

I don't have enough **FAITH**
to be an **ATHEIST**

with Dr. Frank Turek

PODCAST

Is What You Do More Important Than What You Believe? | with Alisa Childers and Natasha Crain

(March 10, 2023)

Frank:

Ladies and gentlemen, out on the road right now, but I gotta tell you about a couple of things before I hand this program off to the great Alisa Childers and the great Natasha Crain. I am at Godspeed Church in Thousand Oaks, California, this Sunday, March 12, all three morning services and then the evening. I will be doing I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist and there will be time for Q&A at the end. Then we're going to be out on our college tour. I'm going to be at Ignite Church in Vermont, March 19. The next night, March 20, I'll be at the University of Vermont. On March 23rd I'll be at Valdosta State University in Georgia. The following week, we'll be at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, on March 28th and then on the 30th we're going to be at Indiana Purdue University in Indianapolis. All the details are on our website at CrossExamined.org.

On March 27 we're going to be starting the online course Life's Compass: Jesus, You, and the Essentials of the Faith. If you want to be a part of that class, and I hope you do, sign up at CrossExamined.org, click on Online Courses, and you'll see it there. While I'm on the road you couldn't have better co-hosts in Natasha Crain and Alisa Childers. So, they're going to take the program from here and I'll see you here next week. Alisa, Natasha, take it away.

Alisa:

Well, a common sentiment upon among people of all kinds of different worldviews today is that what you do matters more than what you believe. Maybe you've heard it put this way, love is more important than doctrine. Have you heard that one? Or maybe you've heard loving people is greater than being theologically correct. Well, recently, a Facebook post made the rounds that said this, "Humble Christianity sounds like, how do my beliefs make me more capable of loving others not my beliefs make me the authority on truth and morality over others?" Well, we'll talk about these ideas from a logical and theological viewpoint in a moment.

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As you've noticed, I don't sound very much like Frank Turek. That's because Frank invited me and my friend Natasha Crain, to host the show today. Well, Frank's out of town and we're excited to be with you today. And we want to let you know about our Unshaken conference that Frank is going to be joining us for coming to Calvary Chapel Chino Hills on May 6.

Natasha:

So, in case you haven't heard about it, Frank, Alisa, and I are doing a series of four conferences this year called Unshaken to equip and encourage you to stand firm in your faith in this really challenging culture. So, like Alisa said, our next date and location is May 6, at Calvary Chapel Chino Hills in Southern California. Tickets are now on sale for that location, so if you are somewhere in that area, you're not going to want to miss this. Go to UnshakenConference.com to get your tickets and learn more. And we just announced this week that will also be in Tucson, Arizona on September 23 and Nashville on November 4. Those tickets will go on sale soon.

We also want to remind you that CrossExamined Instructor Academy is coming to Albuquerque, New Mexico from July 27th to 29th. If you're not familiar with CIA, it is a training event for people who want to become apologists. There really is no other event like this if this is something you want to do. Alisa and I are excited to be two of the instructors again this year along with Frank and several other amazing apologists. To apply go to CrossExamined.org, click on Events, and you'll find the information that you need.

All right, let's get into the show. As Alisa said, we're breaking down this idea that behavior is more important than belief. Now, if Frank were here, I'm pretty sure he would ask: Is that a belief? That's my best impression. And yes, it absolutely is insane that what you do is more important than what you believe. You just made a statement about what you believe. You can't logically separate beliefs and behaviors. Our beliefs will always drive our behaviors.

Aside from this logical problem, the idea that what we do matters more than what we believe, presupposes that we all should just know what behaviors are the good behaviors to do. But of course, we have to ask what standard are we using to define good behavior? That's the big question that we're gonna be talking about. So, let's look at that problem in the context of progressive Christianity. Alisa, how does this whole behavior over belief paradigm show up in progressive Christian thought?

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Alisa:

Well, go over to ProgressiveChristianity.org, which I believe really represents the primary views of progressive Christians. In fact, when I first started analyzing the movement of progressive Christianity, I didn't actually use their list of beliefs because I thought it sort of represented the more extreme version, but fast forward a few years, I think it really nails it right in the bullseye of the progressive material that I'm reading. And it seems to be a really good analysis and kind of summary of what progressive Christians believe theologically, and that is one of those points that how we behave is more important than how we believe. So, progressive Christians often focus on that behavior over belief paradigm. One of the reasons they do that is because they don't accept Scripture as the authoritative and God-breathed Word of God. So, God is sort of reduced to a single attribute of love and that's really all that matters. All that matters is how we define love.

But there are, of course, some problems in here. Although I think we would agree that love is an attribute of God, God is love. That's Biblical. That's what the Bible says. But we have to define love, first of all, based on the character and the nature of God, because it's one of his attributes. It's not like there's this arbitrary standard of love that exists outside of God that he has to measure up to and then we can say, "Okay, yeah, God is love because he matches this arbitrary outside standard." We actually root our definition of love in Him. And so, how do we know who He is? Well, we go to Scripture. And if we look in Scripture, we find all sorts of passages that define what love should look like for Christians. One famous passage, of course, is 1 Corinthians 13, where the Apostle Paul tells us that love is patient, love is kind. But there's also a section in there where Paul says, "Love cannot rejoice in wrongdoing, but love rejoices in the truth." That's a really important facet of love and it's part of the definition of love, according to the Bible.

So, as Christians, we are actually not being loving if we approve of, or celebrate something that is sinful in people's lives, or that might harm them. And let's take a moment and talk about that word harm. That's a word you see in progressive Christianity a lot. This belief is harmful. This belief is leading to wholeness. This one is oppressive and this one is liberating. I agree we should reject harmful and oppressive beliefs, but we can't know what beliefs are harmful and oppressive unless we know first what is true. So, we have to root love in truth. And I believe

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that's what 1 Corinthians 13 is telling us to do. We can't rejoice in wrongdoing, but love rejoices in the truth.

Now, culture would define love very differently from that. And if you look out into culture, maybe you've noticed that people tend to define love, really more based on a celebration, or an affirmation of whatever sort of moral choices everybody else wants to make. Now, of course, you've listened to the show, that can tend to bottom out in some hypocrisy. While there's sort of this all-inclusive acceptance of all sorts of different behaviors, there really is an intolerance to someone coming along and saying what they believe is right or wrong, especially if they're basing those beliefs in the Bible as they would touch on issues of sexuality, or morality, life and things like that.

So, like I mentioned a minute ago, this is really rooted in the progressive view of Scripture. And it's really important to understand this. The way that Christians have historically understood the Bible is that the Bible is the Word of God. Yes, we have so many different denominations, and among those denominations we're going to disagree on secondary and third tier issues. But there's something we use as an objective standard to settle our debates, and that's the Bible. And that's because historically, this comes all the way from Jesus to the apostles, that the Bible is viewed to be the authoritative word of God that's inspired by God. And so, when we're talking about the Bible being inspired by God, we're talking about it being God breathed. And when we come back, we're going to talk a little bit more about the progressive view of the Bible and how they might disagree with historic Christianity on the inspiration of Scripture and what it is.

Well, before the break, we started to talk about the progressive Christian view of Scripture and how that ties in with how we view things like love and how we're going to assess some of these messages that we find on social media. So, we started talking about the historic Christian view of the Bible, and that's that the Bible is divinely inspired. We're all familiar with the passage that says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for correction, reproof, teaching all these things." This is one of the memory verses we probably memorized if you grew up in church. But that word that is translated into English, as inspired by God comes from one Greek word that means God breathed. That really suggests the highest authority for the divine voice. This is God's words on paper, right. God used the human authors and their personalities and

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their cultural context. We see that reflected in the text. But the words on the page, these are God's words. This is the historic view of the Christian scriptures, and because of that, we are compelled to obey it. We say this is God's revelation to us so that we can get to know Him and what He wants us to know about these things.

But in the progressive church, this is really not the case. So, while you might hear progressive Christians say things like the Bible is inspired, they don't mean it in the same sense that the historic Christian view has talked about these issues. So, in the progressive church, it might be viewed as something that's more inspiring, or something that God might use in your spiritual walk to bring enlightenment or to maybe give you a message or something like this. But from Genesis to Revelation, in the progressive church, it is not viewed as the authoritative word of God.

And certainly, I've not come across any progressive Christian who would say that they believe the Bible is inerrant. And so, the Bible is really more viewed as an ancient spiritual travel journal. In the mind of the progressive, we can look at scripture and we can understand what the people who wrote it believed about God and the times and places in which they lived but they didn't necessarily always get God right. They might have been doing their best to figure it out. Maybe they looked around into pagan cultures and thought, well, those people are sacrificing to their gods, maybe we should sacrifice to our gods and then attribute that to Yahweh. Again, this is the progressive view. But I'm sure you can already see so many problems with this, especially as it would touch on doctrines of inerrancy and inspiration.

Natasha:

That's really good. And Alisa, this all reminds me of a book that you and I read together last year called *If God is Love, Don't Be a Jerk*. This is a best-selling book by a progressive Christian author, John Pavlovich. And Alisa and I did a podcast where we walked through this book's ideas and claims. But the book is really sort of a manifesto on everything that we're talking about here, this idea that your behavior, your loving behavior, specifically, is more important than belief. And the title sounds harmless enough, you know? *If God is Love, Don't be a Jerk*. We don't want to be jerks, but as a progressive Christian who doesn't see Scripture as authoritative, Pavlovich doesn't have an objective standard for defining love. You see that play out throughout the book.

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So, it's really a good case study of everything that you were just talking about. Over and over again in that book, he emphasizes we need to love others, we need to love others, but his conclusions and his assumptions about what it means to love others are at odds with what the Bible teaches. He basically accepts culture's definition of love, which, like you said earlier, is to just affirm whatever a person wants for themselves. And it's actually quite ironic, but he is extremely critical of evangelical Christians who do believe what the Bible teaches. He thinks that they are the unloving ones for accepting what the Bible teaches and thinks that evangelical Christians are hurting people with their beliefs.

So, it's a very interesting look at this idea because I find that a lot of times, what progressive Christians do is they look straight to the second greatest commandment that Jesus talks about, to love others. In fact, one time I saw a progressive Christian post on social media, "The greatest commandment is to love others", but that's actually not correct. That is sort of the ongoing narrative that you would hear from progressive Christians, that this is the greatest commandment. But when Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is, the first and greatest commandment is to love God. The second is to love others. This is a really important point because it shows there's a hierarchy. You can't know what it means to love others unless you first know what it means to love God.

And so, here's the bottom line, if we don't have a revealed word from God of what it means to love him, that greatest commandment, and therefore what it means to love others, this is exactly the outcome that you're gonna get. Everyone uses the same word. We're all talking about love but we are meaning very different things. So, love in the biblical sense is not whatever we just happen to feel is loving, it's rooted in theological truths about who God is, about what he's done, and how we're to respond. So, if we don't believe those truths, our behaviors can actually be unloving according to God's standards, whether we realize it or not.

Alisa:

I'm so glad you brought that up. So often in progressive Christianity they will try to refute somebody who might be saying, "Hey, the Bible teaches this about sexuality, or this particular behavior is sinful, according to the Bible." The progressive might say, "Hey, Jesus Himself said, you know, the greatest commandment is to love God and love one another." They think that's refuting what you've just said, but it actually proves what you just said.

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If you look through the Ten Commandments, you have several that are about loving God and several that are about loving your neighbor. If you love your neighbor, you're not going to steal, you're not going to commit murder, you're not going to covet, right. And if you love God you're not going to worship idols, you're going to put him first. And so, in a way, if we really look at Jesus saying that, it actually supports the Ten Commandments. He's rooting the definition of love and what it really is, and rooting it in truth, not just sort of an all-out affirmation of whatever anybody else kind of thinks works for them, or something that is their truth, or something along those lines.

And here's another example of an accusation that you may have heard. So, you know, maybe you go online and you post a particular Bible verse, or maybe you defend biblical reliability, or inspiration, or even inerrancy, and someone accuses you of bibliolatry. Has this happened to you? There's this accusation that when we point to what the Bible teaches about doctrine, that we somehow are worshipping the Bible rather than Jesus? Have you heard this? Well, there was a was a meme, or maybe it was a graphic quote, that made the rounds on social media a couple of weeks ago. Maybe you remember this. I'm going to read this to you and we're going to talk through it because it's really important to root what we believe about love in truth and in the word of God. And if we do that, let's analyze this quote together.

So, here's what the progressive Christian said that made the rounds on social media. He said this. "When we Christians claim that the Bible is the ultimate and final authority on all things, we are misusing the Bible. Our core conviction as Christians is that Christ is the ultimate and final authority on all things. Christ took the cross out of love for the world, not the Bible. Christ is the greatest revelation of God to the world, not the Bible. Christ is the one who brings salvation, not the Bible. Christ is the one who will return to judge the living and the dead, not the Bible. Christ is the WAY, the TRUTH, and the LIFE, not the Bible. We are called to be disciples of Christ, not the Bible." And then he puts a little bit of final commentary here and he says, "When we elevate the Bible to the authority of Christ, we turn it into an idol, an idol that we so often use as a weapon against others, all while Christ is calling us to take up our washbasins, to wash feet, and our crosses, out of love for the world."

And so, he's basically making the point that if you raise the authority of the Bible, the written word of God, to the authority of Christ, if you make those things the same thing, then you are

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actually idolizing the Bible. You are worshipping the Bible like an idol. I mean, that's a bold claim. That's a big thing to say. But here's what I'd love to do. We're not going to walk through the whole thing, but let's take a look at some of the statements. And before we look at them, again, Natasha mentioned a logical fallacy that is a self-refuting statement and that's one of the ways you can analyze social media posts. I want to introduce you to another one. This is called the either or fallacy. Sometimes this is referred to as the false dilemma and it's very simple. Basically, what the either or fallacy says is that you are given only two sides of an argument, or only two statements, when there are more sides available. And that is exactly what's going on in this post.

Just take a look at some of the statements that are made. He says, "Christ took the cross out of love for the world, not the Bible", as if those two things are pitted against each other and you have to pick one or the other. Well, it's true, Christ took the cross out of love for the world, absolutely. But how do we know about the significance of that event? How can we possibly analyze theologically how that's even relevant to us unless we have God's revealed word in the Bible? So, these things are not at odds with one another, they're not in competition.

Let's look at a couple other ones. Christ is the one who brings salvation, not the Bible. Remember that either or fallacy, when only two sides of an argument are presented, but there's actually more sides available? Well, yes, Christ is the one who brings salvation but we learn about that in the Bible. And I just think it's really interesting to note too, that if we view Christ as the Living Word, Jesus as the Living Word, and you look at what Jesus had to say about Scripture over and over and over again, he referred to it as the word of God, the command of God. He chastised the Pharisees for adding to Scripture and He continually referred to Scripture as the revealed word of God. So, the Living Word didn't see any contradiction with calling the written word, God's revealed word, scripture, viewing it as authoritative.

In fact, in the desert when he was being tempted by the devil, He continually fought the temptation by appealing to the authority of Scripture. And I think I'd love to get your thoughts on this idea, too, when he says here at the bottom, "When we elevate the Bible to the authority of Christ, we turn it into an idol." What do you think about that, Natasha? I mean, it seems like he's really making a jump there.

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Natasha:

Yeah, it's almost like a category error because he's kind of assuming that if you hold both of these things, both Jesus and the Bible up to a certain level of authority, that you're making an idol out of one. But the authority of Jesus, if God has told us what is true in the Bible, then the Bible carries authority because of who it's from. And so, both can be authoritative at the same time. That's the problem. It's not that it is an idol. We're not worshipping the Bible. And I think what he's really doing here is building a straw man of how Christians see the Bible because I don't know of a single Christian who holds the historic Christian faith who would say, I worship the Bible. Have you ever seen someone say that, Alisa?

Alisa:

Never. Never once. Never.

Natasha:

And I'm sure he hasn't either, but because he wants to make kind of this emotional appeal, he takes that we hold the Bible up to a level of authority because of where it comes from, then he relabeled that worship, and then says we shouldn't worship the Bible. So, it makes this straw man, this circular argument, and that's not what we're doing at all. We're saying that the Bible is God's word, and logically speaking, if the Bible does originate from God, then that would imply that it is authoritative because it's His word. So really, the question is: Is the Bible God's word? That's the fundamental thing that we need to come back to. Well, we're going to talk about some more examples of this after the break and some other memes and ways that people claim that behavior is more important than belief.

Before the break, we were talking about this idea that behavior is more important than belief and how it kind of finds its way through a lot of different things on social media, memes, and books we've talked about. There's another meme that I want to talk about that I saw just last week that was really popular. It had a few thousand likes and shares. It was a quote by Robin R. Meyers from his book called, *Saving God from Religion*. And here's the quote. "Consider this remarkable fact. In the Sermon on the Mount, there is not a single word about what to believe, only words about what to do and how to be. By the time the Nicene Creed is written, only three centuries later, there's not a single word in it about what to do and how to be, only words about what to believe."

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So, let's think about what the underlying claim is here. This underlying implied claim is that Jesus wasn't concerned with beliefs, it was only those pesky problematic early Christians who kind of changed his teachings about how to live into statements that we all need to believe by the time of the creed. But let's think about what this meme is saying. First, just a piece of logic. It's not remarkable at all to pick out a piece of Scripture and show that it doesn't teach something in particular. So, we're not even talking about whether this is right or wrong, we're just talking about the logical piece of this.

I could just as well make a meme that says, "Hey, consider this remarkable fact. Judges 19 talks all about how a concubine was cut up limb by limb and by the time the Nicene Creed was written there was nothing about concubine murder anymore." That's ridiculous, right? We don't take a piece of Scripture and then say it doesn't teach this, then later, this other thing happened and they're not the same and therefore we can draw a conclusion. Just logically speaking, this kind of comparison of a piece of Scripture to a creed is meaningless.

But there's also no reason to treat the Sermon on the Mount as a definitive teaching of Jesus outside the rest of what Scripture says. We have to look at the totality of Scripture to understand all of Jesus's teachings. But even so, it's actually false. It's completely false that the Sermon on the Mount doesn't have a single word about what to believe. It's filled with statements about what to believe. For example, Jesus says in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them." Well, when Jesus says, "Do not think", He is telling you what to believe. He's saying, don't think this, think this instead. He's correcting what you're thinking about and what you're believing. He's indicating what beliefs are true about reality.

Or consider where Jesus tells the crowd, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, you shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you, that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment." So, what do you think? Do you think that Jesus wants you to believe his claim that you'll be subjected to judgment for the anger in your heart? Of course, He does. When Jesus speaks, He's speaking from a place of authority and He's telling you what you should believe if you want to believe what's true.

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So, just looking at this one little meme, it's fascinating as a case study, again, to look at how there's the logical issue that we can break down. No, it's not remarkable to take a piece of Scripture and compare it to a creed and think that something is vastly off here. But also, we have to really understand that when somebody says something with that level of assertion, that there's not a single word about what to believe. It sounds like they're very certain about that. It sounds like, yes, of course we all know that.

But we always have to ask: Is that true? Well, let me go back to the Sermon on the Mount and consider Jesus's words. Let's look at what He said and is that claim in and of itself even the correct claim? And as we can see here, it's not. It's filled with, hey, believe this and don't believe that. Beliefs drive behaviors and that underlies everything that Jesus is talking about, in terms of how to live and how to be, as the meme is saying. Alisa, what do you think?

Alisa:

Well, yeah, I think that's a really insightful comment you have there about how you can just take any verse in the Bible and say, well, look, this doesn't say anything about, X, Y, or Z. And I think one principle that we have to keep in mind when we analyze something like this is also just when we're talking about the Bible and properly interpreting the Bible, we have to interpret Scripture in light of Scripture. We don't just pick one verse. As our friend, Greg Koukl, always says, "Never read a Bible verse." And what he means by that is, you don't just read one verse, you have to read the surrounding context. It's helpful even to read paragraphs before and after, see how that fits into the whole. But also take what's being taught there in light of the entire revelation of Scripture to get to a good interpretation. So, we got to remember that.

But also, it's really interesting to me that that meme seems to ignore hundreds of years of church history that happened in between the Sermon on the Mount and the Nicene Creed. So, of course, the Nicene Creed was formulated largely as a response to a heresy that was challenging the deity of Jesus. And I always tell people, I affirm the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed is great, but it's really not enough in and of itself. We have to have a much more multifaceted idea of what the essentials of the faith are. Throughout church history, we tend to formulate creeds based on current heresies that are coming in to challenge something that people had already been affirming and believing. So, the Nicene Creed, we had Arius coming in, challenging the deity of Jesus. Well, of course, we know from earlier creeds, creeds that are

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embedded within the New Testament themselves, that the earliest Christians did believe that Jesus was God. It was a claim he made about Himself.

Gary Habermas has said that the earliest Christology is the strongest of the highest Christology. So, the Nicene Creed was responding to a heresy that was coming in. But there is a creed that is arguably one of the earliest creeds in all of Christianity that we find in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. Even the most skeptical and atheist scholars will date this creed to anywhere within about 18 months to 5, 6, 7 years after Jesus's resurrection. And this is unbelievably early when we're talking about history. Even famously skeptical scholar, Bart Ehrman, said on his blog, "This creed was Christianity in a nutshell for Paul", and he will affirm, this isn't something Paul made up, this is something that was passed down to him.

And what do we find in that creed? Well, we find a whole lot about what Christians believed, right. That Jesus died for our sins in accordance with the Scripture, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and the twelve. And if you look at that creed, what you find is a theological belief that's then supported by two lines of evidence. So, we must believe as Christians, and according to the earliest Christians, that Jesus died for our sins. There was a divine reason for Christ's death and that is inextricably linked with the evidence of the Scripture.

Of course, the Old Testament Scriptures that they had at that time, placing this in light of the Old Testament sacrificial system and prophecies about the Messiah, so that's one line of evidence. And then you have the burial, right? You don't bury living people, you bury dead people, so that's evidence that Jesus was really dead and a divine reason is given that we must believe if we're going to be Christians. We must believe that He was raised on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures, and then as affirmed by the eyewitnesses of Jesus life. And so, I think it just really ignores a whole lot of church history to go right from the Sermon on the Mount to the Nicene Creed.

And here's another logical error in that. The Sermon on the Mount is not a creed, whereas the Nicene Creed is a creed. Creeds functioned as statements that helped Christians understand that we're on the same page. We believe the same things. Here's the core of where we're coming from. Whereas the Sermon on the Mount didn't function like a creed, that wasn't its

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purpose. And it's also just kind of interesting to me, Natasha, that if you read the Sermon on the Mount, and you're gonna view that as, Jesus didn't really care what you believed, He only cared what you did. Then what are you going to do with verses that say things like in the Sermon on the Mount, "If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out"? I mean, you have to understand right belief to know how to interpret that. Is Jesus actually saying that everybody should be plucking their eyes out if their eye causes them to sin? Part of what the Sermon on the Mount functions to do is show us how important grace is and what a gift the salvation of Jesus and him taking our sins upon Himself on the cross is. This is tightly tied with right belief.

I agree on one sense that our behavior is going to reveal what we really believe. Like that's true. Your actions are going to speak for what you really believe about the world. It's so important to have the right beliefs because our actions are going to flow out of that. But when we're talking about a paradigm where people really don't believe the Bible is authoritative, then it really just becomes a very subjective type of quest. What do I think is the right action or the wrong action? Well, that's going to be based solely on my feelings if I don't have an objective standard to root that in. So, for Christians, this is why biblical authority is so important. It's not idolatry to hold the Bible as authoritative.

And I've often thought, every metaphor breaks down at a certain point. This isn't a perfect metaphor, and when I give this sort of analogy, or metaphor, whatever you want to call it, I'm not in any way saying that the Bible is a rulebook. But let's just take the example of a teenager whose mother leaves them a note and says, "Hey, you have to take out the trash by three o'clock." What if the teenager said, "Well, I obey my mom, I'm not idolizing this note she left. For me to say that the note has the same authority as my mom would be to idolize this note and that's not right. I'm supposed to just obey my mom."

Well, that would make no sense at all. So, when we read the Bible, we're reading the very words of God to us. It's not idolatry to put that on the level of God because this is what God has revealed to us. This is His word. So, Natasha, what else? When we think about good works flowing from right belief, there's a lot the Scripture has to say about that too.

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Natasha:

Yeah, it's really clear that Scripture prioritizes right belief as a foundation for right behavior for all the reasons that you're talking about. And by the way, I love that analogy. I think that's a great one. For example, in Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus tells His disciples - and we're talking about the Sermon on the Mount once again here, ironically, "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Well, think about what that implies. Good deeds should lead to glory for God, but in order for that to happen, you have to be a light who represents Jesus. Otherwise, the deeds that you may call good are not actually good by God's standards, and far from glorifying God, they dishonor Him. So, we have to be able to define our good works based on what the Bible teaches so that they do bring glory to God. As another example, Paul says in Ephesians 4:17-20, "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding. Alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned."

That is a very explicit teaching. That is a very clear tie between being darkened in your understanding of God, your beliefs about God, and the behaviors that you're going to give yourself up to if you have those wrong beliefs. We'll talk more after the break about verses that show us that right belief is a foundation for right behavior.

So, before the break, we were working through some Scripture that shows how important it is to prioritize right belief as a foundation for right behavior in order to define what right behavior, good behavior, God glorifying behavior even looks like. Here's one more. When Paul is speaking to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-30, he says, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. To care for the Church of God, which he obtained with His own blood. I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will

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come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them."

So clearly, Paul is worried about the teachings of these wolves, as he calls them. He knows that what they speak will twist the truth and will draw disciples away. So, for him, belief is not a secondary issue, it's a primary concern. And you can see that throughout his letters that he usually starts his letters by talking about the beliefs. He talks about the truths of Jesus and who Jesus is and what He's done. He affirms this and then that leads into a rest of the discussion of okay, well, what does that mean for you? What does that mean for the problems you're facing? What does that mean for the false teaching that you're hearing? What does that mean? So, we see that same pattern over and over again throughout the New Testament. Alisa, you had some verses also.

Alisa:

Yeah, and Paul isn't the only one that referred to wolves. This is something Jesus famously said as well: watch out for wolves. They look like sheep, but inwardly they're ravenous wolves. And then Jesus says something very interesting there. He says, "You will recognize them by their fruits." And if you really look through the New Testament, Jesus is actually not talking about good fruit being maybe good feelings or something that gives you more peace in your life, he's not even really talking at that point about the fruit of the Spirit, which are sort of these deeply embedded traits that a true Christian will embody - of course, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, all of those - he's talking about good fruit versus bad fruit.

And if you actually take the Greek word that bad fruit is translated from, it's a Greek word *poneros*, which has a moral connotation. So, when Jesus is talking about bad fruit, and the New Testament talks about bad fruit, it's literally talking about sinful behavior. So, it just goes to show that in Scripture there is absolutely no separation between belief and behavior. In fact, it inextricably ties those things together. According to the New Testament, producing good fruit is being obedient to the commands of Christ. Jesus even said, if you love me, you'll keep my commandments. So, this is not just about behavior, it's rooted in belief, and we have to believe the right things in order to behave the right way.

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And another interesting thing to me is when I was researching for my book, *Another Gospel*, on just the topic of deception, the topic of false teachers and false teaching, I looked in absolutely every book of the New Testament and as far as I could find, in all but two, false teachers and false teachings are explicitly warned against. Explicitly. And then in the two, there was still an emphasis on discernment and being really careful. Of course, 1 Timothy 4:16, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. This is teaching to what you're supposed to believe. Persist in this for by doing so you will save both yourself and your hearers." So, this is a major theme in the New Testament to make sure that we have right beliefs about God.

Second Timothy 1:13 says, "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching with faith and love in Christ Jesus." First Timothy 6:1-4, this is a passage that is very familiar to a lot of people, but it says teach and urge these things, if anyone teaches a different doctrine - notice it doesn't say if anyone teaches a different behavior, although those things are tied together. If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. It's so important, according to the New Testament, that we believe the right things.

Second Timothy 4:1-3 says that "in the presence of God, and of Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing and His Kingdom, I give you this charge, preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, encourage, with great patience and careful instruction." This all has to do with belief. "For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from truth and turn aside to myths." So, behavior over belief. Emphasizing that can actually lead you to believing lies.

One of the examples I love to give about the game changer in certain scenarios is truth. Truth has to do with belief. We want to believe what is true. And I give this analogy because a lot of times certain doctrines are rejected because people think they're abusive or they think they're harmful to people. For example, we talked about this on one of our *Unshaken Faith* podcasts, *Natasha*. We talked about the doctrine of original sin, the idea that human beings are inherently sinful and that that sin separates them from a holy God. Well, in the minds of many

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people, that's an abusive doctrine. Abusers try to knock you down a peg and they want to have control over you so that you will depend on them. And they'll say, well, that's what the church is doing by teaching you that you're a sinner. But if behavior over belief is your sort of driving motivation, you could see what kind of a case they're making.

But imagine a scenario in which there's somebody laying on the ground unconscious. Maybe you walk in and you see them laying there, and somebody else is just beating on their chest causing deep bruising. Well, you might agree that's abusive, that's very harmful to that person, unless the person laying on the ground has just had a heart attack and the person beating on their chest is administering CPR. So, right belief, truth, believing what's true about the scenario changes the narrative, because now you see that's actually not abusive, that's actually life giving. That person is actually trying to save the life of the person who's just had the heart attack. And that's how important it is for us to believe right things. That's going to flow out into right behavior.

But you know, when we think about progressive Christianity, when we think about some of these worldviews that want to remove the right belief aspect and just go right to behavior, we know that's not going to exist in a vacuum. Everybody's still going to believe something about what right behavior looks like. And I think this is why in the progressive Christian church, and in that paradigm, social justice activism as defined by the secular culture, is going to be more important than what you believe theologically about the person of Christ, or what you might believe about who God is, or even what the Bible is. See, that makes sense of it all, right?

If you think behavior is more important than belief, you're still going to believe something about what right behavior is. And if you don't root that in biblical authority, if you don't root that in the revealed word of God, then your idea of what is good and right is going to look just like what it looks like in culture. And so, you're going to be finding yourself doing activism for causes that could actually be, not just untrue, but in reality based on truth, harmful to people. So, it's very important that we keep that biblical worldview. Do you see that as well, Natasha, that this social justice ideology tends to take front and center when belief is less diminished?

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Natasha:

Yeah, absolutely. I think that we can see that in just the simplest form. If you think about what a definition of justice might look like, what does justice even mean? Generally speaking, justice is making right that which is wrong. Just consider those basic terms that you're using if you think about that's what everyone's trying to do when they're working for justice. But this is why people who are working for a secular version of social justice are often working in very different ways than someone who is working for justice in a biblical sense because right and wrong are going to require a standard. They're going to require some kind of definition. And so, a lot of times people have asked me, what's the difference between biblical justice and secular social justice? Those are so often confused today. Well, there's a whole lot that we could talk about but if we want to just make it really simple, it comes back to thinking about that definition and those terms.

If you're making right that which is wrong, you're gonna have to have a standard to determine what is right or wrong. If that objective standard is God Himself, as those who hold to the historic Christian faith and the authority of the Bible would believe, then we're going to have a very specific understanding of what right and wrong, and therefore, justice is going to look like. That's going to be very different than people saying that right and wrong are going to be defined based on how people feel. And that's overwhelmingly the standard that we see today when we look at things like critical theory, when we talk about oppression and dividing the world into oppressors and the oppressed. Oppression is often considered to be a state of mind. It's how you feel in response to the external constraints of the world, the norms and the values and the expectations that society places upon you. It's how you feel with respect to those things. So, if I feel that I am oppressed by those external constraints, then I am oppressed in this worldview, and that's what makes something right or wrong.

And there's a lot of contradiction that goes on within that, in terms of people who feel oppressed because society expects a gender binary, for example. And then other people expect, no, there is a gender binary, but I am the opposite gender. There are a lot of different things that don't all work together within a social justice conversation because everyone feels oppressed for different reasons. They don't have the same standard to work from. So, that ultimately is the heart of the difference between a secular social justice and a biblical justice. Where are we going to get that standard? How are we going to know what it means to make

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wrong things right? How will we define the brokenness in the world? We all look around and say, yes, the world is broken, there's a problem, but we're going to define the brokenness in different ways.

Alisa:

Yeah, those are such good thoughts. And it's like the social justice ideology would say that real justice is that everybody has the exact same outcome, but as we know, even Heaven is not going to be like that. We're going to have different experiences in heaven with different rewards. And so, it's why it's so important just to swing back around to the idea that we really have to see the Bible as our authority, because it's the revealed word of God. And we can't know what justice is unless we know who God is. His justice and His righteousness are virtually interchangeable. In fact, in the Hebrew it comes from the same root, so if we're talking about the nature and character of God, we have to start there.

Well, thank you all so much for listening today. Don't forget to go to UnshakenConference.com. Listen to the Natasha Crain Podcast and the Alisa Childers Podcast for long form episodes and also subscribe to the Unshaken Faith Podcast that Natasha and I started together. Weekly, 15 minute, culture soundbite episodes to help you think things through. We'll see you next time. Thanks.

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