

# **“Strengthen Your Faith” Lesson Series**

## **“Christianity: The Ultimate Basis for Justice and Equality”**

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**ROOM FOR DOUBT**

# Room For Doubt

**Room For Doubt** encourages questions, addresses doubts, and strengthens faith. It offers a variety of resources, including a great website and a cool mobile app, video and animation productions, live presentations, and a growing number of curriculum options. It is a grant-funded project at [Lincoln Christian University](http://www.lincolncristian.edu).

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## How To Use This Resource

This lesson plan includes the main outline with blanks already filled in for you. It also provides gray “explanation boxes” with detailed explanations of the material in the outline as well as online videos and other resources. You can use it for self-paced learning. **Just go through the lesson yourself (or maybe with a few friends or family), learn what you can, and watch videos as you have time.** If you have time, check your learning by seeing if you can answer the questions in the Discussion & Reflection Guide at the end of the lesson.

We encourage you to install and frequently use the **Room For Doubt app** (for iOS or Android). It offers great searchable resources and even allows you to submit questions. See <https://www.roomfordoubt.com/app/> or use the QR code.



# “Christianity: The Ultimate Basis for Justice and Equality”

Room For Doubt: “Strengthen Your Faith” Curriculum<sup>1</sup>

[www.roomfordoubt.com](http://www.roomfordoubt.com)

## Lesson Objectives: “This lesson helps students ...”

1. Understand the concepts of justice, human rights, and human equality.
2. Reflect upon the moral foundations necessary in order for us to have an objective moral duty to uphold justice and the dignity, rights, and equality of all humans.
3. Examine key biblical teaching that should direct our attitudes and behavior concerning justice and human equality.
4. Consider how biblical principles apply to specific examples of injustice and inequality in our culture: racism, sexual orientation, gender, and the unborn.

## Introduction

- Like many lessons in the “Strengthen Your Faith” series, this lesson could easily be divided into two or three different lessons.
- This lesson has some “Going Deeper” points. These points can be pursued if time and interest allow, but they are not essential to the core of the lesson.
- Note the Recommended Resources at the end of the lesson. Many of these resources are found in the hidden text throughout the lesson.

- A. Issues related to injustice, human equality, and human rights are prevalent in our culture today—and rightly so. We should take seriously issues such as racism, abortion, and any attitude or behavior that attacks the dignity or rights of others.
- B. Our moral sense tells us that something is *really wrong* with people being mistreated or denied the same rights as others.
  1. But why do we think it’s “really wrong”?
  2. Why should those in power care about the justice, rights, and equal treatment of those not in power?
  3. What causes it to be “wrong” to deny justice or equal treatment to others?
  4. What is “justice” anyway? And what makes something “unjust”?

- Note: The above questions are intended to get everyone thinking. If time allows, have some initial dialogue about these questions. We will cover them all as the lesson goes on, but it can be valuable to get initial reactions.

- C. In this lesson:
  1. We will carefully consider these important questions and the concepts of justice, human rights, and human equality.

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<sup>1</sup> Room For Doubt (R4D) seeks to encourage questions, address doubts, and strengthen faith. It offers a variety of resources, including a great website and mobile app, video and animation productions, live presentations, and different curriculum options for churches, small groups, college ministries, high school camps, and high school youth groups. Be sure to install and use the Room For Doubt mobile app (for iOS or Android)! R4D is a grant-funded project at [Lincoln Christian University](http://Lincoln Christian University).

2. We will discover how **Christianity provides the moral foundation that is necessary for justifying and upholding justice, human rights, and the equality of all humans.** (Many people demand justice and despise injustice, but they don't have an adequate basis for doing so.)
3. For simplicity, we will **focus on justice**, though justice includes the existence of human rights and human equality.
4. We will also apply the lesson's principles to **four prominent topics** that are especially relevant today: racism, sexual orientation, gender, and the unborn.

## I. The Concepts of Justice, Human Rights, and Human Equality

A. What is **justice**, and how is it connected to the concepts of rights and equality?

1. Justice occurs when there is \_\_\_\_\_ **CONSISTENCY** \_\_\_\_\_ between what one *deserves* and what one *receives*.

- There are different theories of justice and ways of defining it. For our purposes, we will think of justice as follows: Justice occurs when there is **consistency between what one deserves and the outcomes that one receives** (e.g., one who does what is wrong and deserves punishment suffers a consequence that matches the severity of the offense).
- This understanding of justice contains the idea that **people "deserve" certain outcomes**. It assumes that humans have **free choices** about what they do and are responsible for their choices—that's why they *deserve* certain outcomes in response to their actions or choices. It also presumes that humans have **certain rights** such that they deserve to be treated in accordance with these rights.

2. Justice: Equals receive \_\_\_\_\_ **EQUAL** \_\_\_\_\_ treatment.

- The **principle of equality** comes into play in this definition of justice. It is not just to treat equals inconsistently. (Note the section below on "what do we mean by human equality"?)

3. **Injustice**, since it involves a lack of justice, means that one receives an outcome that is *inconsistent* with what one deserves. The outcome is not fair or equitable.

- **Note about Jesus:** Although Christ received an outcome that was worse than what He deserved, He accepted this outcome voluntarily out of love for us. He chose to take our place and pay our penalty. Much more can be said about the justice of the atonement, and this gets into philosophical and legal reasoning that is beyond the scope of this lesson. For those interested in pursuing this topic further, William Lane Craig is a great resource. Material by Craig on this subject is provided in the Relevant Resources section of this lesson.

B. What do we mean by *human rights*?

- One's "rights," as we are using the term here, have to do with what one is entitled to *morally*. One may also speak of a person's *legal* rights, but this is a different matter. One's moral rights and one's legal rights do not always coincide. For example, African-Americans in the United States once did not have the *legal* right to freedom, but this does not mean they lacked the *moral* right to freedom.
- Of course, talking about "moral rights" in this way raises an **important question** that we will address in this lesson: **On what basis** should we think that any human has such a



sense that life is seriously flawed without people getting a fair chance and receiving justice. This world isn't the way it should be. We want this for ourselves and our fellow humans.

- We also desire for our lives to have *ultimate meaning and significance*. Most of us sense that human life is incredibly valuable, which is why it is so hard to accept that our lives in this world are just a brief flicker and then they go out.
- Most of us recognize the enormous value of the above. They seem like a “pipe dream” to many in this life, but we can imagine how good life would be if the world were like that. As the lesson continues, we will see that Christianity provides a moral foundation for justice, equality, and human value—but it also does more. It provides hope that our need for these things will ultimately be fulfilled. If Christianity is true, these are not pipe dreams. These things will be a reality.

## II. A Moral Foundation for Justice (Including the Rights and Equality of All Humans)

A. A brief overview of a moral case for God's existence:

1. Premise 1: If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist.
2. Premise 2: Objective moral values and duties *DO* exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.

- Keep this general summary in mind.
- A separate lesson in the “Strengthen Your Faith” series focuses on this argument. See “A Moral Argument for God's Existence.” The essence of that material is included in this lesson, so is not necessary to complete that lesson before this one. This lesson stands on its own.

B. Important terms to understand:

1. “Objective” vs. “Subjective”

- a. *Objective*: Something is true (or false) *regardless of how anyone THINKS or FEELS about it*. E.g. “The earth is a globe.” The earth is an *object* “out there” (not merely in our mind), so what is true or false about it is based on what's actually “out there.”
- b. *Subjective*: Subjective matters are *based on what someone (a subject) thinks or feels about it*. E.g. “Chocolate ice cream is the best!”

- “Objective” means independent of what any person thinks about it. For example, it is an objective fact that the earth is a globe. The earth was a globe even when most humans thought that it was flat. Whether or not it is a globe is to be determined by what is “out there,” not by what any person happens to think about it.
- By contrast, something that is “subjective” depends upon personal opinion. For example, I may think Cookies & Cream is the best flavor of ice cream, but someone else may disagree and think that chocolate is the best. There is no objective truth about the matter. What's “true” or “false” is a mere “subjective” matter, not an “objective” matter.

2. “Moral Values”: whether something is morally “good” or “bad” (e.g., justice is “good” and injustice is “bad”). Moral values in this sense must be *objective* values; they are actually good or bad regardless of how one thinks or feels about them.

- Some moral values can be viewed as *subjective*. For instance, a person might think or feel that cheating or lying or sexual unfaithfulness can be okay. These might be their *personal* moral values. But even if these are seen as personal moral values, a big question is whether the person *actually* thinks that they are merely *personal*. If someone else cheated or lied or was sexually unfaithful *to that person*, how would that person actually view it? In most, if not all, cases, somehow it would be “wrong.” That means that there is some underlying *objective* moral value involved in spite of what someone might personally claim.

3. “Moral Duties”: our moral responsibilities to abide by moral values (e.g., it is *our duty* to love children and not abuse them).

- It isn’t critical to spend a lot of time stressing the difference between moral values and duties, but it is important to explain what these terms mean.
- Moral values have to do with whether something is good or not. Justice and human equality are “good,” but injustice and inequality are “bad.”
- Moral duties are our moral responsibilities. It seems that upholding justice is a moral duty. So is treating people equally. Failure to do these things means failing to carry out a moral duty.
- Moreover, these values and duties seem to be “objective.” E.g., the Jews should be treated with the same respect as everyone else even though Hitler had a different opinion.

C. **Applying Premise 1** to justice: If God does not exist, then the objective moral value of justice does not exist. In other words, God is necessary for the objective moral value of justice and the objective duty to treat others justly.

- The moral values of justice, human value, and human equality and our moral duties to uphold these values depend upon God. Any adequate foundation for objective moral values and duties must have qualities that are found only in God.

1. Why think that God is necessary for the moral value of justice?
  - a. If there is objective morality, then something or someone must serve as the sufficient objective standard of morality (and justice).
  - b. Question: *Without God*, what would you propose as the foundation for justice and the duty to treat others justly?

- If you have time, wrestle with this for a while. Perhaps get into small groups and discuss.
- The key thing to think about is this: what would the standard of objective morality have to be like if there is such a standard? From what sort of person or thing could objective morality come? What kind of qualities must the standard have? In an atheistic world, could there be such a standard? If so, what would it be?

c. Some non-God options for the foundation of objective morality (and justice):

- (1) \_\_\_\_\_ **PERSONAL** \_\_\_\_\_ preference
- (2) \_\_\_\_\_ **SOCIAL** \_\_\_\_\_ custom
- (3) \_\_\_\_\_ **SOCIAL** \_\_\_\_\_ law

- If there really is objective morality (as there seems to be), then someone or something must exist that serves as the “moral measuring stick.” This objective moral standard is needed to establish what is objectively “good” or “bad” and to lay objective moral duties upon everyone.



(5) \_\_\_\_\_ **ETERNALLY** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ **EXISTING** \_\_\_\_\_

- If at least some moral truths are *necessary* truths (i.e., truths that couldn't be different from what they are), as they appear to be, then it seems important that the foundation for these truths is *eternal*.
- Does it not seem important that **justice**, for example, is necessarily good? In order for moral truths to be necessarily true, they must be eternally true.
- If Christian theism is true, justice could exist and be expressed eternally within the Trinity so that justice is an eternally existing moral value that existed prior to and independently of humans.

e. Note that **all five of the above qualities are attributes of God!** Also, note that atheism has nothing like this.

- All five of these plausibly seem to be qualities that the standard of objective morality must have, and all of them are attributes of God. Also, apart from God, what sort of reality could have these qualities? If atheism were true, there does not seem to be anything like that. Thus, it is hard to see how there could be a basis for objective morality if atheism were true.

D. **Applying premise 2** to justice: The objective moral value of justice *does exist*.

1. We *rightly demand justice for everyone*, which suggests that our standard is not just our personal preference or social custom or some national law; it is an *objective* moral value.
2. We *rightly criticize* others for injustice, and the only way that this moral criticism is proper is if there is an objective moral value of justice that is *above* mere individual, social, or national sentiments.

E. Conclusion: If we think that values like justice and human equality objectively exist and that we have an objective moral duty to uphold them, then God must be the basis for this.

- It seems that we cannot justify these values and duties as objectively true apart from God existing.
- Thus, worldviews that accept the existence of a personal, transcendent, unchanging, eternally existing, necessarily good Being are able to justify that justice and human equality are objectively good and we have an objective duty to uphold them.
- So if you think it is *objectively* wrong to deny justice to a human or to treat some humans as inferior, then you should think that there is good reason to believe in God.
- **Optional video:** The above reasoning is part of William Lane Craig's moral argument for God's existence and is summarized in the following 5-minute video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxiAikEk2vU>

### III. Biblical Teaching on Justice and the Rights, Dignity, and Equality of All Humans

- Let us now examine key biblical teachings that should direct our attitudes and behavior concerning justice and human equality.

A. Justice is part of God's \_\_\_\_\_ **CHARACTER** \_\_\_\_\_ (Deut 32:4; Ps 89:14; Is 30:18).

- The Bible says that one of God's essential attributes is that he is perfectly just.

- God, as the standard of objective moral goodness, could not be anything less than perfectly just.

“The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He” (Deut 32:4 NASB).

“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; lovingkindness and truth go before You” (Ps 89:14).

“Therefore the Lord longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; how blessed are all those who long for Him” (Is 30:18).

- God is perfectly just—completely “without injustice.” He will deal with us fairly. How does it help you in your relationship with God to know that God is perfectly just?

B. Because God is perfectly just, He has commanded that we must also be just. That is why it is a moral duty for us (Ps 82:1-4; Is 1:17; Micah 6:8; Lk 11:42).

“God takes His stand in His own congregation; He judges in the midst of the rulers. How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Vindicate the weak and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and destitute. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them out of the hand of the wicked” (Ps 82:1-4).

“Learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (Is 1:17).

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

“But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithes of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others” (Lk 11:42).

- We are commanded to reflect God’s character. Because God is a God of perfect justice, we must strive to carry out justice. It is our moral duty.
- In the first two of the above verses, notice the emphasis on upholding justice for the weak, the fatherless, the widow, the orphan, the afflicted, the destitute, and the needy. Why are these groups emphasized? Because they are especially vulnerable. Widows and orphans had difficulty surviving in that culture without a husband or father to provide for them. God commands us to see that justice is done for all people, but He especially emphasizes justice for those who are most vulnerable and at risk. Who are the most vulnerable, needy, and at-risk people in our culture? What can you do to ensure that justice is done for them?
- The Micah passage makes clear that God requires justice from us. It is not a suggestion. It is a command and a moral duty.
- In Luke 11, Jesus condemns the Pharisees for disregarding justice. Although they carefully followed certain aspects of God’s requirements, they did not carry out justice. Jesus considered this to be a significant problem.
- So justice is not optional for Christians. Not only does God provide a basis for the existence of justice as an objective moral duty, but God commands us in the Bible to carry out justice for all people—especially the most needy.

C. We are all made in **the image of God** (Gen 1:26-27), and this is the foundation for human value and equality.

- Why does everyone, especially those who are weak and needy, deserve justice? Why should we believe that the welfare of all humans is so important? The ultimate reason is that we are all made in “the image of God.”

- Human value and dignity do not arise from our personal achievements or our social status or our ethnic identity. They exist *independently* of these things. They exist because God created every human in His likeness. They exist because God has given every human equal status.

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:26-27).

“But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way” (James 3:8-10).

“Every single human being, no matter how much the image of God is marred by sin, or illness, or weakness, or age, or any other disability, still has the *status* of being in God’s image and therefore must be treated with the dignity and respect that is due to God’s image-bearer. This has profound implications for our conduct toward others. It means that people of every race deserve equal dignity and rights. It means that elderly people ... and children yet unborn deserve full protection and honor as human beings. If we ever deny our unique status in creation as God’s only image-bearers, we will soon begin to depreciate the value of human life, will tend to see humans as merely a higher form of animal, and will begin to treat others as such. We will also lose much of our meaning in life” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 450).

- Bible interpreters have focused on different aspects of what it means to be made in “God’s image.” Some think it mostly has to do with certain qualities that we have, such as: being personal and having a conscious mind; being capable of moral decisions; having free will; etc. Others think it mostly has to do with God giving us the role of overseeing the earth— just as God is sovereign and rules over all things, we are to rule over the earth. Still others emphasize that it has to do with our ability to have a relationship with God in a way that other creatures on this planet cannot.
- **Optional video:** William Lane Craig suggests that, regardless of which of the above views one takes on the meaning of the image of God, the image of God must include the fact that we—like God—are persons, have a conscious mind, and have free will and the ability to act morally. If we lacked such qualities, we could not have a relationship with God or oversee the earth. Watch here (3 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45gMure8bc0>
- Ultimately, what is clear about all humans being made in the image of God is that it means that all humans are incredibly valuable. You are made in God’s image and are have enormous value! All of us are incredibly far from God’s perfection. We are corrupted by sin, and we are flawed and weak. The strongest and most intelligent of us do not even begin to compare to God’s power and knowledge. But we are all made in God’s image. All of us, despite our sin and flaws, are in the divine image.
- The image of God is the basis for human value. We have objective value because God gives us value and not merely because we subjectively value ourselves. We long for justice and sense that others should have value, but these longings would be unjustified without God to serve as the foundation of objective morality and meaning and human value (as we argued above).
- James 3:9 says it is wrong to curse other people (whether Christian or not) because they “have been made in the likeness of God.” This applies to all people. So we are all valuable and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. We all should be treated equally, and everyone should receive justice.

- **Optional video:** The Christian apologist Shawn Hart discusses some of the above concepts here (4 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euvlaHcmWmo>

D. More biblical teaching on **human equality**: We are one in Christ (Gal 3:26-29), and we are commanded not to show favoritism (James 2:1-9).

Paul says: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise" (Gal 3:26-29).

James says: "My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, 'You sit here in a good place,' and you say to the poor man, 'You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,' have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (James 2:1-9).

Peter says: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him" (Acts 10:34-35).

- In Galatians 3, Paul is not denying that there are differences ethnically, socially, or in terms of gender. But **Christianity is a rejection of inequality across ethnic, social, and gender lines**. All of humanity is called to come to Christ and enter into one body. Within this body, we are all equal heirs of the promise to Abraham that God would bless the world through Christ. There is unity and equality in the body of Christ.
- But Paul still spoke about the Jews as a distinct people and about himself as a Jewish follower of Christ. He said, "I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin" (Rom 11:1). He did not deny ethnic differences. He still gave different commands to men and women (e.g., 1 Tim 2:8-15; 1 Cor 11:1-16). He did not deny gender differences. He still recognized that the institution of **slavery** had not been abolished even as he tried to encourage a slave owner to view a slave as an equal. (See Paul's book to Philemon that discusses Philemon's slave, Onesimus). Paul did not deny that social distinctions (even bad ones like slavery) still exist. But Christianity is a basis for unity and equality that is unmatched in the world. Regardless of what the world says, God's Word declares that no race or gender or social class is better than another.
- **Re: Slavery. Slavery in Bible times was not like slavery in the American South.** Here are some basic differences: (1) Slavery was not race-based; (2) Many slaves were more wealthy and better educated than free people; (3) Many people sold *themselves* into slavery as a better alternative; we should understand that there was no "social welfare" to take care of people; (4) Slavery was a prominent part of the ancient economic structure. (In Italy, 35%-40% of people were slaves.) **The basic point is this: the Bible does not promote slavery; it limits it and offers guidelines for it.** Even the Mosaic law required that slaves be set free after six years and be given many provisions (Deut 15:12-14). And while Paul recognizes Philemon's legal right to retain his slave Onesimus, he appeals to Philemon's free will to set Onesimus free.
- **In James 2**, we learn that showing preferential treatment to some people above others is a sin. Giving preferential treatment to certain people (e.g., the rich) is wrong, and so is talking to people in ways that demean them or portray them as inferior to others (vs. 1-

4). We must also be careful that we do not think about people in ways that demean them; we must guard against having “evil motives” and evil thoughts when it comes to our interactions with others (v. 4). Favoritism is inconsistent with: God’s love for all people (v. 5); the second-greatest command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (v. 8); and God’s moral law, which declares favoritism to be a sin (v. 9). Peter also emphasizes these ideas in Acts 10.

- **Optional video:** Allen Parr discusses James 2 and the importance of not showing favoritism, expounding on much of the above. We must be careful not to put up barriers against others based on what we hear about them, what we see in their appearance, or what we know about their past. It is a sin to show favoritism. Watch here (8 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50MzsBegDxo>

#### IV. Case Studies on Injustice and Inequality in Our Culture

- Let us now consider how the above biblical principles apply to specific examples of injustice and inequality in our culture. Entire lessons could easily be done on each of these, so we can only raise a few key points in this brief space.
- We will include four extremely relevant case studies: racism, sexual orientation, gender, and the unborn.

##### A. Racism

- In 2020, great attention was rightly given to the sin of racism. The tragic deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd have put the spotlight on the social injustices that black Americans continue to face. Arbery was shot to death by two white men as he jogged through his neighborhood in Georgia, and Floyd died after a white police officer held his knee on Floyd’s neck for over eight minutes. Protests broke out across the country after the distressing video of Floyd’s death was seen by millions.
- In this climate of racial tension, it is important to consider how Christianity provides a basis and a motivation for opposing racism and upholding the equal rights and equal value of people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

1. The biblical commands discussed above (e.g. justice is for all people; everyone is in the image of God; the body of Christ should demonstrate unity and equality; favoritism is sin) make it clear that **racism is sinful**. It is objectively morally wrong.

- Little more needs to be said about these points, and it should be obvious how they are incompatible with racism. One must not treat (or even think of) any human as inferior, and one must love all people as one loves oneself.
- Recall that a being such as God is necessary in order for there to be objective morality. So the existence of the Christian God *makes it possible* for racism to be objectively wrong, and the above biblical commands *make it clear* that racism *is* objectively wrong.
- Can secular worldviews really justify that racism is wrong? Most of us sense that racism is objectively wrong (wrong regardless of the fact that racists think it is fine). But apart from the existence of God, how can one justify this? If humans are just relatively advanced animals who happened to evolve on this planet by blind natural processes according to natural selection (the survival of the fittest), then who or what provides a basis for something being objectively wrong with racism? If one race comes to have more power and is able to oppress or kill off another race, is that not just survival of the fittest in action?

- Many atheists are against racism (which is a good thing), but can their worldview justify that racism is objectively wrong? Christianity can justify that it is wrong, as God has declared all people to be objectively valuable and made in God's image. Christianity can also provide a motivation for us to shun racism because Christ has loved us and sacrificed for us and has called us to love one another...

Jesus says: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35).

2. A good example versus a bad example in the Bible: Jesus and the Samaritans (Jn 4:1-45) versus Peter and the Gentiles (Gal 2:11-14).

- **In John 4:1-45**, Jesus spends time in Samaria and talks with a Samaritan woman at a well. Jesus, of course, was a Jew, and Jews did not associate with Samaritans. After the Assyrians had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in the eighth century BC, both Jews and foreigners later returned to settle the land. Samaritans are a mixed race of Jews and foreigners, and they were despised by those who were purely Jewish. Jews normally avoided Samaria entirely. But Jesus entered Samaria and asked a Samaritan woman for a drink, crossing a racial barrier that was unheard of in that culture. Jesus showed concern for the spiritual wellbeing of this woman. He did not let racial prejudice keep Him from sharing the good news with her, and He stayed in Samaria for two days teaching other Samaritans as well.
- **In Galatians 2:11-14**, the Apostle Peter did not put unity in Christ above racial differences. Peter knew that God had accepted the Gentiles (non-Jews) and that God approved of Jews eating with Gentiles (something Jews avoided doing). Peter, a Jew, had been eating with Gentiles, but when certain Jewish men showed up who did not approve of this, Peter withdrew from the Gentiles and stopped eating with them. This led other Jewish Christians to follow Peter's bad example as well. When the Apostle Paul saw this, he confronted Peter about it and reminded him that this sort of divisiveness is not acceptable for Christians. Even Christian leaders can be tempted to give into the racial divisions of the culture, but Christians must resist this and uphold unity.
- **Optional video:** Tony Evans talks about how Jesus did not let cultural or racial differences keep Him from caring about a Samaritan woman (Jn 4). Peter, on the other hand, failed at this at one point (Gal 2). Do not be ashamed of your racial identity or hide it, but never let your racial identity become more important than your identity in Christ and your calling from God to love all people. Watch here (11 min): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rI3Dlre\\_9Bg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rI3Dlre_9Bg)
- **Optional video:** Tony Evans talks about how Christianity provides a basis for unity. All Christians, regardless of race or ethnicity, are called to be one body and to achieve a common purpose (much like a football team has one aim despite being made up of people from diverse backgrounds). Evans says that Christians should be leading the way to improve race relations by promoting unity within God's kingdom. God designed us with racial differences that make us unique and special, but our identity as Christians is even more important than our racial identity. "The goal of racial unity is not sameness. It is oneness." Celebrate and do not hide your racial uniqueness, but seek unity and love above all. Watch here (13 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcApfNxZFpc>
- **Optional video:** Here is a reenactment of the story of the woman at the well from the movie "The Gospel of John" (5 min): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bt\\_9NZe-E4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bt_9NZe-E4)

## B. Sexual Orientation

- There has been a great deal of consideration given to LGBTQ rights in recent years in America, and it is important for Christians to think through what the Bible says about this topic. We can only scratch the surface here. The goal is to emphasize that: (1) Christians must love all people regardless of their sexual orientation, but Christians must not approve of violating God's boundaries on sexual activity. (2) The Bible puts boundaries on sexual activity, requiring that sex must remain within marriage (Heb 13:4) and that marriage involves a man and a woman (e.g., Gen 2:18, 24; Mk 10:6-9).

1. The biblical commands discussed above (e.g. justice is for all people; everyone is in the image of God; the body of Christ should demonstrate unity and equality; favoritism is sin) make it clear that **discrimination against, or mistreatment of, others based on their sexual orientation is sinful**. It is objectively morally wrong.

- While Christians ought never approve of sexual behavior that is outside of God's boundaries, we must show love and compassion to those who engage in sexual sin. The most loving thing that we can do for such people is to kindly encourage them away from sexual sin while showing genuine care for them as people.
- We are all sinners, but we are all made in God's image. Many who are heterosexual in their orientation fall into sexual sin by engaging in sexual behavior that is outside of God's boundaries (i.e., outside of marriage). Many humans struggle to resist sexual sin, and those who struggle with homosexual behavior should not be made out to be the worst of sinners for their particular struggle. Yet that does not mean that homosexual behavior is morally acceptable. We must love all sinners but not approve of sins.
- A well-known example of NOT treating unbelievers in a loving and respectful way is the **Westboro Baptist Church**. This group calls themselves Christian even though they are known for using hate speech targeted at homosexuals and others.
- **Optional video:** This brief clip provides an example of what the Westboro Baptist Church is known for (22 sec): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erdXo4TV6b8>
- Such people reject the Bible's emphasis on loving one's neighbor as oneself (Mt 22:39) and representing Christ with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:15-16). Jesus would condemn all such acts of hate and injustice, even if—perhaps especially if—it is done in the name of Jesus.

2. Homosexual *behavior* is outside of the boundaries that God has for sex (Lev 18:22, 20:13; Rom 1:18-28; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:8-10).

- **Homosexual conduct** was a "grievous sin" in the OT. Homosexual conduct was widespread and was part of Sodom's defiance against God (Gen 19, Jude 7). This behavior was one of a number of sexual sins that were capital crimes (Lev 18:22; 20:13) under Israel's law (along with rape, adultery, incest with one's father's wife or one's daughter-in-law, and bestiality). God takes sexual sin seriously. The NT is also clear in its condemnation of homosexual behavior (Rom 1:18-28; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:8-10).

3. The Bible never speaks about the concept of sexual *orientation* (i.e., one's attractions).

- **When the Bible speaks of "homosexuality" as a sin, it is referring to behavior, not mere attraction.** "Sexual orientation" (attraction without accompanying behavior) is a modern notion, not a biblical one. The Bible only addresses sexual orientation indirectly under the more general categories of "temptation" or "lust" (see James 1:13-15; Matt 5:27-28). So one might sin by "lusting" for someone else of the same sex even without

overt sexual behavior. However, God does not condemn a person simply for struggling with same-sex attraction; rather, it *becomes* sin when one carries out the behavior (or lust).

- The Bible condemns all sexual behavior (and lust) involving someone who is not one's spouse. God's boundaries for sex must be respected. Just as fire can warm you and heat food and be very beneficial when it is kept within the safe boundary of a fireplace, sex is a very good thing when it is enjoyed in the safe boundaries of marriage. Even if we think we know what sexual boundaries are best for us, we must submit to God in this area. We must all strive to refrain from sexual sin with God's help.
- In her book *Confronting Christianity*, Rebecca McLaughlin has a chapter on homosexuality in which she makes the following useful points. Christianity encourages deep same-sex relationships—but they must be non-sexual and non-romantic relationships, as that is reserved for marriage. Marriage is a special, God-designed, exclusive relationship that reflects Christ's special relationship with the church (Eph 5:22-33), but friendship outside of marriage is designed to be more inclusive. Different relationships have different boundaries, but nonsexual relationships—despite having a boundary of no sex—can be deeper and more meaningful in many ways than some sexual relationships. If one has no desire for marriage in the way that God designed it, one must remain single. Paul said singleness is a good thing, and Jesus was single; churches should not prevent single Christians or Christians who have same-sex attractions from being involved in church. What matters is honoring God with our sexual behavior regardless of our desires. Many people do not have the sexual fulfillment they desire, but this should point us to Christ as the ultimate fulfillment of our desires.
- **Optional video:** William Lane Craig talks about how it is homosexual behavior (not the orientation) that the Bible condemns as sinful. This is consistent in both the OT and NT. Watch here (3 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtzkHLEzPmM>

### C. Gender

1. The biblical commands discussed above (e.g. justice is for all people; everyone is in the image of God; the body of Christ should demonstrate unity and equality; favoritism is sin) make it clear that **discrimination against another person based on gender is sinful**. It is objectively morally wrong.

- Again, it should be obvious how these points are incompatible with looking at one gender as inferior to another. One must not treat—or think of—men as inferior to women or women as inferior to men.
- Here are some important verses:

“God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:27).

“However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God” (1 Cor 11:11-12).

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:26-29).

2. Women have often been mistreated and devalued throughout human history, but the truth of Christianity means that women and men are both enormously—and equally—valuable (cf. Gen 1:27; 5:1-2; Matt 19:3-4).

- Notice especially how both genders are specifically mentioned in Genesis 1:27 (and in Gen 5:1-2) when God says that humans are made in the image of God. Women and men are equally made in God's image and are thus equally valuable. How does this compare with worldviews that deny the existence of God? If there is no objective morality and no basis for viewing women as equally valuable as men, then what is to prevent men from thinking that they ought not dominate women since they are stronger? If we live in a world in which the strong survive and there is no inherent value to human life other than the value we give to ourselves, what is to stop men from devaluing women?
- But if Christianity is true, then such thinking and behavior is objectively wrong, and men who treat women in this way will be held accountable by God.

3. Men and women are one in Christ; neither is independent of, or superior to, the other (cf. 1 Cor 11:3-12; 1 Tim 2:8-15).

- In 1 Corinthians 11, we are reminded that men and women depend upon each other and neither is superior to the other. God designed men and women so that each has certain roles (e.g., men cannot bear children).
- Recall that, in Galatians 3, Paul is not denying that there are differences in terms of gender. Christianity rejects gender inequality, but it does not reject gender differences. Paul still gave different commands to men and women (e.g., 1 Tim 2:8-15; 1 Cor 11:1-16).
- God created husbands and wives to be united as one flesh, but in our fallen state there is friction. God calls the universal church (all Christians everywhere, all who are part of the body of Christ) to be unified, but we often are not. Nevertheless, Christianity offers a basis for unity and equality that is unmatched in the world.

4. Jesus elevated the status of women in a countercultural way (cf. Jn 4; Lk 8:1-3).

- In first century Israel, women were considered second-class citizens. It was a male-dominated society. We know from writings of the time that women's testimony in court was not even given credibility. But Jesus respected women and elevated them above the views of the culture. For example, not only was Jesus breaking racial barriers by talking to the Samaritan at the well, but he was also breaking a gender barrier. Talking like this in public with a woman he did not know was not the norm, which is why it surprised the disciples (Jn 4:27) and the Samaritan woman. Notice how she emphasizes not only that she is a Samaritan but that she is a *woman* (Jn 4:9). Jesus also had female followers who supported His ministry (Lk 8:1-3).
- **Optional video:** Helen Mitchell discusses the countercultural approach of Jesus toward women (8 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2v3N8BjMMI>

5. The biblical instruction that wives submit to their husbands does not mean that men are more competent or better leaders than women (cf. Eph 5:22-33).

- Wives submitting to husbands (Eph 5:22-33) is done out of submission to Christ and not because the man is more competent as a leader. This passage calls the husband to love the wife like Christ loves the church (deeply, sacrificially, and willing to die for her). Husbands are not to be tyrants or dictators. Some husbands are weaker leaders than their wives, but God does not command wives to submit because men are always better

leaders or because men are more valuable than women. The husband should aim to love his wife like Christ loves the church and should seek her best interest and listen to her, and the wife is commanded to respect her husband. This command is designed for a marriage to function smoothly and not for women to be oppressed by men.

#### D. The Unborn

1. Unborn humans are called “children” in the Bible (Lk 1:41, 44).

- The same Greek word (*brephos*) that is used for unborn babies is used for babies that are born and for small children (e.g., Lk 2:12; 2 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 2:2).

2. The life of the unborn is protected with the same punishments for injury or death that one gets for harming an adult (Ex 21:22-25).

“If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman’s husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges decide. But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise” (Ex 21:22-25).

- In Genesis 9:6, God declares the death penalty for murder. God says, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.” Because humans are made in God’s image, taking the life of another human is serious.
- In Exodus 21:22-25, the same penalty is applied to one who causes an unborn child to die. The unborn baby is considered a human, and thus his or her life must be protected.

3. God knows unborn babies personally in the womb (Ps 139:13-16; Jer 1:5).

“For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them” (Ps 139:13-16).

God said to the prophet Jeremiah: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jer 1:5).

- The Psalm 139 passage, David praises God for God’s care over David and knowledge of David when David was in his mother’s womb. God knew David and had plans for David even while he was growing in the womb. Jeremiah says the same thing.
- Do not forget also that Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, was once a developing fetus. Even then, God had plans for Jesus that were revealed to Mary (Lk 1:31-33).

4. So the biblical commands concerning justice for all people and all of humanity who are in the image of God apply to the unborn. Harming them is objectively morally wrong.

- **Optional video:** This video is not put out by a Christian group, and there is no evidence that the woman in this video is a Christian; however, she expresses guilt that is quite common among women who have had abortions. Although the right of the baby to life (due to being a human who is in the image of God) is reason enough to be pro-life, another reason is that women are often greatly troubled after having an abortion. Some people claim that being pro-life is being anti-woman, but that is not true. This video reveals the emotional pain of a young woman who got an abortion (6 min): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vkc8Emp7jvQ>

- Over a million abortions occurred each year in the United States from 1978 to 1997, but the number has been on the decline since the 1990s. Nevertheless, roughly 600,000 babies are still aborted each year in this country.

## Relevant Resources

- A note on the meaning of justice: The lesson described justice as occurring when there is consistency between what one deserves and what one receives. Although Christ received an outcome that was worse than what He deserved, He accepted this outcome *voluntarily* out of love for us. He chose to take our place and pay our penalty. **William Lane Craig** has much to say on this topic. See his article here: <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/scholarly-writings/christian-doctrines/is-penal-substitution-unjust/>. Also, see his discussion of how Christ serves as our “proxy” (a 32-minute video on how Christ chose to take the place of those who choose to enter into union with Him): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Dv1MBm6I9g>. Another good source is (24:52-37:00) of: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xYNBx6nm9kY>. You can also preview his book *The Atonement* at [https://www.google.com/books/edition/The\\_Atonement/QsliDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Atonement/QsliDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0).
- **William Lane Craig’s moral argument** for God’s existence argues that objective moral values (such as justice and human equality) and our objective duty to uphold them must be grounded in God. His argument is summarized in the following 5-minute video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxiAikEk2vU>
- Pages 127-146 of Craig’s book *On Guard* summarize his moral argument. Most or all of it should be available online for free here: [https://books.google.com/books?id=Xm55ZJSBe2AC&printsec=frontcover&dq=on+guard+craig&hl=en&newbks=1&newbks\\_redir=0&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjNx5DmwvvrnAhUCCkKwKHVxDCQsQ6wEwAHoECAMQAQ#v=onepage&q=%22can%20we%20be%20good%22&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=Xm55ZJSBe2AC&printsec=frontcover&dq=on+guard+craig&hl=en&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjNx5DmwvvrnAhUCCkKwKHVxDCQsQ6wEwAHoECAMQAQ#v=onepage&q=%22can%20we%20be%20good%22&f=false)
- William Lane Craig suggests **several possible meanings of what it means for humans to be made in “God’s image,”** and he concludes that the image of God must at least include the fact that we—like God—are persons, have a conscious mind, and have free will and the ability to act morally. If we lacked such qualities, we could not have a relationship with God or oversee the earth. Watch here (3 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45gMure8bc0>
- The Christian apologist **Shawn Hart** discusses how **the image of God is the basis for human value.** We have objective value because God gives us value and not merely because we subjectively value ourselves. We long for justice and sense that others should have value, but these longings would be unjustified without God (4 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euvlaHcmWmo>
- **Allen Parr** discusses James 2 and the importance of **not showing favoritism.** We must be careful not to put up barriers against others based on what we hear about them, what we see in their appearance, or what we know about their past. It is a sin to show favoritism. Watch here (8 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50MzsBegDxo>
- **Tony Evans** talks about how **Christianity provides a basis for unity.** All Christians, regardless of race or ethnicity, are called to be one body and to achieve a common purpose (much like a football team has one aim despite being made up of people from diverse backgrounds). Evans says that Christians should be leading the way to improve race relations by promoting unity within God’s kingdom. God designed us with racial differences that make us unique and special; but our identity as Christians is even more important than our racial identity. “The goal of racial unity is not sameness. It is oneness.” Celebrate and do not hide your racial uniqueness, but seek unity and love above all. Watch here (13 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcApfNxZFpc>
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your racial identity or hide it, but never let your racial identity become more important than your identity in Christ and your calling from God to love all people. Watch here (11 min):

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rI3Dlre\\_9Bg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rI3Dlre_9Bg)

- Here is a **reenactment of the story of the woman at the well** from the movie “The Gospel of John” (5 min): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bt\\_9NZe-E4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bt_9NZe-E4)
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# Discussion & Reflection Guide: Christianity: The Ultimate Basis for Justice and Equality

A Resource Provided by Room For Doubt

[www.roomfordoubt.com](http://www.roomfordoubt.com)

- This guide offers many excellent questions for discussion and reflection. (You could probably use these for multiple lessons.) However, given your time constraints, use your judgment in choosing those that are seen as most important and relevant for your situation.

1. What is justice, and how is it connected to the concepts of rights and equality? What are the most significant issues today that have to do with justice, human rights, and the equal treatment of all?

- Justice occurs when there is consistency between what one deserves and the outcomes that one receives (e.g., one who does what is wrong and deserves punishment suffers a consequence that is proportional to the severity of the offense). Also, justice entails that equals receive equal treatment.
- This definition contains the idea that people “deserve” certain outcomes. This assumes that humans have free choices about what they do and are responsible for their choices such that they merit certain outcomes in response to certain actions or choices. It also implies that humans have certain rights such that they deserve to be treated in accordance with these rights. Also, the principle of equality comes into play in this definition of justice. It is not just to treat equals inconsistently.

2. Why should those who have power care about the justice, rights, and equal treatment of those who are not in power?

- Given the truth of Christianity, it is objectively wrong to deny justice or equal treatment to others, and there will ultimately be accountability before God for all who withhold justice and mistreat others. But, if Christianity were not true (and especially if atheism were true), this question becomes much harder to answer.

3. What do we mean by human rights? What is the difference between moral and legal rights?

- One’s “rights,” as we use the term in this lesson, have to do with what one is entitled to morally. One may also speak of a person’s legal rights, but this is a different matter. One’s moral rights and one’s legal rights do not always coincide. For example, black people in this country once did not have the legal right to freedom, but this does not mean they lacked the moral right to freedom.

4. On what basis should we think that any human has such a thing as moral rights? Where do these rights come from? What is their basis? What guarantees that we have them and should respect them?

- This lesson is focused on how Christianity justifies that humans have certain moral rights. It aims to show why humans have a certain dignity and deserve to be treated with respect even if the law does not recognize these rights or other people do not recognize these rights.

5. The truth of Christianity means that one day there will be an ideal life of perfect justice as well as goodness, kindness, and social harmony—a life where there is love and respect for everyone and

nobody will suffer wrongly. All wrongdoers will be brought to justice. The enormous value that humans seem to have (which appears to be inconsistent with our dying after a relatively brief life) will be upheld because we will have eternal life. What is the significance of the fact that Christianity meets our deepest needs for justice, human value, and social harmony?

- It means these things are not a “pipe dream,” as they often seem to be in this life. Christianity calls us to uphold justice, human value, and social harmony in this life; however, it also means there will be ultimate justice and social harmony in the next life; moreover, human life does not face the absurdity of ending at the grave.

6. Do you remember how to define these key terms: “moral value,” “moral duty,” and “objective”?

- Moral value = whether something is morally “good” or “bad” (e.g., justice is “good” and injustice is “bad”)
- Moral duty = whether something is morally required or not—our moral “responsibilities” (e.g., loving children is a moral duty and abusing children is morally prohibited)
- Objective = does not depend upon what anybody thinks about it; true regardless of what anybody thinks (e.g., the earth is round)
- Subjective = depends upon personal opinion (e.g., Cookies & Cream is the best flavor of ice cream)

7. What does it mean to say that there are “objective moral values and duties”?

- Answer: Some things are morally good or bad regardless of what any human thinks. Also, we have certain moral responsibilities regardless of human opinion.

8. What does it mean to say the following: “If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist.”

- In any world that lacks God (i.e., in any way that we could imagine reality being that is atheistic), there would be nothing in that world that could serve as an objective standard of what is “good” or “bad” or “right” or “wrong.”

9. We learned that if there is objective morality then there must be something that serves as the standard of objective moral truth. We argued that this standard must have these five qualities: personal, transcendent, unchanging, eternal, and necessarily good. Do you think it seems reasonable that the standard of objective morality must have these qualities? Why?

- As a reminder, here were the reasons given for each of the attributes in the lesson:
- *Personal*: Morality is an aspect of persons and not impersonal things. It is persons who are moral agents and take morally significant action, so it would seem bizarre for the foundation of objective moral goodness to be impersonal. It would also be odd for an impersonal reality to be the source of moral duties. Could an impersonal reality establish moral duties and hold human persons accountable for upholding them?
- *Transcendent*: Transcendent means “beyond humanity.” It seems to be crucial that the standard or foundation of objective morality must be beyond humanity. Objective means “beyond human opinion,” so it seems that objective morality must come from a reality that is beyond humanity. A transcendent source of moral truth is needed if moral truths rise above subjective human opinion.

- *Unchanging*: Surely the source and standard of objective morality couldn't be changing. It couldn't be in flux such that what is good or bad or right or wrong today may be different from what it was yesterday.
- *Necessarily good*: The ultimate standard of objective morality must not merely be contingently good or good in virtue of something else; rather, it ought to be good in itself. It ought to be the Good. It ought to be the standard by which anything else can be called good by comparison, and it ought to be this way necessarily and not contingently. "Contingent" means it just happens to be that way—it depends on something else to make it that way and could have been different. Surely the standard of objective morality is not merely contingently good; rather, it has to be good. It is by very nature "the Good" (the very standard of what goodness is). If the standard of objective morality were not necessarily good, then it would not be a good candidate to place moral duties upon us. A source of moral duties that is not itself essentially good would be open to the criticism of being arbitrary (since it could have been different than what it is).
- *Eternally existing*: If at least some moral truths are *necessary* truths (i.e., truths that couldn't be different from what they are), as they appear to be, then it seems important that the foundation for these truths is eternal. In order for moral truths to be necessarily true, they must be eternally true. For example, if Christian theism is true, love (a moral value that seems to require not just personhood but multiple persons to give and receive love) could exist and be expressed eternally by the Trinity so that love is an eternally existing moral value that existed prior to and independently of humans.

10. If you were an atheist, how would you try to justify that there can be *objective* moral values (such as justice and human equality) and objective moral duties (such the duty to uphold justice)? If there were no God, what would you point to as the one true standard that establishes what is universally good/bad and right/wrong for all people?

- There doesn't seem to be anything in an atheistic world that would have the five qualities indicated above, and it seems that any legitimate standard of objective morality must have these qualities.

11. The Bible says God is perfectly just—completely "without injustice" (Deut 32:4). He will deal with us fairly. How does it help you in your relationship with God to know that God is perfectly just?

12. We are commanded to reflect God's character. Because God is a God of perfect justice, we must strive to carry out justice. It is our moral duty. The Bible especially emphasizes upholding justice for the weak, the fatherless, the widow, the orphan, the afflicted, the destitute, and the needy (e.g., Ps 82:1-4; Is 1:17). Why are these groups emphasized, and how does this apply to us today?

- Because they are especially vulnerable. Widows and orphans had difficulty surviving in that culture without a husband or father to provide for them. God commands us to see that justice is done for all people, but He especially emphasizes justice for those who are most vulnerable and at risk. Who are the most vulnerable, needy, and at-risk people in our culture? What can you do to ensure that justice is done for them?

13. What does it mean to be made in God's image (Gen 1:27)? Are all people made in God's image? How does this concept allow Christianity (more than other worldviews such as atheism) to justify that all people have value and deserve justice?

- Bible interpreters have focused on different aspects of what it means to be made in God's image. Some think it mostly has to do with certain qualities that we have, such as: being personal and having a conscious mind; being capable of moral decisions; having free will;

etc. Others think it mostly has to do with God giving us the role of overseeing the earth—just as God is sovereign and rules over all things, we are to rule over the earth. Still others emphasize that it has to do with our ability to have a relationship with God in a way that other creatures on this planet cannot.

- Ultimately, what is clear about all humans being made in the image of God is that it means that all humans are incredibly valuable. You are made in God's image and are have enormous value! All of us are incredibly far from God's perfection. We are corrupted by sin, and we are flawed and weak. The strongest and most intelligent of us do not even begin to compare to God's power and knowledge. But we are all made in God's image. All of us, despite our sin and flaws, are in the divine image.
- The image of God is the basis for human value. We have objective value because God gives us value and not merely because we subjectively value ourselves. We long for justice and sense that others should have value, but these longings would be unjustified without God to serve as the foundation of objective morality and meaning and human value. It is hard to see how atheism justifies that humans have intrinsic value. Who or what gives us intrinsic value if we are just animals that have accidentally evolved?
- James 3:9 says it is wrong to curse other people (whether Christian or not) because they "have been made in the likeness of God." This applies to all people. So we are all valuable and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. We all should be treated equally, and everyone should receive justice.

14. Does the Bible deny that there are differences ethnically, socially, or in terms of gender? Does the Bible declare that these differences are a basis for inequality?

- In Galatians 3:26-29, Paul is not denying that there are differences ethnically, socially, or in terms of gender. But Christianity is a rejection of inequality across ethnic, social, and gender lines. All of humanity is called to come to Christ and enter into one body. Within this body, we are all equal heirs of the promise to Abraham that God would bless the world through Christ. There is unity and equality in the body of Christ. But Paul still spoke about the Jews as a distinct people and about himself as a Jewish follower of Christ. He said, "I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin" (Rom 11:1). He did not deny ethnic differences. He still gave different commands to men and women (e.g., 1 Tim 2:8-15; 1 Cor 11:1-16). He did not deny gender differences. He still recognized that the institution of slavery had not been abolished even as he tried to encourage a slave owner to view a slave as an equal (Philemon). He did not deny that social distinctions (even bad ones like slavery) still exist. But Christianity is a basis for unity and equality that is unmatched in the world. Regardless of what the world says, God's Word declares that no race or gender or social class is better than another.

15. In James 2, we learn that showing preferential treatment to some people above others is a sin. Have you ever thought of this as a sin? What significance does this teaching have for justice and equality?

- Giving preferential treatment to certain people (e.g., the rich) is wrong, and so is talking to people in ways that demean them or portray them as inferior to others (verses 1-4). We must also be careful that we do not think about people in ways that demean them; we must guard against having "evil motives" and evil thoughts when it comes to our interactions with others (verse 4). Favoritism is inconsistent with: God's love for all people (verse 5); the second-greatest command to "love your neighbor as yourself" (verse 8); and God's moral law, which declares favoritism to be a sin (verse 9). Peter also emphasizes these ideas in Acts 10.

16. Why would it be hard to show that racism is objectively morally wrong (wrong regardless of the fact that racists think it is fine) if atheism were true?

- If humans are just relatively advanced animals who happened to evolve on this planet by blind natural processes according to natural selection (the survival of the fittest), then who or what provides a basis for something being objectively wrong with racism? If one race comes to have more power and is able to oppress or kill off another race, is that not just survival of the fittest in action?
- Many atheists are against racism (which is a good thing), but can their worldview justify that racism is objectively wrong? Christianity can justify that it is wrong, as God has declared all people to be objectively valuable and made in God's image. Christianity can also provide a motivation for us to shun racism because Christ has loved us and sacrificed for us and has called us to love one another.

17. How does Christ's love and sacrifice for us and His command for us to love one another as He has loved us provide the ultimate motivation for Christians to oppose racism?

- Jesus died for everyone, and He created all people and loves all people. He loved people of every race and ethnicity enough to die for them. You do not deserve what Christ has done for you, but He loves you and sacrificed for you. If you find it hard to love people of other racial groups, that is something you must work on. Christ loves you and loves them and requires that you love others just as Christ loves you.

18. When it comes to relating to people from other racial groups, contrast the approach of Jesus interacting with the Samaritans in John 4:1-45 with the way Peter interacts with the Gentiles in Galatians 2:11-14.

- In John 4:1-45, Jesus spends time in Samaria and talks with a Samaritan woman at a well. Jesus, of course, was a Jew, and Jews did not associate with Samaritans. After the Assyrians had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in the eighth century BC, both Jews and foreigners later returned to settle the land. Samaritans are a mixed race of Jews and foreigners, and they were despised by those who were purely Jewish. Jews normally avoided Samaria entirely. But Jesus entered Samaria and asked a Samaritan woman for a drink, crossing a racial barrier that was unheard of in that culture. Jesus showed concern for the spiritual wellbeing of this woman. He did not let racial prejudice keep Him from sharing the good news with her, and He stayed in Samaria for two days teaching other Samaritans as well.
- In Galatians 2:11-14, the Apostle Peter did not put unity in Christ above racial differences. Peter knew that God had accepted the Gentiles (non-Jews) and that God approved of Jews eating with Gentiles (something Jews avoided doing). Peter, a Jew, had been eating with Gentiles, but when certain Jewish men showed up who did not approve of this, Peter withdrew from the Gentiles and stopped eating with them. This led other Jewish Christians to follow Peter's bad example as well. When the Apostle Paul saw this, he confronted Peter about it and reminded him that this sort of divisiveness is not acceptable for Christians. Even Christian leaders can be tempted to give into the racial divisions of the culture, but Christians must resist this and uphold unity.

19. How should Christians interact with those who struggle with homosexual behavior? What are God's boundaries on sexual activity? Do most of us struggle with these boundaries?

- Christians must love all people regardless of their sexual orientation, but Christians must not approve of violating God's boundaries on sexual activity.

- The Bible puts boundaries on sexual activity, requiring that sex must remain within marriage (Heb 13:4) and that marriage involves a man and a woman (e.g., Gen 2:18, 24; Mk 10:6-9). Homosexual behavior was one of a number of sexual sins that were capital crimes (Lev 18:22; 20:13) under Israel’s law (along with rape, adultery, incest with one’s father’s wife or one’s daughter-in-law, and bestiality). God takes sexual sin seriously. The NT is also clear in its condemnation of homosexual behavior (Rom 1:18-28; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:8-10).
- Note that the Bible never speaks about the concept of a sexual “orientation” (i.e., one’s attractions). What the Bible condemns is homosexual behavior and all sexual behavior (and lust) involving someone who is not one’s spouse. God does not condemn a person simply for struggling with same-sex attraction; rather, it becomes sin when one carries out the behavior (or lust). We must all strive to refrain from sexual sin with God’s help.
- Christianity encourages deep same-sex relationships—but they must be non-sexual and non-romantic relationships, as that is reserved for marriage. Marriage is a special, God-designed, exclusive relationship that reflects Christ’s special relationship with the church (Eph 5:22-33), but friendship outside of marriage is designed to be more inclusive.

20. How does the truth of Christianity mean that women and men are both enormously—and equally—valuable? How might it be harder for worldviews that deny the existence of God to justify that men and women deserve equal treatment and are equally valuable?

- Both genders are specifically mentioned in Genesis 1:27 (and in Gen 5:1-2) when God says that humans are made in the image of God. Women and men are equally made in God’s image and are thus equally valuable. If there is no God, on what objective basis is it guaranteed that women and men are equally valuable? What would make it objectively wrong for men (since they are stronger) to dominate women? If we live in a world in which the strong survive and there is no inherent value to human life other than the value we give to ourselves, what is to stop men from devaluing women? But if Christianity is true, then such thinking and behavior is objectively wrong, and men who treat women in this way will be held accountable by God.

21. What are some ways that Jesus elevated the status of women in a countercultural way?

- In first century Israel, women were considered second-class citizens. It was a male-dominated society. We know from writings of the time that women’s testimony in court was not even given credibility. But Jesus respected women and elevated them above the views of the culture. For example, not only was Jesus breaking racial barriers by talking to the Samaritan at the well, but he was also breaking a gender barrier. Talking like this in public with a woman he did not know was not the norm, which is why it surprised the disciples (Jn 4:27) and the Samaritan woman. Notice how she emphasizes not only that she is a Samaritan but that she is a *woman* (Jn 4:9). Jesus also had female followers who supported His ministry (Lk 8:1-3).

22. Why are wives to submit to husbands? What does that involve, and what are the responsibilities of the husband and the wife in this submitting?

- The fact that wives are to submit to husbands does not mean that men are more competent or better leaders than women. Wives submitting to husbands (Eph 5:22-33) is done out of submission to Christ and not because the man is more competent as a leader. This passage calls the husband to love the wife like Christ loves the church (deeply, sacrificially, and willing to die for her). Husbands are not to be tyrants or dictators. Some husbands are weaker leaders than their wives, but God does not

command wives to submit because men are always better leaders or because men are more valuable than women. The husband should aim to love his wife like Christ loves the church and should seek her best interest and listen to her, and the wife is commanded to respect her husband. This command is designed for a marriage to function smoothly and not for women to be oppressed by men.

23. The lesson noted that unborn humans are called “children” in the Bible (Lk 1:41, 44), and this is the same Greek word (*brephos*) that is used for babies that have been born and for small children (e.g., Lk 2:12; 2 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 2:2). We also saw that the life of the unborn is protected with the same punishments for injury or death that one gets for harming an adult (Ex 21:22-25), and God knows unborn babies personally in the womb (Ps 139:13-16; Jer 1:5). How does this help you to think through the issue of whether unborn children are humans made in God’s image that deserve protection from abortion?

- The biblical commands concerning justice for all people and all of humanity being in the image of God apply to the unborn. Harming them is objectively morally wrong.

24. What are your biggest takeaways from this lesson?