

The Second Leg: Orthodoxy (“Right Belief”)

Total Time: 11-16 min

OPENING | 4 min



Read the following aloud.

In the last 3 trainings, we discussed God’s Good News about Politics and prayed for an obedient response to Jesus in the context of our political discipleship and civic engagement. We also reiterated our resistance to the temptation to worship at the altar of a particular party, platform, or politician. The image of the three-legged stool reminds us that Christ is on the throne and has authority over our emotional lives. With that in mind, the next leg is our thoughts, beliefs, and convictions or *orthodoxy*. Jesus is Lord over that, too.

In the United States, the dominant Christian culture places a greater emphasis on right belief and correct thinking and conformity over practical behaviors and emotional experiences. This demonstrates itself in churches where pain, injustice, and suffering are dismissed and minimized, especially in conversations about power. The #MeToo movement and its religious corollary, #ChurchToo, are infamous examples of this broken theology. For decades sexual abuse was covered up in many industries, and institutions did great harm to individuals to preserve power and influence. Contrary to that, the Jesus of Scripture as we are learning, holds feelings *and* beliefs *and* our third leg, actions (*orthopraxy*), in beautiful tension and with equal value. He does not ignore correct belief or intellectual rigor, but rather he puts it in its proper place.

We see this in Matthew 22 and Mark 12. In these passages, the religious leaders attempt to use intellectual arguments to trap Jesus. These religious leaders had aligned themselves with the occupying Roman forces. They used their social, political, and economic power to exploit and exclude those with less; and violently opposed those who challenged that system. In these instances, they questioned Jesus, but His arguments are superior, and He left the crowds in awe. After stumping the Pharisees and Sadducees, an expert in the law asked Jesus to choose one law out of the 623 laws in the Torah to be the greatest. Jesus says:

²⁹ "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." - Mark 12:29-30 (NRSVue)

God's word explains that they were astonished at His wisdom and no one else dared to question Him. In this and many other passages, Jesus uses His intellect to call those who claim to be His people towards a greater level of faith and faithfulness to God. We see this when Jesus defends healing the man with the withered hand in Mark 3 or a lame man in John 3. The fruit of Jesus' knowledge and wisdom is freedom and healing. In contrast, the religious and political leaders who are experts in the law and supremely educated used their minds to maintain the status quo and keep their hierarchy in place.

In our current media landscape, news, entertainment, education, opinion, advertisements, and theology all come to us simultaneously and are presented without distinction. Most of this content is designed to appeal to our emotions, rather than our intellect. We must use our minds not just to consume information but discern its meaning, truthfulness, and desired response.

There are many ways to apply this practically. We're using the acronym CASE.

- **Compare** the claims of Christian politicians and influencers to what Scripture says.
- **Avoid** straw-man arguments which use lies, oversimplification, or extremes to discredit or distort a claim.
- **Seek** wisdom and understanding by listening to the perspectives of friends of different backgrounds and social locations.
- **Evaluate** the potential biases or points of view of what we see and read.

As followers of Jesus, let us faithfully seek the truth in all spheres of life, but especially in politics.

DISCUSSION | 5-10 min

Break into pairs, small groups or remain as a whole group depending on your context and discuss the following questions together.

- Reflect on the values your family, faith community, and culture have around education and knowledge. What patterns or narratives inform how you think today?
- How can we use our minds to evaluate the truthfulness of what we encounter in our chaotic news landscape?
- What would it look like for you to love the Lord with your mind and use your intellectual abilities to “love your neighbor as yourself”?

PRAY | 2 min

Imagine for a moment that you are a religious leader in the crowd when Jesus is actively disrupting the cultural and social expectations. You may feel uncomfortable because of the conflict, in awe of His power and knowledge, joy because of the healing, or all of them at once! In James 1:5 (NRSVue) it says, “If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.” Ask Jesus for knowledge and wisdom on how to engage the systems and structures of our day, with His love and justice at the center.

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