

Five Lies  
Your TV  
is Telling  
You

# Five Lies Your TV is Telling You

## **“If It’s True for You, It’s True”**

Is there anything that is really true, or is it all relative?  
Can Christians claim to have the truth? What about tolerance?

## **“If It Feels Right to You, You Should Do It”**

Is ‘gut-reaction’ our best guide to making decisions?  
What place is there for feelings in a Christian’s life?

## **“It’s All a Matter of Chance, Anyway”**

Are we just the result of a great cosmic accident? Is there any ultimate purpose in life? Is God in charge?

## **“You’ve Got to Fulfil Yourself”**

How can I realise the full potential of my life? ‘Eat, drink and be merry’? Should I aim to experience everything?

## **“Just So Long As Everyone’s Happy”**

If no-one’s complaining, does that mean it’s all OK?  
Surely I can’t do any better than try to please everyone?

## **Five Lies Your TV is Telling You – 1**

# “If It’s True for You, It’s True”

There is a popular idea around that it doesn’t matter what you believe, just so long as you believe something. ‘They’ tell us that it is not the things which we believe that matter, but rather that just ‘believing’ does us good – it is good therapy, will improve our sense of well-being and give us security. In the words of the song from ‘Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat’, “any dream will do”. Will it?

We see and hear reports of people who have apparently overcome depression and other problems through courses of treatment which have enabled them to ‘believe in themselves’ again. These reports come into our living rooms via the TV soaps, news reports, documentaries, newspapers, our friends and relations and even the local gossip. The telly is not automatically guilty – it is simply one of the messengers which brings the message to us:– *“Believe what you like, just so long as it seems to work!”*

We are told that everyone must be allowed to be right. However, if we follow this through, it means that there is no such thing as real truth, because all we have is our different opinions. If we say that we are right and others are wrong, we are told that we are not being ‘tolerant’, as if it were more important to put up with different ideas than to find the right one.

This sort of approach is illogical and totally unscientific. The whole of science, throughout its history, has been a search for reality, what actually is. Theories have come and gone but they are all subjected to one test:– do they fit the facts? As long as they cannot be proven, they remain theories, though their credibility gradually increases as people go on using them as working ideas and other factors seem to fit.

The New Testament word for truth, *aletheia*, comes from a word meaning ‘that which cannot escape notice’ – in other words, it is not just a nice idea, it is actually there, it is fact, it is reality. Facts have a habit of getting in the way, don’t they? We can’t change them to suit ourselves, they remain obstinately in place and we have to get used to them unless we prefer to live in our own little world of make-believe.

Some philosophies and religions want us to believe that there is nothing more than make-believe. Hinduism teaches that the whole creation is just illusion and that ‘spiritual’ reality is the only reality. In practice, this usually means that nothing is real. Out of this comes an attitude which says that my idea of reality is just as valid as yours and that it doesn’t matter whether either of them is true. This attitude has invaded modern thinking and is one of the reasons that we have moved away from a ‘black-and-white’, ‘right and wrong’ approach, towards accepting a much more relative set of values. Some people (the so-called ‘moral majority’, for example) now say that they want to return to ‘old-fashioned values’ because they see the results of this mistake. Perhaps they do not realise that these values only make sense in the light of absolute truth which is not dependent on human opinion.

By contrast, the Bible teaches clearly that God is so real and personal that we cannot ignore him. It also says that the world is real, along with the whole of creation, and that we as individuals also have a real existence which is more than just being very clever animals. It is because absolute truth exists that is does matter what we believe. It is also very possible to be wrong!

In ***John 8***, Jesus claims not only to bring the truth from God but also to be the truth. In ***verse 12***, he does not just say that he brings light into the world, but that he himself is the light. In the rest of the chapter, he goes on declaring his credentials, stating clearly the authority that he has received from the Father and underlining his unique claim to have come from God and to declare truth in a very exclusive way. See ***verses 24, 28 & 29, 31 & 32, 38, 40, 42, 45 & 46, 51, 55 and 58.***

In this chapter, Jesus puts himself right on the line. He challenges the people listening to him to face up to reality, to make clear judgements. In **verse 46**, he tells them that they cannot have it both ways; either he is sinful, in which case they are free to reject what he says, or he is telling the truth and they need to believe him. It is very similar to the reply he gave to Annas the Jewish high priest in **John 18:23**. All his teaching is at stake on the basis of his life and work. If he can be proved to be other than perfect, we have every right to reject his teaching. On the other hand, if he is sinless, the only honest thing we can do is to accept what he says and become his disciples – there is no middle road!

Many people know about Jesus's miracles and think that he was some sort of magician or that the stories have been exaggerated in the telling. They do not take them seriously. Jesus himself did. As far as he was concerned, they were part of the proof that he was the Son of God. Again, he puts himself on the line. In **John 10:31-39**, Jesus challenges his opponents: *“Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may learn and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.”* This is ‘fighting talk’; it is important to him that people know that he has come from the Father. He knows that he himself is the message.

One of the best-known but most controversial things that Jesus said is in **John 14:6**. *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.”* How many times have we said (or heard someone else say) that other faiths and philosophies are all trying to reach the same God, so each person can surely choose the route that suits them best and, if they are sincere, then that's the main thing. We may feel uncomfortable with the thought that Jesus claimed to be the only way to God, but he was very clear about it, as we have seen. If we are Christians and still feel uncomfortable, it should show us that we know we are being inconsistent – we say we follow Jesus but evidently do **not** believe what he said! How easily we are

persuaded by relative thinking!

A simple example:— Perhaps I want to take a plane to Italy, so I turn up at the airport and get on a plane, believing that it will take me there. I might be lucky, but I might not. If the plane is going to Spain, I will have a surprise and, never mind how hard I try to believe that I am going to Italy, I will end up in Spain. Of course, at a real airport they would check to make sure that I had the right ticket to go where the plane was going, but that is just the point; facts are important and need to be checked.

What are we to say, then? We have looked at enough to see that Jesus gave a very uncompromising message but there is much more in the New Testament to show that the early Christian believers were also convinced that they had found **the** answer. See **Acts 4:12** and **13:39**, for example. Jesus himself said, “*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost*” (**Luke 19:10**). If mankind did not need rescuing, why did he come? Even **John 3:16** is meaningless if Jesus is not the only way to God!

There is no middle ground, no sitting on the fence. Jesus did not say, “Believe in Christianity”, he said, “Trust in me”. He declares himself to be the message. He declares that he is the only way to God. He even claims to **be** the truth himself! Either he is telling the truth or he is not. If not, we should reject him completely – how reliable is the teaching of someone who is so fundamentally wrong? But if he is telling the truth, this is the most important truth in the world and we need to follow him unreservedly. “*This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!*” (**Mark 9:7**).

We may need time to look at the evidence, to examine the claims of Jesus, but in the end there are only two options:— Disbelief or Discipleship!

*“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.  
Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

**(John 8:32)**

## **Five Lies Your TV is Telling You – 2**

**“If It Feels Right To You,  
You Should Do It”**

With the overthrow of a belief in any absolute truth, modern Western society has also abandoned ‘right and wrong’ as clear guidelines for behaviour. In the 1960s, the ‘new generation’ of philosophers and gurus (drawing strongly from various forms of oriental belief, especially Hinduism) began to persuade the youth of the day that there were no such things as absolute values; they were told to make up their own moral values according to what suited them at the time. This was the era of ‘free love’ and ‘flower power’. It didn’t matter about old-fashioned standards – the important thing was to be ‘turned on’ by drugs, sex, alcohol, parties, music. Sure, no-one wanted to hurt anyone else, but the main thing was to ‘have a good time’, one way or another.

The hippies and dropouts of the 60s have become the middle-aged executives of the 90s. Most of them have stopped wearing the beads and flares, some of them (secretly or openly) still take illicit substances and/or support the legalisation of so-called ‘soft’ drugs. If they no longer advocate the alternative culture which was their lifestyle 30 years ago, it is not because they consider it wrong; it is merely inconvenient. It no longer fits with their current ambitions or the ‘corporate image’ and tends to hinder their pursuit for cash, the key to all pleasure.

Underneath it all, the philosophy has not changed. Then, they learned to live simply for ‘kicks’; now they might call it ‘satisfaction’ or ‘fulfilment’, or perhaps admit that they are simply living for what they can get out of life.

Of course, it is not restricted to the teenagers of the 1960s. Their children have grown up in a world where rights are considered more important than responsibilities and their parents have grown old being bombarded with persuasion that fixed values are irrelevant and out of date. Everyone is encouraged to do whatever feels ‘good’

to them – and ‘good’ has no moral value to it now; it just means ‘enjoyable’!

We can stand on the ‘Christian’ sidelines and sneer, sign petitions for a return to ‘old-fashioned values’ and write letters to the press to deplore the erosion of moral standards – but have we looked at our own condition?

‘Christian’ fashions change. It is no longer fashionable to uphold truth, to apply Scriptural principles. John Lennon told us in the 60s that ‘Love is all you need’ and modern-day Christians seem to believe it. We have reacted against the old legalisms which we inherited – all the petty home-made laws about what you could or couldn’t do on a Sunday, what you can or can’t wear, lipstick, fashionable clothes, jewellery, cars, music, cinemas, pubs, night clubs. . . You name it, it’s now OK, or so we are told!

### **From the Outside In?**

Let’s be clear about it – legalism is not Christianity. Trying to live by any set of laws, man-made or God-made, will not put us in God’s good books. The effort would probably kill us and his standards are too high, anyway. We must not let ourselves think that ‘good enough’ will do for God – perfection is his standard and we cannot reach it. All the do’s and don’ts never really help on their own. About the best they can achieve is to try to make people toe the line, at least in public. They make no impact on the attitudes and motivations which make us think and act the way we really are. In fact, they may even serve to indulge our man-made urges to be religious, and deceive us even further away from true trust in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul said as much in ***Colossians 2:20-23***.

One of the ironies is that today’s ‘freedom’ has become a new legalism which says that we are not allowed to have any absolute right and wrong. We are told that the only certainty is that there are no certainties, no fixed values. If we start to refer to ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, we are told not to impose our values on other people. Instead, a rejection of fixed values is imposed on us all!

This way of thinking has flooded into modern ‘Christian’ thinking. It has undermined discipleship by taking us away from simple obedience to our Lord. How often have we heard it said that God

is love, so he will forgive us whatever we do? How often have we given ourselves the same excuse as we have knowingly disobeyed the voice of God? Fixed Scriptural principles are rejected as 'legalistic'. For example, the Bible makes it clear that the only place for sexual relationships is within the secure commitment of marriage. This has always been difficult, perhaps especially for young single Christians, and maybe even more since the 1960s. There are many 'experts' who advocate premarital experimentation in the interests of 'sexual compatibility', and others who defend homosexual practice. Both of these are clearly wrong and not for Christians.

Some would argue that such a hard line excludes people. Not at all; we are included on the basis of God's grace and mercy. God's love to us is unconditional – he loves us just as we are, but that does not mean that he is content for us to remain unchanged! To receive his love and experience his forgiveness, we need to have a change of heart about our wrong motives and actions. First, we will need to agree that they are wrong! Then we need to put our trust in what Jesus has done to set us free from guilt and the power of evil in our lives. Identifying wrongdoing and then providing both forgiveness and the power to change is wonderfully inclusive. It may not be a soft option, but it deals with our problems cleanly, like cleaning an infected wound to allow healing to start. See **1 John 1:5-10**.

### **From the Inside Out!**

Having made a clean start, real Christianity does not rest on how many rules I follow, nor on how much I can do for God. It relies totally on how perfect Jesus was and is, and how much he has done for me. As we begin to face our failure to live right, and put our trust in what he has done to restore our broken relationship with God, the result of that trust is discipleship – a life that is being changed and with a growing desire to follow the Lord in every way – following his principles and laws, yes, but because of a response to love, not by force of law. See **Jeremiah 31:31-34** and **Hebrews 8:1-12**. 400 years before Jesus, God promised that he would put his laws inside people! Now he has fulfilled that promise, through the forgiveness and new life that are ours in Jesus. There is nothing wrong with God's laws and principles – the problem comes when we try to change the 'outside' of our lives! His way is to change us from the inside out, so that we are in the process of being "*conformed to the image of his Son*". See **Romans 8:29**, **Colossians 3:10**, **Hebrews 2:10**.

## **The Obedience of Faith**

Many Christians run straight into trouble concerning guidance. Having appreciated that we are not under law, we adopt a sort of pseudo-spirituality which places instinct above principle. Avoiding the old legalisms, we sometimes think that we should just do what feels right, perhaps saying that we are being 'led by the Holy Spirit'. Here is such a fine line! On the one hand, slavish legalism is **not** what the Lord wants in his disciples, he wants free and willing service, truly led by his Spirit. On the other hand, he has given us the Holy Spirit, ". . . *that we may understand what God has freely given us*" (**1 Corinthians 2:12**) and it is very important that we learn to recognise what he is saying, both through spontaneous receptiveness to his leading and through a growing knowledge of his ways. It is significant in **Psalm 103:7** that Moses learnt God's ways, whereas the Israelites only saw his acts! In **John 15:9-17**, Jesus shows us the difference between legalism and discipleship. Look at **verse 15** – this is what he wants for us!

It is clear that the Holy Spirit of God will not lead us contrary to principles which he has already stated plainly in Scripture. We have also seen that coldly applying scriptural 'rules' will quickly bring us into the lifeless bondage of legalism. How are we are to follow our Father's principles without falling into dead religion? By having those principles 'written on our hearts' by the same Holy Spirit who caused them to be written in Scripture! The aim is that we will increasingly know his ways and recognise his voice!

*"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,  
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.  
Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is –  
his good, pleasing and perfect will"*  
**(Romans 12:2)**

## Five Lies Your TV is Telling You – 3

# “It’s All a Matter of Chance Anyway”

The denial of any absolute truth and the rejection of fixed values of right and wrong have become part of the society in which we live, accepted without question. Why? Many people will say that they do not believe in God and might admit that they have no real reason for living other than to have as pleasant a life as possible. At one extreme, they may be 100% dedicated to their own pleasure and gratification; at the other, they may give themselves to trying to help others. In the end, though, most people have not found any real motivation for living and often do not like to think about it. They feel uncomfortable and even despair because they are faced with the pointlessness of their lives.

One of the reasons for this is the wide acceptance of the theory that the universe is just an accident, that there is no Creator and that each of us is merely the product of millions of coincidences, having no existence other than just as a chance combination of atoms. This idea has come partly from popular interpretation of Darwin’s book *The Origin of Species*, in which he put forward the theory of evolution. The idea is that, over many years, one species gradually evolves into another different species. The theory of evolution is now taught as if it were proven fact, but it remains a theory, because no-one has been able to prove that one species has ever changed into another!

People’s reasons for believing in evolution are interesting. Julian Huxley, an eminent scientist, said that he accepted evolution because “the only alternative is creation, and that is unthinkable.” In other words, believing in evolution allowed him to escape from believing in God, which he did not want to do! Many now accept chance evolution without question, because it seems to be generally believed and they are afraid to be different.

The results are far-reaching. If there is no Creator, there is no ultimate purpose to life, man is just an animal and there can be no responsibility and no moral values except what is convenient for society. Right and wrong are redefined as what is accepted or not accepted by other people. “If you can get away with it, it must be OK.” In fact, modern western life adopts just this approach, and we should not be surprised that non-Christian people do not accept the Bible’s insistence on truth and right living – why should they? The foolishness of some present-day campaigning is that it tries to restore ‘old-fashioned values’ without any reference to personal faith in a personal God.

The modern emphasis on animal rights is another symptom. If we humans are just animals, then why should we have any greater privileges than other animals, why should we expect to dominate them, kill them for food or clothing, keep them as farm animals or pets, and why should we use them for medical research? If we are only animals ourselves, it seems unjust.

This approach flies in the face of the Bible’s clear declaration of God’s order in the world. One of his commands to mankind is, “*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.*” (**Genesis 1:28**) Mankind is intended to be in control of creation in responsible management, not selfish exploitation. The Bible does not teach vegetarianism but shows that, normally, man will eat meat.

God clearly sees mankind as special. In **Genesis 1:26**, he says that he is going to make man in his own image, having some of his own characteristics. **Psalms 8** sums it up beautifully and shows how God has placed humanity at the pinnacle of earthly creation but just lower than the heavenly beings. In fact, we are in a unique position: like the animals, we have physical bodies but, like God and the ‘heavenly beings’, we have spiritual existence and therefore eternal significance. We are not just ‘smart animals’ but are intended to be like our Creator!

This is where it gets really exciting! Here is a God who has made us at least a bit like himself. He has personality, so we

have too. He can feel, think, plan and decide, so we have those abilities also. He has made us to have relationships with each other and with him. He has made us for a purpose and we are **not** just cosmic accidents. Perhaps we have not quite dared to believe in our own significance before God. Let's start to see the level of personal interest which our Creator has in each one of us!

When God made mankind and placed all of creation under our control, his plan was that we should exercise his delegated authority on earth. This delegated authority has been surrendered to the control of Satan because he successfully persuaded us to join his rebellion. As a result, "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (**1 John 5:19**), so we should not be surprised at the evil we see around us. It is often the direct result of individual or corporate sin and in any case is the effect of mankind 'taking creation with him' in rebellion against God. **Romans 8:18-25** hints at the great release of creation which will take place when the 'sons of God' are revealed – read it!

Our rebellion is twofold. Firstly, the whole human race is 'geared up' to disobedience to God, because of man's ambition to get equal with God by his own efforts. Even if you don't believe in a literal Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve, read **Genesis 3:1-7** and see whether it doesn't ring true to the way we are. See the subtlety in which God's instructions are twisted! Second, we cannot just blame our ancestors for our own misdeeds. However hard we may protest "I couldn't help it", we all know that we are responsible for our own actions.

There was no way that God could allow rebellious man to share in his great plans for the whole of creation, so he provided the remedy by sending Jesus to make a way for us back into God's purposes. He would still have the 'sons' he always wanted, mature partners with him in managing creation. In the process, he has opened out an inheritance which seems to be better than Adam and Eve could ever have dreamt of! As Paul writes in **2 Corinthians 5:21**, "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*"

Solving the sin problem involved joining our lives with the life of the eternal Son of God and this did more than just deal with the problem – at the same time he joined us into the full inheritance of Jesus, the One who has always been the expression of God and now expresses him in human form! Amazing facts!

When he came as the Messiah, the Anointed One, to die in our place, the Lord Jesus Christ committed himself to humanity for eternity. The Father's ultimate purpose is to sum up everything in Jesus, as it says in **Ephesians 1:9-10**, and to include us in that glorious fulfilment as heirs together with him. Read the whole passage, **Ephesians 1:3-14**! It tells us of his purpose and also how to enter into it, in **verses 13 & 14**. We need to hear the word of truth and trust in Jesus, and that is when we are included in Christ and therefore in the amazing purposes of God. We will ultimately share in that inheritance in physical, visible form but in the meantime we are given the Holy Spirit as the "*deposit guaranteeing our inheritance*"!

God knows each of us intimately and wants us to share in that inheritance. He knows all our strengths and weaknesses and calls us to enter his kingdom. As we respond to that call, he includes us in Christ, in the Church which is the Body of Christ. Here there are no volunteers, but there is no force either. We each come by invitation but he needs our co-operation, to share as sons in the inheritance of his Son. Read **Hebrews 2:5-18**!

Is it all a matter of chance? No, but God will not force his plans on us. If we refuse to follow his plans for us, he cannot fulfil his purposes for us.

*"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers."  
(Hebrews 2:10-11)*

## **Five Lies Your TV is Telling You – 4**

# “You’ve Got to Fulfill Yourself”

If you think that truth is relative, that there is no such thing as right and wrong, and that the whole of life is down to chance, what have you got left? Just yourself! So what do most of us do? – concentrate on ourselves! We are told that the most important thing now is to develop ourselves, our personality, abilities, ideas, relationships and ambitions. This isn’t just a case of “do what you like, it doesn’t matter”. Now we are told that personal development is the most worthwhile and noble thing to pursue and that ‘we owe it to ourselves’ to become as fulfilled as possible, whatever that may mean for us.

It is easy to see around us. Each one tries to be ‘fulfilled’ and realise every single ambition that they have, whether it be for more money, job promotion, positions of power, sexual indulgence, entertainment, gourmet food and drink, travel, achievement in research or exploration, fame . . . the list goes on! Finding this fulfilment is placed so high on the priority list that everything else is sacrificed. We all know public and private cases in which ethics, morals and commitments have been laid aside to reach personal goals – but it doesn’t matter, we are told, because there is no meaning, moral framework or absolute truth, anyway!

Like most lies, this one has a basis in truth. Our mind, will and emotions are potentially extremely rich and can produce amazing results. No-one could deny the value of much of the advance in scientific research and medicine in recent years, for example. The ‘creative arts’ may be more uncertain but at least there are some examples of beauty, expression and communication which come to us through art, music, drama and literature, whether in modern or traditional media. In the field of the human will, we can see how explorers, business tycoons and

politicians have achieved amazing feats through sheer power of determination. We cannot necessarily endorse all these achievements, but we must admire them. In their various ways they have shown the potential of the human soul. They are the best rôle models held up to today's world, demonstrations of **success**, which is what we are told really matters.

Sure enough, this approach has invaded Christian life and thinking, perhaps especially in the last decade or two. In both our individual lives and our fellowship activities, we are encouraged to measure success, by personal satisfaction and achievement, by numbers and enthusiasm, by finances and projects. The competitive edge has made us success-orientated, always measuring ourselves against ourselves and other Christians, always trying to improve our performance in human terms and believing that the Lord is pleased with our apparent 'success'! Our attitudes to premises and presentation often give us away!

Jesus turns it upside down! In **Matthew 16:21-28**, four things follow each other. First, Jesus says clearly that he is going to Jerusalem, where he will suffer, be killed and be raised up. Second, Peter tries to put him off and actually contradicts him. Third, Jesus rebukes Peter, saying that he has his mind on man's things, not God's. Then, fourth, Jesus goes on to say that anyone who wants to follow him must lose his life in order to find it. The word translated 'life' is the Greek word for 'soul', *psuche*, from which we get 'psychologist' and 'psychoanalysis'. Our soul is what we really are as individuals, the expression of our mind, will and emotions. What Jesus is saying is this: If we try to hang onto ('save') our own identity and personality, we will lose it. If, on the other hand, we lose it for his sake, we will really find it. What does this mean?

Let's look at some examples:—

**1) The rich young man.** In **Matthew 19:16-30**, the young man who comes to Jesus is a pillar of society; he has kept all the Law from his earliest days and wants to be sure of eternal life. There is no indication that there is anything wrong in his life, no

hint of dishonest gain, but still Jesus tells him to sell all that he has and follow him. Again, Jesus knows that the man's attention is earthbound, just like Peter's was, and, in order to be really complete (better translation than 'perfect'), he needs to have his treasure in heaven. The word translated 'perfect' or 'complete' is the Greek word *teleios*, which means mature, fully developed or **fulfilled**. Jesus promises **fulfilment** through abandoning man-made priorities, laying aside the legitimate to focus on the ultimate.

Peter is quick to remember that he and the others have made substantial sacrifices to follow Jesus, giving up comfortable homes and secure work in order to travel around with him – “What about us?” he says. Jesus' reply is authoritative and without compromise: “You will not lose out!” See also **Mark 10:29-31**.

**2) Paul the apostle.** In **Philippians 3:4-16**, Paul starts by listing the natural, human qualities which marked him out as an exceptional young man before his conversion. Perhaps, if he had not become a disciple of Jesus, Saul of Tarsus might have been mentioned in our history books as the foremost opponent of the early church. He certainly made a mark on his own generation! What is his opinion of all these outstanding attributes? He turns them on their heads! Loss equals gain, gain equals loss. Whatever he could have relied upon for success is now in the bin. Christ, whom he despised before, is now his only goal. Not, he says, that he is already 'perfect' (*teleios* again!), but that is where he is heading, to fully take to himself the purpose for which Jesus fully took him to himself (**verse 12**, literal translation). He had found the road to fulfilment – total abandonment to the Lord Jesus Christ, in very practical ways, too! (See **2 Corinthians 11:21-33**, for example!)

**3) Jesus himself.** On the face of it, Satan's second suggestion to Jesus might have seemed like a good idea (**Matthew 4:1-11**). Jesus wanted everyone to believe in him, Satan was not asking him to do anything specifically wrong – what harm could there be in it? It would be a quick way to achieve results! By contrast, when Jesus healed people, he often told

them **not** to tell anyone else. In **John 12:23-26**, Jesus talks about himself and applies the same principles that he gave to Peter and the rich young man. He knows that he is going to die soon, and knows that this is the greatest fulfilment of his whole mission. If he refuses to die, there will be no harvest, no multiplication of his life.

In **Hebrews 2:10**, we see how the Father chose to “*make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering*”, in the process of “*bringing many sons to glory*”. ‘Jesus didn’t need to be made perfect’ we think, ‘because he was already sinless!’ Here is *teleios* again! Jesus was fulfilled, made complete, through his suffering and death as the ‘grain of wheat’, in order that out of death should spring life, “. . . *In the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ they will be called ‘sons of the living God’.*” (**Romans 9:26**)

What about ourselves, then? Will we call ourselves disciples of the Lord Jesus and expect to escape his reversal of the world’s priorities? Will we hope to achieve enough success to ‘make it’ in the world and, at the same time, try to be spiritual enough to be seen as a good Christian? No way, says Paul to the believers in Colossae! See **Colossians 3:1-5**.

Does this mean that Christians have to be ineffectual and hopeless in every other area of life apart from their walk with God? Even the fact that we ask the question reveals how deceived we can be! Once the basic question of discipleship is settled, the rest of life comes under it and, if anything, we become **more** fulfilled and effective people. By abandoning our own ‘fulfilment’ to the Lordship of Christ, we receive back much more than we gave up.

As he meditated on **Matthew 16**, Jim Elliot wrote,

*“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep  
to gain what he cannot lose.”*

## Five Lies Your TV is Telling You – 5

# “Just So Long As Everyone’s Happy”

When all fixed standards have been denied and there is nothing left but the quest for self-fulfilment, what safety net is there to prevent the whole of western society from rapidly descending into the ‘law of the jungle’, where each one is simply out to gratify their own desires and ambitions? Just about the only thing left is the approval of everyone else. Some openly reject even this restraint and refuse to be ‘contained’ by society, often inventing their own sub-culture. Even here, the fear of disapproval, the power of ‘peer pressure’ is enormous. Many ‘rebels’ say that they are going to express themselves and stamp their lives with their own individuality, but then conform to the culture of dress, language and behaviour dictated by their particular group!

We naturally fear the disapproval of others and so feel that everything must be OK if no one is complaining. This way of thinking hides under the convenient disguise of ‘democracy’ and we therefore tend to accept it without question. Underlying the democratic approach is the assumption that the majority must be right in any situation. We all know that this is not true but nonetheless accept it as the nearest we can come to ‘getting it right’ in most areas of public life.

The danger comes as this thinking invades our own lives, as individual Christians or as we share in Christian fellowship. We may agree that other people in the world (who are, after all, in the majority!) are wrong in their rejection of Jesus. In fact it is important that we **do** start from here, as we did when we considered the importance of truth. However, having made that important break with the demands of ‘democracy’, we often slip back into accepting whatever the current majority of Christian opinion thinks. Perhaps more dangerously, we refuse to consider some subjects unless there is already a clear Christian majority opinion. How can the Lord lead our thinking if we will only follow someone else’s thoughts?

The subjects we have already considered cut across the majority

opinion of the people we know in day-to-day life and we may have found that they threaten us as well, especially when we start to look at the implications in our lives:–

1) When we say that Jesus is **the** truth and that no-one can find God without him, the majority complain that we are dismissing their philosophy of life.

2) When we say that there are **fixed** standards of right and wrong, good and evil, the majority protest that they can judge for themselves according to the circumstances.

3) When we say that life is **not** just a matter of chance, and that God has a purpose for each person, the majority demand the right to steer their own independent course.

4) When we say that the only way to real fulfilment is through **losing our lives for Jesus' sake**, the majority run away, determined to avoid death at any cost.

The majority will **not** be happy with the Christian message and, if we just want to make sure that we please everyone, we will soon compromise with Jesus' demand of our discipleship. 'Democracy' does not allow God to speak with authority, only to express his opinion! When Jesus spoke of his followers as 'salt' in the world, he emphasised the need for us to remain 'salty', making a difference where we are! (See **Matthew 5:13**)

Jesus never had a reputation for 'niceness'. He stood firm on what was true and sometimes seems to have made a tough situation even more difficult, driving home unpalatable facts even when he was already facing antagonism. He did not hold back when unpopular truth needed to be declared. See **John 8:31-59** as one example of this!

In Western Europe and perhaps especially in Britain, Christians seem to have taken an attitude that expects society to fall in line with the teachings of Jesus and the Bible. How often have we heard the plea that 'this is supposed to be a Christian country', in the light of the latest ungodly legal decision or action of a public figure? In Biblical terms, there is no such thing as a Christian country, however much (or little) the laws of that country may have been based on the Bible or written by Christians. We can thank God for the extent to which the culture and legislation of our country are compatible with following the Lord Jesus Christ, but we have no right to force other people to follow the Bible's teaching, nor to expect the government to enact

godly laws. Jesus makes it clear that he, his kingdom and his disciples are different, not based on the same scheme of things as the rest of the world. See **John 17**, **John 18:36-37** and **Colossians 1:13**.

However, this does **not** mean that we have nothing to say, that we just keep quiet in the face of evil. On the contrary, individual Christians and local churches have a responsibility to both speak out and live out truth, whether or not anyone takes any notice. (It has been wisely said that, in order for evil to triumph, all that is required is for good men to do nothing!) This will not make us popular, just as it did not make Jesus popular – see **John 7:7**, **15:18-27** and also **Luke 21:10-19**, which relates especially to the last days before Jesus' return.

We need to face this issue squarely. The option of living a life that is in harmony with both our Lord and the world system is not available – it never was! The early Church faced the same problems and James wrote to try to stop the rot. In **James 4:1-10**, he touches on the havoc that results when the world system operates among believers. He is not necessarily talking about gross sin that is plainly obvious to all, but to an approach to life that is based on pleasure (Greek '*hedone*') and enjoyment. He equates this pleasure-based living ('hedonism') to friendship with the world and enmity with God!

We may think that we are in no danger of living this way, but how often do we allow the grace and truth of our life in Jesus to be compromised for enjoyment?

It may not seem much like 'living for pleasure', but sometimes Christians hold each other to ransom with emotional blackmail. How often has an individual or group of people threatened to cause trouble if they do not get their own way? Diotrephes in **3 John 9** seems to have operated this way. Keeping him happy was definitely dangerous to the church's spiritual progress!

How much of present-day 'Christianity' is based on 'having a good time' rather than on the truth of Scripture and a **real** relationship with the living God? How many people have had a wonderful experience in a Christian meeting without any greater knowledge of God? For many, the experience is so enjoyable that they can't wait for the next time when they have another one - they are 'hooked' in just the same way as a drug addict, mindlessly craving for the next 'high'. The easy way of keeping people happy in this brand of false Christianity is simply to foster the 'spiritual hedonism' by gearing everything towards

another experience, and another . . . Perhaps this is what the church in Corinth were doing which led Paul to write **2 Corinthians 11:2-4**?

Some other Christians can be 'kept happy' by being filled up with teaching, so that they feel they know all the answers. This is subtle, as it seems to be completely right and proper. We feel happy if we have grasped a truth which we did not understand before. However, Paul makes it clear that it is possible to learn and learn without coming to a real recognition of the truth - see **2 Timothy 3:1-7**. He warns against false teachers who will prey on the vulnerability of 'weak women weighed down with sins' and fill their heads with teaching but not in such a way that they really **know** for themselves. Instead of being 'experience junkies' they become 'doctrine addicts'. An obsession with end-time prophecy often seems to have this effect, and it is certainly not restricted to the ladies!

This seems like a 'no-win' situation, in which we are in danger of being hooked on either experiences or the latest 'wind of doctrine'. We need to have our thinking changed and our lives transformed - but how?

The first essential is our personal response to the love of our Father God. **Romans 12:1&2** speaks of presenting ourselves as living sacrifices to him. A sacrifice has no rights but is completely at the disposal of the one to whom it is offered. In order to counter the effect of the lies from the world system around us, we need to make sure that this issue is settled. The results are renewed thinking and practical 'proving' of what he wants to do – discipleship working out in our lives.

God's plans for our development include our fellow believers. Christian growth is intended to be corporate as well as individual. See **Ephesians 4:11-16**. The input of those with special ministry to the church is intended to help us all to build each other up to maturity, precisely so that we will **not** be deceived by all the wrong thinking and latest fashions, but grow up together into the maturity of becoming like the Lord Jesus Christ – amazing prospect!

These changes come as direct results of the working of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus said that important parts of the Holy Spirit's work are to 1) lead us into all truth and 2) disclose more of Jesus to us (John 16:13,14). Paul describes the ongoing process of revelation and transformation in **2 Corinthians 3:18** and John says how it will come to completion when we actually see Jesus (**1 John 3:2**).

These notes were written to accompany a series of talks at Lapford Congregational Church in April, May and June 1998. They do not pretend to completely cover any of the subjects, but I hope that they will be useful as we seek to 'bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ' as an important aspect of learning to be his disciples.

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