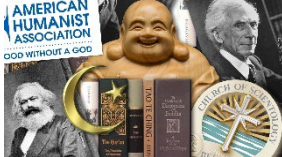


# Divine Defense

## *Discerning Pretender From Defender*

February 5, 2023



Today we're learning how to be more discerning – concerning the actual identity of our defender and judge. Because, in case you missed it, we're all on death row down here – and to make it out alive, we need a plan that can shift the blame or clear our name before it's time to flip the switch. And whatever course of action that we plan to take is affected by who we have defending and deciding our case. But because court's already in session, the world's waiting to hear your answer to two questions: *How do you plead?* And *Who is defending you?*

But before we all yell, *"Jesus took the wheel – case closed!"*, I want to revisit a critical consideration that we touched on last week:

**How can we know if we've got the Lord as our Defender?** Because

[Jesus Himself said] "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. – Matthew 24:4-5 NIV

*Don't we know it!* Our whole world is driven by products and people who all promise to be the one answer to all our problems; the savior from life's uncomfortable reality and ultimate end. And all we need is to believe in them and they'll cure what ails us! And when phones and pharmacies aren't enough, we have a whole host of religions and philosophies that claim they can do away with our inevitable death sentence. We can pick from ethereal energies, reincarnated realities, or any of many attractive afterlives – so long as we just agree to trust their truth and follow their lead. So how do we know when we've got the real deal? Well we can:

Test all things; [and] hold fast what is good. - 1 Thessalonians 5:21 NKJ

After all, that's kinda how humans decided we discover truth best; the scientific method. We put a proposition into practice to see what it produces. And the Bible agrees:

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. [but] By their fruit you will recognize them. – Matthew 7:15-16 NIV

[So test for truth and] Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but [consider the options and you'll] 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 NIV

Cuz you see, God's so confident of the truth in His will that He says, *"Testing the rest will only prove I'm the best!"* And I gotta say, that's about the strongest pitch to prove whose plan is superior. Because real truth is apparent and transparent, not conditional and complicated.

And Paul gives Titus a *great* example to *teach* him how to *detect* the frauds behind 'snake-oil saviors' – test their *truth* by assessing any *problems* that their *argument* might produce:

There are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception ... They must be silenced, because they are ... teaching things they ought not to teach – and *that* for the sake of dishonest gain. [Just hear how easy it is to find the flaw in their logic:] One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." – Titus 1:10-12 NIV

*Dude, stop right there!* You just said we can't trust whatever you say next! Paul is pointing out that **a case based on total truth shouldn't produce problems like paradoxes, but sound solutions that make sense!** So with that in mind, **how sound is the Savior behind your Christian defense?**



Well I guess **that depends on which Jesus you got working your case.** Cuz like He said, "many will come in My name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah, and will deceive many.'" And if you step back and *look* at the picture Christians *collectively* paint of *our* Lord, we're all over the map! Meaning, no matter *how* you slice it, once again **a lot of us are missing the mark on our Savior!**

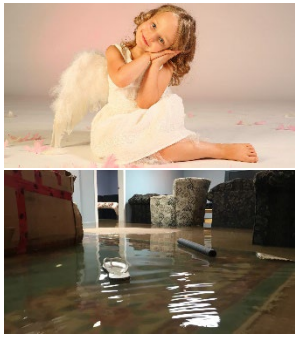
[And unfortunately, that's nothing new;] *These* people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; *their* teachings are merely *human* rules. – Matthew 15:8-9 NIV

So sorry, but **it's necessary to take a close look at your defender's case to discern whether you're working with a counterfeit Christ or the real deal.** For instance, lately, a lot of Christians have adopted a defense that *subtly* denies our need to *fully* surrender. *Instead*, they take the *truths* lived out by Jesus as an *example* meant to guide our superior 21<sup>st</sup> c. minds toward our *own* truth; and their *plan* is to **dismiss the case by denying their guilt.** And I gotta admit, it's compelling *and* convenient; making it *very attractive!*

After all, **how are we responsible for an offense that we don't fully understand?** I mean, Adam and Eve didn't even *know* what good and evil *were* until *AFTER* they ate. And *likewise*, if *imperfection* is our big problem, how is *that* our *fault* if it's our created *nature*? Shouldn't we be judged only on *intention* over *action*; the way taking a life for *profit* is *bad* but the *same act* – to *protect* – is *heroic*?

Well at first look, that *does* seem like the sound logic a *divine Defender* would *use* – it's only when we look a little *deeper* that we discover it's too *shallow* to save us. Cuz **there's a higher law in a superior court that us humans love leave unresolved. Cause and effect.** Whenever *anything happens, regardless of intention, it has an effect.* Spill your coffee, *stain your pants.* And cause and effect *can't* be debated; only *obeyed* by every inch of creation. And despite how much we *want* to *overlook* or *excuse* it, we just *can't* deny it.

Which means, **a truly perfect defense plan has to account for intention and effect.** And that makes things much more difficult, because **to resolve an effect, things can't just be judged right, they must be made right.**



Way back when my kids were young and cute, one of them was overzealous with the toilet paper and my wife and I were called downstairs to two inches of standing, stinking water covering our carpets. And there was our kid, dazed and confused, only becoming scared and sorry after they saw us scramble and scream to stop the stream of sewage. And after we got it under control, we had to come up with a plan to undo the effect our cute little offender caused. Well, what do you do? Get your piggy bank kid... No! Without bad intentions, we let them off the hook. Maybe an explanation and some advice, but then they're free and clear.

**But what about the mess?** Has justice been served? Well, not fully, until things have been fixed. The case can't close until somebody plumbs the pipes and cleans the carpet. Cuz **forgiving can make things just but it takes fixing to put things right.** And that takes a divine defense cuz only:

The Lord works *righteousness and justice* for all the oppressed. - Psalm 103:6 NIV

Regardless of intention, when we violated perfection, we created a need for someone to clean up *our* mess and *put things right*. Because **debt doesn't disappear. *Something or someone has to absorb the effect of every action.*** And for righteousness and justice to be served, humanity would have to restore the perfection that only God is capable of. So if your Savior is the 'real deal' Jesus what would His plan have to be? Well, like Bruce read last week:

God presented [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement ... He did this to demonstrate His justice [that *higher* kind that doesn't overlook anything, but accounts for intention and effect; and He did this] ... so as to *be* just and [at the same time] the One who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. – Romans 3:25-26 NIV



**“Right, but if Jesus paid the debt, and the debt was owed to God, and Jesus and God are one, can't He just say, 'I don't owe Me anything?'”** Well, yes. But He'd be a *Cretan* and *not* God. **“Why?!”** Well I'll explain if you stop whining. To clean up the mess that our sin *caused*, God has to give up one of three things, and leaving sin *unpunished* would mean **giving up His righteousness.** And that's *not* an option due to the flawed logic. Because any and all sin spoils perfection, if God overlooked *either* the *intentions* or *effect* of sin, He'd be aiding and abetting it and violating His own law. But that would be *unrighteous*. And disqualify Him as God.

So then there's God's second option to restore perfection; **just kill the kids who caused it!** Because God alone in the universe is nothing but perfection. The only flaw here is that killing us off would mean **giving up His love.** And once again, that's not an option because:

We know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. – 1 John 4:16 NIV

And is there any parent here who *really* thinks this is an option? **Don't raise your hands!** And that leaves only one other option; He could become one of us and put things right. But paying that price would mean **giving up His life.** *And oh dear* this option doesn't contradict His love or righteousness; it proves it. Because **pretenders will stand by you; but a divine Defender will stand for you.**

Which is His plan. His perfect, painful, holy, and heartbreaking plan that can justify *and* rectify our offense of imperfection. By giving *Himself*, our *intentions* could be corrected by His *example* and our *effect* could be undone by putting perfection back *in humanity*. But living *His* life of perfection, only to *die* for our *imperfection*, doesn't just *demonstrate* His divine justice and righteousness; it *adds* an example of His *love* all in one fell swoop.



Which means **God's plan doesn't just shift the blame and clear our name, it changes the game**. Because it shows us *how* He puts His divine plan into action using a *human* host. What *He* did, *we could* and *should* learn to do! Cuz in case you've forgotten, *you're* God's kid and He wants *you* to grow up and become like Him so *you* can move back in! And that **growth toward His image is what we call sanctification**. And He snuck it into our justification and rectification because He's not content just paying our penalties, He wants to keep us clean by training and transforming us. Y'know, while my wife and I were cleaning the carpets, one of the sweetest things I ever saw was when my kid *tried* to pitch in. Cuz even though their misguided paper towels just made the mess worse; it made the situation better. And years later, it's worth the work to know they've learned to keep things clean. I'm still waiting to see it... but one step at a time!

But – that growth *itself* poses one more problem, cuz **the hardest part of being a Christian is becoming like Christ without thinking you are Christ**.

Watching God work His plan for this world through us kids can be so empowering that we can overstep our assignment. So don't forget, **we're benchwarmers while we're down here**. And the only speech we ever add to our defense is what we've seen when we're called to witness. **Sitting next to Jesus leads us to believe we can sit in for Jesus**, but don't make that mistake!

YOU ARE NOT GOD. **"Yeah, but I'm made in His image"** – Sure, but YOU ARE NOT GOD, **"Yeah, but I'm partnered with Him in the body of Christ"** – Good, but YOU ARE NOT GOD, **"Well, right but He's my Father, I'm in the family"** – Great, but YOU ARE NOT GOD! We can look *like*, work *with*, and *be* brothers with Jesus – but **He's the only Human who gets to play God**. We watch and learn.

The Lord will fight for you; *you* need only to be still." - Exodus 14:14 NIV

Whenever *we're* involved in our own defense, it compromises our case. Because here's what I want you to take home today – **the most common counterfeit Christ is the Christian sitting in your seat**. **"Yeah, I knew it! Shame on them!"** No. Shame on us. **It's our interjections and objections that prevent our perfection**. Remember, this place is our example of how things go when we're in charge! And yet, walking this tightrope is the perfect training for perfect love.

And **here at His Place we know that's how we get the real deal with the perfect plan to defeat death**. So take a long look at the case *you've* been building and ask, **"Have I got the genuine Jesus as my defender?"** And then keep your case free from flaws, by keeping it away from shallow *frauds*. Instead, **take a seat on the bench, listen to the Lord, let Him lead, and learn from that love!**