

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 3

Organized Confusion

When someone thinks of himself more highly than he sees others, he misses the message of the Savior's love. Unlike those who take pride in high positions, His Spirit has no such motive. We can trust in Him completely because God is like His Word: He's real. He doesn't weave a web to catch and consume us.

Jesus was unimpressive to the leaders, yet He was the Son of God. He glorified His Father, and God would glorify Him. He was concerned with pleasing the Father, not others. When they were seeking to kill Him, He showed up among them, doing His Father's will, but they were powerless to harm Him because His time hadn't come.

As each of us surrenders his heart to the Father as Jesus did, he follows in His steps. As we trust Him, we obey and love Him; if we love Him, we seek Him; if we seek Him with our whole heart, He will reveal His words to us by the Holy Spirit of Christ in us.

⁵ You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷ casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. ⁸ Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. ¹⁰ After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you. ¹¹ To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen.

(1 Peter 5:5-11 NASB)

Sheep⁴ will lead one another off a precipice and plunge to their deaths, and surprisingly, the entire flock will follow; that's

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one reason sheep need a Shepherd. The Lord is our Shepherd. Jesus said He is the true Shepherd who knows His sheep, and we hear His voice, not the voice of a stranger. If we are His sheep, we quietly listen for His voice and follow Him.

⁷ Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.⁸ All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. ... ¹⁰ The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.¹¹ I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. (John 10:7-8, 10-11)

The Witness

Even today true believers learn to identify the voice of the Shepherd whose Spirit rules in our hearts. When other voices confuse our minds by distorting the clarity of His words, this is our victory: we are not alone; His presence remains in us. As we settle into His Word, finding our rest in Him, we regain peace and truth. Our Counselor is the Holy Spirit of God—we are subject to Him and not the other way around. All who belong to the Father listen to the Word of the Father:

¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you." (John 16:13-15 NIV)

Jesus rebuked self-righteous leaders who rejected the truth; to this day, He is the same: He rejoices in us when we love the truth and take the cross, face the grave, and rise to life again. Our Savior passionately desires us to be united in the knowledge of the truth as one in Him. He will return for a blameless, purified bride, not one mottled by quarrels and deceptions. Fiery trials will refine us, not by fearing men, but by His fear. We must trust Him to bring us through as we endure to the end.

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¹⁷ I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. ¹⁸ For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.

(Romans 16:17-18 NIV)

¹ The elder unto the well beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. ...³ For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. ⁴ I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. (3 John 1, 3-4)

The truth is alive because Jesus lives, and He wants us to know Him well. We grow as we learn the words that His Spirit inspired, humbling ourselves by relinquishing our opinions that pollute the purity of the Scriptures. When we set aside pride, doubt, fear, and self-will, we can objectively believe the Bible. It's time to give ourselves up, leaving our egos at the cross.

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ: (Philippians 1:6)

Christ came to give each of us a new life, and this life comes by faith in His words. If we agree with teachings that lead to death, we will surely wither and die, but if we separate ourselves from the teachings of men, committing ourselves to believing the Bible only, we will thrive. Truth is not optional—Jesus embodies the truth.

Writings of the Apostles

The New Testament is all we have of the original apostles' knowledge and doctrine. The church in Rome had been taught the truth by Paul who warned them against teachings that digress from the doctrines of the apostles. Although they strove for the union of believers, false teachers and false apostles divided their congregations with lies. After the apostles passed on to be with Christ, as they had written, wolves scattered the sheep, and liars spread deceit, perverting the former sound doctrines.

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Because of the present darkness, we who profess to believe must arm ourselves with the truth to understand the things the apostles and the prophets wrote. With clear consciences and honest hearts, we can abandon the disharmonious doctrines of men. As we meditate on the difficult passages, His Spirit will reveal them to us; this could take time, and patience is necessary.

Did we think walking in the light would not be a battle against the dark spirits of this world? No matter what the issue, at the cost of comfort, we take up our personal cross, dying to the flesh, keeping the faith because we know the truth. Soon we will be where there is no death or tears or pain.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty *again*? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. (Matthew 5:13 NASB)

We might reason all is well though we wander from one teacher to another, turning from the Word to fallacies that please our personal desires. Do we really love the truth? Then we must not believe whatever we choose to believe. *It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. (Lam. 3:22-23)*

Most of us have little knowledge of the Scriptures; misquote them, rearrange their contexts, and malign the few who understand the truth. The Scriptures are the true realities of life in the kingdom of God. Since His words are spiritual, neglecting the Holy Spirit is no way to receive their truth. When we apply the Word by the Spirit's power, its effects are evidenced on earth as in heaven.

Love Suffers Long

¹⁴ Do all things without complaining and disputing, ¹⁵ that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. (Philippians 2:14-16 NKJV)

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In the earliest churches, the congregations chose trustworthy and faithful men, appointing them as servants. As time passed, some saw themselves as leaders and took titles, and eventually the leaders behaved like rulers. But Christ is our only Leader; our only Teacher, Counselor, Shepherd, and Savior.

Even in the first churches, Paul observed false apostles who spoke boastfully without the authority or power they claimed the right to possess. He wept, agonizing over the future of the church and dreading the repercussions of their deceit. Paul was wise to weep; since the early days, deceivers have been among us.

⁶ Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, ... ⁹ There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience. (Hebrews 4:6, 9-11 NIV)

Paraphrases are dangerous to our faith because versions are rewritten by private interpretations, which alter the accuracy of the Word. Though their writers often skew the truth, many rely on paraphrases as we should the correct translations. How would the Bible read today if its copiers had paraphrased it? Its critics would have good reasons for calling it unreliable. It's a fearful thing to tamper with the words of the Holy Bible! Does the One who made our eyes not see?

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2Timothy 3:16-17 NIV)

³ And He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Step forward." ⁴ Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent. ⁵ And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched *it* out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other. ⁶ Then the Pharisees

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went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.
(Mark 3:3-6 NKJV; cf. Luke 6:6-11)

Believers must adhere to the words of the early apostles, the eyewitnesses whose writings were carefully copied and delivered to us. We each live as we believe; therefore, if we think we've believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we should search reliable versions of the Bible and compare them; we must intend to grow with integrity as we study His Word for the truth.

Jesus came, drawing us into His Holy Spirit to open His Word and reveal the Father to us. If our foundations are based on men's teachings, our faith is misguided. His Spirit will teach us His Word; no one else knows the mind of God except His Spirit. Is He a Witness within us?

Heresies

The Roman *papa* proclaimed himself ruler over all churches and called those who opposed his deceit, "heretics." In later years, the infamous leaders of the worldwide nominal church ordered Inquisitions and massacred many Jews along with true believers of the gospel of Jesus who loved the truth more dearly than their own lives. But the confession of Christ by Rome presented doctrines different from the biblical perspective with an ever-dying Jesus—dogma that lacked the power of faith in the presence of the living Christ.

The remnant of Jewish and gentile Messianic believers was falsely accused of heresy, persecuted, tortured, and put to death by the Roman Catholic Church. Should we ignore the facts? Its history made the Roman Church the leader of false teachings.

Contrary to such behavior, Jesus *never* taught us to destroy those who hold to other doctrines; they are reserved for the judgment. He *never* told us to harm our opponents; at a time when Jesus came to save sinners, the destroyer continued to destroy, just as he does today. But Christ sent His disciples, not to wage carnal warfare against flesh and blood but to save souls from death and hell. The cross is the symbol of our calling.

Anyone who has been transformed by faith in Jesus can discover the truth in the Bible, but many of us have already been influenced by our peers who press us to maintain the status quo,

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i.e., to hold onto what we have believed along with them. As a result, we have veered from the authority of His Holy Spirit to the private interpretations of men who are unwilling to change.

A true revival requires sacrifice and reformation. But will we prefer to weave our way through the Scriptures, targeting the ideas others have persuaded us to believe when God requires us to believe only Him?

The Definitions

Believe: In the present tense, biblically, the word means to be prompted to action by an ever-present faith. To believe on the Lord Jesus is unlike only having once believed; it is not that we *believed*, but that we *do believe* as we *live by faith*.

Heresy: A belief or opinion contrary to *orthodox doctrine*, defined as “the correct opinion,” i.e., a philosophical opinion, decided by a majority in either religion or politics.

Orthodox: The word “orthodox” originated in 17th century Middle English and comes from the Greek word, *orthodoxos*, via the Latin *orthos*, meaning “right or straight,” and *doxa*, “opinion.” It’s understood to mean traditionally accepted teachings or sound doctrine; literally, it is *opinion* and is not necessarily right at all, since truth is not a matter of *opinion*, even the opinion of the majority. By chance, an opinion might hit the mark, but since truth is inerrant, why muddle it with opinions?

Orthodoxy, by its definition, is nothing more than “political correctness,” or Fascism. When theories enter science, it is no longer an accurate study; when opinions enter faith, it is no longer trustworthy; yet all churches profess orthodox doctrines, developed from opinions that distinguish and divide them from the truth of the Holy Scriptures.

In the sixteenth century, John Foxe wrote a book of collected stories about the deaths of English Protestants found guilty of heresy by the Roman Catholic Church [RCC]. Margaret Polley was the first Christian woman martyred in England. Maurice, Bishop of Rochester, brought an accusation of heresy against her. The following is an excerpt of her testimony:

[The Bishop Maurice] “Do you hold and maintain that in the sacrament of the altar, under the form of bread and wine, there is not the very body and blood of Christ, and that the said body is verily in heaven only, and not in the sacrament?”

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She answered, “What I have learned from the Holy Scriptures I steadfastly maintain, viz., that the very body was crucified for the sins of all true believers, ascended into heaven, is there at the right hand of the Majesty on high; that such body has ever since remained there, and cannot, according to my belief, be in the sacrament of the altar. I believe that the bread and wine in the sacrament are to be received as symbols and representatives of the body and blood of Christ, but not of His body really and substantially. I think, in my weak judgment, that it is not in the power of any man, by pronouncing words over the elements of bread and wine, to change them into the real body and blood of Christ. In short it is my belief that the eucharist is only a commemoration of the death of our Savior, who said, ‘as oft as ye do this, do it in remembrance of Me.’ ” ... He then asked her, “Will you recant the error which you maintain, be reconciled to the Church, and receive the remission of sins?” To which she replied, “I cannot believe otherwise than I have spoken, because the practice of the Church of Rome is contrary not only to reason and my senses, but also to the Word of God.”⁵

Queen Mary I, in an attempt to reconnect the church of England to Rome, put to death hundreds of Protestants who refused to convert. In July 1555, Margaret Polley was convicted of heresy and sentenced to death. The false church burned her at the stake in Tonbridge. Through His Holy Spirit, she'd found the truth in the Word of God for which she died willingly. [Granted, no secretary sat beside her, writing her words as she spoke, but the people of those times understood the gist of the exchange.]

Under the reign of “Bloody Mary,” Thomas Cranmer and John Rogers died at the stake for “the crime” of publishing the Bible in English. In all, nearly four hundred men, women, and children died martyrs’ deaths for opposing Roman Catholic doctrines during her reign. The queen had turned from the Roman faith under her father, King Henry VIII, who divorced her mother. She later sought reconciliation with the Vatican by condemning its dissidents.

A remnant of true believers were the so-called “heretics” of the Dark Ages, but their light shined as a witness of truth. They endured torture while the church sanctioned their executions, beheading them, burning them, or slaying them by the sword.

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The perpetrators were self-deceived, deluded to imagine that they represented the Lord Jesus but by their deeds, they were His mortal enemies— the antitheses of godliness. The men who destroyed human lives thought they had done God a service by killing their opponents, but the antichrist spirit then and now is one and the same. Of martyred saints, John Foxe wrote: “They were baptized in blood, because their enlightenment forced them to be in advance of their day.”

On their way to Jerusalem, which despised Samaria, Yeshua spoke to the disciples as they passed by a Samaritan village that had refused to welcome them:

⁵⁴ And when His disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?” ⁵⁵ But He turned and rebuked them, and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. ⁵⁶ For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save *them*.” And they went to another village.

(Luke 9:54-56 NKJV) [Samaritans were Jews whose ancestors had intermarried with Assyrians after the invasion.]

Today the truth of the Word is considered heresy by many, while heresies are accepted as *orthodox*. How do we identify heresies? Whatever does not agree with both the Spirit and the Scriptures is heresy. *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Tim. 2:15)*

The Spirit is life; the Word is Light; together they shine to overcome death and darkness, but if we ignore either one, we necessarily turn from the path of life. The Word overcomes the darkness in all who confess their need and search for its light. Its truth is the vitality of the Spirit, quickening our mortality.

Satan is a liar, but he is not stupid; he knows a divided kingdom can’t stand. He waits for any opportunity: pride, envy, selfish ambition, greed, itching ears, carnal minds, worldly desires, imaginations, and deceptive hearts, finding it relatively easy to introduce his heresies. *If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. (Ps. 139:11-12)*

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As though the darkness is not here, we're sure we know all we need to know, but we've overlooked the false doctrines that divide us. We should believe the truth as one while opposing the forces that unite against biblical truth; but we've adjusted to our confusion. If we remain in institutional churches, we won't discard the lies to find the truth by the mind of Christ; remember, we don't war against flesh and blood.

Deceit did not announce itself when it entered the church; like noxious gas, it seeped in. It did the same in us who follow teachings that contradict the Scriptures—a little here, a little there—till lies pervade the atmosphere to destroy us. We've been unaware that deceptions have targeted our hearts, minds, bodies, and souls; while Satan binds us with sins and encumbers us with confusion, sickness, and disease.

When we receive the true faith of the apostles, it changes us to strengthen us as new creatures and to join us together as the rising bride of Christ. We can be the salt and light of the world, and the whole earth can know God sent His Son to take away our sins. Light shines most brightly in the dark; therefore, this could be our greatest hour!

Unspiritual Tailors

False teachers have stirred the passions of men for centuries, appealing to the base nature and convincing the unspiritual mind of another gospel. Disciples of darkness have followed perverse doctrines with fervency. For ages, the lying spirits have been corrupting multitudes. The religion that has perverted the gospel of Jesus Christ has controlled nations and influenced empires!

We should find salvation in the Word by continuing in the truth; but if we're unwilling to face the light that exposes our sin, we will wrestle the Word to our own harm. If we tailor the truth to fit our flesh, then instead of living like Jesus, we'll live like a man without the truth who only cares for his own desires. If we sensitize our hearts to be quiet—we find His presence in our stillness; then by diligently searching the Scriptures, we begin to learn the spiritual language of Yeshua. *Be still and know that I am God. (Ps. 46:10a)*

The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge;
the ears of the wise seek it out. (Proverbs 18:15 NIV)

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Consider the man who attended seminary and graduated with honors: he learned everything well, but had he been taught the truth? If he had studied the truth, he was the rare exception, because hundreds of other schools of thought would have trained him differently. More than likely, His perceptions were perverted by false teachings, the *opinions* of professors who were more cerebral than spiritual. Some of his teachers had quit believing the Bible altogether, confused by human intellect. How cruel a traitor the mind of man can be!

Now the young graduate finds a church to pastor, and he is thrilled. As the years pass, however, he grows disenchanted with his denomination. In his personal quest to be closer to the Lord, he earnestly seeks the truth of the Word and finds some things he was instructed to believe just don't line up with the Bible.

The problem is, now he's been teaching those doctrines to his own church for several years, and the institution that gave him his job is signing his paycheck. He must decide which to choose: his income or the truth?

He also has a family to provide for, which complicates the already difficult problem. He prays about it, but he doesn't hear an answer from heaven. God is silent. He knows he must put sin to death instead of choosing the ignoble desires of the man he used to be.

What a struggle the cross is! It is warfare against our natural desires, against the carnal flesh that always seeks convenience and comfort rather than the agony of its death. The cross buffets the flesh, but false teachings fatten it with sweetness.

Here is the dilemma of the temple priests: if Jesus had spoken the truth and really was the Son of God, their Messiah, then the Jews had been wrong about their faith for centuries! They'd been looking for a king, not a personal Savior.

Turning to Him, they'd have to admit they'd been teaching the traditions of the rabbis [teachers], but not the truth. If they were to challenge the traditions of their religious culture, they'd lose their jobs and their political standing with the tetrarch, Herod. More than that, if Yeshua actually was Messiah, King of the Jews, then Rome would certainly hear about this, and the empire would displace them from the land.

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The established institutional churches have done with their own laws and traditions just as the temple rabbis had done—so impressed with themselves that they created their own religions, often far removed from the inspired writings. Today’s churches are also entangled with government dependency, a lot like ancient Judea. Jesus rebuked the synagogue leaders, but though they knew He was right, they refused to change.

⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees convened the Sanhedrin and said, “What are we going to do since this man does many signs? ⁴⁸ If we let Him continue in this way, everyone will believe in Him! Then the Romans will come and remove both our place and our nation.”
(John 11:47-48 HCSB)

Is the church prepared for the return of Yeshua? Whether earlier or later than we anticipate, He will come for us at a time we least expect Him. We must redeem the days that remain by seeking Him with all we are and by living in relationship with Him, doing His will by obeying His Word. We must believe in His powerful life at work within us, equipping us to discipline our thoughts, shunning everything evil and unclean by trusting in the purity of His Holy Spirit.

The devil is the prince of the power of the air, but Messiah is the King of kings and Lord of lords. We are His kings and lords if by faith we enter His provision for our holiness. The final Day will arrive—the end of time for everyone. Do we believe all things are possible with God? Even the purity of our thoughts? Are we crucified with our Savior, surrendered with Him in His death, living in His life as He rises to shine from within us, or are we more like sealed tombs? The fear of the Lord should shake us awake.

² And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

³ And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. (Daniel 12:2-3)