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A conversation overheard between a grocer and his young son went something like this: *"Have you fixed the scales so that we can reduce the weight on all the items?" 'Yes Dad.'* *"Did you mix the white sand with the sugar yet?" 'Yes Dad'* *"Did you put the grade A sign on all that cheap coffee that we bought the other day?" 'Yes Dad'* *"Good son! Off to bed now – and don't forget to say your prayers! 'Yes Dad!*

Sceptics who discount religious faith often quote illustrations like this to prove their point. But they often fail to see, or don't want to see, the many genuine people who do live up to their faith and derive great peace from it.

Others opt out of believing because they say that even Jesus contradicts Himself. For instance, at the last Supper He said to the apostles: "peace I leave with you; this is my gift to you". And today we hear the exact opposite: "Do you suppose that I have come to bring peace on Earth. No, I tell you, not peace, but rather division".

Some people say that religion causes its fair share of division in the world. Well, the message of Jesus was divisive. Jesus only promised peace to those who believe in Him. Before his Passion He said to the apostles: "In the world you will have trouble, but fear not, for I have overcome the world".

When people misinterpret the Bible they too can ferment unnecessary division. I would say, for instance that a fundamentalist view of the bible served as a kind of backdrop **(not backstop)** to the troubles in the Northern Ireland, the causes of which may now be contained but are still 'bubbling under the surface'. Calvin believed that his devotees were predestined to be saved whilst those outside his circle would be

lost. Religious language like that can, over time, colour peoples' thinking and contribute towards civil unrest. In John's Gospel Jesus says that people indoctrinated with a twisted religious mind-set would even resort to violence and killing thinking by so doing they were pleasing God. 'They are very much mistaken,' Jesus said. We've seen many examples of this in our times.

In some instances, however, when trouble threatens, god-fearing people can get scared and take flight – a bit like Peter after he categorically denied knowing Our Lord when confronted by the servant girl. In contrast we find Jesus standing his ground in the face of opposition. For instance Jesus confronted Simon the Pharisee for his lack of courtesy. He also stood up for people whom others looked down on, like Zachaeus, the tax collector, or Mary Magdalene, branded as a sinner or Bartimaeus, the blind beggar. These actions would not have endeared Him to many people. They were divisive.

True believers don't deliberately set out to pick a fight with anyone but if they're genuine, the fight will surely come to them.

So, if we want a 'trouble free existence', its best join another group because being a Christian cannot guarantee you that.

The peace which Jesus affords us, if we follow Him faithfully is more than a 'feel good factor' - it resides deep down in the soul of a person and no one can take it from us unless we allow them.