

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ~ MAKING DISCIPLES ~ EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY

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THE REALITY OF GOD

Part Four

By Rayola Kelley



When I considered doing this series about the reality of God, I realized that it was a great task and if there was not some heavenly inspiration behind it, it would not impact others in a beneficial way. I even considered that some might become bored with pursuing such an avenue, especially when it comes to believers. After all, it is assumed that if you are a believer, religious, or go to church, you should know God, right?

The problem is that people may know *about* God because of religious teachings, theological debates, and spiritual influences, but such knowledge does not mean one personally knows God. There are those who may tout religious degrees, spiritual enlightenment, and greater revelation, but none of these aspects of religion ensures that one truly knows the God of heaven.

Sadly, I have discovered this fact not only about others, but about myself. I had an intellectual concept of God, and assumed such knowledge constituted a personal understanding about God. Later I discovered the error of my thinking when I learned that knowledge about God is not the same

as possessing a personal familiarity that comes out of having a relationship with Him. This state can be quite natural to those who remain carnal in their understanding of God and way of approaching Him.

In dealing with many people in different religious circles, the one thing that becomes obvious is that religious people may take liberty to argue Scripture, but their concepts of God bind Him to a narrow box of understanding, which flings such individuals into a quasi-state of unbelief towards the true God of the Bible. For example, there are those who spiritualize the things of God, but fail to obey God because they have no sense as to what is acceptable to Him. Such people often become disillusioned with God. And, like I used to be, there are those who assume they know God because of their religious affiliations, but in the end lack godly fruit. These individuals often become foolish and hypocritical in their attitudes and practices. There are also those who become dissatisfied with God when He does not bow down to their personal emotional whims or expectations. Many pseudo faiths are inundating Christendom, reminding me of Jesus' warning concerning the end days, "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth" (*Luke 18:8*)?

God is Spirit and truth (*John 4:24*). He cannot be known on a fleshly, intellectual, or emotional plane for He is unseen and must be spiritually discerned (*1 Corinthians 2:11-14*). The problem with trying to understand God according to man's carnal functions is that it will also produce another type of gospel. For instance, those who consider God on strictly a fleshly plane usually end up with some feel-good or social gospel that promotes self-serving agendas and personal works over grace, while those who only consider God on an intellectual level will end with a New Age gospel that exalts personal enlightenment over the sim-

ple gospel of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection (*2 Corinthians 11:2-4*). Those who depend on emotions will end up with a sentimental gospel, where certain sentimental notions about Jesus must be first stirred up before they will respond to the matters of God.

God is Spirit. This means we can only interact with Him on an unseen, spiritual level. This is one of the reasons we have been given His Spirit (*Ezekiel 36:26-27; John 3:3-5; 1 Corinthians 2:10-11*). It is only in His Spirit that we can interact with Him in a personal way. In order to properly interact with Him in the spiritual realm, we must be quick to discern the intent of something and where it is leading us in our understanding about God and His kingdom. We must use our senses to discern God's perspective and not use them to determine how we feel about something, thereby, promoting prideful judgment on our part.

This brings us to the intent of something. The intent of the right Spirit is to lead us into all truth about Jesus (*John 16:13*). The one thing I tell people is that we must not discern a matter on the basis of feelings or what instrument God chooses to use; rather, we must discern in spite of our emotional feelings as to if that instrument is speaking truth. It is important to point out that if we have attached some type of bias or prejudice, whether in ignorance or fear, to a particular instrument in God's kingdom, that is the instrument He is most apt to use to expose our prejudice and challenge us in our way of thinking. The test is always the same in each case. It comes down to whether we are going to love the truth and choose it regardless of how much it challenges our concepts or whether we become hardened towards it. We will either accept God's way of doing something or insist that He bow down to our way before we accept an answer to prayer

or a change in course. In the past I have discovered that the instrument God often uses to speak forth His truths is the very instrument that will require me to humble myself in order to receive truth in the right spirit. As believers, we must not be faulted for settling for mediocrity or rejecting truth because God did not use the instrument we have deemed as being acceptable in that area or position. Today, people are caught up with the types of vessels and instruments that are being used, thereby limiting God in who He may use to bring about a matter for His glory and not according to people's limited understanding.

God is truth. In other words, He is not just a matter of facts. Facts operate according to the natural world and can only graduate to the spiritual arena when truth is the objective. Facts do not operate in any real boundaries, and it is for this reason that facts can be perverted to fit into heretical teachings, twisted to fit self-serving agendas, and touted as being the final authority as to what constitutes truth. However, facts must never be used to constitute what is truth; rather, truth must verify the legitimacy of facts.

Truth has a foundation that never changes. It is based on the reality of the true God of heaven. It is hedged in by moral uprightness and by that which brings life to the spirit and liberty to the soul. Facts deal with the seen world with its methods, formulas, and proven laws, thereby can be measured, while truth deals with the unseen aspects of the Spirit and cannot be measured. For this reason truths are received by faith. Facts are one dimensional, while truth clarifies and reveals the dimensions of the unseen. Facts inform, while truth verifies a record as being so. Facts feed the intellect, but truth feeds the spiritual man. Facts can lack truth, but truth declares and confirms a fact as being so.

The problem today is that most people do not see the need to guard, emphasize, and ensure the intent of the Spirit: that of truth. It is easy to put emphasis on the different truths of God, but fail to uphold the complete truth. For example, many Christians emphasize love, but Scripture tells us that love rejoices in the truth and not

in iniquity, thereby defining the real emphasis of love as being that of truth (*1 Corinthians 13:6*). Godly love should always end in truth for it to have the moral character to bear all things, the resolve to believe all things, the devotion to hope in all things and the passion to endure all things.

Love without truth is not pious for it is void of the moral uprightness that would firmly set one on the immovable Rock, nor will such a void in love ensure its quality or excellent commitment to ensure liberty in the Spirit and personal growth. For example, godly love cannot remain mediocre (lukewarm) in devotion towards God or indifferent towards that which would be destroyed. It cannot remain silent when it sees a person walking over a spiritual cliff into judgment and wrath. Love cannot quietly stand by while others are being hurt by the domino effects of sin. Truth warns in love, stands immovable in authority, prays in passion, is confirmed by heavenly wisdom, and will remain standing as delusion and error fall into traps of foolishness, the miry holes of consequences, and the pits of utter condemnation and destruction.

As we consider the emphasis of truth in the Bible, it is number one in the description of the transformed mind in *Philippians 4:8*, and the first to be mentioned in the armor of God in *Ephesians 6:14*. Jesus made it clear that He brought a sword of truth to bring necessary separation in our lives so that we are able to follow Him into the disciplined life of a disciple (*Matthew 10:34-39*). He also made it clear that if we *believe* the truth we will obey it and verify our discipleship, and if we *know* the truth, it will make us free (*John 8:31-32*).

This brings us to another aspect about truth. Truth will bring offense for it is sharp and capable of waking up those who slumber in their sins and destructive habits. It will bring separation from the world, for the world stands as an enemy to truth. It will bring clarity, for there are no shades of compromising grey in it. It will cause a reaction, because it calls for a response. Truth is truth and there is no changing it. You can dull the sharp blades of its clarity with various excuses to make it more palpable to the carnal taste of others, but in the end it will

stand as is and judge those who refuse to line up to it. We can discard the righteousness of truth by doing away with the moral aspect of it to allow us the luxury of being comfortable in our religious emphasis, but in the end it will expose the iniquity that motivates the carnal man.

Since God is the essence of truth, there are various warnings as to what will happen if truth does not become a priority in our spiritual pursuits. Truth must be firmly established in our foundational understanding or we will end up falling for everything and eventually collapsing during storms of judgment. If truth is not our premise, we will end up straying from it. If it is not our preference, we will buy a lie. If it is dulled down by compromise, we will lose our edge of properly discerning. If it is not practiced, we will become hypocrites. If it is not upheld, we will lose our authority in Christ. If it is not our emphasis, then we will miss doing the will of God, which brings me to one of the main warnings in the Bible concerning truth that is found in *Romans 1:18*, "*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.*"

The question is why is there such an abrasion towards the truth that even Christians will sacrifice or compromise it? The reason is obvious. The truth is a sharp two-edged sword that will cut through excuses, sentimental nonsense, and quasi-religious environments (*Hebrews 4:12*). It will expose idols of the heart and topple idols of the mind, making it politically incorrect to a world bent on maintaining its forms of idolatries, seductions, and delusions. It will not be moved from what is so; therefore, it is often classified as being unloving. It will not placate that which perverts it, thus it is considered to be judgmental. It will not bend to avoid hurting one's feelings; therefore, it becomes offensive. Truth will not move from the center of moral rightness or compromise its intent of lining us up to the righteous ways of God. It will never risk losing its authority, for it cannot cease to be what it is; therefore, it will remain standing upright and sure in the end (*2 Corinthians 13:8*).

This brings us back to God being

Spirit and truth. The Bible is clear that God can only reveal Himself to man by His Spirit (*Zechariah 4:6; Matthew 16:15-18; John 16:7-11*). If a matter has not been revealed by the Spirit of God to the spirit of man, it may be a fact in man's mind, but not a revelation to his spirit. Revelation constitutes truths that have been made real and living to a person's inner being by the Spirit (*Ephesians 1:17*). In other words, the person knows that he or she knows a matter is true because it has been declared as being so by God's Word, established as being such by His Spirit, and confirmed by the godly fruits it produces.

This brings us to the truth about God. Since the fullness of God is beyond man's mere comprehension, man can only benefit from the Spirit and truth of the Bible when he approaches it with the intent to believe what it says about God (*Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:6*). Even though the Word establishes the fact that there is a God, the Spirit is the One who reveals who God is in light of His nature, will, and ways. The problem is man takes the existence of God as a fact, but will often define God according to what makes sense to him, redefine God's will according to what is comfortable and convenient, and establish the ways of God according to his own sense of limited or perverted justice. The result is that man will often erect a god to his own liking.

It is important to know what spirit we approach the Bible in. If we fail to approach the Bible to believe that all it says is true, we will pick and choose what we do believe. We will argue against truths that do not make sense and we will demand that what we know is the final authority to determine the legitimacy of a matter.

This brings us back to the reality of God. We cannot know God without the revelation of the Spirit, and we cannot fully receive such revelation about God without loving the truth about who He is, His perfect will, and His righteous ways (*2 Thessalonians 2:10-12*). Therefore, it is important to examine our attitude about God and His Word. If I have my own take on God, the Spirit will not be able to unveil truths about Him that are contained within His Word. If His Word is subject to my personal whims, then I

will adjust what I perceive about God according to my own understanding and feelings. It is vital that I am prepared to receive the truths of God by faith because they are going to challenge personal logic, preferred reasoning, and carnal understanding.

Next month we are going to be considering one of the truths about God, which is generally accepted by mainline Christianity, but proves controversial and confusing in certain camps. As believers we must be prepared to believe what the Bible says in regard to God and choose the way of faith in order to possess the vital truths about Him.

Are you ready to receive such truths regardless of what it might challenge in your present understanding?

QUOTES FOR THE WISE

"The eye of the world is quick to perceive any indication of selfishness in those who profess to be wholly given up to God, and while it is sometimes complained that the standard they set up for God's saints is too high, it is quite possible that ours may be far too low. If we are truly delivered from the plague of selfishness, we shall not kick against injustice; we shall not stand upon our rights; we shall not manifest any self-important bearing, or cherish any resentful spirit. We shall not be elated when praised, or disheartened when blamed. We shall not thrust ourselves in the best seat . . . We shall always be ready to wash the feet of the saints; we shall not seek to do great things, but gladly do the least and lowliest service. We shall not be offended if others are preferred before us; we shall not get feverish about the present or worried about the future; we shall not seek to get the best of a bargain. We shall never, as the Welsh preacher said, 'put our hand into our Master's till,' or so speak of ourselves or our achievements as to attract attention to ourselves rather than to Jesus Christ. In all these things He has left us an example that we should follow His steps, and to be truly holy is to be truly Christ-like." - *The Way of the Cross* by J. Gregory Mantle, pg. 36

"Self is the root, the branches, the tree of all the evil of our fallen state." - William Law

THE DANGER OF ADDING OR SUBTRACTING Part Three DELUSIONS, DETOURS, AND DEAD ENDS By Jeannette Haley

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." - Psalm 119:105

One sure thing you can always depend on is the instructions for life's journey contained in the Word of God. *"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore"* Psalm 16:11. The Bible is both our spiritual road map and compass that reveals God's plan for our lives. It instructs us as to the right path to follow, and warns of the many pitfalls we will encounter if we choose the wrong path. Its precepts are established truth, its judgments righteous, and its wisdom eternal.

Jesus described the road we must travel when He said, *"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it"* Matthew 13, 14. The first thing we learn from this verse is that before we start our journey, it is vital that we begin by entering in at the narrow gate, Jesus. He said, *"I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture"* John 10:9.

There are many people who travel on a highway that runs parallel to the narrow road. These people give the appearance of having started from the same point as those on the narrow road, and they look as if they are traveling in the same direction, on their way to the same destination. The problem is, they have never truly entered in through the narrow gate, and the road they are traveling on is the broad road of the flesh, the world, and the devil that ends in destruction.

The question is how do so many well-meaning people end up on this pseudo-Christian road? After all, they believe there is a God, and that He loves everybody. They believe that

Jesus came, performed miracles, and died on a cross. They believe that the Bible is the “good book,” and they even like to be part of the church scene where they can associate with others, and feel good about themselves. After all, there is some “good” in everybody, right? On top of that, they believe that when they die they will go to heaven, and live happily ever after.

Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The broad road is a composite of a variety of roads and paths that people choose to travel, but one of the most deceptive of those roads is the so-called “Christian” road that is paved out of delusion, detours, and dead ends that are the result of adding to, or subtracting from the truth of the Word of God because deep down many cannot, or will not, agree with the whole, entire and complete counsel of God. After all, there is a lot in the Bible that can easily upset our sensitivities and preconceived notions of how a “good” God should be doing things. There are whole passages of Scripture (including the words of Jesus) that are insulting, and downright offensive to our insidious pride and human sensitivities. Proof of that is evident all around us in the overabundance of the “seeker-sensitive” type of surface, shallow, imaginative and emotionally charged feel-good books, movies, sappy email junk, pictures, and sermons, along with many so-called “Christian” TV and radio personalities who do great damage to the *“faith which was once delivered unto the saints”* Jude 3b.

A.W. Tozer, in his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (HarperCollins: San Francisco), 1961, p. 4, stated it well: “Wrong ideas about God are not only the fountain from which the polluted waters of idolatry flow; they are themselves idolatrous. The idolater simply imagines things about God and acts as if they were true. Perverted notions about God soon rot the religion in which they appear. The long career of Israel demonstrates this clearly enough, and the history of the Church confirms it. So necessary to the Church is a lofty concept of God that when that concept in any measure declines, the Church with her worship and her moral standards decline along with it. The first step down for any church is taken when it surrenders its

high opinion of God. Before the Church goes into eclipse anywhere there must first be a corrupting of her simple basic theology. She simply gets a wrong answer to the question, ‘What is God like?’ and goes on from there. Though she may continue to cling to a sound nominal creed, her practical working creed has become false. The masses of her adherents come to believe that God is different from what He actually is, and that is heresy of the most insidious and deadly kind.”

It is imperative, if we are to please God and dwell with Him for eternity, that we receive love for the truth, regardless of whether we understand it fully, agree with it completely, or like it at all. Remember, Jesus is the Truth. Truth is not something we can afford to flippantly toss around and take lightly, for without truth, we are doomed to perish. Without love for the truth, we can be easily tempted to love lies—especially lies about moral accountability within the Body of Christ. One little lie let into a church body, petted and pampered and protected will corrupt the entire body. *“A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”* Galatians 5:8. We read in 1 Corinthians 5:6-9, *“Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.”* (See 1 Corinthians 5.)

Without truth, we will never have the right perspective, the right heart attitudes, and the right motives. Without truth, we will lack wisdom, knowledge of God and His ways, and direction for our lives. Without truth, we will be forever shackled to the darkness of lies and deception, however subtle, and blind to the true Light of the world. Without truth, we will exist in a Christ-less void, forever chained by the darkness of hopelessness, fear, and the endless misery of separation from the Holy One who is the only Truth that sets men free.

What does it mean to “receive love for the truth?” In 2 Thessalonians 2:10-14 we read *“And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish: because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they*

should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” [Emphasis added.] So we see that, just like faith, love for truth is something we must “receive” from God. And, if we stiffen our necks, harden our hearts and refuse? Then God Himself will send us a delusion from which there is no escape. *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* Hebrews 10:31.

Years ago when on a road trip with a friend, we decided to turn off the freeway to take a two-lane highway to a waterfall. After traveling a long distance and not seeing any signs directing us to the waterfall, we began to wonder if we had missed another turn off. We kept going anyway in spite of seeing a sign that indicated we were heading in the wrong direction. I was so positive that we were heading in the right direction that I concluded the sign was wrong. Eventually we saw a sign with the name of a place that we recognized as having already passed before turning off the main freeway. Both of us were shocked when we realized that we had not only completely missed our intended destination, but we had backtracked about ten miles. This is how delusion works. We can convince ourselves that we know what is right, or best for us, even though the Bible plainly states differently.

Who hasn’t encountered detours when on a road trip? Some detours are short while others seem like an endless interruption. After all, we just want to get to our destination in the most direct and uneventful manner possible. In the journey of life, however, detours are inevitable because of unforeseeable circumstances beyond our control. Sadly, we can also take ourselves on some spiritual detours that result in dead ends, and even disaster. Such detours occur because somewhere

along the line we begin to ignore the warning “signs” in God’s Word. Instead of heeding the truths of Scripture concerning what our priorities should be, we allow the priorities of the world, or the dictates of our flesh to become detours. Even though we may intellectually know that such detours result in a dead end, we somehow convince ourselves that “God understands” or “God wants me to be happy” or “after I get what I want, then I’ll repent.” Of course, all of this is a perversion of what the Bible teaches, and is sin. That is the bottom line.

The truth is the truth, and it will never change. What God has spoken is truth and His truth will stand for all eternity. However, we can “tweak” the Word of God, and delude ourselves when we override His truth by “adjusting” it to fit in with how we think it should be in our own minds. For example, we know that God is love. Therefore, if God is love and we go into rebellion, even though we’ve “accepted Jesus” or repeated a “sinner’s prayer,” and willfully sin and continue in it, then God, since He is love, should welcome us to heaven if we should die in that sin, right? Here is what the Word says: *“Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother”* 1 John 3:6-10. And, 1 John 5:18 says, *“We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.”*

It is so easy to add to God’s Word by taking a truth, such as, for example, “God is love”, to extremes. We would do well to remember words of a wise Christian who once said, “Any truth, taken to extremes, be-

comes an untruth.” God’s love is a sacred truth that should be properly understood as revealed by the written Word, and revelation of the Holy Spirit. Any attempt at defining God’s love must be kept within the context of Who God is, His holy attributes, and remain consistent with how that love should be manifested in our personal lives and the church body in righteousness and holy living according to His Word. The tendency of fallen man, however, is to bring God’s love down to a base human level where it can be redefined, and adjusted to a “one size fits all” idea. This impression leaves God’s love reduced to what can be compared to a warm, fuzzy blanket of carnality that endorses and covers iniquity and sin, which in reality is not love at all but an excuse to dodge confrontation that leads to true repentance, conversion, and salvation for the lost soul. Fallen, finite man cannot even begin to grasp, even in his best state, the lofty magnitude, power and purity, beauty, and glory of the love of God apart from the cross of Christ.

If you want to see God’s love, look back to the Cross, but consider this, “It is shallow nonsense to say that God forgives us because He is love. When we have been convicted of sin we will never say this again. The love of God means Calvary, and nothing less; the love of God is spelt on the Cross and nowhere else. The only ground on which God can forgive me is through the Cross of my Lord....Forgiveness means not merely that I am saved from hell and made right for heaven (no man would accept forgiveness on such a level); forgiveness means that I am forgiven into a recreated relationship, into identification with God in Christ. The miracle of Redemption is that God turns me, the unholy one, into the standard of Himself, the Holy One, by putting into me a new disposition, the disposition of Jesus Christ.” (Excerpted from *My Utmost for His Highest*, by Oswald Chambers, pg. 324.

Are you tired of taking detours, wandering around in confusion and wishing you could get off the “merry-go-round” of daily meaninglessness? If so, *“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and*

he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” Isaiah 55:6, 7. Jesus invites you to come to Him, saying, *“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* Matthew 11:29, 30.

Will you do it now? †



HIS LOVE...REACHING

Right from the beginning God’s love has reached, and from the beginning man has refused to understand. But love went on reaching, offering itself. Love offered the eternal... we wanted the immediate. Love offered deep joy...we wanted thrills. Love offered freedom...we wanted license. Love offered communion with God Himself...we wanted to worship at the shrine of our own minds. Love offered peace...we wanted approval for our wars. Even yet, love went on reaching. And still today, after two thousand years, patiently, lovingly, Christ is reaching out to us today. Right through the chaos of our world, through the confusion of our minds. He Himself is reaching... longing to share with us...the very being of God. His love still is longing. His love is still reaching, right past the shackles of my mind. And the Word of the Father became Mary’s little Son. And his love reached all the way to where I was.— Gloria Gaither

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” - AW Tozer

“If we will not be governed by God, we must be governed by tyrants.” - William Penn

“Whatever makes men good Christians, makes them good citizens.” - Daniel Webster

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

CHRISTIANS, SIN AND LOVE

Q: *The first epistle of Peter talks about how love covers a multitude of sins. I have been hurt by people in the past and struggle with forgiveness because there is no acknowledgment on their part that they have offended me. I am confused and put off by some who call themselves Christians but who are walking in sin that I know is contrary to God's Word. I know they are wrong, but feel that I am being critical towards them. I don't know how to properly reconcile these issues. Could you give me any insight about this matter?*

A: There is much confusion about this subject. Sadly many churches and Christians fail to practice the church disciplines clearly set down in the Bible as to this subject, thereby, maintaining a clear separation from the world. Because the separation is not there, it causes confusion as to how Christians are to handle the different matters of offenses, trespasses, and iniquity. The reason this separation is missing is because much of the world's attitude has found its way into the church and there is no real distinction between the holy and the profane. As a result, leaven is taking root and growing as church disciplines are being ignored, while that which is offensive to God is being conveniently justified away while being lumped under some perverted idea of love.

If you read *1 Peter 4:8* in context, it is in reference to our past life. Peter is talking about offenses that hurt the old man or our pride. Most people are not even aware that they have walked over or hurt our pride. We need to recognize that godly love will not give audience or bow down to such pride. Pride falls under the category of the sin of iniquity and it will produce jealousy, anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness. Ultimately, such iniquity will manifest itself in a critical spirit towards those who have committed the offense.

Romans 12:9-10 gives us a definition of godly love that has the power to cover personal offenses by applying it in a right attitude. We apply love by preferring others over ourselves.

This preference allows us to humble ourselves and choose the way of forgiveness by letting go of our rights to hold or maintain such offenses. It also gives us the freedom to properly consider in what way we can best serve, encourage, and minister to those who have offended us, providing an avenue of lasting reconciliation.

The problem today is that most people only think in terms of offenses committed against their pride and not against God. They judge others on the basis of how such individuals make them feel about themselves (uncomfortable, jealous, embarrassed, etc.) rather than if a person's relationship has been broken between him or her and God because of moral trespasses and iniquity. As long as we feel okay about someone, it does not matter what kind of offenses he or she has done against God or others. We can overlook such individual's destructive offenses towards others and call it love that covers sins (because we are not the one offended), and we can ignore trespasses against God, and incorrectly accredit it to His love. Remember, we have a ministry of reconciliation, pointing people back to a right relationship with God, not one to help someone into hell in the name of love (*2 Corinthians 5:18-20*).

As far as being judgmental towards sin, if God has declared it as wrong, you do not need to pass judgment on it because God has already deemed it as being so. Jesus instructs us to judge righteously (*Matthew 7:24*). This simply means we will line up to His Word and agree with Him about a matter. We are instructed to reprove all works of darkness (*Ephesians 4:11*) If a brother is erring or doing wrong against us in such a way as to put his or her soul in danger, the Bible is clear that if such a person fails to see the error of his or her ways, we must give three warnings in the attitude of meekness: person to person, with a witness, and then before the church. If he or she fails to repent, we are to completely separate from that person as an example to others and a means to bring a person to repentance in order to restore him or her back into fellowship. (See *Matthew 18:15-17*; *1 Corinthians 5*; *2 Corinthians 2:2-9*; *2 Timothy 2:24-26*; *James 5:20*.)

It is important to keep in mind, we

must be spirit-led and in a right spirit before ever confronting another brother who is in sin, but if we fail to confront sin, not only are we showing a gross lack of love for the person's soul, but we are putting ourselves in danger of coming into agreement with the unholy and losing our discernment, distinction, testimony, and sliding into a comatose state of mediocrity.

Today much of the church in America has succumbed to a comatose state because sin is not properly confronted and dealt with. As a result, the church has become an unholy thing in which the Holy Spirit cannot find holy ground to land on. Without the presence of the Spirit there is no conviction of sin (because the church is not prepared to deal with it anyway), no discernment (because it is not properly exercised and is discouraged because of the fear of being labeled judgmental), no distinction (New Agers also love people into hell with their good intentions and deeds), no authority (testimonies lack any real growth, power, and passion), and there is no life to bring any real contrast as to how far away people are from the mark. Sadly, the church blames the absence of the Spirit, not on the fact that the ground must be unholy, but because many are not expecting the Spirit to land. What many fail to realize is that the latter is true because the first condition is present.

I hope this helps to give you a balanced understanding of this sub-

QUOTABLE

"The church is not the agent God will use to usher in His Kingdom of righteousness and justice. That position belongs solely to God's Son, the Messiah. To say otherwise is to deny Jesus the glory ascribed to Him alone.—James A. Showers, *Israel My Glory*, Sept/Oct 2014

"God has a plan for His Church upon earth. But alas! we too often make our plan, and we think that we know what ought to be done. We ask God first to bless our feeble efforts, instead of absolutely refusing to go unless God go before us." — Andrew Murray, *Absolute Surrender*

ROMANS CHAPTER 13

By Chuck Baldwin (2007)

It seems that every time someone such as myself attempts to encourage our Christian brothers and sisters to resist an unconstitutional or otherwise reprehensible government policy, we hear the retort, "What about Romans Chapter 13? We Christians must submit to government. Any government. Read your Bible, and leave me alone." Or words to that effect.

No doubt, some who use this argument are sincere. They are only repeating what they have heard their pastor and other religious leaders say. On the other hand, let's be honest enough to admit that some who use this argument are just plain lazy, apathetic, and indifferent. And Romans 13 is their escape from responsibility. I suspect this is the much larger group, by the way.

Nevertheless, for the benefit of those who are sincere (but obviously misinformed), let's briefly examine Romans Chapter 13. I quote Romans Chapter 13, verses 1 through 7, from the Authorized King James text: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor."

Do our Christian friends who use these verses to teach that we should not oppose President Bush or any other political leader really believe that civil magistrates have unlimited authority to do anything they want without

opposition? I doubt whether they truly believe that.

For example, what if our President decided to resurrect the old monarchical custom of *Jus Primae Noctis* (Law of First Night)? That was the old medieval custom when the king claimed the right to sleep with a subject's bride on the first night of their marriage. Would our sincere Christian brethren sheepishly say, "Romans Chapter 13 says we must submit to the government"? I think not. And would any of us respect any man who would submit to such a law?

So, there are limits to authority. A father has authority in his home, but does this give him power to abuse his wife and children? Of course not. An employer has authority on the job, but does this give him power to control the private lives of his employees? No. A pastor has overseer authority in the church, but does this give him power to tell employers in his church how to run their businesses? Of course not. All human authority is limited in nature. No man has unlimited authority over the lives of other men. (Lordship and Sovereignty is the exclusive domain of Jesus Christ.)

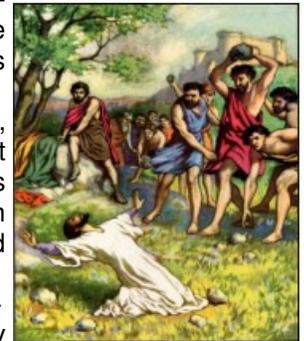
By the same token, a civil magistrate has authority in civil matters, but his authority is limited and defined. Observe that Romans Chapter 13 clearly limits the authority of civil government by strictly defining its purpose: "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil . . . For he is the minister of God to thee for good . . . for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."

Notice that civil government must not be a "terror to good works." It has no power or authority to terrorize good works or good people. God never gave it that authority. And any government that oversteps that divine boundary has no divine authority or protection. Civil government is a "minister of God to thee for good." It is a not a minister of God for evil. Civil magistrates have a divine duty to "execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." They have no authority to execute wrath upon him that doeth good. None. Zilch. Zero. And anyone who says they do is lying. So, even in the midst of telling Christians to submit to civil authority, Romans Chapter 13 limits the power and reach of civil authority.

Did Moses violate God's principle of submission to authority when he killed the Egyptian taskmaster in defense of his fellow Hebrew? Did Elijah violate God's principle of submission to authority when he openly challenged Ahab and Jezebel? Did David violate God's principle of submission to authority when he refused to surrender to Saul's troops? Did Daniel violate God's principle of submission to authority when he disobeyed the king's law to not pray audibly to God? Did the three Hebrew children violate God's principle of submission to authority when they refused to bow to the image of the state? Did John the Baptist violate God's principle of submission to authority when he publicly scolded King Herod for his infidelity? Did Simon Peter and the other Apostles violate God's principle of submission to authority when they refused to stop preaching on the streets of Jerusalem? Did Paul violate God's principle of submission to authority when he refused to obey those authorities who demanded that he abandon his missionary work? In fact, Paul spent almost as much time in jail as he did out of jail.

Remember that every apostle of Christ (except John) was killed by hostile civil authorities opposed to their endeavors. Christians throughout church history were imprisoned, tortured, or killed by civil authorities of all stripes for refusing to submit to their various laws and prohibitions. Did all of these Christian martyrs violate God's principle of submission to authority?

So, even the great prophets, apostles, and writers of the Bible (including the writer of Romans Chapter 13) understood that human authority – even civil authority – is limited. Plus, Paul makes it clear that our submission to civil authority must be predicated on more than fear of governmental retaliation. Notice, he said, "Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for con-



science sake." Meaning, our obedience to civil authority is more than just "because they said so." It is also a matter of conscience. This means we must think and reason for ourselves regarding the justness and rightness of our government's laws. Obedience is not automatic or robotic. It is a result of both rational deliberation and moral approbation.

Therefore, there are times when civil authority may need to be resisted. Either governmental abuse of power or the violation of conscience (or both) could precipitate civil disobedience. Of course, how and when we decide to resist civil authority is an entirely separate issue. And I will reserve that discussion for another time. Beyond that, we in the United States of America do not live under a monarchy. We have no king. There is no single governing official in this country. America's "supreme Law" does not rest with any man or any group of men. America's "supreme Law" does not rest with the President, the Congress, or even the Supreme Court. In America, the U.S. Constitution is the "supreme Law of the Land." Under our laws, every governing official publicly promises to submit to the Constitution of the United States. Do readers understand the significance of this distinction? I hope so.

This means that in America the "higher powers" are not the men who occupy elected office, they are the tenets and principles set forth in the U.S. Constitution. Under our laws and form of government, it is the duty of every citizen, including our elected officials, to obey the U.S. Constitution. Therefore, this is how Romans Chapter 13 reads to Americans: "Let every soul be subject unto the [U.S. Constitution.] For there is no [Constitution] but of God: the [Constitution] that be [is] ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the [Constitution], resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For [the Constitution is] not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the [Constitution]? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For [the Constitution] is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for [the Constitution] beareth not the

sword in vain: for [the Constitution] is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For this cause pay ye tribute also: for [the Constitution is] God's minister, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor."

Dear Christian friend, the above is exactly the proper understanding of our responsibility to civil authority in these United States, as per the teaching of Romans Chapter 13. Furthermore, Christians, above all people, should desire that their elected representatives submit to the Constitution, because it is constitutional government that has done more to protect Christian liberty than any governing document ever devised by man. As I have noted before in this column, Biblical principles form the foundation of all three of America's founding documents: The Declaration of Independence, The U.S. Constitution, and The Bill of Rights.

As a result, Christians in America (for the most part) have not had to face the painful decision to "obey God rather than men" and defy their civil authorities.

The problem in America today is that we have allowed our political leaders to violate their oaths of office and to ignore, and blatantly disobey, the "supreme Law of the Land," the U.S. Constitution. Therefore, if we truly believe Romans Chapter 13, we will insist and demand that our civil magistrates submit to the U.S. Constitution.

Now, how many of us Christians are going to truly obey Romans Chapter 13? †

Without confrontation there is no contrast,
 Without contrast there is no conviction,
 Without conviction there is no conversion,
 Without conversion there is no consecration,
 Without consecration there is no conciliation with God.
 --Jeannette Haley

WORDS OF BLESSING FROM DEAR FRIENDS

"I pray all is well for you! May God abundantly bless you beyond measure!!" - ID

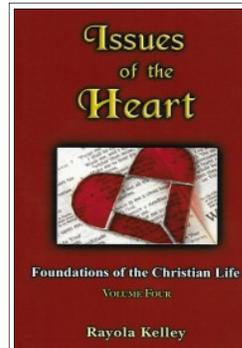
"Thank you for always being able to pray with us and to help discern the spirits. You all are a blessing to our family and may the Lord bless each of you and your ministry this coming year!" - ID

"Thank you all for the work you do in God's kingdom. Because of your work, His word is being spread in many places." - ID

"Thank you once again (another year gone by already!) for all your love and dedication to rescuing the lost and discipling, teaching and ministering to everyone you come in contact with. Your reward will be great in heaven someday! - WA

"Hope your blessings for the New Year, anything your heart desires for the growth in Christ and the work you all are doing as the time to work grows closer to an end. Know you are prayed for daily and are loved." - ID

Note from GSM: Thank you! God bless you all for your faithful love, friendship, prayers and support!



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