Roman government than in open-heartedly examining the evidence that Jesus was the Messiah they had been waiting for.

This kind of example helps us see how in narrow-mindedness and bitterness, bias bows to no one.

We next wanted to define and understand the basis of this bias in action:



Bias can be forcefully driven by a powerful need to protect ourselves. This need can be manifested by the poorest of the poor, and just as easily by those who have great power and authority. **Self-protection in imperfect humanity can be a shield that repels the truths that can truly protect it.**

Our need for self-protection often shields us from what could ultimately protect us most.



### Calming and correcting our *self-protecting* bias:

Instead of our bias bowing to no one, let us bow in humility before our God who is ever just and impartial. Bowing before what is greater than we are is a great way to begin to dismantle this bias.

But how can we break it to pieces?



**Our first and highest loyalty is to God through Christ.**

**Self-protection implies that we are driving our own preservation.**

**Let us instead give that preservation work over to our heavenly Father and His providence, for He will surely do a better job than we can ever do.**

Undoubtedly, God will do a better job than we can do, so why do we spend our time and energy trying to protect ourselves when God promised He would protect us? Let's think higher.

The second Bias in Action point from Part I was:



*in action*

**BIAS BLOCKS OUR ABILITY TO LISTEN.**

Listening is one of our most important skills.



**PERSONAL STATUS CAN EASILY DEVELOP A BIAS THAT SHUTS DOWN ANY INSTRUCTION FROM THOSE WE PERCEIVE AS BENEATH US. LISTENING IS INSULTING!**

We decide listening is beneath us! What a great example we saw in Naaman, described as a *valiant warrior*, a *mighty man of valor*. The prophet Elisha prescribed washing in the Jordan River to cure his terrible disease of leprosy. But the fact that Elisha sent a messenger instead of telling Naaman himself was a complete insult, so much so that if his servants hadn't convinced him to just try it, he never would have been cured.

He would have stomped right past the miracle!



**Bias creates expectations.**

**Expectations bring anticipation.**

When we are met with what we perceive as an inferior solution to our circumstance, the letdown shuts down our ability to receive that solution. We categorically reject that solution, and thereby may be rejecting exactly what we may need!

All we have to do is think of politics and *how stupid “those” people are who don’t think like me*. Social media trains us to judge and sentence people instantly by swiping them off our screens and out of our lives.

Bias keeps us from listening.



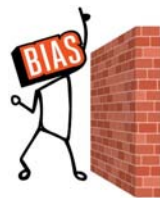
**Calming and correcting our *blocked listening* bias:**

Instead of allowing our bias to block our ability to hear let us reframe our expectations towards truth rather than our preconceived expectations. We should ask ourselves, *What do I really want from this? Do I want to know truth, or would I just rather pat myself on the back?*



To stay focused on God’s will as first in our lives, we must apply the discipline needed to take a breath and reassess our expectations. We cannot hear God’s words and directions when our personal expectations are shouting them down.

Our final Bias in Action point and warning from Part I was:



*in action*

**BIAS BUILDS WALLS.  
THIS TAKES TIME AND EFFORT.**



**BIAS CAN BE FOUNDED IN SOLID TRUTH. IF UNCHECKED,  
IT WILL ONLY GROW AND DOMINATE WITH TIME!**

As our example, we talked about the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15. The debate at the conference was over new Christian converts who had come from a Gentile background. Should they first be required to become Jewish with all of its rituals under the Law? Both sides had truth in their arguments. The challenge was to look for God’s leadings in His dealings with the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas brought out their experiences and observations which derailed the Jewish bias. Otherwise, this issue could have completely derailed the fledgling movement of Christianity.



**Bias builds walls.**

These walls are especially thick and strong when our rationalization for them has a basis in biblical truth. These walls can and will undermine tolerance and mutual respect, even within the sacredness of true Christianity. Left unchallenged, they cut off the necessary lifegiving support we as followers of Christ need from one another.  
**These walls are dangerous to our Christian health!**

**Julie** This particular bias became a real-life issue for us this week. We were emailing with someone who held such a deep-seated doctrinal bias that when we proposed a scripture that unequivocally proved the belief is incorrect, rather than consider the evidence, they categorically decided the entire book of the Bible where that scripture was located was heresy.

That is a dramatic example! That reaction - *I believe it, I believe it... I'm not listening! You are wrong...I'm not listening!* - is what builds a bias-built wall that can't be penetrated.



**Calming and correcting our building bridges instead of walls bias:**

The apostles and elders modeled a process to dismantle walls and build bridges, allowing all sides to engage. It created a provocative conflict (in a positive way), that encouraged all to speak, listen, consider and follow the evidence that verified biblical truth.



**While building walls based upon our adhering to what we believe to have been true can be appropriate, we MUST be sure that we are seeing the whole godly truth of the matter. Let us be sure that our interpretation is always subject to the test of biblical truth.**

If we are not subjecting ourselves and our beliefs to the test of biblical truth, then we are wasting our time as Christians.

We are finished with the recap from Part I. Now, let's introduce other ways our biases operate and influence our lives.

**Bias is: an inclination or outlook that prevents an unprejudiced consideration of a matter.**



*in action*

**BIAS BREAKS TRUST.**

Because trust is the foundation for any and every relationship, our biases in this area are serious. Trust can be broken in many ways. It can be broken through thoughts, actions, observations, faulty conclusions or words.

**Jesus laid out a basic warning for all of this for his followers during his Sermon on the Mount. He tells them they are accountable for their words:**

**Matthew 5:21-24:** (NLT) *21 You have heard that our ancestors were told, You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment. 22 But I say, if you are even **angry** <3710> with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell (Gehenna). 23 So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, 24 leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.*

There are different levels of anger and even anger with a legitimate cause can be dangerous.

**Angry:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3710 *orgizo*; from #3709, to provoke or enrage, i.e. (passively) become exasperated

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: 1) to provoke, to arouse to anger  
2) to be provoked to anger, be angry, be wroth

This is the serious kind of anger where we become exasperated, throw up our hands, give up and walk away. Jesus warns against this.



**OUR CHOICE TO LOSE TRUST IN ANOTHER CHRISTIAN BROTHER OR SISTER SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN LIGHTLY.**

Jesus warns that our imperfect human emotions and reactions towards them will only bring us judgment, because we aren't seeing the whole picture.

Very few of us like confrontation. It seems easier to be angry, avoid that person and just let the anger fester and quickly lead to evil-speaking. We think of all we wish we would have said at the time, so we replay it in our mind over and over. It's awful and difficult to confront the issue, but we are supposed to try to honestly and humbly resolve our differences.

Replaying the argument over and over again in our mind provokes our own anger, frustration and exasperation. We mentally build a case and our trust remains broken.

Anger is self-perpetuating. It keeps rolling around in our head.

**James 1:19-20:** (KJV) *19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath <3709>: 20 For the wrath <3709> of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*

**Wrath:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3709 *orgé*; from #3713; properly, desire (as a reaching forth or excitement of the mind), i.e. (by analogy), violent passion (ire, or (justifiable) abhorrence); by implication punishment: anger, indignation, vengeance, wrath

*Wrath* here is from the Greek root word for *angry* we just reviewed in **Mathew 5:22**. My anger doesn't produce God's righteousness. But what about when we are actually right?

*"Righteous indignation" is usually personal indignation, sprinkled with a little bit of righteous for flavoring. — Rick*

If our immediate reaction is anger, it might be a red flag. It is better to carefully look at situations that seem wrong, leaving anger out of it. Leading with a strong emotion like anger can blind us to a rational evaluation of the actual facts.



**Bias breaks trust.**

Trust is broken when suspicion rises. Suspicion rises when we see, hear, or conclude something about another. While there can be legitimate grounds for our suspicion, it is very likely that our suspicion has provoked anger which blinds us to reason.

We trust God and we trust Jesus. We should be trusting each other as Christians and yet there are all kinds of pitfalls in the way!

**What should we do when we are losing trust because we see evidence that seems to justify that action?**

There are many things we can do. However, the one thing we need to absolutely avoid is to blindly feed our anger and end up taking and verbalizing a position that is only founded on a partial consideration of the whole matter. To put such a dilemma in order, it is critical that we remind ourselves of who we are, who we follow and what we stand for.

**Bias: An inclination or outlook that prevents an unprejudiced consideration of a matter.**



What if someone legitimately does break our trust? Let's say they go behind our back and do or say something to betray us or insult us, or we thought we could depend on them and they prove untrustworthy?



Unfortunately, this happens regularly. Trust can be broken, but is this something to actually break my trust, or has it just shaken my trust?

Sometimes our trust should be broken by what we see. Unquestionably. But do we handle it as our human, fleshly selves? Or do we handle it as followers of Jesus Christ, seeking to look at the situation as he would?



**Calming and correcting our breaking of trust bias:**

The Apostle Paul was blunt in his teaching when it comes to the potential for trust breaking within the brotherhood. He essentially makes the issue into a simple right or wrong comparison. This comparison is focused on ME and not the person I may have a problem with.

**We are told to break the barrier of bias instead of breaking trust with bias:**

**Ephesians 4:25-32:** *25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. 26 **be angry** <3710>, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity.*

Here's that same Greek word for *angry* that in Matthew 5 Jesus said leads to judgment, but here we can be *angry* and not sin, so presumably no judgment. How does that work?

Anger happens. Jesus and the Apostle Paul understood the emotion exists, but what comes next? What do we do with the emotion? Does it drive us or do we choose to manage it? That is the difference. *Be angry and yet do not sin.*

The Apostle Paul's point is clear. If we don't get ourselves under control, we leave the door open for Satan to enter. We are allowed to have the emotions; we have to challenge our responses to our emotions. We cannot let them take over our ability to reason.

**Paul continues with the practicality of the issue:**

*28 He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. 29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.*

Can you imagine how crystallized our character is when even in our worst, angry and frustrated moments, our words are still uplifting and helpful instead of sarcastic and bitter and snarky? This is difficult!

*30 Do not grieve the holy spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

Paul is giving us recipes to help restrain our biases and stop from breaking trust.

*Let bitterness and wrath and anger...be put away from you...so you Do not grieve the holy spirit of God. Be kind...tender-hearted.* If somebody did wrong, it needs to be dealt with, but we cannot do this with spite and anger.

**Be angry and do not sin is quoted from:**

**Psalms 4:4-5:** *4 Tremble, and do not sin; meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah. 5 Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the LORD.*

*Tremble* here means to be agitated, to shake with violent emotion like anger or fear.

You've heard people say, "He was so angry that he was shaking!" When we are that angry or upset, we can't sleep. Our brain keeps replaying what we should have said or done if we could do it all over again.

To counteract that emotion, *meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still.* This is a choice. We naturally replay the event again and again, making the problem bigger, and then we feel worse.

We can bring our Bibles into bed, read the Psalms, say them out loud, pray and meditate on them. We can decide this is what we will think about. When our mind starts to drift again, we stop and refocus. It is a conscious decision to change the path our thinking is taking.

By quoting from the psalm, the Apostle Paul is telling us how to deal with these things. He is helping us make the choice to change the end result.

We also need to realize our liberty in Christ is not to be at the command of our emotions; rather, it is to command our emotions.

**When our emotions become overwhelming “dictators” in our decision making, understand that liberty in Christ doesn't justify those emotions:**

**Galatians 5:13-15:** (NKJV) *13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!*

Christian liberty doesn't mean we get to do anything we want!

Julie



I've found myself using the word “irrelevant” a lot lately with myself in relation to others. I say, “But so and so did this or said this to me...” **Irrelevant.** It doesn't give me permission to retaliate in any way, even if it's in my own thoughts. It certainly doesn't give me justification to act in a similar way if that person really did do something. “But so and so isn't getting the lesson they should.” **Irrelevant.** Of course we want to help them, but someone behaving poorly isn't going to be my example. It's **irrelevant.**

Take the situation that has shaken our trust and put it into the “irrelevant” category as far as how much emotional energy we will spend on it. If we do not give it emotional traction, we won't continually dwell on it and make the situation even bigger than it is. This is the idea of meditating in our beds.



**Trust is an incredibly important part of our Christian relationships, but it also needs to be understood as very fragile as well. Let us first and foremost seek to protect trust by seeking for and relying on the complete truth of a matter instead of reacting to pieces of information and responding with anger.**

**Our biases can break our trust and also break our Christianity!**

Biases can splinter and even shatter our Christianity if we allow broken trust to overwhelm us. We can forget God's promises. Be careful about trust and our biases.



in action

**BIAS BELITTLES OTHERS.**

To “belittle” someone is to make them seem unimportant or “less than.” It's synonymous with “diminish,” “minimize,” “condescending” and “trash-talk.”

This brand of bias is big and very ugly, and we have seen far too much of it in our modern world. With all that we have now experienced in history, you would think we would be wiser, but we are not.

This is all about who we classify as being the “other.”

Single words carry a lot of emotion and have led to hatred and even murder and genocide. Words like:

- Race
- Politics
- Gender
- Nationality
- Religion

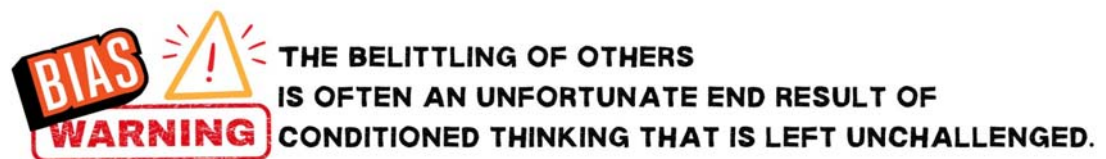
How many news reports have we seen where people have committed suicide, provoked and encouraged by anonymous faces on social media? Any sign of weakness and we become the “other” to be easily swiped away—disregarded—or much worse.

Belittling others in this era has the potential to become a life-and-death situation. Understand the depth and power of bias!

**In his epistle, James plainly targeted this kind of bias, as it is not new:**

**James 2:1-4:** *1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. (Here’s the bias!) 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, You sit here in a good place, and you say to the poor man, You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool, 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?*

James is clear: Do NOT allow appearance or your perception to change what is real.



If we continue belittling others, we can easily become tools in the hand of Satan to attack and do harm to those for whom Christ died, and of course, Christ died for ALL, so we need to be careful. We certainly don’t want to advance Satan’s goals.

This could be an unfortunate end result of conditioned thinking left unchallenged. We need to examine and challenge how we have been conditioned to think. If we don’t, Satan knows us well enough to play on our weaknesses, knowing we won’t think twice about it. This is wrong! We need to put things in a spiritually-guided, biblical perspective.

**This gives us help:**

**Proverbs 16:19-23:** *19 It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud. 20 He who gives attention to the word will find good, and blessed is he who trusts in the LORD. 21 The wise in heart will be called understanding, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness. 22 Understanding is a fountain of life to one who has it, but the discipline of fools is folly. 23 The heart of the wise instructs his mouth and adds persuasiveness to his lips.*

With our thinking unchallenged, we can easily fall into the category of being a fool.



The fact that a belittling bias can be the simple result of our natural state of mind does not make it any less destructive. On the contrary, this is the kind of bias that easily flies under the radar. It can be rationalized and dismissed, and yet it is **just as wrong as any other bias** that might be more easily seen.

Do not allow familiarity with such a thing to take away the intensity with which we fight it. We need to be careful.

Having this kind of bias is a direct affront to everything we are to stand for as Christians. This should be just plain scary!

**We may have a natural bias challenge we may not even be aware of.  
How do we become aware and break its grip?**

Becoming aware will only happen by having the humility to examine ourselves. Our intention must be to challenge our fleshly mind and reach for the mind of Christ as its replacement. While this is no easy task it is a necessary one. As Jesus' disciples, our lives cannot be pleasing to God if we dwell in what feels safe and natural.

**Bias: An inclination or outlook that prevents an unprejudiced consideration of a matter.**

We are trying to put common biases on the table so we can introspectively look to see if one or more of these is gripping us. We're talking about belittling others—being condescending in our secret thoughts, words, attitude or tone of voice.



**Calming and correcting our belittling bias:**

It may seem like an oversimplification, but the humility needed to break such a destructive bias begins with one word: **listen**.

**Now that James has made this belittling bias visible, he plainly shows us the necessity of overhauling our approach to those we may look down upon:**

**James 2:5-8:** *5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? 8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well.*

The critique here is that I'm deciding who gets more focus, respect and honor. In this case, I'm respecting the one who is dressed better and has money. Think about how people idolize celebrities and influencers today. But this could easily be me honoring someone who looks like me, or talks like me or thinks the way I do on any given topic. Who doesn't like someone who agrees with them all the time? We create our circle and belittle those outside of our circle. It is important we challenge such thinking in order to eliminate it.

James demonstrated the exact opposite of a belittling bias, modeling the corrective process.

- 1** These whom you look down upon are God's chosen! How will we feel when we stand in front of our Father and He asks us why did we treat them that way? Why did we look down on them? And God says, "I chose them!"
- 2** You are violating a fundamental and unchanging biblical principle: *love your neighbor as yourself*. This principle never changes. We are not loving our neighbor as ourselves if we belittle them.

**He continues:**

**James 2:9-13:** *9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. 11 For He who said, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not commit murder. Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the Law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.*

*Mercy triumphs over judgment*— therefore, stop with the partiality and bias that this person is better than that one.

In **Galatians 2:11-13**, even the Apostle Peter needed reproof from the Apostle Paul because Peter was favoring the Christian Jews over the Christian Gentiles.

Partiality and belittling are insidious sins.

- 3** James is imploring us to recognize our sins. We are not "fine" if we are failing in any area of our Christian walk. We need to work hard at eliminating bias.

**Sins that go unchecked will be judged, as this is another universal truth of God's plan:**

**James 2:14-19:** *14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and be filled, and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. 18 But someone may well say, You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.*

- 4** ACT based on our faith with spiritual thinking rather than REACT based on our fleshly comfort levels. It is not enough to believe; we have to live that which we believe.

**The Apostle Paul wrote the same things in different words:**

**Philippians 2:1-4:** *1 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.*

There's no room for bias in this admonition.

*3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*

Along these lines is **Romans 12:10:** *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.*

This is surprisingly deep with four separate concepts. But let's look at just one - *give preference to one another in honor.*

**Memorize Romans 12:10:**



Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.

*Honor* is the same Greek word used in

**John 12:26.** Jesus said if any man serve him, that's who God his Father will *honor*. This is the same *honor* the husband is to give his wife in **1 Peter 3:7**. It is the same *honor* that results from the trial of our faith being more precious than gold in **1 Peter 1:7**.

It is the same *honor* that crowned Jesus Christ according to **Hebrews 2:7,9**. This is a very high standard, to not regard another as more important than ourselves AND to give preference to the other IN HONOR. We have to appreciate, and therefore honor, their relationship with God.

Honor is the absolute opposite of any kind of belittling thought, word or action. It is the opposite because it is lifting others up rather than pulling them down. It is too easy to be natural when we are called to be spiritual. This is why we are shown such powerful lessons like in **Romans 12:10**.



**Mutual respect is a foundation stone of true Christianity. Jesus made that abundantly clear, and the entire New Testament reiterates this truth. To belittle another in any way is to act contrary to everything we hold dear as Jesus' disciples. Let us keep our eyes open, our hearts receptive and our minds alert to living this higher standard WITHOUT EXCEPTION.**



We have thus far covered five different kinds of bias. We began by stating that bias bows to no one, showing the pride behind it. We then saw how bias blocks listening and builds walls. Bias also breaks trust and belittles others.

Our final example of bias shows its ability to permanently disable relationships by burning, by destroying, any hope of reconciliation.



If you literally burn a bridge, it can't be crossed again. This expression to "burn a bridge" is an idiom meaning to act in such a way that it's impossible to return to the way things were; to behave in such a way that it causes a permanent rift.

As horrible as belittling is, this goes a step further, saying we are never going back. We are not ever changing; we're through. We have destroyed what is behind us.

Instead of giving an example of those who burned bridges, let's use a biblical example of how a bridge could have been burned but was not.

**This takes place right after the Acts 15 Jerusalem Council with two of the key individuals who were at that pivotal meeting:**

**Acts 15:36-40:** *36 After some days Paul said to Barnabas, Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are. 37 Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. 38 But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. 39 And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. 40 But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.*

John Mark is Barnabas' cousin who started out with them on the first missionary journey, but he didn't stay with them to the end, leaving them in Pamphylia. Here Paul and Barnabas agreed to serve God separately. Their combined testimonies were some of the most important at the Jerusalem Conference that brought the brotherhood back together after the rift over whether the Gentile Christians would have to become Jews and follow the Law. Now they are going off in different directions after this sharp disagreement.



**Julie** Rick, I came to you recently with a tough issue and you gave me two good preliminary pieces of advice to set me on the right path. First, you said don't allow personal hurt to get in the way of potential conversations. In this case, the object was to understand the other person's position more fully and clearly, not to get them to admit they were wrong, which is what I really wanted.

It's a paradigm shift to want to stimulate conversation and not just make our point. When we stimulate conversation, we open a door for the ability to solve something. When we just try to make our point, all we are doing is pointing at somebody, and that tends to hurt and cause defensiveness.

The second good piece of advice was a reminder that when approaching your Christian brother or sister, assume the highest intentions on their part, respecting they were trying to stand for truth. If I come at them with a sword of accusation and emotion, they pull out their sword of defense and we just fight. (Or put up their shields and shut you out!) Along these lines, if someone is talking negatively about my brother or sister in Christ, I like these three words: Be a skeptic. Don't assume it is true. Evil speaking and evil surmising is a big temptation we all fall into when we assume motives of others and don't give them the benefit of the doubt. Evil surmising means imagining selfish or evil motives to be behind the words and acts of others. They deserve to have us think highly of them as the baseline, in that they have a relationship with the Lord, before we believe something negative about them. Here's that "honor" again.

This fits in with the earlier comments on what is **irrelevant**. The emotions become irrelevant when we refuse to waste energy on them. They cannot drive the situation if they have no fuel behind them. We can be skeptics when we hear negative things about the honor of a brother or sister if we remove the associated emotion.

**Galatians 5:15-17:** *15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. 16 But I say, walk by the spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 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.*

The challenge is getting through the flesh so the spirit can be the influence that provokes us to move forward.



While some disagreements are clearly justifiable, it is far too easy to simply assume we fit into that acceptable category. We end up feeding our bias and carelessly burning a bridge. **It is too easy to simply believe we are right!**

Once again, this is scary territory! We don't want to burn bridges between us, and we do want to stand up for principle!

**This is a problem. Paul and Barnabas split up over this disagreement.  
How can we hope to do any better?**

First of all, this is not the end of the story. While these two men of great faith were passionate in their positions and actions, the core of their parting was seeing that the work of the gospel would continue with the same power and fortitude as before. Our attention needs to be drawn to what we know happened after they parted. We need to know the rest of the story!

Both Paul and Barnabas were working hard to spread the gospel message. They strongly disagreed on the logistics of the manpower.

**Bias: An inclination or outlook that prevents an unprejudiced consideration of a matter.**



**Calming and correcting our bridge-burning bias:**

This disagreement between Paul and Barnabas would have been a significant dissension, for the rigors of a missionary journey cannot be taken lightly. They were going out to do hard work! Paul simply believed the young John Mark could not do it, as he had given up on a previous journey. Barnabas believed John Mark could do it this time. They had a *sharp disagreement*. What do we do when we have this kind of a dilemma with another brother or sister? How do we find common ground?

**Let's re-read one part:**

**Acts 15:39-40:** 39 And there occurred such a *sharp disagreement* <3948> that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. 40 But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.

**Sharp disagreement:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3948 *paroxusmos*; from #3947 ("paroxysm"); incitement (to good), or dispute (in anger)

The King James Version translates this word as "contention" and "provoke unto"

**Paroxysm:** a sudden attack or violent expression of a particular emotion or activity

It seems like they were raising their voices or maybe even yelling in a heated argument.

Their emotions were highly charged – the gospel was at stake, and they were both trying to do the work of God. This is a hard disagreement, no question.



I believe this provoking was proper and appropriate. I think the argument was a good argument since these two disciples of Jesus were both clear in their opinions and perceived needs. They were honest with one another. The key is: while they separated, they did not attach importance to this particular decision beyond its true scope. This did not change their work or who they were.

In other words, *I strongly disagree, but we part as friends and brothers in Christ. We agree to disagree and move on with God's work.*

One good thing that came out of this was they had two separate missionary journeys that could help spread the gospel faster. Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus. Paul and Silas traveled through Syria and Selicia.

We're sure it was overruled, but at the same time, it was not a comfortable parting. It could not have been easy because they had traveled so many miles together. They had worked together at the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15 to bring the incredible witness of what they had observed of the Gentile Christians. And now they can't agree. When they parted, it could not have been easy.

**We don't know a lot about what happened after, but in later writings, the Apostle Paul reveals the nature of the unity that continued to exist:**

**Colossians 4:10-11:** *10 Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); 11 and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision (Jewish Christians), and they have proved to be an encouragement to me.*

John Mark is an example to us. He could have been so upset by letting Paul down in the past, with Paul being so blatant in not wanting to travel with him again. He could have just quit. But apparently working under Barnabas' encouragement was good for him. He became valuable to the cause and is an encouragement to Paul at the end of Paul's life. That is a beautiful testimony to his perseverance and love of the Lord's work.

Paul only names a few who he says are an encouragement to him, and John Mark is one of them.

**This "prison letter" is Paul's final writing before his execution:**

**2 Timothy 4:11:** *Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.*

Think about this. Paul is near the end of his Christian walk. Who does he ask for? John Mark. We can see there are no burned bridges here. There was a strong disagreement, there was maturity gained, and there was a continuation of the work of the gospel. Paul watched the growth of John Mark and embraced him who had obviously become very important to him.

Paul taught us that serious disagreements are acceptable as long as we are thoroughly convicted to keep the issue as the issue, and NOT centralize and escalate the issue, making it the centerpiece of everything else. Don't burn bridges!

We talked recently about trying to make a space between the stimulus and our response. Often our first quick thought, or even what we blurt out of our mouths, is driven by emotion and it's our natural fleshly inclination talking, not what Jesus taught us. We all have temptations to immediately say what's on our mind or heart even when it's not kind or pure. If we can just check ourselves so that at least our second thought—and hopefully it's before we say anything—has a godly spirit and influence.

This is the best place to start. Sometimes we can't control the first thought, but we can control the second one as well as the action.

### Have a conscience tuned to spiritual things.

Such a finely-tuned conscience will not burn bridges!

### A poorly-tuned conscience will heed that which is fleshy and comfortable:

**1 Timothy 4:1-3:** *1 But the spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, 3 men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.*

This is harsh. Their consciences will be seared...as with a branding iron. They will be marked because they will take the sacredness of truth and pollute it, creating falsehoods to gain a following. There is no goodness in that. There is no spirituality or true Christianity in that.

When seared with a branding iron, the nerves are killed. There is no feeling, no finely-tuned conscience left. They are numb without the ability to feel.

### A well-tuned conscience is keyed into spiritual things and led by godly influence.

### The Apostle Paul is devastated that his fellow Jews were not, with a few exceptions, accepting Christ:

**Romans 9:1-3:** *1 I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the holy spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.*

He continues by describing the blessings and privileges God had given Israel, and is in anguish how they choose to stay under the Law instead of accepting the Messiah. Paul even says he would change places with them if only they would listen.

This indicates the depth of Paul's conscience and how important the Jewish people were to him. His heart hurt for those in Israel who did not accept Jesus.

### Remember the warfare we are engaged in and the weapons we are directed to use:

**2 Corinthians 10:3-5:** *3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.*

Sharp, clever, sarcastic words make great weapons, don't they? And they can feel good, too, but they aren't the right weapons for us.

*5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*

Taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ is how we avoid burning bridges. We are only to use those weapons that are spiritual and biblically-driven.

**Building bridges instead of burning them comes back to the humility of seeing things through spirit-driven eyesight and the fortitude to work at changing.**

**Our words reflect our hearts, as shown by Jesus chastising the Pharisees:**

**Matthew 12:34-35:** *34 You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. 35 The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil.*

When we are tempted to say things which are not good, not helpful, not beneficial, not spiritual, not kind, not loving, not wise or not reverent, we must ask, what is in our hearts that pushes us to say these negative things?

**James shows us how to work on our words and therefore our hearts:**

**James 3:2-4:** (NLT) *2 Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way. 3 We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. 4 And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong.*

James uses these examples to say little things make massive differences because they exert control in our lives.

**Know the power of your words. They can bring bias or bring blessing:**

**James 3:5-10:** (NLT) *5 In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. 6 And...the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell (Gehenna) itself. 7 People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, 8 but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. 9 Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. (There's the bias!) 10 And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!*

It is interesting that James chapter 3 follows the warnings about belittling others in the second chapter. When we put all of this together, James has a specific objective: we must watch what we do and what we say. We need to spiritually help and build up our brethren and those around us.



**To be a Christian is to be engaged in the work of self-denial and accomplishing God's will. The only bridge burning here is the removing of any connections we have had with our own sinful human condition. Just as Jesus died for every man's sin, we also must live for the purpose of blessing those whom Jesus bought. Let us build the bridge that Jesus instructed us to build!**

Bias is big. Bias is powerful. Bias is prevalent. Bias is everywhere. Bias is personal. We all need to make this a personal battle, looking at the biases in our own hearts and minds.

We ask the Lord to grant us the grace, strength, direction, and spiritual knowledge and understanding to fight these biases. We want to glorify God's name rather than ours, and glorify God's name rather than any other thought, perception, perspective or group.

Let us glorify God by putting bias away.

**So, is my Christian judgment tainted by bias?  
For Rick, Jonathan, Julie and Christian Questions...  
...Think about it!**

*All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.*



**Next episode**  
Join us next week on January 22, 2024  
Episode 1317: It's Time to Change,  
But How Much is Enough?



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### Bonus Material and Study Questions

*For more on Gehenna:*

**Ep.1024: Is the Hell of Christian Tradition Taught in the Bible? (Part II)**

*Hellfire's pagan influence on post-New Testament Christian beliefs*

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1024-hell-taught-bible-part-ii/>

**Matthew 5:22:** Jesus used the literal garbage dump in Israel called *Gehenna* as a metaphor for the second death described in Revelation (**Revelation 20:6,14, 21:8**). To understand these references to council and judges and *Gehenna*, all should know something of Jewish regulations. The "Court of Judges" consisted of seven men (or 23 – the number is in dispute), and had power to judge some classes of crimes. The High Council, or Sanhedrin, consisted of 71 men of recognized learning and ability. This constituted the highest court of the Jews, and its supervision was over the gravest offenses. The most serious sentence was death; but certain very obnoxious criminals were subjected to an indignity after death, being refused burial and cast with the carcasses of dogs, the city refuse, etc., into *Gehenna*, there to be consumed. The object of this burning in *Gehenna* was to make the crime and the criminal detestable in the eyes of the people, and signified that the culprit was a hopeless case.

**Ep.1181: Is It Ever Right to Judge Your Brother?**

*Determining the what, when, how and why of appropriate judgment*

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1181-judging/>



Parents and Bible class teachers, continue your studies on this topic with this short, animated video for kids at [ChristianQuestions.com/YouTube](https://ChristianQuestions.com/YouTube):

Why should we get along with our brothers and sisters? <https://youtu.be/k01kqjx-Rc>

# Study QUESTIONS

## Ep. 1316: Is My Christian Judgment Tainted by Bias? (Part II)

<https://christianquestions.com/society/1316-biases-part-ii/>

See:



1. What is our working definition of “bias”? Rephrase this in your own words.
2. Recap the following biases:
  - a. Self-Protecting Bias
  - b. Blocked Listening Bias
  - c. Building Walls Bias
3. Bias Breaks Trust: (Matthew 5:21-24, James 1:19-20, Ephesians 4:25-32, Psalms 4:4-5, Galatians 5:13-15)
  - a. Words—how did Jesus show the “spirit” of the Law was at a higher level than the “letter” of the Law?
  - b. Anger—why is even legitimate anger a danger?
  - c. How can we be angry and yet not sin? How does Psalm 4 help counteract the emotion behind anger?
  - d. Irrelevant—what is “irrelevant” Christian liberty and emotional energy?
4. Belittling of Others Bias: (James 2:1-19, Proverbs 16:19-23, Galatians 2:11-13, Philippians 2:1-4)
  - a. Belittling—what does this mean? Do you see belittling in your own life?
  - b. What can be the result of not challenging our own conditioned prejudicial thinking?
  - c. Explain the four steps James gives us to correct our tendency to belittle.
  - d. How does the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:10 give us help in conquering this bias?
5. Bridge-Burning Bias: (Galatians 5:15-17)
  - a. What does “Don’t burn your bridges behind you” mean? Have you done this in your life?
  - b. Why is this a step beyond belittling?
  - c. In Julie’s example, what was the first step in defusing a tough issue? The second?
  - d. By removing emotion from our communication with the other party, what happens?
6. Calming and correcting our Bridge-Burning Bias: (Acts 15:36-40)
  - a. What was the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark?
  - b. This was a “sharp disagreement”—what is the danger here?
  - c. How had Paul and Barnabas worked together to influence the Jerusalem Council?
  - d. What happened as they left Jerusalem to continue their missionary journey?
  - e. Discuss the hints we get much later in the relationship between Paul, Barnabas and John Mark as they all matured in their Christian walks. (Colossians 4:10-11, 2 Timothy 4:11)
7. Expand on the thought of putting space between the stimulus and our response:
  - a. How should our conscience be tuned? (1 Timothy 4:1-3, Romans 9:1-3)
  - b. What are our weapons to avoid the burning of bridges? (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)
  - c. Building bridges requires us to do what? (Matthew 12:34-35, James 3:2-10)
8. Look carefully at your behavior and your thoughts; examine your heart and mind—what hidden biases do you have? What *are* your personal biases? What suggestions in Episodes #1315 and #1316 will help in eliminating these biases? A personal journal can help keep track of your progress.