

## HAVING A HEART FOR THE WORD

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### Acts 20:22-31

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“And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

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What we can get out of Paul’s epistles is not JUST a lot of sound doctrine, to help us to better understand God, His Ways, and what He expects of us, as children of God. What Paul demonstrated in his actions, as well as his words, is of the very heart of Christ Jesus, being God’s humble servant, staying focused on the Word and then also having a love for God’s people. That ties in with what Jesus said was the greatest commandment of God’s. In context, we read from the book of Mark, “Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He [Jesus] had answered them well, asked Him, “Which is the first commandment of all?” Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” So the scribe said to Him, “Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

What do you suppose that scribe lacked to have Jesus tell him that he wasn't far off from the kingdom of God? After all, in the Matthew account of this story, Jesus ended the dialogue by saying, "**On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.**" (**Matthew 22:40**) What was lacking for that scribe [or lawyer as Matthew called him], that is, up until that moment in time? The scribe had not yet believed on Christ and received Him yet, to be, as Jesus said must take place for one to be saved, that is being born-again, or in other words, born of the Holy Spirit. After all, one cannot love God with all of their heart, soul, strength and mind on their own, otherwise we'd be still be living according to the law and Jesus wouldn't have had to die on a cross for our sins. And one cannot then be justified before God for their own righteous acts since God is perfect in all of His Ways (**2 Samuel 22:31**) and Works (**Deuteronomy 32:4**) and nothing but perfection can exist in His glory and kingdom. Believing on Christ Jesus and receiving Him, by being born-again is spoken of by the Apostle John, saying, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (**John 1:12-13**) John was making it very clear that one cannot save themselves, only Christ Jesus can. We also cannot save anyone else, or deliver them or heal them, but Jesus can, to those who will put their trust in Him.

Worded a bit differently to drive home the point that it is God that is doing the saving and not by our own goodness or righteousness, the Apostle Paul tells us in **Ephesians 2:8-10**, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Those good works are then the evidence of a changed life in Christ Jesus. "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we **suffer with Him**, that we may also be **glorified together.**" (**Romans 8:16-17**) We experience His Spirit testifying to our spirit for ourselves and we also become a testimony to others as God begins working in us the fruit of the Spirit of "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (**Galatians 5:22-23**) Another biggie for us to know who is living as a new creation in Christ, or for ourselves to recognize and be assured of our own salvation, can be found in **2 John 1:9**: "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son." John is not saying that if you sin after being born-again that you are no longer saved or never were saved. In his first epistle John tells us, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (**1 John 1:9**) It is in the **practicing** of sin that

becomes a huge red flag to those who purport to be a Christian, a child of God. We also know, from Jesus' interactions with the Jewish leaders that they had an appearance of godliness but were, as Jesus put it, children of the devil, Satan (**John 8:44**).

The doctrine of Christ is the Word of God. We are not living according to the Old Covenant to where we are sacrificing animals and stoning people for egregious sins, such as blasphemy or adultery, since God is no longer leading the nation of Israel, as He once did. But we are to live according to the New Covenant that is in Christ Jesus. Believing on and receiving Christ and then living according to His doctrine, which means we are to be loving God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind and loving others as God loves them, and yes, that means also for us that, as Jesus tells us, we are to not be practicing sin such as adultery (as Jesus told the woman caught in adultery to go and sin no more-**John 8:11**) or blasphemy of God- as those were just two examples that I came up with. Yet, for us, in the New Covenant in Christ, our foundation is and will always be Christ Jesus Himself. Jesus tells us, "Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock." (**Matthew 7:24-25**) Christ Jesus is that Rock!

Therefore, if Christ Jesus is our foundation, and as He said in **John 14:6**, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me", then everything that we build upon that foundation must be of the Word of God, of Christ Jesus and His Word. We know that the Word for us has that two-fold meaning. First, the Word of God is the written Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, that faithful men of God, as they were inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote for us, of what God wanted to tell His people. Secondly, the Word of God is Christ Himself. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." (**John 1:1-4**)

It continually amazes me, and grieves me, that men and women of God, even highly respected men and women of God, those who even have high positions in the church, will give a message or sermon and include all kinds of other literature and quotes in their messages, of even ungodly people who did not know Christ, which can lead someone to consider that their words are of equal importance or should even be considered. Seemingly inferring, that all wisdom is good and profitable for us as God's people, as children of God. The Apostle Paul said in his letter to the Corinthian church, "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this

world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." (**1 Corinthians 3:18-20**) Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 1:30**, that Christ Jesus is our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. As I've said in previous messages, I am certainly not necessarily condemning other literature outside of Scripture, but for what is God's will and purpose, what we need and what we have for us to overcome in this world and to be who God wants us to be, we have the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God. I enjoy reading other literature to entertain my mind, at times, just as I would watch a movie-to be entertained. The caveat, or warning in that, is to make certain that one isn't grieving the Holy Spirit in our "entertainment". Right? There are more books than one could count in a lifetime, to choose from, and more movies that can be watched in one's lifetime. The other issue then is on whether it is taking you from your grounding in Christ Jesus. The more time you spend doing one thing or another, it will become you. Jesus in, Jesus out yet the same goes for garbage in garbage out.

That is why we not only need to ensure that Christ Jesus is our foundation, but that everything built upon that foundation is also of Christ, and not the wisdom of this world or the ways of the world. Paul begins for us in our passage of Scripture in **Acts 20** saying, "And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God." Finishing his race with joy had nothing to do with his circumstances that gave him pain and suffering, and it wasn't just about him getting to heaven so that he could prance through the fields of glory, swim in the crystal sea, and take long strolls on the streets of gold. His joy was in doing the Father's will and being sure that God's people were solidly grounded on the Rock of Christ Jesus, and on His Word.

Paul goes on to say, "And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. [God forgave him] For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Did you get what Paul was saying? From what Paul goes on to say, when there are no men and women of God to stand up for His Word, the wolves come in and make a mess of things. Paul had told Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (**2 Timothy**

**2:15)** Paul nor Jesus nor any of the other Apostles were saying to tell God's people that everything is going to be wonderful, that there would be no pain, sorrow, suffering, tears, or death to those who are in Christ Jesus.

"For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples **after themselves**. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears." Speaking perverse things, mingling the ways and wisdom of this world into the truth of the gospel of Christ Jesus, adding to the foundation of Christ that is not THE WORD OF GOD! Paul told Timothy, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." If it is of vital importance to be **preaching** the WORD OF GOD, it is equally necessary that we are to be **reading and studying the WORD OF GOD**, and then also to be abiding in the Word, through obedience to the Word, in prayer, in fellowship with God's people, and in reading and studying His written Word.

I'm hoping and praying that God will pour His grace upon us and give each of us a real passion for His Word, and a deep love for God and His people. We are being led by the Holy Spirit to know God, trust Him, and honor Him and so having a real reverence for **His Word** means that we recognize it as a precious gift from God, just as is our salvation in Christ Jesus and that we also want the same for others, as the Apostle Paul said, "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (**Ephesians 4:13**) May we all have a heart for His Word, as it becomes us, that we can all confidently state as Paul did, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (**Galatians 2:20**), and then that we also have the same longing of that for others.