



## HOW YOU SEE IT

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*Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, November 29, 2020*

Jesus prayed to the Father:

*Consecrate those who belong to You by means of the truth; Your word is consecrating truth.*

(John 17:17)

If the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the truth, and every counterfeit is both false and ultimately destructive, wouldn't you give anything to know that? Wouldn't you give your all?

I mean, if there is really *only one way* to know and please God who made us, wouldn't you give your whole self to know and then to follow it?

We've all wondered at times if this *really is* that way. Such doubts are normal. They are doors to deeper reflection and discovery, and to firmer convictions and confirmations, when guided by the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures.

### **Doubt to Discovery**

Allow me to share two personal examples of the process from doubt to discovery.

The first was my search for the baptism with the Holy Spirit. I was led to faith in Jesus by a Spirit-filled believer, and in answer to my prayer, I began speaking in tongues within a month of being born again. However, I had no confirming emotional experience, which, as a former drug addict, I desired and expected. Too bad. I took it on faith, but my young faith was still weak.

Then, I read a book about the Last Days by a then-popular author that included an appendix, dedicated to dismantling faith in the baptism with the Spirit, based on his particular theological perspective—cessationism. He was persuasive, listing many Scriptures, which led to a period of confusion and doubt. In my search to know the truth, I came across another book (*Nine O'clock In the Morning*), which was the testimony of an Episcopal priest's personal discovery of the baptism with the Holy Spirit—his candor, describing his skeptical reluctance, yet sincere desire, convinced me his experience was real and the contrary theological argument was erroneous.

Soon, I read his other book (The Holy Spirit and You) which detailed Pentecostal theology and outlined steps to receiving the baptism with the Spirit. When I followed those, God answered me with assurance and resolved my doubt.

The second issue was the rapture of the Church. Years had passed, when I heard a group of respected pastors teach forcefully that the rapture of the church was a needless fiction of recent origin that divided and weakened the church. This led to an intensive personal study of the Scriptures on this single topic, in which I discovered both direct references and many supporting examples of the character of our Heavenly Father. Once again, I became convinced of what the Word had to say on the matter, which settled the issue for me and resolved my doubt.

Doubting thoughts are not to be feared, if you sincerely want to know what is true. God is not put off by your wondering, and He is more than able to teach you what is true.

### **All Paths Lead To...**

Observing the ethical similarities of the world's religions, it's easy to wonder if there aren't many ways to God. Here are a few examples to make the point:

Mohammed offered eight paths of conduct for the Muslim religion:

1. to remain conscious of God, whether in private or in public
2. to speak justly, whether angry or pleased
3. to show moderation both when poor and when rich
4. to reunite friendship with those who have broken off with me
5. to give to him who refuses me
6. that my silence should be occupied with thought
7. that my looking should be an admonition
8. that I should command what is right

Hindus, who recognize millions of gods, suggest five virtues:

1. Non-violence (*Ahimsa*)
2. Self-restraint (*Dama*)
3. Non-covetousness/Non-stealing (*Asteya*)
4. Inner purity (*Saucha*)
5. Truthfulness (*Satyam*)

Without any god at all, Buddhism suggests an eightfold path of enlightenment:

1. Right understanding (*Samma ditthi*)
2. Right thought (*Samma sankappa*)
3. Right speech (*Samma vaca*)
4. Right action (*Samma kammanta*)
5. Right livelihood (*Samma ajiva*)

6. Right effort (*Samma vayama*)
7. Right mindfulness (*Samma sati*)
8. Right concentration (*Samma samadhi*)

Even witches may be virtuous people! Wiccans have a single overarching ethic: 'As long as you aren't harming anyone, do as you wish' (the freedom to act, thinking through and taking responsibility for the consequences of one's actions). And they enumerate eight virtues:

1. Mirth
2. Reverence
3. Honor
4. Humility
5. Strength
6. Beauty
7. Power
8. Compassion

It's not even necessary to be religious to behave ethically (though not everyone will agree on specific ethics). By definition, secular ethics are not derived from purported supernatural revelation or guidance, and are based solely on human faculties, such as

1. scientific reason
2. sociobiological composition
3. ethical intuition

What these and other philosophies also share in common is that they are offended by the Christian message of the cross. Very few are offended by the death of Jesus, but very many are offended when we insist that His death means what the Bible says it means.

### **Human Point of View**

Let me return to my original question: If the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the truth, and the *only* way to know and please God our Creator, wouldn't you give your whole self to know and then to follow it?

Let's get Jesus' perspective on this topic...

Mark 8:31-38 NLT

<sup>31</sup> *Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later He would rise from the dead.*

This was not the image of Messiah that they remembered from school. Moreover, it was not the end they had in mind for their wonderful friend, Jesus. This was confusing, mind-boggling. Peter could not hear it any more.

*<sup>32</sup> As He talked about this openly with His disciples, Peter took Him aside and began to reprimand Him for saying such things. <sup>33</sup> Jesus turned around and looked at His disciples, then reprimanded Peter. “Get away from me, Satan!” he said. “You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.”*

Frankly, I think I would have been right there with Peter. I wouldn’t want our Kingdom-teacher and miracle worker to come to such an end. It wouldn’t be right! Jesus had the divine power and authority to circumvent such schemes, and He should do so.

And I would have been standing right beside him when Jesus looked at us and said, “Get behind me, Satan!”

The message of the cross is offensive to the natural mind. A *mere human point of view* cannot take it in. Jesus said that a *mere human point of view* is essentially satanic, because it either ignores or denies that there is a higher point of view (God’s point of view). Satan began this tactic in the Garden of Eden and he still uses it to great effect today.

## **The Jesus Way**

What follows in the passage is the way Jesus proposed to do life.

*<sup>34</sup> Then, calling the crowd to join His disciples, He said, “If any of you wants to be My follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow Me. <sup>35</sup> If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for My sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. <sup>36</sup> And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? <sup>37</sup> Is anything worth more than your soul?”*

Following Jesus Christ necessarily requires forsaking “your own way,” because that is the essence of human sinfulness (any way but God’s way). You cannot go Jesus’ way AND have your own way at the same time. God calls us to a decision, a fork in the road—we must choose.

Christian ethics or virtues will never be *identical* to other systems, for they are all anchored to the existence and engagement of Jehovah God, but they are noticeably similar.

However, the unique element of the Christian message is the cross of Jesus Christ. Not simply the death of a martyr, but the sacrifice of the Creator God Himself, in a human body, as the ransom for humanity’s crimes against God. And that ransom was verified as sufficient and satisfactory when God raised Jesus from the dead.

Take away the cross from Christianity, and all that's left is the shell of ethical principles and religious traditions. This is new age religion.

What's more, that element cannot be added to any other of the world religions without breaking them—without destroying their narrative, their philosophical structure, and their proposed way of life.

That is the uniqueness of the Gospel message. This is the way.

It is not the only way to believe or express religious feelings, but it is the only way of eternal life and salvation. As if to clinch that reality, Jesus concluded with these words:

*<sup>38</sup> If anyone is ashamed of Me and My message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when He returns in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.*

Christ and His message are demanding and challenging. He does not ask us to simply become religious. He does not ask us even to be virtuous. He asks you to repent.

To admit and confess that you have been going the *wrong way*, your own way, and to turn from it—to deny yourself as the leader of your life, and give yourself to follow *His way*—the way of the cross.

For Him, in His role as Savior, that meant self-sacrificial identification with those who are lost. He died in our place.

For us, in our roles as His followers, that means staying personally close to Christ and serving others with humble (non-judgmental) compassion.

This is the way. May you receive this consecrating truth today, and make your commitment anew to follow, never to advise, the Lord. Share with Him freely, but, in the end, be prepared to submit to His wisdom and His way.

Now, to seal the deal, sing with me this wonderful, old song:

*I have decided to follow Jesus  
I have decided to follow Jesus  
I have decided to follow Jesus  
No turning back, no turning back*

*The cross before me, the world behind me  
The cross before me, the world behind me  
The cross before me, the world behind me  
No turning back, no turning back*

*I have decided to follow Jesus  
I have decided to follow Jesus  
I have decided to follow Jesus  
No turning back, no turning back*

Amen.