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## MAY 2019 “WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?”

Greetings in the Name of Jesus!

Anyone who has attended church for at least one year has been exposed to teachings on many different subjects. Being raised in a Baptist church, I heard teachings that originated from a “Baptist perspective” on everything taught. Later, I was part of a non-denominational church for several years, then part of a traditional, Pentecostal church for another few years. In each, what I heard came from their perspective. No matter what church I attended, I always heard that the Bible supported what was taught.

What we hear in church has a great impact on what we believe. This is why in the third chapter of James a powerful warning of great judgment is given to those who stand up to teach the Word of God. The more we hear something, the more we tend to believe it, especially if what is said comes from someone we trust.

In the Baptist church I was taught that speaking in tongues is not for today. But then, in the non-denominational and Pentecostal churches, I heard just the opposite and witnessed people speaking in tongues. Eventually, I experienced what I had been told was no longer for Christians: the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. Obviously, my experience with God was a total contradiction to what I had been taught about tongues not being for today.

Knowing that God is not double-minded and that He will not give conflicting interpretations of scripture to different churches and denominations, I definitely needed clarity. So, I put everything I had heard about tongues “on the shelf,” and started reading the New Testament. Beginning with Matthew chapter one, I read verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter all the way through to the end of Revelation chapter three (Revelation chapter four starts John’s description of end-time events). This took several days, but when finished I realized that every, single verse that had been used to oppose tongues being for today had been taken out of context.

That experience taught me a powerful lesson: Just because a teaching is presented by someone I trust, it doesn’t mean that what is taught is scripturally accurate. This is, without debate, one of the most serious problems in the Body of Christ today. Christians esteem certain preachers to be on their “approved” list, and then blindly accept everything they hear from those preachers, *while rarely – or never – checking the Bible to find out if it’s true*. This approach is foolishness in the highest degree. You see, a preacher can live a life void of sin and be sincere in all he preaches, but some of what he preaches can be sincerely wrong.

Every now and then Christians have contacted me and asked my opinion or “thoughts” about some doctrine, belief or theological point. I make it clear that I will not give them an opinion but will give them what God has said in the Bible. Surprisingly, some people almost seem to be upset with such an approach, though I don’t know why. You see, Jesus said we are to live by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God, not by opinions and thoughts about what we think God means in scripture.

All of this leads me to ask, what do you believe? Below is a sampling of topics and a very brief summary of what is taught about each.

**SPEAKING IN TONGUES** Some believe tongues are for today, others do not. Many teach that the initial evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues. There are those who say Christians cannot pray in tongues at will any time, that they must wait for the “unction” to come over them. Some teach that every time a Christian speaks in tongues, no matter what the situation, there must be an interpretation. Many are convinced that a Christian can get the same results by praying with the understanding as can be achieved by praying in tongues.

**RAPTURE** The tribulation, as many teach, is what the book of Revelation reveals as the final seven years of history before the millennial reign of Jesus on Earth. The “rapture” is taught as God’s removal of Christians from the Earth...

- (1) before the tribulation...or...
- (2) mid-way through the tribulation...or...
- (3) sometime between mid-way and the end of the tribulation...or...
- (4) right at the end of the tribulation...or...
- (5) there is no rapture at all.

Some teach that not only is there no rapture, but that Christians will take over the world, creating a type of utopia for Jesus and His return.

**TITHES, OFFERINGS AND PROSPERITY** It is taught that Christians who do not tithe are cursed. In a sermon before thousands, one preacher said, “Christians who don’t tithe are robbing God, and thieves don’t go to Heaven.”

Some teach that Christians are still under a law to tithe and that financial “seed” offerings must be given to receive blessings from God.

But others teach Christians are no longer required to tithe, that God does not demand offerings in order to bless us, and that giving is simply a matter of whatever God tells us to give and what we choose in our heart to give.

**HEALING** Many teach that healing is not for today, that Christians cannot lay hands on the sick to see them healed, that God heals only if it is His will and that confessing for healing will not produce results.

Yet just the opposite is true according to many others. They teach that healing is most assuredly the will of God and that all Christians have the scripturally-mandated right to believe for healing from every form of sickness, disease or physical impairment.

**SPIRITUAL WARFARE** It is taught by some Christians that there is no devil and there are no demons, that such references in scripture are allegorical.

Others teach that Christians are caught in something like a “spiritual tug-of-war” between God and the devil – as though they are playing some sort of chess game with Christians being the pieces on the board – and the results are beyond our control.

Some declare that essentially all sickness, injury, accidents and problems are because of demonic attacks.

Then, there are those who teach that not everything adverse is because of demonic attack, yet we are still in an Ephesians chapter six warfare with the devil and demons.

**GENERATIONIAL CURSES** Numerous Christians are firmly convinced that many, if not most, problems such as addictions, fear, confusion, poverty, and much more are a result of curses being passed down from parents, grandparents, great-grand parents, etc. They believe Christians must repent for the sins of their ancestors in order to break the curses that are creating havoc in their lives.

However, many are just as firmly convinced that there is no such thing as a generational curse, that problems such as addictions, fear, confusion, poverty and more are many times a result of poor choices on the part of the individual. They teach that instead of trying to identify the sins of past family members, the focus should be on who the individual has become in Christ, the completed work of Jesus, a Christian's position as a child of God and the authority each Believer has in Christ.

**THE SIN NATURE** A great number of Christians believe that when people accept Jesus as Savior their sins are forgiven and washed away by the Blood of Jesus, but that they still have the same sin nature. They go on to explain that the sin nature will not be removed until they are in Heaven. Additionally, they believe that acts of sin committed by a Christian are inevitable because of the sin nature.

Conversely, many believe that at the moment of salvation, the sin nature is removed, and the individual receives a new nature, which is the life of God. Further, they teach that the power of the new nature enables a Christian to overcome all temptation and live a sinless life on Earth.

There are many other topics I could have included in the above list. But the reason I chose the ones listed is because at one time, I believed incorrectly about every one of them. My incorrect belief was a result of listening to and blindly accepting teaching I heard from ministers I had placed on my "approved list." But then, after digging into scripture and leaving verses in context, my understanding changed. I began seeing verses and passages in a whole, new light, which goes right along with Psalm 119:130,

*The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.*

What do you believe about the topics I've identified? Furthermore, *why* do you believe what you believe about those topics? What I have observed over the years is that many Christians basically repeat what they've heard their favorite preachers teach.

For example, for many years I had specific beliefs concerning the rapture and end-time events. Those beliefs had been molded in me by the books and sermons of various end-time prophecy ministers considered to be experts on the subject. Everything they taught was filled with a huge amount of scripture, past and present world events, charts, graphs, and more to further prove and support what they were saying. It was all extremely convincing.

Then one day as I was reading my Bible, the Holy Spirit drew my attention to a particular verse, one that is used in association with end-time prophecy. As I read it, I started to see something about it I hadn't previously noticed. I backed up in the chapter and read it all again in context. Suddenly, I realized that the verse in question *could not in any way* be used the way so many preachers had used it in their sermons about end-time prophecy.

That was close to 15 years ago and since that time, the Holy Spirit has helped me correctly understand several other passages of scripture that have been greatly misused concerning the rapture, the anti-Christ, and more as it relates to end-times. Moreover, He explained to me that

the closer we get to the return of Jesus, many additional passages of scripture will be correctly understood about end-time events, exposing the error that has been so widely accepted in the Body of Christ.

It is now somewhat interesting when I hear Christians talk about the rapture, the mark of the beast, the return of Jesus and so on. At times, I can almost identify what preacher they've been listening to by what they say. In other words, I can tell that they have not gone back to the Bible, left scripture in context and studied to verify whether or not what they heard was true. Don't get me wrong; I do not in any way present myself to be an expert on end-time prophecy. But God has helped me see how that a lot of what I had believed was wrong.

What I find rather exasperating is when Christians, who claim to be hungry for truth, flat-out refuse to accept that something they have believed is wrong – no matter what the subject – even when scripture is presented to them in a line-upon-line manner. Often, they argue their point using teaching from other preachers, at times sounding like a playback of a recording of a sermon preached by someone on their “approved list.” There are even times when they will throw out Greek or Hebrew words, attempting to legitimize their position.

Now, the Greek and Hebrew languages are undeniably vital to scripture. But the definition of Greek and Hebrew words is not what establishes the meaning of a verse and passage. It is the *context* in which those definitions are used. In fact, the precise definition of a Greek or Hebrew word can *only* be understood when the use of that word is left in the context of the scriptural passage in which it is used.

Christians who deny truth when their belief is revealed as a lie, who adamantly insist that they are right no matter what, could be described by the Greek word “phusiōō.” This word means to breathe, blow or inflate. Six times in the New Testament it is translated as “puffed up,” in other words, “self-inflated.” Phusiōō is derived from the word “phusiosis” which means “haughtiness.” A good example of the use of phusiōō is found in Colossians 2:18,

***Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind***

The term “fleshly mind” as used in this verse is referring to someone who has come to a belief about God or scripture based on unresearched conclusions that are influenced by the words of others. In doing so, they become something along the lines of a self-proclaimed expert on a subject. Until I made a decision to study and rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15) I was one of those people.

And what do Christians do when they “know that they know that they know” something is an absolute, undeniable, Bible-supported fact? They like to teach others, often as though they are trying to impress others with their vast knowledge of scripture. But if scripture isn't searched and rightly divided to sufficiently establish genuine truth, then those Christians could be described by 1 Timothy 1:7,

***Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.***

They allow their beliefs to be established by men, not God's Word, then determine that they are knowledgeable enough to be "teachers" of tongues, the rapture, prosperity, generational curses, healing, etc, etc. This is true for those sitting in the pews and those behind the pulpit.

Someone might say, "But Pastor Jim, if those people would spend time praying in tongues, the Holy Spirit would correct all their wrong beliefs." Yes, that is true...unless...they are so puffed up they reject the correction the Holy Spirit is trying to bring about. You may wonder if such a thing is possible; I can tell you for a fact it is possible. You see, we can pray in tongues untold hours every day; but if we have not made ourselves teachable, the Holy Spirit will be hindered in what He is trying to do. I have encountered more than one Christian who is this way.

Maturing and learning as a Christian is a never-ending process. We must always approach scripture with the mindset that we do not know nearly as much about any subject as there is to know. We absolutely *must* make a firm, unchangeable decision to always be teachable, and then study scripture contextually to confirm what we are taught...and keep praying in the Holy Spirit. As long as we genuinely hunger and thirst for truth, God will feed us from His table!

In His Grace,

*Jim*

P.S. - If you would like to receive a sermon explaining why being teachable is one of the most critical elements of being prepared for the return of Jesus, use the form below to request a CD of my sermon, *Be Teachable and Endure*.

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☐ Check this box to receive a CD of the sermon, *Be Teachable and Endure*."

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