

# When You're Wrong

Dan Nelson

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I didn't mean to do it. I didn't intend to break the law but like the flash of a bolt of lightning thrashing down from the sky to scold its victim, so my own demise seemingly came out of nowhere. I felt completely pummeled by the flash of light from above and am still feeling the burn from the shock of the whole disaster. The irony is that I didn't even know what had happened until a week later. Yes, you understand what I am talking about: the uncertain and devastating ordeal of getting a traffic ticket.

It was an otherwise typically delightful day for me here in the Ojai Valley; the sky was blue, the birds were singing. Then that fateful time came to go to the street to uncover what peril awaited me - in the mailbox. I can honestly tell you that I had absolutely no idea what was in store for me. I was completely blind-sided. I bet even the postman himself was unaware of his own involvement in this dastardly delivery of death and destruction. All right, I know I am being a bit melodramatic here but the pain and suffering is all too real. The light from the sky is the flash from the camera that caught my portrait on Main Street in Ventura. The burn is how I felt, as a victim of circumstances, not the villain for which I must pay the price of culpability. The shock is the blank stare on my face and numbness in my limbs after reviewing the cost of the whole disaster. I think I even need therapy after enduring eight full hours of punitive recompense - traffic school.

I didn't know I had run a red light but the picture showed it so. As I began to prepare my defense, I recalled it was right about five o'clock and I was facing into the setting sun, obviously blinded by the brightness as I attempted to board the freeway toward home. I considered the city engineering and planners who poorly designed the placement of this traffic light that would be in the midst of the overwhelming illumination at sunset everyday. I attempted to ponder the possibility of error or fraud, after all, it was just a few pixels of red on the printed photograph that incriminated me and digital photos like these can be easily manipulated with a computer. I deliberated the county financial crunch and speculated how some people will do just about anything to raise revenues. Of course, these notions are silly and really demonstrate how far we might stretch to explain away our guilt. I even contemplated my reason for being there in the first place. I was only in Ventura that day due to a couple of counseling appointments with people from the church. I was trying to help people and now I am being punished; attempting goodness, consequentially blamed.

The reason I am baring my story is because I believe there is a vital spiritual truth here. My attempts to substantiate my innocence were fallacious at their foundation. I was wrong, period. The Bible teaches that we are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God, that the wages of sin is death but forgiveness is readily available for those that humble themselves, acknowledge their need, and come to Christ, that eternal life is a free

gift of God by His grace to people because He loves us so much. One significant obstacle in some people's lives is their insistence on their goodness, their essential innocence. Innocent people don't need forgiveness; they desire justice, to be treated fairly. As I questioned the evidence, the indictment process, and even the integrity of the system, ultimately I just didn't want to admit fault. As I reflected upon my virtuous reasons for being there in the first place, it was a desperate attempt to rationalize myself as prey to unfairness. But this attitude, if allowed to develop, will only get me into trouble. And this same attitude, when approaching the truths of God, will continue to keep people away from the blessings that God wants to pour out. We must admit that we are wrong; guilty of sin. It is only when we acknowledge our need that we can be helped. As Jesus taught that it is only people who perceive their sickness that will receive help from a doctor, so we must recognize our need and receive from God what He has for us. One last thought. Although I was caught and punished for this violation, it was a rare occurrence. How many times have I transgressed traffic laws and gotten away with it? Now if I understand that nothing escapes the eyes of God, no, it's not justice I want, it is mercy and grace. It is definitely mercy and grace.

Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. This article was published in 2004. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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### **Sunday Worship:**

**9:00 & 10:30am**  
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley  
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

### **Mid-Week Study:**

**7:00pm Thursday**  
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley  
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View