

MYTHBUSTING – *Undoing the Headaches and Heartache inflicted by half-truths.*

If this series had a mascot it would be the **Bereans** of **Acts 17**. Scripture describes them as open-minded, eager and enthusiastic to receive Paul's teaching. Then it says in the same breath that they took everything Paul taught and they ran it by scripture to test its truth.

Sometimes questioning isn't symptomatic with a lack of faith, but a love for truth.

Because while scripture says the truth will set you free, the reality is half truths can hurt us. Distortions of God's truth can derail us.

2 Corinthians 11:3:

I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent.

Why would he fear this? See **verse 4**: *You happily put up with whatever anyone tells you...*

He's implying the Corinthians should walk in what he commanded in his letter to the Thessalonians: ***Test everything. Hold on to what is good. Stay away from every kind of evil.***

The verse that inspired this series is **GALATIANS 5:9** where Paul says:

“A little leaven [a slight inclination to error] leavens the whole batch [it perverts the concept of faith and misleads the church].”

The question we are asking ourselves in light of this verse in this series:

How many of our missteps are the result of being misled by misconceptions?

How much of our headaches are the result of half-truths?

How many heartaches do we dish out when we tell them to others?

“Parts and parcels of truth are the most envenomed shafts which fly from the bow of Satan.”

Often are fed part and parcel of MLK's message.

This weekend you'll probably hear: *“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.”*

But not the entire ***“I Have a Dream Speech”***

You'll probably read: *“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”*

But not the entire ***“Letter From a Birmingham Jail.”***

We live in a culture that – through taking part and parcel of his teachings - tries to divorce him from his Christian beliefs. But we'd do well to remember MLK was a minister even before he was an activist.

He once said – ***“I didn't get my inspiration from Karl Marx; I got it from a man named Jesus, a Galilean saint who said he was anointed to heal the broken-hearted.”***

The other side of the coin is that there's many who would amen the above... yet try to divorce him from the hard conversations he tried to have about racism and the church - especially

predominantly white churches - and its failure to play a role in the fight for civil rights and social justice. (*Those are the passages that go unquoted in Letter from a Birmingham Jail*)

Many will say emphatically: **“Social justice is a distraction from the gospel.”**

But again- how does one test a churchy myth:

Hold it up to scripture’s greater content and context. Hold it up to life.

1.) **Scripture** doesn’t hold this up.

This is a prime example of reading verses but not reading the Bible.

I’m not sure you can get through one page of the OT prophets without God’s heart for justice.

One journey through the book of James should be enough to derail it.

Faith without works is dead, and a lot of the work in James has to do with social issues.

2.) **Life** doesn’t hold this up.

Almost nobody who would say “Social justice is a distraction from the Gospel” denies the Gospel’s implications on social justice in practice. Many who cling to this statement on social justice when it comes to race don’t hesitate to talk about the implications for the systemic problems of euthanasia, or abortion, or orphans...

What Biblical umbrella do we fight for these issues under?

THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN LIFE

We see this from the first page of the Bible. Many of us read the creation narrative this January.

God creates plants “according to their kind.” God creates sea creatures “according to their kind.”

God creates land animals “according to their kind.”

“According to their kind” is a common refrain.

But with mankind – the Bible says we are created in the image of God.

You were made in the image of God. I was made in the image of God.

In that is inherent, priceless value, from the womb to the tomb.

MLK Jr. - *I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.*

And taken on face value without the content and context of all that MLK said and wrote, people have time and time again inferred that MLK had a dream that society wouldn’t see color.

“We should be colorblind.”

At first glance the notion of not seeing race and color seems like a good thing.

It sounds good and catchy and is used so commonly it’s often upheld as something to strive for.

It’s why we also prop up being color blind with Bible verses... the same way we take the quote from MLK.

Galatians 3:26-28 – *For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

We should ask, *what is Paul seeking to eliminate with these words?*
The elimination isn't race, ethnicity or seeing color.

Again, look at the context of scripture. Look at Paul's own writings...
Paul in Romans 9 says he would rather be cut off from Christ than to see "*my people, those of my own race*" without Christ. He deeply identified with his Jewish ethnicity.

The elimination isn't of race. Paul isn't looking to eliminate or ignore the differences.
The elimination is of the **hierarchy** that society so often adopts based on these differences.

In psychological terms we are hard wired to make dichotomies.
US – the in group and THEM – the out group. (sports, coffee, comics, politics)
Dichotomy again and again becomes **hierarchy**.

We elevate "US" and look down on "THEM" for thinking differently.
Behaving differently. Prioritizing differently. Parenting differently. Voting differently.
And in terms of race and color - looking differently.

And sometimes hierarchy in society goes way beyond looking down our nose at someone.
In our nation's history it has included both underlying systemic issues and outright slavery.

We have to understand that to talk about issues like racism isn't divisive.
The division is already there. To talk about it is to bring it into the light and heal it.

How does eliminating differences hold up with the rest of scripture?
It doesn't even hold up with the rest of the verse!

We aren't called to be blind to male and female distinctives.
When they come together in their unique strengths, God is glorified through the **harmony**.
It's why marriage is so beautiful.
It's why we often see the Church culturally go to bat for scriptures definition...

Paul writes in scripture to the church in Corinth:
*"Live in **harmony** with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose."* (1 COR 1:10)

The greater context of scripture and Paul's writing here to Corinth makes it plain:
Unity isn't uniformity.
The unity God desires replaces hierarchy based on differences not by eliminating differences, but by replacing hierarchy with harmony that is strengthened by differences.

We as a God's people are called to
REPLACE HEIRARCHY based on differences WITH HARMONY strengthened by them.

Harmony by definition, demands difference.

The WORDS are the same.

Just as we never compromise the WORD of God and it's truth on the altar of unity.

But the expression and notes of the words is different, thus creating harmonies.

Uniformity would actually bring **down** the quality of worship, not elevate it

We live in a culture where uniformity is easy and effortless.

In most arenas we form groups of people who agree with us on pretty much everything.

The Church as Paul wrote about it – many backgrounds coming together as one – should be a place where our community is dropped in our lap and we're forced to live outside our echo chamber. Consider different perspectives. Hear stories from other backgrounds.

MLK didn't have a dream where all people were **the same**.

He had a dream that they were **equal**.

He didn't dream for society to no longer **SEE** color.

He dreamed of a society that didn't **JUDGE** based on color.

From public to personal perception, from conversations to the courthouse.

Galatians 6:7 – *You cannot mock the justice of God.*

Injustice in any and all society does just that. Hence the value of social justice.

But we hear social justice and it's become politicized, we think of "them" over there.

We need to **reclaim justice** as a Biblical word repeated and defined throughout scripture again and again.

MLK in his I have a dream speech would say: ***"We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."***

These aren't the words of a minister who had become distracted by social justice.

He was quoting the prophet Amos who prophesies in the OT:

"Let justice roll down like water, righteousness like a mighty stream"

Colorblindness makes it hard to do justice.

Because in a lot of cases colorblindness makes us blind to injustice.

Colorblindness makes us justice-blind.

Redlining in real estate. School segregation. Gentrification. The Racial Wealth Gap.

You're blind to these disparities and systemic issues if you refuse to see color.

Galatians 2:11-14 - *But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile believers, who were not circumcised. But afterward, when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision. As a result, other Jewish believers followed Peter's hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.*

Paul calls Peter to account. He says in vs. 14 - ***“you're not living in line with the Gospel.”***
How could Paul accuse Peter of such a thing?

Paul asks: ***“How can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”***

The same impulses that derailed Peter cause us to subscribe to being colorblind.
Peter walked in the privileges that came with being a Jew.

When you talk about systemic or structural sin, few sins are more systemic in nature than pride. Looking to our own interests first, and the interest of others second or not at all.
It's how throughout history we see predominant culture privilege arise again and again.

But for Peter, there were perks with being a Jew among Jews in Christianity.
There was a privileged comfort for a Jew in being Jewish in that religious realm.
And there was potential uncomfortable conflict if he stood with the Gentiles.

For me, a white man in America, the temptation to be colorblind is there.
Rather than deal with a problem, I can adopt a view that acts like it's not there.
Colorblindness gives comfort to the privileged.
Rarely if ever is colorblindness exercised to benefit the persecuted culture.

The ability to claim colorblindness in times of heightened racial tension is the height of privilege.
It's easy to be colorblind when you're in the predominant culture.

For me to be a minority in a situation I almost have to work for it.
For many people we pass every day, it's their every day reality.

For a person of color in a culture where they are the minority, the push for colorblindness implies there is something shameful about the way God made me that we shouldn't talk about.
Their distinctions. Their identity.

The colorblind option is a half truth that does harm.
What is the full truth?

Raise your kids to be **COLOR WISE**.

Paul – **1 Corinthians 9:21** - “I became all things to all people...”

19 - *“To the Jews I became like a Jew”*

20 - *“To those not having the law I became like one not having the law”*

It's a fancy way of saying that in an act of wisdom, Paul became *LIKE* those *UNLIKE* the Jews to reach and love them. He didn't just see and discern ethnic and cultural differences,

he was wise enough to let those distinctions GUIDE his ministry!

He noticed things like culture, color and creed. And this wasn't racism.
It was the opposite. It was love. It was empathy.

MSG version of 1 Corinthians 9:20 - *I didn't take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ—but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view.*

One of the symptoms of our sin nature is the subconscious way we think our experience is the valid one, the one point of view upon which all judgments should be made.

Being color wise recognizes that while I may not need a new perspective,
I start in life with this narrow lens and should always push to broaden it.

Raise your kids to have **COLOR BRAVE**.

Ephesians 5:11 - *Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them.*
Racism is evil. We don't sweep it under the rug. It needs to be exposed.
Being colorblind is our way of dodging our call to expose racism and champion justice.
We need to be color brave.

If you do this- ultimately- you'll be raising your kids to engage God's mission.

God's mission? Fill Heaven.

Revelation 7:9 – *I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne*

We worship and will worship in Heaven next to people that voted different than us.
We worship and will worship in Heaven next to people that look different from us.

You know who wasn't colorblind? John.
Colorblind would have made him Heavenblind.
Colorblindness doesn't just make us blind to injustice.
It makes us blind to beauty.

Ephesians 2 speaks of bringing those who are far near.
Tearing down the dividing wall of hostility. Making two one.
God is in the business of bringing unity out of division.
He's in the business of doing his biggest work when things seem most broken.
And he's still in the business in using his people, his church.
Our voice of witness needs harmony.

Ephesians 3:10, in the breath and chapter right after his
God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the Heavenly places.

We will see the beauty of Heaven one day in all of its colors and rich variety.
And the Heavenly places watch US now, hoping we build the same kingdom here.