

# ***Verses to Learn – How & Why***

***'How sweet are your words to my taste,  
sweeter than honey to my mouth!'***  
(Psalm 119:103)

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*To the amazing Sophia Nicholas,  
whose eyes do see!*

***‘Jesus said, ‘Blessed are your eyes because  
they see, and your ears because they hear.’  
(Matthew 13:11,16)***

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## Introduction

Just this morning I was thinking again about *how* we know the Bible contains the inspired Word of God. I mean, we say that this collection of writing, the ‘Scriptures’, has inspired words of God. We draw authority from these words, and we set them apart as ‘holy’, as spiritual. How do we know this?

Well, friends, let me first question the question, so to speak. In my own life – one tough summer in particular – I found myself wrestling with this question of ‘*How do I know?*’. It was not just about the Bible, but about my own spirit understanding that Jesus – and my personal knowledge of Jesus – was true, whereas others were false. How do I know?

Paul spoke of ‘*other Christs*’ that were taught, false ones, and I have met people sharing these ‘Christs’;<sup>1</sup> so how do I know that *my* understanding and experience of Jesus is true, and theirs is false? How do I know that the Bible contains the inspired Word of God, and not the ‘sacred’ writings of other religions?

Before I came to an answer – after weeks of wrestling, night and day - I came to another question: *Why was I asking this?*

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:4

Was it the case that I was not sure about my vision of Christ, and his Scriptures? Or was I asking for 'another'? It dawned on me as soon as the question occurred to me: I was not asking because I was not sure; I was asking because I wanted proof for others.

It dawned on me, as Paul writes, that ***'I know whom I have believed.'*** (1 Timothy 1:12) And I know that the Bible is God's inspired Word, the true Scriptures. I know these things. What I truly didn't know, was that this 'knowledge' was not something I 'held', but that held *me*. It was not in the light of my mind or the world around me that I could see this 'Light'; rather, it was ***'in God's light that I see light.'*** (Psalm 36:9) I could not 'prove' the truth of the revelation that I see – namely, Jesus Christ – because it was he himself who 'shined' this light of knowledge into my soul:

***'For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.'***

(2 Corinthians 4:6)

In this book I share verses from the Bible that I have learned over the years. These are verses that I have learned with the main purpose of sharing the revelation with others. God spoke in great measure to some prophets and people who heard him directly, and they wrote these words down. In the case of Jesus, not only did

people 'hear' him, but they walked with him in person. These people's writings – their views and words - were imbued by the Spirit of God, to stand and 'speak' for all time. This collection is the Bible.

The Bible's coherence – in theme, Spirit and prophecy – from beginning to end, almost overwhelms me. It is its own authority. I don't, in this book, discuss '*how*' I know, but rather springboard from what I do know, and *who* I know – Jesus Christ. The Scriptures we have and hold and speak, are not magic in themselves. They must be Spirit-filled when we come to them, and Spirit-led when we share them.<sup>1</sup>

This book consists of verses – usually in 'sets' of about five – that I have learned. After I list them (under a theme heading), I explain a little about *why* I learned these in particular. However, before I begin the sections on Scriptures, I'm going to share a little about '*How*' I commit them to memory.

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<sup>1</sup> See section, 'The Scriptures'

## How I Memorize

The key to memorizing verses, is really *wanting* to have them in your memory. The main, 'general' reason to memorize is two-fold: First, because I will need or want to recall them for my own comfort and understanding of God, and secondly, to have ready to share with others, as the Spirit leads.

Now, regarding the second reason above – to have ready to share with others – this has two further sub-reasons: to encourage some, to correct/admonish others. Having key Scriptures to mind can be a powerful protection – for self and others - against false or limited teaching, false prophets (of whom there are many), and deceptive spirits. I break down specific 'reasons' for verses I've learned in the following sections, but here I just want to share a little about 'how' I learn.

When I am trying to memorize a verse, I tend to read it over and over. I will then write it down on an index card, and carry it with me through the day (or days, or even weeks), and read it, then try to recite it, then read it again to check if I recited it correctly. I always say the reference before and after I say the verse.

I will also record in my own voice the verses or passage on my phone 'voice recorder', so that when I am driving or going for a walk, I might listen, and/or speak along, with my recordings.

Memory work, does take work! You have to 'repeat' the effort, and you have to prolong the effort. What I mean by 'prolong' is to revisit the Scriptures days later, weeks later, months later, years later. It is prompting the mind to revisit – to recall – what you have committed to it, over time, that really embeds it in the mind. Keep pulling it to the surface, and it will eventually hold a much longer-term presence.

When I was a young lad I got my ear pierced. In fact, I had four piercings. Now, over 30 years later without wearing earrings, one of those holes is still effectively open. It was the one hole that I actually wore an earring in over a period of about 4 years. The other holes I only used over a few months here and there, and they are long closed. Now note, I haven't worn an earring in that one hole for about 30 years, but I can still put a 'stud' in it very easily. It was as if the hole gave up trying to close over after a period of time, and the hole just became part of my person.

I remember learning Psalm 8 by heart when I was about 6 years old. Years pass sometimes without reciting it, and yet some starry night when I'm looking at the stars, I will whisper through the whole Psalm. (*'... when I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have set in place...'*) This 'hole', so to speak, has never closed over. Partly due to memorizing when I was young (that's just a season in life when memory work is easier,



and seems to drop down lower into the mind), and partly due to the years that I did continually draw it to the surface of my mind and run it through again.

So try to practice drawing out verses you learn over longer periods of time. Keep a notepad – just the references – and flick back through that notepad and see if you can recite some of those Scriptures. If not, well, maybe that's OK, maybe they were for a particular season only, but maybe they are worth looking back up, writing out, and practicing again...

Let me drop in here something really important: Learning verses is to know God, and make him known. Not to make information about him known, but to make *him* known – in spirit and truth. If learning verses becomes a 'knowledge' thing or a 'Bible trivia' thing, just pack it up, the value is gone, and pride has taken over. It won't be used of the Lord. It will be used, but not of the Lord. ***'Knowledge puffs up, while love builds up.'*** (1 Corinthians 8:1) Sometimes the true, loving thing to do is not quote a verse, but live the verse – ***'Wisdom that comes from above is... peace-loving, considerate... full of mercy...'*** (James 3:17)

I have sticky notes on my desk in work with verses, little picture frames here and there, notes on my fridge, jean pockets full of them, scraps of paper here and there... Don't get me wrong, this is not an obsession or 'in the face' of others; but

it is a real discipline. I'm doing this for growth, and I'm doing this for battle. It feeds me, and it equips me. I use Scriptures all the time in talking with people, in hearing from the Lord for people. Jesus himself said that the Holy Spirit would call to our minds things that Jesus had taught, and also **'teach us all things'**. (John 14:26)

Not everything I minister to people is a verse, but much of God's Word – and histories in the Bible – inform what I minister to people, and what the Lord calls to my mind for people.

Let me give you a *general* 'Why', because in the following sections I'm only referring to specific reasons for verses I've listed, not the general one. As humans we know the truth about God by his revelation to us. We don't 'intuit' God's truth. We don't 'figure it out'. It has been revealed to us by God himself, through his prophets and his Son, and this is how we 'calibrate' our understanding, our 'sense' about God. So the Scriptures give us the full and pure understanding of who God is, and how he works. As we know the Scriptures and its stories, we can filter our own experiences and 'test' them, to know what is of God, what is not. We are called in Scripture to even train our discernment by **'constant practice'**, and to **'test prophecies, holding to what is good.'**<sup>1</sup> We can only test and practice things of truth, when we know the character and actions of God, as he has

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 5:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21

revealed it throughout the ages. So we memorize key passages that seem to distinguish the true character of God, and his key actions throughout history. We note them. We hold them. We let their light infiltrate our mind, our 'eyes', so that we see by *that* light.

***'Jesus said, 'The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!'*** (Matthew 6:22-23)

We don't just see light, we see *by* a certain light. Jesus is the light of the world, and the more of his truth we allow to flow through our hearts and mind – not just in word, but in Spirit<sup>1</sup> – the more light we'll have by which to see.

So we memorize in order to capture and hold God's revelation about himself, that which does not come to us naturally – such as his character, his name, his attributes, his promises, and how he has acted in the past, how his Spirit works now, and how he says he will act in the future.

Ok, now, let me finish this section also talking about 'reprieve', or breaks. I sometimes take a season of not working my mind and heart in memory work. I just get tired, and like an athlete that needs some down time, or a season of rest,

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<sup>1</sup> John 8:12; John 1:9; John 6:63; John 5:19; Matthew 22:29

I also rest my mind. I let things settle. I will hear a verse or even think of one that I used to know the reference for, and rather than hustling to look it up and refresh my 'memory', I just let it float by. I focus rather on the actual words, the content, not on whether I have it 'filed' in my heart and mind for battle, for ministry. These seasons of rest can last months and months. And it is good for me! So don't let Scripture memory become something 'dead', a lifeless discipline where the joy is gone, and the Spirit's leading is gone. It is ultimately to know God better, to see deeper into his Spirit, and sometimes – just like anything in life – less is more. Peace.

## **There Is One God**

***'I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.'*** (Isaiah 45:5)

***'You shall have no other gods besides me.'***  
(Exodus 20:3 – The first commandment)

***'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'*** (Deuteronomy 6:4)

***'On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.'*** (Zechariah 14:9)

***'There is one God and one mediator between man and God, the man Jesus Christ.'***  
(1 Timothy 2:5)

This section is a bedrock to the next one: *'Jesus Is God'*. It is important to know that God is 'One', otherwise the unique identity of Jesus as God means very little.

Some cults and false religions will 'parse out' or cut up the identity of God, making him more than one. They will appear to be giving Jesus honor, recognizing him as a god, but not *the* God. Or they will appear to be giving Jesus a 'high' status as a deity, but not *the* Deity. They will use terminology that is true of Jesus, but not true in the way they are using it. They will recognize him as a *'prophet'*, as the *'Son of God'*, but they are not using these titles with the full meaning

they are given in Scripture. They are 'lowering' him from being one with the Father, one with the 'only' true God.

These five verses are ones that I have decided to memorize, just to hold this fact clear: There is only one God, and God is one.

So the following section, the truth of Jesus as God himself, is deeply radical, and, in fact, the reason for which he was crucified, or deemed a 'blasphemer'. He was killed for his identity – not as a god, but as *the* true God. If God is not 'one', well, like in the Hindu religion, anything and anyone can be 'a' god. They will recognize Jesus as one of many, but not as the one and only. This is why it is first important to know that there is only one true God.

## Jesus Is God

***‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.’*** (John 1:1,14)

***‘The virgin will be with child and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.’***

(Isaiah 7:14 – 600 years before Jesus was born)

**\*Note:** Matthew quotes this verse, and adds, ***‘which means, ‘God with us.’*** (Matthew 1:23)

***‘Then the disciples worshipped him...’***

(Matthew 14:33)

***‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?’***

(John 14:9-10)

***‘Are you the Messiah?... “I am,” said Jesus.’***

(Mark 14:61-62)

This is the most important section in this book, because it is the most important truth. You see, the ‘gospel’ of God for salvation – is Jesus. Not what he said, nor what he gives us, but Jesus himself. So the question really is, *‘Who is Jesus?’* To know him – the true him – is to touch, see, hold God.

Jesus is God. The gospel is Jesus, and he is God. To answer, 'Who is Jesus?' is to answer, 'What is the gospel?'

Cults everywhere try to separate Jesus from God – even just 'slightly' – but here they lose everything! Because the same way we lose a person when we deny who they really are, we lose God when we deny he is Jesus. We lose Jesus when we deny he is God.

Now, if you treasure this, and look for it in Scripture, you will see it everywhere! I deliberately put five verses in this section – the five that occurred to me personally as 'key' – but there are hundreds you could 'note' and/or learn, about this issue. Jesus referred to himself as '*Lord*' (John 13:13) – and we know there is only one Lord. (see previous section) Jesus said he was '*one with the Father*' (John 10:30), and the people knew this was not 'symbolic' or 'one in purpose', but actually saying he was one in essence; this is why they tried to stone him at that moment, and said, '*You a mere man claim to be God!*' (vs.33)

The Gospel of John is full of verses that really speak to the identity of Jesus, his deity. But honestly, all through the New Testament – in all the 'letters' of Paul, and everywhere – the identity of Jesus as God is expressed in so many explicit and implicit ways. Read the first chapter of Revelation, Colossians 2:9, Colossians 1:15-20... Just keep your eyes open to this, and have



no doubt whatever! Cults build on denying this. And the true identity of Christ – is the true Christ. And the true Christ is the message, is the 'door', is the gospel. (John 10:9)

Quick 'reason' regarding each of the five I chose to feature above:

**John 1:1,14** – No explanation here needed. The Word was 'one with', and the actual God. John does not try to explain the unexplainable (the 'mystery of the Trinity'), but he does state it emphatically at the very outset of his Gospel. And then he goes on to say, '*The Word became flesh...*' (vs.14) The Jehovah Witnesses have changed this Scripture in their 'New World Translation' (completely distorting the Word of God), because they deny that Jesus is one with God. They actually changed this Scripture – that's how significant it is!

**Isaiah 7:14/Matthew 1:23** – Jesus called '*Immanuel*', which means, '*God with us.*' His name, his title, actually expresses that in Christ, God is with us. God has come. (Yes, please look up Colossians 2:9, maybe add this to your collection here)

**Matthew 14:33** – Only God can be worshipped. It is one of the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20) It is everywhere in the Old Testament. And then here the disciples fall and worship Jesus. I was once told by a cult follower that we cannot, must not worship Jesus, because he is not the

Father God, and only God can be worshipped. This is a key verse that shows we are to worship Christ, the disciples did. And if you keep your eyes peeled, there is much more 'worship' of Christ to note in the Scriptures.

**John 14:9-10** – Jesus bringing himself and the Father into 'one'. He did not allow the distinction in the sense of people getting distracted by different truths, so to speak. We are told that the Father has given all honor to the Son (John 5:22-23), and that the Father has elevated the name of Jesus above all others, and at his name every knee will bow. (more worship – Philippians 2:9-10) At times Jesus prayed to the Father, and worked within the mysterious oneness and yet separation. But when Phillip was looking for a distinct difference according to human recognition, Jesus simply said, ***'If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.'*** This is the paradigm Jesus gives us, in order to best know him, and to best know the Father.

**Mark 14:61-62** – Jesus claims to be the Messiah. The Jews knew the prophecies (such as the one here, Isaiah 7:14, and look up Isaiah 9:6 – you sing this one at Christmas). The Jews knew the Messiah to be one with God, God himself, the Savior, so when Jesus claimed this identity, they deemed it blasphemous, worthy of crucifixion.

## **The Scriptures**

***‘You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.’*** (John 5:39-40)

***‘Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.”*** (Matthew 22:29)

***‘... from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.’***  
(2 Timothy 3:15-16)

***‘Do your best to... rightly handle the word of truth.’*** (2 Timothy 2:15)

***‘... it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’***  
(Matthew 4:6 – see Psalm 91:11-12)

This section is not about the compilation of the 66 books of the Bible, nor their divine inspiration.

The verses I've chosen in this section are about the correct handling of the Scriptures that we already recognize as inspired.

**2 Timothy 2:15** - In reading the Scriptures we learn about God. If we read them with a prideful heart and an agenda, we will learn 'wrongly'. We are not reading the Scriptures, we are reading 'into' the Scriptures, to justify this or that. This is mishandling the Scriptures that we have.

In the same way that we can mishandle the Scriptures in our own lives, we can mishandle them in leading – misleading – other people. So we are warned to not mishandle them.

**Matthew 4:6** - Now an example of this mishandling of the Scriptures is best seen in the devil himself quoting the Scriptures. Yes, in this verse it is the devil speaking to Jesus, quoting Psalm 91:11-12. The devil is quoting Scripture, but he is 'mishandling' the Scripture. He is quoting it in order to manipulate Jesus, to twist truth. It is not the Scripture that is wrong (because he quotes Psalm 91 perfectly), but rather it is the spirit that is wrong, and his motive is wrong. This can happen from the pulpit also, and from the lay person one to another. This is why we must 'discern' the spirit of who is speaking, of what is happening, and not get caught up or distracted by just the Scriptures being quoted.

**John 5:39-40** - The purpose of studying the Scriptures is *not* to have 'Bible trivia'. The ultimate purpose of knowing Scripture – much or little – is to know God himself. We study the written Word in order to know the Living Word. If – as in the case of the Pharisees – we don't bend the knee to Jesus, well, our 'knowledge' of the Scriptures is really useless. This is why I have noted John 5:39-40.<sup>1</sup>

**Matthew 22:29** - Now, to not get too 'down' on Scripture knowledge, here we see Jesus admonishing the Sadducees that their error lies in not knowing the Scriptures well enough - together with the power of God. I have met people who rely fully on their 'sense', their discernment, their 'love of God', but they lack discipline in reading and knowing the Scriptures. Jesus admonishes the Sadducees to know *both* the Scriptures and the power of God, i.e. the Spirit of God. Know both. Walk in both.<sup>2</sup>

**2 Timothy 3:15-16** – In these two verses we see and note not only the usefulness of Scripture (which is pretty 'directive', i.e. teaching, rebuking, correcting, training), but also – again related to the point in the previous paragraph – that the ultimate purpose in knowing Scripture is to have '*faith in Christ Jesus.*'

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<sup>1</sup> Also read Philippians 3:1-11. Here Paul emphasizes that actually knowing Christ is the full prize of all other knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> In Philippians 1:9 Paul admonishes people to 'add to their love, knowledge.'

So verse 15 tells us that the ultimate 'goal' of all Scripture knowledge is knowing Christ, and verse 16 tells us some *uses* for Scripture. It is important to ponder verse 16, and ask God to help us to help each other. It is easier to 'encourage' people with Bible verses, than to 'rebuke' or 'correct' them. But knowing Scripture is 'useful' to also help steer people, correct them, guide them in right thinking and principles. Do we do this? Not in a 'preachy' or self-righteous way, but in love, in the Spirit's leading, we are called to correct, and even rebuke, with true Scriptural references to hand.

## **Revelation**

***'With you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.'*** (Psalm 36:9)

***'God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.'***

(2 Corinthians 4:6)

***'... No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit.'*** (1 Corinthians 12:3)

***'Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!'*** (John 9:25)

***'Elisha prayed, 'Open his eyes, Lord, so he might see.'*** (2 Kings 6:17)

The aspect of 'revelation' that I am focusing on here is to do with our 'seeing' and knowing God and his truth. Some people see, and some people don't see. Both might be looking at the same thing, the same person – Jesus Christ – and some 'see', and some don't. I've always been struck by the story in John 11, when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. Some who saw this acknowledged Jesus as Lord and Savior, others went away and plotted his death.

What is your personal story of 'seeing' Jesus? For many of us, there was a 'before' and 'after'. There was a time when we knew the stories and truths about Jesus, but did not 'believe', did not 'receive'. Then there was a moment or time, when Jesus became real to us, and we turned a corner. Often it is not that we heard something that we had not heard before, but rather that we 'heard' something differently. I've heard many people share their story and this line is in it somewhere: *'I had heard it a thousand times before, but this time it was like I was hearing it for the very first time...'*

So what is going on when the penny drops, when our eyes open, when our heart 'sees'? This is a moment of revelation – when something is 'revealed'. Yes, this is a moment you opened your eyes, but it is more truthfully a moment when *God* opened your eyes. In other words, God did the opening, not you. Truth was unveiled, a curtain lifted, and there it was before your eyes. You see, because you were shown. Now, there is a deep moment of 'choice'. You can't really determine what you see, but you can decide to close your eyes to what you see. Or you can decide to hold them open, recognize, follow the light.

A friend once told me that although he knew Jesus to be true, he was choosing the world. He was this clear, this definitive. He saw, but chose to look away. So it is not all about seeing. Some 'see' and look away. And if someone's heart



does not want to know, chances are high they will never find reason to know. If you are seeking to *not* find, you won't find. And this is because you choose not to find. Sometimes this is what's going on.

When a person sees the light, and bends the knee, God has revealed. This is sometimes the deepest and truest explanation of a moment of coming to believe. And the verses above speak to this powerful moment and reality of revelation. This is why, my friends, we pray for people to see Christ, as well as speak to them about Christ. Because it is not all about them. We need the Spirit of God to break through the clouds and 'reveal'.

The Scripture above where Elisha prays for his servant to have his eyes open to see the army of God on the hills, well, the army was already there but the servant had not seen them. God unveiled something and the servant saw something that he had not seen.

I will finish this section with this point: Just because we pray to God to unveil a person's eyes, does not mean that there is no purpose or power in our sharing the gospel with a person, or explaining things. Jesus has called us to this task of witnessing, preaching, sharing.<sup>1</sup> In a sense it is a picture of how God works all through history. He will call Moses to do this or

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<sup>1</sup> See the section, 'The Gospel'

that, and Moses will call on God to do this or that. God is in relationship with people, and that is how he works. He loves us, and works to and through us, and we need him for every aspect of life, both practical and spiritual. He calls us to speak his message and name, and we pray that as we do God moves to open the ears and eyes of those who listen. Relationship two ways.

## All People

***'God did this [made all people, all nations] so that they would seek him, perhaps reach out for him and find him...'*** (Acts 17:27)

***'All souls are mine.'*** (Ezekiel 18:4)

***'Jesus said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'*** (Matthew 28:18)

***'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come from God.'*** (John 8:42)

***'God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.'***

(1 Timothy 2:4)

There are two aspects of this theme that are important to me. 'All People' can refer to the fact that God shows no favoritism, as noted above in 1 Timothy 2:4. And the other aspect, is that 'All People' are called by the one true God, to see and believe in Jesus Christ. All people are loved equally, and all people are called equally.

Now, how does this work when it comes to people who have never heard about Jesus? Well, friends, the position I have adopted on this topic is as follows: When Jesus died and rose again, the full and complete truth of God was a done deal. Jesus is the 'door' to salvation, the light of God, the gospel truth. And this truth of

the gospel was, as it were, poured out in Spirit on the *history* of mankind – past, present and future. What do I mean by this? Well, a little bit like oxygen across the globe, so too is the eternal truth of Christ across history. Whether people ‘see’ and understand about oxygen, they breathe it nonetheless, and live by it. Let me expound a little on this...

There are ‘good’ people who have never heard about Christ. There are also ‘good’ people who *have* heard about Christ, but have chosen not to believe in him. This latter group, many of whom I know personally, believe their own goodness just comes from within. They are, for example, being faithful to their wives, not because they believe in Jesus, but because they feel it is the ‘right’ thing to do – even though they may not have any religious belief in right and wrong. They just do good things because...

Now, I believe that all true goodness – in the believer and unbeliever – comes from the same source of goodness – Jesus Christ. I believe he is God ***‘in whom all things were created’***, and the Giver of ***‘life and breath and everything else’*** to all mankind.<sup>1</sup> So when a person tells me they don’t need God to be a good person, I believe they are simply unaware of how active and present God is in their own hearts, minds and actions regarding goodness. Much like someone who has never ‘believed’ in oxygen,

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<sup>1</sup> Colossians 1:16; Acts 17:25

and claims you don't have to believe in it to still breathe and live. Correct. You don't. But whether you believe in it or not, the truth is you are depending fully on it.

The gospel of Jesus was stamped across the very winds and spirit of history when all was said and done, when, as Jesus said, his work was 'finished'. (John 19:30) Paul puts it this way:

***'This is the gospel... that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven...'*** (Colossians 1:23)

How has it been proclaimed to every creature under heaven? Well, as God's full and complete truth, it has moved into the very fabric, the lifeblood of God's creation. So when a person is truly thirsty for the true God, this same person will recognize the truth of Christ when it comes to them. They will hear his name, his story, his call, and their hearts will be open to his Spirit.<sup>1</sup> There are people who have not heard of Christ, but they are believers in the one true God, and their hearts are open to Christ. In a sense, my friends, they believe in Christ already, they just have not yet heard of him.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John 7:17; Acts 17:26-27

<sup>2</sup> These same people, if they do not hear the gospel from you, from me, here on earth, will hear it from Christ after they die. And they will believe. (see 1 Peter 3:18-20) People who lived before Christ's time, and people who live after but have never heard of him, are the same category of people: those who were never told.

And there are others, who have heard of Christ, and even professed him, but their hearts are actually closed. They say 'yes', but they do not follow. Is it the person who has not heard yet, but who has an open heart to the one true God, or the person who has heard, said 'yes', but not walked with the one true God? According to Christ, it is the former.<sup>1</sup>

So how do these truths about 'All People' help me, personally? They give me confidence in the gospel. Believing that God has made all people for himself, and that God has 'proclaimed' the gospel to all creatures (in spirit, in revelation, in conviction), I can share the name and gospel about Jesus freely. I believe that if a person is truly open to God's truth, they will see Jesus. If they are not, they won't. It doesn't really matter whether they are from a completely different religious or cultural background – like Cornelius in Acts chapter 10 – if they fear the true, living God of all creation, they will recognize the truth of Jesus in what I share. All people loved by God, all people called by God, to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Acts 17:27** – This verse is so simple, so clear, and just states God's purpose in creating people, i.e. that they would come into relationship with God. Knowing Christ personally is God's purpose in creating people. Have you ever asked, or been asked, '*Why did God create*

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<sup>1</sup> See Matthew 21:28-32

people?’ This verse answers that.

**John 8:42** – These people claimed to be zealous believers in God. But Jesus said to them that their belief in God actually was *not* true, or they would recognize Jesus. This is a very important thing to remember when dealing with people who say they are true believers in God, but not in Jesus. Well, Jesus doesn’t go for that. Because a true believer in the true God, recognizes that Jesus is the One. *(see John 5:46 for a very similar word from Christ)*

I finish this section by noting, however, that it is important to not ‘judge’ a person for their doubt. Don’t claim to know or see that they are rejecting God personally, just because they don’t ‘see’ or accept Christ as Lord. There can be true ‘doubt’, and that is why we are admonished to be **‘merciful to those who doubt.’** (Jude 1:22) And there can be stages in people coming to see, and our part at a given moment might be a sowing of seed, not a crossroads of eternal decision.

So how do we ‘use’ John 8:42 above in our practical lives of outreach and witness? Well, one thing is certain; we cannot ‘align’ or ‘partner’ with people of faith in God only, but who don’t bend the knee to Jesus as Lord. We have a clear indication from Christ that unless a person loves him, worships him, there is a breakdown in their belief in the true God. We should not judge or define that breakdown. What we do is

continue to pray, and as the Spirit leads, share. We don't judge, but we don't 'partner' either. We don't say or believe that we are all effectively worshipping and believing the same God. In this case, at this juncture, we '**show mercy mixed with fear.**' (Jude 1:23) We don't 'partner' in faith or outreach.



## **The Holy Spirit**

***‘The Holy Spirit will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears... it is from me [Jesus] that he will receive what he will make known to you.’*** (John 16:13-14)

***‘If someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.’*** (2 Corinthians 11:4)

***‘When you believed, you were marked in Christ with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance...’*** (Ephesians 1:13-14)

***‘We were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body — whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.’*** (1 Corinthians 12:13)

***‘While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message...’***  
(Acts 10:44)

***‘Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. They have lost connection***

***with the head...*** (Colossians 2:18-19)

The other day I found a side road that twisted and turned and came to a dead end. I got out of my car as I had about an hour to spare. I had been looking for a place to park and pray, and this was perfect. Nothing but trees and birds and a stretch of lonely road. I could walk and pray out loud. So relaxing.

As I prayed, I realized that I was asking the Lord to use this special quiet moment in my life and circumstances, to speak to me in a special way. I was using words and phrases like, *'Come and be with me, Lord'*, and *'Still my mind and speak to me, Lord.'* I was saying things like, *'Speak in a fresh way, Lord, pour out a double measure on me now, Lord...'*

Like in any relationship, when special time is put aside, special connection can happen, special conversation. Our relationship with the Lord is similar. It is really important to believe and know, however, that when you first come to 'meet' the Lord – i.e. believe in him and receive him – you are baptized in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes and dwells in you, and makes you new. It is by the Holy Spirit that this transaction of salvation happens. The Holy Spirit upon you, in you.

So when we read in Scripture of the Holy Spirit coming on certain people at certain moments

and is manifested in a special way (like people speaking in tongues, and/or praising God<sup>1</sup>), well, this is a special experience of relationship, or a specific spiritual 'gift', not a separate and higher level of salvation. There is no separate requirement and experience for the believer in Jesus to be 'baptized in the Holy Spirit'. Like on my walk and prayer time the other day, you may – and hopefully do – experience different moments of God's presence with you, different special encounters of relationship with the Lord; but the day, the moment, you believed *'the true message of the gospel'*<sup>2</sup> you crossed over from death to life and were *'marked in Christ with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.'* (Ephesians 1:13-14)

Do not let people mislead you, and make you feel that just because the gift-Giver did not give you the same gift he gave them, that you have not yet known the gift-Giver fully. This is a lie. You were indwelt by – i.e. baptized in – the Holy Spirit, the moment you believed. Adopt this view, please. It is the truth. There are not two levels of being saved, or filled by the Holy Spirit! This wrong view and teaching is unbiblical and divisive, with regards baptism of the Holy Spirit and also any other 'legal' requirement. In the early church people were saying *'Belief + Circumcision'* (whether you spoke in tongues or

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<sup>1</sup> See Acts 10:44-46

<sup>2</sup> Colossians 1:5

not!), and Paul, perceiving 'another gospel' at work here, an added 'level', was almost violent in his words about this. (see Galatians chapter 5)

I'm going to comment briefly on each one of the five I've chosen:

**John 16:13-14** – Jesus is making clear that the Holy Spirit is, in effect, one with Jesus, and a 'voice' for the words of Jesus, a power for the will of Jesus. Sometimes people try to isolate the Holy Spirit from Jesus, and make him a separate focus altogether. This is not OK! It can be misleading. They may be 'separate' entities, but their unity is such that we cannot and must not try to separate them in our own strength.

**2 Corinthians 11:4** – This verse is important in that it states there can be 'different' things and entities meant by the same titles – a different gospel (but yes, called 'gospel'), a different Jesus (but yes, called 'Jesus'), a different spirit (but yes, called the 'Holy Spirit'). So just because people (cults) use the titles and words that we use, it does not mean they are truly abiding by how these things have been clearly defined in Scripture. Be free to 'discern'. Don't be swept away just because people use the right words.

**Ephesians 1:13-14** – This verse is clear and explicit about the Holy Spirit indwelling (baptizing) a person who truly believes – in that moment.

**1 Corinthians 12:13** – This verse is very important! Paul is speaking to a church that has people with different spiritual gifts, which he is literally listing in this chapter. He refers to each gift – including ‘faith’ and ‘wisdom’ – as ‘manifestations of the Spirit.’ He is stating in this chapter that not everyone has the same gift, which means that not everyone in this church has the gift of tongues. And yet... Paul says in this verse that everyone in Christ has been baptized in the Holy Spirit, and everyone has been given this Spirit from whom to ‘drink’.

**Acts 10:44** – This is an important incident to note regarding the manifestation – or baptism – of the Holy Spirit on a people group, before they had been water baptized, and before they had actually made a clean-cut profession of faith. The gift-Giver, God himself, poured out his Spirit in a special way as faith came forth in the hearts of these people. Not in the order of a profession of faith, and then a second experience of going forward to receive a gift of tongues. No separate experience of faith and an outpouring of the Spirit, in two levels and different times. Nope. But in this case the Holy Spirit manifested himself through a gift of speaking in tongues and in praise of the Lord, all at a time of a step of faith. This doesn’t always happen, nor is it taught to happen or be pursued. It can happen, might happen, but the call of God is to repent, believe, and receive Christ. Whatever gift he chooses to pour out at such a time of faith – if any - is entirely up to the Giver.

**Colossians 2:18-19** – This verse strikes me in a number of ways. First, these ‘super-spiritual’ people tend to come over ‘humble’ and deep. But Paul calls them *‘falsely humble’*. Secondly, these people go into *‘great detail’* about their spiritual experiences, and we often associate ‘detail’ with a mark of validity, but in this case Paul says they are speaking only *‘idle notions’*. Thirdly, note how Paul refers to their so-called ‘spiritual’ disposition as coming from an ***‘unspiritual mind’***. So do not let such hyper-spiritual people ‘disqualify’ you from being ‘truly’ spiritual. Dismiss this folly, and continue to keep your eyes on the true Jesus, and remain in the presence of the true Holy Spirit. (*Remember, there can be false ones – 2 Corinthians 11:4*)

I conclude this section with this reflection. I don’t mean to come over ‘defensive’ or hostile to people who I believe are in error in some understanding and teaching of the Holy Spirit. However, this type of teaching can lead people – particularly young believers – to a deep sense of not yet being ‘full’ in Christ, or not having the full and complete Holy Spirit in their being. And this is very disheartening, and very divisive. There has been much individual and even corporate heartache based on this type of divisive teaching. ‘Divisive’ in that it literally divides people. I leave you with two powerful Scriptures on this issue – i.e. fullness in Christ, and divisions.

***'In Christ all the fulness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fulness.'*** (Colossians 2:9-10)

***'Christ himself is our peace... he has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility... His purpose was to make in himself one new humanity...'***

(Ephesians 2:14-15)

## Homosexuality

***‘Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.’*** (Romans 1:26-27)

***‘The law is made for lawbreakers... for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders... for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel...’***  
(1 Timothy 1:9-11)

***‘The sexually immoral, adulterers, men who have sex with other men... will not inherit the kingdom of God.’*** (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

***‘Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.’*** (1 Corinthians 6:18)

***‘Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.’***  
(Leviticus 18:22)

We live in interesting times. There is a big push in developed countries across the world to be



accepting of homosexuality. Now, it goes a little deeper than just 'accepting' people or even including people; the real 'push' is to be accepting of it morally, and even 'ontologically'. In other words, what the world is pushing for is to get 'homosexuality' completely *outside* of the arena of morals. The 'push' is that being homosexual is about 'who' you are, not about choices or morals.

Well, this is a belief, like any belief. I can disagree with beliefs, as people can disagree with mine. And in this matter, I disagree. I believe the Bible is clear that homosexuality is sinful. There's no way around it. Does this mean that I am hateful or unloving towards people who struggle with this sin? No! Jesus came for the sinner. He said it was the sick who needed a doctor, not the well. (Mt 9:12-13)

However, as a Christian, it is my responsibility to quietly, gently, humbly, hold to the teachings of God. And to instruct others, as the Spirit leads (not whenever I think I need to, necessarily), in the things of God. Why? Two reasons:

- 1. To win people:** I want people to know this truth, and be free!
- 2. To warn people:** Let it not be on my head that people were not warned and ready to stand before God.

God said to the prophet, Ezekiel:

***‘Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, ‘You wicked person, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade them from their ways, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. But if you do warn the wicked person to turn from their ways and they do not do so, they will die for their sin, though you yourself will be saved.’***  
(Ezekiel 33:7-9)

I have ‘mellowed’ in this area over the years. I used to get quite tense, stressed about it. But now, with more people around me who struggle in this area, I hold it more loosely before the Lord. I am as committed as ever to speaking the truth as the Lord leads, and instructing people in the truth; however, I can be calm now, smile, be kind, because I have realized it’s not my problem.

This sounds harsh, but what I’m trying to say is that my ‘cause’ in holding to the truth, and making the truth known, is to help people when they stand before God in judgment. And judgment is not just after we die, it is even now:

***‘Jesus Christ... the judge of the living and the dead...’*** (2 Timothy 4:1)

So yes, I want to help people and direct people so they are right with God. But I don’t have to

*battle* with people when the issue, the moral issue, is primarily between them and God. I walk with God, and will testify to him. Insofar as it depends on me, I live in peace, and make peace.

***'As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.'*** (Romans 12:18)

I will not, however, make peace with things that God is against. This is cowardly, and this is error. So I will be kind, I will be calm, I will be merciful, but I will be strong and stand on truth.

I had an amazing conversation with a colleague at work who is a female homosexual married to another lady, and they had a child together through certain alternative means. She asked me what I thought about her sexual orientation, from my perspective as a Christian. By God's grace I was able to share with her my views, and even encourage her to ask the question of God directly in prayer, and consider reading the Gospel of John (or any Gospel). I have an audio recording of the details of this conversation, approximately 10 minutes long. If you would like access to it, please contact me through my website.

Let me share a couple thoughts on each of the verses I have listed above:

**Romans 1:26-27** – This is significant in that it specifies homosexuality as not just something

wrong, but *'unnatural'*. It refers to the desire as being 'shameful', and also that there are 'penalties' associated with it. This is a lot of 'warning', so to speak. This is not just an area of morality of little significance, and most definitely not an area *outside* of morality, that a Christian can believe falls into a category of simple identity. The verse in Leviticus describes homosexuality as 'detestable'.

So what is our take-away here? Simply that it *does* matter, and it *is* sinful. And God has views on it, has expressed them, and will judge. We don't have to be judgmental – not in this area, not in any. But we do have to believe, and at times warn as 'watchmen', that there is a Judge, and *he* will judge.

**1 Timothy 1:9-11** – Three points on this:

1. 'Sexual Immorality': Not only is homosexuality stipulated here as wrong, but so too is 'sexual immorality' generally, and separate to homosexuality. (see the next section, '*Sexual Immorality*')

2. Rules: '*The law is made for...*', in other words, the '*Do's & Don't's*' are made for certain things and certain people. Homosexuality is a '*Don't*' in the Bible, in the Law, according to this verse; homosexuality is a '*breaking of the law*' according to this verse.

3. The Spirit of the Gospel: Paul says that the

law is for anyone or anything that does not conform to the gospel. This is very deep, and yet very important. You see, truth is 'spirit', and flows by the Spirit of God. Even the true essence of the 'law', the rules, are 'spirit', not words.<sup>1</sup> This is why people can misuse the law, the rules, referencing only words, and not the Spirit of Jesus. And there you have 'legalism', which is a killer, not a life-giver.

Paul confronted Peter and James and Barnabas and others, because they were not acting in accordance with the gospel. (Galatians 2:14) This is a famous 'facing off', and yet if you look at the text you will see that Paul is not actually referencing any 'rule' that Peter is breaking; he is picking up on a wrong spirit, something – and therefore some actions – that were 'off' the spirit of the gospel.

This is why you will sometimes know – and need to walk from – something that might have OK words attached to it, but you discern the spirit is not that of Christ, even if people are using his name. (see Matthew 7:21-23)

So in this verse above – *1 Timothy 1:9-11* – we see Paul again stipulating that the true, heart-convicting 'law', is that which does not conform to the gospel of Jesus, and homosexuality is in this category.

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<sup>1</sup> John 4:24; 2 Corinthians 3:17; John 6:63; Romans 7:14a

**1 Corinthians 6:9** – This verse speaks for itself.

**1 Corinthians 6:18** – This verse is important for a key reason: It stipulates that sexual sin (heterosexual and/or homosexual) is *different* to other sin. It is set on a different level, it is set apart. People say all sin is equal, but that is not the case in our bodies and earthly lives. It may be true when it comes to God's judgment regarding righteousness for salvation, but it is not true about 'actions' and consequences here on earth. This verse sets 'sexual sin' apart from other sin.<sup>1</sup>

In our society now – and this is not a 'new' thing – people make very light of sexual sin. Actually, people try to avoid talking about anything 'right' or 'wrong' when it comes to sexual choices and actions. I think this is because people carry so much 'weight', so much guilt, about their own choices and behaviors, that they just can't bear for anything to do with sex or lust to be a moral issue.

But it is a moral issue. And if we're honest, and lift our eyes just a little, we are flooded with news articles and friends' stories about heartache after heartache due to sexual activity, choices, abuse, violence. It's everywhere! And yet, if we keep avoiding a 'moral' discussion about it, and God's teaching on it, we are the ones allowing the hurt

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<sup>1</sup> Another verse like this one, setting apart 'sensual' actions, is Colossians 2:23

to flow, the sin to harm people. Dare to know  
and to stand on God's teaching about 'right' and  
'wrong' in this area of sexual immorality.

## **Sexual Immorality (& Sex Before Marriage)**

***'... the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.'*** (Genesis 6:2)

***'Anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery...'*** (Matthew 5:32)

***'Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'*** (Matthew 5:28)

***'If they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.'*** (1 Corinthians 7:9)

***'Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.'***  
(Hebrews 13:4)

We talk about sex and marriage as if they are separate. But in the Bible it is clear that the very act of sex was the *contract* of marriage. To have sex, is to get married. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:16 that the act of sex is a type of physical and spiritual unifying with another person, and Paul is saying this to warn people not to do it. Jesus also referred to this act of marriage – sexual union and commitment between a man and a woman – as *'becoming one flesh'*. And Jesus



said that this unification was of God, something God *'joined together'*:

***'Jesus said, 'So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.'*** (Matthew 19:6)

And so throughout the Bible, the 'consequences' of having sex outside of the committed relationship before God and man, is often what is spoken of and spoken to, and simply referred to as 'sexual immorality'. There is never a question as to whether it is right or wrong; it assumes that everyone knows it is wrong.

There are so many Scriptures that reference 'sexual immorality', and so many stories and examples throughout the Bible, it was hard for me to stick to five verses above. I will explain why I consider these five as important to know.

**Genesis 6:2** – It is clear from this verse that 'marry' and 'sleeping together' was the same thing. God is upset that men are 'marrying' – i.e. sleeping with – anyone they choose. No commitment, no accountability, just sleeping around. This is the sin that God specifies as his reason for the flood. I'm sure there were more, but this one is mentioned. It is also noteworthy that this is unbridled heterosexual sin, as God is specifying relations between men and women.

When I was in college a friend discovered that I believed homosexuality to be wrong. He was

shocked. Over coffee he asked me if I felt I would need to point out this 'sin' to a homosexual, if I were talking to them. I said to him that I also believed pre-marital sex to be wrong, and that he was living in this way now with his girlfriend, and I had never 'pointed this out' to him. Now he was really shocked! Anyway, my point here is that both heterosexual immorality (promiscuity, pornography, lewd talk, joking, thinking, looking) is sin, as is homosexuality. Sometimes we overlook a lot of general heterosexual sin in our own lives and in the lives others, and yet we recoil from people caught in homosexuality. We forget that God brought on the flood due to general heterosexual immorality. This brings us to...

**Matthew 5:28** – This verse is a 'leveler'. It is really important. Jesus is not saying that lust is *like* adultery; he is saying it *is* adultery. Now, is Jesus trying to throw us into a panic? Of course not! He is not coming to make us all introspective and hyper self-aware about our sin. What he is doing here is not allowing us to separate the heart from actions, or think of ourselves as better than others because we have not actually 'done' this or that. Yes, there is value in not giving birth to sin (James 1:15), but we must be honest, truthful, in our understanding of right and wrong. Lust – that second look, that hidden scrolling and viewing - is sinful. It is lustful, and adulterous. Condemnation? No, but rather 'direction', guidance, grounding.

Jesus admonished us to live out our faith *'in secret'*, in the closet.<sup>1</sup> His call was for integrity in our faith and lives, rather than falsity or hypocrisy. We live in a world now that has given in to pornographic images. People don't fight it. They don't turn away. They don't turn it off. They don't speak against it. This lusting is adulterous, and matters. It is sin, and it hurts people, betrays people, and destroys true sexual satisfaction and provision in marriage. Pornography is sexual immorality. Matthew 5:28 is very important regarding that point.

Thousands of years before Jesus was born, Job said,

***'I have made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a woman... Does God not see my ways and count my every step?'*** (Job 31:1,4)

Now, to you, my sisters, reading this, let me just appeal to you: Please consider the pressure and temptation on men. Please be modest in dress. I won't go into this, nor is my appeal that you conceal your God-given beauty as a woman. But this is a very real area to consider deeply, and about which to consult with other, godly women. Please avoid the spirit of legalism or discouragement, but *do* consider how in wisdom you might navigate this area.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 6:4,6,18

**Matthew 5:32** – Here we see that principle at work, namely where sexual intimacy is ‘equated’ with marriage. Jesus is basically saying that we need to fight for all those challenges in marriage, except if the marriage itself, so to speak, has been broken by one person. How? Having sexual relations with another person. Why? Because sex is marriage. (*you know what I mean here*) This is a key verse regarding pre-marital sex, i.e. it can’t happen, because sex is marriage. And where this happens outside of marriage (i.e. before, during, and according to Jesus, sometimes after), it is sinful – either ‘sexually immoral’, or ‘adulterous’.

Why am I coming down so heavy on this? Well, I hate being ‘heavy’, honestly. And I’m not trying to deny God’s grace and forgiveness for sexual immorality. I depend on it! What I’m trying to save people from is the error of thinking they do not need God’s grace and forgiveness in this area. If we say that something is not a problem, that God calls a problem, we will not, cannot receive his help. So if the enemy can convince us that something just isn’t wrong – when God calls it wrong – well then we are truly lost. Look at this verse, and look at who is teaching such error!

***‘Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the***

**clean...**' (Ezekiel 22:26)

We can only really see, talk about, depend on God's grace, when we recognize wrongdoing.

**1 Corinthians 7:9** – Here we have another key verse regarding sexual activity as part and parcel of marriage. Otherwise there would be no 'burning with passion' prior to getting married. Paul is saying that if you feel you need sex in your life, than marriage is your route.

Now consider the grace of God in this, rather than, perhaps, a sense of restriction. God has provided a relationship structure within which you are blessed to have and enjoy sex. This is amazing. This is incredible. And in this chapter, Paul actually encourages people to not feel bad if they feel they need to marry. (see verse 28) If you want sex, that's fine, get married!

Let me expound on this, two short points. (Well, I'll try to keep them short!)

Sex is worth a life-time commitment.

So says God. This is his contract, his idea. So when two young people just sleep together, but cannot and will not get married, well, they are devaluing something deep and long that God has created. It's wrong on many levels. It's a devaluation without even knowing.

I remember as a kid my brother and I were practicing throwing a knife at wood. We were just

flinging an old, rusty blade. We lost it. Then a friend of our dad's heard that we had lost our knife, and he gifted us with a really expensive, multi-purpose Swiss Army Knife – complete with micro-magnifying glass, scissors, screwdriver, etc. It was top of the line, gleaming red, expensive. We didn't know its value. We didn't know about Swiss Army Knives. We took this knife and began throwing it like the old rusty one. Half hour later this gift had the red case split off, bent blade, broken pieces. Game over. Gift wasted. Devalued. We treat sex like this, when we 'use' it, or avail of it, for a relationship or experience that is outside a lifetime commitment before God and man.

Marriage is commitment and faith, not a 401K!  
In other words, we have made too much of the marriage 'contract'. If you are walking with Jesus truly (not just in lip service, but in morals and testimony), you are ready to get married. You don't need a financial plan, or even financial peace. You need peace with God, and a heart that is ready to commit.

I think we have priorities wrong in our society. We feel you need a house, a car, a career, health insurance, etc., before you are ready to marry. This is not biblical at all. Read Matthew chapter 6, to the end. We are called to seek first the righteousness of God (like marrying before we have sex), and if we pursue his ways, he will provide what we need – i.e. shelter, food, drink, clothes.

The challenge to the Christian regarding marriage is not to have savings for a big wedding; it is to have faith that God's way are right, and if we pursue his ways, he will provide. And so we save ourselves, get married, and believe God to meet our needs.

My wife and I got married on this promise of God, Matthew 6:33:

***'Seek first my kingdom and my righteousness, and these things will be added to you.'***

We were young (20 and 19). We had four more years of college to go, a place to live for only three months, and \$500 total after we returned from our very humble 'honeymoon' in a cottage about 100 miles out of the city. We had no summer jobs lined up yet. We were broke, but happy, and confident – not in ourselves, but in the Lord.

It's been tough, honestly. Marriage is tough. If not financially, relationally. If not regarding wealth, then health. If not between partners, between parents and kids. The human heart is broken, sinful, selfish, and life is an unpredictable path. Marriage is a tough road. This is why it needs full commitment before God and man. And this is one of God's reasons for the prize of sexual intimacy for those that are bonded and committed to the road of marriage. If you give away the prize without the commitment,

you risk not getting a very deep commitment afterwards. It's like giving payment before someone works. It's like giving desert before eating proper food. It's like giving a good grade before you study and take the exam. It's like getting a position on a team without trying out...

However, by God's grace, the support of many, the generosity of many, the faithfulness of Jesus, we're still here, five kids later, 25+ years later...

**Hebrews 13:4** – Another verse that just points to the 'exclusiveness' of the 'bed' within marriage parameters. That's all on this one!

OK, I will close out this section here, by again focusing on the grace and freedom of God. There is forgiveness, my friends, for sexual immorality. We confess, repent (turn away), and walk with God. Where there is sincere repentance, there is an outpouring of God's forgiveness.

***'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.'*** (1 John 1:9)

If you have sinned in this area, Jesus calls you to repentance and forgiveness. There is a door open to you today, right now. Look at this incredible invitation from Jesus to you, to me. Look at this door to freedom!

***'Those whom I love I rebuke and***



***discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.'*** (Revelation 3:19-20)

## Water Baptism

***'I baptize you with water for repentance...'***  
(Matthew 3:11, John the Baptist)

***'Apollos only knew the baptism of John...'***  
(Acts 18:25)

***'We no longer consider anyone from a merely human perspective, as we once did Christ, but we do so no more.'*** (2 Corinthians 5:16)

***'Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...'*** (1 Corinthians 1:17)

***'The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you – they are Spirit and life.'*** (John 6:63)

Water baptism is a symbol of turning away from a sinful life, and beginning a new life in Christ. Well, this was what it symbolized when John the Baptist was doing it, hence the first key verse above. It was a baptism with water for repentance. Now, after Jesus died and rose again, water baptism came to also symbolize death and resurrection. Again, it doesn't touch the soul any more than our physical water can touch the soul. Paul puts it this way:

***'... having been buried with him [Christ] in baptism... you were also raised with him through your faith...'*** (Colossians 2:12)

Water baptism is a symbol. Sometimes in Scripture it accompanied a profession of faith, and sometimes not. But when it became mixed up with the message – like so many things – Paul makes this incredibly important statement:

***'I was not sent to baptize, but to the preach the gospel.'*** (1 Corinthians 1:17)

If water baptism had anything to do with the salvation of the soul or faith itself, it would be *part* of the gospel. But here Paul separates the two completely, and even says that in preaching the gospel (*'which is the power of God for salvation'* – Romans 1:16) baptism has no role.

So what about infant baptism? At best a symbol by the parents of dedicating their child to Jesus Christ. It is a type of statement of faith, and a type of hope and prayer. It is symbolic – in this case not even of the child's heart and soul, but of the parents.

Let's talk briefly about Acts 18:25. Here we have Apollos, a man who debated with people about Jesus being the Messiah, who we are told, *'only knew the baptism of John.'* Some people use this to speak of a second baptism of the Holy Spirit. But I feel this is error, as I believe there is no two-tier filling of the Holy Spirit, any more than there is 1000-tier filling of the Holy Spirit. When we believe in Jesus, we are indwelt, *'sealed'*, by the Holy Spirit, once for all, and completely. (Ephesians 1:14; Colossians 2:10)

What we know about the baptism of John is what John said about it: It was with water for repentance. It was an act of turning away from sin, because the Savior was coming. And today we are still called to repent. Repentance is a key 'action' in true faith, and a true belief in Jesus.

I believe Apollos, who now knew Jesus to be Lord, was still focusing on the call of God for people to respond to this Jesus by repenting, and marking this turn-around by water baptism. So when he meets Aquila and Priscilla, after Jesus had ascended to heaven and sent disciples around the globe to preach the gospel, they explained to Apollos *'the way of God more adequately.'* (vs.26) What does this mean exactly? Well, no one knows. But what we do know is that he went on from there and *'publicly debated'*, and *'proved from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.'* (vs.28)

I believe the instruction that Aquila and Priscilla gave Apollos was more about the completed work of Christ, and how now he pours out his Spirit in all who repent and believe. You see, John was speaking of a Christ to come who would baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 3:11b) Now that Jesus has completed his work, this filling of the Holy Spirit happens when people lift their eyes to Christ. It is no longer up ahead in Christ; it is *now* in Christ. People repent, believe, and are completely 'sealed' and saved!

Two points on this:

Different View of Christ: You will see from the verse above, 2 Corinthians 5:16, that even Paul says we changed our view of Christ over time. When he was with us on the earth (like when John was seeing him, and speaking about him) we were considering Christ from a merely human perspective. Now that he has finished his work, ascended to heaven, poured out his Spirit, well, there no longer is a baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire 'up ahead', or 'to come'; it is here now! ***John's baptism and Christ's baptism are all one completed work through repentance and faith – neither of which are a physical baptism.*** There is forgiveness and a 'sealing' in the Holy Spirit. So for Apollos to be focusing mainly on repentance and a water baptism to symbolize this, well, that was *Part A*, so to speak, an old, original focus at the outset; but now *Part B* has also happened, and the two are one. Hence Paul's message: ***'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.'*** (Acts 16:31)

Same Message: After Apollos had learned the way of God more adequately, he went forward with the same message as before: *Jesus is the Savior*. This is important to note. The gospel is the gospel. You and I learn much about the Lord as we grow in him, and our understanding of him deepens daily, yearly. This, so to speak, instructs us in the way of God more adequately. Our confidence may grow as a result, and our

fervor. But the message we speak to others about Christ remains the same. His gospel is his gospel, and is complete. The message of repentance of sin, and faith in Jesus for salvation and an indwelling of his Holy Spirit, remains the same.

Water baptism, like any symbol of faith, can quickly take on a type of 'spiritual' value that God never meant it to have. This happened all through the history of the Bible! One story that strikes me powerfully is when Moses was instructed by God to make a bronze snake, as a focal point to demonstrate faith. When people were sick (bitten by a viper) they had to look to this bronze snake in order to receive the healing of God. This plague came and went in a matter of days. What then happened was that the people made an idol of this bronze snake, and began to worship it for years to come. A Godly king, Hezekiah, had to later on demolish this bronze snake, which now had a name, 'Nehushtan'.<sup>1</sup>

Again, the law of circumcision, a symbol of commitment to God, became something associated with the righteousness of the soul. It was a command of Moses, of God, but not with that type of purpose or spiritual value. It was such a powerful distraction and deception, that even some apostles gave into to it, acting like people who were circumcised were on a different

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers 21:6-9; 2 Kings 18:1-4

level of Christianity compared to those who were not. (Does this sound familiar regarding 'baptism of the Spirit'?)<sup>1</sup>

Nothing, my friends, that touches the body or can be made by human hands or human philosophizing, touches the soul or partners with the gospel. This is true of what we do, or what people do against us. We can't do something to make someone holy (like infant baptism), nor can we destroy a soul through physical or sexual abuse. Look at what Jesus says:

***'Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.'*** (Mark 7:15)

The soul is the domain of God alone. It is untouched by humans, for good or evil. You decide your own soul's destiny of righteousness when you decide on Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 2 (note verse 14); 1 Corinthians 7:19

## Gifts of the Holy Spirit

***'Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.'***

(1 Kings 19:11-12)

***'We were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.'*** (1 Corinthians 12:13)

***Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.'*** (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22)

***'There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them... To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.'***

(1 Corinthians 12:4,7,11)

***'Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?'*** (1 Corinthians 12:29-30)



I often think of a scene in a movie, *'Narnia'*, where three children were each given (as 'gifts') a special weapon for battle. Peter was given a sword, Susan a bow and arrow, Lucy a bottle of healing balm and a dagger. Could Lucy perhaps have used Susan's bow and arrow, or Susan used Peter's sword? Of course! But the special 'ability' of each person with their 'assigned' weapon, would be most effective.

Spiritual gifts are similar. God equips each believer in Jesus with a 'gift' for service. One might be given a gift of teaching, and another the gift of 'helping'. And all gifts are referred to as 'manifestations' of the Spirit. One person helping another person, working from their gift of 'helping' and their faith in Christ, is 'manifesting' the Holy Spirit within them just as much as a person speaking in the tongues of angels, or another person healing a lame man.<sup>1</sup>

I have, in my selection of verses above, again included **1 Corinthians 12:13**. I also included this one under the section, *'The Holy Spirit'*. It is so important to see here that Paul, speaking to the whole church, and reminding them all that each has a different gift, is also referring to all of them as having been baptized in the Spirit. So baptism of the Spirit cannot mean – or manifest itself – in one gift only. Every spiritual gift is a

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:28 refers to 'helping' and 'guiding' as spiritual gifts, and it is earlier in verse 7 that we are told that everyone in their gifting is 'manifesting' the Spirit.

manifestation of the spirit, and every believer has been baptized in the Spirit.

**1 Corinthians 12:29-30** – Here Paul is emphasizing differences – as ‘determined’ by God, which we saw in verse 11.

Now some people will reference the next verse which says, ***‘But eagerly desire the greater gifts.’*** They will use this to say that we should ‘desire’ and pursue greater gifts, and usually they are talking about ‘speaking in tongues’. What is interesting is that ‘tongues’ is listed ‘lower’ – if we are ranking them – than the gifts of ‘helping’ and ‘guidance’ in verse 28, and yet people are not saying we should be pursuing the gifts of helping and guidance.

But anyway, my feeling is that to see this last verse as prompting people to desire ‘tongues’ goes against the Spirit and teaching of the whole chapter. Paul does not, *cannot* mean this. He has just spent a whole chapter (and then the following two) trying to get people away from ‘ranking’ and holier-than-thou thinking on spiritual gifts.

This verse can also be translated as, *‘But you eagerly desire the greater gifts’* – in possibly an ironic or admonishing statement about what people *are* doing, but should not be doing. This latter translation would render an opposite meaning altogether, i.e. *Don’t do this!* I think this is closer to the meaning of the full passage,

confirmed by the very next line where Paul says, **'I will show you a better way,'** and then rolls into the very famous chapter on Love.

In other words, stop looking to elevate yourselves spiritually talking about this gift 'over' that gift. All gifts are a manifestation of the Spirit, everyone has been baptized in the Spirit, let's take our eyes off 'ranking' and start loving one another more.

**1 Thessalonians 5:19-22** – What is prophecy? Well, it is really speaking the truth of God in the Spirit of God. (See section, *'The Scriptures'*)

In the Bible some people were prophets – like Moses – who were detailing the words of God for all people, for all time, e.g. the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20) Other prophets throughout Scripture were speaking key, individual words of God to individual people for a specific purpose – like Nathan, telling king David that God had specifically instructed him to not build the temple, or on another occasion to attack the enemy from behind, only when the wind blew in the tops of the poplar trees. This is specific!<sup>1</sup>

So what do we mean when someone has the gift of 'prophecy'? Well, this person tends to speak God's word in a special way, with authority, either generally (like Moses or John the

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel 5,7

Baptist<sup>1</sup>), or specifically to you or me.

A prophetic person may tell you that they feel the Lord is leading you to this or that course of action, or this or that focus in your path ahead. Specific leading. And don't forget the spiritual gift of 'guidance' referenced earlier. (1 Corinthians 12:28)

So there is much overlap in spiritual gifting and outworking, same as there is overlap in the functions of the body and of an army unit. Prophecy might look like teaching, encouragement, evangelism, guidance, wisdom. So to actually discern a spiritual gift of prophecy in a person – an 'anointed' tendency to speak a general and/or specific word that reveals purposes of God in a person's life, or church's direction, etc – well, this shows itself over time. There are a number of people in my life that I consider 'prophetic'. When we pray together, they might then share with me that a particular image or word came to their mind for me. And over the years these images and words have been pivotal in my understanding of God's guidance for weeks and months later, confirming themselves over and over.

Now, a prophetic person may even have insight into a road block in your life, even give you a

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<sup>1</sup> It is so interesting to me that John the Baptist, referred to as a prophet by Jesus himself, never did a miraculous sign. (John 10:41; Matthew 11:9)

warning about it, but not have the full 'take' on the leading of the Lord in your life. Look at this amazing passage in Acts:

***'Leaving the next day, we [Luke, Paul and others] reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist... He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'" When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done." After this, we started on our way up to Jerusalem.***  
(Acts 21:8-15)

And this leads us to consider the verses from **1 Thessalonians 5:19-22**. We are called to not 'despise' prophecy in our lives, but we are also called to discern, to test, and in a way to decipher – hold to what is good, reject what is not good. It feels complicated, messy. And that's OK! God is relational. He is not an equation or an algorithm. We need to spend time in prayer,

speaking to him, listening to him, gazing on him.  
What are you saying, Lord?

And finally, we consider the passage from **1 Kings 19:11-12**. This is important, in that the true voice of God to Elijah came in a whisper. The big noise event, the grand statement from nature and fire and wind, was not the word of truth. The whisper. When it comes to spiritual gifts, settle and listen. Look and consider. The big noise from the big stage may appeal to our desire to have clarity and direction, but may not be the deeper stirring and leading of the Lord in your life.

## Rules

***'Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.'*** (1 Corinthians 7:19)

***'Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.'*** (Colossians 2:16)

***'Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.'*** (Romans 10:4)

***'The law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith.'***  
(Galatians 3:24)

***'No one will be declared righteous by the works of the law...'*** (Romans 3:20)

***'For Christ himself is our peace... setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity...'***  
(Ephesians 2:14-15)

***'The law is spiritual...'*** (Romans 7:14)

Rules and standards and disciplines, etc., these are good things! Even moral codes, ethics, ways of behaving... Important! But 'legalism' is

different. Let's talk about that briefly...

You see, as Romans 7:14 says above, the 'law' (i.e. the rules and commands in the Old Testament) is actually 'spiritual'. It is not a list of cold 'Do's & Don'ts'. It is spiritual – full of the Spirit of God, in order to lead us to Christ, as Galatians 3:28 says. In this light we see and 'feel' the law as full of life, and leading to life and promise.

Legalism is also 'spirit'. It is a binding spirit. It is using rules and regulations for self-righteousness – when our only true righteousness comes from Christ, not from any rules or regulations. A spirit of legalism does not lead to Christ, but rather to a bottomless pit inside oneself, and to condemnation.

Back in the day of the apostles, the early church, people were trying to tie Christians to an old set of rules from the Old Testament, specifically the command of circumcision and the command of rest on the Sabbath. Now I say 'command', because these were rules in the Bible.<sup>1</sup> They were commands. This is important to note, because in doing so it takes us even deeper into the freedom that Christ is and brings.

Some people nowadays also try to get Christians back into the Old Testament rules and traditions. One argument is that God never withdrew or

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 17:10; Exodus 20:8-11



nullified the old rules, so we should not abandon them. This is not true! God did withdraw them time and time again, and also enacted a much deeper and higher 'withdrawal' of the Law than just a scratching of old text.

For example, look at the Scriptures above that literally and specifically say that circumcision is 'nothing', and also that you cannot allow yourself to be judged on observing the Sabbath. How so? These were commands in the Old Testament! How can Paul now say circumcision is nothing?

Paul is not saying that it is not good to get circumcised. Paul himself, in fact, circumcised Timothy. (Acts 16:3) But Paul also told the church in Galatia that if they got circumcised Christ meant nothing to them. (Galatians 5:2) So what's going on here? Well, anything that actually comes alongside the gospel message and starts to 'meld' with it – circumcision, Old Testament rules and diets, etc. – in that context they are of absolutely no value, and if we mix them in with Christ, Christ is of no value. He stands alone, and his saving message of repentance and faith is not touched or enhanced by any rule or command.

Legalism is a subtle thing. It can slip into the heart, and sneak into teaching.<sup>1</sup> It is spirit. We need to have a keen eye for it, and Paul admonishes us in this way:

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<sup>1</sup> Jude 1:4; Galatians 2:4

***'It was for freedom that Christ has set us free. Do not allow yourselves, therefore, to be subject again to a yolk of slavery.'***

(Galatians 5:1)

One more thing to note about 1 Corinthians 7:19. The second half of the verse says that *'Keeping God's commands is what counts.'* But circumcision was a command – Genesis 17:10. So if circumcision now counts for nothing, but keeping commands does, well, the true 'commands' of God that matter are those of the heart, of faith, of *'love for God'* and *'belief in Christ.'* (Matthew 22:36-40; John 6:40)

I leave you to summarize or rephrase the other verses we have noted above – Jesus being the 'fulfillment' (culmination) of the law, the purpose of it ('to lead us to Christ'), and indeed the destroyer of it in his own flesh, so a new humanity could be formed. Now, just as a path that leads to a place does not become meaningless once you've reached that place (as it might lead others<sup>1</sup>), so too the law continues to have deep truth and value in our lives here on earth. We have found Christ, but insofar as the law is 'spiritual' and hopeful and pure in our lives, it continues to lead in God's truthful direction – always to the very Spirit of Jesus.

Other Scriptures on this (and there are so many!), regarding 'freedom' in Jesus, and

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Timothy 1:8-11

release from the spirit of the law, are found in Philippians chapter 3, and Ephesians 2:8-10, etc. Remember, the enemy is an accuser (Revelation 12:10), and will 'guilt' you all day long... Paul encourages us to not just 'ignore' the devil, but to *resist* him till he flees (James 4:7-8), and to really dig deep and contend for this precious freedom that Jesus has paid for and given us. (Galatians 5:1)

So be earnest about discerning between good, healthy use of rules (true 'spiritual law'), legalism (a heavy, self-righteous use of the law/rules), and the Holy Spirit's full and powerful release from your sin, from the very presence of the law in your soul. Be free! Be like a child! Don't get down on yourself for this or that. Run free and honor the victory of Christ! (Matthew 18:3)

## The Gospel Message

***'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'***  
(John 3:16)

***'I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...'*** (Romans 1:16)

***'Jesus said, 'Repent and believe the good news.'***" (Mark 1:15)

***'He asked, 'What must I do to be saved?' Paul replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...'***" (Acts 16:30-31)

***'How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ... Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.'***  
(Romans 10:14,17)

The gospel message is about coming to Jesus. It is a sincere, heart decision. God sees, knows, embraces.

We can 'fake' it here in this life very easily, by saying some right words, and joining the right

organization or church. But God sees and knows the heart. Jesus says there will come a day when he separates every single person into two groups, those that know him and those that don't. We cannot judge one another, but we can be sincere about our own self. *Have I turned away from sin and believed in Jesus Christ? Am I walking the walk, or just talking the talk?*<sup>1</sup>

So what is the true message, the gospel message? Well, it is simply responding to the call of Christ, and he called us to repent of our sin (turn away from it), and believe in him, follow him. Repent and believe in Jesus. Sincerely. This is the gospel message of salvation.

Now, just like any man or woman rescued from a fire, there will be much to 'work out' after the rescue. After the person has been saved from the fire, well, now we can begin to help them with clothing, housing, avoiding the same disaster again in the future by establishing a new life, a fresh 'build'... This is much like the gospel. When a person comes to Jesus in repentance and faith, well, they have been saved indeed, and now a new life begins. They have passed through the 'door' of Christ, and now a 'new creation' begins to establish a new identity and take new roads...

***'Jesus said, 'I am the door, and anyone who***

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<sup>1</sup> Titus 1:16; Romans 3:15-16; Matthew 25:31-46; Matthew 7:21-23

***comes through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture.”***

(John 10:9)

***‘Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old has gone and the new has come!’***

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

Once we come to Christ we are saved. As we walk with Christ, we change habits, friends, thoughts, beliefs, etc. But the actual step *to* Christ, by turning away from sin and turning our hearts to him, this is the gospel message, the salvation moment.

Some people, after accepting the message, will fall away quickly, according to Jesus. Others will fall away over time, pulled by the world and its temptations. And others will have roots go down, grow strong and steady, and continue the path and relationship with the Lord. This doesn't mean there won't be times of stumbling, falling, walking away, but the ultimate story will be one of getting back up in sincere faith, and walking on... It's not for us to judge others. Discern, yes, and distance ourselves from wayward people. This is biblical. But not judge the heart of another, or try to define where exactly they are at with God. We are called to lift our own eyes and walk with Christ, step by step, day after day.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 13:1-23; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

***‘The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, ever-brighter until the full light of day.’*** (Proverbs 4:18)

Now, it’s also important to understand that sharing the gospel with others is introducing them directly to Jesus. It is presenting to them who Jesus is (see the section, *‘Jesus Is God’*), and sharing with them that they can know him, they can open the door of their heart to him, and he will come in. (Revelation 3:19-20)

When we live out our own Christian faith, through actions, this is a beautiful thing and does truly serve to advance the work of God. But it is not the same as sharing the gospel. It is more like tilling the ground, clearing the air, paving a road – all very important and Spirit-led work. But the actual gospel message is one that needs to be *‘preached’*, needs to be *‘heard’*, needs to be *‘believed.’* This is why I include above the key verses from **Romans 10:14,17**.

When we live out our faith, there is often a focus on us – our lives, our actions, our testimony. This is good. But when we share the gospel message, we are, in a sense, stepping out of the picture. We are leaving a person alone with Jesus. Our Christian lives and actions are like paving roads, and then sharing the gospel with a person – whether it is us or others – is like allowing a person to actually *travel* that road, *step onto* the pavement we’ve laid, to arrive at Jesus himself.

You may be a seed-sower, a pavement-layer, in many people's lives, and then one day – you may never know about it – someone else introduces this person to Jesus through the gospel. However, by *'letting your light shine before men'*, just living out a true faith and walk, you may have truly softened a person's heart, and prepared the way for them to be open to Christ. So don't feel you have to always be the one to share the message. Continue to pray, sow, live, love... If God does prompt you to speak, then speak. But know that everything counts, and most of what we do is sow, not reap, water, not harvest. Be encouraged! Walk on!

If we do have an opportunity to share the gospel message, we must do so *'in step with the Spirit'*. (Galatians 5:25; John 5:19) We don't just do it in our own strength or timing. There were even times Jesus told the disciples to *not* share the message of who he was with people. (Matthew 16:20) We need to live out our faith sincerely, and as the Lord leads we share the good news of the gospel with people, that they, too, can know him. If you want to consider this challenging area of 'sharing faith' in a little more detail, please access the short booklet I have written on my website (free in PDF), or on Amazon: *Finding Freedom Sharing Jesus* ([www.sharingyourfaith.weebly.com](http://www.sharingyourfaith.weebly.com))



## Fasting

***‘They asked Jesus, ‘Why do your disciples not fast?’ (Matthew 9:14)***

***‘The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they called him a glutton and a drunkard.’ (Matthew 11:19)***

***‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and an acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.’ (Hosea 6:6)***

***‘Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice... to set the oppressed free... to share your food with the hungry?’ (Isaiah 58:6-7)***

***‘Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink... or by a Sabbath day... Such regulations have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.’ (Colossians 2:16,23)***

I want to start by considering this last verse. We as people are addicted to pride and a sense of accomplishment. When any one of us gets a routine going in life – *health, fitness, diet* – we get pretty high and mighty about what others should be doing. We feel good about ourselves, and we make our ‘discipline’ a standard for others. Take careful note here that even Paul

says that '**harsh treatment of the body**' can have an '**appearance of wisdom**'. Also note that Paul puts as the higher goal the avoidance of immorality ('*sensual indulgence*'), which this '**harsh treatment of the body**' does nothing for.

I have often heard of fasting as one of the '*spiritual disciplines*'. But I've never seen a list of spiritual disciplines in the Bible where fasting is mentioned or commanded. In fact, in the life of Jesus, it seems the opposite. Jesus' own disciples were seen to *not* be fasting. Why? Jesus said that it was because the Bridegroom had come. And you know what? That Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, has never left us.

We do see examples of fasting in the New Testament by disciples and apostles. For example when Paul and Barnabbas fasted and prayed and then appointed elders. (Acts 14:23) However, when Paul talks about appointing elders in 1 Timothy 3, there is no mention of a process of prayer and fasting.

So we do see examples of fasting, but what we are *not* given (by Jesus or any of the writers of the New Testament) is a list of guidelines for fasting, such as occasions when to fast, how long to fast, foods (include water or not?) etc. We have no commands on this. Some examples, no commands.

In contrast to fasting, I feel, we have Paul telling Timothy to stop drinking only water and take a

little wine for his health, his stomach. (1 Timothy 5:23) We also have Jesus as someone known not for austerity but for actually drinking alcohol and eating with people. (see above verse, Matthew 11:19)

So to summarize and conclude: Be free. Be at peace. Fast if you want and feel called or led for a reason. Don't do it to be more spiritual. Don't do it to impress others or God or yourself.

The fasting God '**chooses**' is to share food, not deprive self and judge others.

So be free. Walk with God like a child and know you are loved, whether you have ever fasted or ever do!

***'Unless you change and become like a child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.'***  
(Matthew 18:3)

## Apostles

We make a lot out of a little. Especially when it comes to rank and authority. We love power. We love to be influential. It really all comes back to pride and the Fall – when we chose to become ‘like God’ rather than just receive life from him.<sup>1</sup>

It is my general understanding as I read the New Testament of the Bible, that apostles were a select group of disciples, tasked with a higher level of responsibility, and a higher level of sacrifice. Note this verse:

***‘Jesus appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.’***

(Mark 3:14-15)<sup>2</sup>

Disciple means ‘student’. Apostle means ‘person sent’.

Now, look at how Paul describes the ranking and the ‘charge’ of apostles:

***‘For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. We are fools for Christ, but***

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:1-5

<sup>2</sup> Also see Luke 12:13

***you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world — right up to this moment.*** (1 Corinthians 4:9-13)

*(Maybe just memorize verse 9, the one underlined above. But 'note' the whole of chapter 4.)*

In this chapter and the WHOLE previous chapter (1 Corinthians 3) Paul is telling the church to *not* esteem him as higher than other apostles, such as Peter and Apollos. Paul is appealing to them to keep eyes only on Jesus.

Now, this is different to my experience of church structures that have apostles in the rankings, and indeed Christian leaders that think they are apostles. My experience is that these people are given a high ranking, often quite wealthy and removed from what the term meant by a '*person sent*'. They are not sent. They are sitting in a nice office somewhere, or at a plush pulpit. They love the power and respect, as did the Pharisees in the day of Jesus.

***'Jesus said, 'Beware of the teachers of the***

**law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."** (Luke 12:46-47)

So rather than the so-called apostles of today being the 'sent people' – to other towns and countries, or down the back streets, in danger and leading the charge - they consider themselves the highest anointed. They are rarely 'sent', or even outside the walls of their church building, unless prominent guest speakers of another lauding church or organization. And other rather power-hungry leaders in the church look to them for the 'touch', the 'laying on of hands', the impartation of gifting and permission to be important themselves. If the term 'apostle' loses its lustre, church structures introduce more lofty terms, like Bishop or whatever. The point is power.

Paul did not want people to refer or dwell on his past spiritual accomplishments, but rather only the present moment. (see verse below) *Why?* Because Paul, a real apostle, had an anointing from Jesus and did not need a big introduction, with a professional photo of his wife and kids and list of accolades about how spiritual he was. Nope. He needed only God's leading to do what he was called to do, whether people liked it, or

people did not like it, and sometimes paid for it with near-death beatings.<sup>1</sup>

***‘Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say.’***  
(2 Corinthians 12:6)

Yes, we have examples in Scripture where others – other than the twelve – are referred to as apostles. Not many, but a few. We do have the extraordinary calling and sending of Paul himself as an apostle, and it is important to note the two criteria, it would seem, that Paul refers to in order to defend his ‘sent’ status (or apostleship):

***‘Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?’***  
(1 Corinthians 9:1)

***‘I received the gospel I preach by revelation from Jesus Christ. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it.’*** (Galatians 1:12)

So note: An apostle (generally in the Bible), has seen the risen Lord in clear vision or the flesh, and has received their commission not from man (or other apostles), but from Jesus Christ directly.

Again, some will quote 2 Timothy 1:6 where Paul

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:24-27

says to Timothy that he received his gift through the laying on of Paul's hands, and therefore we have precedent for apostles imparting giftings and authority to others... This is not a command we see taught anywhere. Nor does Paul refer to his own apostleship as that which imparted said gift. We see elders called to pray for healing, and yet no elder is required to have a gift of healing.<sup>1</sup> We must be very careful to distinguish between real structures and commands and directives in the Bible, and just events that happened, and things people of faith did here and there.

So for me the picture of a real apostle in today's world, needs to look a lot like the apostles that we have history for – Paul, Peter, James, John, Steven... They need to labor and war at the end of the procession, and pierce the darkness as pioneers – lives on the line. These are the examples we have in Scripture. They need to have seen the risen Lord and receive their teaching from Jesus.

The Scriptures I would note – just to be able to discern 'false apostles' as the church did in Revelation 2:1-5 – are a few of the ones above. You don't really even have to memorize them, just note where they are – i.e. the chapter of 1 Corinthians 4, etc.

Might be good to learn one or two. But honestly, just note the lives of the apostles in Scripture,

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<sup>1</sup> James 5:14, 1 Timothy 3



and keep an eye out for those types!;)

So who is Paul referring to in the Bible when he speaks of apostles in churches, etc.? Personally, I think he was speaking primarily of the actual apostles doing the work, evangelism, teaching and church planting. He considered himself as a 'father of faith' to those he led to Christ, and would write letters to these people and ask that they be read in the other churches that he had planted. He was the apostle, I believe, that he was referring to, when he spoke of an apostle's role and presence in a church he had planted and would visit. He also recognized the apostleship of the others that Jesus had appointed:<sup>1</sup>

***'Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But you eagerly desire the 'greater' gifts.'*** (1 Corinthians 12:27-31)

Many refer to this as a ranking list, but it cannot be! The whole thrust and appeal of Paul in these three chapters (12-14) is that everyone knows

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<sup>1</sup> See Galatians 2

they are an equal part of the body. Even in this passage alone Paul is appealing to people: **'Are all apostles? Are all prophets?'**

And I'm yet to see a church that does utilize this as a ranking list, to follow it down the list, and rank a 'helper' higher than a person who speaks in tongues.

The apostles of the day knew each other as apostles, so we have Peter referring to Paul in his own letter, and referring to Paul's teaching. (2 Peter 3:14-16) I believe that when Paul refers to apostles as pillars in a church structure, he was referring to those apostles that everyone knew to be set apart by God, and 'sent'. Their lead, their planting, their writings, were at the time, I believe, what was being referred to as authority in the churches they had planted.

*So are there apostles today?*

I don't know. I don't really care. I don't think any true apostle, however, would care either. I think they would be 'sent' and active. They would not be at all consumed with who recognized them *(except, maybe, by the churches they planted, and that for the sake of the church itself)*.

Their legacy would be in their ministry, and their lives – like those of the prophets and the original apostles – would be out front in battle. They would recoil, I believe, from people starting to esteem them too much, as did Paul:

***‘So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God. (1 Corinthians 3:21-23)***

Any so-called apostle looking for more recognition than Paul did, or esteem, is most probably a ‘false apostle.’

## **God's Sovereign Will**

Many people reason like this:

***'If it happened, and God could have stopped it, then he must have allowed it.'***

And because of this, people might say to you:

***'Well, God must have a plan in all this!'***

Here we must stop. It is very important to do so. This reasoning is error, and leads to a faulty view of God and how he works in our lives.

Our reasoning is spiritually flawed, ever since we ate of the ***'tree of knowledge'***.<sup>1</sup> This tree of knowledge not only darkened our understanding of truth, but opened the door to death and sorrow. We cannot reason our way to God's truth.

***'God, in his wisdom, made it so that man in his wisdom, could not find God.'***

(1 Corinthians 1:21)

So let's back up to the very first line of this chapter. Some people 'reason' that if God could stop anything... But this reasoning is not what is revealed in Scripture. God does not speak of controlling life like this. God does not act – or interact – in the Bible that show God to operate

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2:17

or 'explain' things like this. Never do we read about an event of hardship or tragedy, and a prophet speaks saying, 'God is Sovereign and could have prevented this but chose not to.'

This is man's reasoning, not God's revelation.

God has not revealed this way of being and working in the Scriptures. And man's 'wisdom' is not equipped to find God, or God's ways. What we are told to do is to really see and know the revelation of God, of Christ, and then submit our 'reasoning' to that:

***'We take captive thoughts and make them obedient to Christ.'*** (2 Corinthians 10:5)

We subject our reasoning to God's revelation, not the other way round.

So what has God actually revealed about his 'Will'?

Let me say before I set out these verses, that they do not run in a straight line, they do not fit in our 3 dimensions, they do not conform to our reason. The way we deal with these Scriptures, these revelations of God, is we allow them to show us who God is, and we surrender our reason, our dimensions, our way of understanding, to them.

Taking these revelations all together (and so many more I don't mention here), we are left with a Spirit space of truth. We are *not* left with clear

understanding. God's ways are higher than our ways – how could we understand them?<sup>1</sup>

And one last thing before I set out these five verses: The main error for people is thinking God allows all things, in the sense we understand and use the word 'allow'. And because this is the main error, I am here sharing verses where we see God *not* allowing things, i.e. indicating that things happened, and can happen, that he does not allow in the sense we understand the word.

There are many Scriptures about God's power and presence and actions in our lives, and many people know and quote those. Here I am sharing just a few of those 'other' verses that are less known, but are very important to know so that we move into that Spirit space of truth when it comes to God's involvement in our lives. These are deep waters, beyond our understanding. But no matter how we process this, there is no place to believe that God allowed sin and darkness in your life or in anyone's life, with some other higher purpose. He just didn't. He doesn't. That is just not what God has revealed.

***'God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.'*** (1 John 1:5)

***'God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.'*** (James 1:13)

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 55:8-9

***‘Jesus said, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself cannot stand.’ (Matthew 12:25)<sup>1</sup>***

***‘The Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.’ (Luke 7:30)<sup>2</sup>***

***‘If you had kept God’s command, he would have established your kingdom...’***

(1 Samuel 13:13)

In this last verse we have an ‘*If/Then*’ situation. We can influence the course of history, and God’s blessing and actions in our lives, by choices we make. Our will is in the mix!

There are many more verses to note, and I probably have not chosen the best of them. Keep an eye out for them – not just verses but whole accounts, i.e. how God acted in situations.

We see a very ‘human’ way of working, primarily. God has made us with choice, with his image and spirit, and with consequences. He has made us in his image (Genesis 1:27) not in the image of a puppet or robot.

So how do we understand God’s working in our lives? How do we know when something was his will or our will?

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<sup>1</sup> Look carefully at the context of this passage. Jesus is clearly saying that he does not collaborate with the powers of darkness – and he goes on to say those who mix up his Spirit with the spirit of darkness are committing unforgivable sin.

<sup>2</sup> Just note that people can reject what God wills them to do.

Well, this comes with discernment, and with a soaking in God's Word to see and consider how God works. Better to first understand that God's Will does not mean 'controlling' people and allowing evil. This understanding of God is not the biblical one at all. It might be rational on a level, it might be philosophically consistent. But it is not biblical or what God has revealed.

***'See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.'***

(Colossians 2:8)

So when it comes to 'God's Will' all we really know is that he is good, hates evil, and never 'wills' it, never allows it, never collaborates with it. Hurt and pain come only from Satan and sin. So how do we explain an all-powerful God and yet sin and darkness that goes on?

Well, we don't explain it. We just dig into God's revelation, we stay humble, we weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15), we cry to God, we ask for involvement, change, healing.

We don't explain. We have seen Christ, and we follow. We know he will judge all sin, and make all things new, that he loves and will restore. With humility, sometimes with a tear in our eye, we stand with the hurting and bring the healing balm of Jesus to them in this moment.



## **Conclusion:**

***‘Encourage one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs...’*** (Ephesians 5:19)

My friends, in this short book I don't share verses about 'encouragement', or 'worry' or 'fear', etc. Probably the most impactful verses I've shared with people, I haven't even included in this book! Here are a few to look up, however, when you have time:

Philippians 4:7-8

Psalms 17:8

Psalms 4:8

Psalms 46:1

Psalms 27:1

Deuteronomy 33:27

1 John 1:9

2 Corinthians 7:10

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

The Scriptures and themes I have included in this book are more to do with 'battle'. They are to do with defending the true teachings of God, and knowing where in the Bible these things are taught. They are themes and verses I have needed, particularly for the giftings and responsibilities that the Lord has called me to, namely sharing Jesus with others, or evangelism.

I believe that some of these verses are also important for young believers who do not yet

know much of the Scriptures. There are many false teachers now (Paul said there would be<sup>1</sup>), who are literally saying that certain things are OK, that the Bible clearly says are not OK. How do they get away with this? Well, because people don't really know what the Bible teaches, and so they just believe the false teaching.

You may not be able to memorize all the verses in this book, and that is OK! But I wonder would you consider picking even one verse from each section, and memorizing that one? It would give you a pivot point on the theme, and I'm confident it would be used of the Lord in your own soul, and in the lives of others over time.

Also, my friends, it is far more important to know the truth of Scripture 'generally' than specifically. What I mean by this is, for example, it is important to know that if you repent of sin and believe in Jesus Christ you are saved – whether you know where the verse is for this or not!

I encourage people to read the Bible, and just keep going through it, so that we know the stories, the teachings, the promises – generally. God will call them to our minds when we need them, and if we really need the reference, well, we can look it up online easily now. If you don't have a Bible reading system, here is what I recommend. Start in a Gospel – maybe the Gospel of Mark – just one chapter a day. And

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 4:3; Matthew 7:15-20

just keep going. Seriously, that easy. And take a day or two off each week. But then just keep going. Don't be afraid to scribble little notes in your Bible, or underline here and there. It's for knowing, enjoying, it is not a trophy or an idol. Write on it! And remember to keep going. Don't get stuck on a chapter, because often the next chapter helps to balance out the previous one, or shed light on something you read many chapters before. So don't stop, just keep on rolling...

Bless you! Thank you for reading this book! I pray it will be an encouragement to you, and I know that the Lord's path is 'ever-brighter' for every disciple that walks with him. (Proverbs 4:18) And one day all of our roads will converge at the gates of heaven, and we'll walk into his kingdom on the streets of gold. (Revelation 21:1-5; Revelation 22:1-5)

**Thank you for taking time to read this book. I hope it encouraged you!**

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