

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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PART I

THE DECEIVER DIVIDES US

¹⁸ For, to begin with, I hear that when you come together as a church there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. ¹⁹ There must, indeed, be factions among you, so that those who are approved may be recognized among you. (1 Corinthians 11:18-19 HCSB)

¹⁷ But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." ¹⁹ These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. (Jude 17-19 NIV)

¹⁸ Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "*He catches the wise in their own craftiness*"; ²⁰ and again, "*The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.*" ²¹ Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: (1 Corinthians 3:18-21 NKJV)

¹⁰ Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10 NASB)

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. ²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. ²¹ I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. (1 John 2:19-21 NKJV)

CHAPTER 1

Truth or Deception?

“Are we ... of the number of those who, having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation? For my part, whatever anguish of spirit it might cost, I am willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst, and to provide for it.” – Patrick Henry, speech at the Virginia Convention, 1775.

What Does the Word Say?

Only one source of information provides insight and wisdom about the one true God: the Holy Bible. Yet the same Word that saved us has been the controversy among us. How strange!

While living in sin, we turned to Jesus Christ, and faith in Him changed us, but along the way, unaware, we wandered from the truth into the diverse teachings of men. Whether oversimplified or far too complicated, their confused doctrines increased our divisions. The fault was theirs alone, but we received it.

If we repent of pride and seek the truth, then we can regain the union of our fathers, apostles and prophets whose words led the first churches and taught the truth in writings, gospels, and letters about our salvation.

How can we know the truth with certainty? We gain the mind of Jesus Christ by faith in His Spirit who authored the Scriptures. As we live in the Spirit, Messiah reveals His Spirit-filled language to us. With open hearts, we receive the Word. He speaks Spirit-to-Spirit, renewing our minds to understand His inspired pages. Just as He opened the Tenakh to His disciples on the road to Emmaus, He teaches us who walk with Him today.

His Spirit must reveal His words for us to understand them. If we refuse to change our beliefs, we'll remain in the darkness of our dogmatism; however, if we'll believe His Word, taking it into our hearts, He'll enlighten our minds and change our souls. We change and grow as we learn the ways of God. His truth will unite us in love as Jesus is loved by His Father, but we are only worthy of Him as we take up our cross and follow Him:

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³⁸ “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁹ He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.
(Matthew 10:38-39 NKJV) – Jesus

The revival we need demands our reformation. Our renewal requires a dramatic change in our personal character by faith in every word of God, leading us to repentance. Will we receive a revival that would transform how we’ve lived? or do we want a resurrection without dying and a revival without changing?!

To know the truth of God, we must erase the teachings of men from the slates of our minds. And why not? If what we’ve received is true, the Word will prove it; if not, we’ll seek the truth directly from the Word, and we’ll find it.

¹⁰ For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, ¹³ which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. (1 Corinthians 2:10-13 NASB)

By returning to the Holy Spirit as our Teacher, we’ll take in His inspired words, even passages we’ve shunned. We will dare to believe the words of God when orthodoxies oppose them, and His Spirit will teach us the deep things of God though we stand with Him alone.

Our First Love

What was our first love? the love of the Word! We believed in Jesus, He changed us, we rejoiced, and He shared our joy. We read scriptures for hours on end, cherishing the words we learned by heart. We wanted to be just like Him, but the teachers said, “That’s not possible in this lifetime.” We believed them and became like them, blinded to the truth of the Word. Since those days, we’ve felt safe in our crowd, but we’re not safe at all. (See Mat. 7:14)

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When we first believed in Jesus, His Spirit opened His words to us and changed us. Then we turned to men. Now after years of learning, do we still love the truth? Though we've learned so much, it seems that the elect have been deceived, that is, if it's possible for the deceived to be among the elect!

We might never admit it, but many professing believers have accepted the lie that the truth is relative, and we've applied that fleshly rationalization to excuse our differences. Think about it: if truth were relative, God could vacillate; but He is the Rock that isn't shaken, the Word of God in Christ. Unlike the steadfast truth, conjectures shift like sand as vain imaginations do; our opinions are our own enemies, endangering our lives.

We've chosen to trust in the way the world seeks its wisdom, and we've believed the ideas of men above the words of God. We've relied on mortals and have exalted them as iconic leaders. We have sinned. By turning from the way of our Savior, we have tripped into pitfalls. *And the Jews marveled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? (Jn. 7:15)* Jesus learned, not from men, but from the Holy Spirit as His Word!

Have we been in relationship with the Holy Spirit, or do we hardly know Him? The Spirit and His Word urge us to discern good from evil, using caution; but deceptions have divided us who rejoiced together when we first believed the truth. How did this happen to us? We slipped into the patterns and ways of a culture, *Ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.* (2 Tim. 3:7)

Seeking Jesus

Jesus said He is the truth; that is to say, no lie is in Him. He does not divide His believers; without hypocrisy, the truth unites us. He is the Light; the Word of God exposes everything.

In the 1960's, the Holy Spirit was poured out on a generation that should be mature in Christ today, but we left our first love when we turned from the Word to men. Jesus-Yeshua will come again to receive Jews and gentiles who are one in the Word, one in the Spirit, one in the Father. The wise prepare with the faith of a child, learning at His feet—starting over again if needed, believing the truth, tearing down the strongholds, pulling down the doctrines that oppose the Word of God. (See 2 Cor. 10:3-5)

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Jesus sent us out as sheep among wolves. Wolves live in packs; they're not loners but have lots of company. If we stand alone, we must agree with every word of God: *man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.* ((From Deut. 8:3; also Mat. 4:4; Lk. 4:4)

Can two walk together except they be agreed? (Amos 3:3)

When Jesus returns, *shall he find faith on the earth?* (See Lk. 18:8) His intention is to save everyone who lives by faith in His words. How can we stand before the Word of God unless we believe Him? How can He increase in us unless we decrease?

¹⁵ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood. (Galatians 1:15-16 NKJV) – the apostle Paul

Many of us have made the gifts of the Holy Spirit titles for ourselves, but God never gave us titles. He gave us places in the body, not titles. We haven't known who the Nicolaitans were, but we have sinned like they did. We should pay attention to the Word and live by our faith. We've lost humility, but if we'd be humble, He'd reveal His truth and restore us. If we prayerfully read and faithfully believe His words, His Spirit will enlighten us to understand the truth, and by His truth, He will unite us.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15 NKJV)

Have we selflessly lived in humility, loving others? As His Spirit patiently works within us, let's seek to know Jesus, not for any other reason than to become like Him. Our hearts can't hide from Him whose wisdom tests our motives, but His words are life to us when we receive them. Let's not shun His admonitions, preferring ease above the discomfort of a splintered cross.

Knowing we could not learn the truth without Him, the Father sent the life of Christ to us, His Holy Spirit—our Teacher. He lives within us if His Word has taken root and been fruitful in

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our hearts. The Seed of the Spirit, the Word, gives birth to His own kind—thus, we were born of His Spirit, conceived by His Word in our hearts! Now two natures force our choice in every decision: will we follow the flesh or the Spirit?

When we received Jesus, we received the Word of God. The Seed of His life is in us; when we surrender to Him by faith and obedience, His words remain in us. *If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him (Jn. 14:23)*

As willing hearts receive the scriptures, we thrive and are fruitful; but His words don't take root in hardened, unbroken ground, or where rocks or thistles are, so we cast our cares on Him and clear out the thistles; we embrace our trials and break up the hardened ground to dig our wells; each time we repent, we unearth stones. As we keep His words, the Spirit makes us holy.

⁴ Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore makes himself a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? ⁶ But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:

*"God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble."* (James 4:4-6 NKJV)
[The name "James" is Jacob, or *Ya'akov*, in Hebrew.]

His Spirit is jealous for our souls' desires. By faith, we must tear down everything that stands between the Word and our soul; anything that competes for first place is an idol. If we want Jesus more than the visible world, we accept the loss of all these things; however, whatever makes us proud will bring us shame.

¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.
(1 John 2:15-17 NIV)

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The Almighty is unimpressed by our opinions. He gives and takes away the intelligence of the intelligent but rewards the faith of the obedient. He commands us all to believe His words because He is the true God. Since faith honors Him, He searches the earth for faith in our hearts; then He enlightens our minds.

Yeshua first entrusted His words to twelve ordinary men. And He made them all apostles. He chose some to write as His eyewitnesses to the churches. His Jewish disciples established the first congregations of Christians on the earth. They were average men, not extraordinary individuals, which is exactly why He chose them.

Though Paul had been a scholar, in order to believe the truth of the Scriptures, He rejected many of the things he had been taught. Separating himself from the counsel of men, he tore down what he thought he knew so he could correctly understand the Scriptures.

Jesus taught His followers by supernatural revelation. He made it clear that it doesn't take a genius to understand the prophets' books, but it takes the Holy Spirit, the Author who inspired them. He disciplines us and withholds knowledge from us until we prove ourselves faithful. Indeed, the mystery of faith is the key to the Scriptures: first we must believe the words; then His Spirit teaches our minds by revelation—just as when we first believed the gospel.

One Truth

Why do nearly all knowledgeable teachers disagree with one another? The answer is obvious: the deceiver is among us. How did this happen? It's been this way from the beginning; Jesus warned us it would occur. He saw it among His own people, even in the synagogues where devils had deceived the leaders.

One root of unbelief is pride; another is spiritual laziness. Some of us presume our intelligence will lead us to understand the Scriptures; others agree that only an elite few are bright enough to learn the Word. On the one hand, there's pride; on the other, laziness. We go to schools to learn the Word, but no one who relies on his intellect can understand the Holy Spirit, and the rest of us are fine with that. To understand its contents, we must be solely dependent on the Author of the Book whose truth is singular: its reality stands up against everything false.

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Since no lie is in Christ, we will be held to account for our unbelief that doubts His many references to the Tenakh—even to stories of Jonah and Noah, to the Law and the Prophets. Do we say we believe in Him when by our words and actions we deny Him? We must yield to Him in whom God appears as His Word.

“Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops.

(Matthew 10:27 NKJV) – Jesus

If we believe in God and fear His Word, when He convicts us of our sins, we prove our love for Him by repentance. Embracing the truth, we escape carnality and unbelief; confessing our sins, we receive the truth that frees us. Though every man is a liar, the words of God are always true. His truth shines its light, spoken or unspoken—His truth is constant.

God wants us to know Him by His Word; He isn’t trying to confuse us but is drawing us into His Spirit—into Himself; He wants to teach us His words. He attracts us by concealing the secret things we can only discover as we press in to receive the words that we can’t understand unless we believe them. It’s as simple as the faith of a child to open the gates of the kingdom.

Our Father would unveil His truth, cleanse our hearts, and renew our minds to change our lives if we would only believe His words. That’s grace! If we would cooperate and not shrink back, He would draw us out of our darkness, into His light: grace again! He freely gives us the will and the faith to believe—by grace! When we stumble, as all do, He lifts us up to walk again: grace! If we’re honest with ourselves, we find His grace toward us amazes us, and we glorify Him for His patience and love.

Often His words are difficult because we’ve been misled and indoctrinated by ideas that please our selfish desires. He would renew us to unite with His desires. By His loving mercies, God has given each believer the Holy Spirit as his Teacher. He would clarify the Word to us and transform our carnal nature into His spiritual nature. When we realize God speaks in spiritual words, we can see why the Holy Spirit is our Teacher. If He is our Shepherd, we are His sheep; are we listening to His voice or to men? But not all who profess faith have His Spirit, and only those *led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God.* (See Rom. 8:14)

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“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life. (John 6:63 NKJV)

¹ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. ² And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans 12:1-2) Q: Will we give up our lives to Him?

For rarely will anyone die for a righteous man—though perhaps for a good man, someone might even dare to die. (Romans 5:7 TLV) –Yeshua is that good man.

We experienced the Holy Spirit soon after we received Jesus as Savior and Lord. Then we opened the Bible and discovered it read quite differently from before. Its words hadn’t changed but were there all along. When we believed, the Spirit opened our hearts to take in its words, and His inspiration changed our souls.

Though teachers have said no one can personally receive a revelation of the Word, that’s not what the next passage teaches. These verses tell us that prophecies never came by the opinions, ideas, or interpretations of men; but holy men wrote the words as the Holy Spirit inspired and moved them:

¹⁷ For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, a voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory:

This is My beloved Son.
I take delight in Him!

¹⁸ And we heard this voice when it came from heaven while we were with Him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ So we have the prophetic word strongly confirmed. You will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dismal place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ First of all, you should know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from one’s own interpretation, ²¹ because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:17-21 HCSB)

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In our first letter by Paul to the Corinthian church, shocking things had been going on among them, yet they hadn't been judging the simplest matters. The Corinthian believers had been listening to persuasive opinions of men rather than instructive words of the Holy Spirit. Until the apostle explained spiritual maturity to them, they had been blind to their own carnality:

¹⁴ But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ But he that is spiritual judgeth all things yet he himself is judged of no man. ¹⁶ For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

¹ And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, *even* as unto babes in Christ. ² I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able *to bear it*, neither yet now are ye able. ³ For ye are yet carnal: for whereas *there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?* (1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3)

Paul said the spiritual man is judged by no man, because he has the mind of Christ; the carnal man does not have the spiritual mind of Christ, but his perceptions are like those of the natural man. The Corinthian church was carnal because they were divided and lacked spiritual understanding. They had not grown spiritually since their early days in Christ because, although some exercised the gifts of the Spirit, they had not yet produced the fruit of the Spirit; however, the fruit of the Holy Spirit is the experience of daily life for the spiritual man.

We hinder spiritual growth by believing erroneous doctrines; one such teaching is that we all have the mind of Christ. That lie is pleasant to a proud, carnal church, but if we don't anticipate the tendency of our mortal nature to lure us from the truth, we become the victims of our own proud deceptions.

When we distort what is holy for personal comfort; when we take pride in men; when we pervert the Word; when we prefer intellectual teachings about spiritual things—our sins confuse and blind us. We are divided because not all that we've believed

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is true. How much misinformation have we spread? If we have the Holy Spirit, how did the divorce from Truth occur? Have we been unaware of the devil's schemes? Will we allow the light to expose what we've hidden in the dark? Have we matured since our first days in Jesus or merely repeated the same tenets? Have we believed His Word and listened to His Spirit as at first or relied on others instead? We are confused with many diverse teachings by not listening to the one true Teacher. Have we been comfortable in our world but forgotten our Lord?

⁴ For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵ But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. (Jude 4-5 NKJV)

Jesus Christ calls us to be holy and blameless, without fault; yet we quarrel among ourselves over what we should understand. Some argue our conflicts are peripheral and unimportant. In other words, some Christians don't believe every word of God is significant. We're in unbelief, but faith in His truth is life to its believers.

Someone says, "If anyone thinks he has the truth, he's arrogant." To the contrary, God reveals His words to the humble. By disagreeing with His truth, men are arrogant. False teachers have convinced us our conflicting doctrines are unavoidable, and privately we think God understands when we believe ideas other than His. We have been duped if we believe false teachings are acceptable to God. The opinions of scholars and laymen alike are futile, trying to understand His words with merely mortal minds.

The true Messiah will return for the holy union of Jews and gentiles—His true bride—spotless and blameless, vigilant and faithful, prepared for the Groom. If we believe in Him, we agree with every word of His Spirit. Do we believe or challenge Him?

⁴⁴ Then Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. ⁴⁵ And

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he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. ⁴⁶ I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. 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. ⁵⁰ And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.” (John 12:44-50 NKJV) – To obey is life.

His Spirit empowered Jesus to speak and obey His Father’s words. He told us that obedience to His Father is everlasting life. Not just true for Him, the Word is true for all who follow Him. As the Spirit empowered the Son of man to live by His words, Jesus empowers us to do as He did by faith in His words.

¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake. ¹² Verily, verily I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. ¹³ And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. (John 14:11-14)

¹ Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, ² as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. ⁴ I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. ⁵ And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. (John 17:1-5 NKJV)

The serpent challenged the integrity of God and defied His authority in Eden. He deceived the ones God had made in His

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image and does the same today. The question, “Does God really mean what He says?” prompts us to ask, “Why would God say something He doesn’t mean?” The suggestion that Messiah did not mean what He said is identical to the deception of the serpent in the garden:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1 NIV)

“... Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. (John 17:11b NKJV)

Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14 NASB)

Though Adam trusted a liar but not his Creator, now the Lord is offering us a golden opportunity to believe in Him. Faith in the Son of God sets us apart from the world, sanctifying us for holy purposes; our fear of Him honors God. *Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. (1 Pet. 2:17)*

Many Interpretations

See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused him who spoke on earth, much more *shall we not escape* if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven. (Hebrews 12:25 NKJV) [Jews who rejected Moses’ words did not escape the wrath of God; can the brethren in Christ escape who refuse His words?]

Jesus often spoke in parables, metaphors, and spiritual words to His disciples, urging them to diligently seek and fully know Him. The Holy Spirit divinely interprets His spiritual words for us to live in Him by receiving and following them.

Many words fill the Scriptures; not just a few are essential for life and godliness. Believing His words unites us; properly dividing the Scriptures, we will not be ashamed before God at the end of time. He commands each believer to depart from

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divisive spirits that interject deceit, spread confusion, hinder maturity, and undermine salvation. (See 2 Tim. 2:14-26)

Our commitment to unity succeeds by a common faith in the truth as we love one another. We can't enter heaven if we refuse the truth that saves us who live by it—truth is our plumb line.

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

²⁴ “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the wind blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” (Matthew 7:21-27 NIV)

If we believe only some Scriptures but not others, we could very well end up with the hypocrites, crying out, “Lord, Lord! Open the door to heaven for us!” Apart from the light, no one can know God; the Light came from the Father into the world as the Word of God. As the true Light, He invades the darkness, penetrating every hiding place. And His life is in His Word.

We who claim a relationship with Jesus Christ must come out of death into life, out of the darkness into the light that exposes dark and secret thoughts. God who never lies requires us to believe His full counsel; by it, He imparts life to us. Apart from the truth, a little leaven puffs up the whole lump of dough. If the meaning of a passage eludes us, His Spirit lives in us to give us wisdom when we ask in faith and wait for understanding.

It's not for us to pick what we prefer. His words are not like food in a cafeteria where we take just what we want and reject the rest, but His words are the unleavened bread of life to us who receive them. His words deliver us out of the nature of sin,

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which is why faith in the truth is vital to everlasting life. Is holiness critical to our experience, or is sin permissible?

If we say we love Him but refuse to obey God, we are self-deceived. It's impossible to shun His words and love the Lord. The good news is, if we repent, He changes us, giving us the faith that prompts us to obey by His Spirit's power. He might speak through another with wisdom for us to hear; but if walls go up, we can be sure somebody built them.

²³ Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. ²⁴ He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me. (John 14:23-24 NKJV)

¹ Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, ² Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. ³ And this will we do, if God permit. (Hebrews 6:1-3)

The Cunning Serpent

The decision to be ready for His coming is individually ours. The apostolic fathers wrote words that fill our hearts with fear, adamantly teaching purity, preferring the cross to the pleasures of this world. Have we known the same Savior, or is our Jesus quite casual about sin? Has our Jesus done it all without giving us the mandate to follow Him, or is there a cross to carry? Does Jesus want us to face disapproval as He did? Is this the abundant life? Yes, the life that is greater than its rejection is abundant! It's the life that empowers us to love our enemies and pray for them who hate us; the abundant life rises above its adversaries.

³ But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity *of devotion* to Christ. ⁴ For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have

Truth or Deception?

not accepted, you bear *this* beautifully.
(2 Corinthians 11:3-4 NASB)

³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; ⁴ And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

Looking to the future, the apostle did not see an enlightened, truth-loving, cross-carrying, Savior-following church. Instead, Paul exhorted Timothy to continue with perseverance in the truth, contending against erroneous doctrines. Light exposes all things; truth is light, exposing what's hidden in darkness. Is the truth in us? Are we hiding pride in our hearts? Are we afraid to look? but we must.

⁹ "The heart is deceitful above all *things*,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?

¹⁰ I, the LORD, search the heart,
I test the mind,

Even to give every man according to his ways,
According to the fruit of his doings.
(Jeremiah 17:9-10 NKJV)

One Teacher

⁵ This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (1 John 1:5-7)

If we walk in His light, we fellowship with Him and with our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we believe the words His Spirit inspired, we believe Jesus, the Word made flesh. By faith in Jesus, we believe His Father since He is the Word of God. (See Jn. 1:1, 14) They are One for the Father is in His Son as His Word, proceeding from His bosom: *Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.* (2 Cor. 3:17)

The Deceiver Divides Us

¹² “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. ¹³ But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. ¹⁵ All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose *it* to you.” (John 16:12-15 NASB)

⁹ However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. ¹⁰ If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:9-11 NASB)

Jesus said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life.* (See Jn. 14:6) If anyone wants to know the Father, he must first know His Son. By formulating doctrines before we believe the Word, we are bound to err with ideas that aren't true to the Bible.

⁸ But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹ Do not call *anyone* on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. ¹⁰ Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, *that is*, Christ. ¹¹ But the greatest among you shall be your servant. (Matthew 23:8-11 NASB) – Jesus

What we see in the selfless actions and words of Jesus Christ our Lord is the way to life everlasting. Our words and actions plant seeds to the Spirit or to the flesh; only one way leads to life:

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16:24-26 NKJV)