

# What does it mean to be accountable to God?

## TRANSCRIPT

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**NOTE: This transcript was AI-generated and has not been fully edited.**

[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** This is the Denison Forum Podcast. I'm Mark Turman, Executive Director at Denison Forum, sitting down again for another conversation with Dr. Jim Denison, our Cultural Apologist and Founder at Denison Ministries and Denison Forum. Jim, welcome back to the podcast.

[00:00:17] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Thank you, Mark. Glad to be on with you. Always. It's always a privilege.

[00:00:20] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, we're excited. The Denison Forum Podcast as well as all that we do at Denison Forum is intended to equip people to think biblically, to live holy, or I, as I like to say, to live beautiful lives, to serve redemptively and to make the world a better place for everybody until Jesus comes again.

And we're going to talk about one of the perhaps more confusing less talked about teachings of God's word that really does relate to a lot of things, but we're moving closer and closer to that time that the Bible tells us about when Jesus is going to come again and that the world, as we oftentimes referred to as the end times, the Bible says near the latter end of of its writings and Timothy, that one of the characteristics of these days would be that people would not endure sound doctrine.

And one of those things that we want to talk about is just what I've called the doctrine of accountability, sometimes called the doctrine of judgment. It contains things like the reality that the Bible teaches of condemnation, the doctrine of hell. And we just want to talk about that for a few minutes today and Jim, get your thoughts about how that equips us to think biblically, to live

holy and to serve redemptively in this world. And maybe as a way to just get us started on this big conversation is just to say, why do Christians need to know about what do they need to think about when it comes to being accountable to God? Why is that important?

[00:02:34] **Dr. Jim Denison:** That's a great question. I think it's on two levels. First of all, because the Bible keeps telling us that and scripture wouldn't tell us something we don't need to know. You and I come at the culture from this kind of Western sort of Plato, Aristotle's subjective sort of love to ask questions that don't have practical consequence necessarily.

Really interested in subjective kind of speculative thinking. I got asked some questions the other day in Sunday school from some folks that wanted to know It had to do with the Tower of Babel and some things that about all of that, that they were interested in, but there wouldn't have any practical consequence.

And I often say that if there's not a practical solution or practical consequence, you may not be asking a biblical question, not that it's a wrong question, but it may not be what the Bible intends to do because the Bible intends to be practical. Well, that means when the Bible does say something, you can know that it does have practical consequence. When Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5, that we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, that we may receive what is what we essentially a reward or punishment for the things that we've done in the body, whether good or bad, when he writes in 1 Corinthians 3, that we'll all go through judgment, not relative to our salvation, but relative to rewards or loss of.

Our works will be tested by fire, as it says, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw. And if something is burned up in the fire, we'll be saved, but yet so as by fire. When the Bible makes those statements, we can know it's relevant or the Bible wouldn't say it. So we can start with that. We need to know that because God told us so, and God doesn't tell us something we don't need to know.

But on a second level, I think one way we can know why the Lord would tell us that has to do with what God knows about basic human nature. Many years ago, in the first church I was pastoring, one of the elderly men in the church, a real mentor to me, and I were talking about something we were frustrated about together.

And he said, you know, he learned over the years, people don't do what you expect, they do what you inspect. And I found that to be true over the years. We all need to be held accountable. Otherwise, we're not going to live lives the way that our lives ought to be lived. There are things in my life I just don't want to do, Mark.

If I'm not going to be held accountable for it, I'd just rather not do it. If it's going to cost me more than it thinks, I think it's going to benefit me. If the long term gain is too far out there for the short term loss, if it's just something I'd rather not do or would rather do, And there's no accountability in my life, then have to admit, I'm like Paul in Romans seven, the things I don't want to do or what I do and the things I do or the things I don't want to do.

We all have this will to power, this drive, this desire to be as God. So accountability helps us be our best selves. That's what I'm saying. When God reminds us of accountability in the present and the future, he's not making a cosmic killjoy. He's not doing this because he doesn't love us. He does. He doesn't.

He does it because He loves us. He's like that parent that keeps the child from playing in the street because that's what's best for the child. We can know that anything God does is best for us because God is love. It's his nature. He can't help but love us. He loves each of us as if there were only one of us like Augustine said.

God loves you as much as he has ever loved any human being in all of human history. So accountability is an expression of his love by which he helps us do that which is best for us that we might not do. Otherwise, and that to me is one explanation for why scripture so clearly and consistently speaks of the accountability that God brings into our lives.

[00:05:57] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, to help us to understand the Bible often says, or the Bible makes clear that God is love. And we often hear that coming particularly from people who are not Christians, but may know something about the Bible. In the same way, wouldn't we say that God is righteousness or God is holy, that God is true?

I'm just thinking you know, literally from the pages of Leviticus, the early pages of the Bible, all the way to the letter that's just about at the end of the Bible where Peter is writing and he says the same thing that you find in Leviticus, which God says, I am holy and I want you to be holy.

Why do you think, you know, we don't nearly say God is righteous in the same amount of frequency that we say God is love, but don't we have to hold those two things together?

[00:06:45] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Absolutely. In fact as you know, in the Bible, you emphasize by repetition for instance, in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, we're told that God is holy. You and I would say holy, or holy, yes, to get to the superlative level. The Bible repeats the same word three times to get to that level.

The only attribute about God in scripture elevated to the third level is his holiness. The Bible doesn't say God is love. The Bible says God is holy. The Bible also says our God is a consuming fire. And so, when we come along and say God is love, so that's the only attribute of God there is, or at least the only one we ought to be thinking about, we're losing the balance of Scripture here.

If you're just going to weight God's attributes by repetition, you put holiness first. You'd look at his love in light of his holiness, not the other way around, which is what our feelings centered kind of subjective sort of, we think because God is love is God. We have this kind of idea that love, whatever it is, whatever it means is the highest value in this day with LGBTQ activism being so commonly around us.

We hear all the time. Love is love. Love is love. And what they're trying to say is that same sex love is just as valid as opposite sex love or opposite gender love to which I want to come along and say, all right, well, if you're going to say all love is love, does that apply to polygamy? Does that apply to pederasty?

Does that apply to adults wanting sexual relations with children? What does, is there a rule here? Is there a line anywhere in your world? But in our culture, we just want to say, love is love and love wins. And therefore, because God is love wins. And to your point, has to be balanced with the rest of what scripture says about God.

Because the best way to understand God's love is to understand that it's a holy Love. Because he is love, he can only want what's best for us. Because he's holy, his best is always best. He can never make a mistake, because he's holy. So whatever he does for us, out of love, must be best for us, or God wouldn't do it.

Balancing love and holiness is the best way of understanding each of those.

[00:08:50] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And it's so important to have that framework. Because when you're reading the Bible is sometimes it's just hard to kind of square these things up. And one of the. One of the things I want to do in this conversation is talk along the lines of individual accountability or personal accountability, and then what we might call corporate or group accountability.

But just recently many of our listeners, I suppose, will remember the name Henry Blackaby. Henry Blackaby died a couple of weeks ago, just too much shy of his 90th birthday. You and I remember from our pastoring days back in the nineties and into the early two thousands Dr. Black, have he created a book based on the life of Moses called experiencing God and thousands, tens of thousands of people did this study that is based on the life of Moses.

And so that was on my mind recently. And I also read. The story of Moses leading the children of Israel in the wilderness because of their sin. And there's a lot to think about there. They get to one particular place again called Meribah where there's not enough water or there's no water. And the people start complaining to Moses.

He goes to God. God says come back and speak to the rock. But instead of speaking to it, Moses takes his staff and he hits the rock twice. And God brings water from it. But then God says to Moses, because you didn't do what I said. You're not going to now have the privilege of leading the people of Israel into the promised land when this 40 year experience of accountability is over.

And I've thought this myself, and I've heard others talk about this, that seems like a harsh punishment for a really great leader. Now we're going to have some other examples I'll bring up in a minute. Can you just kind of give us your insight on that particular experience? God's judgment of Moses at that point seems overly harsh for all the ways that Moses had tried to be faithful.

How are we to think about something like that?

[00:10:58] **Dr. Jim Denison:** first of all, it doesn't it? If God were to judge me that way and take this one issue compared to everything else that we know about Moses over here and say, based

on this one thing, you have vetoed your right to come into the promised land, despite what you did relative to Pharaoh, what you did leading us through the Red Sea and through these 40 years and the Decalogue and, you know, the first five books of the Bible, I mean, has there been a more consequential figure than Moses, except of course, Jesus, and then perhaps Paul really in all of human history.

And so he makes this one mistake where he's supposed to speak to the rock and he strikes it instead. And for that, he's not allowed into the promised land. He can only see it from Nebo, but he can't go in. Boy, you look at that. You listen to that and you think, well, boy, that seems harsh. That seems unfair, doesn't it?

And based on what we know of the story. I could see why someone would think that, because I certainly would agree with that as well. So two thoughts in response. First of all, the Bible doesn't tell us everything we want to know, just everything we need to know. We don't know the whole story there. We don't know how a God who is holy, and can never make a mistake made that decision.

Clearly he didn't make a mistake, even though it seems just like he did, because he can't. Clearly, he was not being unfair to Moses, because he can't be unfair. He wasn't being unloving, because he can't be unloving. And so here I am, coming along, being platonic and Aristotelian, and asking speculative questions, and wanting to know more than the text wants to tell me, because it doesn't have a practical consequence, and assuming that what I know about that story is all that can be known.

And once I make that assumption that all that can be known is what the text tells us, then I can jump to the conclusion that I'm more fair than God is, that I'm more just than God is. And if I'd only been there instead of God, Moses would have had a better shake. Well, that's because I'm coming to the text from the wrong position, from assuming that God isn't what the Bible says God is, and assuming that the text tells us everything that there is to know about that story.

That's the first thing to say. A second thing to say is, Moses never seems to raise the objection that we do. He'll bring it up, multiple times from that point all the way up to the very end of his

life, at the end of the book of Deuteronomy. But nowhere does Moses ask our question. Nowhere does Moses raise his hand and say, Well now God, this is unfair.

God, look at all the good things I did and yet this one thing. God, you're being unfair to me. He never complains to God about that. And it's not that the Bible doesn't record people complaining to God. I'm reading the book of Job right now. In my own personal Bible study and in Holy Scripture, you've got chapter after chapter of Job complaining to God that he's being treated unfairly.

Had Moses felt that way, I think we might've known it, but nowhere in the text does Moses raise that question, which causes me to think that again, Moses knows more to the story than we do. Moses knows there's more about this than we do, and Moses knows that God can't make a mistake, and therefore this wasn't a mistake.

One last thing to add, conjecture that kind of connects the dots would be that perhaps in the doing of this, Moses was stealing glory for himself, because it seemed he was, that Moses was taking direct action on this, that Moses was acting as though he were God. That Moses was stepping in the place of God.

Well, in that case, why did God allow the water to come forward? Well, because the people so desperately needed it would be the answer. He knew how desperately they needed, this need was great, so Moses honored that, but at the same time, or God did, but at the same time, God wouldn't let Moses steal his glory.

They say if you want to get along with God, stay off his throne. And again, that's not because God's a negativist. It's because God knows it's best for us not to try to be on God's throne, not to take the weight of glory that only the Lord can carry. One last thought, Moses doing this, if in fact what's happening is Moses is stealing the glory of God.

This is a signal that God needs to send. This is an example God needs to set. If this could happen to Moses, it could happen to me. If God would judge Moses for stealing God's glory, God would do the same for me. Perhaps that story is recorded in Scripture as a warning to the rest of us. But I go back to say again, Moses nowhere asks our question.

So at least in his mind, it was not unfair. Even though it seems to us like it is because we think we have the right to judge the character of God. And we think we know all that can be known from what the text tells us. And those are obviously inaccurate assumptions to make.

[00:15:21] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And it, it seems to me that just by you pointing that out that Moses may have had the place or came to the place eventually of just saying, you know what, God was right in what he decided in that moment. And it makes me also wonder about what we read hundreds of years later from the writings of James, where James says.

Not many of you should be teachers or leaders in the church because you will incur a stricter judgment that there's a higher level of accountability. For those who are given places of greater influence, particularly within the church, within the spiritual community, and that I almost had the sense of reading it recently where God was just trying to say, you know what, Moses had done a lot of good.

And he, at the same time was not a perfect person. We know that he had complaints and doubts and all of those kinds of things. And it was never going to be, Hey, we're, it's never the case in the Bible where we're trying to weigh out that you do more good things than bad things. That's, if that were the case, we would all be in trouble Moses as well.

So it's never a matter of scales cause we would never anywhere get close. But there is this principle that if God gives you places of significant influence, particularly somebody like Moses, that there's a higher level of accountability that we all need to be aware of. And so in that way, it is a living out of what James says in some way, isn't it?

[00:16:43] **Dr. Jim Denison:** It really is. I absolutely agree. And that's back to using Moses as an example. And in a way that seems unfair to Moses, but Moses didn't consider to be unfair. You know, Mother Teresa said, I know that God won't give me more than I can handle. I just wish he didn't think so highly of me. Well, to turn that in this direction, I know that the higher my visibility, the more my example matters. In the kingdom of God, and the more the Lord will judge more strictly those that he has called to higher places of influence, higher places of impact and significance. And scripture just says that, as you pointed out.

And so Moses is kind of exhibit A of that, I would think we might say.



[00:17:22] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And I think there's as you pointed out just a moment ago, and a really interesting thing for us to realize is that in this, even in this story with Moses and the striking of the rock and the gushing of the water, there lays side by side, both the justice, the righteousness of God and the mercy of God, as you pointed out, God still let the water flow, which was a complete act of mercy and grace and provision on God's part.

But it lies side by side with this.

[00:17:50] **Dr. Jim Denison:** So,

[00:17:51] **Dr. Mark Turman:** forfeiting his privilege of going into the promised land. And so we see those two things sitting side by side in the very same story. And that's not the only place that shows up in scripture. So let me widen this out. I wonder how. You might respond to somebody who is not a Christian or somebody who was struggling with doubts, particularly reading the Old Testament.

Sometimes reading the Old Testament can be a really challenging thing, but we read the story of Noah and the flood in the early chapters of Genesis, and then we read the story that's very familiar in many people's minds in some way. of Sodom and Gomorrah and the destruction of those cities by fire, because of their sinfulness it almost is like at times that somebody might step back and say, you know, God is saying you have to love me and you have to follow me, or I'm going to destroy you, which sounds like a coercive.

Kind of dynamic, a coercive kind of faith and following how would you respond to somebody that was looking at it that way? What's wrong with seeing the character of God in that way?

[00:19:00] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I grew up that way. I grew up thinking that God had a big scale and the good goes here and the bad goes there and wherever the scale tips determines where you go. Essentially, most of the world's religions have some version of what I just said, whether it's the fourfold noble truth and eightfold noble path of Buddhism on its way to Nirvana, or it's a 613 laws of Judaism or the five pillars of Islam or multiple reincarnated lives of Hinduism.

There's this works righteousness, sort of an idea here, and this sense that God is like Zeus. at the top of Mount Olympus, waiting to throw thunderbolts at people that he doesn't like, people that

displease him on some arbitrary or capricious sort of a level. And so you kind of got to go around life just always kind of afraid of God.

And the Bible speaks of being afraid of God. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. And so we can go, so this is the kind of God we have here. We have the kind of God that's willing to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, willing to destroy the world with a flood. What a mean, angry, capricious God this is. I really don't want anything to do with a God like that.

It's what C. S. Lewis said after his wife died. He said he wasn't afraid, he thought, that he was going to stop believing in God. What he was afraid of was that he was discovering this is the kind of God he has been all along. The kind of God that wouldn't answer his prayers, the kind of God that would allow his wife to suffer greatly before her death due to bone cancer, Joy Davidman Grisham that we're afraid that's the kind of God that's really is.

Now, one way to get out of that is to have an Old Testament God and a New Testament God, that you've got the God over there that we don't like very much, but the good news is we're New Testament Christians, and now we turn the other cheek, and now we follow Jesus, and Jesus demonstrates that God now is a God of love.

So, God grew up. Or, we've got a different God now, and all the things inside that, ignoring the fact that Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple, and Jesus warned Jerusalem that it would be destroyed, and Jesus in Matthew 23 is very willing to call the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites, and all that he said to them as well.

So, at the end of the day, I think we come back to where we were earlier. The Bible says, God is holy. The Bible says, God is love. It just says that. I'm either going to measure what I don't understand about God through the prism of what I do, or the other way around. I'm going to judge God's love by Sodom and Gomorrah, or judge God's love by the flood, or I'm going to judge the flood by God's love, and Sodom and Gomorrah by God's love.

I choose to do the latter. I choose to judge what I don't understand about God through the prism of what I do. God being a God who is love, why would he allow, or even cause, the flood? Why would he judge Sodom and Gomorrah? And I come out at a different place. So because God is holy, God cannot allow unpunished sin.

He can't do that and be holy. You can't be a good policeman and allow people to break the law and be a good policeman. God's holiness requires That sin must be punished. It must be punished. And so he sends warning after warning. Noah was a preacher of righteousness for a hundred years We think as he's building the ark as you put together what Peter says with the chronologies and Genesis You've got Abraham that's warning the people praying for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

You've got Lot It was a righteous man there. You've got the people being warned repeatedly You've got this God of love warning people not to commit sin or the consequence of their sin Because the soul that sins shall die. Sin cuts me off from God. God is the source of life. When I sin, it's like cutting flowers off at the root.

They may look alive, but from that moment forward, they've died. Death is the consequence of sin. That's why in Genesis where Adam and Eve were told not to sin, because if they sinned, they would die. The sin cuts us off from the righteous God, and the consequence is death. is death. Because God is holy, He must punish sin in order to be holy.

That punishment is actually for our good, because that accountability is what calls us, those of us that have not yet made the decision Sodom and Gomorrah made, and not yet committed the sins that had occurred in Genesis 6, not to commit those same sins. And so at the end of the day, I have to believe God deals with us as gently as He can, or as harshly as He must.

In Genesis 6, he must have done everything he could, same with Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. Must have done everything he could. Because he has love to warn them, to bring them to repentance. Paul, Peter said, God is not willing that any should perish, but all should come to repentance. Paul writes in 1 Timothy, God wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

God didn't want to punish in the flood. God didn't want to punish Sodom and Gomorrah. I have to believe he gave them every opportunity he could until finally he knew in his omniscience they were not going to repent. And because He's a God of holiness, He must punish unrepentant sin. That's in the Bible as an example for us.

God deals with us as gently as He can or as harshly as He must. But at the end of the day, because He's holy, He has to punish sin. Even because He's love, He'll do all He can to warn us before that day comes. And to me, that's how we put those two facts of God together.

[00:24:07] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. So good. A foundation for where our thinking needs to go. And like I said, as you referred to the all knowing aspect of God, only God would be able to know when he had done all that could be done. You know, we talk a lot, we talk a lot and we are grateful that God is as patient as he is.

But God knows and only God can know where the end of his patients should be. And that's something that we have to, by faith, accept is that he perfectly knows when that place arrives and what the right next step is after you get to that point of. Of offering as much patience as possible, which really kind of sets up a framework for what I wanted to kind of ask you next about, which is in what sense?

In what sense does accountability and judgment? make our lives meaningful. Some people sometimes say, well, you don't even have to have this belief in accountability and judgment, but how could our lives be meaningful without it? If we just didn't believe in this accountability.

[00:25:18] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, really on three levels. I think we can respond to that. The first is just basic human nature. We are ourselves much more at peace. I think much more peace for themselves and others when we know what the rules are, when we know where we can and can't live in a way that flourishes in our sake and for the sake of others.

There was a study done some time ago of playgrounds without fences. Yeah. When the kids were allowed to play at the playground, but there were no fences, they stayed right by the equipment. They didn't know how far out they could go. So they stayed next to the swing set, next to the slides, and were pretty scared.

And were right there. Then when the fences were put up, now they knew how far they could go and they roamed. Now they roamed the entire playground. Now they ran. Now they played chase. Now they had more fun. Now they got better exercise because they knew what the limits were. They knew where they could go without harming themselves.

We all want to know that we all want to know that, which is dangerous to us. We want to know what food we shouldn't eat. We want to know what things we shouldn't drink. When we travel overseas, we want to know, can we drink the water or not? Can we eat this food or that food? They're just things that we want to know because we know that we live in a fallen world, the things out there that will hurt us, the things we can do that will hurt us and knowing what the rules are, knowing what the laws are is best for us.

And we somehow instinctively know that. But second, we're social animals. God said, it's not good for the man to be alone. I will provide a helper for him. And because we're social animals, we want to know the rules because we instinctively intuitively don't want to hurt other people either. Now we all have bad days.

I know that, but on our good days, we want to know what the rules are so we can know what our behavior is. It's going to help others to flourish. As well, we want to know about our spouses, our love languages, as we used to say, we want to know what benefits them and what hurts them, what grieves them, what encourages them, what we can do that can demonstrate our love for them and can serve them and our children and our grandchildren, even our perfect grandchildren, like yours and mine, we want to know how we can live, what the rules are.

For to live in ways that are most effective for them. When you keep your grandkids overnight, one of the things you ask the parents, okay, what are the rules? When do they go to bed? When do they get up? What can't they eat? What homework do they need to be doing? What can we do to ensure they're flourishing for their sake?

But then on a third level, there's an instinctive need in us to know and have a right relationship with the one who made us. The oldest art yet discovered on the walls of Lascaux, France is worship art. It's on some level, in some Neolithic level, depicting God or the gods or some act of worship of some kind, some reverence of some kind.

Our souls are restless to the rest in Him, like Augustine said. So there's something in us that wants to be right with God. And we want to know what the rules are. It's the rich young ruler coming to Jesus saying, what do I need to do to inherit eternal life? It's the 613 laws of Judaism.

It's a reason that every religion that I know of has some kind of rules basis around itself, because we want to live lives that flourish, that God can bless as well.

And we know that there are rules involved in any relationship of any kind, much less with the Holy God. So seeking accountability is what's best for us. It's what's best for our relationships. And it's best, most of all, for our relationship with the Holy God.

[00:28:27] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And it's so necessary in my mind that all of what you're describing is the way that our lives and our choices matter and because if we don't believe that our choices matter, that they have both consequence and reward, then we're just left to this kind of fatalistic nebulous, nothing ultimately matters.

More than just in the moment that it happens. And I love what you're saying is that God wants us to know his will. He wants us to know him and know his way. And he reveals that to us. He's revealed it to us in the person of Jesus. He's revealed it throughout the Bible. And he's also revealed it through his Holy Spirit who is with us.

I would hope it's probably not true, but I would hope that all of our listeners. Know that Denison Forum is a part of a larger ministry called Denison Ministries. And one of the other things that we have in that larger ministry is a devotional resource that we call First Fifteen. It's just First One Five dot org.

And people can spend time with God by utilizing the devotional resource. And one of the things that First Fifteen is talking about right now is the gift of the Holy Spirit, this gift that comes after Jesus. Ascends back into heaven. He promises that his spirit will come and that the spirit Jesus says tells us a lot right before he goes to the cross about the work of the Holy Spirit and his teaching and guiding us into the things of God, into the ways of God and one of the things Jesus said right before he was arrested.

He said that the Holy Spirit That he was promising would come and that he would convict us of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Can you unpack that statement a little bit? What does it mean? For this Holy Spirit coach and guide to have this convicting role in our lives. How does that work?

[00:30:24] **Dr. Jim Denison:** First of all, let's say what it doesn't mean. And then what it does mean. What it doesn't mean is that you and I have that same ability. You and I can't convict a single soul of a single sin, we can't save a single sin, or we can't change a life, we can't heal a marriage, we in our own agency cannot change human hearts, human words can't change human hearts, only the Holy Spirit can do that.

So to move back over to who the Holy Spirit is and what he does in our lives, the Spirit understands us. He knows our minds. He knows our thoughts. If we're believers, he lives inside us. He prays for us with groanings that cannot be uttered. So he knows us better than we know ourselves. He is omniscient because he is the third member of the omniscient triune God.

He knows all that's ever happened. He knows all that will ever happen. And he therefore is better at convicting us of sin, of things that are going to harm us and others and our relationship with God than any other agent possibly could be. He is better at convicting us of righteousness, of those things that we ought to do that are righteous as opposed to sinful, and better at preparing us for judgment, and if necessary, bringing judgment into our lives.

Because again, he is omniscient, he is omnipotent, he loves us. When the Bible says God is love, it's referring to the Holy Spirit as well as the Father and the Son. He only wants what's best for us. He lives in us. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, of Christ as our Lord. And so He alone has that capacity to convict us of sin, to move us into righteousness, to prepare us for judgment in ways that will be to our eternal benefit and good.

All of that is the work of the Spirit in our lives. That's why it's so urgent to start every day as Ephesians 5. 18 says, by being filled with the Spirit. It means being controlled by the Spirit. It means we take a moment and we literally ask the Holy Spirit to take control of our minds and our lives. We submit the day to Him.

We ask Him to show us anything we need to confess and we confess whatever comes to our thoughts. We ask His forgiveness, His cleansing grace. We ask Him to lead us through the day. Then when we have decisions to make, even conversations like this, we're asking the Holy Spirit to lead us. We're asking him to give us words to say.

Jesus promised us that the Holy Spirit would tell us what to say when we needed to know what to say. I've heard myself even today say things I didn't plan to say, things that the Holy Spirit, I think, has prompted in my mind in our conversation today. So we walk through the day being led by, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and he leads us into our best lives, into our best relationships, and into our best relationship with our Father as well.

[00:32:52] **Dr. Mark Turman:** So helpful. Jim, I've heard you say, I don't know countless times that we live in a time where people want to say that there's no such thing as truth and that all truth is personal and subjective. And when you get in, you know, You and I know that the word conviction is a word that you typically hear in church settings, in religious settings.

You don't hear it too much out in the general public so much, but you do hear out in those environments when you get into any kind of conversation about truth, sometimes you'll often find yourself stumbling into a conversation about words like shame and guilt. And you'll hear people say that, you know, they don't want to be around anything that might produce.

Shame or guilt in them. Can you kind of unpack that a little bit? We stumbled into this conversation a number of weeks ago, and I wanted to come back to it. Just this idea of shame versus guilt is either or both of them biblical. If so, what's the difference or is one of them not biblical? How would you explain the difference?

[00:33:53] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, in my thinking, I don't know that either of them are God's intention for us. Shame is continued, a lot of ways to define it, but I would think it's it's kind of a general sense of lesser than. I'm ashamed as a person. You can be ashamed of specific things. You can feel yourself to be A person worthy of shame, just kind of in general, guilt tends, I think, to be more specific.

I feel guilty about X. I feel guilty because I didn't do Y or because I had that thought or said that word or whatever it might be. In both cases, I'm dealing with the present consequences of previous sins, of previous failures in my life. And I might have an overall sense of shame or I might feel guilt about specific things.

Well, if I'm feeling both either of those, what that says to me is I either haven't I haven't confessed that sin to God and claimed his forgiveness, or I haven't really believed what the Bible



says he does when I do. Because the Bible says, 1 John 1, 9, If you confess your sin, he is faithful and just to cleanse you from, to forgive your sin and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

I love that the word all is there. All. Unrighteousness, no loopholes. Then the Bible says that God separates our sin from us. As far as the East is from the West, Micah seven says he buries it in the depths of the deepest sea. Isaiah 43, 25 says he remembers it no more. So the next time you confess that sin, God won't know what you're talking about because he has this divine omniscient ability not to remember what he has forgiven.

You and I don't have that ability with ourselves and with others. And so God's grace. Is greater than all our sin, as we sing, even over the guilt and the shame that we often feel as a result of it. So if I'm living in guilt and shame, it's because I haven't confessed that to God. It's because I don't believe that God says what he says about that.

Or on a third level, it's because I still feel the need to punish myself. For what God won't punish me about. I think we talked about this the other day, but I think it's part of human nature, isn't it? If I back into your truck, I have to pay for that. Now, if you back into my truck, I can say, It's alright, I've got insurance, don't worry about it.

If I back into your truck, I want to make that right. I don't want to feel indebted. I want to make things right. So when God refuses to punish my sin, I punish myself. And I do that by beating myself up over with guilt over that sin or shame over kind of a pattern of sin. And I'll do that long enough, deeply enough until I finally come to the belief that maybe I'll punish myself enough.

And now I can finally let myself off the hook and can kind of go on about my life. Having feeling, having felt that I somehow paid the debt that God actually already paid on the cross. So. Either I haven't confessed it, or I haven't believed that God's forgiven me, or I still want to punish myself if God won't punish me.

And all of that, I think, goes to the guilt and shame. That is not God's intention for us. I will add this, Mark. Most of the world's religions, some even think all apart from Christianity, are shame and guilt centric. they center in making you feel guilt about the wrong things you've done and

feel ashamed that you did it as a means of keeping you from doing it in the future and as a means of reforming your behavior in the present.

The Bible isn't that. The Bible says, For by grace are you safe through faith, that not of yourselves is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. The Bible doesn't require guilt and shame to be forgiven because Jesus already took all our guilt and shame. On the cross, and the debt is paid.

There's no other debt left for you to pay. And if you're trying to pay it yourself, you're doing something God's already done.

[00:37:31] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, it makes me think again of something that Henry Blackaby said years ago. You know, the idea of, you know, we've probably all heard people say, we've probably thought it ourselves well. The person I harmed forgave me and God forgave me, but I can't forgive myself. Henry Blackaby said on one occasion when it came to being used by God, he said if you say that God can't use you, you've actually said more about God than you have about yourself.

You've shorted God and the same kind of false. really comes in the air when you say, well, God may have forgiven me, but I can't forgive myself. So I'm going to need to continue to punish myself or torture myself over something. When you adopt that idea, rather than trusting in what you just quoted, first John one, nine was one of my pastor's favorite verses.

You've actually said more. About your arrogance than you have about God's grace that you won't allow grace to operate in your life that an eternal, perfect and holy God has offered to you. That's really a false humility and a strange kind of arrogance that we all need to think deeply about.

Before we move on, we're going to have a few minutes to talk about a new resource that we're going to let let people have a opportunity to know about. But it seems like forever ago, I think it was about 18 months ago that you and I had the opportunity to lead a tour in Israel. And one of the places we went was new to me.

We went to the village of Korazin and while we were there, we got to visit the synagogue that is still there. And one of the things you talked about at that moment was how Jesus came there and

he actually said something. Relevant to our conversation today about this community. He pronounced what the Bible calls is a woe or a word of judgment over this city.

He said, woe to Corzine and woe to Beda, which was a neighboring village because of their disbelief. What are we to take it when Jesus pronounces a. like this over an entire community. He actually does it in places like Matthew 23 when he's talking to the religious leaders and he takes them as a group and.

He calls them like seven times out for being hypocrites because of how they are not living the things that they're supposed to be living, that they are teaching to others. So how do we think about this this action of Jesus, this action of God of corporate judgment and accountability. We so oftentimes just think of it in a personal way, as we've been just talking about today, which is appropriate.

But how do we think about it from a biblical standpoint on a corporate standpoint?

[00:40:16] **Dr. Jim Denison:** That's a great question. And it is interesting that because Jesus did curse Corazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum and said of them that that had compared them to Sodom and Gomorrah unfavorably and pronounced judgment against them, that over the centuries all three were abandoned. And now, as you know, having been to all three spots, all three places they're no longer inhabited.

Any of them are, which is maybe kind of an interesting point to me. It says something about the collective consequences of individual sin. Sin is a personal individual matter. No one can make me sin. I can't make anybody else sin. All sin is a personal individual decision to disobey God to rebel against God.

But my sin can cause other people to sin as well in the sense of enticing them in the sense of luring them. in the sense of motivating them. And so it can be that the sins of some in Chorazin could have led others to commit such sin on such a wholesale level that then judgment against the collective was necessary.

That's one way in which individual sin can affect the collective. The other way, and this is a really tragic part of the story as well, it is a fact of scripture and a fact of history that sin does

often affect those that don't commit that sin. That there are individuals who are the innocent victims of guilty acts, the person that gets drunk and smashes his car into somebody that wasn't drinking.

The person who well, the Vladimir Putin invasion of Ukraine, the Holocaust obviously comes to mind, where the sins of some do have consequences for those that didn't commit those sins. And so it could be that not every single person living in Khorazin was as much a sinner as some of. Those in the community were, but the sin was so widespread, was so broad that now judgment had to come against the entirety, had to come against the village.

But perhaps just to add one other thought, perhaps part of what Jesus is doing here is warning the people in Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum so that those that aren't committing these sins can flee before the consequences against those that are. affect them as well. Perhaps that's part of the economy that's happening here.

To give them an opportunity not to have to pay the consequence of sin they didn't commit. But it is a tragic fact that sin does have consequence beyond itself. Someone said sin will always take you further than you wanted to go, keep you longer than you wanted to stay, and cost you more than you wanted to pay.

And part of that cost can be the cost for innocent people. That are affected by the sins we commit. I'm thinking right now, Mark, about pastors. You and I both know who fell into personal sin and their families and their congregations paid a grievous price as a result that can't, I'm not saying God judged them the way that God judged Corazine, but I am saying that sin does have consequence beyond the center itself.

And that's one more reason not to sin because we cannot know the future consequence of present disobedience.

[00:43:19] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, so, so much for us to think about and so much for us to learn in this area to be reverent before God. And like I said, that, that idea of being Reverencing God, not in an unhealthy way, but in a holy way that we are to take him seriously and we are to take our lives and the prospect of sin and judgment very seriously.

And so there's a lot in that we could spend a lot more time unpacking this topic, both on a personal and on a corporate level. But we hope today's conversation has been helpful before I let you go. I just want to talk a little bit about this resource that is releasing from our ministry a cultural commentary on the gospel of Matthew.

We're subtitled it a guide to genuine discipleship. So want to just talk a little bit, maybe my first question is really. On the lower shelf, which is, why do we call the biographies of Jesus gospels instead of biographies? Why don't we just call them biographies? Okay.

[00:44:24] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Great question. As you know, gospel comes from the Greek word euangelion, meaning good news. It makes it really clear that when it's the gospel of Matthew, it's a good news proclaimed by Matthew. It's a good news proclaimed by Mark, as opposed to a biography, so to speak. Biography, as you and I know it, is a recent invention.

It's only been really in recent generations that people have come along to write a so called objective biography of Winston Churchill or Abraham Lincoln or whoever it might be. Previous to that, even biographies were written for a specific purpose. They were written to accomplish a specific aim.

outcome, whatever that outcome might be, whether you're working against someone like Napoleon by a nefarious biography of him, or you're trying to elevate his example. And so you're doing kind of a exalted hagiography of them, that sort of thing. So biographies have always had a larger purpose, even if they were more objective than you might think, but none of that was the purpose of the gospels.

As John says at the end of his gospel, if everything Jesus did and said had been written down, the world couldn't contain all the books that would be that that would be written as a result. We know very little of Jesus life before the age of of 30, for instance, when he begins his public ministry, because it's not relevant to the gospel, to the good news that God loves us.

And has come for us in Christ to give us the privilege of eternal life. So every gospel is written as a means to the end of narrating the life of Jesus in a way that would lead its intended audience to trust in Him as their Lord. Matthew wants Jews to come to Christ. So he repeats Old Testament prophecies more than any other gospel does.

And all the time is saying this was done to fulfill the words of the prophet Isaiah or whomever. To convince them that Jesus is Messiah. Mark wants Romans. Primarily to know Jesus as their Lord. And so he's all the time telling miracle stories and a lot about Jesus going at dealings with the Roman culture.

Luke is really thinking about women and minorities himself, probably a Gentile. And so he traces Jesus genealogy back to Adam and he has more women involved in the story than others. John comes along 30 or 40 years later to write an interpretive biography that more broadly wants you to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and believing have life in his name, as he says in John 20, 30, and 31.

But all of them are really telling a story. It's a true story, of course. I don't mean that a fictitious story. But they're giving us a narrative as a means to the end of leading you to trust in Christ. That's why they're called evangelists. That's why the four gospel writers are typically called and were evangelists.

So these books are written as a means to an end of leading you to Christ, faith in Christ. And they tell his story as it's relevant to that outcome. And that's what makes them gospels as opposed to biographies in the modern sense.

[00:47:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. Really helpful to have that clarity. We're calling these, or you've called these cultural commentaries. Matthew is actually the second in a series. We Released one on the book of acts called bold faith. And we have another one that you've written that'll come out in a few months later this year on the book of revelation that I'm sure will be very interesting to people, but you take a unique approach in these works.

And like I said, you've referred to them as a cultural commentary. For those who have read similar resources, this is not. A coverage of every single verse within the gospel of Matthew but very significant sections. What is the unique approach that you take that you would, that this would be called a cultural commentary?

What do you mean by that?

[00:47:45] **Dr. Jim Denison:** That's a good question. I'm first of all, wanting you to understand the original context and its cultural setting of the scripture in question. And then second, I want to bring that into application in our cultural context as well. Now all commentary on some level. Or at least most of them will do that.

You could have, I suppose, have a commentary that's entirely devotional and wouldn't do what I said. But if you're looking at more expository commentary on some level, they're going to do that. They're going to give you what this word meant in an original context or what the historical setting of Caesarea Philippi was and Matthew 16 or whatnot.

And they may have some kind of application into the current context, but that's really what I'm. Majorly focusing on what was the cultural setting of the day. How does that relate to the cultural setting of our day in the belief that God's nature doesn't change? He says in Malachi three, I, the Lord do not change human nature.

It doesn't change. We still have the same issues, fears that our ancestors did that the people in scripture did. So if we can understand the intended meaning of the text in its original cultural setting, we can elevate that meaning and apply it to our. cultural setting and discover how that word is still resonant and relevant for us today.

So it's focusing primarily in the context of the culture in which Jesus found himself and in which we find ourselves. The reason we don't treat of every verse in Matthew's gospel or the others is that this is intended for small group Bible studies. If you were going to do a small group Bible study through the gospel of Matthew verse by verse, you probably should count on the next five years.

of your life, to be fair to Matthew, if you're going to do that. And so to do it in the kind of a time frame that most small group Bible studies would wish to do, or individual guided Bible studies would wish to do, we select those passages in the Gospel of Matthew that, number one, are most germane to the cultural agenda that we think he's pursuing here, and second, are most relevant to our cultural setting.

And so we pick up those things that could make a shorter study than five years, but do this in a way that is perhaps more amenable to group study and individual self guided study.

[00:49:47] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, and as yeah, so, so good. And as you and others taught me years ago at the seminary that Matthew is really focused on revealing Jesus as the King. And that is so much needed in our culture today. We talk about all the time that what we want to do is we want to equip culture changing Christians who do what we talked about at the beginning.

A culture changing Christian is someone who learns to think biblically under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to live holy and beautifully. To serve redemptively in whatever place of influence and service that God gives them to help the world flourish, to help it, to be better for everybody until Jesus comes again.

And we hope that this tool, Matthew a guide to being a genuine disciple will help everyone to do that. Folks can find that on our website. [denisonforum.org](http://denisonforum.org) and we would love for you to share in that resource and we hope that it will help you to walk with Christ and to serve even better as what he says in the gospel of Matthew chapter five, to be salt and bright.

Salty bright for the kingdom of God and to let your life reflect back to the presence of God and to the greatness of his love revealed to us in Christ. Dr. Jim, thank you for having a conversation with us today. I want to thank our audience again for sitting down with us. We hope that this has been helpful and encouraging and equipping.

To you in a number of ways. And we would just again, ask you to share this with friends and family to rate us on your favorite podcast platform. And again, thank you for helping us. We are a donor supported ministry. We're able to provide biblical resources that are relevant for today's issues and needs, and we're able to do that free because of generous donors like you.

And we're grateful for that. Thank you for helping us to be a salt and light in this way. See you next time on the Denison forum podcast.