

**YOU THINK YOU
KNOW
JESUS**

**But What If
You're Wrong?**

*The Terrible Danger of Knowing
About Christ Without Knowing Him*

YOU THINK YOU KNOW JESUS

**But What If
You're Wrong?**

JOSEPH M. JACOWITZ

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P R E F A C E

This booklet grew out of a message I preached at Christ Bible Church on Sunday, October 18, 2026. The sermon gave voice to a burden I have carried for many years: the precious souls within our churches who are lost and do not know it, and those who belong to Christ but struggle to believe that they are His. Both need faithful care. Neither should be left alone with assumptions or fears that no one helps them bring before God's Word.

I am deeply concerned about people who have been brought into the church without entering the kingdom of God. Some have heard a false gospel. Others have received a message so weakened or cut short that they have scarcely understood their sin, their need of the new birth, or what Christ accomplished to save sinners. Unbiblical methods of evangelism can deepen the confusion by treating a visible response as proof of an inward work that only God can do.

A person remembers making a decision or repeating a prayer and is told that the matter is settled. Another rests in baptism, church membership, biblical knowledge, Christian service, or a godly family background. Prayer, baptism, and service have their rightful place in the Christian life. The danger comes when people are taught to rest their souls upon these things instead of Christ. They may spend years protecting a confidence that nobody should have encouraged them to place there.

We dare not neglect them because they already sit among us. A familiar face in the congregation is still a person who must meet God. As pastors and fellow Christians, we must

reach out with the true gospel, listen carefully, answer honestly, and remain willing to help when the questions become painful. We cannot assume that people will find their way simply because they know where to find a church.

The gospel we must bring them announces a Savior who died for sinners and rose again. Acceptance with God rests upon His sacrifice and righteousness, received through faith, never upon the merit of our religious record. We must call people to repentance and faith in Christ, taking care that even their response does not become a substitute for trusting Him.

And we must deal tenderly with the struggling believer. Doubt is not proof of spiritual death, any more than confidence is proof of spiritual life. The Christian who grieves over sin needs help to confess it and look again to the Savior. In John 6:37, Jesus promises, "the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." His welcome must be heard alongside His warnings.

This is the concern behind these pages. I do not want you left with a false peace, or left alone in needless fear. Please read with your own soul in view. Let God's Word uncover what needs correcting, and let it lead you to Christ while you have this opportunity to hear Him.

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INTRODUCTION

What If You're Wrong?

Imagine spending your life telling people you know Jesus, only to stand before Him and hear Him say, “I never knew you.”

That is the possibility Jesus sets before us in Matthew 7:21–23. The people He describes appeal to what they have done in His name. They expect His welcome. Yet His answer reveals that they have misunderstood the most important thing about themselves. They believed they belonged to Him.

How does someone become so certain, and yet be so wrong?

This problem reaches far beyond a few conspicuous hypocrites, and I cannot speak of it as though the danger belonged only to some distant congregation. In its 2025 findings, Barna reported that only 54 percent of American Christians strongly agreed that faith was central to their lives.¹ That same year, Ligonier and Lifeway Research found that 47 percent of American evangelical respondents believed God

¹ Barna Group, “Faith’s Shrinking Influence: What 25 Years of Data Reveals,” December 10, 2025. The 54% figure concerns self-identified Christian U.S. adults. <https://www.barna.com/trends/faiths-shrinking-influence/>

accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.²

What troubles me is that this confusion concerns the very faith people profess and the Savior they claim to know. We are dealing with souls who must stand before God, not merely answers to a questionnaire. And I want that concern to reach nearer than your opinion of the church. Does your confidence rest in Christ, or in the fact that everyone around you assumes it does?

Think of the church member who can defend a doctrine but will not receive its correction. He knows the passage well enough to explain it to someone else, yet when it reaches his own conduct, the excuses begin. My friend, have you received the truth, or have you learned to handle it without letting it handle you? I plead with you: do not mistake your ability to explain God's Word for submission to the God who speaks.

Or consider the parent whose children hear Christian words on Sunday and endure cruelty at home throughout the week. Those children know the difference between the person the church admires and the person they fear. God knows it too. He hears the words spoken after the visitors leave. He sees the harm that religious respectability conceals. How can we claim to fear Him while making peace with conduct He condemns?

The damage spreads through families and congregations: trust is broken, sin is excused, and people learn to feel spiritually safe without bringing their lives under Christ's authority. I fear for the person who has lived with that contradiction so long that it no longer troubles him. Paul describes people whose works "deny Him," despite their profession of knowing

2 Chris Larson, "The Results from Our 2025 State of Theology Survey Are In," Ligonier Ministries, September 18, 2025. The 47% figure concerns U.S. respondents classified as evangelical by four strongly held beliefs. <https://www.ligonier.org/posts/the-results-from-our-2025-state-of-theology-survey-are-in>

God (Titus 1:16). Please do not hurry past those words. What does your life say when your lips have finished speaking?

Christ's verdict upon Sardis was "you are dead" (Revelation 3:1). Its reputation could not conceal its condition from Him. A congregation can retain its name, its activities, and its members' confidence while failing to recognize its spiritual ruin. I cannot help you find comfort in a reputation that Christ Himself may overturn.

I must bring you to His Word: "Examine yourselves" (2 Corinthians 13:5). Have you been resting in what people believe about you rather than in the Savior you profess?

"Awake, you who sleep" is the summons we need to hear (Ephesians 5:14). I am pleading for something deeper than a renewed interest in church. Jesus said, "You must be born again" (John 3:7). Religious familiarity cannot give you that life. "Do not be deceived" (Galatians 6:7).

The most devastating consequence is a soul approaching eternity certain that all is well, although its assurance has never rested in Christ. Jesus describes people addressing Him as "Lord, Lord," yet His answer includes the terrible words "never knew you" (Matthew 7:21–23). I cannot read that warning and speak to you as though nothing urgent is at stake.

Death will end the time you think you have for considering it. No pastor's reassurance, no record of service, no cherished memory will overturn the judgment of Christ. I would rather have you troubled enough to seek Him now than leave you undisturbed in a confidence that will fail you forever. Please, bring your profession into the light. Face what His Word exposes. Come to the Savior while you are hearing His warning and His mercy is being offered to you.

The explanation reaches deeper than inconsistency. Every believer falls short. Jesus taught that we need to be born again (John 3:3). The Holy Spirit gives spiritual life, bringing us to

repentance and faith in Christ. A congregation can welcome us, teach us, and give us responsibilities. Those privileges, precious as they are, cannot substitute for that inward work of God.

We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, who died for sinners and rose again. Our obedience grows from His saving work; it does not purchase it (Ephesians 2:8–10). That is why two people can share the same religious surroundings while standing in very different relationships to God. One has received life in Christ; the other has learned the outward forms of Christianity without receiving the Savior they proclaim.

We must not mistake every struggle with sin for evidence that someone is unconverted. A genuine Christian may commit individual acts of sin, but *he cannot live in sin permanently*. That is the main difference between the true and false Christian. “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor *is* he who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:9–10). A weak believer needs correction and the comfort of Christ’s faithfulness. But neither must we mistake a convincing profession for proof of spiritual life. The question before us is whether our confidence rests in Christ Himself or in a religious life we have mistaken for knowing Him.

Let us turn now to a crowd in Jerusalem who thought they knew enough about Jesus to dismiss Him. As we listen to their confident words and His searching answer, I ask you to resist the temptation to examine only their mistake. Listen for the assumptions you have made about Him, and let His Word test the confidence you have brought to these pages.

CHAPTER 1

The People Who Thought They Knew

John 7:27: “However, we know where this Man is from”

THEY THOUGHT THEY KNEW ENOUGH

Jesus was speaking openly in the city where men wanted Him killed. Some of Jerusalem’s residents knew about the threat, and they could not reconcile it with what they were seeing. John 7:25 records their question: “Is this not He whom they seek to kill?” Yet there He was, teaching in public, and the rulers were not stopping Him.

Their surprise comes through in John 7:26: “But look! He speaks boldly.” Had something changed? Had the rulers discovered that Jesus really was the Christ? Their silence raised a possibility these people could not easily ignore.

That was a question worth pursuing. If Jesus was the promised Messiah, everything depended on recognizing Him. They were discussing more than a disagreement between a teacher and the authorities. The One God had promised to

send might be standing before them. Surely that possibility deserved more than a hurried conclusion.

But their next words reveal how quickly they could dismiss it. John 7:27: “we know where this Man is from.” They believed the Messiah would appear without anyone knowing His origin. Since they thought they knew where Jesus came from, they concluded that He did not meet their expectation.

Notice where their confidence rests. They have a conviction about what the Messiah’s arrival must look like, and they have information about Jesus’ earthly background. Put those together, and they believe the question is settled. His familiar background becomes their reason for discounting His claim.

I want us to notice that turn carefully. They had asked whether Jesus could be the Christ, but they allowed what they thought they knew to close the question. The confidence of their answer concealed how much they still needed to understand. They were standing within hearing of Jesus, yet treating their own conclusion as though it had already answered Him.

WHEN AN ASSUMPTION BECOMES THE STANDARD

Their expectation was not the only one being voiced. Later, in John 7:40–43, some identified Jesus as the Prophet or the Christ, while others objected that the Messiah could not come from Galilee. These objectors appealed to Scripture: the Christ would come from David’s family and Bethlehem. The crowd did not speak with one mind. (John 7:40–43)¹

1 Compare John 7:27 and 7:40–43. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 8, portrays a hidden Messiah awaiting Elijah’s disclosure. This later Christian literary witness does not establish universal first-century belief. Pink offers a different reading in *Exposition of John*, ch. 26. The discussion here rests on John’s immediate context. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/01281.htm>

Notice the difference. The earlier speakers expected an unknown origin; these later speakers pointed to a birthplace Scripture had named. Their appeal to Scripture deserved to be taken seriously. But Matthew 2:1 tells us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. His association with Galilee did not disqualify Him. They knew the prophecy, but they did not know enough about Jesus to declare that He had failed to fulfill it. (Matthew 2:1)

That is a sobering possibility: we can quote Scripture accurately and still use it to defend a false conclusion. The error may lie in what we have assumed about Christ.

To the earlier speakers, Jesus gave an answer that reached beneath their discussion of earthly origins. He had not come on His own initiative. He came from the Father, who had sent Him. John 7:29: "But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me." Their familiarity with His earthly background had not brought them to recognize His divine mission. Worse, Jesus said of the One who sent Him, "whom you do not know" (John 7:28). Their confidence concealed ignorance at the very point where knowing mattered most. (John 7:28–29)

A little knowledge can make a person teachable. It can also persuade him that there is nothing important left to learn. These people were weighing the Savior while leaving their own assumptions unexamined. We must not read their words without examining ours. When Scripture challenges your understanding of Christ, will you let Him correct you? Or must He fit the conclusion you have already decided to defend? Isaiah 8:20: "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

WHEN KNOWLEDGE BECOMES AN EXCUSE

That danger reaches much closer to home than we may want to admit. You may have heard the gospel since childhood. You may know why Christ had to die, what justification

means, and why good works cannot earn salvation. Those are precious truths. But familiarity can make us impatient with the very teaching we need. We hear the subject announced and decide we have nothing further to receive.

James 1:22: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

2 Corinthians 13:5: “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.”

No one in the church is above the critical duty of self-examination. Even those most gifted and knowledgeable in the Scriptures can lose sight of our goal. This was Christ’s warning to those most learned in the Scriptures in His day:

John 5:39–40: “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.”

Notice whom James warns. A person can hear God’s Word, understand its meaning, and deceive himself about his response to it. Agreement can leave him satisfied before obedience has even begun.

Imagine a man listening to a sermon about forgiveness. Before the preacher has finished, he can name the relevant passages. He understands that Christians must put away bitterness and forgive in response to God’s mercy. Ephesians 4:32 gives the reason: “even as God in Christ forgave you.” Forgiveness grows out of grace already received; it does not purchase that grace.

Then the sermon reaches the resentment he has nourished for years. He begins explaining why his case is different. The wrong was serious. The offender remains unrepentant. No one else understands what happened. Those facts may be true. But he uses them to defend something further: his determination to keep rehearsing the offense, wishing the offender harm, and feeding his bitterness.

I want you to notice where the evasion occurs. He has moved from acknowledging another person's sin to excusing his own. He need not call the injury harmless to confess that his cherished resentment is wrong. Yet the doctrine he explains so readily never reaches that confession.

He leaves the sermon pleased that forgiveness was taught correctly, while the grudge he brought with him remains undisturbed. He can discuss forgiveness more comfortably than he can forgive. A. W. Pink warns, "Where there is not an increasing conformity of heart and life to God's Word, then increased knowledge will only bring increased condemnation."²

BRING CHRIST WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN PROTECTING

Perhaps your evasion takes another form. A private habit remains hidden because you are ashamed to name it. An apology is postponed because admitting the wrong would cost you someone's good opinion. You tell yourself that you are waiting for the right time, yet the delay keeps sparing you the same humiliation. Eventually, protecting your reputation can seem more urgent than dealing with the sin beneath it. You want to remain known as a godly person without letting anyone discover where you need help becoming one.

My friend, I plead with you to let the desire for God's forgiveness become greater than your desire to be thought innocent. Concealment leaves the sin at work within you, even while people continue to admire you. Come to Christ with what you have been protecting, willing to confess and

2 A. W. Pink, *Profiting from the Word*, ch. 6, "The Scriptures and Obedience," introductory discussion before numbered point 1. <https://www.sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-pink/the-scriptures-and-obedience/>

forsake it. Hear both the warning against hiding and the mercy God holds before the repentant:

Proverbs 28:13: “He who covers his sins will not prosper.” The verse goes on to promise mercy to those who confess and forsake their sins.

Galatians 6:7: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked.” We cannot evade the consequences of what we sow by maintaining a respectable appearance.

1 John 1:8–9 warns that when we deny our sin, “we deceive ourselves.” But when we confess, God is faithful and just “to forgive us our sins” and to cleanse us from every kind of unrighteousness.

Please do not answer this by counting your years in church. Years of hearing the truth can become years of learning how to dodge it. Nor should a struggling believer mistake every failure for proof that he has never known Christ. There is a profound difference between grieving over sin and arranging your life so that no one may challenge it.

Charles Spurgeon put the needed distinction plainly: “It is good to know, but knowledge must be crowned with faith.”³ The truths you have learned tell you whom to trust. They declare His authority, His mercy, and His power to save. Receive them as reasons to entrust yourself to Him, including where obedience will cost you the good opinion you have worked to preserve.

The gospel proclaimed in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 directs you to Christ, who died for our sins and rose again. Bring Him the sin your explanations have been protecting. You cannot conceal anything from Him, and you need not make yourself worthy before seeking His mercy. John 6:37 gives

3 Charles H. Spurgeon, “Knowing and Believing,” sermon 3331, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 58, section II. Preached September 30, 1866; published December 5, 1912. <https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/knowning-and-believing>

His promise: “the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” The crucified and risen Savior receives sinners. Come to Him for forgiveness and for grace to forsake what you have defended.

Then let repentance reach the particulars. Name your sin before God without making someone else responsible for it. Make the apology you owe. If secrecy has helped a habit survive, seek wise help from a faithful pastor rather than preserving the conditions in which you keep returning to it. Ephesians 2:8–10 places salvation wholly in God’s grace and obedience within the life His grace creates. These steps cannot purchase pardon; Christ has already provided all that is needed to save those who trust Him. You may lose someone’s flattering impression of you by telling the truth. Come to the Savior who already knows the whole truth about you and still calls you to Himself.

AXIOMS

1. Our assumptions about Jesus must submit to what He reveals (John 7:27–29).
2. Knowing Scripture must lead us to Christ (John 5:39–40).
3. Hearing without obeying feeds self-deception (James 1:22).
4. God offers mercy to those who confess and forsake their sin (Proverbs 28:13).

JUSTIFICATION AND HOLINESS

God declares us righteous through faith in Christ, not because we have become holy (Romans 5:1). Yet everyone He justifies He also makes holy:

1. Christ gives us righteousness and holiness (1 Corinthians 1:30).

2. The justified are also washed and sanctified (1 Corinthians 6:11).
3. Union with Christ brings new life (Romans 6:4).
4. God gives His people an obedient heart (Ezekiel 36:26–27).
5. Saving grace teaches us to reject sin (Titus 2:11–12).
6. Christ died to purify His people (Titus 2:14).
7. His Spirit helps us put sin to death (Romans 8:9–13).
8. Good works grow from salvation; they never buy it (Ephesians 2:8–10).

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

God keeps everyone He has truly saved and will bring them safely to heaven. His promise belongs to those born again, not everyone who merely calls himself a Christian (John 10:27–29; 1 Peter 1:3–5). They continue trusting Christ because God sustains their faith, not because their endurance earns salvation (Philippians 1:6; Ephesians 2:8–9).

True believers still sin and may fall badly, as Peter did. But Christ brings them back to repentance; He will not let them abandon Him forever and be lost (Luke 22:31–32, 61–62; John 6:39–40). Continuing faith is evidence that they belong to Him (Hebrews 3:14). His promise gives struggling believers hope, never permission to continue in sin (Romans 6:1–2).

CHAPTER 2

Religion Without Spiritual Life

Matthew 23:25–28: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. 26 Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

27 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. 28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

YOU CAN BELONG TO A CHURCH WITHOUT BELONGING TO CHRIST

People at church can depend on you even if you have never come to Christ. You know the hymns. You can explain the gospel. When there is work to be done, the church knows whom to call. It becomes difficult to imagine that someone so useful could still need to be saved.

But usefulness cannot give you spiritual life. Nicodemus was a religious leader, yet Jesus told him, “You must be born

again” (John 3:7). He needed life from the Holy Spirit, not another religious achievement. We need that same inward work of God. Learning how Christians speak and behave cannot produce it (John 3:1–8).

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

Two people can sit through the same sermon and sincerely say they believe it, while only one has trusted Christ. The other may be resting in the fact that he has always attended church. We cannot read either heart as God does. But we can refuse to treat our own church membership as an answer to Christ’s words.

Consider how quietly that mistake can work. You spread an unkind story about someone, and your conscience troubles you. Instead of admitting the wrong, you remember the hours you have given to the church. Surely someone who does so much for the Lord cannot be in serious spiritual danger. Your service has become your excuse for leaving a sin untouched.

That should grieve us. The tongue we use to praise God has wounded someone made in His image (James 3:9–10). Yet we have answered His correction by pointing to our good works. Are we seeking His forgiveness, or merely trying to silence the warning?

A believer can fall into that sin and repent. A fall into sin does not, by itself, prove that you have never known Christ. Jesus speaks for His people before the Father when they sin (1 John 2:1). But neither a long record of service nor a Christian reputation can take His place. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ, not by our works. Genuine obedience grows from the life He gives (Ephesians 2:8–10).

My friend, do not hide your need behind your usefulness. Confess the sin you have been defending. You do not need to

make yourself more impressive before coming to Jesus. You need His forgiveness and His power to change you. He will not turn away the sinner who comes to Him (John 6:37).

BRINGING PEOPLE TO CHRIST

We should rejoice when someone begins attending church. He is coming where he can hear God's Word and receive the care of God's people. But our concern for him must reach beyond making him feel welcome. We want him to know the Savior, receive His forgiveness, and learn to follow Him.

Paul describes the heart of his ministry in Colossians 1:28: "Him we preach." His work included warning and teaching, with the aim of bringing people to maturity in Christ. Faithful ministry therefore includes encouragement and correction. People need to hear Christ's warning against sin as well as His promise of mercy.

We pastors, together with our churches, must keep showing people the difference between outward religion and life in Christ. We dare not make church a comfortable place to hide from God. He promises to "judge between sheep and sheep," confronting those who trample the weak (Ezekiel 34:17–22). Being among His people did not excuse their cruelty. Nor does our standing in a church excuse the anger we unleash at home.

God charged His priests to distinguish "the holy and the unholy" (Ezekiel 44:23), and required Jeremiah to distinguish "the precious from the vile" if he was to speak for Him (Jeremiah 15:19). We must submit to His truth ourselves before pressing it upon others.

Our ministry must likewise challenge the excuses that let people remain comfortable in their sins. If we reassure people merely because they belong to our church, we may strengthen the very deception that keeps them from seeking Christ. We

must patiently bring their false assurance into the light, not to humiliate them, but because we long to see them saved.

My friend, stop using your place among Christians to avoid facing your need of Christ. Turn from the sin you have defended and trust the Savior who died and rose again. His Spirit can give you the life that religious respectability cannot.

This is gospel work within the visible church: seeking the salvation of people who sit among Christ's people but have never trusted Him. The shepherd labors to bring them from an empty Christian profession to living faith in the Savior. When this work is neglected, churches can fill with people who mistake the congregation's acceptance for God's acceptance.

God promised "shepherds according to My heart" (Jeremiah 3:15), who would feed His people with knowledge and understanding. His watchman was to warn the wicked "to save his life" (Ezekiel 3:17–18). Those who "watch out for your souls" (Hebrews 13:17) must therefore speak when silence would leave someone deceived. Paul's readiness to "warn everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31) shows the love that should move us. We must obey the charge to "Convince, rebuke, exhort" (2 Timothy 4:2), patiently teaching the truth even when it is unwelcome.

We must teach people Scripture's tests for self-examination: repentance instead of excuses, trust in Christ instead of religious reputation, and genuine obedience that is growing, though still imperfect (2 Corinthians 13:5). Paul likewise tells believers at the Lord's Table to judge themselves rather than invite the Lord's discipline (1 Corinthians 11:31–32). John's command to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1) requires us to examine religious teaching, including messages that offer assurance while excusing disobedience.

Peter tells believers to "be even more diligent to make your call and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10), urging them to

grow in the faith, self-control, and love that God's grace produces. Such growth confirms His work; it does not earn His election.

Where the Word exposes an empty profession, we must keep pleading with that person to repent and trust Christ. The Holy Spirit gives life through the gospel we preach. We long to see the person we have warned become a brother or sister in Christ, forgiven and able to rejoice in a salvation that is real.

SCRIPTURE SUPPORT

1. Ezekiel 3:17–18: “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand.”
2. Jeremiah 3:15: “shepherds according to My heart”
3. Jeremiah 15:19: “the precious from the vile”
4. Ezekiel 44:23: “And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.”
5. Ezekiel 34:17: “judge between sheep and sheep”
6. Hebrews 13:17: “watch out for your souls”
7. Acts 20:31: “warn everyone night and day with tears”
8. 2 Timothy 4:2: “Convince, rebuke, exhort”
9. 1 John 4:1: “test the spirits”
10. Matthew 7:16: “know them by their fruits”
11. Galatians 6:1: “restore such a one”; “a spirit of gentleness”

We can fail here by caring more about being liked than speaking the truth. We may hear a friend excuse dishonesty, yet say nothing because he has only recently begun coming to church. “I don’t want to drive him away,” we tell ourselves. Patience matters, and correction should be gentle. But if we have decided never to speak, we are using patience to hide our fear. We are protecting his good opinion of us while leaving him to defend the sin that harms him.

Christ gave Himself to save sinners, yet we can withhold the truth to protect our own comfort. Bring that selfish fear to Him. The Savior who died and rose again can forgive you and give you courage to speak (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Then approach your friend gently, as someone who needs Christ’s mercy too.

This responsibility should humble pastors and congregations of every size. A full room does not prove that everyone in it belongs to Christ. A small congregation does not prove greater faithfulness. The Lord requires His servants to be faithful to Him and His Word (1 Corinthians 4:1–2). We must teach, pray, and care for people, depending upon the Holy Spirit to give life. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 3:6: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.”

So welcome people warmly, and keep pointing them to Jesus. Where sin needs to be confronted, do not withhold the warning or the hope. Tell them why they need Him and what He has done to save them. Our love must reach beyond wanting them beside us in church to wanting them reconciled to God through Christ.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER YOU CONFESS?

Perhaps you have fallen into the same sin again, and now you fear that you have never known Christ. John writes to Christians who need both correction and comfort. In 1 John 2:1, he tells them not to sin, then assures them that “we have

an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” He directs the fallen believer back to Christ. A grievous failure does not mean that the Savior has abandoned His own. Addressing a fallen believer, Charles Spurgeon said, “The Lord loves you still, and if he ever loved you, all your sin cannot wean his heart from you.”¹

But confession itself can become another religious habit. Suppose you have lied to avoid blame. You tell God you are sorry, yet refuse to correct the lie because someone would discover what you did. You want relief from guilt while keeping the protection the lie gave you. The person you deceived still believes something false. You have wronged that person and disobeyed the God whose forgiveness you seek. Ephesians 4:25 begins with “putting away lying” and tells each person to “speak truth with his neighbor.” Paul grounds that command in our belonging to one another in Christ. Ask Christ for mercy and courage, then tell the truth to the person you misled.

In 2 Corinthians 7:1, Paul calls believers to respond to God’s promises by rejecting every impurity of body and heart, “perfecting holiness” as they fear Him. God’s promise to receive His people as His children gives them reason to pursue purity (2 Corinthians 6:16–18). Paul then asks the Corinthians to welcome him and his fellow workers, reminding them that their ministry had not harmed, corrupted, or cheated anyone (2 Corinthians 7:2). The men bringing correction had cared for them honestly.

In 2 Corinthians 7:9–11, Paul rejoices because the Corinthians’ grief had brought them to repentance. His correction had helped rather than harmed them. He explains

1 C. H. Spurgeon, “The Sinner’s Advocate,” sermon no. 515, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 9, preached June 21, 1863, section IV. <https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/the-sinners-advocate>

that “godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation,” whereas the “sorrow of the world produces death.” Their grief had stirred them to take the wrong seriously and to clear themselves of wrongdoing. They showed indignation over the sin, fear of God, an earnest desire to put matters right, zeal, and a readiness to see justice done. Their response showed that they had dealt faithfully with the matter. Thomas Watson put the evidence plainly: “Turning from sin is so visible that others may discern it.”² We must therefore ask more than whether our sin makes us feel bad. Are we receiving correction? Are we taking the steps obedience requires, even when they cost us something? A believer may struggle painfully and fall again. He needs patient help, not a demand for instant perfection. But if you refuse every call to change, do not use your distress as proof that all is well with your soul.

My friend, bring this whole need to Christ. His blood cleanses sinners, and His Spirit enables His people to put sin to death (1 John 1:7; Romans 8:13). You cannot earn His forgiveness by the depth of your sorrow or the strength of your resolve. Trust the Savior who died for sinners, and ask Him to change what you have been unwilling to surrender. Then act on the truth He has shown you. Tell the truth, receive correction, and seek help where you are weak. You need more than relief from a guilty conscience. You need Christ, who forgives His people and teaches them to obey. Richard Sibbes distinguished our unfinished growth in holiness from God’s settled verdict of forgiveness: “Failings, with

2 Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (1668), chap. 4, “The Nature of True Repentance (2),” “Ingredient 6: Turning from Sin.” Full-text transcription, *The Highway*. https://www.the-highway.com/repentance_Watson.html

conflict, in sanctification should not weaken the peace of our justification, and assurance of salvation.”³

Believer, when you repent, you can rest in the forgiveness Christ has secured for you. Hebrews 9:14 speaks of His blood’s power to “cleanse your conscience from dead works.” Romans 8:16 assures us, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit” that we are God’s children. Through that assurance, the Holy Spirit lifts the burden of guilt and renews our faith in the Father’s love. You can stop hiding and draw near to God again. To the church He called to repentance, Jesus promised in Revelation 3:20, “I will come in to him and dine with him.” He offers restored fellowship. Let His promise settle your heart: the sin you have confessed is forgiven, and your Savior welcomes you.

AXIOMS

1. A respected place in church is no substitute for life in Christ (John 3:1–8).
2. The Holy Spirit gives the new life that religious effort cannot produce (John 6:63).
3. Faithful ministry calls people inside the church to examine their faith by Scripture and trust Christ (Colossians 1:28; 2 Corinthians 13:5).
4. True repentance leads us to turn from sin, not merely feel bad about it (2 Corinthians 7:9–11).
5. Christ speaks for His people when they sin and calls them back to obedience (1 John 2:1).

3 Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax* (Edinburgh: Maclaren & Macniven, 1878), chap. 22, “Christ’s government is victorious,” 131. <https://www.digitalpuritan.net/Digital%20Puritan%20Resources/Sibbes,%20Richard/%5BRS%5D%20The%20Bruised%20Reed.pdf>

6. Christ's blood cleanses our conscience so that we may serve God (Hebrews 9:14).
7. Christ calls His people to repent and welcomes them into fellowship with Him (Revelation 3:19–20).

REGENERATION: NEW LIFE OR ITS COUNTERFEIT?

Regeneration is the new birth: by His sovereign grace, God gives spiritual life through the Holy Spirit to sinners who are dead in sin. Faith, repentance, and obedience are fruits of this gift, not works that earn it (John 3:3–8; Ephesians 2:1–10).

1. God gives a new heart; counterfeit religion cleans up the appearance while leaving the heart unchanged (Ezekiel 36:26–27; Matthew 23:27–28).
2. Living faith rests in Christ for acceptance with God; counterfeit faith rests in religious credentials and personal goodness (Philippians 3:4–9).
3. The renewed heart learns to welcome God's light, even when it exposes sin; counterfeit religion avoids the truth that threatens its comfort (John 3:19–21).
4. Genuine repentance turns from sin toward God; counterfeit repentance may regret the consequences without forsaking the sin (2 Corinthians 7:10–11).
5. New life produces a desire to obey Christ; counterfeit profession calls Him Lord while refusing His authority (Luke 6:46; 1 John 2:3–4).
6. Spiritual life expresses love through care for fellow believers; counterfeit religion speaks warmly while closing its heart to their needs (1 John 3:14–18).

7. The renewed heart seeks God when no one is watching; counterfeit religion performs its devotion to be noticed (Matthew 6:5–6).
8. The Spirit produces Christlike character; counterfeit religion points to impressive gifts and activities as proof of God's approval (Galatians 5:22–23; Matthew 7:22–23).
9. New life brings an ongoing battle against sin, not immediate perfection; counterfeit religion denies or excuses the sin it ought to confess (Galatians 5:17; 1 John 1:8–9).
10. Christ keeps His people trusting and following Him; counterfeit profession can begin with excitement and collapse when faithfulness becomes costly (John 10:27–29; Matthew 13:20–21).

THE PASTOR'S WORK OF SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

Some people who belong to a church have never come to Christ. A faithful pastor must distinguish living faith from an empty profession so that deceived people are warned, weak believers are strengthened, and sinners are brought to the Savior.

1. Preach the gospel inside the church. Do not let someone mistake church membership for salvation; keep calling him to the crucified and risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1–4; John 3:3).
2. Let Scripture, not appearances, set the tests. Religious language, impressive gifts, and useful service can hide a life that refuses Christ's rule (Matthew 7:21–23).
3. Look for faith that continues with Christ. A profession that rejects the Son revealed in Scripture cannot be treated as genuine Christianity (1 John 2:19–24).

4. Look for repentance and obedience, not sinless perfection. A believer still sins, but he must not defend the disobedience Christ commands him to forsake (1 John 1:8–2:6).
5. Ask whether love becomes practical. Withholding help from a needy brother when able to give it contradicts a profession of Christian love (1 John 3:14–18).
6. Teach people how to examine themselves. Help them test their faith against God's Word, including the dishonesty they excuse as necessary (2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 John 1:8–9).
7. Warn with courage and grief. Speak personally and gently, seeking repentance rather than the satisfaction of proving someone false (Acts 20:31; 2 Timothy 2:24–26).
8. Treat weakness differently from defiance. Comfort the discouraged and support the weak while warning those who refuse correction; be patient with each (1 Thessalonians 5:14).
9. Protect the flock from false teachers. Test their teaching by Scripture, even when they are popular or have arisen within the congregation (Acts 20:28–31; Titus 1:9).
10. Follow Christ's steps of discipline. The church must address stubbornly unrepentant conduct to seek restoration, without pretending to possess God's perfect knowledge of hearts (Matthew 18:15–17; 1 Corinthians 4:5).
11. Depend on the Spirit to give life. Pressure and stricter behavior cannot produce a new heart; salvation is God's merciful work through Jesus Christ (Titus 3:5–7).
12. Watch your own life and teaching. A pastor who calls others to repentance must not excuse the sins he refuses to face himself (1 Timothy 4:16; 1 Peter 5:2–3).

CHAPTER 3

When Confidence Is Wrong

*2 Corinthians 13:5: “Examine yourselves
as to whether you are in the faith.”*

My friend, I plead with you: do not read this warning with everyone’s soul in view except your own. You can agree with every word and still refuse to consider whether you need to repent. False assurance is deadly because it persuades you to stop listening where your life most needs to be searched. A. W. Pink wrote, “It is not that those empty professors who call themselves Christians are all (though many probably are) conscious hypocrites, rather are they deceived souls.”¹ Sincerity cannot make a fatal mistake safe. James 1:22 calls us to be “doers of the word,” rather than merely listening to the truth. Proverbs 14:12 warns against trusting a path simply because it seems right to us. Let that warning reach you before you send it on to someone else.

Often that confidence rests on a memory. You walked an aisle, prayed with a counselor, wept during a sermon, or publicly professed faith. Those memories may belong to a

1 A. W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Justification*, chap. 9, “Its Evidence.” <https://ccel.org/ccel/pink/just/just.ch9.html>

genuine conversion. But please do not hide behind the day you professed faith when Christ is confronting the way you live. If every warning sends you back to an old experience instead of bringing you before Him, something is terribly wrong. A memory cannot pardon sin. In John 6:63, Jesus says, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.” Paul abandoned confidence in his religious record to gain Christ, and Hebrews describes those who share in Christ as continuing to trust Him (Philippians 3:7–9; Hebrews 3:14). Bring your present life to the Savior you say you met then.

That refusal to listen can deepen through years of church attendance. Imagine a man hearing a sermon about bitterness. He thinks of someone who needs it, praises the preacher on the way home, then rehearses the same old grievance against his brother. His agreement with the sermon has become his way of escaping it. Each week he grows more practiced at leaving church unchanged. Martyn Lloyd-Jones warned, “If your assurance doesn't promote your sanctification it is a false assurance and it is probably of the devil.”² By sanctification he meant our growth in holiness. God warns that sin hardens us (Hebrews 3:12–13). Paul describes hearers who choose pleasing teachers in 2 Timothy 4:3–4: “they will turn their ears away from the truth.” Do not spend your life learning how to resist the Word that calls you to Christ.

Jesus brings us to the terrible end of such confidence in Matthew 7:21–23. People address Him as Lord and point to extraordinary works done in His name. His answer is, “I never knew you; depart from Me.” Please pause before those words. No years of service, no praise from others, no certainty of their own can make Him withdraw that verdict.

2 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “Assurance and Sanctification,” sermon no. 1053, John 1:16, April 12, 1964, MLJ Trust recording, 12:55–13:13. <https://www.mljtrust.org/sermon/assurance-and-sanctification/> Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QcYvpwFz7vg>

They claimed His authority while living in rebellion against Him. Spurgeon observed, “And note, once more, that they clung to their false hopes right to the end. They did not really know of the deception themselves.”³ Jesus asks why people call Him Lord while refusing to obey Him (Luke 6:46). Hear that question now. It is mercy to be confronted before the day when His verdict is final.

I believe the problem of false profession is widespread, and that the majority of those who profess Christ in our day do not truly know Him. That is my pastoral conviction, and I say it with grief. Think what it means for a person to live among Christians, hear the gospel for years, and still enter eternity without Christ. I cannot treat that possibility lightly, and I beg you not to treat it as someone else’s problem. Christ warns about the crowded road to destruction (Matthew 7:13–14). In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul commands, “Examine yourselves,” to determine whether our professed faith is real. For a moment, stop examining the careless church and the mistaken friend. What are you trusting to carry you through judgment?

The church in Laodicea shows how comfortable blindness can become. Its members were wealthy and believed they needed nothing. Christ exposed their spiritual poverty and directed them to receive from Him what their resources could never provide (Revelation 3:17–19). He explains His rebuke: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.” Perhaps your bills are paid, your friends respect you, and nothing has interrupted the sin you keep excusing. Do not mistake that quiet for peace with God. The early church preacher John Chrysostom warned, “For we ought ever to be afraid while

3 Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Disowned,” sermon no. 2808, preached April 22, 1877, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 48 (1902), section II. <https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/the-disowned>

we sin, but especially when we suffer no ill.”⁴ God’s kindness should lead us to repentance; refusing to repent leaves us facing greater judgment (Romans 2:4–5). His patience has given you time to turn. Please do not use that time to make another excuse.

Sardis had another reassurance: its reputation. Christ said in Revelation 3:1, “you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.” Other people knew the name; Christ knew the condition. A congregation can win praise for activity that He knows is spiritually empty. Perhaps your own conversion is beyond question among your friends. But their confidence cannot answer for you before the God who sees beneath the appearance (1 Samuel 16:7). Better to face the embarrassment of honest examination now than carry an unquestioned reputation to judgment. In Revelation 3:2–3, Christ calls Sardis to wake up, remember what it received, and repent. He is speaking while they can still respond. Will you let concern for your good name keep you from hearing Him?

Now bring that warning into the hidden life. Suppose a man teaches a Bible class while returning to pornography in secret. He admits it is wrong but refuses to remove the access that feeds it or seek help from a mature Christian. When troubled, he remembers the people he has helped. He is using his service to protect his sin. In Matthew 23:28, Jesus exposes people who appear righteous but are “full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” Titus describes people whose deeds deny the God they claim to know; Jesus explains that people avoid the light to keep their evil hidden (Titus 1:16; John 3:19–21). If you recognize yourself here, I beg you to stop defending what is destroying you. Let it grieve you that you are resisting the

⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, Homily XIII, §7, trans. George Prevost, rev. M. B. Riddle, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 10, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888). <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/200113.htm>

Savior you teach others to honor. You need His mercy more than you need to keep your secret.

Do not mistake this appeal for a demand that you buy your salvation. You could never pay that price. We are saved by God's grace through faith in Christ. Ephesians 2:8–10 declares that salvation is “not of works,” and that the life He gives produces good works. Luther wrote that “it is impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible as to separate heat and light from fire.”⁵ A painted flame cannot warm your hands. Living faith, however weak and sorely tried, responds to God. James challenges a claim to faith that never shows itself in action (James 2:17–18). Come to Christ for the life you cannot give yourself. Why settle for reassurance that leaves you captive to the very sin you need Him to break?

Ask Him to search the place you have been defending. What correction have you brushed aside? What excuse comes to your lips when Scripture names the sin? What must you stop, confess, or put right? Please answer before God; do not turn even these questions into something you can read and leave behind. Pray as David did in Psalm 139:23–24, “Search me, O God,” asking Him to expose what is wrong and lead you in His way. Let His light uncover what secrecy has protected (Ephesians 5:11–13). If a trusted believer has tried to warn you, hear that person out. Lay down the defense you have rehearsed so often. The voice you resent may be bringing the help you desperately need.

And you, troubled believer, must hear me with equal care. I do not want these warnings to drive you away from the Savior who sustains you. Peter fell grievously, but Jesus had prayed for his faith, assuring him in Luke 22:31–32, “I have

5 Martin Luther, “Preface to the Epistle to the Romans” (1522), trans. Charles M. Jacobs, in *Prefaces to the Books of the Bible* (Everyone’s Luther, n.d.), 97; reprinted from *Works of Martin Luther*, vol. 6 (A. J. Holman Company and The Castle Press, 1932). <https://wolffmueller.co/martin-luthers-preface-to-romans/>

prayed for you,” and promising that he would return and strengthen his brothers. Christ does not despise the weak person who comes for help; Isaiah describes His tender care for those already bruised (Isaiah 42:3). Take your wounded conscience to Him. You need not turn the depth of your sorrow into proof that you are saved, or treat every painful struggle as proof that you are lost. Rest your whole need upon Christ. He is a better keeper of your soul than you are a judge of your feelings.

Let God’s Word settle where your confidence belongs. George Müller wrote, “As in all spiritual matters, so in this particular also, the Word of God alone is to be our rule and guide.”⁶ His warnings will not let us make peace with sin, and His promises will not let us accuse Christ of refusing sinners who come to Him. John locates eternal life in God’s Son and writes so that believers may know they possess it (1 John 5:11–13). In John 6:37, Jesus promises to receive the person who comes to Him: “I will by no means cast out.” My friend, believe His welcome as earnestly as you heed His warning. Do not defend your sin against His rebuke, and do not defend your despair against His promise.

AXIOMS

1. Sincere confidence can still be false; God’s Word must test it (Proverbs 14:12; James 1:22).
2. A remembered profession cannot replace present trust in Christ (Philippians 3:7–9; Hebrews 3:14).
3. Religious service cannot excuse a life of disobedience (Matthew 7:21–23; Titus 1:16).

⁶ George Müller, “Answer from the Holy Scriptures to the Four Most Important Questions,” in *The Writings and Teachings of George Müller of Bristol* (Müllers.org, n.d.), 40. https://www.georgemuller.org/uploads/4/8/6/5/48652749/the_writings_and_teachings_of_george_muller_of_bristol.pdf#page=40

4. Prosperity and reputation cannot reveal what God sees in the heart (Revelation 3:1, 17; 1 Samuel 16:7).
5. Obedience grows from salvation; it never purchases it (Ephesians 2:8–10; James 2:17–18).
6. Christ's warnings call us out of deception, and His promises call us to Himself (Revelation 3:2–3; John 6:37).

You do not have to untangle every question about your past before you seek Christ now. Come honestly. Stop offering your history as a reason He should leave you undisturbed. You may need to pray, “Lord, I have been defending myself instead of listening to You. Have mercy on me. Bring me to Your Son, and teach me to obey You.” No wording can save you, but no polished explanation is required before you plead for mercy. In Luke 18:13–14, the tax collector came without a defense, pleading, “be merciful to me.” The God who sees everything hidden invites needy sinners to seek grace through Christ (Hebrews 4:13–16). You can stop pretending before the One who already knows. Ask Him for the mercy you cannot provide for yourself.

Your hope is the Savior who died for sins and rose again. He bore the judgment sinners deserve (1 Corinthians 15:3–4), and Hebrews 7:25 assures us that He is able to save “to the uttermost” those who approach God through Him. I urge you with all the seriousness this deserves: turn from the sin you have been protecting and entrust yourself to Him. Do not trade His mercy for a little more time with what is ruining you. He is alive to receive you, forgive you, and make you His own. You have no promise of another opportunity to hear this appeal. But you have heard it now, and Christ's promise stands. Come to Him. Let the warning that unsettles your confidence bring you to the Savior who can truly make you safe.

CHAPTER 4

The Voices That Keep Us Asleep

John 5:40: “But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.”

When God’s Word exposes a false hope, we may look for reassurance instead of repentance. We turn to voices that tell us we are safe, including the excuses we repeat to ourselves. I want to ask you plainly: when Scripture disturbs you, are you seeking help to obey it, or someone who will tell you to stop worrying? In 2 Timothy 4:3–4, Paul describes hearers who choose pleasing teachers and turn their ears “away from the truth.” The search for comforting voices can begin with our refusal to hear an unwelcome command. Hebrews 3:12–13 warns that sin deceives and hardens us. Please do not use another week of church attendance to put off what God’s Word has already made clear.

A person can know the hymns by heart and still be blind to the Savior. In 2 Corinthians 4:3–4, Paul describes Satan blinding unbelievers to “the light of the gospel.” A. W. Pink wrote, “So closely does the gospel of Satan resemble that which it parodies, multitudes of the unsaved are deceived

by it.”¹ Second Timothy 2:26 describes captives who need to come to their senses and escape the devil’s snare. I believe Satan devotes more effort to deceiving people inside churches than outside them. That is my pastoral judgment, not a comparison Scripture measures for us. But the danger itself is plain: religious surroundings cannot deliver a soul. I cannot assume you are safe because you sit among God’s people. Have you come to their Savior?

Some deception arrives with the appearance of spiritual power. In 2 Thessalonians 2:9–10, Paul describes the lawless one’s coming with “signs, and lying wonders.” He is speaking about a particular rebellion, not teaching that every strong impression comes from Satan. Yet his warning destroys the assumption that something impressive must come from God. Jesus also warns about false prophets who perform astonishing signs (Matthew 24:24–25). Martyn Lloyd-Jones put the test plainly: “Anything which is obviously contrary to the teaching of the scripture is to be rejected.”² Please do not surrender your judgment to a powerful experience. Ask what the message teaches about Christ, sin, and salvation. No wonder can make a lie true.

Nor should these warnings make you think of Satan as God’s equal. In Job 2:6, God permits the enemy to afflict Job while commanding, “but spare his life.” Satan cannot set his own limits. James 1:13 makes clear that God never tempts anyone to sin. His sovereign rule does not make Him evil. Take the enemy seriously without giving him the place that belongs to the Lord. You need not explain every frightening

1 A. W. Pink, *Another Gospel* (Chapel Library, n.d.), PDF p. 1, second paragraph. <https://www.chapellibrary.org/api/books/download?code=agos&format=pdf>

2 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “Testing the Spirits, Part 3,” sermon no. 1093, John 1:26–33, February 28, 1965, MLJ Trust recording, 3:25–3:33. <https://www.mljtrust.org/sermon/testing-the-spirits-3/> Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IBlbqKK_U

experience before you can seek Christ. The devil is powerful enough to deceive you, but he cannot overpower the Savior who calls you to come. Look to the One who rules, and let His Word settle what you believe.

Paul then uncovers something more searching than the deceiver's skill. Those who perish have refused "the love of the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:10). Truth becomes unwelcome when it threatens a sin we want to keep. Augustine observed, "They love truth when she shines on them, and hate her when she rebukes them."³ We may welcome a sermon about forgiveness while resenting the command to forgive our brother. Jesus exposes this refusal to come into the light in John 3:19–21. My friend, do not call yourself a lover of truth while choosing which truths may address you. I urge you to name the command you keep resisting. What have you asked a reassuring voice to excuse?

That desire gives false teachers a ready audience. Second Peter 2:1–3 warns that they will "exploit you with deceptive words." Luther protested against false peace in his own day: "Away, then, with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, 'Peace, peace,' and there is no peace!"⁴ The Christian vocabulary can remain while the call to repentance and new life disappears. Paul warns of people who will no longer tolerate sound teaching (2 Timothy 4:3–4). A church may fill its service with entertainment, offer a few pleasant thoughts, and send people home confident because they participated.

3 Augustine, *Confessions*, book X, chap. 23, §34, trans. J. G. Pilkington, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110110.htm>

4 Martin Luther, "Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences" (1517), thesis 92, trans. C. M. Jacobs, in *Works of Martin Luther, with Introductions and Notes*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman, 1915), 38. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Works_of_Martin_Luther,_with_introductions_and_notes,_Volume_1.djvu/52

But has anyone brought their hidden life before God? I fear for people who are continually encouraged without ever being confronted. Neither a crowd nor a cheerful departure proves that Christ has been faithfully preached.

Repeated refusal can make the warning itself seem to fade. First Timothy 4:1–2 describes hypocritical teachers “having their own conscience seared.” Their growing insensitivity is a dreadful condition, not a spiritual achievement. Spurgeon warned, “Conscience is the candle of the Lord, it shows you your enemy; you try to put it out by saying, ‘Peace, peace.’”⁵ Please distinguish that silence from the cleansing Christ provides. Hebrews 9:14 speaks of His blood cleansing the conscience so that we may serve God. Forgiveness brings us near to Him; practiced evasion helps us continue resisting Him. I do not want a tender believer to mistrust genuine peace. But if your peace depends on avoiding what God says, you must not mistake it for His pardon.

Consider someone defending a sexual relationship outside marriage. He still prays and attends church, but when Scripture challenges him, he explains that the arrangement is complicated and changing it would hurt. The cost may be real. It cannot make disobedience right. First Thessalonians 4:3–5 calls believers to sexual holiness, and Jesus exposes outward religion concealing a heart “full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matthew 23:28). I plead with you: stop using your religious life to protect your hidden one. Let it grieve you that you have worked so hard to defend what dishonors the Savior you profess to love. Bring Him the sin without its carefully prepared excuse. Seek His forgiveness and help to end what you have been defending.

5 Charles H. Spurgeon, “A Blast of the Trumpet Against False Peace,” sermon no. 301, preached February 26, 1860, New Park Street Pulpit, vol. 6, section 3. <https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/a-blast-of-the-trumpet-against-false-peace>

Imagine a man closing a program because its sexual scenes trouble him. The next week he watches again, telling himself that one hour cannot matter very much. By Thursday, the images are still feeding his thoughts. His excuse counts the viewing time; it ignores what he carries away. Romans 13:14 commands us to “make no provision for the flesh,” and Jesus treats deliberate lust seriously (Matthew 5:28–30). This applies to pornography as well as entertainment that trains you to welcome what you ought to resist. Please stop arguing that the exposure was brief when its effects keep following you. Remove the access, ask a mature Christian for help, and bring the appetite itself to Christ. He calls you toward freedom, not toward a better explanation for your captivity.

Yet every uneasy feeling is not a message from God. I am asking you to submit your feelings to Scripture, not to spend your life obeying every fear. In John 6:63, Jesus says that His words “are spirit, and they are life,” and 1 John 4:1 requires believers to test spiritual claims. George Müller wrote, “We have to rely on the written Word, and not on ourselves or our impressions.”⁶ Examine the concern honestly. If Scripture exposes sin, repent; if your fear contradicts Christ’s promise, believe Him rather than the fear. Neither a pleasant feeling nor an alarming one is qualified to govern your soul.

The whole church needs this willingness to hear and obey. I have been encouraged to hear members of our own prayer meeting asking for greater holiness and freedom from worldly compromise. First Peter 1:15–16 calls the whole of our conduct into God’s service. In Acts 20:31, Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that he continued to “warn everyone night and day with tears.” That is the spirit I want in our

6 George Müller, “Faith,” in *The Writings and Teachings of George Müller of Bristol* (Mullers.org, n.d.), 81. https://www.georgemuller.org/uploads/4/8/6/5/48652749/the_writings_and_teachings_of_george_muller_of_bristol.pdf#page=81

preaching and our prayers: enough love to tell the truth, and enough humility to receive it ourselves. A small congregation seeking holiness can serve your soul better than a crowded church that helps you evade correction. Smallness saves no one. Seek a church where Christ's Word can correct you, and where people will help you obey it.

If you recognize your captivity, please do not conclude that your hope lies in becoming stronger by yourself. Christ sends His gospel to turn people "from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). Colossians 1:13–14 joins deliverance from darkness with redemption and forgiveness in His Son. The Savior who exposes your chains is able to free you. I am not asking you to make yourself acceptable before approaching Him. Bring the double life, the cherished excuse, and the appetite you cannot master. Ask Him to save you from the sin you have been protecting. You need more than relief from an uncomfortable sermon. You need the living Christ.

AXIOMS

1. The voice that excuses your disobedience is not helping your soul (2 Timothy 4:3–4; Hebrews 3:12–13).
2. Religious surroundings cannot free a heart blinded to Christ (2 Corinthians 4:3–4; 2 Timothy 2:26).
3. Spiritual power must be tested by God's truth, not admired as proof of it (2 Thessalonians 2:9–10; Matthew 24:24–25).
4. Love for the truth receives its correction as well as its comfort (2 Thessalonians 2:10; John 3:19–21).
5. A silenced conscience and a cleansed conscience are not the same (1 Timothy 4:1–2; Hebrews 9:14).
6. Repentance stops defending the sin and turns toward the Savior (Romans 13:14; Acts 26:18).

7. Christ delivers sinners; religious reassurance cannot take His place (Colossians 1:13–14; John 6:63).

RECONCILIATION: PEACE WITH GOD THROUGH CHRIST

1. Without Christ, our sin leaves us God's enemies, separated from Him and deserving His judgment (Colossians 1:21; Ephesians 2:1–3).
2. Church membership and good deeds cannot remove our guilt or bring us into peace with God (Romans 5:6; Ephesians 2:8–9).
3. God provides reconciliation through His Son, showing His love for sinners who have done nothing to deserve it (Romans 5:8–10).
4. Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the only Savior who can bring sinners back to God (1 Timothy 2:5–6; John 14:6).
5. The sinless Christ bore our punishment on the cross, making peace with God through His blood (2 Corinthians 5:21; Colossians 1:20).
6. Christ rose again, and all who are reconciled to God through His death will be saved by His life (Romans 4:25; 5:10).
7. We receive peace with God by turning from sin and trusting Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21; Romans 5:1).
8. Through Christ, God forgives believers and welcomes them into His family, where they may approach Him as Father (2 Corinthians 5:19; Ephesians 2:18–19).
9. Those reconciled to God are made new in Christ and are called to live for Him rather than for themselves (2 Corinthians 5:15–18).

10. Those reconciled to God must keep trusting Christ, with the hope of standing before God holy and without blame (Colossians 1:22–23).

Come to Him now, with nothing concealed and nothing offered in your defense. The Savior who died for sins and rose again does not require you to make your past less shameful before you seek His mercy (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). In John 6:37, He promises to receive “the one who comes to Me.” His welcome is for needy sinners, not for people who have managed to need Him less. I beg you to trust Him more than the voices that have helped you remain unchanged. Confess the sin plainly. Turn from it, even where obedience costs you. You will not find a kinder Savior by continuing to resist this One.

And we who speak to sinners must be careful what hope we offer them. John 6:63 declares, “It is the Spirit who gives life.” We cannot produce that life by securing an outward response. Ephesians 2:8–10 places salvation in God’s grace and describes the obedience that follows His work. I want us to bring people to Christ without assuring them that a repeated prayer, a raised hand, or a public decision has made them His. Those actions may express genuine faith; they cannot create it or prove it by themselves. This brings us to the danger we must face next: methods that persuade someone to do what we ask, then assure him that God has done what only God can do. We dare not leave a soul asleep with our assurance when he still needs Christ’s saving power.

CHAPTER 5

A Gospel We Cannot Manufacture

John 6:63: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing."

“Walk down this aisle to receive Christ.” A person who knows little about the Bible may hear those words and join the two things together: walking to the front and receiving the Savior. He goes forward, repeats the prayer someone gives him, and is told that he is saved. Years later, when God’s Word exposes a life still governed by sin, he remembers the aisle. He did what he was told. Surely that settled the matter. Yet Jesus warns that some who appeal to their religious deeds will hear, “I never knew you; depart from Me” (Matthew 7:21–23). Ephesians 2:8–10 directs our confidence to God’s grace in Christ, not to an action we can remember. My friend, if the memory of a meeting keeps you from hearing Christ today, that memory has become a dangerous refuge.

This is why our methods require such care. They can teach people what to trust before those people understand what we have taught them. The physical action is easy to remember: a particular room, a particular evening, someone standing beside them. When doubts arise, they are sent back to that

moment instead of brought to the Savior. By decisionism I mean treating a person's decision or outward response as proof of conversion. An altar call, a raised hand, or a repeated prayer cannot give spiritual life. Iain Murray warns, "Yet the whole invitation system inevitably gives the impression that 'confessing Christ' by moving forward is in order to conversion."¹ His point is simple: walking forward must not be presented as the step that makes someone a Christian. We must direct the sinner's confidence to Christ, not to an action performed before a congregation. In John 6:63, Jesus says, "the flesh profits nothing"; John 1:12–13 locates the new birth in God, not human will. Martyn Lloyd-Jones described regeneration as "a creative act of God in which man is entirely passive and contributes nothing, nothing whatsoever."² A person may genuinely turn to Christ during a public invitation. But neither the walk nor the witness standing beside him can establish that God has changed his heart.

The danger becomes especially painful when adults press a child to repeat a sinner's prayer and then assure him that he is saved. A child may be trying to please the adult without understanding his need of Christ. We must teach children the gospel plainly and call them earnestly to the Savior, as Timothy learned the Scriptures from childhood (2 Timothy 3:15). We must also be patient with the work we cannot perform. Paul's example was to "warn everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31), not to relieve his concern by securing a reassuring answer. Dear parent, do not make your child carry your need to hear that everything is settled. Help

1 Iain H. Murray, *The Invitation System* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 8; excerpt quoted in *Grace Quotes*. https://gracequotes.org/topic/altar_calls/

2 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Regeneration—a New Disposition," sermon no. 7901, February 12, 1954, MLJ Trust recording, 37:32–37:46. <https://www.mljtrust.org/sermon/regeneration-a-new-disposition/> Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzI2HRGac4>

him understand whom he needs, and keep bringing him to Christ.

A weakened message often prepares the way for a misleading response. Paul warns that “they will not endure sound doctrine” and will seek teachers who suit their desires (2 Timothy 4:3–4). Jesus describes religious people whose outward appearance conceals inward corruption (Matthew 23:25–28). A message can mention Jesus, blessing, and forgiveness while leaving the hearer’s cherished rebellion untouched. Then a quick response seems sufficient because the preacher has made the need seem small. If I promise you peace while leaving you free to defend your sin, I have made it easier to agree with me and harder to recognize your need of Christ. I dare not call that kindness.

The gospel brings us to the Son of God who died for sinners and rose again. Romans 5:8 declares, “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” We need the pardon His sacrifice provides and the righteousness we cannot supply. Redemption means that Christ paid the price to free His people: Peter directs us away from earthly wealth to the blood of the spotless Savior (1 Peter 1:18–19). You cannot add the sincerity of your prayer to the value of His blood. You cannot make His sacrifice sufficient by remembering the date you believed. The Savior is sufficient; faith rests in Him. Let the cross show you both how serious your sin is and how costly His mercy was.

That is why agreeing with Christian facts, though necessary, is not the whole of saving faith. Intellectual assent means acknowledging that the facts are true while stopping short of entrusting yourself to the Savior they reveal. You may defend the resurrection in an argument and refuse Christ when He calls you from a dishonest practice. Jesus exposes that separation in John 5:39–40: “you are not willing to come to Me.” James 2:19 reminds us that even demons possess

true knowledge about God without trusting Him. Jonathan Edwards wrote, “There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness.”³ He is not asking us to learn less and feel more. The truth must reach the heart, so that we embrace the Savior we can describe. Please do not answer this warning by listing the doctrines you believe. What happens when those doctrines reach the sin you want to keep? Truth about the Savior must bring you to the Savior.

But how does a person who resists Him become willing to come? Here we must surrender our confidence in human ability. Jesus says, “It is the Spirit who gives life” (John 6:63), and Ephesians 2:1–5 describes God making alive those who were dead in sin. The Holy Spirit renews the heart and will, so that the sinner who resisted Christ comes to trust Him. Spurgeon said, “Never yet did a man believe in Jesus with the faith here intended, except the Holy Spirit led him to do so.”⁴ We do not bring God a little spiritual life so that He can finish what we began. Even the willingness to abandon our self-defense and trust His Son comes from His grace. This humbles the preacher as well as the hearer. I can explain the gospel, plead with you, and answer your questions. I cannot give you life by obtaining the answer I want.

Ephesians 2:8–10 places salvation in its proper order: grace saves us through faith, and good works follow as the fruit of God’s work. Salvation is “not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Titus 3:5 likewise directs us away from our own

3 Jonathan Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to be Both Scriptural and Rational Doctrine,” preached at Northampton and published in 1734, section I, “Secondly,” point 1. https://ccel.org/ccel/edwards/sermons.supernatural_light.html

4 Charles H. Spurgeon, “Faith and Regeneration,” sermon no. 979, preached March 5, 1871, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 17, section I. <https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/faith-and-regeneration>

righteousness to God's mercy and the Spirit's renewal. A. W. Pink wrote, "A saving faith is a supernatural thing, and brings forth supernatural fruit."⁵ Neither the movement of our feet nor the strength of our resolve can earn what God gives. Even our intellect, judgment, and will are gifts; none puts Him in our debt. If your account of conversion ends with admiration for your own wisdom, you have missed the wonder of grace. The Christian's gratitude is not that he proved wiser than his neighbor, but that God had mercy on him.

Does this make the call to repent and believe unnecessary? Certainly not. Peter commands, "Repent therefore and be converted" (Acts 3:19), and Paul calls sinners to repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). Peter Masters writes, "We are called to make a persuasive presentation of the Gospel because it is God's way of bringing the redeemed into his kingdom."⁶ You must turn from sin. You must trust the Savior. God does not repent or believe in your place, but His grace produces that response in you. Faith receives Christ; it contributes no merit to His finished work. Please do not turn your inability into an excuse to postpone coming. You do not need to discover God's secret purpose before obeying His plain command. I call you to Christ because He saves sinners, not because you can make yourself worth saving.

I know something about the pride this truth confronts. I grew up Jewish in Brooklyn, hearing how good I was, how well I would do, and what a future lay before me. My ego became as big as a blimp. I was proud of my culture, my religion, and myself. Who could bring that proud man down

5 A. W. Pink, *Saving Faith* (Chapel Library, n.d.), PDF p. 1, third paragraph. <https://www.chapellibrary.org/api/books/download?code=sfai&format=pdf>

6 Peter Masters, "Regeneration and Gospel Persuasion," Metropolitan Tabernacle, section "It is God's way," first paragraph; adapted from a lecture at the 2015 Tabernacle School of Theology. <https://metropolitantabernacle.org/articles/regeneration-and-gospel-persuasion/>

and make him cry to Jesus Christ for mercy? Only God could do that work. Acts 26:18 describes deliverance “from the power of Satan to God.” That was what I needed, not a little help to become the man I already admired. First Corinthians 1:29–31 leaves us no ground for boasting in ourselves. God broke my pride and brought me to repentance and faith. I tell you this because the doctrine is personal to me: a gospel that leaves me congratulating myself has not dealt honestly with the man I was or the grace that saved me.

Perhaps your pride takes a quieter form. You have read sound books and learned to recognize another person’s error. Yet when someone asks about the sin you keep defending, you answer with your doctrinal knowledge. You have used the truth you know to avoid the obedience it requires. Calvin wrote, “Christ cannot be known without the sanctification of his Spirit: therefore faith cannot possibly be disjoined from pious affection.”⁷ Faith does not leave the heart content to resist the Savior it trusts. Christ tells the church at Laodicea, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (Revelation 3:19); James 1:22 warns against hearing without doing. His correction is not an enemy to your assurance. It exposes the false peace that keeps you from seeking Him. I am not asking a struggling believer to prove that he never sins. I am asking whether you bring your sin to Christ or use your religion to protect it. Name the dishonesty, the bitterness, or the relationship you have been defending. Stop asking your knowledge to excuse what your Savior calls you to forsake.

AXIOMS

1. A remembered decision cannot replace present faith in the living Christ (Matthew 7:21–23; Ephesians 2:8–10).

⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.2.8, trans. Henry Beveridge (1845), p. 476 in the CCEL edition’s embedded pagination. <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.v.iii.html>

2. A method can teach a false confidence even when the preacher uses Christian words (John 6:63; John 1:12–13).
3. Love for a child teaches patiently; it does not declare a spiritual work that an adult cannot produce (2 Timothy 3:15; John 1:12–13).
4. A message that leaves cherished rebellion unchallenged conceals the sinner's need of Christ (2 Timothy 4:3–4; Matthew 23:25–28).
5. Knowing the truth about Jesus is not the same as entrusting yourself to Him (John 5:39–40; James 2:19).
6. Grace gives the life from which repentance, faith, and obedience grow (Ephesians 2:1–10; Titus 3:5).
7. Faith receives Christ's finished work; it adds nothing to the price of redemption (Romans 3:24–26; 1 Peter 1:18–19).

REDEMPTION: BOUGHT BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

1. Without Christ, we are slaves to sin, guilty before God and unable to escape the judgment our sins deserve (John 8:34; Romans 6:23).
2. Neither our good deeds nor our religious efforts can pay the price to free us from sin and guilt (Psalm 49:7–8; Ephesians 2:8–9).
3. God freely gives redemption through Jesus Christ because of His grace, not because we have earned His mercy (Romans 3:23–24).
4. God's Son became a man to redeem those under God's law and bring them into His family (Galatians 4:4–5).

5. The sinless Christ bore our sins on the cross and gave His own blood as the price of our redemption (1 Peter 1:18–19; 2:24).
6. God raised Jesus from the dead, and our living Redeemer saves all who come to God through Him (1 Peter 1:21; Hebrews 7:25).
7. We receive this redemption by turning from sin and trusting Christ, not by earning it through any religious act (Acts 20:21; Romans 3:24–28).
8. In Christ our sins are forgiven, and we belong to the Savior who bought us (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20).
9. Christ redeemed us to be His own people, leaving sinful ways behind and gladly doing what pleases Him (Titus 2:14).
10. Those Christ has redeemed await the redemption of their bodies, when He will free them from death itself (Romans 8:23; 1 Corinthians 15:52–54).

Come to Him now. You do not need to recover a feeling from a meeting years ago or make your repentance impressive enough to deserve mercy. Confess the sin plainly and rest your hope in the Savior who died and rose again. In John 6:37, He promises, “I will by no means cast out.” Titus 2:14 shows that He gave Himself to redeem and cleanse a people for His own possession. If there is a dishonest practice to stop or a sinful relationship to leave, trust Him with the cost. Such obedience does not purchase forgiveness; it expresses the turning of a heart that is no longer defending its rebellion. I plead with you to come to the living Christ, who gives what no preacher’s method can manufacture. This same Savior stood before the Jerusalem crowd, speaking of the Father who sent Him (John 7:28–29). We must hear what He told those religious people about the God they claimed to know.

CHAPTER 6

The Father You Cannot Know Without His Son

John 7:28–29: “Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple, saying, ‘You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me.’”

They were standing in the temple, discussing Jesus, while remaining strangers to the Father who sent Him. That is what makes this scene so frightening. These people could talk about His hometown and debate what their rulers believed, but they could not recognize God’s Son when He stood before them. Jesus answered their confidence with words no religious person should hurry past: “He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know” (John 7:28). Matthew 7:21–23 warns that even speaking and working in Christ’s name can coexist with not belonging to Him. Martyn Lloyd-Jones explained that knowing God “carries the sense of a

certain intimacy.”¹ These people had religious information without fellowship with Him. My friend, a lifetime spent around the things of God cannot make it safe to refuse the Son of God.

Listen to what Jesus says next: “But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me” (John 7:29). He does not offer another opinion for the crowd to consider. He speaks as the eternal Son, who was with God before there was a temple, a Jerusalem, or a world. John 1:1, 18 establishes who He is and why He alone can make the Father known. We cannot correct His account of God with a warmer picture of our own. When the Son speaks, the question is whether we will receive what He reveals or insist that God must be different.

This leaves no room for the claim, “I have my own relationship with God,” if that relationship permits us to set Christ aside. First John 2:23 says, “Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.” John 14:6 closes every imagined way around Him. A. W. Pink states the consequence plainly: “None cometh unto the Father but by Christ; and none knoweth the Father but by Him.”² You cannot appeal to the Father against the Son, as though Jesus were too strict and His Father more willing to overlook your rebellion. They are not divided about your sin or your salvation. The Father sent this Savior. To refuse Him is to refuse the Father’s provision for the very guilt you need forgiven.

1 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “Do You Know God?” sermon no. 5467, John 8:19, July 10, 1960, MLJ Trust recording, 12:27–12:34. <https://www.mljtrust.org/sermon/do-you-know-god/> Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRxDfiqZAYM>

2 A. W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, chap. 26, “Christ Teaching in the Temple,” exposition of John 7:28–29, paragraph immediately preceding John 7:30. <https://sermonindex4.b-cdn.net/speakers/aw-pink/exposition-of-the-gospel-of-john-chapter-26-christ-teaching-in-the-temple/>

We need to bring that truth into the sentences we use to quiet our consciences. “God understands” can be a grateful confession of His patient care. It can also mean, “He will make an exception for the sin I will not leave.” The words sound reverent while the purpose beneath them is rebellion. God exposes that mistake in Psalm 50:21: “You thought that I was altogether like you.” Second Timothy 4:3–4 shows how readily we seek teaching that agrees with our desires. Calvin described “every man giving himself full license, and devising some peculiar form of divinity, to meet his own views.”³ We may never deny God’s existence; we simply imagine that He shares our excuses. Then the god we describe begins to sound suspiciously like ourselves.

Consider the bitterness you have renamed honesty. Someone wronged you, and the wrong may have been serious. But when you repeat the story, are you seeking wise help, or enjoying another chance to make that person look small? Have you begun to think that being hurt gives you permission to hurt back? Christ tells His church, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (Revelation 3:19). Ephesians 4:31–32 calls us to put bitterness away and forgive as God has forgiven us in Christ. Forgiveness does not require calling evil good or placing yourself in danger. It does require surrendering the revenge you have been calling justice. Please do not ask God to bless what His Son died to free you from.

Or perhaps the excuse protects a lie. You change a detail because the truth would cost you money, embarrass your family, or expose how you have treated someone. Then you pray for peace without correcting what you said. Yet Jesus describes His Father as “He who sent Me is true” (John 7:28),

3 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.5.12, trans. Henry Beveridge (1845), pp. 59–60 in the CCEL edition’s embedded pagination. <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.iii.vi.html>

and Ephesians 4:25 requires His people to put away lying. The Father's compassion is not permission to make another person live with your false account. Tell the truth to the person you misled. Accept the cost you have been passing to someone else. Obedience will not purchase forgiveness, but asking for forgiveness while planning to keep the lie should trouble your conscience.

The same evasion can protect sexual sin. A married person cultivates a secret intimacy and calls it friendship; someone keeps returning to pornography while insisting that God knows how lonely life has become. Loneliness deserves compassionate care, but it cannot give us authority to rewrite God's commands. Jesus says, "He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know" (John 7:28); First Thessalonians 4:3–5 identifies sexual purity as God's will for His people. If your account of God's kindness always leaves this habit undisturbed, where did you learn that account? Not from His Son. Close the hidden account, end the sinful exchange, and seek truthful help rather than another reason to delay.

Now listen to a familiar defense: "God knows my heart." Yes, He does. He knows whether you are bringing Him your guilt or asking Him to admire your intentions while you keep disobeying. In Revelation 3:17, Christ exposes a church that says it needs nothing while it does "not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." Hebrews 4:12–13 leaves nothing in us hidden from His sight. The knowledge that should bring us to confession must not become our excuse for avoiding it. Ask yourself plainly: What sin have I expected God to understand so well that He would stop requiring me to forsake it?

I am not asking the troubled believer to search for a flawless heart before he dares to trust Christ. A child of God may struggle fiercely with the very sin he hates. The question is whether you are seeking Christ's help against it or using

religious words to defend it. His call to a wayward church is, “Therefore be zealous and repent” (Revelation 3:19), and First John 1:8–9 joins an honest acknowledgment of sin with the promise of forgiveness and cleansing. Do not mistake His correction for proof that He is unwilling to receive you. He is exposing what harms you. Bring Him the actual sin, not a carefully edited account that leaves you looking innocent.

And do not imagine that you must persuade a reluctant Father to love sinners. Look at the Savior He sent. Romans 5:8 declares, “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” First John 4:9–10 locates the sending of the Son in God’s own love. Spurgeon said, “God was not made to love us by the death of his Son.”⁴ The Father’s love provided the sacrifice that satisfied His justice. Please do not stand at a distance imagining that the Savior must overcome His Father’s unwillingness to receive you. The Father Himself sent Him.

But His love does not make your guilt small. The Son who said, “for I am from Him, and He sent Me” (John 7:29), came to bear the judgment His people deserved. First Peter 2:24 directs us to His bearing our sins in His body on the cross. Reflecting on that sacrifice, Peter Masters writes, “He knew those for whom he was dying and felt our punishment.”⁵ Think what you are asking when you want God’s kindness to leave your sin untouched. That sin required the death of His Son. The mercy you need is far greater than permission

4 Charles H. Spurgeon, “God Beseeching Sinners by His Ministers,” preached July 27, 1873, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 19, section II, paragraph beginning “God was in Christ, God came on earth to reconcile men.” <https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/god-beseeching-sinners-by-his-ministers>

5 Peter Masters, “The Cup of Blessing,” section “The cup of sharing,” paragraph beginning “We are ‘crucified with Christ’”; excerpt of a sermon preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, May 29, 2022. <https://metropolitantabernacle.org/articles/the-cup-of-blessing/>

to continue as you are: forgiveness through His sacrifice, and freedom to live as a child of the Father who receives you.

So put down the picture of God your excuses have drawn. The Son who says, “But I know Him, for I am from Him” (John 7:29), is not guessing what the Father will be like when you come. Hebrews 7:25 directs you to this living Savior, who brings His people to God and intercedes for them. You do not need a kinder god than the Father Jesus reveals. You need to stop mistaking your preferred permissions for kindness. Will you trust the Father’s love enough to surrender the lie, the grudge, or the hidden relationship? I plead with you to stop defending what is keeping you from the joy of walking honestly before Him.

AXIOMS

1. Familiarity with the things of God cannot replace knowing God through His Son (John 7:28–29; Matthew 7:21–23).
2. We receive the truth about the Father from Jesus; we do not correct Him with a god of our own imagining (John 1:1, 18; John 7:29).
3. Refusing the Son means refusing the Father who sent Him (1 John 2:23; John 14:6).
4. Mercy is being misused when we appeal to it to defend what Christ commands us to forsake (Romans 6:1–2; Titus 2:11–14).
5. God’s knowledge of our hearts is a reason for honest confession, never an excuse for continued disobedience (Hebrews 4:12–13; 1 John 1:8–9).
6. The cross reveals a Father who neither excuses sin nor withholds His Son from sinners (Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:9–10).

TEN EVIDENCES OF LIFE WITH THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

These are fruits of grace, not the price of acceptance with God, who is one God in three persons. Look for growing faith and repentance, not sinless perfection or strong feelings.

1. You come to the Father through His Son, by the Spirit, rather than expecting God to welcome you without Christ (Ephesians 2:18).
2. The Spirit leads you to call upon the Father as His child, rather than merely repeating religious words (Galatians 4:4–6).
3. Love for the Father challenges your love of the world, rather than leaving its desires in charge (1 John 2:15–17).
4. You rest your hope of acceptance on Christ's finished sacrifice, rather than your record of good behavior (Hebrews 10:10–14; Philippians 3:9).
5. You seek to obey Jesus as Lord, rather than using His name while refusing His authority (Luke 6:46–47).
6. You treasure Christ Himself, rather than wanting His gifts without wanting Him (Philippians 3:8; 1 Peter 2:7).
7. Through the new birth, the Spirit gives you new desires toward God, rather than leaving you content with an outwardly religious life (Romans 8:5–9; Titus 3:5).
8. You let Scripture correct you, rather than claiming the Spirit's guidance while refusing His Word (2 Timothy 3:16–17; Ephesians 6:17).
9. You fight sin with the Spirit's help, even through painful struggles, rather than defend its right to remain (Romans 8:13; Galatians 5:17).

10. You love God's children in practical ways, rather than claiming fellowship with the Father while refusing to care for His family (1 John 3:14–18; 4:20–21).

Come through Jesus, my friend. You need not hide the sin He already sees or make yourself worthy of the mercy He gives. His promise is, “the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37). Ephesians 2:18 shows that through Him we have access to the Father by the Spirit. Jonathan Edwards wrote, “There meet in Jesus Christ, infinite justice and infinite grace.”⁶ Confess what you have defended, rest in the sacrifice of the crucified and risen Savior, and take the obedient step you have been postponing. You are not coming to a Father less merciful than His Son. You are coming through the Son the Father sent to bring you home.

⁶ Jonathan Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ,” on Revelation 5:5–6, doctrinal exposition, subsection A, point 2. <https://ccel.org/ccel/edwards/sermons/sermons.excellency.html>

CHAPTER 7

The Savior Who Went Willingly

John 7:30–31: “Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. And many of the people believed in Him, and said, ‘When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?’”

They wanted Him arrested. He went on teaching. John tells us why: “no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come” (John 7:30). A. W. Pink writes, “All the hatred of men and all the enmity of Satan and his hosts could not hasten Christ’s appointed death.”¹ Acts 2:23 later places His crucifixion within God’s settled purpose without excusing the men who killed Him. We must hold both truths together. These were guilty men intending

¹ A. W. Pink, Exposition of the Gospel of John, chap. 26, “Christ Teaching in the Temple,” exposition of John 7:30, paragraph beginning “What an illustration of this is furnished by the incident before us!” <https://sermonindex4.b-cdn.net/speakers/aw-pink/exposition-of-the-gospel-of-john-chapter-26-christ-teaching-in-the-temple/>

real harm, but they were not deciding when the Son of God would die. My friend, look carefully at the Savior standing before them. The people who hated Him did not hold His future in their hands.

Yet the Father's appointed hour would come. We misunderstand this scene if we see only a narrow escape and miss the willing sacrifice ahead. Jesus said, "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself" (John 10:18). Matthew 26:53–54 shows that His refusal to summon deliverance served the fulfillment of Scripture. J. C. Ryle writes, "He did not go to the cross because He could not help it."² He could have been delivered from His enemies; He would not abandon the work His Father gave Him. His enemies wanted Him dead. He wanted His people saved, and He knew what saving them would cost.

Please do not hurry from His willingness to your duty without considering what He willingly bore. Romans 5:8 says, "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." First Peter 3:18 explains the purpose of His suffering: the righteous One suffered for the unrighteous to bring us to God. He was not merely showing frightened people how to be brave. He was bearing the guilt that courage, kindness, and a lifetime of religious effort could never remove. Reflecting on Christ's love at the Lord's Supper, Peter Masters writes, "I see love I cannot measure; love I can barely comprehend."³ Before you ask whether you have strength to follow Him, see

2 J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, John*, exposition of John 7:25–36, paragraph beginning "There is a mine of deep truth in the words before us." <https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/j07.htm>

3 Peter Masters, "The Cup of Blessing," opening section, paragraph beginning "What do I see in that cup at the Lord's Supper?"; excerpt of a sermon preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, May 29, 2022. <https://metropolitantabernacle.org/articles/the-cup-of-blessing/>

why you may come to Him. The Savior who knew the cost of your redemption did not turn away from paying it.

Nor did hostility silence every response of faith. John reports, “many of the people believed in Him” (John 7:31). They considered His signs and asked what greater works they could expect from the Christ. John 20:30–31 confirms that His signs bear witness to His identity and call us to believe. We must not turn John’s account of belief into a claim that everyone in this group was pretending. The text does not say that. What it does show is that opposition and belief were present together. The anger of influential people could not make Jesus unworthy of trust. You need not wait for the people around you to welcome Him before you entrust yourself to Him.

That is where the scene begins to search us. We may gladly confess Christ where everyone approves and become strangely vague where His name is unwelcome. Jesus asks for more than the right title: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 7:21). John 12:42–43 describes people whose fear of losing their place kept them from openly confessing Him. Their desire for approval had become a decision about allegiance. Spurgeon prayed, “May we never cease from duty because we dread the eye of man!”⁴ I want you to consider where that pressure reaches your own life. Whose displeasure have you begun to treat as a sufficient reason to withhold obedience from Christ?

Imagine a coworker asking why you have hope while caring for a dying parent. You could speak simply about Christ, His resurrection, and His promises. Instead, you settle for

⁴ Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption,” *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 30 (1884), on Romans 8:15–16, section I, paragraph beginning “Secondly, there is a carnal fear.” <https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/the-spirit-of-bondage-and-of-adoption>

saying that you try to stay positive, because you have heard this person mock Christians. A gracious answer does not require a speech or an argument. First Peter 3:15 calls for a ready explanation of our hope with gentleness and reverence. But Proverbs 29:25 warns, “The fear of man brings a snare.” The danger is easy to miss: you have not stopped believing the truth, but you have begun letting another person decide whether you will speak it. Ask Christ for help to answer honestly when the opportunity comes.

The same fear can make kindness costly. Picture a church member sitting alone after others have made it clear that friendship with him will lower your standing with them. Perhaps there is no scandal to address, only an awkward person whom fashionable people find inconvenient. James 2:1–4 exposes the sin of measuring people by their social advantage. Jesus identifies His people as those who do “the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Will you go and sit beside that person, listen, and offer ordinary friendship? You need not advertise your courage. But do notice if you are more concerned about who sees you beside him than about how you might love him.

I am not asking you to be reckless, abrasive, or eager for a quarrel. Prudence considers how to obey wisely; fear looks for permission not to obey at all. First Peter 4:15–16 distinguishes suffering for wrongdoing from suffering as a Christian. The Christ who said, “I lay it down of Myself” (John 10:18), also withdrew from danger when His work called for it (John 7:1). Calvin explained that each believer “should follow his own calling, and not be led away from the performance of his duty by any fears.”⁵ You may choose

5 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle, commentary on John 7:30, concluding application beginning “But we ought to struggle against our own distrust.” <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34/calcom34.xiii.v.html>

a better time to speak, seek wise counsel, or take lawful steps to protect yourself. What you may not do is make freedom from every possible loss a condition of following Him. Do not confuse creating needless trouble with faithfulness, or avoiding every trouble with wisdom.

Perhaps you have already failed. An opportunity passed, you said nothing, and now you are ashamed. Listen to Christ's words to His church: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Revelation 3:19). Luke 22:31–32 shows Him praying for Peter before Peter's denial and looking ahead to his restoration. Your failure needs confession, not a promise that you will manufacture a braver personality. Tell the Lord exactly what you feared losing. Where a correction is still possible, make it. I plead with you not to use yesterday's cowardice as a reason to keep your distance from the Savior who restores His failing people.

And do not require yourself to feel fearless before you obey. Psalm 56:3 says, "Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You." Hebrews 4:15–16 directs needy believers to the Savior who understands their weakness and supplies mercy and grace. Fear can be present without being allowed to make the decision. You may have to begin the conversation with a dry mouth. You may need to ask a trusted believer to pray with you before you take the next step. That dependence is no disgrace. The disgrace would be to call Christ your Lord while reserving the right to refuse Him whenever obedience unsettles you.

Still, I will not promise that obedience will win everyone over. A friendship may cool. A family member may resent your faith. Hebrews 11:35–40 will not let us measure faithfulness by an easy outcome, and Romans 8:35–39 assures believers that suffering cannot separate them from Christ's love. Remember His declaration, "I lay it down of Myself" (John 10:18). The Father's purpose led Him through

suffering, not around it. His appointed hour is not a promise that we will always escape harm; His death and resurrection are the foundation of our confidence that no harm can take His people from Him. Trust Him with the consequences you cannot arrange.

Before you close this chapter, name the obedience you have been postponing. Is there someone who deserves an honest account of your hope, someone you have avoided because loving him might cost you approval, or a clear duty you keep delaying until nobody objects? Christ says, “Therefore be zealous and repent” (Revelation 3:19), and James 4:17 will not let us remain satisfied with knowing the good we ought to do. I do not want you merely to admire His courage and leave your own terms unchanged. Ask Him to expose the bargain, forgive the refusal, and help you do what His Word requires. Then take the step that belongs to today.

AXIOMS

1. Christ’s enemies were responsible for their hostility, but they could not overrule the Father’s appointed hour (John 7:30; Acts 2:23).
2. Jesus gave His life willingly to save His people; the cross was neither an accident nor a failure of His power (John 10:17–18; Matthew 26:53–54).
3. Christ’s death answers our guilt before it becomes our example of costly obedience (1 Peter 3:18; Ephesians 2:8–10).
4. The hostility of others does not make Christ less worthy of our trust (John 7:30–31; John 20:30–31).
5. Fear of losing approval becomes sinful when it governs the obedience we owe to Christ (Proverbs 29:25; John 12:42–43).

6. We may obey with trembling hearts because Christ supplies grace and suffering cannot separate His people from His love (Hebrews 4:15–16; Romans 8:35–39).

PROPTIATION AND IMPUTATION: WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE FOR BELIEVERS

Propitiation means that Christ's sacrifice satisfies God's holy and just wrath against our sins. Jesus willingly bore the judgment we deserved, so that everyone who trusts Him is delivered from that wrath. The Father's love provided this sacrifice; the Son did not have to persuade an unwilling Father to love us (Romans 3:25–26; 1 John 4:10).

The imputation of Christ's righteousness means that God credits Christ's perfect righteousness to everyone who believes in Him. God accepts us as righteous because of Christ's obedience, not because we have earned His approval. This is a gift received through faith, not a reward for becoming good enough (Romans 5:19; Philippians 3:9).

1. Our sin deserves God's wrath. God's anger is His holy opposition to evil, not a sudden loss of temper; we need rescue from His judgment, not merely relief from feeling guilty. Feeling at peace does not mean that we have peace with God. Our safety rests in Christ's sacrifice, not in how calm our conscience feels (Romans 1:18; 2:5–6; 5:1, 9).
2. God Himself provided the sacrifice we needed. He loved sinners before they loved Him and sent His Son to save people who could never remove His righteous judgment by their own efforts (1 John 4:10; Romans 5:8–9).
3. Christ took the sinner's place. He bore the punishment our sins deserved while remaining entirely sinless; carrying our guilt did not make Him morally corrupt (Isaiah 53:5–6; 1 Peter 2:22–24).

4. At the cross, God showed mercy without setting justice aside. He forgives those who trust Jesus because their sins have been judged in their Substitute, not because He has decided that sin no longer matters (Romans 3:25–26).
5. Christ's sacrifice needs no addition or repetition. You cannot improve it with religious duties or repay it by punishing yourself; His one offering is sufficient to save His people from God's wrath. Years of church attendance and service cannot pay for a single sin. Are you resting in what Christ has done, or treating what you do for the church as part of the payment (Hebrews 10:12–14; Romans 5:9)?
6. Christ supplied the obedience we failed to give. Where Adam disobeyed and brought condemnation, Jesus obeyed, even to death, and secured a righteous standing for His people. Being respected as a decent, honest person is not the same as being righteous before God. We need Christ's obedience credited to us, not a better reputation than our neighbors (Romans 5:18–19; Philippians 2:8).
7. In Christ, believers receive more than the cancellation of their guilt. The sinless Savior bore our sins, and God credits His righteousness to us: we stand accepted in Him, not before God with an empty record and a righteousness still to earn (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 4:6–8).
8. We receive this righteousness through faith alone, not by our works. Faith does not earn God's approval; it rests on Christ instead of offering God a record of personal achievements. A past decision or a prayer you once repeated cannot stand in His place. The question is not simply whether you remember making a profession, but whether you are trusting Christ and His righteousness (Romans 4:5–6; Philippians 3:9).

9. God's verdict does not pretend that we never sinned. He forgives real sins and declares us righteous on the strength of Christ's finished work, so our hope rests on what Christ has done rather than how well we performed today (Romans 4:6–8; 8:33–34).
10. Being counted righteous is distinct from being made holy in daily life, but Christ never separates the two gifts. We do not obey to earn acceptance; having been accepted in Christ, we are called and enabled to live for Him. Giving up destructive habits does not erase our guilt or supply the righteousness we lack. A changed life is the fruit of salvation, not a substitute for Christ's finished work (1 Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 2:8–10).

Come to Him, my friend. He does not ask you to purchase His welcome with a record of fearless obedience. His promise is, “the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37), and Hebrews 7:25 directs you to the living Savior who intercedes for those who come to God through Him. Jonathan Edwards urged the sinner to come: “You need not hesitate one moment; but may run to him, and cast yourself upon him.”⁶ Rest your hope in His finished sacrifice, confess the fear you have been defending, and ask for grace to follow Him. I want you to leave this chapter looking at Jesus, not measuring your courage. The One who went willingly to the cross for His people can be trusted with whatever it costs to obey Him.

Please do not carry your guilt toward eternity while hoping that more years in church will somehow settle it. God's judgment does not become less just because your sins have become familiar to you. Romans 5:8 declares, “while

6 Jonathan Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ,” on Revelation 5:5–6, Part Three, section B, paragraph beginning “It is true he has awful majesty.” <https://ccel.org/ccel/edwards/sermons/sermons.excellency.html>

we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 3:25–26 and First John 4:10 direct us to the sacrifice the Father’s own love provided. At the cross, Jesus bore the wrath His people deserved; there is no unpaid punishment left for those who trust Him. That is why I am pleading with you to come, not asking you to make yourself less guilty first. Confess the sin you cannot undo. Stop offering promises in place of the Savior who gave Himself for sinners. You do not have to persuade God to invent a way to forgive you. He has given His Son. Do not refuse the mercy you cannot live or die safely without.

And come without trying to find one good thing in yourself strong enough to answer everything that accuses you. Second Corinthians 5:21 directs you to the sinless Christ who bore our sin so that we might stand righteous before God in Him. Romans 4:6 says, “God imputes righteousness apart from works”: He credits righteousness to you without asking you to earn it. My friend, Christ’s obedience is complete even when your account of yourself is full of things you wish you could change. Everyone who trusts Him receives that righteousness freely. You need not spend another day trying to make yesterday’s failures disappear beneath today’s religious duties. Nor must the struggling believer wait for a flawless week before resting in God’s acceptance. Turn from your sin, but do not turn your repentance into another payment. I urge you: give up the attempt to save yourself, trust the crucified and risen Savior, and follow Him as one whose welcome has already been secured by Christ.

CHAPTER 8

Why Love Gives a Warning

Revelation 3:19: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.”

“**W**here is the grace in all these warnings?” I want you to hear Christ’s own answer before you decide that a searching sermon has been unkind to you. Revelation 3:19 says, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.” Thomas Watson wrote, “It is mercy to men’s souls to tell them of their sins.”¹ The Lord who speaks these words loves His church too much to leave its sins unnamed. Hebrews 12:5–11 likewise teaches us to receive His correction as the care of a Father. A warning may disturb the peace you brought into church because that peace depended on leaving something undisturbed. My friend, would you really want your pastor to help you keep that peace if it were carrying you toward judgment? I

1 Thomas Watson, *The Lord’s Prayer*, sixth petition, part II, “Deliver us from evil,” discussion of sin as evil, application (10), paragraph beginning “It is the passion of most to be angry.” <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/watson/prayer.ix.html>

would rather grieve you now with truth that brings you to Christ than comfort you with words you cannot take safely into eternity.

More than forty years in pastoral ministry have not made the care of souls a light matter to me. Hebrews 13:17 describes shepherds who “watch out for your souls,” and says that they must give account. A minister can receive the congregation’s thanks while failing the Lord who entrusted people to his care. God told Ezekiel, “hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me” (Ezekiel 3:17–18). The watchman did not own the message; he was responsible to deliver it. Brother pastor, have we kept quiet to preserve a relationship when the Lord required us to speak? We must answer that question before our silence teaches people that nothing is wrong.

Yet the Lord has not given His shepherds permission to claim His knowledge of every heart. In Ezekiel 34:17–22, God says He will “judge between sheep and sheep,” confronting strong sheep that trample the weak and spoil what they need. He sees injury that influence within the flock cannot excuse. Ezekiel 44:23 also requires the priests to teach His people to distinguish the holy from the unholy. These passages call us to take God’s distinctions seriously, not to pretend we possess His final judgment. A pastor must name what Scripture condemns, protect people being harmed, and call the sinner to repentance. Neither a respected member’s position nor a preacher’s confidence can change what God has said.

Consider how easily we learn to resent the person who interrupts a compromise. You defend a program because you watch it only once a week, although its images return to your mind long after you turn the screen off. Soon the question changes from what the program is feeding in you to why the pastor keeps interfering with your enjoyment.

Second Timothy 4:3–4 warns that people will choose teachers “according to their own desires” and “turn their ears away from the truth.” Spurgeon described hearers who welcome a preacher until his words reach their own lives: “when he comes to press home searching questions, by-and-by they are offended.”² The danger has reached your hearing: the pleasure you defend is beginning to decide which preaching you will accept. First Peter 2:11 identifies sinful desires as enemies of the soul. Please do not give one of those enemies the right to dismiss the person who warns you.

Paul’s example shows us how that warning should sound. In Acts 20:31, he reminds the Ephesian elders that he did not cease to “warn everyone night and day with tears.” Calvin comments, “Also, he speaketh of his tears, which did add no small efficacy to his exhortations.”³ His tears belonged to the warning because the people belonged in his affections. First Thessalonians 2:7–12 brings the same tenderness and earnestness together: he cared for believers closely and urged them to walk worthily of God. Brother pastor, do the people we correct know that we long for their good, or only that we can identify their faults? We cannot borrow Paul’s authority for rebuke while refusing his costly affection. Let the person hear the truth plainly, but let him also know that we are willing to pray, listen, and help him obey it.

And when the warning reaches you, do not spend all your strength inspecting the messenger while leaving the message unanswered. The Lord told Ezekiel to “hear a word from My

2 Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Warning Neglected,” sermon no. 165, New Park Street Pulpit, vol. 4, preached November 29, 1857, introductory paragraph beginning “Men will always be looking out for themselves.” <https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/the-warning-neglected>

3 John Calvin, Commentary on Acts, vol. 2, commentary on Acts 20:31, paragraph beginning “For which cause, watch.” <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom37/calcom37.viii.v.html>

mouth” (Ezekiel 3:17); First Thessalonians 5:21 requires us to test what we hear. Ryle urges, “Let the meekness of Peter in taking a reproof, be as much our example as the boldness of Paul in reproving.”⁴ Open the Bible and ask whether the correction is true. A preacher’s error needs correction, but his awkward delivery does not make your sin innocent. Needed medicine does not lose its value because it comes in an ordinary cup. If the Word has exposed something you have been defending, receive the help it offers before discussing the cup. I plead with you: do not turn a conversation about your need to repent into a review of someone else’s manner.

The congregation must learn to give this care as well as receive it. Galatians 6:1 calls believers to “restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness,” while Hebrews 3:12–13 warns that sin deceives and hardens and tells us to exhort one another. When a brother admits that he has been hiding a sinful habit, his confession must not become the week’s conversation. Help him seek faithful counsel, remove the occasions of sin, and return to honest fellowship. Pray with him, and ask again how he is doing. Restoration takes more than expressing disapproval and walking away. A church that wants honest confession must be ready to offer patient, truthful help when that confession comes.

That work must begin with us who lead. First Timothy 4:16 commands, “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine,” and Revelation 3:19 calls us to zealous repentance. Baxter warns ministers to examine themselves: “Take heed to yourselves, lest you perish, while you call upon others to take heed

4 J. C. Ryle, “The Fallibility of Ministers,” concluding application (3), paragraph beginning “In the next place, let me entreat all who read this paper.” https://gracegems.org/23/Ryle_fallibility_of_ministers.htm

of perishing”;⁵ the man giving the warning must not place himself beyond its reach. Brother pastor, if we have reassured people too quickly, avoided a necessary subject, or permitted a practice because correcting it might cost support, we must face that failure before God. Where our failure has misled the church, the church needs a plain acknowledgment, not a speech about how courageous we intend to become. The pastor cannot call the church to repentance where he refuses to lead it in repentance. Let us stop protecting the version of ourselves that has always been right and confess what must change.

Then we must teach again. Jeremiah 3:15 promises “shepherds according to My heart,” who will feed God’s people with knowledge and understanding; Titus 2:11–14 explains that saving grace trains us to reject ungodliness and live for Christ. If people have learned to call every warning legalism, a sharper tone will not teach them what grace actually does. Open the passages they have misunderstood. Show them why repentance is the response of a sinner receiving mercy, not the price of buying it. Explain why obedience is the fruit of life in Christ rather than a replacement for His righteousness. We want a congregation persuaded by God’s Word, not one that merely knows its pastor has become stricter.

Teaching must change the practices that have contradicted it. In Revelation 3:2, Christ commands, “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain,” and Acts 20:28 charges shepherds to care for the church purchased by His blood. If an outward response has been treated as proof of conversion, stop giving assurances that Scripture does not authorize. If activities have left no time for prayer, searching preaching, or

5 Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, chapter 1, “The Oversight of Ourselves,” section 1, “The Nature of This Oversight,” point 1. <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/baxter/pastor.all.html>

personal care, change the calendar. If a member's influence has kept his harmful conduct beyond correction, bring the matter under faithful, biblical shepherding. A church cannot teach people to welcome correction while its own arrangements keep correction from reaching the people who most need it.

And when resistance comes, remain. Second Timothy 4:3–4 warns that people “will not endure sound doctrine”; First Peter 5:2–4 requires shepherds to serve willingly, without domineering, in view of the Chief Shepherd's appearing. Listen carefully if someone says your approach has been careless or harsh, and correct what is wrong. But do not restore an unfaithful practice merely because people threaten to leave. Attendance can fall in a single week; repairing the damage done by years of false assurance may take much longer. Love must be patient enough to teach again and courageous enough not to withdraw the truth. Christ's ownership of the church must matter more to us than the relief of ending a difficult conversation.

Someone may still ask, “Are you trying to rob me of assurance?” If your confidence rests in Christ, I want it strengthened; if it rests in a lie, I dare not help you cling to it. Christ told Sardis, “you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead” (Revelation 3:1). First John 5:11–13, however, was written so that believers might know they have eternal life in God's Son. Scripture exposes false confidence and gives real assurance. We must do both. Do not measure your safety by how little a sermon troubles you, or your sincerity by how much it does. Ask whether you are trusting the Savior and receiving His Word, including where it contradicts the excuse you wanted to keep.

Let me bring this close enough for you to answer. What happened after the last clear correction you received? Did you act on it, seek help, or simply wait until its urgency

faded? Revelation 3:3 says, “Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.” James 1:22–25 warns against hearing that never becomes obedience. Perhaps the next step is to speak privately with your pastor, acknowledge the wrong you dismissed, or remove the habit you keep finding reasons to retain. Name it before you leave the matter again. I do not want this chapter to become another warning you remember without ever receiving the help it offered.

AXIOMS

1. Christ’s love gives warnings because sin harms the people He loves (Revelation 3:19; Hebrews 12:5–11).
2. A shepherd must answer to God for his care of souls, not merely to the people who hear him (Ezekiel 3:17–18; Hebrews 13:17).
3. Faithful correction names what God condemns without claiming God’s perfect knowledge of every heart (Ezekiel 34:17–22; 1 Corinthians 4:4–5).
4. A desire becomes doubly dangerous when we let it decide which truth we will hear (2 Timothy 4:3–4; Hebrews 3:12–13).
5. Pastoral repentance must become patient teaching, concrete reform, and continued faithfulness (1 Timothy 4:16; Titus 2:11–14; 1 Peter 5:2–4).
6. Genuine assurance rests in Christ; faithful warning brings us to Him rather than leaving us absorbed in ourselves (1 John 5:11–13; John 6:37).

TEN REASONS GOD'S LOVE WARNS HYPOCRITES AND COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANS

1. Love tells you what self-deception hides: Christ exposed Laodicea's spiritual blindness so that people satisfied with themselves would seek what only He could give (Revelation 3:17–19).
2. Love challenges false assurance before it fails you: calling Jesus Lord and pointing to religious achievements cannot replace being known by Him (Matthew 7:21–23).
3. Love warns because the sin you excuse is killing you, and God offers eternal life in Christ where sin can pay only death (Romans 6:23).
4. Love tells you about coming judgment while you can still hear the call to repent, rather than letting you discover your danger when judgment arrives (Luke 13:3; John 5:24–29).
5. Love corrects your reading of God's kindness: His goodness calls you to repentance, so continued blessings must never become your excuse for continued unbelief (Romans 2:4–5).
6. Love interrupts your postponement because the time God patiently gives you is an opportunity to repent, not a promise that you can always wait longer (Luke 13:6–9).
7. Love exposes your sickness so that you will seek the Physician, for Christ calls sinners to repentance rather than helping them pretend they need no mercy (Mark 2:16–17).
8. Love tears down your hope in religious performance to direct you to the Savior who died for sins and rose

again, the only hope worth trusting (John 5:34–40; 1 Corinthians 15:1–4).

9. Love brings God's Word to your ears because saving faith comes through hearing His message, not through congratulating yourself on how religious you have become (Romans 10:1–4, 14–17).
10. Love calls you out of hypocrisy toward life and joy with God, who takes no pleasure in the wicked's death and welcomes the repentant sinner (Ezekiel 33:11; Luke 15:1–7).

My friend, if this warning has uncovered an empty profession, do not mistake being exposed for being beyond mercy. The Christ who rebuked Laodicea also said, "If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). He was addressing a complacent church, calling its people to receive Him rather than remain content without Him. Second Corinthians 5:20–21 directs sinners to reconciliation through the sinless Savior who bore our sin. I am pleading with you to stop guarding the religious appearance that cannot save you. Tell Him the truth. Trust the Lord who died and rose again, and do not postpone coming until you have made the warning less painful. Sibbes reminds us that "there is more mercy in Christ than sin in us."⁶ His mercy is what you need now.

And if you belong to Christ, receive His correction without turning your whole life into a search for evidence against yourself. Romans 5:8 declares, "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us," and Romans 8:1, 33–34 directs

6 Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed*, chapter 2, "Christ Will Not Break the Bruised Reed," subsection "Who Are the Bruised Reeds?," paragraph beginning "But if we have this for a foundation truth." <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/bruisedreed.html>

your confidence to God's verdict and Christ's finished work and intercession. Confess the sin He has brought to light, accept the help He provides through His people, and go on walking with Him. You need not keep reopening what His blood has answered. I want you to rejoice in your Savior with an honest heart, grateful that He would not leave you alone with what was harming you. The Shepherd who corrected you has not ceased to love you.

CHAPTER 9

Come to Christ

*John 6:37: “the one who comes
to Me I will by no means cast out.”*

You can close this booklet and leave everything else open: the question about your soul, the sin you have not confessed, the promise you keep making to deal with it later. I do not want to leave you there. Christ told Sardis, “Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent” (Revelation 3:3). James 1:22–25 warns us how quickly hearing can be followed by forgetting. The danger is not that you will forget every sentence. You may remember enough to discuss the book while avoiding the One to whom it has pointed you. My friend, what will you do with Jesus Christ?

Perhaps the hardest words for you to say are, “I may have been wrong all these years.” You have told others that you know the Lord, and now admitting your need feels like tearing up the account you have given of your whole life. But listen to the people in Matthew 7:22: “have we not

prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” Their record could not answer Christ’s judgment. Philippians 3:7–9 shows Paul setting aside the religious advantages he once counted as gain to be found in Christ. Do not spend the years you have left defending the years that cannot save you. The embarrassment of admitting your need is no reason to refuse the Savior you need. Spurgeon urged, “Come to him just as you are.”¹ You do not have to make your past less shameful before you can ask Him for mercy.

Let me tell you plainly where your hope lies. The gospel announces that “Christ died for our sins” and that “He rose again the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). The eternal Son became man, obeyed His Father perfectly, and willingly died as the Substitute for sinners. He bore the punishment His people deserved; He was buried, and He rose bodily from the dead. First Peter 3:18 explains why the righteous One suffered for the unrighteous: to bring us to God. This is more than a message about improving your life. You have guilt you cannot remove, and Christ has accomplished the salvation you cannot achieve. You are being called to trust a living Savior, not to draw strength from the memory of a good man who died.

And Christ supplies the righteousness you lack. When you trust Him, God does not forgive you and then leave you to earn the right to remain in His family. He counts Christ’s perfect righteousness as yours when you believe, so your acceptance rests on the obedience of His Son rather than the quality of your religious performance (Romans 5:19; Philippians 3:9). Hear the order of grace in Romans 5:8:

1 Charles H. Spurgeon, “Struggles of Conscience,” sermon no. 336, New Park Street Pulpit, vol. 6 (1860), section III, paragraph beginning “Oh, sinners, Mercy’s door is wide open flung to you this morning,” <https://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/struggles-of-conscience>

“while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” You do not have to become worthy before receiving His mercy. Promising a better week cannot make you worthy. Ryle counsels, “Rest not on your own faith, but on Christ.”² Even your believing must not become another achievement you offer Him. Lay down the attempt to present God with a life good enough to cancel the life you have actually lived.

What, then, does coming to Christ mean? Acts 20:21 brings repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ together. You turn to God from the sin you have been choosing, and entrust yourself to His Son for pardon and life. Christ’s command to His wayward church is plain: “Therefore be zealous and repent” (Revelation 3:19). Watson writes, “By repentance we please God, but we do not satisfy him.”³ He means that repentance cannot pay our debt of sin; only Christ’s sacrifice answers that debt. Faith likewise is not a good deed that makes God your debtor. Both belong to receiving mercy. You cannot honestly ask Christ to rescue you from sin while insisting that He leave you free to keep it. But you need not conquer sin in your own strength before asking Him to save you from its guilt and rule.

Perhaps you keep waiting for a feeling that will finally give you permission to come. You want deeper sorrow, stronger confidence, or an experience you will never question. Yet Jesus promises, “the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37). Ephesians 2:8–9 directs you away from boasting in anything you supply and toward salvation as God’s gift. Tears cannot carry the weight of your soul.

2 J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots*, chap. 20, “Christ Is All,” concluding application (4), paragraph beginning “Have you faith?” <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/ryle/holiness.iii.xix.html>

3 Thomas Watson, *The Lord’s Prayer*, fifth petition, “Forgive us our debts,” section III, proposition (7), paragraph beginning “Not that repentance merits the forgiveness of sin.” <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/watson/prayer.viii.html>

Neither can the absence of tears prove that Christ has barred the way. Tell Him the truth about your sin and your need. The question is not whether you can produce an impressive response, but whether you will rely on the Savior who has given this promise.

Now let me speak to the believer who has read these warnings and begun treating every failure as another announcement that he is lost. John writes to Christians, “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). First John 1:8–9 calls us to acknowledge and confess our sins, not to pretend that conversion has made confession unnecessary. Pink cautioned against counting fellow Christians unbelievers because of their frailties: “Even a nugget of gold has been known to be covered with dust.”⁴ That caution should also restrain a tender conscience from treating every weakness as proof of spiritual death. Your sin is serious, but Christ’s advocacy is real. He does not defend you by claiming that you did nothing wrong. Your hope is His righteousness and sacrifice. Grieve over the sin; do not let your grief condemn you when God declares that those in Christ are not condemned (Romans 8:1).

Receiving that comfort should make you more honest, not less. Galatians 6:1 tells believers to “restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness,” and James 5:16 joins confession with prayer for one another. First bring the need to Christ Himself. Sibbes urges, “Conceal not your wounds, open all before him and take not Satan’s counsel.”⁵ Then, if you have

4 A. W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, chap. 26, “Christ Teaching in the Temple,” exposition of John 7:24, paragraph beginning “There is not a just man on earth that doeth good and sinneth not.” <https://sermonindex4.b-cdn.net/speakers/aw-pink/exposition-of-the-gospel-of-john-chapter-26-christ-teaching-in-the-temple/>

5 Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed*, chap. 2, “Christ Will Not Break the Bruised Reed,” subsection “For Ourselves,” paragraph 1; wording of the modernized text at Monergism. <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/bruisedreed.html>

fallen into a pattern you cannot seem to break, speak plainly to a faithful pastor or mature Christian who can help. Do not describe the struggle so vaguely that nobody can understand what needs to change. Ask for prayer and practical help, and accept the inconvenience of being helped. You are not earning your place among Christ's people by letting them know you need them. You are receiving care that pride has kept at a distance.

And if you cannot tell whether you are a self-deceived professor or a wounded believer, do not make a settled verdict about your past the admission price for coming to Christ. First John 2:23 says, "he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also." Hebrews 7:25 directs everyone who comes to God through Him to His saving power and continuing intercession. Examine yourself honestly, but do not expect to find a savior by looking further into yourself. Seek wise pastoral help without requiring reassurance as the price of telling the truth. Whatever needs correcting in your account of the past, your present need is not to stand farther from Jesus until you understand yourself completely.

We began with people who thought they knew enough about Jesus to dismiss Him. Now hear His own testimony once more: "But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me" (John 7:29). The Son knows the Father to whom you must answer. He also said of His life, "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself" (John 10:18). He knew whom He came from and what He came to do. You need not discover a path to an unknown God or persuade an unwilling Savior to care. The Father has made Himself known in His Son, and the Son has gone willingly to the cross. Will you continue treating Him as a subject you understand instead of the Lord you trust?

You may want someone to give you a prayer and then tell you that saying it settles everything. I will gladly pray with

you, but I cannot put a promise in God's mouth that He has not made. Romans 10:9–13 connects calling upon the Lord with genuine faith in Him, not with the saving power of a form of words. Christ told the complacent church in Laodicea, "If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). They needed fellowship with Him, not another religious act performed without Him. Pray honestly, in words you mean. Then let your confidence rest in Christ Himself, not in the fact that you have prayed.

AXIOMS

1. Admitting that your religious confidence was misplaced is less terrible than carrying it unchanged into judgment (Matthew 7:21–23; Philippians 3:7–9).
2. Christ's death answers our guilt, His righteousness supplies our acceptance, and His resurrection assures us that our Savior lives (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, 17; Romans 5:19).
3. Repentance and faith receive mercy; neither earns it, and neither gives us permission to keep defending sin (Acts 20:21; Ephesians 2:8–10).
4. A believer's failure calls for confession and renewed dependence on Christ, not the assumption that His saving work has failed (1 John 1:8–2:2; Romans 8:1, 33–34).
5. Self-examination serves us when it brings us honestly to Christ; it cannot replace trusting Him (2 Corinthians 13:5; John 6:37).
6. No prayer, religious record, or future intention can take the place of coming to the living Savior (Romans 10:9–13; Hebrews 7:25).

I must not finish without speaking plainly about death. First Thessalonians 5:3 warns of people saying, "Peace and

safety!” when “sudden destruction comes upon them.” Hebrews 9:27 places judgment after death. I do not know how long you have, and I will not pretend that I do. But none of us can promise himself another opportunity to repent. Death will end the conversations in which you have kept this question open. There will be no next sermon, no quiet afternoon to reconsider, no return to the moment when you understood the warning and decided to wait. Please do not confuse the time God has given you with a promise that He owes you more.

Yet the words before you now are not a notice that the opportunity has passed. Scripture says, “now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). Hebrews 3:7–8 calls those who hear God’s voice to resist the hardening that refuses Him. I am pleading with you to receive this present mercy. Let the warning do its work, even if it overturns what you have always believed about yourself. God has not required you to settle every question, produce a flawless history, or make the shame disappear before you seek Him. Turn from the sin you have defended. Ask Him for mercy. Trust Jesus Christ, who died and rose again to save sinners.

The last word I want to leave with you is Christ’s own welcome: “the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37). Hebrews 4:15–16 also invites His needy people to seek mercy and timely help. Edwards wrote, “Whatever your circumstances are, you need not be afraid to come to such a Savior as this.”⁶ Whether these pages have uncovered an empty profession or brought a real believer to fresh repentance, do not remain alone with what they have exposed. Speak to the Lord honestly. Rely on His saving

6 Jonathan Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ,” on Revelation 5:5–6, Part Three, section B, paragraph beginning “You will certainly be graciously and meekly received by him.” <https://ccel.org/ccel/edwards/sermons/sermons.excellency.html>

work, and follow Him in the obedience His grace supplies. I have not written to leave you frightened of approaching Him. I want you to know the joy of belonging to Him. The book ends here; His promise has not ended. Come to Christ.

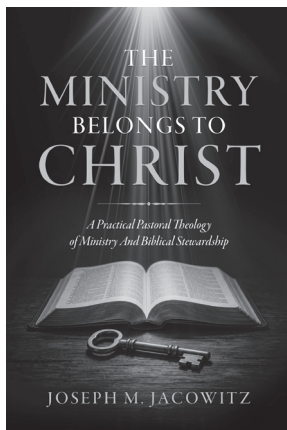
A CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your patience, Your holiness, and Your enduring mercy. By Your Spirit, uncover the false confidence we have used to hide from Your Word. Grant repentance and faith to those who have known religion without knowing Your Son. Bring them to rest in His sacrifice and righteousness alone. Restore Your children who have wandered or grown cold. Teach us to confess the sin You expose, receive Your forgiveness, and follow You with willing hearts. Help those who are frightened and uncertain to look to Christ rather than search for a savior within themselves. Keep us from trusting the words of this prayer instead of the Lord to whom we pray. Great Shepherd, gather Your wandering people close to You, and teach us to walk in the joy of fellowship with You. For Jesus' sake, amen.

THE MINISTRY BELONGS TO CHRIST

*A Practical Pastoral Theology of Ministry
and Biblical Stewardship*

Joseph M. Jacowitz



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Does He govern the way we serve?**

We confess that the ministry belongs to Christ. But what happens when obedience threatens our income, influence, or plans? This book brings that searching question into the everyday life of the church.

Joseph M. Jacowitz examines leadership, money, spiritual authority, and the responsibility to make biblical teaching freely available. He addresses publishing, pastoral training, counseling, missions, and the needs of believers who cannot afford Christian resources.

Written for pastors, ministry leaders, and concerned Christians, this book calls us to honest self-examination, faithful stewardship, and renewed dependence on the Lord. Its aim is to help us serve with the humility and freedom of stewards who answer to Christ.

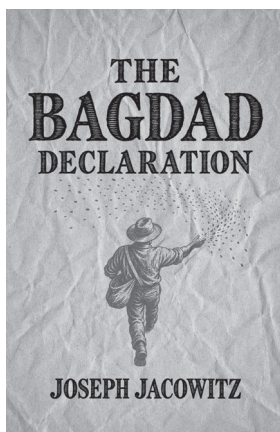
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THE BAGDAD DECLARATION

A call to faithful, freely given ministry

Joseph M. Jacowitz



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how should it be shared?**

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A companion to *The Ministry Belongs to Christ*, it sets out eight articles addressing Christ's headship, access to biblical truth, doctrinal purity, servant leadership, voluntary support, and spiritual accountability. Supporting sections examine the commercialization of ministry and respond to practical objections.

For pastors, churches, and ministry workers seeking a clearer foundation for service, this book offers principles to study, discuss, and apply together. It calls us to remove financial barriers around biblical teaching and to trust the Lord as we freely share what He has entrusted to us.

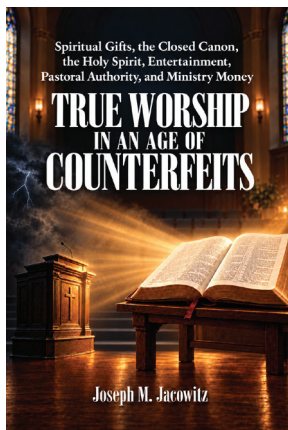
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TRUE WORSHIP IN AN AGE OF COUNTERFEITS

*Spiritual Gifts, the Closed Canon, the Holy Spirit,
Entertainment, Pastoral Authority, and Ministry Money*

Joseph M. Jacowitz



**When someone says, “God told me,”
how do you know that He did?**

A preacher’s confidence can make his words hard to question. A moving service can feel like proof of God’s presence. But neither confidence nor emotion can tell us whether a church is faithful to Christ. His Word must decide.

Joseph M. Jacowitz examines claims of new revelation, spiritual gifts, and modern apostles and prophets. He shows why the completion of Scripture does not mean the end of the Holy Spirit’s work, and considers how entertainment, pastoral authority, and money can draw the church away from biblical worship.

Written for pastors and believers who want to distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit, this book calls us to test what we hear, examine what we practice, and recover worship governed by Scripture. Its purpose is to turn our attention from impressive personalities and experiences to Jesus Christ.

Test the claim. Open the Scriptures.

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