

When Popular Opinion is Wrong

Rich Nathan

May 31-June 1, 2003

John: The Jesus I Never Knew Series

John 9

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John 10

When I was in England a few weeks ago I went to Oxford University to visit a young friend who interned for me a few years ago. Together we visited the spot where two Protestants, Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer, were burned at the stake during the reign of Queen Mary I who became known as “Bloody Mary” because of the 290 Protestants who were executed during her reign in the year 1555.

Both Dr. Ridley and Mr. Latimer were offered the opportunity to recant their views concerning what, exactly, went on during communion. These two men rejected the Roman Catholic perspective that Christ was literally being sacrificed again during the celebration of communion or the mass. These two men preached faith alone as the way to salvation. And so history tells us that they stood before a religious court. They were asked to recant their opinions. Dr. Ridley said, “So long as there is breath in my body I will never deny my Lord Jesus Christ and his known truth. God’s will be done with me.”

As a result the stake was prepared for he and Hugh Latimer. The chain of iron was placed around both of their waists and nailed to the ground. Gunpowder was placed around these two martyrs necks. Wood was piled at their feet and lit. It was at this point that Hugh Latimer uttered his famous line to Dr. Ridley, “Be of good comfort,

Mr. Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England that I trust shall never be put out."

Ridley and Latimer died excruciating deaths. But Latimer's prophecy came true. Protestantism triumphed in England and their martyrdom only served to make the truth burn brighter in the minds of all who saw them die and also heard about their deaths.

Throughout history people who buck popular opinion, folks who challenge the prevailing orthodoxy often find themselves persecuted, sometimes violently. And I don't want to leave you the impression that it was only Roman Catholics who did this to Protestants. When the Protestants were in power in England and Germany many Catholics were put to death. But it was extremely moving for me to stand at the very spot where two Christian pastors were burned to death simply because they refused to deny what they knew to be true.

Of course, we don't do things like that today. We don't persecute people based simply on their holding unpopular or controversial opinions. We live in a tolerant society, a society that permits dissent, a society in which you are allowed to question authority, right?

Let me tell you a true story. There was a 15-year old high school junior in the Denver area named Danny who decided to think for himself. His class was assigned a Nova program produced with government funds for National Public Television, which

stated the usual evolutionary story as fact. The story went something like this. “The first organized form of primitive life was a tiny protozoan. From these one-celled organisms all life on earth evolved.” Science education today requires high school students to memorize that kind of naturalistic doctrine and repeat it on a test as fact.

Because Danny had a special interest in pursuing truth, and because his father was a pastor of a church that had an interest in questioning evolutionary naturalism, Danny knew that this claim of molecule to man went far beyond what science could prove. So he wrote a lengthy paper criticizing the Nova Program as propaganda.

The school administrators at first agreed that Danny had a point and they tentatively decided to withdraw the Nova Program from the curriculum. Well, this set off a media firestorm across the nation. Now, Danny was making a reasonable point. The doctrine that some known process of evolution turned a protozoan into a human is a philosophical assumption. It is not something that can be confirmed by an experiment or by historical study, or by the fossil records.

But the fact that a school was seriously considering dissent from the reigning orthodoxy of evolutionary naturalism infuriated the Darwinists in the city. They flooded the city newspaper with letters that were so venomous that the editorial page editor said this, “These defenders of intellectual freedom behaved, in fact, were just like a bunch of fundamentalist Christians. There’s been a different kind of fundamentalism, but no less dogmatic and no less intolerant.” What Danny was

challenging was the definition of evolution as an unsupervised impersonal, unpredictable natural process that accounts for the entire history of life.

The school board quickly reversed itself about withdrawing the Nova Program. When so-called civil liberties lawyers threatened the school district with an expensive lawsuit.

What happens to people when they decide to march to the beat of a different drummer? When they challenge prevailing opinions? What happens when you stand up for truth that everyone around you denies? That's the subject of John 9. I've called today's talk, "When Popular Opinion is Wrong." Let's pray.

There is in John 9 an interlude, if you will, a case study that breaks from John's outline in which he has been showing Jesus to be the fulfiller of all of the Jewish holidays. We've seen in previous weeks that John has been telling us that the various Jewish holidays, the Sabbath, the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, and in ch. 10, Hanukkah, are all designed to be pointers or signs leading us to trust in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and as the Savior of the world.

But these signs were resisted by popular opinion. And so we read in ch. 9:1-2, *As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'*

The disciples are stating an opinion that has been popularly believed throughout all of recorded human history. If things in your life are going badly, then you must be responsible, or your family is responsible. In Eastern religions this view of personal responsibility for one's misfortunes is labeled "karma." If you are born with a birth defect, or a disability, or you grow up in poverty, many Hindus would say that you are simply experiencing what you deserve based on your actions in a prior life. You are paying off the bad karma that you inherited because of your evil deeds from past lives.

We Christians do not believe in karma, but we do teach a principle of sowing and reaping. We understand that there is a relationship between what I do or fail to do and the consequences I suffer. If parents are neglectful or abusive there is a high degree of likelihood that their children are going to grow up with significant problems. If you are sexually promiscuous, you have to understand that one of the consequences may be a sexually transmitted disease, or an unwanted pregnancy.

Who sinned, the disciples asked, him or his parents that he should be born blind? They are stating popular opinion in every culture in every age. Popular opinion always reduces life to a formula. Popular opinion generally pictures the universe as a gumball machine in which we put in our quarters, pull the lever, and a gumball will fall out.

And popular opinion is often right. If we work hard in school, as a general rule, we will get better grades, better job prospects, and a better future. If we have a bad

attitude, or mess up on our jobs, we generally will get poor evaluations and may be laid off. If we commit to sexual purity, we have a better chance of having a happier marriage. There are all kinds of studies that indicate that the most satisfying marriages emotionally and sexually are those entered by two virgins. If we love our children and discipline them and set a good example, generally, our children will make better life choices. If we don't smoke, if we eat right, if we exercise, generally we will live longer.

The wisdom that we find in the book of Proverbs is generally true. Being careful and diligent in your work often does lead to wealth. And being hasty and lazy often does lead to poverty.

The problem with the disciples' perspective, the problem with the view of sowing and reaping is an absolute, the problem with formula thinking is that the formulas don't always work the way popular opinion suggests that they should work. Popular opinion would have gone along with Job's friends. Job was suffering because of his sin. This man is blind because he did something wrong or his parents did something wrong. The truth that we discover in the Bible is that life is far more mysterious, far more untidy, far messier than what the formula suggests. The book of Proverbs was never meant to be a book of promises. It is a book of general principles that often work.

But sometimes they don't work. Sometimes a person works hard and he or she gets shut out of a job because of racism, or anti-Semitism, or favoritism. Sometimes people don't work hard – they party, they get drunk in college, and they end up being

the president of the US. Sometimes people maintain their sexual purity, they don't sleep around, and they end up never getting married. Some folks end up living as singles because they have refused to compromise their high standards. And other people have violated God's standards, and have ended up having happy marriages.

I have known men and women who have been as committed as anybody to their marriages and have had their spouses cheat on them. I have known people who have done everything one can do to bring about a certain result from God; they have prayed, they have repented from all known sin, they have fasted, they have reconciled their relationships and they still have lost a loved one to cancer, or to an accident.

Life in a fallen world is far more mysterious, far more chaotic, than the formulas suggest. A sinless man may end up being hung on a cross.

Evangelical Christianity is great at marketing general principles and proverb-style wisdom as absolutes. Do these five things and you will achieve financial blessing. Follow these principles and your child will love God. Pray this way and your influence will increase.

It is true that all pain and suffering is linked to sin. But all pain and suffering is not necessarily linked to your sin, or the sin of your families.

Let me pause here and ask you a question. Have the formulas ever failed you? Have you ever put your quarter in in any area of life and not have the gumball come out? Or, as is often the case, has more than one gumball come out? Isn't that our understanding of the word "grace"? That connectedness between what we sow and what we reap is sometimes broken? That we end up reaping far more exceedingly, abundantly, beyond all that we ask or ever think?

Have you ever had a formula fail you? Has life ever appeared to you to be far more mysterious and untidy and unfair than you assumed it to be?

Do you know, friends, one of the great signs of spiritual maturity is when a person has a cherished formula fail, a formula taught by their church or by a well-respected Christian author or by someone on Christian TV; a formula that was passed down by their Christian heritage suddenly fails and yet that person still trusts in the goodness and in the love of Jesus Christ.

In a wonderful book that if you haven't read, I would highly recommend to you by CS Lewis called, *The Screwtape Letters*, which is fantasy. It is the imagined collection of letters written by a senior devil to a junior devil about how to tempt people. The senior devil, Screwtape, writes to the junior devil, Wormwood, this bit of advice. He says, *Do not be deceived Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human looks around upon a universe from which every trace of God seems to have vanished and asked why he has been forsaken, yet still obeys.*

You see, you know that you are growing in spiritual maturity when you don't get it, when everything falls apart, and every formula fails and yet you still obey God. Having high moral standards does not seem to be working out for you, but you still obey.

Jesus challenges the popular opinion of formula thinking that either we or our families are responsible for every thing that happens to us in life – either good or bad. He says in v. 3, *“Neither this man nor his parents sinned”, said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”*

Christ doesn't tell us the cause of the suffering. But he does point to its purpose. He says, *“This happened that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”* In this particular case the work of God that was to be displayed in this man's life was the healing power of Christ. People could look at this formerly blind man and say, *“Here is a flesh and blood pointer to the truth that Jesus is Messiah.”* Here is a flesh and blood pointer to the truth that God is at work through this man Jesus of Nazareth.

Often, Christ doesn't tell us the cause of the problem. But he does, in scripture, tell us the purpose. God wants to make us a display case of his work.

Go to a jewelry store and look in a display case, or window. What leads people into the store to purchase an item? I guarantee you that jewelry stores don't put in their

windows rusty spoons, broken watches, bent up earrings, or damaged strands of pearls. The jewelry store wants to display the quality of the workmanship done in that store so they display their best items in the most attractive way.

Here's what Jesus is saying. He is saying in v. 3, "Christians, you are a display case, you are a showcase for the work of God." And you might want to underline John 9:3 in your Bible and next to it write, "My identity; my purpose in life."

See, the popular opinion is that all pain is bad. The popular opinion is that all grief, all loss, all depravation, all-suffering, all trials are bad. And the popular opinion would be true if the purpose of life was your immediate happiness, or my immediate happiness. But Jesus is saying here that God has a greater purpose for your life than your immediate happiness. God wants to put you on display. He wants to show off his workmanship in your life. He wants you in the window not as a rusty spoon or a broken watch, but as a beautifully polished diamond in a perfect setting. Christian, you are in this world to display the workmanship of God not only to other people, but the apostle Paul tells us in Eph. 3, to display God's wisdom to the angels, to the powers, to the authorities, to the whole demonic realm.

That's why we suffer. God wants to display his character in your life. God wants to display his righteousness. The Bible tells us in Ps. 119:67, *Before I was afflicted, I went astray. But now I obey your words.* And in Ps. 119:71, *It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.*

Sometimes pain is designed to discipline us, to bring about our repentance so that God might display his righteousness through us. Has that ever happened to you, friend? Have you ever experienced the discipline of the Lord and seen as a result life change and obedience? That you formerly just sort of played around in an area, but God disciplined you and you were able to truly say that it was good for you to be afflicted so that you might learn God's decrees, so you might learn to obey God.

God wants you to be a display of not only his righteousness, but also of his empathy and comfort. The apostle Paul writes in 2 Cor. 1, *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our trouble so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.* There is a softening effect of suffering. I have found this to be true in my own life. I absolutely do empathize with people who have gone through what I have gone through in an infinitely greater way than I would have had I not experienced certain kinds of trials.

Friends, has your heart ever been softened by your experience of a peculiar kind of pain? Have you seen in your own life your ability to comfort and to empathize with others increase because you have experienced great personal pain?

Sometimes God wants to put on display the quality of enduring faith and covenant faithfulness. Some of you may be familiar with the words of Habakkuk. *Though the fig tree does not bud, and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop*

fails and the fields produce no food; though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God my Savior.

I will keep believing. I will keep trusting. I will keep faith with God.

Sometimes God wants you to display in your life a hope of heaven. To show people that this world is not all there is. As we read in 1 Peter 1:3, *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade, kept in heaven for you. In this you greatly rejoice: though now you for a little while you may have to suffer grief and all kinds of trials.*

Let me ask you, who are followers of Christ, do you recognize that there is an overarching design to your life beyond your immediate happiness? Your purpose is not to exercise your right to be happy or to indulge your lusts. You are on display to show forth what God is like to this broken and fallen world. Those of you who are followers of Christ, do you understand this fundamental truth: that life is supposed to be oriented toward God and not toward you?

John 9:6-12 – *Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the pond of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same*

man who used to sit and beg?” Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.” But he himself insisted, “I am the man.” “How then were your eyes opened?” they asked him. He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.” “Where is this man?” they asked him. “I don’t know,” he said.

There is a popular opinion that prayer does not bring about healing. The details in this story are important because everything here points to Jesus. For example, this little bit of detail regarding Jesus making mud out of clay and his saliva and packing it into the man’s eyes. The early church Fathers all saw that as an allusion pointing to the original creation. Just as God created Adam from the original mud and clay of the earth, according to Gen. 2, so Jesus in recreating this man’s eyes uses mud and clay. There’s a pointer here. John 1:3 has already told us that through Christ every thing was made. Through him all things were made. And without him not any thing was made that was made.

And then there is another pointer in the name of the pool that the man was sent to. It says, “Go,” he told him. “Wash in the pool of Siloam.” The word means “sent.” Jesus, throughout the gospel is the one sent by the Father. There’s even a little bit of a play on words because the word Siloam is related to the Hebrew word that we would pronounce Shiloh. And Shiloh in Gen. 49:10 was always considered to be a name of Messiah.

So John keeps piling up the pointers to Christ. But you know the folks here have as much trouble believing as we moderns do. They look for alternatives that are more reasonable than that a man born blind was healed. Maybe this man was not the same man. Maybe this was a relative. We think these folks living back in the Bible time were so gullible that they believed almost anything. You know, this pre-scientific age – just tell them that God healed a man born blind through prayer and they'll say, "Of course. Let's celebrate with some religious festival."

These people understood something about the way the world worked. They may not have known the intricate anatomical structures of the eye. But they understood that people born blind stayed blind until death. That such people didn't suddenly start seeing. The popular opinion then and the popular opinion today was that prayer does not bring about healing, especially the healing of really grave conditions.

A portion of the Christian world would agree with this opinion. There are today hard core anti-charismatics who write books, go on the radio, arguing fervently that many of the spiritual gifts that we read about in the New Testament, such as healing, have been withdrawn. That if there is a claim of healing, it is almost certainly fraudulent or mistaken. The most popular opinion within Christianity as well as outside of the Christian faith is that there might be a psychosomatic effect to prayer. A person may be calmed or relaxed. A person may experience hope that leads to a release of endorphins. But certainly it cannot be the case that anatomical structures, broken bones, blinded eyes, cancer-filled organs, could possibly be healed as a result of

some supernatural intervention that takes place through prayer. Where's the evidence for this view?

Let me share with you a few recent studies.

In 1988 a study was done and published in the Southern Medical Journal by a Dr. Byrd that was titled "The Positive Therapeutic Affects of Intercessory Prayer in a Coronary Care Unit Population." Cardiac patients from the San Francisco General Medical Center were randomly divided using a computer-generated list into two groups. The names of the patients in the test groups were given to a group of Christians who prayed for them while they were in the hospital.

The intercessory prayer team members were chosen on the following basis: They had to be born-again Christians on the basis of John 3:3, and they had to lead an active Christian life on the basis of daily devotional prayer and fellowship in a local church.

The placebo group received no prayer. Neither the test group nor the placebo group cardiac patients knew that they were receiving prayer. The hospital staff, the doctors, and the nurses were also blinded, since they didn't know which patient belonged to which group. The prayer entirely took place off the premises and the patients never met the pray-ers.

Now listen. There was no statistical difference between the placebo and the groups prayed for before the prayer was initiated. But after prayer was started, the study clearly indicates that there was less congestive heart failure, the prayed for group required less diuretic and anti-biotic therapy. They had fewer episodes of pneumonia. They had fewer cardiac arrests. And were less frequently intubated and ventilated.

There was another study done titled, "Does Prayer Influence the Success of In vitro Fertilization Embryo Transfer?" Here again there was a double blind study in which the efficacy of prayer was assessed in patients undergoing treatment this time for in vitro fertilization. The patients were unaware of the study. This was performed in S. Korea. 219 women were enrolled. In the no-intercessory prayer group, 26% of that group became pregnant. This is apparently average for in vitro fertilization embryo transfer therapy.

However, in the prayed for group, there was nearly a doubling of the success rate. 50% of the women who were prayed for at a distance became pregnant.

There is significant research on the effect of church involvement on physical and mental health. Church involvement has been associated with lower blood pressure, fewer strokes, lower rates of death from heart disease, lower mortality after heart surgery and longer survival in general. A strong religious faith and involvement in a church appears to be the combination most consistently associated with better health.

Regarding mental health, studies indicate that people who are more religious experience greater well being and life satisfaction, less depression, less anxiety, and are much less likely to commit suicide. Therapies for depression that incorporate religious beliefs in treatment result in faster recovery from illnesses than do traditional therapies.

Heart surgery patients who are religious have a 20% shorter post-operative stay than non-religious patients. Hospital stays are nearly 2.5 times longer for older patients who don't have a religious affiliation.

If you are interested in this kind of thing, you may want to pick up a book titled "The Faith Factor: Proof of the Healing Power of Prayer" by a man named Dale Matthews.

Let me ask you a personal question. Do you believe in the power of God to heal through your prayers? If you say you do, do you regularly pray for healing? When someone in your family is sick, or when you are sick, or when someone in your workplace is ill, do you pray for their healing? You might say, "If the popular opinion is wrong, if the truth is bubbling up even in medical journals to the healing powers of prayer, why don't more physicians link prayer together with healing? Why isn't this taught in medical school?"

And you need to understand that the prevailing prejudice against spiritual practices, especially Christian spiritual practices like intercessory prayer is so strong that most

medical journals will not publish in this area. One physician, a man named Dr. David Larson, who is a physician at the National Institute for Health Care Research called research in this area the anti-tenure factor. David Larson in an interview once said with a smile, “If you want your career to go backwards, start publishing in the area of the link between prayer and healing.”

Another physician, a man named Harold Koenig, who teaches at the Duke University Medical Center said that, “Despite the common experience of physicians of seeing patients get well through prayer, there is tremendous resistance to acknowledging a spiritual origin for healing.”

See, there are various opinions that simply cannot be expressed in scholarly journals. If you think of scholarship as the unbiased search for truth, think again. When I taught at OSU I was an editor of a law journal for several years. And it was absolutely the case that certain politically unpopular viewpoints would be rejected simply on the basis of viewpoints. Certain things may not be said.

John 9:13-23 – They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day of which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?” So they were divided.

Finally, they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet." The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

"We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents answered, "He is of age. Ask him."

In this story the Pharisees censor all statements from Jews that Jesus may be the Messiah. Anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue.

You know that every society exercises tremendous pressure toward conformity to a certain prevailing opinion. And there is severe sanction toward anyone who steps out of line and begins to question the perceived orthodoxy. So Galileo was imprisoned for calling into question the medieval church perspective that the earth was the center of the universe and not the sun. Martin Luther was forced into exile when he refused to recant. The pressure to conform is immense and the sanctions are huge for people who step out of line.

A woman on our staff told me that when she was a teenager she bought clothes at the GAP in order to be accepted by the group of popular girls, the ones who set opinions for the school. She got on the bus wearing her new GAP clothes and one of these girls looked at her and said, “Where’d you get that shirt? Penney’s?” She said, “No. I got it at the GAP.” The other girls laughed and said, “That shirt wasn’t bought at the GAP, that was bought at Penney’s.” She began to argue and said, “Oh no, no, look at the tag. It’s from the GAP.” She was so desperate for these girls’ acceptance, but they laughed at her and walked away saying, “She buys her clothes at Penney’s.”

I remember as a child that I wanted my dad to buy me Converse All Stars. That’s what was popular at the time. And I wanted him to bring them to the summer camp where I was a camper. But he bought me some other brand shoe and it was a major disappointment for me to get on the basketball court wearing these cheap sneakers when everyone else was wearing Converse All Stars.

There is enormous pressure to conform. And those who don’t often pay a steep price. Many of you are familiar with the name Alexander Solzhenitsyn. During the WWII Solzhenitsyn privately criticized Joseph Stalin and he was packed off to spend eight years in Soviet prison camps in Siberia. Here’s this loyal Marxist sent off to prison camp. While there he met many Christian believers who were sent to prison camp because of their Christian faith. And Solzhenitsyn was converted from communism to Christianity.

After prison, Solzhenitsyn poured out tales of life in the prison camp in his famous “One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.” This man became lionized as a truth teller in a country that lived by lies. Eventually, the Soviets had enough of dealing with this truth teller and so they packed him off the US. Here is the great hero of freedom and truth, the darling of free speech. Harvard University asked him to give their commencement address. Solzhenitsyn gave an address titled “A World Split Apart.”

The address began this way, “Harvard’s motto is Veritas. Many of you have already found out and others will find out in the course of their lives that truth eludes us, if we do not concentrate with total attention on its pursuit. And even while it eludes us, the illusion still lingers of knowing it and leads to many misunderstandings. Also truth seldom is sweet, it is almost invariably bitter. A measure of bitter truth is included in my speech today. I offer it as a friend, not an adversary.”

And then Solzhenitsyn told the truth about America. The truth of the decline of morals in America. The truth of the loss of God. The truth of the loss of courage. The truth that we try to find meaning in the accumulation of material. The truth of the loss of direction of most Americans.

After Solzhenitsyn gave the speech, the newspaper covering his speech critiqued it under the headline, “Solzhenitsyn, Shut-Up.” Solzhenitsyn, this freedom fighter, was called a reactionary, a religious fanatic. There are some opinions that simply cannot be tolerated. You will be put out of the synagogue, dismissed by the academic elite and by the media elite.

Like what? What opinions cannot be spoken in America today?

You cannot say that evolution is not the way life came to be. Richard Dawkins, an Oxford zoologist, who was one of the most influential figures in evolutionary science wrote a book titled, *The Blind Watch Maker*, which was ostensibly about biology, but which was, in fact, a sustained argument for atheism. According to Dawkins, “Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.” And then he turns his guns on those who deny evolution. Here’s what Dawkins, this brilliant Oxford zoologist says, “It is absolutely safe to say that if you meet anybody who claims to not believe in evolution that person is ignorant, stupid, or insane [and then he puts in parenthesis] or wicked. But I’d rather not consider that.” Dawkins went on to explain that what he really disliked about those who believe in God is that they are intolerant.

If you are interested in reading more on the subject of evolution, you might want to pick up a couple of books by Phillip Johnson. There is an easy book by Johnson titled “*Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds*.” Phillip Johnson is the author and we have the book in the bookstore. There is a more challenging book by Johnson titled “*Darwin on Trial*.” And then there is another wonderful book by Michael Behe titled “*Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*.”

Here’s another opinion that cannot be said, homosexuals can change their sexual orientation. The Gay Rights Movement is so heavily invested in the idea that homosexuality is an immutable trait. In other words, that sexual orientation does not

change. That to say otherwise is to be labeled as homophobic, a bigot, intolerant, a Neanderthal. You may find yourself the subject of violence or threats.

Exodus International has a website posting the stories of literally hundreds of people who in the face of this enormous firestorm of criticism have written their stories on line. You can check out the Exodus International website. But there are hundreds of stories of men and women who were formerly exclusively homosexual in their sexual practices and who self-identified for years as gay or lesbian, who have changed. The major media will simply not cover the stories of these people. They are said to be repressed and in denial. They certainly will slip back into homosexuality.

Friends, in this church there are dozens of people who consider themselves in the past to be gay or lesbian, but who have changed their sexual orientation. If you are interested in reading more on this subject, you can pick up two books. One is a book that I wrote called "Who Is My Enemy: Welcoming People the Church Rejects." There are copies available in the bookstore. Another is a book by Jeffrey Satinover titled, "Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth."

Finally, you cannot say in America that abortion is the murder of a child. Despite the mountain of evidence that we have regarding fetal development – still persist in saying that a fetus is merely part of a woman's body.

STATS

You cannot say that abortion is the murder of a child.

So what happens when you are faced with popular opinion that denies the truth that you know? Well, the story tells us that we have the option of two very different responses. We can take the response of these parents who knuckle under, conform. In vv. 20-21 they say, *"We know he is our son," the parents answered, "We know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who has opened his eyes, we don't know."*

May I ask you a personal question? Do you knuckle under in the face of a crowd? Your family system all supports a lie. You grew up in a home where no one would say that dad or mom was an alcoholic. Or that grandpa was a sexual molester. Do you knuckle under? A family member's lifestyle is totally immoral. He or she wants you to support them. Do you knuckle under? Everyone at work thinks one way. Everyone values one thing. And you just quietly go along with the crowd.

I've done that. I've kept my mouth shut.

Friend, is that your regular practice? Will the Holy Spirit show you something about your current life where you are just conforming and smiling along when you know the truth to be otherwise?

The other approach is that taken by the man. We read in vv. 24 – *A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.”*

He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see.”

Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?”

Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple. We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.”

The man answered, “Now this is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. WE know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody as ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

He just keeps rubbing their faces in the truth. He keeps bearing witness to the truth. This man, with his limited understanding of Jesus, stands up against all the world.

Friend, those of you who have had the opportunity to know so much more about Jesus than this man, do you follow his example?

This chapter is all about standing up to the crowd, bearing witness to the truth you know, refusing to simply be a go along, get along kind of person, doing what's right and speaking what's true, even when it is unpopular, even when there is a price to pay, because life is not about my or your immediate happiness. It is about being a display case for God.

Conclusion.