

# The Person and Work of God the Holy Spirit

## A Study

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### Part I - The Person of God the Holy Spirit

#### Lesson 4 - The Sanctifier

Have you ever wondered why God the Holy Spirit is called “the Holy Spirit”? He is holy, of course, but God the Father is also known for His unblemished holiness, and that holiness is an attribute also of God the Son. So, there is no sense in which the Holy Spirit possesses a greater degree or measure of holiness than the other two persons of the Trinity. So, it is not His unique holiness that leads us to call Him “the Holy Spirit”. Likewise, the Spirit is indeed a Spirit, but God the Father is also a Spirit, and God the Son is a Spirit in His being, as the Logos, the second person of the Trinity. So, it is clearly not because He is a Spirit that we designate the third person of the Trinity as “the Holy Spirit”.

There are a couple of reasons why the third person is known as the Holy Spirit. First, the term “Holy” is attached to His title because of the particular task the Spirit performs in our redemption. Among the persons of the Trinity, God the Spirit is the principal one who works for our sanctification- the process by which we are conformed to the image of Christ and made holy.

Christians often ask, “*What’s the Will of God for my life?*” And they go to great lengths to find out. They follow so-called “prophets who might give them a special “word” that will help them to find their “calling” because they have all kinds of questions about who they should marry, what career they should pursue, and a whole host of other topics.

And sadly, as they are spending almost all of their time struggling to find out about *these* issues, they are completely unaware (and unconcerned) about the principle will of God for their lives that has nothing to do with these things. The Bible is very clear about the principal will of God for our lives. The Apostle Paul writes,

#### **1Thessalonians 4:3a**

**For this is the will of God, your sanctification...**

“**Your Sanctification**”. So, the principle will of God for our lives is our sanctification. Sanctification is the ongoing process of being conformed into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ on this earth and in this life *before* we go to Heaven. It begins at the very moment of justification and extends all through our lives- all the way to glory. And as we have discovered in previous studies, sanctification is not some side or peripheral issue that only concerns certain believers while others, who are equally saved, simply choose not to participate in it. No, our sanctification is the primary reason why we were saved in the first place.

#### **Romans 8:26-30**

**26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words;**

**27** and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He **c**intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God*.

**28** And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

**29** For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

**30** and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Many times, Christians speak of being “led” by the Spirit to do something. Yes, the Holy Spirit at times leads people to specific destinations or to specific tasks or to say specific things. But the *primary* leading of God the Holy Spirit, the *overwhelming* leading of the Spirit in our lives as set forth in Holy Scripture, that makes all other “leadings” to pale in comparison, is that He leads us to pursue biblical holiness in a systematic and purposeful and continual way. And that struggle and that ongoing effort, that “leading”, is called “sanctification”. It is His power working in us that helps us grow in holiness.

So, we need to be very careful to go to the pages of the Scripture to learn about God’s will and the leading of the Spirit, and not simply to listen to the popular teachings of the Christian subculture in which we live.

So, a primary reason why God the Holy Spirit is called “the Holy Spirit” is because it is His specific task to enable and empower followers of Christ in their struggle for sanctification.

## **Testing the Spirits**

Secondly, the third person is called “the Holy Spirit” because there is more than one *kind* of Spirit. For example, the Scriptures make a distinction between “the spirit of man” and “the Spirit of God”. But even more important for our consideration here, the Bible speaks clearly and repeatedly about “evil spirits” and “unclean spirits” and other “spirits” who are *not* from God but are demonic spirits (fallen angels) who desire to hinder the progress of the Christian in his quest for sanctification.

And the key difference between these evil spirits and the Holy Spirit is precisely at the point of holiness. Evil spirits are unholy, but the Holy Spirit is holy altogether. It is because of this distinction that the apostle John warns us,

### **1John 4:1**

**Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.**

I emphasize these points for this reason. In the Christian world, many of us are masters at justifying our sin, and one of the chief ways we do it is by saying we were led to do such and such by the Holy Spirit. This is not an uncommon problem. At least once a week I talk to a professing Christian who tells me he or she is getting a divorce without biblical grounds, entering into a marriage in opposition to the biblical qualification for marriage, running a business according to unscriptural principles, or teaching things that the Bible doesn’t say.

Almost without fail they tell me that they feel free to do these things because “*I prayed about it and God has given me peace*” or “*The Holy Spirit has led me to do this.*” or “*God spoke to me.*” or “*The Holy Spirit has given me this revelation.*”

When I hear these kinds of justifications for unbiblical behavior, it is very possible that the people may actually believe what they are saying, but they are *not* speaking the truth. They are speaking in error- very serious error. And no amount of sincerity or passion can make something that is in error to be true. We know this for two reasons which are grounded in two crucial designations about the Character of God the Holy Spirit,

- He is the *Holy Spirit*
- Jesus repeatedly called Him “**the Spirit of truth**” (**John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13**)

The Holy Spirit never entices, speaks, or leads *anyone* to do *anything* that is unholy or ungodly. And godliness and holiness is defined by Holy Scripture- not by human intellect, human reasoning, or human values. Neither does the Holy Spirit ever in any way incline us to embrace a lie. God the Holy Spirit loves Truth- because He is the Spirit of Truth.

We refer to the Bible as the Word of God, and so it is. One of the reasons why the Church has confessed its faith that the Scriptures are the Word of God is the Biblical claim that the Words of sacred Scripture were originally inspired by God the Holy Spirit. Of course, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit not only inspired the writing of the biblical books but He also works constantly to illumine the Scriptures to our minds and to show us how to *apply* them to our daily lives. Paul writes,

### **1Corinthians 14:33a** **God is not a God of confusion**

... and that includes the Holy Spirit. This means that the Holy Spirit never teaches us to do something that He has already explicitly forbidden in sacred Scripture. So, when the Bible says we are to test the spirits to see if they are from God, how are we to do it? What kind of a test should we employ? Obviously, the test must be a biblical test, because we know that in the Scriptures we have the teaching of the Spirit of Truth.

Therefore, if I have an internal inclination, a hunch, or a desire, and I want to associate that internal leading with the Holy Spirit, but at the same time I also see that this inclination in my heart is clearly opposed to what is taught in Scripture, I have proof positive that I am confusing lust, covetousness, or some other internal fallen human feeling with the leading of the Holy Spirit, and that is a horrible thing to do.

We almost never hear about this in the Christian community these days, because Christians easily make themselves seem spiritually astute by saying that God laid this or that on their hearts or that God “led” them to do various things or that God “spoke” to them.

But every time we hear such a claim, we should ask another series of questions like:

- You say that God has spoken to you- what do you base that on- a feeling or a tingle on your arm?
- How do you know that God laid that on your heart?
- Why do you assume that God led you to do that and that what you are saying or doing is not simply a manifestation of your own ambition or your own will?

- Why process do you go through to assure that this is God and not yourself?

And if they don't have a real good answer that includes what the Bible actually teaches then we would be correct to dismiss everything they say out of hand. We should expect everyone who lays claim to hearing from God to be able to prove that to us, because the stakes are too great to simply assume that they are correct.

God the Holy Spirit does indeed place burdens on believers to pray and to do and to say certain things. He can lead a believer supernaturally, but He always does this within and through the Scriptures. He never goes against or contradicts or resists His own revelation in the Bible. So, the best way to "test the spirits" is to judge them by the Spirit's own truth- the 66 Books of the Holy Bible.

## **Hostility to Doctrine**

Part of our growth in sanctification is our growth in the understanding of the things of God. Truth matters to God and it should matter to us. Many years ago, the leaders of the Church determined that "personal relationships" were more important than truth and so most churches are built on that principle- that having a relationship with someone is better than knowing and understanding and believing and loving and obeying the truth. This is a very dominating principle taught today.

And while personal relationships are important, without having and knowing the truth nothing else matters. That is why the Church itself is called,

### **1 Timothy 3:15**

**... the household of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.**

The Church of Jesus is the guardian and the defender of the truth which is what makes up the Christian Faith. So, while many today are perfectly willing to compromise truth so they can maintain human relationships, the Church in the Bible and the Church that existed on the earth for almost nineteen centuries saw things differently. They believed that truth was more important than any other commodity on earth and that everything else, including personal relationships, sprang forth from a correct understanding of the truth.

And that is why the first nineteen centuries of Christianity saw battle after battle to preserve the truth against heresies, false teachings, and apostates and why we hardly ever see those battles today. It isn't that there are no false teachings in our time. It is that the Church has deemed these battles to be "bad for business" and have chosen to continue a relationship with false teachings and false teachers rather than call them to repent and fight to preserve the purity of the Gospel.

The Apostles prophesied that this would happen when they wrote,

### **1 Timothy 4**

**1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,**

**2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,**

**3** *men* who forbid marriage *and advocate* abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

**4** For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude;

**5** for it is sanctified by means of the Word of God and prayer.

**6** In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, *constantly* nourished on the Words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.

**7** But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;

**8** for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life* to come.

**9** It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance.

**10** For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.

**11** Prescribe and teach these things.

**12** Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith *and* purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

**13** Until I come, give attention to the *public* reading of *Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching.

**14** Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.

**15** Take pains with these things; be *absorbed* in them, so that your progress will be evident to all.

**16** Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

### 1 Timothy 6:1-5

**1** All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and *our* doctrine will not be spoken against.

**2** Those who have believers as their masters must not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but must serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these *principles*.

**3** If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness,

**4** he is conceited *and* understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions,

**5** and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.

### 2 Timothy 3

**1** But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.

**2** For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,  
**3** unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good,  
**4** treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,  
**5** holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.  
**6** For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses,  
**7** always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.  
**8** Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these *men* also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith.  
**9** But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, just as Jannes's and Jambres's folly was also.  
**10** Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance,  
**11** persecutions, *and* sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium *and* at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me!  
**12** Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.  
**13** But evil men and impostors will proceed *from bad* to worse, deceiving and being deceived.  
**14** You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*,  
**15** and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.  
**16** All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;  
**17** so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

## **2**Timothy 4:1-5

**1** I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:  
**2** preach the Word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.  
**3** For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,  
**4** and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.  
**5** But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

## **2**Peter 2

**1** But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

**2** Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned;

**3** and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

**4** For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment;

**5** and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;

**6** and *if* He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing *them* to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly *lives* thereafter;

**7** and *if* He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men

**8** (for by what he saw and heard *that* righteous man, while living among them, felt *his* righteous soul tormented day after day by *their* lawless deeds),

**9** *then* the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,

**10** and especially those who indulge the flesh in *its* corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties,

**11** whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord.

**12** But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed,

**13** suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you,

**14** having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children;

**15** forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the *son* of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

**16** but he received a rebuke for his own transgression, *for* a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet.

**17** These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved.

**18** For speaking out arrogant *words* of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error,

**19** promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.

**20** For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.

**21** For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.

**22** It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A *DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT*," and, "A sow, after washing, *returns* to wallowing in the mire."

#### **1John 4:1-3**

**1** Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

**2** By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;

**3** and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

#### **Ephesians 4:11-16**

**11** And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,

**12** for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

**13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

**14** As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

**15** but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,

**16** from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

This is what Jude meant when he wrote,

#### **Jude 3**

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

Then Jude went on to say that all false teaching centers around three issues,

#### **Jude 4**



**For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.**

And so even though there are literally thousands of false teachings, there are really only seven major “roots” from which all the other false teachings come. Historically, those “roots” are:

1. The heresy of the Judaizers (Legalism)
2. Antinomianism (Lawlessness)
3. Gnosticism
4. Modalism
5. Arianism
6. Pelagianism
7. Socinianism

Early on, even before the completion of the canon, the grace of God was attacked on three fronts by the first three heresies. Legalism *denies* grace because it teaches that we have to earn salvation by what we do for ourselves while Antinomianism *abuses* grace in that it teaches that since we are saved by grace, we are then free to live according to the dictates of our own hearts afterward.

Gnosticism is a bit more difficult to define but suffice it to say that while it also attacked grace, it’s main thrust of deception was concerning both the deity and the humanity of Jesus Christ while Modalism attacked the concept of the Tri-unity of God.

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Centuries, a terrible battle erupted concerning the person of Jesus Christ. Arius taught that God the Father had “created” Jesus at some point before He made man-making Jesus a glorified being, but a created one nonetheless. God raised up Athanasius to confront this heresy and defend the biblical truth that Jesus is fully God.

The controversy centered around one single Greek word- *homousia*- which means “*same being*”. Arius added a single Greek letter to that word- the letter “I” (Greek- the “iota”) making the Word to be *homoiusia* which meant “*similar being*”.

So, Arius was teaching that while Jesus was certainly elevated above man- He was nevertheless below God and was like the angels. This controversy raged on in the Church for forty-two years until God finally brought victory through the tireless efforts of Athanasius- who is now called, “The Father of Orthodoxy”. Arianism was officially and formally declared to be a heresy and after repeated attempts to get Arius to repent and recant failed. He was formally excommunicated and died an unrepentant heretic.

Athanasius then had this section about the nature of Jesus placed into the “Nicene Creed” which he wrote himself,

[I believe in]

...one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only-begotten Son of God,  
begotten of the Father before all worlds;  
God of God,

Light of Light,  
very God of very God;  
begotten, not made,  
being of one substance with the Father [*homousia*],  
by whom all things were made.  
Who, for us men and for our salvation,  
came down from heaven,  
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary,  
and was made man;  
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;  
He suffered and was buried;  
and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures;  
and ascended into heaven,  
and sits on the right hand of the Father;  
and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead;  
whose kingdom shall have no end.

The point here is that the early church so valued divine truth that it was willing to fight and argue and debate and wrestle for forty-two years over one letter of one word! And what we must understand is that this was God the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth in action. The leaders of the Church during this battle certainly did not see their relationship with Arius to be more important than knowing and understanding and loving and defending the truth about the nature of Jesus Christ, did they?

But sadly, it is difficult to even imagine the modern church being willing to fight forty-two days or even forty-two minutes over *any* subject if the result would be a loss of fellowship with an individual. That is how far we have fallen. We should implore the Holy Spirit to raise up men who are not simply willing to fight, but who are eager to die for the sake of the purity of the biblical gospel.

There is a pervasive indifference and sometimes outright hostility to the study of doctrine or theology today that is both confusing and frightening. You hear silly slogans like, “*We don’t need doctrine- all we need is Jesus*” as though anybody can “have” Jesus without knowing who He is. Or, “*Some people are so busy studying the Bible that they miss what it says*” as though there is another way of knowing what the Bible says without studying it. Or, “*Too much doctrine quenches the move of the Spirit*” as though the only way to have a move of God in your church is to either be ignorant or unconcerned about what God said. Or, perhaps the worst, “*People who concentrate on truth have no love*” as though any genuinely saved person can have one without the other.

These statements and other like them are simply attempts at either excusing the laziness of people who simply don’t want to do the “heavy lifting” of putting time into the Scriptures or they are attempts at justifying rebellion, because God demands and expects His people to value what He said enough to spend time with it.

## **2Timothy 2:2**

**The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.**

## 2Timothy 2:15

**Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the Word of truth.**

It is spoken and repeated often today that people who genuinely care about divine truth are not loving, and that is a real problem. They say, “*because God is more concerned that we be loving than that we know truth*”.

And the first question we need to ask is, “*Who told you that?*” It is true that, because we are fallen, that the study of what the Bible teaches on an ongoing basis can lead to a “dead orthodoxy” that is not godly at all. But it is also true that *not* knowing Truth can lead to heresy and false teaching being accepted and believed- which is far worse. I would argue that in every case in recorded history where studying biblical doctrine led to a hardness of heart that what we will find is that, in reality, the full range of biblical truth was not being taught at all.

It is impossible to read or study any book of the Bible with any degree of care and not come across a very simple formula:

- ✓ Divine truth always points toward Godly love
- ✓ Godly love always points toward divine truth

Truth is not in competition with love and true, biblical, Godly love is not the enemy of divine truth. In reality, divine truth and Godly love are two sides of the very same coin. If you genuinely know and understand divine truth (because you have spent time studying it) then you will love, and if you love (in the manner that the Bible teaches- not in the way the lost world teaches) then it is only because you know and understand divine truth.

The apostle John taught two things about the Father and the Spirit:

- A. God the Father is love (**1John 4:16**)
- B. God the Spirit is truth (**John 16:13**)

That doesn't mean that the Father doesn't care for or possess truth nor does it mean that the Spirit doesn't have any love. What it *does* mean is that what brings these two concepts together in a way that we can understand is the life and ministry and words of the Lord Jesus Christ- who perfectly loved God and man and who perfectly taught the truth while perfectly rejecting and exposing lies.

It is patently false to suggest that if we do pursue the study of Christian truth, we absolutely cannot be loving- therefore the best way to be loving is to avoid truth. Think of the implications of that! Such a conclusion means that the best way to be loving is to avoid- as much as we possibly can- an understanding of the things of God.

The study of divine truth is simply the study of the nature and character of God whose crowning virtue is love. Sound doctrine actually teaches the central importance of love and inclines us to love the God of the Scriptures and other people as well.

Many in the modern church say things like, “*I don't care about this controversy or about doctrine in general, I just think we need to be more loving toward one another.*” But is it really a manifestation of godly love to allow serious theological error to continue unchallenged and deceive people? How is that being loving? Was Paul unloving when he disputed daily in the marketplace about the things of God (**The Acts 17:17**)? Was Jesus unloving when He

contradicted the teaching of the Pharisees? Were the prophets of ancient Israel unloving when they rebuked and admonished the false prophets? Was Elijah unloving when he disputed with the prophets of Baal (**1Kings 18**)? If we are not supposed to study the Bible and understand what it says, why did God go to such great lengths to give it to us? To use it for a paper weight?

I cannot imagine someone in the crowd on Mount Carmel that day saying: *“You people can follow Elijah if you want to, but I’m not going to. He may have truth on his side, but he is not very loving. Look what he did to these prophets of Baal. How unloving!”*

Contending for the truth of God is an act of love- not a sign of an absence of love. If we love God, if we love Jesus Christ, if we love the Church- then we must also love the truth that defines the very essence of Christianity.

The influence of existentialism in the culture in general and in the Church in particular has produced something that was unknown in previous generations:

### *Relational Theology*

Simply put, relational theology is a theological system that has content and meaning determined by relationships. It is only a half-step removed from pure relativism. This is the kind of theology that says if you believe that God is one and I believe that God is three in one- that what really matters is our personal relationship- not who God is. So, in this system, truth is determined by the relationships, not by the Scripture.

For example, if I say that Jesus died on the Cross as an atonement and someone else says His death was not an atonement, in relational theology we dare not even discuss the issue lest we sever our relationship. The relationship must be preserved at all cost, even if divine truth is lost.

Relationship Theology is not a work of God the Holy Spirit, it is not a sign that we have evolved into a far more tolerant culture, and it is not a by-product of us learning from the mistakes of the past. Relationship Theology is a full attack against the authority of God the Holy Spirit and what He produced on the earth (divine truth). It is an unmitigated disaster, it is a curse on the people of God, it is a manifestation of extreme cowardice, and it is an example of an absence of love for the truth.

Relationship Theology that values human relationships above divine truth always and in all cases belittles or outright denies that the objective, propositional, absolute truth of Scripture even exists much less is something to aspire toward and it will, in every case, end up with people being deceived by ancient heresies and false teaching.

## **The Goal of Knowing God**

### **Jeremiah 9:23&24**

**23 Thus says the LORD , "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches;**

**24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD .**

Emil Brunner, the twentieth-century Swiss theologian and one of the “fathers” of neoorthodox theology, wrote a little book titled *Truth as Encounter*. His thesis was that when we study the things of God, we are not studying truth in the abstract. We who are genuinely saved

desire to understand theology not merely so that we can make an “A” on a theology exam. We want to understand the doctrine of God so that we can understand God so that we can meet the living God in His word and deepen our personal relationship with Him.

But we cannot deepen a relationship with someone if we do not know anything about Him. So, the propositions of Scripture are not an end in themselves but rather a “means” to an end. **The end is to know and to love God.** But these propositions are an absolute necessity to that end. So, for anyone to say that Christianity is not about propositions but about relationships is to establish an extremely dangerous and false dichotomy. It is to insult the Spirit of truth from whom those divine propositions came. The biblical propositions (what the Bible teaches) should be our very meat and drink, for they define the Christian life.

It is so sad to hear people say that studying Biblical Truth removes people from “real life” where people are “hurting” and allows them to only deal with life in the abstract. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is virtually impossible to experience pain in this life and not ask questions about truth. We all want to know the truth about suffering for example and where is God in our pain. That is not abstract, it is very real, but it is purely a theological concern.

The answer to this and a thousand other “real life issues” comes to us from the Scriptures, and from the Scriptures alone. And the Scriptures reveal the mind of God Himself through the agency of the Holy Spirit- who is called the Spirit of Truth. So, we must understand that we cannot love God at all if we do not love His truth.

It is sad that in today’s sophisticated Western culture, people are more familiar with the twelve signs of the Zodiac than with the twelve tribes of Israel or the twelve Apostles. Our world likes to see itself as very sophisticated and technologically advanced, but it remains filled with superstition and lore and wives’ tales and fiction.

And genuine believers are not immune to this. We too can succumb to the new-age desire for the power to manipulate our environment. We do not have to go very far to accept the foolish idea that the courses of the stars determine our destinies, our prosperity, our achievements, and our successes.

But what is equally dangerous and even blasphemous is when supposedly born-again believers employ superstitions and wives’ tales and fiction and lore to equate our fallen human “feelings” and inclinations and urges with the leading of the Holy Spirit. It just seems so much more exciting to live with a “freewheeling openness” than to have to discipline ourselves to biblical holiness and actually “walk in the Spirit” and practice the difficult discipline of mastering His Word.

So, this is exceedingly dangerous ground. But thanks be to God that we are not alone. God the Holy Spirit walks in us and empowers and enables us to not only love the truth but to understand it and to obey it. And so, if we want to do the will of the Father here on the earth, we need to study the Word of the Father, by and through the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, and leave the magic to the astrologers and soothsayers.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.