

The UNION

Get Ready to Meet the King!

God Calls His Church to
Truth, Faith and Holiness

2019

Joan H. Richardson

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CHAPTER 2

Descending Darkness

¹⁰ For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it.
(Isaiah 55:10-11)

Certainly some scholars are humble servants, seeking His truth, but it seems that often intellectuals rely on their own minds rather than on His Spirit for their answers. Many have never received the Holy Spirit. Some wrestle with the Word; dismayed by their confusion, they concede defeat, and with bruised pride, challenge the integrity of the Scriptures.

Those who depend on their intelligence espouse theories that spread like viruses. Some of them established doctrines about critical issues, seducing entire denominations to their detriment. Too many have had a biblical education that included the interpretations of scholars; considering the opinions of pundits, we thought we could figure things out, but none of us could even begin to understand apart from the mind of God. He corrected me to show me the better way: let His Spirit be the Teacher.

Misguided intellectuals are not the only ones at fault. Nearly all of us have been tricked by the deceiver; it just takes a wandering thought or a personal idea to receive a lie. The misfortune of scholars is that they are widely believed. Knowing this, as submissive servants, we must all pay attention to His inspired words and search the counsel of the Holy Spirit to correctly divide the Scriptures; then we can discover the truth by destroying the lies one at a time—the way we received them.

Reading the Word afresh, we believe it as it is written and take down the strongholds in our own minds that prevent us from believing its Author. If we'll search for the truth by comparing scriptures, His Spirit will clarify it to us. Paul wrote, *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of*

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God. (Rom. 8:16) If we know we have the Holy Spirit, we can press in to seek His knowledge: as we read and meditate on each passage, we pray and wait to receive understanding. If it doesn't come immediately, that's fine—it will come in time.

Men have taught us what we think we know; however, as we meditate on His words, His Spirit renews our minds. As we take in His words, then His revelations, not our own, expand our thoughts, opening our minds as His knowledge increases in us. When He unseals His words, we learn His ways like never before—with deeper, fuller perceptions of the greatness of God.

The Author, the Holy Spirit, is the light and life of His Word: born in a stable, Jesus was meek, submissive to God. The Spirit chose shepherds and fishermen like Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David; Peter, James, Mark, Andrew, and John—the most unlikely and least of all. God listens to the languages of hearts that receive or reject His words. The Master of speech isn't shaken by our weaknesses but glorifies His omnipotence in our impotence.

Sources of Deceptions

We must be still to listen because the noise of daily activity can obscure His quiet words. Busy thoughts mute His voice since the carnal mind is absorbed in this world rather than in the kingdom to come. As we train our *hearts* to *hear* His voice, we become more aware of His presence. Believing His words, in quietness and submission, we will yield to His will.

We have been ignorant by inattentiveness; dulled by insensitivity, and burdened by daily cares. Most of us left our first love long ago. If we want to know Him, we'll seek Him, pushing all else aside just to read and believe His holy Word. Things quiet down when we cast our cares on Jesus.

If we strain to hear His voice, we will not hear the Lord. If we practice quietness, we'll become better listeners by habit; then, when He speaks, we'll know it's Him, true to His Word.

Teachers often distort the truth to provide quick and pleasant answers, their own inventions that attract our carnal nature. With convincing self-confidence, they soothe itching ears, and we easily accept the appealing information without testing it by the Word, which has forewarned us: the devil weaves his serpentine paths through the Word, convincing the intellects of men.

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¹⁵ Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

¹⁶ Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? ¹⁷ Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

¹⁹ Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. ²⁰ Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. (Matthew 7:15-20) [The man who speaks the truth is godly; the proud man is carnal and untrustworthy.]

Christ commands us to carry a cross daily, without which we would be unworthy of Him. He calls us to live sacrificially, loving others as ourselves. If we love the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we must love Him more than our own families for the sake of His kingdom and righteousness. He gave up everything for us to know Him. If our families deny Him, we follow Him anyway.

We should ask ourselves, “Do I believe what I hear because it pleases me, or do I seek the truth even when it’s difficult to receive? Do I follow Jesus Christ or someone else?” Have we honored leaders but not the Word? Have we been following the sheep all these years just because we are members of a flock? The Holy Spirit and His Word are our defense on the battlefields of life; we keep the ground we gain by faith in Christ alone.

⁶ We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷ No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ However, as it is written,

“No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived what God has prepared
for those who love him”

¹⁰ but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

(1 Corinthians 2:6-10a NIV)

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⁷ “You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you:

⁸ ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS,
BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.

⁹ ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME,
TEACHING AS DOCTRINES
THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’” (Matthew 15:7-9 NASB)

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine. ¹⁵ As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. (John 10:14-15)

The church has been imitating the culture, and the world has turned us upside-down, though God called us to be different—the salt of the earth and the light of the world. But we’ve been far too sophisticated to be separated for sanctification. Now in the last days, the church has been artificial, lifeless, and ineffective; but now is the time to stand strong in righteousness. Many of us have been substituting outward appearance [leaven] for inward spirituality [truth] and have left our first love; we must return.

No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. (2 Timothy 2:4 NASB)

In America, we award ourselves prizes, but God did not give us glorious gifts for tarnishing awards. Do we impress our peers or please our Creator? Did we give our hearts to Christ to gain recognition from others? We are impressed by degrees from “schools of thought” that spread inaccurate, biased ideas. Unlike Christ, we enjoy titles or letters after a name; the apostles had nothing, yet opened mysteries, turning their world upside-down!

²⁷ But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; ²⁸ And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: ²⁹ That no flesh should glory in His presence. (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

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If we live according to our natural tendencies, we will die; if we live by the wisdom and ways of this world, we will die for the love of its wisdom and ways. But if His resurrection delivers us from sin, we will win over the flesh by our faith in His life.

⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4-5 NIV)

There are wolves among the sheep:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. (Matthew 7:15)

And wolves in the world around us:

² Then He said to them, "The harvest truly *is* great, but the laborers *are* few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. ³ Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. (Luke 10:2-3 NKJV) —Yeshua

Then there is the roaring lion:

⁸ Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: ⁹ Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. (1 Peter 5:8-9)

Some preach that Satan, *the roaring lion ... seeking whom he may devour*, is weak or toothless. Maybe that lie makes men feel strong, but the wolves and the lion have teeth, and the apostles knew what that meant when they forewarned us. For survival, sheep must avoid hungry lions—deceptive spirits, working by the words of men who add speculation to knowledge; however, we must take every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ.

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¹³ Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.
(James 3:13-18 NASB)

The desire for power or wealth is lust that leads to envy, covetousness, or pride—emotions of the mind, drawing us to the earth; our possessions possess us when we oppose the Word:

2 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ³ In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping. (2 Peter 2:1-3 NIV)

Envy is resentful or discontented longing for possessions or qualities of others; its idolatry includes class envy. It leads to covetousness, i.e., the desire to possess what someone else has. These sins can turn into thievery—even to adultery and murder:

³ If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, ⁴ he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions ⁵ and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. (Continued)

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⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. (1 Timothy 6:3-7 NIV)

If we serve God, we are content with what we have and with where we are; however, competitive spirits stir greed and envy among us, and selfish ambition is rebellion that attempts to advance above others. If His Holy Spirit rules in our hearts, we are subjects of His affections rather than objects of our own.

³ But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; ⁴ and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. ⁵ For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. (Ephesians 5:3-6 NASB)

The proud man claims a place above others, seeking his own glory, boasting in his accomplishments, possessions, or abilities. Pride is self-worship, another form of idolatry. His outward appearance of godliness might mask a man's pride, but God sees his heart. Only his confession and repentance can free him from pride, which never wants to be found out. It is a most deceptive sin—one that conceals itself under its own cloak.

⁵⁰ And his mercy *is* on them that fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He hath shown strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. ⁵² He hath put down the mighty from *their* seats, and exalted them of low degree. (Luke 1:50-52)

The Word warns us not to speak maliciously against supernatural beings. Have we slandered others? even the prophets? Have we viciously accused spiritual beings? or men in authority over us? the government? our employers? what about the devil? Do we believe the Scriptures? The righteous obey the words of God. If we fall, we repent and rise by faith again.

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⁸Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. ⁹Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" ¹⁰But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. (Jude 8-10 NKJV)

¹⁰ This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority.

Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; ¹¹ yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord. ¹² But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish. (2 Peter 2:10-12 NIV)

Self-willed and carnally-minded, we attempt our unapproved plans. When the Lord sends angels to block our way, like the prophet Balaam, we rage against the obstacles we don't understand. Will we ever see our poverty, immaturity, and carnality? or will we glibly grab verses we think will cover our nakedness?

Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." (2 Timothy 2:19 NKJV)

We have the glory of God within clay jars, our bodies. He formed us, like burning lamps, to reveal His kingdom to men. Yet to grasp our destiny, we must believe the truth of His Word. When we act by faith in it, we keep it until it is ingrained us. We who live by such faith are one in the truth by our love: *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ... He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* (Col. 1:15, 17 NIV) *If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.* (1 Cor. 13:2 NIV)

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The First Institutional Church ²

Beginning in the early fourth century, church bishops created an institution. At first there were hundreds of *papas*, or popes. In the late fifth century, the pope of Rome usurped most of their authority, considering himself as an emperor over the churches.

The commandments had been officially abused and broken in the councils of the fourth century, an ongoing, uncorrected pattern. By the sixteenth century, Martin Luther nailed *95 Theses* to the door of the Roman Church in Wittenberg to oppose the sale of indulgences, or favors. However, Luther retained many other false church doctrines and attitudes.

Now nearly every religious institution has divisions and subdivisions, which embrace varieties of untrustworthy doctrines and teachings. Only the Bible is reliable; the most slandered and most misunderstood book in the world—the Holy Bible—is true.

Though it exists in the world, the kingdom of God is not of the world. Apart from religious kingdoms of men, God designed His kingdom, composed of perfectly arranged gemstones, living by faith. Walking in His righteousness and living by His words, we who are being changed by His Spirit are growing to conform to Jesus' likeness. If we will follow Him to the cross, we will also rise from death to life by His Spirit.

Jesus makes us holy as we seek His righteousness and depend fully on the power of His life within us to raise us into life in Him. And what is holiness but to love and forgive one another while keeping ourselves unspotted by the world?

The First Nicaean Council

Rather than seeking great positions in the church, Jude urged us to be holy, blameless, loving, and merciful so we can enter heaven with great joy. He reminded believers that mockers are those who practice ungodly lusts:

¹⁹ These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit. ²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in His Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. ²² And on some have compassion, making a distinction; ²³ but others

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save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh. (Jude 19-23 NKJV)

Yeshua said we can't see the kingdom of God: it's not an institution, organization, denomination, or building designed and built by men: *The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or Lo there! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you. (Lk. 17:20-21)* He also said, *My kingdom is not of this world. (From Jn. 18:36)*

In AD 324-5, the Roman Emperor Constantine organized the first of many councils of bishops, the Council of Nicaea.³ Impressed by his grand entrances, the leaders were pleased when the emperor joined the meetings. His own purpose in planning the meetings was unity between the church and a divided Roman Empire. In an effort to unite everyone, the bishops compromised the Bible, agreeing to incorporate pagan holidays as Christian days by removing the prophetic feasts from the congregations of believers who shared them. We must not depend on special days for our salvation or for our holiness, however, it's not a sin to share feasts with other believers; neither is it compulsory.

² For example, a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and a poor man dressed in dirty clothes also comes in. ³ If you look with favor on the man wearing the fine clothes and say, "Sit here in a good place," and yet you say to the poor man, "Stand over there," or, "Sit here on the floor by my footstool," ⁴ haven't you discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ...

⁸ Indeed, if you really carry out the royal law pre-scribed in Scripture, **Love your neighbor as yourself**, you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the entire law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of breaking it all. (James 2:2-4, 8-10 HCSB) [If we do not live in love, we break the Ten that judge our sin.]

James wrote we must not show favoritism to the rich, but by pandering to the emperor, the councils mixed the heathen culture with the kingdom of God: paganism with Christianity. He might have humbled himself in their meetings, but the bishops insisted

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he take a higher seat and a prominent role in the council. After that, Constantine led the Council of Nicaea though he had pagan sympathies and was philosophically divided. History shows he was a carnal man—still, the bishops welcomed his opinions. Agreeing with the emperor was politically expedient.

The leaders faced a problem: to reconcile their faith with the pagans of Rome, they would need to make changes that some of them had not anticipated when they'd begun. Their decisions framed "orthodox theology," i.e., *right opinion*. From its inception, the new religion included anti-Semitism, discarding the Feast of Firstfruits and installing the Day of Ishtar, goddess of fertility. Eventually, the Roman day that was consecrated to the god of the sun, their chief god, became the day of the church; this seemed rational since Christ rose on the first day, but Jesus said the Commandments will not pass away till all is fulfilled, i.e., at the end when the Kingdom is given to the Father. He is the only One who kept the whole law. Fulfilling many of the prophecies, He honored the Hebrew Scriptures, but in ignorance, the councils disdained them. Aside from the broken Mosaic covenant, these were the basic tenets of the apostle's writings.

In heated debates, the bishops created new laws, dictates, for the church, which conflicted with the writings of the apostles. In order to unify the world empire, the hierarchy of the institution forced their new religion on multitudes. Does this sound familiar in an age when men seek unity at the cost of truth?

The changes worsened with time; the Commandments were tossed to the wind! The leaders became more corrupt, ruined by the leaven of their rationalizations. Eventually, idols were taken into the church, which severed the union of Jewish and gentile congregations, distancing gentile and Jewish believers from the institutional churches. Soon true believers became the persecuted targets of the apostate church.

In their efforts to defeat false teachings, most of the bishops were deceived when they set aside the Law and the Prophets from which Messiah taught His disciples after His resurrection and which had been the thread in the fabric of the apostolic writings. By neglecting the whole Word of God, the leaders neglected its Author's intentions. Their gentile roots must have influenced the councils' decisions when they offended believers

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but pleased pagan Rome. And that is our history.

While maintaining a sham of obedience to the moral laws of God, the bishops, calling themselves fathers, or “papas,” began altering the Scriptures as early as AD 325. As self-importance grew, a very different church emerged until new laws and new biblical interpretations misrepresented the faith of the apostles. In time, the gentile leaders made more decisions and changed the biblical words they couldn’t understand, fabricating strategies to keep the institution strong. The church lost its identity as a fellowship of believers.

⁴ And Jesus answered and said unto them take heed that no man deceive you ⁵ for many shall come in my name saying I am Christ and shall deceive many.

(Matthew 24:4-5) [The Greek had no punctuation, so I omit it.]

Bishops grew more corrupt with more power. By the fifth century, a few claimed authority over all of the churches of the known world. At first, a Roman pope demanded that his peers subjugate themselves to him, naming himself head of the church of the entire Roman Empire, which became highly organized, ritualistic, and liturgical—impersonal and aloof from God.

Unlike the simpler, organic congregations, which Paul had described as members of one body, humbly ministering to one another in love; the church became a sophisticated organization with outrageous claims, along with its own laws and by-laws. The great apostasy continued. What does this mean to us today?

Many doctrines came from a church that received the spirit of Babylon; in its imperialism, it would claim equality with God. Egypt’s Pharaoh did it; Assyria’s Sennacherib claimed it; in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar wanted worship; in Greece, Antiochus insisted on it; in Rome, the Caesars claimed it; then the popes of Rome joined the long line of ungodly rulers that has existed since Babel—in the culture that worshiped a king!

²⁷ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men’s* bones, and of all uncleanness. ²⁸ Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. (Matthew 23:27-28)

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²⁵ Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. ²⁶ But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.
(Luke 22:25-27 NIV)

Differences and Divisions ³

Eventually the most earnest seekers recognized the inconsistencies of Rome’s dogma. With marginal success, they broke away to form their own belief systems. Thus the denominations are children of a great harlot, a false church begun by scholars who devised doctrines, in large part, from a pagan worldview.

Today the estimated total number of divisions in Christendom is in the thousands, but even ten misinterpretations of the Word should send a chilling message to each of us concerning the validity of what we have been told it teaches. To learn the truth, each of us must hunger and thirst for it. We’ve presumed we know it, but our presumption is arrogance, and the Word we say we hold so dearly is still the truth that’s ours to receive.

Divide and conquer is a strategy of war. Surely an enemy has attempted to lure, scatter, and destroy the flock. Would the devil urge Christians to live holy lives? But the Bible does. Would he tell us we could understand the Scriptures by first believing them? Of course not. Will an enemy correct our path when we wander off? but the serpent has duped and divided us!

Our war is against the unseen: our mortal nature and the devil. The first is dull, engaged in this world and enticed by its pleasures; the second is cunning, opposed to mankind and intent on our destruction. We are lambs among wolves, yet we rarely consider our need for protection.

Both our nature and the devil are defeated enemies when we are filled with the Word and do battle with the sword of truth and the shield of faith. But Christians are often oblivious to these enemies and are easy targets with our swords sheathed and our shields down.

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²² Then a demon-possessed man *who was* blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. ²³ All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, “This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?” ²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard *this*, they said, “This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.”

²⁵ And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, “Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶ If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?” (Matthew 12:22-26 NASB)

God is not divided, and we who believe must abide in Him as one. What becomes of those who believed the truth at first but became proselytes of deceptions after entering the fold? *And how can they hear without a preacher?* (See Rom. 10:14)

Rabbis who studied the writings of the prophets couldn't identify the Messiah when He fulfilled the prophecies before their eyes. Like the church, they didn't believe the hard words of the Scriptures, which were unpleasant to them, and their traditional teachings blinded them. The Savior died for their sins, but they hadn't accepted those words among the prophecies; thus they rejected the prophesied Son of God—His Servant and their Savior. The deceiver was moving stealthily among them even as the Word of God was being fulfilled:

¹³ See, my servant will act wisely;

he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

¹⁴ Just as there were many who were appalled at him—

his appearance was so disfigured

beyond that of any man

and his form marred beyond human likeness—

¹⁵ so he will sprinkle many nations,

and kings will shut their mouths because of him.

For what they were not told, they will see,

and what they have not heard, they will understand.

(Isaiah 52:13-15 NIV)

In Miletus Paul met with the elders of the early church of Ephesus and warned them of the events at hand:

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²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. (Acts 20:29-31 NASB) – Paul’s farewell

A Light in the Dark

⁴⁷ “And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. ⁴⁸ He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. ⁴⁹ For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. (John 12:47-49 NKJV)

²⁸ “Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30 NKJV)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.” (Romans 1:16-17 NASB; also Habakkuk 2:4)

¹⁷ So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given them-selves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

²⁰ You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. ²¹ Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were

The Deceiver Divides Us

taught, with regard to your former way of life, ²² to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:17-24 NIV)
[The truth warns believers of sin and exhorts us to holiness.]

Refined by Fire

When His Holy Spirit reveals a mystery, first He unseals it, then unwraps it, and finally, He opens it completely. It's a gift! Sometimes receiving its entirety takes years because we are slow to hear Him. If we are willing to wait on the Lord, over time everything meshes harmoniously and unequivocally. Those who find the truth have no place for doubt. When the Word first supplants the ideas we've believed, the discovery seems surreal, and we readjust our thoughts—renewing our minds. Then our renewed minds look into His words, and He clarifies our vision.

Faith is strengthened by use; do we believe God *before* we understand Him? We found Him by faith when we recognized our need. Then His Spirit responded to our faith, and the Word suddenly became our first love. Without faith, we'd be like Adam or Eve, fallen in Eden. But deceit will continue to plague the elect until our faith in the truth immunizes us from falsehood.

Faith precedes revelation. God will not disclose the truth to us unless we first *receive* His words; as we take them into our hearts by faith, we *assimilate* them until they become part of us. We should be passionate to believe in His Spirit who is the Lord and Author of our faith. His breath gives His Word life; when we speak it in faith, we deliver it most effectively.

Within our trials, the fires refine us until we are the mighty Sons of God. *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* (Jn. 8:31-32) First we believe, and then we can see.

John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:
(Luke 3:16)