

The Limits of Judging

Countryside Bible Church – January 2020

Theme Verse: “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24).

Lesson One: Judging and a Good Conscience

To fight the good fight of faith, we must keep both the faith and a good conscience (1 Tim. 1:19-20).

To prepare ourselves and our children for today’s moral environment, we need more than ideas.

We need the principles and examples behind a proper moral sensitivity to the consciences of others.

John 7 – We can error in judgment either by not knowing the law or by not knowing the facts.

Therefore, what does the Bible say about judging and what are the cultural facts of our moral environment?

First: The Importance of Knowing Biblical Content

1 Corinthians 5 – This arrogant, hyper-tolerant church must lovingly remove the wicked man from their midst.

Two principles emerge:

First, we must treat outsiders different than insiders (those who profess faith in Christ).

We judge those inside the church, but God judges those outside the church (1 Cor. 5:12-13).

Second, in order to obey God, we must make character assessments.

The sin of discrimination involves treating people differently on externals, not character (James 2:1-13).

Second: The Importance of Knowing Cultural Context

Randy Carlson: “We judge ourselves by *intentions*, but we are judged by others by *expectations*.”

Nancy Pearcey: “Christians *intend* to communicate life-giving, objective truths about the real world,

but their statements are *interpreted* as attempts to impose personal preferences” (*Saving Leonardo*, p. 32).

What expectations do unbelievers bring to discussions on morals?

Core Problem: The Fact-Value Split

J. P. Moreland: Three Worldviews in America Today

Modernism – *scientific naturalism* (all effects are due to natural causes and what is knowable is measurable)

Postmodernism – *social constructivism* (each tribe projects its meaning onto the chaos with its own language)

Christianity – *revealed realism* (divinely-inspired statements that correspond to ultimate reality)

The fact-value split arose from the assumption that only the scientific method gives objective knowledge.

All other claims to knowledge are actually subjective expressions of personal value projected onto reality.

Two Results of the Fact-Value Split

First, we suffer from a **loss of dignity**.

Beyond biological nature, a universal humanity is denied—only radical individualism and equality remain.

More than once, the Supreme Court has affirmed the personal freedom to define oneself.

Several implications follow:

Any imposition on freedom of choice based on some alleged hierarchy must be *oppressive*.

Morality is determined solely by free choices among *consenting adults*.

Morality is also determined by *sincerity*—being true to oneself (authenticity).

My views on morality are *insulated* from criticism, but *isolated* to myself (Stetson & Conti).

Instead of external callings *adding* to identity, a person must leave these callings to “find oneself.”

Because we have *fragile identities*, we are hypersensitive and demanding:

“...we will tend to demand that others affirm our choices, lest we be without worth” (R. Scott Smith).

Second, we suffer from a **loss of debate**.

“Criticism and vigorous debate, far from being the testing ground of truth and error, are now themselves seen as intolerant” (John O’Sullivan in Stetson & Conti, *Truth about Tolerance*, pp. 124-25).

Ironically, our culture rejects religious proselytism, yet seeks to convert us to relativism (Luke Goodrich).

The Culture of Sodom will judge us:

“This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse” (Gen. 19:9).

Lesson Two: Judging and the Ethics of Jesus

Matthew 7 – The Famous Passage

“Do not judge, lest you be judged” (Mt. 7:1).

Illus. He who judges hypocritically is like someone with a log in his own eye removing a speck from another eye.

Judging is a sin preoccupied with the faults of others and to the *neglect* of our own faults.

Judging is a sin involving double standards of *epic proportions*.

Point: Jesus is teaching against hypocrisy, not making an absolute prohibition against judging.

Proof: 1. Removing a speck is actually a loving thing to do (Mt. 7:5).

Dealing with personal sin enables one to “see clearly” in order to help others deal with their sin.

“A criticism is not the same as an insult” (Stetson & Conti, *The Truth about Tolerance*, p. 161).

2. Assessing character is necessary for obedience—to know who are the “dogs” or the “swine” (Mt. 7:6).

Context: The teachings of Jesus *against* judging (Mt. 7:1-6) match in *form* His teachings *for* prayer (Mt. 7:7-12).

Therefore, the best way to guard against a critical, judgmental spirit is to cultivate a spirit of expectant prayer.

How can we remain critical, if we are asking God to give and forgive?

Sum: *Open Eyes* and *Open Heart* – Godly Discrimination with a Charitable Spirit

Fruit Inspection

Jesus affirms that Christians will be able to “know” false teachers:

“You will know them by their fruits” (Mt. 7:16, 20).

Cautions:

1. This statement pertains to *teachers* imposing themselves on us (Mt. 7:15 – “who come to you”).

With regard to people in general, judging is allowed only so far as it is necessary for obedience.

2. Beware of quick assessments—it takes *time* for “fruit” to mature (cf. 1 Jn. 2:19).

Jesus relies on the logic of **abduction**:

If there is only one known cause for an effect, then it is valid to infer the cause whenever we see the effect.

Jesus teaches that there is an absolute cause-and-effect between the heart and the fruit of our deeds and words:

“Every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit” (Mt. 7:17-18).

There are only two kinds of people in the world—those with a good heart and those with a bad heart.

For this reason, Jesus emphasized the causal priority of the heart:

“Either make the tree good and its fruit will be good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad;
for the tree is known by its fruit” (Mt. 15:33).

“But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man” (Mt. 15:18).

“You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish,
so that the outside of it may become clean also” (Mt. 23:26).

“But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you” (Lk. 11:41).

Matthew 12 – A Case Study of Jesus’ Ethics

On the Sabbath, Jesus’ disciples were picking and eating heads of grain—an act allowed by the Law (Dt. 23:25).

The Pharisees criticized them for doing something *unlawful* on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:1-2).

In reply, Jesus did not criticize either their interpretation of the Sabbath or their hypocritical practice of the Sabbath.

Instead, Jesus assumed their position (an unlawful deed was done) but argued on a deeper ethical basis than rules:

David and his men *unlawfully* ate the showbread (v. 4).

The priests in the temple *break* the Sabbath and are innocent (v. 5).

If you had understood, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent (v. 7).

The underlying ethical basis is rooted in a greater-than argument about reality:

“Something greater than the temple is here” (v. 6) and “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (v. 8).

The Ethics of Jesus: *Glory* → *Truth* → *Rightness*

What is right conforms to what is true, and what is true corresponds to reality, which has an intrinsic scale of value.

Contrary to the fact-value split, Jesus’ ethics represent a seamless fact-value union, rooted in revealed realism.

Lesson Three: When Christians Disagree

John 12 – Jesus Himself differentiates between His motive and His message:

He did not come to judge, but to save the world (v. 47); but His word will judge someday (v. 48).

Neither do we come to judge the world, but to save the world—knowing we too will be judged by the word.

Open Eyes, Open Heart – a public message of divine authority and a personal motive of divine salvation

Ask: *What is my **motive**—to be right and to prove myself right? Or to gain a brother?*

“Mercy triumphs over judgment” (Jas. 2:13).

*What is my **authority**—my opinions, my experience, my research? Or God and His word?*

My authority cannot be my *private interpretation* of the word, but *plain Scripture* (cf. 2 Pt. 1:20-21).

According to Jesus, the **word of God** is the ultimate criterion in judgment:

Like **natural law theory**, Christianity holds to a *fact-value union*—value is based on the nature of things.

Unlike **natural law theory**, Christianity holds to the *need* for divine revelation (cf. Pr. 2:6; Mt. 4:4).

Yes, those without the Law have “the *work* of the Law written in their hearts” (Rom. 2:15);

but this “work” may refer to the moral structure of the mind more than its moral content (cf. Ps. 119:104).

Ultimately, we cannot ascertain a lot of the natural law *empirically* for five reasons:

As fallen, human nature (as we find it) does not exhibit what humans *should* be.

As fallen, human beings are unable to see what *should* be seen (“blind”).

As creatures, we are unable to see unseen realities in the present world (God, Satan, angels, demons, etc.).

As creatures, we are unable to see unseen realities in the future (cf. promises and resurrection ethics).

As creatures, we do not know the mind of God regarding His purposes in history (e.g. for an institution).

Therefore, we need the word of God to enlighten our conscience through faith—we call this **the moral law**.

Next week: *How then do we interact with a culture that is “without law” (the Bible)?*

This week: *How do we handle when Christians disagree over the word of God and its application?*

Real-Life Example: The ethics of marriage—especially divorce and remarriage—chosen for the following reasons:

1. More substantial issue than typical questions about alcohol, which can be handled well by Romans 14.

2. The outward fact of broken and blended families easily lends itself to a Pharisaic culture of judging:

A church may act like there are the *good families* and the *bad families* based on this outward fact.

But the *mere* outward fact of broken and blended families says *little* about the current situation:

Do you know the facts, the Scriptures, their current heart, or the reason why they are welcomed?

3. The Scriptures seem to allow for differences of opinion (e.g. the exception clauses in Matthew).

On divorce and remarriage, the five pastors of this church are not in agreement, but allow for differences.

Conclusion – Beware of defining church fellowship along the lines of divorce and remarriage!

Again: *How do we handle when Christians disagree over the word of God and its application?*

Personal Testimony

Early in my pastorate, I remember wrestling with the question:

Should I officiate the wedding of any couple that has slept together or has been living together?

If nothing is said at the ceremony, am I condoning sin—all in the name of the church and its ministry?

Should I officiate the wedding of a divorced man or woman, given Jesus’ warnings about adultery?

Two Conversations – changed my approach to the problem:

Illus. *How can I condemn the mercy of a man who married a deserted woman with children?*

I remembered how Jesus quoted, “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice” (Mt. 9:13; 12:7; cf. Hos. 6:6).

Illus. *How can I make a judgment call on the ethics of admitting into membership a couple recently remarried?*

This situation made me pray fervently—and the answer came from the “unlawful” deeds of Matthew 12.

Therefore, I informed the couple:

“Whether you are justified before God in deliberating doing something ‘unlawful’ is not my call.

However, I want you to know that I will continue to call such a union ‘unlawful’ in my preaching.”

Similarly, I may tell a couple who asks me to officiate at their questionable wedding:

“Unless I can see it another way, I cannot; however, I may *attend* your wedding in good conscience.

If I respect your conscience in this matter, I ask you to respect mine as well. God is the judge.”

Problem: *Situational Ethics* – justifying (or rationalizing) my actions based on circumstances (i.e. rationalization)
In pondering my solution, I have sometimes thought, *Would not citing mercy justify almost anything?*
After all, everyone’s way is right in his own eyes (Pr. 16:2; 21:2)—we have reasons for why we do what we do.

Clarification – We are not talking about a *conflict of commands* justifying a wrongdoing.

1. Although some object that a conflict of commands can never occur, the Bible says it can (e.g. Acts 4:19; 5:29).
2. Although some say that a conflict of commands always leads to sinning, Jesus’ says otherwise (e.g. Mt. 12:5).
3. Therefore, it is possible to do something “unlawful” and yet remain “innocent” (not condemned by God).

When *forced* to do something unlawful, given limited choices, doing the lesser of two evils seems justified.
In the situations given earlier, however, the choices were not forced, but were deliberately made.

Therefore, with open eyes and an open heart, let us use this pressing issue to draw principles from the NT epistles.

How do we handle when Christians disagree over the word of God and its application?

Paradox: In 1 Corinthians, Paul tells us to judge within the church; but in Romans, Paul tells us not to judge.

How should we resolve this apparent inconsistency?

Interestingly, the same paradox appears in 1 Corinthians: “Do not go on passing judgment before the time...” (4:5).
The Corinthians were examining apostles in a party spirit, but he urged them to consider them as servants of *Christ*.
Based on the fact that the one examining him is the Lord (4:4b), Paul warned them not to judge for two reasons:

1. You do not have direct access to all the data (“things hidden in darkness”).
2. You do not have direct access to the heart (“the motives of men’s hearts”).

Principle: Once the genuineness of a pastor is known, scrutinizing him is neither our *place* nor in our *power*:
The Lord will hold His man accountable.

1 Corinthians 5 – Regarding church discipline, Paul urged the *opposite*—to judge those in the church (5:13).

What is different in this case?

First – It is the church’s *place* to judge itself in the Lord, according to His word (5:12b; cf. 11:30-32).

Second – It is within the church’s *power* to know public sin—so-called *scandalous* sin.

Consider the list: “sexually immoral, ...greedy...swindlers...idolaters” (5:10; cf. 5:11; 6:10).

These lists refer to *characters*, i.e. those whose lives are *defined* by these vices through unrepentance.

Just as Jesus inferred a bad tree from bad fruit, so Paul calls them “unrighteous” and hell-bound (6:9).

Yes, a Christian commits sin (cf. David), but in repenting, these sins do not *define* their character.

“Such *were some of you*. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified...” (6:11).

Romans 14 – Liberty of Conscience in the Church

Those who are ***weak in faith*** have a very sensitive conscience and little personal liberty.

Those who are ***strong in faith*** have an insensitive conscience about small matters of “indifference” (*adiaphora*).

Tendencies: The weak tend to *judge* the strong, and the strong tend to *despise* the weak (14:3).

Rather than aim at getting everyone to agree on every detail (uniformity), Paul focused on worship (unity).

Principles: *Faith* and *Love*

Faith – Every man must be firmly convinced in his own mind regarding his own conduct (14:5, 22).

Even though there is a “right answer” (e.g. 14:14), the realistic aim is worship—to give thanks in faith.

Love – Hold your convictions in such a way that you do not judge or despise others.

If you are strong, be extra cautious about emboldening a weak brother to sin against his conscience.

Again: *How should we resolve the paradox in Paul’s letters on judging?*

Ans. **First** – Both passages say that judging is wrong when it is not our *place*: e.g. “Who are you...?” (14:4, 10).

Second – Romans 14 deals with matters of indifference (*adiaphora*), not the immorality of 1 Corinthians 5.

Conclusion: The paradox resolves by contrasting the *moral law* with external rules of *positive command*.

Remember: Romans 14 comes after both the gospel (Romans 1-11) and the moral law (Romans 13).

If any rule contradicts the gospel (e.g. Jew and Gentile oneness) or the moral law, it is wrong.

If any rule dealt with neither the gospel nor the moral law, it was a matter of indifference (*adiaphora*).

This dichotomy between moral law and external rules is also what we see in Jesus’ ethics:

Jesus argued for liberty on the Sabbath due to its purpose of serving man—and He is the Son of Man.

Jesus argued that all foods are clean based on the fact that only what comes from within defiles a man.

Jesus argued from the Old Testament that mercy is better than sacrifice, the technicalities of the Law.

Challenge: *Where is the boundary line of the moral law?*

Challenge: Jesus quoted *Hosea 6:6* twice in Matthew as if it alone were the answer to social ethics (9:13; 12:6).

Would mercy justify breaking a Ten Commandment—to do an “unlawful” act on the basis of a higher law?

But Jesus told us to do the “weightier provisions of the law...without neglecting the others” (Mt. 23:23).

Temptation – It is tempting to reason in the following way:

Jesus clearly prejudiced the internal over the external (Mt. 23:26; Lk. 11:41 – “all things are clean for you”).

Jesus also said there are ultimately only two commands—loving God and loving one’s neighbor (Mt. 22:37-40).

Therefore, it would appear that if I have love in my heart for God and for my neighbor, I can do *anything*.

Problem: *Would this line of reasoning not be a reintroduction of the fact-value split?*

How does love for God and for my neighbor *fulfill* the Law (Rom. 13:10; cf. Mt. 22:40)?

Does love fulfill the law because it *motivates* me to do what is *objectively* right?

Does love fulfill the law because love *itself* makes my action to be right?

After all, an action without love is wrong (1 Cor. 13:1-3; 16:14); so, is any action with love, right?

If God desires mercy, not sacrifice, then when does meeting a need in “mercy” cease to be right?

1 John 3 – There is a beautiful symmetry between doing what is right *and* what is loving (2:28-3:10; 3:11-24).

According to John, for those born again, there is no conflict of commands between what is right and what is loving.

If the action is loving, it is in accord with what is real—love “rejoices with the truth” (1 Cor. 13:6).

John even defines love by obedience: “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments” (2 Jn. 6).

The context shows the temptation: Love demands **not** welcoming or receiving a false teacher (2 Jn. 10).

It would be tempting to justify hospitality on the merciful feelings of helping this man’s basic needs.

But this hospitality would **not** be loving to others, because it would participate in evil deeds (11).

Caution: *Not every good desire justifies our choice of action.*

Growing in love involves growing in *discernment*—it is inescapably linked to objective truth (Ph. 1:9-11).

Interestingly, even in Matthew 12, Jesus argues on the basis of what is *real*—something greater is “here” (12:6).

Solution: Just as Romans 14 follows the moral law in Romans 13, so Matthew 7 on judging follows Matthew 5.

In Matthew 5, Jesus includes divorce and remarriage under His discussion of the seventh commandment.

Similarly, in Matthew 19, Jesus grounded His reasonings on marriage in the reality of creation (19:3ff).

The Law merely “permitted” the Jews to divorce, but it was not that way “from the beginning” (19:8).

Marriage, divorce, and remarriage are part of the moral law—not a matter of indifference (*adiaphora*).

Application: *How should we as a church handle differences among our members over the word of God?*

As with infant baptism—an external ritual on the boundaries of the gospel—we may need to tolerate differences.

However, unlike infant baptism, the issues of marriage are not externals, but part of the moral law itself.

Yet, due to the reasons given earlier, the issues of marriage may be near the boundaries of the moral law.

What should we do? How should we handle our differences?

First – Let us resolve on principle that it is never right to break a moral law, except in conflict with a higher one.

In the name of supposed “mercy,” we should not abort a baby or commit adultery or steal or bear false witness.

Neither should we choose to divorce and remarry on the basis of some supposed “love” to another person.

What is loving and what is right go together due to the fact-value union of reality.

Second – Regarding the messiness of modern life, especially in the realm of marriage, we should be very cautious.

By itself, the *mere* outward fact of broken and blended families tells us *little* about the current situation.

Jesus said, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment” (John 7:24).

Judging with right judgment would require a thorough examination of the past, especially bridges burned.

Judging with right judgment would require a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures on this matter.

Knowing both the standard and the situation, is there a sin here or not? What are the possibilities?

Judging with right judgment would take into account repentance and the desire to move ahead in faith.

If God blessed the unlawful marriage of David and Bathsheba with the next king of Israel—

and that marriage was definitely *unlawful* as acknowledged by David himself in Psalm 51,

and yet God chose their Solomon to be king, even calling him “Jedidiah” (lit. “Beloved of the LORD”)—

then we should not write off the wonderful possibilities of grace for any family,

even for those having blatantly sinned—even for our *own* family and its generational sins.

God be praised for His amazing mercy and grace in Christ!

Lesson Four: When the World Disagrees

Proverbs: *The Need for Discernment*

Take time to listen and to hear both sides of the story (Pr. 18:13, 17).

Let every fact be confirmed by two or three witnesses (Dt. 17:6; 19:15; Mt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1).

Just because a Christian discerns all things and is discerned by no one (1 Cor. 2:15), this does not imply:

1. We are justified in church discipline to act singlehandedly, apart from what duty requires.
2. We are beyond the need of good counsel within the parameters of propriety.

Discernment also applies to how we answer the world—according to his folly or not (Pr. 26:4-5).

With people, there is no paint-by-numbers approach—this is a relational art—we need *discernment*.

This week: *How do we handle when the world accuses us of judging?*

Goal: We are not learning an answer to every objection, but training in faith and a good conscience (1 Tim. 1:19). However, just as striking the scoffer teaches the naïve, so providing an answer may help the wavering to believe. Therefore, we shall first speak about our *conduct in the world* before speaking about our *controversy in the world*.

Conduct in the World

In an epilogue to *The Truth of Tolerance*, Brad Stetson includes among the “vital ideas” to keep in mind today:

“People in contemporary American society reject the gospel for spiritual, psychological and emotional reasons, not for intellectual ones...” (180). Therefore:

“We need to be ready to meet people where they are—personally, psychologically, intellectually—and *comprehensively* communicate to them the all-surpassing and perfect love of Christ” (180).

“We are trying to reach *human beings*, not machines... Human beings carry with them a lot of *pain*. There is a galaxy of hurt swirling around inside the psyche of everyone we meet, and it is this suffering and the grief, anxiety, anger, hate and fear it yields that bind so many non-Christians to the ultimately frustrating outlook on life that they have embraced” (180).

“Emotion, though rightly discounted as a governing principle of knowledge or ethics, is nonetheless the currency of our time. Those who wish to do ‘existential business’ must learn to responsibly and sensitively trade with it” (181).

General Commands – for *God’s people*:

We should be submissive citizens, obedient, good, speaking bad of no one, gentle, and considerate (Titus 3:1-2).

We should be submissive employees, well-pleasing, not argumentative—showing all faith to be good (2:9-10). In fulfilling our roles, we adorn the gospel and defend the word from dishonor (2:5, 10).

We should not repay evil for evil, but respect what is right in the sight of all and seek peace (Rom. 12:17-18).

We should act wisely toward outsiders with gracious and winsome speech (Col. 4:5-6).

We should avoid offending unbelievers in the *adiaphora*—a “stand” on unnecessary items (1 Cor. 10:32-33).

Example: Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (2014).

General Counsel: Take genuine interest in others—ask questions, make comments, feel their dilemmas.

When they finally ask you a question, the door has opened to give an answer (cf. Col. 4:3; 1 Pt. 3:15).

Specific Commands: *The accusation of judging falls under the larger category of slander.*

Slander is different than an open disagreement about a view or an issue, where the focus is on ideas.

Slander focuses on *you*; therefore, you must not defend *yourself* contrary to your Lord’s example (1 Pt. 2:23).

If you cannot accept being wrongly slandered by the world, then are you a Christian (cf. John 15:18-25)?

1 Peter – Slander is the fundamental suffering of a Christian, because it is necessary for justifying persecution.

“Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pt. 2:12).

Example: The will of God is that we “silence the ignorance of foolish men” by “doing right” (1 Pt. 2:15).

Example: A disobedient husband “may be won without a word” through his wife’s conduct (1 Pt. 3:1-2).

Clarification: This is not silence due to fear, but the quiet confidence of godly living by faith (3:6, 14).

Controversy in the World

Claim: The fundamental reality in Western thought today is the *fact-value split*.

How do we answer it?

Problem: We cannot answer the fact-value split directly, because we would assume a fact-value union to do so.

Two Main Areas in the Literature: *Self-Defeating and Reductionism*

Each area has a theoretical side and a practical side.

Illus. Imagine a man in a tree, sawing off the branch he is sitting on—if he is successful, then he will fall.

That is the self-refuting nature of the modern position—if successful, it undercuts itself.

Imagine that tree being in a large forest of trees—but he asserts that this is the only tree that counts.

That is the reductionistic tendency of the modern position—a lot of reality is ignored or denied.

The Example of Jesus

Consider how Jesus addressed the self-defeating and reductionistic tendencies of the pharisaic position:

Matthew 15 – If, to obey God, a man must obey the tradition, then he will break the law and disobey God.

Matthew 12 – Their practical reduction of the Law to mainly Sabbath-keeping ignored the Law and prophecy.

What is Jesus doing in both of these examples?

He broadened the discussion from the immediate issue to the general principles of thought and life.

Jesus had a firm grasp on the basis of their ethics in light of their standard (the Law) and their conduct.

Therefore, let us bypass accusations and focus instead on the underlying foundation of their ethics (philosophy).

Let us correlate these actions to the two points made in the literature:

1. **Self-Defeating:** Hypocrites are inconsistent.

Criticize the Hypocrisy of their Ethics (e.g. Mt. 12:11-12; 15:4-5; Lk. 14:5).

“Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” (Mt. 15:3).

Paul made the self-contradiction principle foundational to his gospel message (Rom. 2:1-3).

Idea: *Take what you are given*—and draw out the implications logically and/or practically.

The genius here is you do not need to convince people of new principles—just use their own (cf. 2:14-15).

Rhetorically, this is wise—if done well, it opens the door of plausibility for new facts (next step).

2. **Reductionism:** Not all the facts are taken into view.

Criticize their Ignorance of Reality (cf. Acts 17).

“Have you not read...?” (Mt. 12:3, 5).

“If you had known what this means...you would not have condemned the innocent” (Mt. 12:7).

“You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Mt. 22:29).

First – Self-Defeating Arguments

Theoretical Side: *To justify itself, the argument has to assume what it contradicts.*

The argument *smuggles* in what it seeks to criticize:

Relativism: “There are no absolutes.” An absolute statement!

Scientific Naturalism: “Only the scientific method gives us objective, verifiable knowledge.”

Michael Rea – This view cannot justify itself nor prove the reality of material objects or other minds.

Skepticism: “We should always be suspicious of anyone with strong convictions.

Atheism: “Where is God, given all the evil in the world?”

Ans. What is evil, if there is no God?

Inclusivism: “We cannot tolerate the intolerant.”

Illus. When a woman decided not to join the US women’s soccer team due to a LGBT pride jersey, one player responded: “You would never fit into our pack or what this team stands for.”

“Our team is about inclusion” (*WORLD Magazine*, 3 August 2019, p. 12).

Practical Side: *No one lives by the standard they profess, especially not by the fact-value split (Rom. 2:1-3).*

In general, if the philosophy cannot be lived out in the real world, how is it *true*?

Moreover, not only is the fact-value split *impracticable*, it also leads to incredible *inconsistency*:

To bring down the West, the critics use values they have derived from the West (Martin Cothran, Winter 2020).

The irreligious are now evangelizing the religious “with an increasingly religious fervor” (Luke Goodrich).

The tolerant cannot tolerate the intolerant—and speech codes have a “double standard” (Stetson & Conti, 122).

Due to the fact-value split, **discrimination** is always bad and **tolerance** is always good, but both are *relative* terms.

Ans. What *kind* of tolerance? What *kind* of judging?

Would there be *any* situation you would never tolerate—legally, safely, for you or your family?

Second – Reductionistic Arguments

Theoretical Side: *False claims to truth reduce reality to one main thing and leave aspects of reality out of view.*

In *Saving Leonardo*, Nancy Pearcey makes reductionism the key target of her counterarguments (pp. 244-45):

Those who reject the Creator have absolutized some aspect of creation into a “mental idol” (Dooyeweerd).

As a result, whatever does not fit the agenda is suppressed or oppressed by this totalizing vision.

Our task is to “unmask the temporal idols” (Dooyeweerd) and show how Christianity alone affirms all of life.

Practical Side: *Reductionism runs the risk of unintended consequences.*

As a result of ignoring part of reality, there is also the risk of negligence.

Ans. “Wisdom is vindicated by all her children” (Luke 7:35).

Be *really* pragmatic—consider *all* the children (no reductionism) and let them grow up (long-term effects).

Example: *Perhaps the most serious reductionism today is the self-referencing isolationism of postmodern ethics.*

The “harm principle” of John Stuart Mill affirms *free choice among consenting adults*, if no harm is done to others.

Problem: Limitless individual liberty *will hurt somebody*.

We have a **Father** (Creator) in heaven.

God is personal—when He sees us (and He sees everything), we can grieve and insult Him.

God is primary—we are made in His image, so we can damage His picture.

We have **family**—honoring father and mother lasts, and our absence and actions hurt their heart.

We have a **future**—we sin against a future spouse, against future children.

Our absence is **felt**—needs are not being met—the sins of omission condemn us (cf. Mt. 25:31-46):

We remove resources from our nation through selfish recreation and self-destruction.

Our behavior is ultimately **foolish**—we will not gain the happiness we desire being our own counsel and end.

Therefore, no man is an island (John Donne) and no act is private:

We are organically connected human beings with external obligations that form much of our identity.

Just as a fact is meaningless apart from context, so is an individual identity apart from social connections.

In conclusion, with regard to the controversy in the world over the fact-value split...

Modern secular views of “truth” are *self-defeating, reductionistic, impracticable* and *inconsistent*.

Modern secular views of “truth” cannot be lived out individually nor form the basis of a common society.

In other words, because such “truth” does not work in the real world in the long run, it is not true.

To **counter the fact-value split** in modern consciousness, consider using the following terms:

moral facts (Nancy Pearcey, *Saving Leonardo*, p. 34).

moral knowledge (R. Scott Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge*).

critical tolerance (Stetson & Conti, *The Truth about Tolerance*, p. 153).

practical reason (an older terms from C. S. Lewis).

Even with its limits, the term **natural law** counters the fact-value split and leads to consideration of the moral law.

Using the idea of **law**, ask how long the “freedom” of freefall lasts before gravity takes over?

Eventually we must face “the recalcitrance of nature” (Thomas Woodward, *Doubts about Darwin*, p. 193).

Eventually we must face the reality of death.

Proposal: *As in the pluralistic, pagan culture of the first century, perhaps we need to preach the Resurrection first!*

After all, a fact is a fact—and the gospel is essentially *news!*

The Incarnation and the Resurrection are the two great facts that bridge the fact-value split,

along with prophetic Scripture, which is the basis for believing the good news of Jesus Christ!