



REFLECTIONS

When Words Become Whips: Confronting Curated Sin Lists with Christ's Priorities

Some Christians wield curated “sin lists” like whips, lashing out at the vulnerable while ignoring greed, injustice, and exploitation among the powerful. This distortion presents a false Christ—harsh toward the weak, indulgent toward the strong. Anchored in [Matthew 23:23](#) (NLT), this reflection exposes the danger of selective truth and invites us to reorder our priorities around justice, mercy, and faith. With Scripture, theologian insights, and practical steps, we are called to speak truth with compassion, confront oppression with courage, and reflect the real Christ who defends the broken and overturns the tables of exploitation.

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Truth Without Justice Is Not Truth at All

We live in a time when “truth-telling” has become a badge of honor among many believers. It’s a phrase used to signal courage, conviction, and devotion to Scripture. Yet the truth being told is often incomplete. In churches, podcasts, rallies, and online spaces, the same topics appear again and again—sexual sin, gender identity, family structure. The same faces are pointed at, the same groups shamed, the same verses recited as ammunition.

The lists are curated—selective and safe. They call out the weak but rarely confront the strong. The single mother, the transgender teen, the migrant worker, or the person struggling in public gets named and condemned. Meanwhile, the billionaire exploiting labor, the corporation stealing wages, the politician bartering compassion for votes—all walk away unscathed.

It’s not that sin shouldn’t be named. Jesus named it. But when the naming becomes uneven—when our words sting the wounded and excuse the powerful—we lose the face of Christ. Our words become whips. They bruise those already bent under heavy burdens. They divide rather than heal.

This imbalance is not a minor issue. It distorts the gospel. When “truth” becomes a weapon used selectively, it ceases to be truth. Jesus never blessed the powerful at the expense of the poor. He never shamed the broken to please the comfortable. When the

church does, it no longer presents Christ. It presents an idol wearing His name.

Anchor in the Word

Key Verse

“What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.”

— Matthew 23:23 (NLT)

Key Scripture Context

These were not gentle words. Jesus spoke them near the end of His earthly ministry, when His conflict with religious leaders had reached its peak. The Pharisees and scribes prided themselves on precision—rules followed, appearances maintained, tithes measured down to the smallest leaf of mint and dill. But they had lost sight of the heart of God.

They measured righteousness by externals. They loved moral order but forgot moral mercy. They defended doctrine while neglecting the suffering. Their religion was technically correct but spiritually hollow.

When Jesus rebuked them, He didn’t dismiss the importance of moral obedience. He said, “You should tithe, yes.” But He exposed their hypocrisy: in defending small rules, they had abandoned great

commandments. They knew the letter of the law but missed its spirit.

The warning is clear. We can be zealous for truth and still be wrong if justice, mercy, and faith are missing. The truth without love is not truth—it is distortion.

What We're Facing

Curated Sin Lists and the Scourge of Words

Today's church faces a similar danger. Instead of mint and dill, we have curated sin lists—topics chosen not by the Spirit, but by culture and comfort. Entire sermons target sexuality, while silence surrounds greed. Pulpits cry out about gender expression, but say little about predatory landlords or exploitative employers.

Social media amplifies it. “Truth-telling” becomes performance. Each post or video aims to prove who's righteous and who's compromised. But beneath the noise lies a selective conscience.

It's easy to thunder about the sins of others when they're already on the margins. It's harder to challenge the sins of those who write the checks, sign the budgets, or hold the votes. The result is an upside-down gospel that comforts the comfortable and condemns the crushed.

Consider this contrast: A trans youth struggling to survive is called an abomination. But a Christian CEO who pays starvation wages is praised as a “kingdom leader.” A single mother on food stamps is told to have more faith. But a congressional leader who drafts cruel

policies and manipulates systems for their own advantage is called a blessing from God.

When we preach purity to the powerless and give passes to the powerful, we betray Jesus. The result is a religion that looks moral but reeks of injustice. Truth loses its shape. Love loses its warmth. Christ's body becomes a fist instead of an embrace.

Then and Now—Drawing Parallels

The parallels to Jesus' day are sharp. In the temple courts, sincere worshipers came seeking peace with God. But the system was stacked against them. Moneychangers charged unfair exchange rates. Merchants overcharged for sacrifices. The poor were trapped between devotion and debt.

The priests and elders—those who should have defended the people—protected the profiteers. Religion became business. Holiness became commerce. And when Jesus saw it, He overturned the tables. He didn't curse the worshipers. He confronted the exploiters.

The same spirit of inversion lives today. The modern church wages "culture wars" while blessing the very systems that crush the poor. It heaps shame on the vulnerable while aligning itself with political movements that exploit them. The rich are cast as saviors; the poor as threats.

This is not new. It is the same spirit Christ resisted. It hides behind religious words but serves earthly power. It is the temple table rebuilt in our time—this time stacked with curated sin lists instead of coins.

Theological Truth in Plain Language

The Bible tells one consistent story about God's priorities. He defends the oppressed. He warns the comfortable. He calls His people to justice as an expression of holiness.

The prophets declared it plainly:

"They sell honorable people for silver and poor people for a pair of sandals" (Amos 2:6, NLT).

God's anger burned not against the broken, but against those who used power to crush them.

Jesus carried that same fire into His ministry. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," He said, "for He has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor... to set the oppressed free" (Luke 4:18, NLT).

James warned believers that "the rich who hoard wealth" would face divine judgment because "the wages you held back cry out against you" (James 5:1–4, NLT).

These passages are not footnotes. They are the center. God's justice is not a side issue. It is part of His holiness. When churches bless greed while condemning poverty, they reverse His heart.

A.W. Tozer wrote, *"A Pharisee is hard on others and easy on himself, but a spiritual man is easy on others and hard on himself."* The curated sin list flips this order. It goes soft on insiders and hard on outsiders. It excuses the powerful and humiliates the powerless. This inversion is the opposite of Christ's Spirit.

Charles Spurgeon warned of this dynamic long ago: *"One reason why the church of God has so little influence over the world is*

because the world has so much influence over the church.” When the church mirrors the prejudices of its culture instead of the priorities of Christ, it becomes an echo chamber of power, not a voice of truth.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who gave his life resisting a church captured by nationalism, wrote: *“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”* The selective silence of modern Christianity is one of its greatest sins. We shout against private sins and whisper about public evils. We call that “truth-telling.” But in heaven’s language, it’s cowardice.

Practical Moves of Faith

Examine Your Sin List

Faithful discipleship begins with honesty. Each of us carries a mental list of what we believe is wrong with the world. But those lists are often shaped more by our environment than by the gospel.

Ask yourself: Whose sins anger me most? Are they the sins that threaten my comfort, or the sins that wound others? Do I weep for the oppressed as easily as I rage against the controversial?

Jesus calls us to reorder our outrage. He confronted hypocrisy at the top more than immorality at the bottom. The Pharisee’s polished prayer received rebuke; the tax collector’s cry for mercy received grace.

If your outrage comforts the powerful and condemns the weak, it’s time to let Christ rewrite your list.

Speak Justice as Boldly as Morality

Truth and justice are not rivals; they are twins. Moral purity means little if it ignores mercy. We are called to name sin, yes—but to name all sin, including the respectable ones: greed, pride, exploitation, favoritism.

Speak about holiness, but speak equally about hunger. Defend purity, but defend dignity too. In your conversations, sermons, posts, and prayers, ask: Am I as bold for justice as I am for morality?

When Christians only shout about personal sins, the world hears condemnation. When we also stand against systemic sins, the world begins to see compassion. That balance is what makes the gospel visible.

Reflect Christ to the Vulnerable

Every conversation about sin should point toward Christ, not away from Him. Jesus did not crush bruised reeds or snuff out smoldering wicks. He restored dignity before demanding repentance. He loved people back to life.

When you speak about sin, imagine the most wounded person hearing you. Would they feel safe? Would they hear invitation or insult? Would they see the heart of Jesus in your tone?

Holiness and compassion must coexist. If our truth-telling drives people away from Christ, then our truth-telling is not true.

Pray for a Reordered Heart

Spiritual transformation begins in secret places. Ask God to reorder your heart before you try to reorder the world. Pray Psalm 139:23–24:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart... Point out anything in me that offends You, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.”

Let that prayer reshape your eyes, your speech, your compassion.

More Light for the Journey

Isaiah 1:17 (NLT): “Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows.”

→ God’s priority list has always placed justice and mercy at the center.

James 2:1 (NLT): “How can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others?”

→ Favoritism in morality is as dangerous as favoritism in wealth.

Luke 6:37 (NLT): “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven.”

→ Condemnation is not our calling; mercy is.

Micah 6:8 (NLT): “O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what He requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”

→ This is the heart of the law—justice, mercy, and humility.

Let’s Walk This Out Together

When Christians curate sin lists, they betray the gospel by misrepresenting Christ. They lash out at the vulnerable while

blessing the powerful. They preach purity while excusing oppression.

But there is another way. We can hold truth and justice together. We can proclaim holiness while practicing mercy. We can turn over the tables of exploitation while opening our arms to the marginalized.

This is not about abandoning truth. It's about returning to it. The truth of Jesus is not selective—it is complete. Justice, mercy, and faith belong together.

The world doesn't need more voices shouting condemnation. It needs a church whose words heal, protect, and restore. When truth is spoken through love, it no longer wounds. It frees.

Check-In Questions and Prayer Prompts

1. Whose sins come to mind first when you think about what's wrong with the world?

Are they the sins of those with power or of those without it? What might this reveal about your influences and fears?

Prayer Prompt:

“Lord, open my eyes to the injustices I’ve ignored. Teach me to care about what You care about. Replace selective outrage with holy compassion.”

2. Have your words ever become whips instead of invitations?

Think of a time when your speech about sin may have harmed instead of helped. What did it feel like for the person on the other side?

Prayer Prompt:

“Jesus, guard my tongue. Let my words reflect Your gentleness. Teach me to speak correction in a way that heals, not harms.”

3. How do you respond when confronted with systemic injustice—greed, corruption, exploitation?

Do you stay silent, feeling powerless, or speak up in faith?

Prayer Prompt:

“Father, give me courage to speak for the voiceless. Let my convictions reflect Your justice, not the comfort of the crowd.”

4. What would it look like for you to place mercy and justice first in daily life?

How might that change the way you vote, spend, give, or post online?

Prayer Prompt:

“Spirit of God, guide my actions toward mercy. Shape my priorities around Your heart for the poor, the outcast, and the forgotten.”

5. Where might Jesus want to reorder your personal ‘sin list’?

Are there areas where you’ve excused yourself or your group while judging others more harshly?

Prayer Prompt:

“Search me, O God. Reveal hidden pride and self-righteousness. Lead me into humility, justice, and love.”

Final Blessing

May the God of justice soften your heart to every wound you once overlooked.

May Christ's mercy wash away your need to be right more than kind.

May the Spirit give you words that heal, not harm.

Go and speak truth with compassion. Defend the weak.
Challenge the strong.

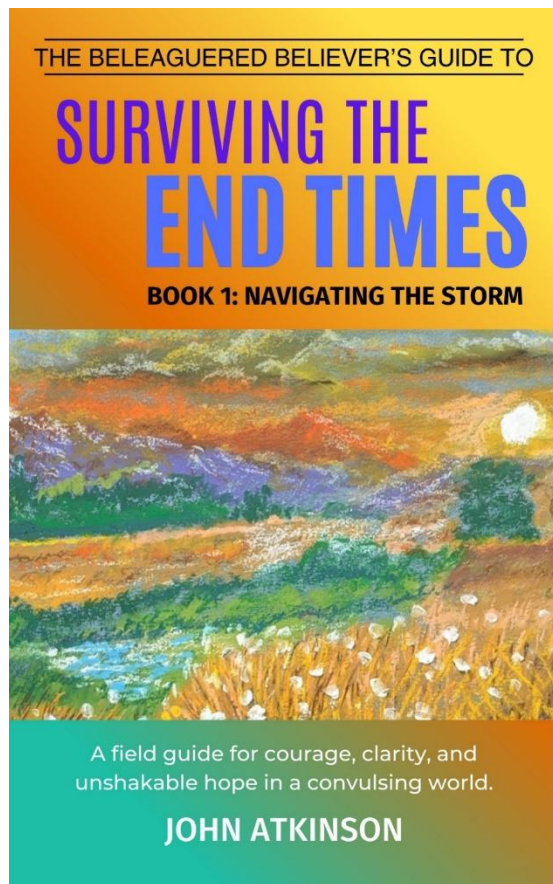
Walk humbly, love mercy, do what is right.

For when justice and mercy meet, the world sees Jesus again.

Footnotes

1. A.W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1955).
2. Charles Spurgeon, Sermon No. 382, *The Great Sin of Doing Nothing*, preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London, 1861.
3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997).

For the Road Ahead



If these words have stirred something in you—a longing to walk closer with Christ, to live truth with mercy, and to practice justice with love—know that this reflection is only one step on a larger path.

The Beleaguered Believer's Survival Guide to the End Times was written with that same heartbeat. It isn't a book of fear or speculation, but a field guide for weary disciples learning to follow Jesus faithfully in confusing times. It offers the same grounding this reflection began—anchoring

believers in truth that heals, courage that restores, and endurance that lasts when the world grows loud and cruel.

If your heart is ready to go deeper—to explore how to hold conviction without cruelty, hope without denial, and faith without fear—this guide will meet you there.

Inside, you'll find teaching, reflection, and guided practices to help you:

- See challenges through Kingdom eyes
- Discern truth in an age of deception
- Endure hardship without losing heart

- Love fiercely when love grows cold
- Stand firm in Christ when the world convulses

Think of Everyday Endurance as your pocket companion for the daily walk, and the Survival Guide as your map for the long journey.

Because no matter how unstable the times may become, one promise never wavers:

“Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God...” (Hebrews 12:28, NLT)

– John Atkinson

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Kindle (Free for Kindle Unlimited Subscribers),
Paperback and Hardcover:

<https://www.amazon.com/Beleaguered-Believers-Survival-Guide-Times-ebook/dp/B0FNZBFLX7/>