

smudged ink.

God's ways lower than our ways

Isaiah 55:9

Peter Walker
www.1peter1three.weebly.com

I dedicate this book to you, the reader. God looks for you. He searches for you. Jesus notices when you're not there, and he leaves the crowd, the event, to find you.

I hope God's words and love come off these pages and stay with you, as '*spirit and life*'.
(John 6:63)

Introduction:

To heal the blind man, Jesus spat in the ground, made a paste in the mud, and smeared this mud in the sockets of the man's eyes. He asked the man if he could see. Not clearly, he said. Jesus put his hands on him again to finish this work of healing.¹ It is also interesting that Jesus did this in private (took the man *'outside the village'*), and after it was done Jesus sent him home and told him not to tell anyone.

Everything about this story goes against everything I want in God, and often demand from God. I want to 'see' power, but Jesus hid this miracle from people like me. I want things of God to be instant, shocking, but Jesus used an earthy, messy process over time to do this. I want proofs of God to blaze across the sky, across my soul, but Jesus spat on the ground, stirred in the dirt. I want things of God to be beyond question at any moment, but midway through this process of healing it was questionable – the man said he could not see clearly.

Many people turned away from Jesus because he was beneath them. His words were off-putting, his actions lowbrow. He told people that to be in right standing with God they needed to **'eat his flesh, drink his blood'**; he let

¹ Mark 8:22-26

prostitutes touch him, pour perfume on him.²

‘Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised and we held him in low esteem.’ (Isaiah 53:3)

I know I’ve missed God looking for him in the skies, when he is mixing spit in the dirt.

² John 6:50-58; Luke 7:36-50

1. Every Glimpse

Have you ever seen 'some' light of God, even a glimpse? Maybe you can recall a time or experience where a measure of God's truth, his revelation, crossed your soul?

When Jesus first asked the man if he could see, after smearing mud in his eyes, the man said he could see partially: ***'I see people; they look like trees walking around.'*** (Mark 8:24) Then Jesus continued the work of healing: ***'Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight restored, and he saw everything clearly.'*** (vs.25)

Seeing God's revelation 'clearly' can come by degrees – like much change and development in life. I think of seasons changing. We see it but we don't see it, if you know what I mean. Same with the sunrise and sunset, and a flower growing or a baby growing. Such power and direction and development, but in degrees, imperceptible degrees.

God created life itself in stages over time. He fashioned and formed things. He even improved on things, by yet again using materials that he had already designed, and a process. (see Genesis 2:18-21)

God created the physical world in which we live – with detail, with time, with stages, with changes and developments. And after God

created this world, this platform for life, this dome, he worked *within* that same dome to make himself known, to reveal himself and his truth. God stepped *into* his creation, into the life and time that he built, and ***‘walked with them in the cool of the day.’*** (Genesis 3:8)

God reveals himself from *within* his creation. He speaks from the inside, not from the outside. He doesn't boom a voice from beyond the stars, but rather steps into his creation, and speaks to and through the people he made, the nature he made, the stirrings of the soul that he put in motion.

In a sense this makes sense, even if we stand *back* and look and judge the matter on our own human terms – if there is any such thing as ‘our own human terms’. If you were to create something intricate, or achieve something impressive, you would hope that people would understand something of you from what you've built or achieved. Even if they hadn't met you. If what you had achieved was formidable, intentional, built with evident design, you would expect people to see and learn about you from your creation. It came forth from you, reflects something of you. You have revealed much of yourself through your creation.

It is OK to pick up reflections – and therefore truth – about God, by degrees, by glimpses. It is OK to have degrees of light come into the eyes, before full and clear seeing. Jesus opened the

man's eyes in this way – by degrees, by natural and messy materials. God's power was behind the process, in the process, but he used natural ingredients to build the miracle of healing.

Have you caught glimpses of God's truth and reality at different times, in different ways? Maybe one evening the sky itself spoke to you. Maybe one quiet, earnest prayer was answered and you or your loved ones were protected. Maybe one word or one opportunity had a sense of the Spirit upon it, or before it. Let these moments gather. Maybe only partial light breaks in. But allow Jesus to build and finish this work of opening your eyes.

'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.' (Psalm 19:1-2)

2. You Are God's Treasure

I remember when I was about 5 years old, my dad, brother and sister were going on a tour of a city in China. We were living on a ship at that time, docked in China.³

I remember the bustle of many people getting ready to go on this 3-day tour, loading bags in the tour buses, lots of excitement and rushing around. I went down to my cabin and climbed up to the small, round porthole window, and watched. I was crying because I would miss them, felt a little lost in the shuffle. Suddenly the cabin door swung open, and my dad said, ***'There you are! I've been looking for you! I just wanted to say goodbye!'*** I wasn't forgotten. I wasn't lost. Everything was OK.

'God has set eternity in the human heart.'
(Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Eternity is in *your* heart. You are cut from the Spirit of God. If you were to stand in the middle of a mansion, in the middle of a rich and wealthy city, and we 'fast-forwarded' maybe 1000, maybe 10,000 years, only you would still be there. God has set eternity in *you*, not in the world – or wealth, or celebrity status – that surrounds you now. This world and its wealth will all fade and disintegrate. But you are forever.

³ More about my 'crazy' life as a missionary kid at: www.1peter1three.weebly.com

You are God's highest creation.

Jesus tells a story about a shepherd who left his ninety-nine 'safe' sheep, to go find the 1 lost sheep. He ends this story by saying there is rejoicing in heaven over the rescue, the redemption, of just 1 lost person. (Luke 15:7)

Time and time again in Scripture we see Jesus seek and find the lost person, or spend time – long, quality time – with people we don't even have names for. One of my favorite accounts is when Jesus rose from the dead. We are told he appeared, and walked alongside, 2 men on the road to Emmaus, a 7-mile walk. Jesus spoke with them, explained Scripture to them, encouraged them. At this moment in history when Christ had risen from the dead, Jesus spent hours of time with these men we don't even know. But God knows. And he chose to be with them, to comfort them, and the rest of the world could wait. (Luke 24:13-35)

Jesus comes to you, and the rest of the world can wait. You are his child, made in his image, with eternity in your heart. You are his highest prize. Not crowds, but the individual. You.

Jesus said, ***'I stand at your door and I knock. If you open the door I will come in and eat with you, and you with me.'*** (Revelation 3:20)

You don't have to look for Jesus. He comes to you. You simply have to be there, open the door.

Take some time to sit still with Jesus, with God.
Whisper this prayer that David wrote:

***‘Keep me, Lord, as the apple of your eye.
Hide me now in the shadow of your wings.’***
(Psalm 17:8)

3. God's Love

'I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and an acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.' (Hosea 6:6)

The purpose of all God's laws is this: to love God, and to love people.

We often lose sight of the purpose of the law, and focus on the law itself. The law becomes an idol, and love is lost. And if love is lost, the whole purpose of the law is lost. It means nothing.

'If I give all I possess to the poor... but do not have love, I gain nothing.'
(1 Corinthians 13:3)

Throughout history there have been horrible, sinful things done by people (supposedly Christians) to other people, in the name of Jesus and God's law. Hate and not love has been the driving force and the outcome of people supposedly holding to God's law. Jesus said this would happen: ***'There will come a time when people will kill you and think they are offering a sacrifice to God. They will do this because they have not known the Father or me.'*** (John 16:2-3) They have *not* known the Father or Christ. They are not, were not Christians.

People have been burned at the stake in the name of God's law. People have been slaughtered for being 'pagan', when Jesus

himself told us to lay down our lives for people, not to *take* their lives. In fact, when Peter drew his sword and cut off a man's ear to protect Jesus, Jesus healed the man and rebuked Peter, saying, **'Put your sword away.'** (John 18:11) This is interesting because Jesus had told them earlier that night, **'If you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one.'** (Luke 22:36) So what did Jesus mean by 'buying a sword' and preparing for the fight? Well, it could not have meant a literal sword or a violent fight, or else he would not have told Peter to put his sword away.

Christ's 'fight' is not against flesh and blood, and his kingdom is not of this world. He was clear about this when his life was on trial. (John 18:36) He said his kingdom – the one he is building through you and me and the Holy Spirit right now – is not one you see with your eyes (not yet), but is 'within': **'The kingdom of God is not one you see with your eyes... The kingdom of God is within you.'** (Luke 17:21)

Jesus himself quoted Hosea 6:6 (**'I desire mercy, not sacrifice...'**) in Matthew chapter twelve. And he is telling people at that moment that even laws can be broken where the love of God and of people is in place – i.e. the *purpose*, the point of the law is already achieved.

Jesus gives 2 examples, the first of king David breaking the law to feed his people (to 'love' his people) and the other example of you and me

everyday 'breaking laws' to love people – letting someone off money they owe at the cashier because they can't afford it, leaving off a 'seat belt' in the car because someone is in pain, even a judge dismissing a case because the theft was by a mother to feed her children. Breaking laws to honor the higher law – love of God and people.

This is not to say – or advocate – for lawlessness. Holiness and Love are of the same Spirit, the Holy Spirit of Jesus. '**God is love.**' (1 John 4:8) The love that surpasses God's law is God's love.

4. World Changer

By faith – or simply *in* faith - you affect the course of history every day. Right where you are, alone, maybe even feeling lonely; you sit quietly with Jesus, and so you change history.

One day Jesus and his disciples were at Mary and Martha's house for dinner. There was much to be done to prepare the food. I'm thinking there had to be more than 25 people to feed, to host. Martha was busy at work. Meanwhile, Mary, her sister, was sitting and listening to Jesus speak. Look at this exchange:

'Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'

'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed - or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'

(Luke 10:38-42)

Jesus is not undermining Martha's efforts and hard work. It is necessary if any of them are going to eat! But what Jesus is pointing out here is that the ultimate point and purpose of being together, even living life, is to love God and love each other. Martha seems in this moment to have lost perspective on the overall purpose of

this meal together, and that is to be with God, enjoy his presence.

When a person simply sits with the Lord, stays present with the Lord – literally or just spiritually in their heart and mind – they are accomplishing God's highest purpose. God came to earth, became a man, so that he could be with us. His very title, Emmanuel, means, '**God with us.**' (Matthew 1:23)

We can honor God with our faith-filled actions, activities, but the *deepest* place with God, the greatest 'deed' we can do, is to just be with God. Mary chose what was better, and it will not – cannot – be taken from her. Time spent with the Lord can never be taken from you.

And so history changes, because God sees this faith and rewards it. What God rewards marks history forever.

'Your Father in heaven who is unseen, sees what you do in secret and rewards you.'
(Matthew 6:4,6,18)

So even when you are alone, Christ is there with you. Instead of looking for things to do *for* him, just sit and be *with* him. This is why he came. This is what he suffered to achieve: time – real, faith-filled time – with you.

5. The Lifter of My Head

'You, Lord... are the one who lifts my head.'
(Psalm 3:3)

Sometimes I worry about what God will 'see' and say when I meet him. I think of him as '*seeing through me*' if you know what I mean. Like, my life may look one way to people here, but God sees my heart...

Truth is, Jesus just did not work like this. In fact, he would call out and call forth prophetic and merciful words over people. I think of when he first saw Nathanael coming towards him, Jesus said, **'Here is a man in whom there is nothing false.'** (John 1:47) It's like Jesus would take the very best of us – not even what we have achieved but what we would dream to be – and calls it our name. He demonstrated the very opposite of what I fear in meeting him. It is actually *me* that 'sees through me', and others might, too, but Jesus looks over my blood stains and calls them, **'white as snow.'** (Isaiah 1:18)

One example of this is when Jesus was brought the woman caught in adultery by a mob of men. Where was the man also committing adultery? Why wasn't he dragged to Jesus? Anyway... This woman had been caught in sin. It was real. It had a history and lifestyle behind it. Jesus could see it all. But he chose to see her future. He said to her, **'I don't condemn you. Go and sin no more.'** (John 8:11)

Jesus is the one who lifts our head, our bowed head. He is not the one to expose us, or humiliate us, or cause us to drop our eyes, our head. No, he is the Lifter of our head. He tilts upward your head till your eyes look into his eyes, and he robes you here, he defines you as royal.

‘Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says... I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.’

(Revelation 2:17)

6. Ground Level

Jesus said things and did things that pushed us over the edge. For example, when we were sitting around talking about rules and judging each other, Jesus said:

'If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better to do life with only one hand than to have both hands, and be thrown into hell.' (Matthew 5:30)

So do I cut off my hand? And every other limb that has caused me to sin? What is Jesus saying?

He's shattering the whole conversation and bringing things back to the heart. Jesus is saying that to focus on this sin and that sin – in my life and others – is like making beds in a burning house. It is futile. We need God to forgive and save!

Following Jesus, watching him work, is to walk not so much into a pattern of living, but to walk *out* of a pattern of living. And to walk *into* the Spirit. It is to be born of Spirit, and now life is like wind – invisible, but true and powerful and reaching.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, ***'The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the***

Spirit.' (John 3:8)

We hate to be out of control, to not have answers and justifications. So when Jesus told Nicodemus – a teacher, an answer-man – that true connection with God through Jesus would take him into Spirit, into the Wind, it would be the very opposite sense of safety, of the concrete, that Nicodemus' whole life and ministry was built on. But it also tapped the very core craving of his soul. We crave to cut loose and fly. Our souls long to lift back up off our heavy feet and live.

To follow Jesus is to step off the cliff's edge and walk on air.

'This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.' (1 Corinthians 2:13)

Jesus leveled with people. He was real, emotional, testing. He pointed out to the woman who asked for healing of her child, that she was of another people, a lesser people. He shot straight, he even offended her here and tested her resolve. And note her response, even contradicting Jesus:

'Jesus said, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.'

'Yes it is, Lord,' she said. 'Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's

table.'

Then Jesus said to her, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed at that moment.'

(Matthew 15:21-28)

Jesus will test you, test me. He will test our resolve. Are we coming to him with intention, humbly, because he is Lord. Or are we just crossing his path, not really following, not testifying, and just asking for this or that. He loves us deeply, completely, but will not be mocked. (Galatians 6:7)

He asks for a heart surrendered. He asks for full following, full commitment. If we stay in the room, in the conversation, when he challenges us, maybe even contradict him, talk back, he will heal, and commend our faith.

Jesus taught us to be meek, and modeled this. He was so meek he even deferred to the request of the demons to go into the pigs rather than to hell – for now. (Mark 5:12-13) But then publicly Jesus referred to king Herod as a **'fox'**, and said he would not change anything he was doing to accommodate this man. And later on, at the time of his death, he defied Herod by disrespecting him, not answering his questions when he asked. Here Herod snapped and turned his curiosity into violence, and his soldiers began to

beat Jesus.⁴

When the high priest questioned Jesus about his teaching, Jesus said to ask those who heard him teach. Such was the disrespect in this comment that the official slapped Jesus and said, *'Is this the way you answer the high priest?'* Obviously it was. And it was the correct, even holy way to answer the high priest. (John 18:19-24)

Jesus called us to turn the cheek in the face of oppression. (Matthew 5:39) But he did not 'turn the cheek' in the face of Judas' betrayal. He warned him, and made clear to all history, that because of this betrayal it would be better that Judas had never been born. (Mt 26:24)

Judgement, not forgiveness, was in store for this oppression. Jesus spoke a similar, chilling word to people who sin against children. He said it would be better for them had they a millstone tied round their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. (Matthew 18:6) So what does Jesus mean when he tells us to turn the cheek, and to bear with oppression? Well, he cuts deep here. He is not telling us to turn aside from a true conflict for principle and righteousness; rather he is telling us to not fight for ego, for pride, for selfish reasons, for mere earthly gain. He is telling us to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven, to fight for *his* causes, his kingdom,

⁴ Luke 13:32; Luke 23:8-12. We are told to honor those in authority (Romans 13:1-7), but here Jesus defies one in authority. ***'There is a time for everything...'*** (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

souls and love and peace.

We see this in the call of Christ to not judge (Matthew 7:1-5), but then he calls us to **'judge correctly'**. (John 7:24) So do we not judge, or do we judge correctly? Yes.

Jesus shakes us, to wake us up. He is not speaking to and through the law to simply give us a new set of laws. He is speaking to and through the law to get back to the *'spirit of the law'*. (Romans 7:14) He is breaking the idols of rules in our lives, to bring us back to the all-important, all-consuming, love of God and love of people, through the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 22:36-40)

Jesus said, **'My words are spirit and they are life.'** (John 6:63) In following Christ, observing how he lived, how he applied truth, what he said, how he said it, when he said it... The paradigm of legalism is shattered, and we blow in the wind. We see and feel and become the **'fulfilment of the law'** (Romans 10:4), **'living stones'** (1 Peter 2:5), Christ himself. (Matthew 16:19)

We could go on to consider how Jesus pressed people, broke their minds, with a call to **'eat his flesh and drink his blood'** (John 6:53), or how he defined God's motive in certain laws – i.e. good laws to direct sinful decisions (Mt 19:12), or how he tricked his brothers about going to a festival (John 7:1-10), or how he said that David broke the law of the priest and of God and it was

OK (Matthew 12:1-4), and so many other examples.

When we really look at how Jesus lived, when we 'follow' him, we get to the limits of the Law, and step beyond it into Spirit. This might sound very lofty, high up, but in the case of Jesus this looked lowly, even beneath us. His high and Spirit ways were lower than our ways, and our pride could not handle his true Spirit living. We still explain him away, rather than bow and break and blow in the Wind.

7. Propriety

I'm a firm believer in boundaries, when it comes to men and women. Not silly extremes, but wisdom in the dynamic. A man alone with a woman can be tempting in emotional and physical ways. It can 'be' something risky, or it can simply appear risky to others, and so compromise reputation and testimony. As a rule, at work, for example, I don't go for lunch alone with a female colleague. Sometimes I have to, or a third party doesn't show up. No sweat, no worries. But as a rule of thumb, I try to avoid these situations.

So when Jesus was alone and speaking to the woman at the well (John 4), we have a questionable situation. And in that culture, it was even far more pronounced. This type of interaction did not happen, should not happen. But Jesus spoke to her. He connected with her. He spoke about personal things in her life. This led to him and his disciples going back to her village, staying there, and leading many to God. In fact, the statement of faith that these villagers made is of the most clear and powerful that I personally have found in the New Testament: ***'We have heard for ourselves and we know that this man is the Savior of the world.'*** (John 4:42)

Now you might say that Jesus could break this boundary because he was holy, trustworthy. But why *would* he break this boundary? Why would

he act in a way that might even *appear* scandalous to the rest of us, whether it was holy or not? Are we not called to be all things to all men, to win some? (1 Corinthians 9:22) Are we not called to do what is right ***'in the eyes, not only of God, but also of men.'*** (2 Corinthians 8:21) Following Jesus leads us – spiritually, and even practically in certain moments – to break norms and rules to reach the souls of people.

Then there was the time that Jesus went to the house of the Pharisees for dinner. Here he is with the most prosperous and respected people of the religious community. Here in this place of 'respectability', a prostitute enters and kneels at Jesus' feet and caresses his feet, wetting them with her tears and perfume, and drying them with her hair. We have sensual touch between man and woman, in the very face of religious leaders, theology teachers. In this moment Jesus justifies her, condemns the others. A similar encounter happens with even stronger words spoken by Christ, at another dinner-party with church leaders. Read about both these powerful, uncomfortable events here: Luke 7:36-50 & Luke 11:37-54.

8. Don't Turn the Other Cheek

'Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.'

(Psalm 82:4)

When Jesus commanded us to not resist an evil person, but to turn the other cheek, he was saying the exact opposite of what the law says. He literally reminded them of the law – ***'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth'*** – and then he said, ***'But I tell you...'***

We are told that the law is spiritual. (Romans 7:14) When we take something spiritual and make it concrete, we lose the purity of it. This is what an idol is. It takes the invisible, and replaces it with something visible. And so the invisible is lost. Same with the Law. Jesus referenced a law about equality and justice, but in order to get back to the very heart of God – the God who gave all laws – Jesus had to give them a completely opposite law, so to speak. He cracked open the law of the *'eye-for-eye'* and revealed that the same Spirit is in turning the cheek.

Jesus was showing them that the heart of God had been lost in the original, spiritual law. People were now using it – *eye-for-eye* – not to honor God and his heart for people and mercy and justice and protection, but for pride and condemnation. The law, intended to steer towards life and protect life, had become a

legalistic weapon.

We do this today with God's laws, with Jesus' own words. Here Jesus tries to crack open and break the spirit of legalism from the law of 'eye-for-eye', by saying turn the cheek; and now some people will point at a victim of abuse and say that Jesus said they needed to turn the cheek, not fight back or fight injustice or fight at all. This is doing to the word of Christ exactly what the others had done to the word of Moses, i.e. losing all perspective of the Spirit behind it and the purpose in it. Jesus was not giving another 'law' in order to leave people vulnerable to abuse.

Where the law had become a bar by which people self-justified or condemned others, Jesus was shattering that bar. He did it about murder, telling people that even calling someone a fool was in the same spirit of murder. He did it about adultery, telling people that even the lust of the heart and mind was to commit adultery – not that it was 'like' adultery, but that it was adultery.⁵ Jesus leveled the playing field. He brought people who felt lofty and superior to others, down to the ground. He brought people who felt lower than others, condemned and ashamed, up to the ground. He brought everyone to the same floor. And here we either reach out and take his hand, or we walk away. But we stand before him with an honest choice, and the honest possibility, of reaching out and touching Christ.

⁵ Matthew 7:21-30

'God made all people of all nations... in order that they would seek him... reach out and find him.' (Acts 17:26-27)

9. The Point of the Rule

Jesus said, ***‘Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard.’***
(Matthew 19:8)

People had taken a rule that was given on a sad day, so to speak, and were using it to justify themselves in doing that same thing. This was completely the opposite point of the rule. Let’s try to draw a parallel here. Let’s write our own fable:

One day a father told his 5 children to go work in the family store. He said that he loved them and did expect them to obey him, and they would be paid fully and well. But he did ask this one thing, with a tear in his eye: If they did decide to not go to work, to please at least let him know, so he could plan accordingly. After a few days, the children came to the father, arguing with one another, and pointing fingers. One child piped up on behalf of all the others, and said: As long as we let you know we have not gone to work, we have done our duty, correct? The father said, ‘I only gave you that rule in the case that you had disobeyed, and had not done your duty.’

So what I’m trying to highlight here is that sometimes we can keep a rule of God, but be breaking a more important rule in the process. All of God’s rules have the intention of leading us to a deep and true love of God and love of people. That is the point of God’s Law.

‘The purpose of the Law is to lead us to Christ.’ (Galatians 3:24)

‘Jesus said, ‘The most important command is this: To love God... The second is this: To love people.’ (Matthew 22:36-40)

We see God reinforce this over and over again, when people get distracted by the rules and all love is gone. A good way to know if God’s rules are being used in his Spirit, and by his Spirit, is if there is much love at work in the process.⁶

We see this play out regarding circumcision. Circumcision had been a rule, a law, given to the people by God. But after Christ came, and some people were trying to make this ‘rule’ part of following Jesus, look at what the apostle Paul writes:

‘If you allow yourselves to be circumcised, Christ means nothing to you.’ (Galatians 5:2)

But weren’t they just trying to keep God’s law? No. Paul saw through it. He could see that they were using this law of God to feel superior to others. Their motive was wrong, and in keeping this law of God they were breaking the more important one: to trust Jesus fully for their salvation.

Now, interestingly, Paul himself circumcises

⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Timothy in Acts 16:3. Why? Well, because here Paul is using one law – that of circumcision – to open the door to people to the deeper law of seeing and knowing Christ. The laws – the steps – were in correct order. Paul saw that this issue of circumcision might distract the unbelievers from hearing the message of Jesus. So in order to remove that distraction, they complied with the expectation. Their purpose was love of God, and love of man, and the full and true sharing of the gospel of Jesus.

So how do we know when someone applying a 'rule' is leading us to Jesus, or pushing us away from Jesus? It's very easy, my friend. What does your heart tell you? (i.e. discernment) What does the Bible teach? And what is the 'fruit' in that person's life?

***'Jesus said, 'Watch out for false prophets...
By their fruit you will recognize them.'***

(Matthew 7:15-16)

***'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
gentleness and self-control.'***

(Galatians 5:22-23)

10. You Are Never Alone

Jesus was called, '**Emanuel**', which means, '**God with us.**' (Matthew 1:23)

Jesus moved mountains to get to you. If there was a false teacher making you confused about God, and making you feel condemned, Jesus turned to that teacher and said, '**Take the plank out of your own eye.**' (Matthew 7:1-5)

If you were caught in sin – very real sin – and people dragged it out into the light and pointed to a verse in the Bible that said you should be punished, Jesus overstepped that verse, asked those people if they had not sinned, and then said you were forgiven, and that you could go forward in a new life without sin. (John 8:1-11)

When people told you that faith in Jesus was not enough, that you had to *add* to your faith some old rules – and some new rules – Jesus spoke strong words to these false teachers. He told them if they added these old rules and new rules (including baptism)⁷ to the pure message of faith, that Christ meant nothing to them! (Galatians 5:2)

When children came to Jesus, no deep understanding of theology, no deep introspection of their own souls, people tried to stop them. But Jesus stopped the 'Stoppers'. He rebuked them

⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:17

and said, ***‘Let the little children come to me, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as them.’*** He added to this, turning to us all: ***‘Unless you change and become like a child, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.’*** (Matthew 19:14; Matthew 18:3)

Jesus left the gathering of ninety-nine Christians, to come find you. (Luke 15:1-7) Jesus appeared to lonely ones, people without name, and spent hours with them, at the most critical time in the history of the world. He did not appear on a stage. He did not appear to the largest gathering for the biggest impact. He appeared to the lonely, saddened, humble of heart on a long and dusty road. (Luke 24:13-35)

Jesus is with you. His very title, ‘Emanuel’, means, ***‘God with us.’*** (Matthew 1:23) Everything about Christ is to be with you completely. To be inside you by his Spirit. To never leave you, never forsake you.

‘This is the mystery of God revealed: Christ in you.’ (Colossians 1:27)

There will be moments of ‘aloneness’ in this life, but you are never alone. Jesus – the King of kings – is with you completely. Who else is actually needed? Jesus, by his Holy Spirit, will also carry you across the end line of life, into the ***‘city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.’*** (Hebrews 11:10) You are never alone.

'Be still and know that I am God.'
(Psalm 46:10)

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