

# RELIGULOUS

WEEK FOUR: Religion Is Responsible For More Evil Than Good



As a follower of Jesus Christ, it is humiliating to admit that the Church has been responsible for an incredible amount of pain and destruction in the world, even as it has been responsible for an incredible amount of good. More humiliating is that there are some in the Church who have tried to minimize or excuse this fact. This is especially so since Jesus' vision was of a "battle" against the "enemy" who was NOT other human beings but the spiritual forces of evil that have animated their choices, who taught us that violence is ALWAYS unacceptable, even if that violence comes in the form of words or even thoughts, and who insisted that true power comes from loving service regardless of our differences or disagreements. *This*, more than anything, is the heart of God. This is how we best resemble our Heavenly Father.

In your own way and at your own pace, please freely explore the follow up questions, Bible study materials, daily Bible reading suggestions, spiritual exercises and other resources listed here to take this conversation to the next level in your life. Use a journal or take advantage of the community with which God has surrounded you (including your family!) to work through what you find here. This resource is for you. It is an invitation to take the conversation beyond Sundays and to make it a 24/7 reality in your life. Enjoy!

## GOING DEEPER:

1. Do you know people who have been discouraged from following Jesus because of the "ugly side" of religion? Has this ever been an issue for you? What circumstances have caused this struggle?
2. **Read Ephesians 6:10-12.** What people or groups does the modern Church (or do you) treat as "enemies", (i.e. distance yourself because of differences or disagreements)? What does it mean that our true enemy is the "spiritual forces of evil"? Why do we make other people or groups the enemy?
3. **Read Matthew 5:21-26.** Jesus' radical redefinition of "violence" includes actions, words and thoughts. In what ways have you seen the modern Church commit violence against people or groups? In what ways have you committed violence against other people or groups? Why have these forms of violence been acceptable to us? How has Jesus' teaching challenged that perspective.
4. **Read Romans 12:14-21.** Of the action steps listed in this text, which would make the biggest difference in how the modern Church treats its "enemies"? Which would be the hardest for you with the people you struggle with? What choices could you make in this respect to change the nature of those relationships?
5. What would it look like for you this week to take a step towards "loving you enemies"?



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## **BIBLE STUDY:**

**Read Ephesians 6:10-20** (remember to use two or three different translations, if possible. In particular, have a look at this passage in *The Message*).

In the NIV, verse 12 reads: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” In *The Message* it reads: “This is no afternoon athletic contest that we’ll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels.”

### **Review the following questions:**

1. Do you believe in the Devil? If not, what are the “spiritual forces of evil”? If so, how do you envision him? Is your view of the Devil a guy in red leotards, with horns, a pitchfork and a tail, who goes around getting us into trouble? Or is it something different? How does **2 Corinthians 11:14-15** add to your perception?
2. David Guzik writes: “Paul does not call the believer to *enter into* spiritual warfare. He simply announces it as a fact.” What is your conception of “spiritual warfare”, what does it mean to you? Do you believe this to be true? If so, in what ways have you, or do you, find yourself “at war with the Devil”?

John Cooper notes: “When discussing the **Full Armor of God**.....and more specifically **The Sword of the Spirit**, some people might envision a preacher or evangelist in the pulpit with their Bible raised high in one hand as though it was a sword. However, most Christians who are familiar with this passage of scripture will agree that ‘the Bible’ in its entirety is considered to be the Sword of the Spirit... The Greek used in the original text Paul wrote is ‘hrema’, meaning in ‘word, as in utterance’ or in English ‘saying’.”

**Read Luke 3:2** and **Hebrews 6:5**. It seems that, in these verses, we phrase “word of God” is being used to describe the “good news” rather than the scriptures.

(Bible Study continued on next page.)



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## **BIBLE STUDY CONTINUED...**

### **Review the following questions:**

1. What do you think the “Sword of the Spirit” is? What does it mean to use the “Sword of the Spirit”? How does this help us “do battle” against the enemy?
2. Matt Slick says: “The Word is that which teaches you, guides you and admonishes. It is worthy of study so that you might learn what is right and acceptable to God.” Are you spending time reading the Word? Slick goes on to say “In order for you to be strong, in order for you to fight the good fight of the faith, you must put on faith and righteousness and salvation. You must use the gospel, which is the word of God and last but not least, you must PRAY.” Will you? What will that look like in your battles against the enemy?

### **NEW TO THE BIBLE**

Those who are new to reading the Bible may want to explore some of the ideas and suggestions on our website.

[CLICK HERE](#)

## **DAILY READING TEXTS:**

<b>DAY</b>	<b>THEME</b>	<b>TEXT</b>
Sunday	Where God guides, God provides	Acts 16:6-16:40
Monday	How you listen determines what you hear	Acts 17:1-34
Tuesday	God protects those who share Jesus' Message	Acts 18:1-18a
Wednesday	The healing power of God promotes Jesus' Message	Acts 18:18b-20:6
Thursday	Willing to give up everything for Jesus' Message	Acts 20:7-21:16
Friday	Being all things to all people to win some	Acts 21:17-26
Saturday	Willing to accept chains for Jesus' Message	Acts 21:27-22:29



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## **SPIRITUAL EXERCISES:**

- ✓ Identify a person or group that you keep your distance from because of differences or disagreements. Be specific. **Read Matthew 5:43-48** and/or **Romans 12:14-21**. Pray each phrase for your “enemies” asking God to help you live Jesus’ vision of love.
- ✓ Write your own definition of “violence”. Now read **Matthew 5:21-26** several times over the week and in several translations. (Look also at **Romans 12:2**, **2 Corinthians 10:5** and **Psalms 139:4**.) Do these verses alter your definition? If so, how? If not, why not? Ask God to expose any violence in your thoughts, beliefs, speech or actions towards others.
- ✓ This week take a risk by reaching out in an act of relationship with a person or group you struggle with. Be the first to engage in a conversation with them, or choose to sit beside them during break time. Try to learn something new about them and from them.

## **RESOURCES:**

[Dear Church, Sarah Cunningham](#)

[So You Don't Want To Go To Church Anymore, Wayne Jacobsen and Jake Colsen](#)

[unChristian, David Kinnaman](#)

[They Like Jesus but not the Church, Dan Kimball](#)

[Jesus Wants to Save Christians, Rob Bell](#)

[The End of Religion, Bruxy Cavey](#)