

Everything Spirit

'The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light.'
(Matthew 6:22)

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This is dedicated to Darien Watson, a man set apart by God to '*truly understand God's grace*' (Col 1:6) - to be freed by it, soar in it, build on it, and free captives with it. (2 Cor 12:9-10)

Everything Spirit

Nicodemus came to Jesus looking for something practical, intellectual, scriptural, tangible, in order to tie things down and wrap things up. Nicodemus had a life in the community, and was in full-time ministry, and he wanted to fit this Jesus in, complete the package, upgrade the system, and keep on moving... But Jesus said, **'No one can enter the kingdom of God, unless they are born of... the spirit.'** (John 3:5)

I used to do my 'quiet times' in the morning – like I do my exercise in the morning – to get it out of the way. I go to church - like I take a vitamin supplement - so that it will enhance the rest of my day, week, and 'real' work. I see, and implement, the 'principles' of Christianity into my life, so that I will be beyond reproach and barely noticeable, and can get on with paying my bills. Just tell me what is required (membership, small group, volunteering, tithing?), and I'll get that on the list and knock it out, so I can get back to work, goals, real life...

Now here's the key, the pivot point, the vision of this booklet: When you looked and saw Jesus Christ before you, you were not looking on a 'principled person' to follow, to emulate. You were not looking on a man who had followed 77 steps to a successful whatever... You were not drawn to a perfect rule-follower, someone who had kept all the commandments... The truth is, commandments, principles and 'steps' did not feature in your **revelation** moment. Nothing practical or principled made its impression on you, when the light of Jesus – the '*life of men*' (John 1:5) – stood before you, shined on your heart. In seeing Jesus, you saw the very Spirit of God, the face of the Father. You were gazing on someone and something 'beyond' all of creation – including *created* commandments and principles. You were seeing and gazing on nothing and no one in life, but rather on the *source of all life*: the Spirit of the living God. This is what you saw, when you saw Christ – you saw Spirit.¹

¹ Col 2:9; Jn 14:9; 2 Cor 4:6; Jn 1:-1-5; Heb 1:3; Col 1:15-20

This booklet will be fragmented. That's both deliberate and inevitable. When trying to see 'Spirit' in and behind the truth of all things, it is like trying to see wind, or see the un-seeable. This is not only 'OK' to do, but we are called to do this. Paul writes, **'So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.'** (2 Cor 4:18)

Even 'words' are 'seen', so to speak. Someone can 'say' something encased in words that constitute truth, but they come forth in the spirit of a lie. That is, after all, the essence of deceit. Here we see the best example of this: The devil himself quoting scripture to Jesus. (Mt 4:1-11) The devil comes to Jesus quoting directly from Psalm 91, but the words carry forth not the living Word of God, but the malicious, jealous spirit and intent of the devil. He eventually exposes his intent, verse 9: *'... bow down and worship me.'*

This passage above in Matthew 4 is so important to ponder. People will come at you with 'true' words, but their intent is dark. The essence of a true word is not the word itself; it is the spirit behind and in the word. Is it holy? Is it of God? ***It is the Spirit that puts truth into a word. It is the 'Living Word' that makes a word live.***

In a sense, even 'light' can be false light, very much in the same way as a 'true word' not being true. This is why Jesus was not just called 'light', but the 'true light'. (John 1:9) And this is why Jesus referred to the 'light' in a man possibly being 'darkness'. *(Stop and read the 2 very subtle verses on this in Matthew 6:22-23)* We can have true words that are in essence 'false', and we can have bright light that is in essence darkness. So what makes a true word actually true? And what makes a bright light actually 'true light'? The Spirit of God in it, of it, behind it, before it. Everything Spirit.

On my jog today I was listening to a rockin' rock-n-roll song... It suddenly dawned on me that this song could be sung in 2 ways: First, the singer could be singing to draw focus to himself, to his own fame, his own experience. Secondly, the singer could be singing to 'serve' the listener, to encourage and inspire people, to 'sing' hope to the soul of the 'other'.

Same song, same lyrics, different spirit being 'sung'. In fact, it doesn't even matter who 'wrote' the song. The writer, the author, might be self-centered, and another artist who simply 'covers' the song, brings it forth in humility and eternal life. It all depends on the 'heart', on the Spirit. Everything Spirit.

God is after the heart. He is intent on the heart. Jesus said, ***'The flesh counts for nothing. My words are spirit and they are life.'*** (John 6:63) We work so hard in this life to tidy things up, box them in, brand them, quantify it, bar-chart it, define it, define you, define me, define borders and define who's 'in' and who's 'out'... What we are really doing is trying to get and feel 'secure'. We're trying to 'wall' things in, so we're safe inside. But so often these walls are just prison walls. They are 'spirit' walls built on fear, on envy, on insecurity. These are 'walls' that bring zero safety, and really only serve to frame up war and winds of darkness. There is only one 'tower' that is safe, and it really isn't the kind of tower we invest in – the name of the Lord.

'The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it, and are safe.' (Proverbs 18:10)

On this note, I'm beginning to see so much 'chaos' in the life and words of Jesus. This is not 'bad' chaos, but more like the 'chaos' that comes from God shaking all things that can be shaken:

‘... ‘Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’^[e] The words ‘once more’ indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.’ (Heb 12:26-27)

Jesus came out to the disciples in the middle of the night in stormy weather, walking on water. (Matthew 14:22-33) This is an intense and messy situation, chaotic. The disciples are tired, the circumstances unclear, the waters dark, the winds strong. And it is in this place, space, spirit, that Jesus moves in an ethereal way, a highly spiritual and emotive way. Disciples are terrified, and yet when they discern Jesus in the midst of the moment, Peter steps out of the boat and walks on the un-walkable, moves in a direction that is impossible, stands on the unstable. In the midst of a deeply chaotic moment, Jesus brings forth an incredible, spiritual and invigorating experience.

Another example (of many) that caught my eye regarding 'chaos' in the way of the cross, comes not from a real life experience of Jesus (as in the case of walking on water), but in his teaching. He tells a parable of ten virgins.² I won't go through it here, but if you read it, and put yourself 'in it', you will see how 'insecure' the whole story or environment is. Again, in this story, the climax comes in the dead of night, when not expected – and yet we are expected to be ready! This is the challenge to us.

Do we lose heart and focus when the night settles in on our souls? Do we only find security and peace, even in our spiritual lives, when things are orderly, predictable, financially comfortable, and we can see the path ahead? Jesus lived a life of peace in the midst of chaos, and he taught us to be ready – found faith-filled – in the dead of night.³

² Matthew 25:1-13

³ Luke 18:1-8 (particularly vs.8)

Same Appearance: The devil himself can dress up ('masquerade') as an 'angel of light'. What this means is that the devil – or something or some spirit that is impure – can have the appearance of that which is pure. So what makes *this* thing, that looks exactly like *that* thing, different? The spirit. Everything Spirit. Is the 'angel of light' beautiful? Yes! Is the devil masquerading as an angel of light, beautiful? Yes! Two verses on this jump to mind: ***'So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen...*** (2 Cor 4:18) And when God said to the prophet Samuel (who was a man of God, but judging incorrectly), ***'People look at outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.'*** (1 Sam 16:7)

Same Words: A demon-possessed girl walked behind an apostle (Paul), declaring a message of truth: ***‘These men are servants of the most high God, who are telling you the way to be saved.’*** (Acts 16:17) The words themselves were the right ones to carry truth, but they were not carrying truth. They were carrying, transporting, a lie. How is this? How can ‘true words’ be telling a lie? The spirit in and through the words was a lie. Everything Spirit. (cf the previous passage above, on Matthew 4) If a believer in Jesus, led by the Holy Spirit, had declared these words about Paul and Silas, a path to the gospel might have been opened to many hearers. But this woman, uttering these words, prompted by the devil, was, in fact, hardening people’s hearts, setting Paul and Silas up for a riot and a beating. Same words, different spirit.

Same Response: Some people listening to Jesus, who had a question, opened their address with these words: ***‘We know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are.’*** (Matthew 22:16) What a powerful statement of confidence and faith in Jesus – if it had been from a true spirit. But, in this case, those speaking these words, or supposedly ‘responding’ to Jesus in this favorable way, were motivated by an envious spirit and were seeking to trap him. (vs.15) What looks like – or has the exact same outward appearance of – a genuine response to truth, is a false response to truth. What makes a ‘response’ to Jesus genuine? Spirit.

Same power: This is deep, and disconcerting. But we see it from Genesis to Revelation, and will see it from the beginning of time, through to the end of world. Jesus himself said that some people would do ‘miracles in his name’, but not know him. (Matthew 7:21-23) This is incredible. And this is why it is so important to not get distracted by miracles. Jesus blessed people with miracles, but he came primarily to ‘seal the deal’ of **‘God with us’**. (Mt 1:23/Isaiah 7:14) In Luke 5, Jesus heals a man, but gives him this reason for the healing: **‘So that you know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.’** (Luke 5:24) When Jesus would perceive that people were ‘distracted’ by power, but not because it pointed to God, but to their own wants and thrills, he would refuse to perform further. Here is what Jesus said when people came to him after he had multiplied the bread the day before: ‘you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.’ (John 6:26) And then Jesus went on to preach – not do more miracles – telling them that they needed to believe in

him as the *'bread of life'* that does not spoil. (John 6:27,35)⁴ So even when it comes to 'power' – real power in Jesus' name – this does not mean that all is right with 'Spirit'. It is important to have a healthy wariness of spiritual dynamics and manifestations, in a world that is broken and sinful at the core. And it is Jesus himself, through these examples and teachings, who calls us to be wary.⁵

⁴ In Matthew 16 Jesus explicitly rebukes the people for 'looking for signs', and says this focus, this demand, is coming from wickedness and an adulterous spirit. (Mt 16:4)

⁵ For more on spiritual discernment, read and ponder Matthew 10:16-23. See how Jesus is calling us to be 'shrewd', and also to see and 'avoid' dynamics of resistance when possible (vs.23). It is OK – not unspiritual - to 'pray to avoid' persecution. (Mt 24:20) Also, check out and soak in these scriptures: 1 Thess 5:19-22; Matthew 24:24; 2 Cor 11:4,14. Is Jesus being lifted high? (John 12:32) Are people being pointed to him? Or is 'power' being highlighted, and are people pointing to other people?

Now this is almost the deepest, the darkest place of where 'Spirit' is everything; it came to me while walking today, and thinking through the message of 'repentance'. You see, repentance is an integral part of the message that Jesus preached. But there were many instances – and powerful gospel verses – where repentance is not mentioned. Take John 3:16 for example – *'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whosoever believes in him, will not perish but have eternal life.'* No mention of repentance.

Again, take the man on the cross with Jesus. He looked to Jesus, he believed, he asked to be 'remembered', and Jesus said, *'Today you will be with me in paradise.'* (Luke 23:43) And yet repentance is preached by Christ – and others – all over the New Testament. The first words of Jesus in his ministry, according to Mark 1:15, were, *'Repent and believe.'* Again, in John 5:14 and John 8:11, we see Jesus telling people – warning people – to stop sinning. As I've mentioned earlier in this booklet, there is the incredible 'message' of Christ in Luke

5:20,24, where a man comes for healing, but Jesus tables the issue of sin. The great commission according to the Gospel of Luke specifies that we are to proclaim *'repentance and forgiveness...'* (Luke 24:47) – *(and yet note here, we are not called to proclaim 'repentance and damnation' or 'condemnation' or even contrite confession; we are to proclaim repentance and 'forgiveness'. Such a spirit of compassion here. Anyway...)*

So this morning I was pondering where and how I could stitch the word 'repentance' in my forever-gospel-message. Well, I can't! There are times when I am called to simply share about Jesus and about belief in him. I know there are times for just this message, because there were times when it was the only message of Christ himself, and the apostles. (see John 5:24, and Acts 16:31) Other times, the word, call and path of repentance is what the Spirit is saying, and is the gospel message. (Acts 3:19; Mark 1:15) So the key to the gospel message itself is not a set line – like, 'Believe in Jesus!' or 'Repent & Believe!', or, 'Believe and be baptized!' The gospel

message itself most definitely is about believing in – i.e. turning to and coming to Jesus in faith – but sometimes comes forth with the ‘map’ of repentance, or in the case of the ‘rich young ruler’, with the map of ‘selling your possessions and giving to the poor.’ (Mark 10:21) So even when communicating the gospel message of Jesus Christ with a person, we need to listen to the Spirit for his words, his prompting, his particularities with that person for that moment.

'God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.'

(John 4:24)

This powerful, enlightening line of Jesus, came forth when talking about 'where' one must worship. The 'woman at the well' was asking Jesus if the proper place to worship (or the proper church to be a member of?), was here or there... Jesus answered with this: true worship happens in spirit, and God himself is spirit.

Everything spirit. And our lives of true faith, and true faith action, springs up from this well within, this spirit well where God meets man. In this same passage, Jesus contrasts 'real' water, with 'living water', saying:

'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' (John 4:13-14)

In our material world, we get so caught up in material, tangible, visible and quantifiable life. It is unnatural not to. So if we are going to really access the 'gospel', and the truth beneath the surface of all things – even religious things – we need to hear and see and take hold of this 'Spirit' truth that Jesus brings. It is from the inside out, from 'waters within', not wells that we dig 'without'. The truth of Jesus is never about the encasing words, nor even the scriptures used (Mt 4:1-11), nor about 'power' (Mt 7:21-23), nor about correct evangelistic methods and/or points... It is about '*keeping in step with the Spirit*' (Gal 5:25), so that like Jesus, we only say and do what we see the Father say and do. (John 5:19) ***It is the unseen spirit within a man, and the unseen Holy Spirit of God, that is the real dynamic and 'truth' of a situation.*** Discern! (1 Thes 5:19-22)

'I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.'

(1 Timothy 2:9-12)

We misinterpret the 'spirit' of this passage, and in doing so we misinterpret the passage. We can only correctly understand what a man is truly saying, if we truly know the man. This holds true for Jesus, also. If we referenced the 'judgment' verses of Jesus Christ (like John 8:26, Luke 12:8-9, Matthew 26:24, Matthew 18:7 and so many more!), but ignored the 'mercy' character, actions and teachings of Jesus Christ, we would misinterpret and misuse the 'judgment' verses. And the reverse is true – i.e. ignoring the 'judgment'

character/scriptures of Christ, leads to misinterpreting the nature of his 'mercy', leading to us 'perverting' his grace as a 'license for immorality'. (Jude 1:4; Gal 5:13) It is the same here with Paul. What is Paul really saying here? Well, we need to know the man; we need to look at his life actions, his spirit and his teachings generally. Let's start with this one:

Paul said to the church in Galatia: *'If you allow yourselves to be circumcised, Christ means nothing to you.'* (Gal 5:2)

However, we read in Acts 16:3, *'Paul wanted to take him [Timothy] along on the journey, so he circumcised him...'*

In the case of the first scripture (Gal 5:2), circumcision was getting mixed in with, and compromising the gospel message. In this context, Paul absolutely forbade circumcision. Because as a 'law' (and it is an Old Testament law⁶), it was

⁶ Genesis 17:10

threatening the integrity, purity, freedom of the gospel message, Paul would not even allow that the law was followed – not at an evening meeting, not as a circumcision small group on the side. It was simply to be ignored, the law set aside. How can this be? When did Jesus authorize this? Had not Jesus himself said that not one letter of the law would ever be discarded?⁷ It comes down to this: Jesus – and the very Spirit of Jesus – is the fulfillment of all law, and in his body he destroyed all law. (Eph 2:15) And at that same moment (and same verse) he created a ‘new humanity’. He is himself the ‘door’ to this new ‘covenant’, new ‘testament’, new humanity. (John 10:9) He is so complete and sufficient for all holiness, righteousness, forgiveness and salvation, that no law, tradition, church or organization even ‘touches’ the edge of the gospel’s garment, so to speak. If anything – law, scripture,

⁷ Matthew 5:18

manifestation, person, teaching, tongue, prophecy – distracts or comes too close alongside the gospel message so that it might be confused as ‘part of the deal’, Paul says, ‘cut it all off!’ (Gal 5:12) We’re told that if people or ‘angels’ preach another gospel than this one, they are to be condemned. (Gal 1:8)

So when Paul circumcised Timothy, it was because circumcision in this instance was opening the door for them to preach the gospel, not getting in the way of the gospel. ***Paul here is using the law to lead to Christ – which is its primary purpose. (Gal 3:24)*** In the case of the church in Jerusalem, however, Titus did not get circumcised (Gal 2:3), and because it was getting mixed in with the gospel message, Paul flat out forbade it: ***‘Mark my words! If you let yourselves to be circumcised, Christ is of no value to you.’*** (Gal 5:2) To the church in Corinth, in the same spirit and with the same concern of compromising the gospel, Paul writes this of the

‘circumcision’ law: *‘Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing...’* (1 Cor 7:19) We must remember, *‘the law is spiritual’* (Rm 7:14), and where the spirit of the law is *off*, it leads not to Christ, but away from Christ.

So back to women braiding their hair, and not teaching men. In this same letter to Timothy, Paul says of the ‘law’, that it is purposed for the unbeliever, the ungodly, and *‘anything that does not conform to the gospel of Christ.’* (I Tim 1:11) Paul’s concern – same book, chapter 6:3b – is *‘godliness’*, not lists and laws, especially if these now were to become the focus. Paul was constantly admonishing people to hold steady in their lives of order, as they form a ‘body’, and local churches. In other words, let’s stay steady, let’s remain grounded, let’s not allow our church expression to be a place of chaos and disorder. Let’s bring the deep, spiritual truth of God into our new Christian lives with intention and direction, not allow our ‘freedom’ to kick us into a rebellious

spirit.⁸ We see this in a key and keen way in 1 Corinthians 7. Here Paul is, as noted above, admonishing people – really trying to encourage people – to be ‘OK’ with their less-than-ideal experiences and circumstances in life, not so that they don’t strive to change these circumstances, but rather so that they focus on ‘living as a believer’ in all circumstances. Paul is not advocating for rolling over and suffering, but for strong mission-mindedness in whatever circumstance you find yourself in. He wants us pointing ahead, focusing on the light, moving forward; he is not suggesting that we find Christ and ‘ignore’ new truths and new paths. Check out the ‘spirit’ of these 4 verses – and I deliberately say ‘spirit’, because that is the only way to see the ‘meaning’:

‘Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—***although if you***

⁸ Galatians 5:13; Jude 1:4; 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

can gain your freedom, do so. For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings. Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.' (1 Corinthians 7:21-24)

So are we to be 'OK' with being a slave ('remain', vs. 24), or are we to fight for freedom (vs. 21)? Well, be 'OK' insofar as Christ is in you, with you, and even in this place you can 'ready your feet' (cf Eph 6:15) and 'live as a believer'. (1 Cor 7:17) In other words, as a slave but a new believer, please don't use the gospel of 'freedom' as a license to become angry, bitter, reactionary and to disrespect your owner/employer. But yes, do use the gospel of freedom, facing forward, calling on God's power in Christ, to bring God's Kingdom to earth (cf the Lord's prayer, Mt

6:9-13), and to look for a way in Christ to mirror your spiritual freedom with occupational freedom here on earth! Incredible mission, destiny, truth of 'change' here and now based on this gospel of Jesus Christ – a message not of mere words, but of power! (1 Cor 4:20)

In Christ you find strength for your current, even bad situation, and you also find power and paths to change it!

It is all about the Spirit, and how we allow his Spirit to move our spirit. Don't use your 'freedom' to fight for your own fleshly desires, but do use your freedom for new paths of truth and the Spirit of the gospel going forward. It's about the Spirit you move in.

So again, the braided hair and teaching issue. What does Paul care about here? What is he saying? Paul is saying to not use our freedom to highlight our own beauty, but to highlight Christ's beauty. Let's bring our outward beauty into our inner-being. Paul is saying that as a Christian now, it's not about outward

appearance, it is about the spirit, the integrity and beauty of the heart. So by all means, paint your face, but our 'focus' is not the hair, the clothes, the bling – it is the heart! Let's keep our spirits on fire, and hold to our 'first love', return to what we did at first. (Rev 2:1-5) Jesus never had an issue with the appearance of the Pharisees ('flowing robes', etc.), he never told them to stop dressing up to look good. What he cared about was that they were not dressing up on the inside, that their spirits were not pretty like their robes. With Christ it is all about the heart. He loves beauty! (see Phil 4:8, and Mt 6:28-30) But he wants us to *'focus on'* the beauty and integrity of the heart!

So I believe Paul is not saying that women cannot braid their hair or dress up, but to make sure that as a woman you are more concerned about beauty and truth of the spirit, on the 'inside', that your beauty 'focus' is inner and not outer in spirit and actions. Again, draw the parallel with circumcision. Paul forbade

the Galatians to do it, but it was not that he 'forbade' circumcision, or banned it forever. ***His point about circumcision was that circumcision is not the point!*** He 'forbade' it insofar as it was becoming the 'point'. As long as circumcision was in its rightful place, it was not a problem. Hence his 'use' of it with Timothy – i.e. to advance the gospel.

Paul says do not braid your hair, braid your heart! This is the point. This is the spirit of the practical advice. If a woman's heart is in the rightful place, if 'holiness' is the flow (1 Tim 6:3b), then braiding hair is not a problem. Or we might say: ***Where outward beauty is not a problem (i.e. not competing with truth, the gospel, holiness), outward beauty is not a problem!*** I think if Paul saw how much some of us good church folk were outlawing 'outward beauty', he would say it was us – and not the women – who are missing the point. Paul would say it was us who are focusing too much on outward beauty, and not the outwardly beautiful

women. To focus on makeup and outward beauty at all – whether the model putting it on or the preacher preaching against it – in both cases the ‘focus’ is to miss what we’re supposed to be focused on: Jesus Christ. So both women and men, churchgoers and church leaders, should not be focused on braided hair. This is the point!

And women teaching men? Similar deal here. Now that we are preaching a gospel of freedom (where there is much oppression), and where all people are equal in God’s eyes (Gal 3:28, Col 3:11, Eph 2:14, Gal 2:6, etc.), Paul is again cautioning us from a spirit of – and therefore actions based on - ‘revolt’ and disorder. He is not quashing gifts and women being involved in ministry or leadership – or even women teaching men. Again, draw the parallel with circumcision. Paul was blistering – and definitive - against circumcision, if all you read is Galatians 5. But in a healthy environment where circumcision is not

competing with holiness and the advance of the gospel, well, Paul has nothing against it, and will use it – like all things – to bring the focus back to Jesus. Paul wants zero blocks to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and so he admonishes Timothy's people to steady on, continue being submissive to their husbands (like any Jew was doing, and they were doing when they came to know Jesus), to continue having children and raising them (as any Jewish wife was doing, and they were doing when they came to know Jesus). Paul is saying (in this case to the women, but same principle for men) that we are not to suddenly – as equals in Christ – misuse and misunderstand God's grace and our equality, as a 'license' for competing for power in the church.

Now if someone came to Paul and said, '*OK, we've locked ladies out of any teaching in the church because you said...*' I think Paul would be upset about this. I think he would suspect a misuse of scripture and power. The focus was never

meant to be the structure of the church and new set of laws, but the 'spirit' and integrity of the focus of the church. It was about order, contentedness, Jesus being clear in the vision of all – the believer and unbeliever – and nothing getting in the way of this focus. Now the teaching that was supposed to free us from distraction, has become the distraction. Paul, I believe, would point us to Deborah, the leader God used to teach and lead men. Paul would point us to Mary who was given the revelation and experience of the risen Lord at the tomb, and used to 'teach' the apostles that Christ had risen. Paul would point to Anna in the temple, the prophet used by God – then and now through the scriptures – to testify to, and teach many men that Jesus is the Messiah. Paul might even point to Mary, his mother, and say that she gave Jesus a directive against his own inclination to do a miracle and keep the party jumping.⁹

⁹ Judges 5:7; Luke 2:36-38; John 20:11-18; John 2:1-12

I think Paul would be upset – much like in the case of circumcision – that people were now focusing more on who was in charge, than what was being taught. I think Paul would spell it out for them (like circumcising Timothy), that if a woman is a gifted and called minister – the same criteria for a man – that their grace should be recognized and their giftings used to advance the gospel, and honor the Giver of this woman’s gift. ***I think Paul would say that his point – like in the case of braided hair, circumcision, etc. – is about avoiding distracting points!***

Paul’s point about ‘women not teaching’ was never meant to be a hard and fast directive about church structure in an unbending way. As in the case of the ‘bondservant’, so, too, the woman who is at home and submissive when she is called to Christ, must not misuse this ‘freedom’ in Christ to revolt, get angry, kick against her circumstance. But again, like that same ‘bondservant’ who needs to ‘steady on’, this woman who is called of Christ, ‘freed’ by Christ, and discovers

that she has a gift of teaching deep within her, but is a 'slave' and locked down by society and culture, well, she should also look to God for this freedom to move her in life to new places...

'Were you a slave [a woman gifted in teaching/preaching but not allowed to do so] when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person...' (1 Corinthians 7:21-22)

Paul wants us to be content, but to move – by the spirit and gospel of Jesus Christ – into new places and spaces to advance his gospel. Not to advance our own status in society or in the church. But if called and equipped by Christ for his gospel – women or men - we move forward and change. All of us together!

If Paul were here today with us, in our culture, in order to highlight that he is talking about 'spirit of truth' versus 'spirit of revolt' in this passage in Timothy, rather than hard and fast laws regarding

church structure, he might put this question to us: *'If a woman cannot teach a man, why do you allow women supervisors in banks and businesses, women professors in schools, women instructors in hospitals? If a woman cannot teach a man, why does the church allow women teaching the men volunteers on what to do and how to do it, or to allow women to teach the men what they need to teach the children in children's ministry? If women cannot teach men, why do church leaders listen to anything women have to say about God, Jesus, or dealing with children and their wives? Christian men cannot and must not read books written by women, lest they defer to any 'teaching' therein. Women must not write anything – even blogs – lest they are inadvertently 'teaching' men who read them...'*

I think Paul would slap us upside the head and say: *'I was telling Timothy and his people, to maintain order as they were doing outside the church walls, and not misuse this 'new humanity' and new covenant and new organization called the 'local church', to simply start competing*

for power. But if a woman is gifted and called, that is different, that is 'orderly', and being used by God to advance the gospel, not distract from it.'

It is important to note that Paul does not specify the pulpit in this passage about women not teaching. So if we are going to disregard the spirit and history of Paul and the gospel in our interpretation of this passage, and make 'laws' out of it, well then, we need to be consistent, and go with the former paragraph – women are forbidden to teach men, period! Paul used this exact same line of reasoning with the church in Galatia to highlight the point being missed, and said if you are going to insist on circumcision in this spirit – a spirit of overlooking and disregarding the spirit and truth of the gospel and everything that has poured into that – then go ahead and cut the whole thing off! (Galatians 5:12) If it's law you want, it's law you'll get. First you'll carve out your place of power, but then the same laws will carve you out. As Jesus said, *'live by the sword, die by the sword.'* (Mt 26:52) Same with Law.

So the issue is 'spirit', not law. Is this not the very essence of everything that the gospel is? Jesus said, ***'The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. My words are spirit and they are life.'***

(John 6:63) So when it comes to this passage in Timothy, I think it can only be read in and through the very Spirit of the *'gospel of grace'* (Acts 20:24), the *'gospel of peace'* (Eph 6:15), and everything Paul actually demonstrated in dealing with like issues. Some key scriptures to gaze on - and their Spirit to soak in - are: Galatians 5:2, Acts 16:3 and 1 Corinthians 7:21-24.

My dad always said, *'You can fall off either side of a horse.'* Let's look at the other side here... So above we talk about 1 Timothy 2:9-12, and it is where we mistake a gospel and Spirit of freedom, for a set of rules. We miss the Spirit, and lock into laws. Now note, the only way to 'unlock' from the law, is not with other laws; it is with Spirit. So we looked at the very Spirit of God that worked in and through Paul, so that we would take the Law captive for the gospel, and not allow the Law to take the gospel captive. You don't get out of the bind of legalism by new and better laws. You step away from the bind of legalism – which is a spirit – by the Holy Spirit. ***You don't fight law with law, but with Spirit.*** Look really carefully at how Jesus dealt with Satan when he was misusing scripture. Jesus did not argue with Satan by referencing the same scriptures and debating them – because they were a false set of terms, or tools. Jesus recognized that the spirit behind the scriptures Satan was quoting, was an evil spirit, and so Jesus brought true Spirit through Spirit-led scriptures – which were different, but had power, and were truthfully administered. (Matthew

4:1-11) *Don't fight law with law. Law doesn't liberate from itself. It only binds and points. You fight law with the Holy Spirit. Law cannot bind Spirit. You take hold of Spirit, and the cords of Law fall off you. Spirit has authority, and the Law breaks when it encounters Spirit.* (Luke 20:17-18; Rev 12:10-11; 2 Cor 10:3-5)

'For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.' (2 Cor 10:3-5)

'The accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.' (Rev 12:10-11)

OK, the other error we often make is missing the Spirit and making a 'license.' Now note, I'm not saying we missed the 'text' and made a license, because often we are quoting the text as our basis for license. No, what we are missing – or ignoring – is the true Spirit of God in and through the text and history, and so we make God's grace a '*license for immorality*'. (Jude 1:4; Gal 5:13) This is exactly the same thing that happens with legalism, the text is used – misused – to serve a spirit that is impure, a legalistic spirit. A legalistic spirit is no better than a liberal spirit, both are idols of the flesh, and indulge the flesh. The only Spirit that can and should breathe, is the Holy Spirit, and this is no more comfortable or intuitive to a Pharisee than a prostitute.

See how Nicodemus – the 'teacher of the law' – struggled with the 'spirit' of Jesus in John 3. He wanted a new rule, a new box to check, a new project to conquer, not a 'wind', not an invisible power completely out of his control and his paradigm of righteousness. (John 3:8) The Holy Spirit – and his teaching and history of actions through the bible – is what confronts and

defeats the spirit of morally liberal 'license'. If you try to correct 'license' theology (like homosexuality is OK, etc.) with just laws, and not the Spirit of the Gospel, the same laws will create spaces that you – yes you – will fall through. You will find that the spirit of immorality – or 'license' – will find its way through, if the not the English, then the Greek or Hebrew or Aramaic, and if not in the present, well, *'back in that culture...'* etc. If you rely only on words, texts and contexts, those same words, texts and contexts will not be – cannot be - watertight. You will be caught out by the same system, by 'fine-sounding arguments' (Col 2:4), by 'contradictions, falsely called knowledge' (1 Tim 6:20), by 'argumentation' that based on the 'principles of this world, rather than on Christ.' (Col 2:8) If you live by your head-knowledge alone, you will die by it. This is why Jesus, when correcting the Sadducees, he did say they lacked in scriptural knowledge, but also in their *'knowledge of the power of God.'* (Mt 22:29) Words on the page – even in the bible - are not enough, even the devil can use/twist those (Mt 4:1-11); the *'living*

Word', the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14), and then breathing words that are '*spirit and life*' (John 6:63), well now we have the fullness of God's truth, and there is nothing that can stand against that.

(But just look at the 'substance' of this truth – Word made 'flesh', and that same flesh speaking 'spirit and life'.

That's a lot of Spirit right there!) The Spirit of God is what blows and fills all spaces, not linear laws and verses that connect like 2-by-4s in a house-framing project. So let me get practical here on the 'license versus Spirit'...

If you wanted to, you could argue that there is no explicit text in scripture that states that premarital sex is definitively sinful, especially if betrothed to be married. Or if you were to argue that 'sex' itself is the marriage contract per scriptural references, well, where then do you draw the line before that? Holding hands? Kissing? How about flirting on text or email, or even dressing to look pretty or handsome? Or sexual thoughts – because Jesus seems to make lustful thoughts the same as the act. (Mt 5:28) So maybe you shouldn't even lay eyes on

that woman you will marry, until like Isaac, you can take her directly into a tent and marry her as soon as you lay eyes on her. (Gen 24) And I don't think Isaac was trying to avoid lustful thinking here, he just happened to have things lined up and ready to go. His expedited marriage act was not a holiness project to keep his 'courting' period pure, so no, let's not create a new 'marriage purity' movement based on this! So if you meet, greet and 'get to know a girl' before getting married, well, are you just in perpetual lust? And on and on and on... If we keep chipping away at this, there is zero system – and zero heart - that is free from guilt, blame, accusation, sin. Zero. Not one person or system – not Christian courting, not pre-arranged marriage, can – through scriptures and accountability alone – determine a 'pure' relationship.

This is not to say that systems and scriptures are not good for this area of life, but that if they (the people who are administering these systems/scriptures) are void of the Spirit of God, and a true love of God, these systems are futile for true godliness and truth. Shoot, even acts

of grand charity and prophecy and speaking in tongues are futile if the love of God is absent! (I Cor 13) Everything – even bearing up under persecution for Christ, discerning false teachers, and doing good works – loses power and relevance to God if and where the spirit has lost its love of God. (Rev 2:1-5) This ‘love’ is the kind that is pure¹⁰, is of Christ, pours forth not from legalism or humanitarianism, but from a heart that has been forgiven much by Christ, and so pours out much love on Christ and on others. (Mark 14:1-9; Luke 7:47) This true ‘love’ of God, and from God, is the first commandment of Christ. This is the very energy of faith and repentance, the lifting of our eyes, a going through the ‘door’, recalibrated vision (Mt 6:22-23), transformed behavior and thinking. (Rm 12:1-2; Ps 19:7) This love of Jesus – holding to his person, his teaching, sitting at his feet¹¹ – is where the Spirit of Jesus (i.e. his very own self), *‘teaches us all things, and recalls to our minds what he has taught.’* (Jn 14:26) There is a

¹⁰ James 3:17

¹¹ John 8:31-32; John 5:39-40; Luke 10:38-42

difference between us working things out/using scriptures, and the Holy Spirit *'teaching us'* things, and *'calling scriptures to our mind.'* In the former case, the flesh is using God for its own means, in the latter, God leading the flesh in truth. In both cases we might come out with a 'system' and some scripture to back it. The difference is, in the former case, it was made by man, in the latter, made by God – through man. What is the essential difference? The Spirit.

So when it comes to sex before marriage, forget the Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic. If you're digging that deep, you're working too hard. Jesus said we had to be like children to enter the Kingdom of God. (Mt 18:3) It is our 'knowledge' of good and evil, our prideful desire to 'know' everything about everything so that we could self-justify, that was the root of our rebellion against God. (Gen 3:5-6) Let's be like children, look and listen to Christ as we study his word. Sex – and sexual behavior – is for marriage. So stay strong, avoid compromising situations and 'touch', and make your wedding plans! If you stumble or question or doubt or even

sin – well, stand up, repent, correct, receive forgiveness and hustle forward with Christ's love, Christ's wisdom (*'first of all, pure...'* James 3:17), Christ's forgiveness (*'which leaves no regret...'* 2 Cor 7:10), and get on with making your wedding plans! ***'If you do marry, you have not sinned...'*** (1 Cor 7:28) Make your marriage (which is *'seeking God's kingdom'*) a far higher priority than *'what you will eat, drink and wear, for the pagans run after these things.'* (Mt 6:31-33)

I think a lot of our struggles with what's right and wrong sexually, come from our lack of faith to take action in getting married, before we have complete 'financial peace', a degree, a 401-K, a 10-year plan, 2 cars, and 100k down payment for our first house... This is not seeking ***'first'*** the Kingdom of God. This is *'first'* worrying about – making a priority – provision/security and money. Even the pagans do that. Marriage is not of the kingdom of the world; it is a principle and an act that is of the 'Kingdom of God'. It needs to be up there with those things we seek *'first'* – and not last!

Get serious about your love of God, and the Spirit of God in your life and through his gospel and his Word, and many things – all things – will be on a true road of understanding, and wisdom will come to you. The Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ and his Word – not systems and Christian books, quotes, stickers, purity movements...

Now, I'm not going to tease it all out again here, as the principles are exactly the same as above, but...

If you wanted to, you could argue that the 'tendency' of homosexuality – especially if not 'practising' – is not fully outlawed in scripture. So if you sit around dissecting scripture, quoting Rabbis and professors, 'contextualizing', etc., you will get no spiritual authority on the issue of homosexuality as sin. And it is sin. How can we know? Well, as Jesus noted in Matthew 22:29, by knowing the scriptures 'and the power of God.' If you are looking through the scriptures to really see and know the character of God, what he loves, and how his Spirit moves, it is clear – both by the scriptures themselves, and by the Spirit of Truth – that homosexuality is sinful. If, however, you find yourself debating on social media whether this or that 'point' or this or that professor... you will find yourself free-falling. What is the Spirit really saying to you – and calling you to say (or not say) - when this topic is tabled?

Look carefully at how Jesus – who only did and said what he heard/saw the Father doing/saying (John 5:19) – dealt with the devil in Matthew 4, and even with the Pharisees regarding taxes. (Mt 22:15-

22) In the former case, Jesus would not 'springboard' or debate the scriptures the devil was tabling. Why? Because the Spirit of God was pointing at other layers and 'scriptures' that were really the issue. Let the Spirit determine for you what the 'issue' is, not what people are saying it is. Don't let people lead the debate on truth. Let the Spirit guide you, lead you, and be a person who knows the scriptures¹², but is also wired up to the 'power of God.' (Mt 22:29)

In the latter case above, that of the Pharisees questioning 'taxes' – a political question with spiritual aspects to it – Jesus did not respond to their question on the 'terms' of their question. Jesus knew the scriptures, and the power of God, and spoke to the issue on a much deeper level than that which was tabled. *(Look up and meditate on this extraordinary exchange (Mt 22:15-22); see how Jesus brought different realms of Spirit into the*

¹² These are key scriptures that I remember, regarding the issue of homosexuality: Romans 1:26-27; 1 Timothy 1:8-11; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Corinthians 6:18 (i.e. that sexual sin is 'different'); 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Leviticus 18:22; Galatians 5:19.

whole question, moment, and dimension of relationship. Jesus was asked, so to speak, a 2-D question, but he answered in 3-D. Just because people come at you in 2-D, don't you stand and respond in 2-D, otherwise you are allowing them to dictate the 'terms' and spirit space of the discussion on truth. Listen for the Spirit, as did Jesus (John 5:19))

So ask God to open your eyes to what his Spirit is saying/doing, and how to really 'hear' his Word in this or that context, with this or that neighbor, in this or that debate or conversation. Truth is not stagnant, it is Spirit, and you will hear its sound, but not know where it comes from or where it is going. (John 3:8) So we need to be tooled up with Scripture, and full of the Spirit of God, or we just won't fly straight. Spirit. Be careful of drawing up 'systems' of truth (like hard and fast moral rules), because you might be harder on yourself and on others than God is being in a certain place, time, space. Do all things with a heart full of faith, and bubbling with the Spirit – and remember, 'rules' and 'systems' – even courting systems - are not the same thing as faith!:

‘Everything that does not come from faith is sin.’ (Romans 14:23)

‘Without faith it is impossible to please God.’ (Heb 11:6)

God is about ‘faith’, not our paltry lists of rules. This is why ‘prostitutes and tax collectors’ are entering heaven ahead of us, and ahead of the ‘Pharisees’. (Mt 21:31-32)

Freedom to Enjoy: One man sits and feasts, when God calls him to look, see and give to the needy around him. (Jm 2:16) Another man sits and feasts, because even in the midst of his *'enemies'*, and in a *'scorched land'*, God has laid him a table. (Ps 23:4; Is 58:11) The first man should not be feasting, the second man would be prideful and not humble, if he refused to feast. ***The question is, what is of God and what is of man?*** The first feast was of man, the second of God. So what 'feast' is good and pure and should be enjoyed? The one blessed and brought by the Lord. If God blesses, to not enjoy his blessing, is to expose in ourselves a belief system of 'good and bad' that is not of God; it must pivot on something else. If all good gifts come from the Father of lights (James 1:17), and all 'goodness' is of his Spirit alone, then if he lays a feast – but we are supposedly focused on the poor in that moment – our hearts are not right. There is no 'rich' or 'poor' issue that in itself determines what is good or bad. The disciples tried this one on Jesus when Mary had extravagantly poured perfume on him – a feast, as it were, in a poor

community. When the disciples challenged her, and the 'spirit' of it all, Jesus rebuked them and said the 'poor will always be with you.' He went on to say that this extravagance was so powerfully Spirit-filled, that it would be one with the gospel message – in memory of this lady!

'Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.' (Mark 14:9)

The same is true of 'guilt' or conviction. The question is not about the *facts* of your sin, your thoughts, your story. The question is who is doing the 'accusing'? If you are not feeling a conviction by the Holy Spirit, then who is bringing this 'conviction'? We are told the Holy Spirit convicts and leads to repentance, in a way – a Spirit – that ***'leaves no regret.'*** (2 Cor 7:10) Is your thinking or bad feeling coming from a Holy Spirit or an unholy spirit? The question, as I say, is not what you have done, or what you have thought... ***the question is what spirit is speaking to you on this***

matter? If not the Holy Spirit, then this 'bad feeling' you have ***needs to be silenced by the blood of Jesus, and your declaration that Jesus is Lord in your life.*** (Read Revelation 12:10-11) So when it comes to guilt and conviction and 'bad feeling', it is the exact same spiritual matter as when it comes to 'feasting', fun and Disney Land. Is it the report, lead and Spirit of Jesus that is in this?

Now listen, don't let the enemy get in here and plague you with, 'Well, are you sure this is a gift from God, and not just you doing/taking what you want?' The enemy is going to target every 'gift' from God, to sour it, to steal your joy, to 'guiltify' an otherwise beautiful experience. So don't look too deeply into these matters, just move on forward in thanksgiving! We are told that we can and do 'accept' and 'sanctify' (make good/holy) gifts from God, by thanking him for them. So don't scrutinize, just move on out – in thanksgiving and faith – in freedom and joy. When in doubt, thank God and enjoy!

'For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.' (1 Tim 4:4-5)

Discernment: It is not about whether a person, a word or a movement 'names' the name of Jesus. We are told by Christ himself that there will be people who do miracles in his name, who are not of him. (Mt 7:21-23) Now, there are people who are not of our particular clan or denomination, and they are solid, good, true. We need discernment. The disciples were wary of a guy doing miracles but he was not in their discipleship group. This guy was OK. Read Luke 9:49-50. So some will do miracles who are *not* of Christ, and others will do miracles who are. The miracle is a miracle. That's not our question, nor our challenge. The question is, and what we are called to 'test', is the Spirit. (1 Thes 5:19-22) So don't feel bad being somewhat wary when in the presence of a Christian 'movement'. Movement doesn't mean the Spirit of God is in it. Read 1 Kings 19:11-13, and note that the big noise and the big power, were not of God. The whisper was of God. Spirit.

Grace: Let's end on this eternal note of Spirit. Let's end, so to speak, where there is no end. Jesus told us that to be born of the spirit was like the wind – we would hear its sound, but not know where it goes or where it comes from. (John 3:8) Picture a feather in a storm, blowing up high in the sky, out over the oceans, in and through valleys and over mountain peaks. Picture waves 'sweeping over you' (see this intoxicating verse and image: Psalm 42:7), and tossing, turning you in deep (but safe) waters. Picture yourself being completely unfettered in your soul, zero 'binding', zero insecurity, completely known by every man, woman and spirit of all times, as a son or daughter of the King. Nothing to prove, the land is yours, your spirit is cool and free as breeze. You are honored, wise, powerful, known, compassionate, and loose to blow in the wind of God... This truth and freedom that saturates the soul is only by God's grace.¹³ His Spirit is Grace. His Grace is Love. This truth is not something you will know in your mind, or 'off by heart'; it is the very Spirit of God that obliterates your

¹³ John 8:36; 1 Cor 3:21-23; Eccl 1:18/Gen 3:5-6

mind - your sinful, 'knowledgeable', mortal mind. So when Paul asked God to take the thorn – the spiritual limitation, discomfort – from him, God said, **'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'** (2 Cor 12:9) Paul wanted the true power, not just the 'feeling', so when he really noted this 'avenue', this doorway of his weakness bringing him to the very winds of God's Grace, he embraced it:

'Therefore I will boast... about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. ***For when I am weak, then I am strong.***' (2 Cor 12:9-10)

Note that Paul does not say in this verse, 'when I am weak, God is strong.' No, Paul sees that this is a gift of God, this wind of Grace, that actually transforms and defines his *own* person: 'When I am weak, then I am strong.'

Be blessed and free to ask God to take the thorn – your fears, insecurities, etc. Paul did. That's natural and OK. But look deeply into the message and power of God's grace – i.e. that our salvation is by grace, and our 'power' and message is not of ourselves, it is a gift of God, not by works, so that no man should boast. (cf. Eph 2:9-20) Peer deeply into the eternal space and Spirit of God's grace. Because although you may be feeling winds of guilt and condemnation, in God's grace you are *not* guilty nor condemned. (Romans 8:33-34) Although you may be feeling insecure and fearful, in God's grace you are of a spirit of '**power and love**'. (2 Tim 1:7) The space of God's grace frees you completely, holds you steady as one '*crucified with Christ*', and living a life not of study, insight, and wisdom, but rather: '*The life I live in the body, I live by faith...*' (Gal 2:20) Here you are untouchable. Here – and only here in God's grace – you are free from condemnation, guilt, regret. Here you are saved.

The place and space of God's grace,
through faith in Jesus Christ: This is the
realm of the Spirit of God, where all truth
abounds. Build here.

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