

Discussing How To Restore The Early Church

Returning Intimacy and Power to the Father's Children

*"I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for,
it will be done for you by My Father in heaven.
For where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them."
(Matthew 18:19,20)*



SECTION 4 - LESSON 26

THE FATHER AND JESUS

Part 2. Discerning The True Gospel From False Ones:

- *Signs Of False Gospels*
- *The True Gospel: Justification + Sanctification = Salvation*
- *Sanctification—A Lifetime Of Putting Things On God's Altar*
 - *False Gospels: Justification = Salvation*
- *The Older Testament: THE Source For The Gospel Of Jesus*
- *Our Father's Covenant: A Trust-filled Pilgrimage Of Love*



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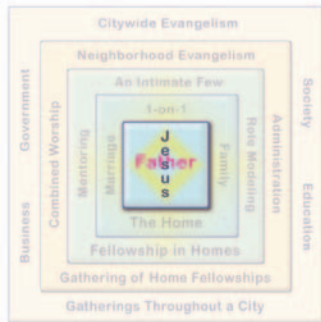
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THE FATHER AND JESUS

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• Signs Of False Gospels

- *The True Gospel: Justification + Sanctification = Salvation*
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THE FATHER AND JESUS

Part 2. Discerning the True Gospel from False Ones:

Signs of False Gospels

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”

(Galatians 1:6-9).

Can you hear the *intense passion* in Paul as he upholds the one true Gospel and condemns those who pervert it?

There IS only one message that stands as the **Good News**. All misrepresentations are eternal **Bad News!**

Hellenized/Romanized congregations are filled with those who have *embraced a false gospel*. Satan will send as many deceived people as he can to fill pews. Crowds of similarly duped people sitting alongside one another provide a certain level of soulish comfort. Since the Holy Spirit won’t dwell in individuals who haven’t embraced the true Gospel, they’ll look for religious systems that offer them self-gratifying, entertaining programs.

- **People who are devoid of the Holy Spirit can’t worship in “Spirit and truth”. So they look for worship services that indulge their mind, will and emotions. Worship leaders try to conjure a “spiritual” mood so attendees will feel good. The success of enjoyment-focused congregations is measured by the numbers who attend services rather than by their Spirit-empowered impact in the world.**
- **Without the Spirit Who gives life to God’s Word, reading the Bible is a chore. Those without His guiding presence look to someone else to teach them, someone who’s not relationally close enough to confront them to live biblical truth.**

- **In order to attract more people, religious leaders rely more and more on programs and services that cater to the carnal nature. Leaders *fill in* for husbands who neglect their spiritual responsibilities at home, rather than *confronting* them. Husbands and fathers are encouraged to “out-source” their wives and children to others for spiritual development, such as through Sunday schools and youth programs.**

Religious systems that cater to false gospels operate through administrative busyness. Warm bodies, especially Warrior and Phallic males, are recruited to keep all the programs running efficiently. (See Lesson 10: *Elders, Our Father’s Representatives.*) Leaders in religious systems are called “pastor” or “elder”, but they are in reality *administrators in charge of programs*, functioning more as managers in corporate America than as spiritual role models and righteous resources.

If you’ve embraced a false gospel, you’ll hunt for Hellenized/Romanized religious communities that can fulfill any of the above-mentioned needs. In contrast, when you’ve embraced the true Gospel, none of the above will be your motivation. You’ll recognize that they’re a hindrance to your living in union with the Father.

The sorry impact of false gospels isn’t confined to congregational settings. The majority of Hellenized/Romanized mission agencies continue to send missionaries to the same places generation after generation. Why? Because they’ve failed to raise up spiritual leadership from among the indigenous people.

The true Gospel of Jesus enables His followers to live spiritually powerful,

relationally intimate lives. But because false gospels don’t yield the indwelling Holy Spirit, mission agencies have to “prop up” the people they serve year after year after year.

A few years ago we were invited to visit a reservation by an older Lakota woman who had been studying the Hebraic foundations, and was a follower of Jesus. She took us to a school for Native American children.

The white missionary principal was proud that he had quadrupled enrollment during his relatively short tenure at the school. We asked him how many Native people had ever taught at the school during its 75 years of existence. “None,” he replied. I asked, “Don’t you see a *problem* with that?” He didn’t.

But as we left his office the elder woman said to us, “*You* see the problem.” A year later God removed this man from the school. For the very first time a Native person became principal—the elder woman who had invited us.

Satan is a deceiver. Wherever our Father has shed the light of His love and established Covenant with His chosen, the Adversary will counterfeit that truth with his own false gospels. For 12 years at our seminars around the country we’ve shared the Gospel that was embraced by the earliest Church. We’ve found that only 3 out of every 100 people self-admittedly have a *ratified-consummated* relationship with our Father.

Most admit with regret that there is no sign of the Spirit’s presence in their lives. Someone told them they were “saved” when they agreed with a few Bible verses and “went forward.”

Tragically, the majority shared one issue in common that kept our Father

from ratifying and consummating the Covenant: **unresolved bitterness**. We'll deal with this issue more in Lesson 27.

Always be on guard against any counterfeit "good news."

There's no way Satan wants you indwelt by the Holy Spirit!

If you have the Spirit of Christ, the presence of God dwells within you.

That makes all the difference, not only in this world, but for eternity.

Don't be surprised that counterfeit gospels have arisen! Even before the Newer Testament came into existence, false prophets and teachers under the influence of Satan were going forth to pervert God's truth.

There were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves (2 Peter 2:1).

Note that even the first-century Galatians who'd been disciplined by Paul face-to-face were warned to beware of a perverted gospel (see Galatians 1:8). Any so-called "gospel" of today that differs materially from the Gospel understood by the earliest followers of Jesus is a path to hell.

Satan is shrewd. He doesn't care how you don't get to heaven, as long as you don't get there! Some people mistakenly assume that God will excuse them at the judgment throne for *not knowing* the true Gospel. The Bible states otherwise.

As we've previously emphasized, entering into Covenant with our Father is first and foremost a *heart issue*. It's a step of yearning to live in union with Him, as

much a determination of your innermost being as a faith issue. Covenanting with our Father is never a mere cognitive act. *You don't enter our Father's Covenant through your mind's analysis.*

Many of the false gospels ask you to agree with a few Bible verses. Then someone ratifies you as "saved." Generally these verses are lifted solely from the Newer Testament. No covenant relationship is established, and definitely no consummation. All you end up with is **human ratification but no Holy Spirit**.

Most likely there was no requirement for *repentance*, your resolve to *turn away from* the sins that needed to be forgiven and *come to* the Father through Jesus for forgiveness and reconciliation. Thus, the Holy Spirit did not enter to consummate the Covenant because no covenant relationship existed.

Yet, others will *assume* you're a "Christian" because you publicly repeated a prayer fed to you by another person. Deluded, you won't be welcomed into heaven without the Spirit: *"And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ"* (Romans 8:9).

Human ratification is occurring in this country in epidemic proportions. The false gospels of today banner "getting you saved" or offer "fire" insurance. How far short they fall of our Father's goal of intimate relational union!

Let's put a false, "cognitive" gospel in the context of a marriage analogy. A cognitive gospel parallels someone offering Sue and me before we ever met a list of personality characteristics about each other. Both of us liked what we read and, as a result of our positive response to the character qualities, we're told, "You and Sue are married!" Still, we haven't met, we

have no viable relationship, and have definitely experienced no consummation. But we're assured by others, "You're married!" I know *about her* and she knows *about me*, but sadly, we *don't know* each other. It's impossible to live in covenant union this way.

This is the same foolishness of false gospels. They require nothing more than cognitive assent to Bible facts but bypass the intimacy and devotion of a covenant union with our Father in Jesus.

Based on what you've read so far, how would *you* differentiate between a cognitive "getting saved" gospel and a "covenant union with our Lord" Gospel?

What type of gospel depicts the one you currently believe? Do you need to make a change?

Is your life with our Lord relational and interactive? Yes or no? If not, why not?

THE FATHER AND JESUS

Part 2. Discerning the True Gospel from False Ones:

The True Gospel —

Justification + Sanctification = Salvation

" So, since we have come to be considered righteous [justified] by God because of our trust, let us continue to have peace with God through our Lord, Yeshua the Messiah... so that the Gentiles may be an acceptable offering, made holy [sanctified] by the Holy Spirit"

(Romans 5:1; 15:16,CJB).

Salvation was understood by the earliest followers of Jesus to occur at the *end of the pilgrimage on earth*. For those who endure to the end in faithful, obedient trust our Lord offers the precious promise of acceptance into His presence:

- *Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved* (Matthew 24:12,13).

- *He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels* (Revelation 3:5).

This is the moment of salvation! To keep your name in the Lamb's Book of Life until the moment you leave this earth calls for two essential elements.

Justification—placing your trust in, and *continuing* to trust in, the shed blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.

Sanctification—the lifelong *heart circumcision* that enables you to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

Your spiritual pilgrimage as a follower of Jesus:

- **Begins with Justification, your Spiritual Rebirth;**
- **Continues in a lifelong process of Sanctification;**
- **Culminates ultimately in Salvation before the Throne on high.**

Anchor this truth for yourself:
The true Gospel is a pilgrimage up to the moment of salvation when you appear before the Lord.

Let's relate this concept to the covenant of marriage. *Justification* is the day you get married, while *sanctification* is living out your marriage. Marriage must be worked out together until the covenant ends when death parts you.

Justification frees us from the death penalty which our sins deserve: "*Since we have now been **justified by His blood**, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him!*" (Romans 5:9). Jesus paid the price on our behalf. Accepting the atoning work of *His death* justifies us before our Father and *reconciles* us to Him.

As we've shared, many false gospels erroneously contend that justification by itself is salvation. But these gospels leave out other verses which pertain to our *salvation pilgrimage*, the aspect of our faith that is sanctification.

In its fullest sense, sanctification may be described as:

A lifelong process of your character and motivation being changed. God brings you to many "altar experiences" in which you can offer your old sin nature to Jesus, the Heart Circumciser. With each death to your old sin nature, you experience increased conformity to Jesus.

Our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted around the world for Jesus understand this truth far better than those in western Christendom do: "*All men will **hate you** because of Me, but he who **stands firm to the end** will be saved*" (Matthew 10:22).

Do you want to spiritually safeguard your journey with Jesus so that you'll endure to the end?

- Always be prepared to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in that which He desires to circumcise in you.
- And, be diligent in putting His Word into practice. In this way you can discern error and avoid deception.

Consider the *pilgrimage to salvation* elements which are captured in the passages below:

*Therefore, my beloved friends, as you have always **obeyed**—not only in my presence, but now **much more** in my absence—**continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling**, for it is **God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose** (Philippians 2:12,13).*

Your *obedient trust* in the God you both love and fear binds you to Him through the Spirit of Christ. Note that your pilgrimage to salvation is worked out with others as a *continuing process*. "***Your salvation***" is plural, indicating that we need to help one another in the changes God wants to make in us.

Next, Paul stresses the element of "*fear and trembling*"—that's how seriously our Lord wants you take the sanctification part of your journey to salvation. Finally, our day-to-day challenges have been designed by our Father as your opportunity to cooperate with the Holy

Spirit as *He works in you* according to His will and purpose for your journey.

Now “*the Lord*” in this text means the **Spirit**. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is **freedom**. So all of us, with faces unveiled, see as in a mirror the glory of the Lord; and we are **being changed into His very image**, from one degree of glory to the next, **by the Lord, the Spirit** (2 Corinthians 3:17,18, JNT).

Our Father has designed that through His indwelling Spirit your free will not be enslaved any longer to sin. As you willingly yield to His work in you, you’ll encounter difficult situations and individuals. Yet, as you respond in the Spirit’s power, you’ll be strengthened and encouraged to recognize the change from how you used to react!

So far as your former way of life is concerned, you must strip off your old nature, because your old nature is thoroughly rotted by its deceptive desires; and you must let your spirits and minds keep being renewed, and clothe yourselves with the new nature created to be godly, which expresses itself in the righteousness and holiness that flow from the truth (Ephesians 4:22-24, JNT).

The more you become transformed into Christ-likeness by choosing to cast off the desires of your old nature, the more you’ll be renewed in godly ways of life to fulfill His purposes for you. His continuing course for you encompasses opportunities to walk in righteousness and holiness—being *set apart* from the world’s ways so that those who have yet to believe will see the difference.

This is our Lord’s ongoing commission for His ever-transforming people to under-

take with serious focus until we stand before His Throne and are acknowledged as His.

What is your understanding of justification and sanctification? Is yours different than the one we articulated? If so, in what way?

Has the truth of justification + sanctification = salvation changed your understanding of the nature of the Gospel? Yes or no? If yes, describe what has changed.

THE FATHER AND JESUS Part 2. Discerning the True Gospel from False Ones: The True Gospel — Sanctification, A Lifetime of Putting Things on God’s Altar

“When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood”
(Genesis 22:9).

This bears repeating because it’s key: Sanctification is the part of your pilgrimage to salvation in which you are changed into increasing Christ-likeness. In Lesson 24 we discussed **heart circumcision**. Sanctification is heart circumcision.

Sanctification, however, is one of the least addressed and most avoided facets of our faith journey. That's not surprising, given the number of false gospels that declare Justification = Salvation.

In light of that error, the sanctification process is optional at best to the majority who call themselves "Christian". The powerless, worldly image of Christendom in the U.S. has proven the tragic fruit of disregarding the call for ever-increasing transformation: The values and lifestyles of those who call themselves "Christian" are no different than those of people who make no such claim. Keep in mind:

Sanctification is a crucial part of your pilgrimage to salvation. Without the sanctifying work of the indwelling Spirit, you'll miss the welcome of salvation.

Ignorance of that which God purposes to accomplish through sanctification has left many "Christians" frustrated and angry. Many felt they were promised a rose garden by becoming a "Christian"; instead, their lives have been pierced by thorns. Tragically, many have forsaken the faith and given up the *pilgrimage to salvation*.

From the biblical perspective of our Hebraic forefathers, *your faith is evidenced by your actions*. The actions you take based on your trust in Jesus are actually *life choices and decisions*. Some of these choices call for you to place on God's altar the things you once held dear.

Faith in action equals choices; in other words, a life of *obedient trust*. In this light let's define sanctification again:

Sanctification can be understood as the action you take in obedient trust to die to something by offering it on God's altar.

That to which you died is replaced by Christ-like character and motivation.

Conforming to Jesus requires you to sacrifice all facets of your old (sin) nature in obedient trust of His Spirit at work in you.

Our spiritual forefather in the Hebraic restoration, Abraham, has set a pattern of obedient trust for us to emulate. We can learn much about sanctification by examining his life responses.

First, God chose him to forsake all that was familiar and set out on a journey to an unknown land. Abraham had no idea how long this trip would take, but his God did—and he believed Him: "*The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you'*" (Genesis 12:1).

Right from the start the Patriarch had to *give up something* in order to *take hold of God's promise*. And, what did God promise him?

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:2,3).

His entire journey would be an opportunity to trust the God Who promised to bless him, and to discover what those blessings looked like.

When Abraham and his nephew Lot had settled in Canaan, their combined flocks and herds proved too much for the land to sustain. Abraham again trusted His Lord, this time to show him where to live in the land. He even offered Lot first choice of where he wanted to settle.

Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company (Genesis 13:10,11).

Lot relied on his own **rationalization** by trusting in what his eyes saw rather than calling upon God for His plan. Do you remember God's appraisal of where Lot chose to live? *"Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD"* (Genesis 13:13).

The consequences of self-reliance were harsh. When Sodom was destroyed, Lot's wife died and his two daughters committed incest with their father. The fruit of that incest continues to plague Israel to this day with animosity and hostility: modern-day Jordan and Syria.

[For more on the sin nature that lies behind human rationalization, see [Lifebyte 24: What's The PROBLEM?](#)]

Abraham's trust in His Lord over where he should live was amply rewarded with an everlasting bequest. He was also promised a blessing that required the childless man to trust in ways that would stretch the staunchest of us:

The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted (Genesis 13:14-16).

During Lot's sojourn in Sodom the city was conquered and Lot taken captive. When Abraham heard his nephew had been seized, he responded with righteous courage. Calling upon the 318 trained men born in his household, this man of faith set out to free him. Because He trusted God, the victory was his.

The king of Sodom wanted to reward Abraham, but the faithful man walked in the humility of knowing from Whom his triumph had come. No way would he accept spoil from a heathen monarch and rob God of the glory due only Him! Abraham declared,

'I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich' (Genesis 14:22,23).

The Patriarch was willing to sacrifice the king's riches because he trusted the God who affirmed His blessing through His faithful priest:

Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything (Genesis 14:18-20).

Melchizedek, whose name means "King of Righteousness", was the priest with whom the Book of Hebrews compares with Jesus, our eternal High Priest. Foreshadowing the Last Supper celebration of the Passover, Melchizedek gave to

Abraham some bread and wine as a “First Supper”. Then he blessed the man who had received such great promises from the God they both served. Stirred by God, Abraham handed to the priest a tenth of that which God had blessed him—no doubt a substantial amount!

Perhaps none of these responses of obedient trust strike you as unusual. This next altar experience, however, strikes the heart of anyone who is a parent. Abraham was commanded by God to take his son Isaac, the son of God’s promise, to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him there.

Abraham was a man just like us, with overwhelming love for his boy. Yet he had a trust that knew only obedience, for he realized that the God Who brought the boy into being could also restore him from the grave. Just as the knife was about to descend on his son’s chest, Abraham was halted by His Lord. A ram provided by God became the acceptable substitute.

Listen to God’s evaluation of Abraham’s motivation and trust: “**Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from Me your son, your only son**” (Genesis 22:12;). In our Lord’s sight, Abraham’s obedience proved his *fear of God*—and God considered that fear noteworthy enough to commend it. (Philippians 2:12,13 reminds us of the vital element of holy fear of our God.)

What was God accomplishing in the life of our spiritual ancestor? And why is this pattern of obedient trust significant to us as followers of Jesus today?

Because He does the same thing to all His children to perfect their trust-based relationship with Him. The same lessons that deepened Abraham’s trust are being offered by God to us. Will our *holy fear of Him* incite the same level of obedience?

In this Hellenized, psychologically-sensitive Christian culture, the fear of God is minimized or discounted all together. The popular mantra resounds: “Our God is *all love*; it’s wrong to fear Him.” But from God’s vantage point, holy fear of Him helps deter us from sinning: “*An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: **There is no fear of God before his eyes***” (Psalms 36:1; see also Romans 3:18).

Holy fear of our awesome God is a critical feature if we’re going to cooperate with Him in our sanctification. Consider this commendation for our spiritual ancestor because of his unflinching trust which produced obedience:

*Wasn’t Avraham our father **declared righteous** because of actions when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that **his faith worked with his actions**; by the actions the **faith was made complete*** (James 2:21,22,CJB).

Abraham’s obedience at the potential cost of losing his beloved son had great merit in God’s sight. The man who was called “*God’s friend*” (James 2:23) was declared “*righteous*”.

Keep in mind that our Father is restoring Hebraic foundations which go all the way back to the Hebrew, Abraham. The process of sanctification in our pilgrimage to salvation will always require decisions of obedience, some perhaps as painful as Abraham’s. Our love for God is proven by our actions. Through choices that reflect our *trust-based fear of God* we walk the path of righteousness.

The life actualities in which you must make a choice are your own “*altar experiences*”. God brings you to a point of trust-based action in which He calls you to put something “on the altar.”

Your caring Father, jealous for a love relationship with you, will not entertain anything that competes with your Covenant union with Him. From God's perspective, whatever you are devoted to or cherish more than you do Him is an idol. His warning is unmistakable: *"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below"* (Exodus 20:4).

Most who call themselves "Christian" would never think they're idolatrous. They don't have graven images around the house to which they bow down. But the Older Testament offers keen insight into what *God* considers idolatry. As we've mentioned before, God's interaction with Israel serves as an example and warning to us today.

In Ezekiel, chapter 14, the elders of Israel approach the prophet for guidance. Through Ezekiel God utters a stern rebuke in this lengthy but pointed passage:

Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of Me at all?

Therefore speak to them and tell them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: When any Israelite sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face and then goes to a prophet, I the LORD will answer him Myself in keeping with his great idolatry. I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted Me for their idols.'

¶Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices! When any Israelite or any alien living in Israel separates himself from Me and

sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face and then goes to a prophet to inquire of Me, I the LORD will answer him Myself. I will set My face against that man and make him an example and a byword. I will cut him off from My people. Then you will know that I am the LORD" (Ezekiel 14:3-8).

Can you hear the pain of God's heart as He speaks through His prophet? These people are going through religious motions but their hearts have turned to other loves. They have *separated themselves* from His ways and His commands, choosing instead to focus on that which gratifies their mind, will and emotions.

Many, who call themselves "Christian", have *idols in their heart* as well which separate them from wholehearted devotion to God. Heart idols aren't based on what you *have*. Rather, your emotional attachment and motivation for having them is what God declares as idolatrous.

It's not enough that you *acknowledge* that some things in your life take precedence over God. He demands *repentance*—turning away without regret or longing for that which you've valued above Him, and being restored in fellowship with Him.

Notice that people who have idols in their heart still think that they'll receive an encouraging word from the Lord. They may ask those with prophetic gifting for "a word" in the hope that God will excuse their adulterous hearts. But God says He'll chastise that person Himself! And, He deals severely with those who hang onto their heart idols because He wants holy fear to fall upon others who have idols as well.

This isn't just an Older Testament issue. The writer to the Hebrews warns us of severe consequences to those who

practice a form of religion but whose hearts are in rebellious defiance of God's ways and His Person:

*For if we **deliberately continue to sin** after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there **no longer remains a sacrifice for sins**, but only the terrifying prospect of **Judgment**, of raging fire that will consume the enemies... How much more severely do you think a man **deserves to be punished** who has trampled the Son of God under foot, **who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him**, and **who has insulted the Spirit of grace**? For we know Him who said, 'It is Mine to avenge; I will repay,' and again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' **It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God** (Hebrews 10:26-31).*

The writer is referring to those who have understood the truth of the Gospel and been set apart for God to transform, but have turned away in *unremitting unrepentance*. No human can help them at this point; only God can deal with them.

We don't want any of you who are going through these Lessons to forsake your faith pilgrimage by hardening yourself to God's sanctification process. He loves His children so much that He wants to transform them into His Son's character, but He tolerates no other "lovers" along the way. John warns us with these simple words, "*Dear children, **keep yourselves from idols***" (1 John 5:21).

Let's put this together for you:

Hellenized Christendom vicariously makes people feel good about their Christianity through **an over-emphasis on "Bible knowledge"**. There's no shortage of organized Bible studies in this

nation. Yet, the vast majority ignore the Hebraic reality that what God reveals in His Word is meant to be *put into action*.

The platform of hearing biblical truths *without accountability* among those who are alongside to journey with you produces knowledge that never migrates to your heart *to be applied*. Hellenized Christendom is characterized more by people quoting Bible verses than by those who put them into practice.

As we mentioned earlier, sanctification is dependent on *faith in action* whereby you must make choices. Jesus emphasizes the distinction between those who hear for *knowledge* sake but continue in self-reliance, and those who hear for *life application* and walk in true wisdom:

- "*Therefore everyone who **hears** these words of Mine and **puts them into practice** is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.*"

- "*But everyone who **hears** these words of Mine and **does not put them into practice** is like a foolish man who built his house on sand*" (Matthew 7:24, 26).

If you put God's Word into practice, you'll mature in spirit as you make choices that affirm your love-grounded, trusting fear of God. Many of these choices will be altar experiences as your personal idols are sacrificed on *God's altar*. And with each sacrifice you make in your heart as His Spirit prompts you, you'll reflect increasing conformity to the character of Jesus.

People who are engrained in Hellenized Christianity find it difficult or even impossible to deal with God's altar experiences. Why? Because sacrificing to God that which He has revealed to

be an idol is *painful*, and nothing in their quest for Bible knowledge through organized programs has called them place *anything* on God's altar.

We've observed that the later in life someone leaves Hellenized Christendom to embrace the true Gospel and the Hebraic foundations, the more painful the altar experiences of sanctification are for him. In His faithfulness to His Word, our Lord the *Circumciser* has a lot of transformation to do before that person arrives at the Judgment Throne!

Cast Down the Idols of Your Heart

Sanctification is our Lord's way to draw you into greater intimacy and obedient trust in your Covenant with Him. To accomplish this promised goal, all throughout your journey to salvation He'll bring you to experiences and decision points during which He'll call you to sacrifice an idol of your heart on His altar. What are your *heart idols*?

These are the possessions, ambitions and goals to which, as you lived in the world according to the world's standard, you grew emotionally attached. Now, as a follower of Jesus, these cherished entities may be idols.

The Apostle John recognizes the attraction of that which appeals to our fleshly desires and worldly ambitions. He also warns that your heart can't entertain two lovers. You have to choose: You love either God or you love what intrigues the world.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—

comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever (1 John 2:15-17).

To the idols of your heart you attach cravings that *feed your sin nature*. You lust after or covet what others have, whether tangible items like a fine house or intangibles such as prestige or recognition. Nagging dissatisfaction gnaws at your soul, keeping contentment at bay.

Just as Abraham modeled for us righteous obedient trust, so too can we learn from the example of rebellious, disobedient self-reliance embodied in the "first son", Cain. He put what *he* wanted to on God's altar, not what God wanted.

The consequences of willful sin in the Garden by Adam and Eve came down on the heads of their children. Sin nature is insidious. It can crouch hidden behind outward acts of obedience, but eventually emerge in undeniable control (see Genesis 4:7).

We know from Scripture that Cain's younger brother had a proven track record of esteeming God and following His ways. The Lord must have made known the only kind of sacrificial offering that was acceptable because Abel was willing to obey! He laid on God's altar that which God had determined to be offered.

By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead (Hebrews 11:4).

When God spoke well of Abel's offerings, the sin nature of Cain flared into

jealousy! Rather than mastering the temptation to sin and repenting before God, Cain walked in the steps of his rebellious parents. The “idol of his heart” was self-will: Ignoring God’s explicit instruction for sacrifice, Cain chose to *do it his way*. In effect, he was daring God to counter his self-determination; he wanted to be *like God*. The idol of his heart led to a flood of evil: jealousy, deception, murder, lying.

And the consequence of his idol’s control? A curse. Separation from God. Banishment from his family. Generational sin through which his descendent Lamech murdered and then boasted about it.

The Apostle whose Gospel and epistles relate how well He knew the heart of Jesus warns us against giving way to the deceits of our heart which propel our sin nature into action. Willful disobedience pleases Satan, not God.

*Do not be like Cain, who **belonged to the evil one** and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his **own actions were evil** and his **brother’s were righteous** (1 John 3:12).*

Prideful arrogance stirs you to boast, focusing the attention of others onto yourself. Even the self-exaltation of quoting Bible verses you haven’t put into practice can be idolatry.

Jesus warned the people of His day about the spiritual blindness that intellectual self-puffery induces:

*You **diligently study the Scriptures [Hebrew Bible]** because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the **Scriptures that testify about Me**, yet you **refuse to come to Me to have life** (John 5:39,40).*

Picture our Lord Jesus speaking to you: ***“You increase your Bible knowledge, but you refuse to be sanctified by putting My Word into practice and placing your idols on My altar.”***

Be alert for idols in your heart! They’re easy to spot. A sure clue we’ve found over the years is this:

Whatever a person habitually brings up first or talks about the most is often an idol.

When a person asks you for help, the area they keep you away from is an idol in their heart.

Watch for idols to which you, your family and those in close fellowship as extended spiritual family cling. Pay attention to what’s habitually brought up first, and what is talked about the most. Recognize the level of *emotional attachment* to the topic. If it competes with the emotional devotion deserved by God, it’s an idol.

If you ever try to help someone who has an idol in their heart, you’ll find they deflect you away from whatever they idolize. It’s as though they’re saying to you and to God, ***“Help me with my problem, but don’t touch my idols.”*** In time you’ll discover that as you anguish to help them, you’ll face a series of dead ends.

Another way to to recognize idols in someone’s heart is this.

Each time they come to you for help, it’s like you’re starting at first base all over again with them.

A person hiding an idol will often *seem* very repentant, overcome by tears and crying out to God about their problem. But that display of sorrow is part of their deception to keep you away from

discerning and confronting the idols they're entertaining.

If you observe idolaters over time, you'll realize they aren't really repentant because there's *no lasting change*. Remorse is not true repentance. True repentance requires not only turning away from sin, but turning to God and living His way. John the Baptizer told us how we could recognize the truly repentant: ***They would produce fruit in keeping with their repentance*** (Matthew 3:8).

A person who hides idols in his heart is determined to hang onto those idols, even if it means deceiving those close to him. If you recall the the Ezekiel 14 passage we cited, even a prophet can get enticed into trying to help.

Since idols of the heart are wrapped around *motives* rather than what others can see, only God can deal with that individual to turn him from sinful idolatry. As Paul notes, “[God] will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts” (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Hannah Hurnard’s classic, ***Hinds’ Feet On High Places***, wonderfully illustrates the issues of pilgrimage and altar experiences. In this allegory the Shepherd of the mountains invites beleaguered little Much-Afraid to leave the Valley of the Fearings and journey to the High Places. Accompanied by the Shepherd’s servants, Sorrow and Suffering, she encounters altar experiences all along the way.

Ultimately Much-Afraid reaches the High Places of spiritual freedom. Transformed through her growth in loving obedient trust, she’s given a new name, **“Grace and Glory”**.

[If you’d like clarity on sanctification and altar experiences, we strongly urge you to purchase *Hinds’ Feet On High Places* and use our free study guide enti-

tled ***Going To The High Places***. The series of lessons are designed to help you understand pilgrimage and transformation. It’s a free download at our website; access the lessons by clicking on “**High Places**” in the menu bar.]

God has brought us to many altar experiences in our 29 years of following Him. We’ve left jobs, homes, family and a host of other things that hindered our pilgrimage of transformation. With each altar experience, we were changed as intimacy with our Lord matured and our dependence on Him increased. May you find similar delicious fruit at each of your own altar experiences!

Yet, we want you to know that idols can sneak into your heart over time. We administrated a retreat center for 11 years. For the first 9 of those years I [Mike] lived as a steward of God, serving others through counseling and teaching. But then my motivation and attitude changed; I began to feel more like an “owner” than a steward.

Finally, our Lord uprooted us and took us to Israel, a painful step I didn’t understand at first. But then an older prophetic friend took me aside to confront me: “Even a *place* can become an idol.” The retreat center had lodged itself as an idol in my heart, and our Father loved me too much to let that idol vie with His Spirit.

In light of places becoming idols, consider for a moment a facet of church-planting that can become idolatrous. Walking as God’s steward and investing your life in the lives of those who yield to the Spirit’s wooing to become followers of Jesus is exhilarating. But if discipling doesn’t produce *indigenous leaders*, then the believers will trust the missionary they can see more than the Lord they

can't see. The church-planter becomes an idol to his disciples, and begins to see himself as indispensable!

Thus we can see more clearly the reason underlying the biblical pattern for the earliest Church evangelists. They shared the Gospel, started a faith community, appointed elders from the most spiritually mature in the Body, then *moved on*. If they'd stayed, the potential for idolizing their own position would set in. By sending the evangelist on to his next assignment, our loving Father safeguarded him from creating an idol in his heart and taking prideful ownership of the service to which he'd been called.

The temptation for ownership lurks for today's clergy who start a faith community. Most of them end up either having to leave or fragmenting the congregation over time because they've idolized their own efforts. Just as He did with us at the retreat center, God has to remove them to restore their first and only love. That in itself can be an altar experience!

No Comparisons Allowed!

One other critical feature of sanctification and putting idols on the altar needs to be addressed: ***Don't compare yourself to others.***

Our Lord forewarned the Apostle Peter of an upcoming altar experience that was His sovereign doing—Satan had to receive God's permission to sift the disciple. Jesus realized that Peter's remorse over his denial might consume the man. By recalling His Lord's warning, Peter could repent and reach out to help the other disciples.

Simon, Simon, listen! The Adversary demanded to have you people for himself, to sift you like wheat! But I

prayed for you, Simon, that your trust might not fail. And you, once you have turned back in repentance, strengthen your brothers! (Luke 22:31,32,CJB).

Peter was able to heed His Lord's advice and not give way to the regret that led to Judas' self-annihilation. The resurrected Jesus talked with Peter on Galilee's shores as the Apostle reaffirmed his love and devotion to his Lord.

Then Jesus revealed to Peter how his life would end. Perhaps fearful that he was going to have to pay a higher cost to remain faithful than John would, he went "horizontal".

Peter turned and saw the disciple Jesus especially loved following behind... On seeing him, Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus said to him, "If I want him to stay on until I come, what is it to you? You, follow me! (John 21:20-22).

Our Father has custom-designed the different altar experiences each of us needs in order to grow in conformity to the character of Jesus. If you look horizontally and compare yourself with others, you'll hinder your own progress. Look up to Jesus for our Father's standard—don't look sideways!

We want to conclude this section with a reminder:

If you don't fully embrace our Lord's sanctification process for your life, you'll never reach salvation's haven. Don't compare with anyone else's experience what *you're* going through in your sanctification process and in His circumcision of your heart.

Guard your attitude when you put things on God's altar. This step of obedience is your act of humble repentance

and agreement with our Lord that this idol needs to be sacrificed. After that idol is consumed, the Holy Spirit will effect the changes in your motivation and character that He wants to transform based on the nature of what you yielded.

Remember, your sanctification is the process of increasing your conformity to Jesus. Do you really think you know how to change yourself? No, you don't! Just put those cherished idols on the altar and let the Holy Spirit do His work in you.

If you resist God's plan and hold onto those heart idols, you'll become a "self-improver". You'll try to show God how you can *change yourself*. And, there are many "Christian" self-help books that will show you just how you can do it. In the end, however, it won't be the character of Jesus you reflect, but pride—the same pride that led to the downfall of Lucifer and Cain.

You'll never grow in humble dependence on God or in your trust in Him by striving all the harder to "be a better Christian". Your futile efforts in self-improvement displace the sanctification work that only the Spirit of Christ can accomplish.

Anchor these realities for yourself:

- The *Holy Spirit* will convict you about the idols in your heart.
- *Don't hesitate* in offering them on God's altar.
- *By grace* the Holy Spirit will effect the necessary changes in your motives and character.
- This is our Father's loving means to *conform you* to His Son, Jesus.

This question is going to take some serious reflection because you need to look for idols in your own heart. What are you emo-

tionally attached to that may compete with your devotion to our Lord Jesus?

Examine those things that make you feel good about yourself in a way that's not due to the Spirit's transforming power. What do you wrap your identity around as far as what you do or what you have? Also, search your heart for those things that you *fear losing*. Please be very complete as you list these.

Recount as many significant "altar experiences" in your life as you can remember. What did God want you to place on His altar? Describe what you went through until that cherished entity was truly sacrificed. How did God bless you afterward for your obedient trust? What changes in you did He make?

If you've considered yourself a Christian for several years and you couldn't write down any significant altar experiences, what might our Lord be trying to tell you? Who do you know who might be able to help you with this assignment?

THE FATHER AND JESUS

Part 2. Discerning the True Gospel from False Ones:

False Gospels: *Justification = Salvation*

“These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me.”

(Matthew 15:8, apperceived from Isaiah 29:13)

The most common thread among the counterfeit gospels of today is that **justification is the same thing as salvation**. Perpetrators of these gospels contend that salvation is guaranteed at the *beginning* of your spiritual journey, at the moment of conversion. This falsehood nullifies the true Gospel as a *pilgrimage* of increasing transformation in Christ-likeness and the faithful endurance until the end which ultimately leads to salvation before the Throne.

The Gospel of the Covenant is reflected in the union of the marriage covenant. Incisively, those who embrace the false “justification = salvation” gospel are among those who populate the divorce statistics in this nation.

This particular counterfeit gospel is most prevalent in the “Bible Belt”. Is it any wonder that the divorce rate (the *breaking of covenant*) is 50% higher there than in the rest of the U.S.? There’s a grievous connection here. Suffice to say, embracing a false gospel can also mean that your marriage covenant is expendable as well.

When you hear phrases like, ***“Once saved, always saved,”*** or, ***“You can lose your salvation,”*** you’re encountering arguments that have nothing to do with the Gospel that the earliest Church embraced. Such statements are the result of the man-made gospels of the last three hundred years.

Think about it: You can’t *lose* what you haven’t yet obtained! Salvation comes at the *end* of your earthly pilgrimage at the Judgment Throne when your name is proclaimed from the Lamb’s Book of Life.

Reread the letter of First John for a refresher on a life of *continuing* love that *keeps on* obeying our Lord’s commands in union with Him. The *Jewish New Testament* translation by David Stern does an excellent job of presenting the *ongoing* sense of the original Greek verbs. We encourage you to read that translation to better understand the Hebraic mindset.

Another marriage analogy depicts the nature of false gospels. A man and a woman have a wedding. Right after the ceremony he leaves his wife. Five years later you meet him and you ask, “Are you married?” He responds, “Yes.” When you ask where his wife is, he answers, “Oh, I left her right after the ceremony.”

Is the man *married* in the biblical sense of covenant union? We asked this question in the “Bible Belt” and were told, “Yes! He’s just ‘backslidden.’” (“Backslidden” describes those who are going to smash into the wall next to the narrow gate.) This response views both salvation and marriage *technically*, not relationally. In other words, the *letter* is more important than the *spirit* of the matter.

- **Letter—mentally agreeing with Bible verses and being declared “saved”.**
- **Spirit—embracing a covenant relationship of life-long union in Jesus.**

Those who have embraced the true Gospel and understand salvation as a pilgrimage immediately respond to the “married” question with an emphatic “No!! The man’s intent never was to enter a covenant relationship. Therefore the marriage is void from God’s perspective.”

Those who embrace false gospels and are “ratified as Christian” by man become inoculated to the true Gospel covenant of spiritual union that endures to the end. Their so-called “salvation” is void already.

Based on what you understand so far, describe the difference between a “saved-at-conversion” gospel and a pilgrimage of loving endurance unto salvation before the Throne.

Think of your ongoing sanctification as the “relational glue” with which the Spirit binds you to our Father. Describe the intensity of your heart union in Jesus. How did that come about?

THE FATHER AND JESUS

Part 2. Discerning the True Gospel from False Ones:

The Older Testament Is THE Source for the Gospel of Jesus

“Whoever trusts in Me as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who trusted in Him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified”
(John 7:38,39).

The Bible stipulates one true Gospel as the way to eternal life. Jesus spoke of it to his Jewish listeners, above, during the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. The “streams of living water” refer to the undeniable evidence of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling in the life of anyone who puts his trust in Jesus.

The only Scripture in existence when Jesus spoke these words was the Hebrew Bible, the Older Testament. If you want to trust Jesus “as the Scripture has said,” you must study the Hebrew Bible to discern the facets of the complete Gospel.

Being accepted by God the Father through the sacrifice of Jesus was the central issue in the early Church. The cornerstone of the Gospel that is based on the Hebrew Bible and understood by our Hebraic forefathers was *not* man accepting Jesus as his Savior, but that the Father accepted the *Lord Jesus* as the only sacrifice for sin out of His great love for mankind.

Christ fulfilled His Father’s reconciliation requirements on our behalf. Jesus’ payment was complete, and a new Covenant was established through His blood.

Veteran missionary Trevor McIlwain puts it well:

The resurrection of Jesus was our Father's sign that the sacrifice for our sins had been accepted by Him. He was, and forever will be, satisfied. If Jesus hadn't been raised from the dead, our hope would be in vain. We would have no sign from our Father that the sacrifice had been acceptable to Him and that a New Covenant had been established.

Over two hundred years before the coming of Jesus, a number of what we call the "*Hebraic stream*" of rabbis began to teach that a person must experience a spiritual birth, a *response* to God's call on his life. These rabbis understood the trust-filled relationship that Abraham had with God.

Conversion meant rebirth. Being "born from above" was a shift from following the letter of the law to abiding in loving obedience with our Father.

Being born again was the point at which you shifted from religious practice (or *no* practice!) and put your *full trust and reliance* in living in union with God. This teaching had been well-known in Israel for some time. That's why Jesus was so surprised when Nicodemus professed ignorance of spiritual birth: "*Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this?*" (John 3:10).

Religious leadership had made sure that response to God was limited to the confines of ritual form and prescribed practice. A multitude of traditions had been added on to *Torah* (God's instruction) to further create boundaries. Only from within these parameters could someone approach God.

Jesus, however, recognized that the "fences of spiritual tradition" were in fact *separating* the people from a relationship of loving trust with His Father. He soundly criticized the religious leaders whose rigid perspective made them wholly unteachable. Their religious bondage had no room for the new wine of spiritual freedom in the Messiah.

*No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the **new piece will pull away** from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours **new wine** into **new wineskins** (Mark 2:21,22).*

To be "born again" was to trust in Jesus "*as the Scripture has said*"—with the same loving obedience as Abraham trusted. Trying to trust in Jesus while relying on religious tradition and ritual as the means to please God rips both apart, rendering them useless.

Our Lord admonished His Jewish audience that they were missing the reconciliation with God through Himself which *Torah* had made clear:

*You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that **by them** you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that **testify about Me**, yet you **refuse to come to Me** [as the Scriptures have said] to have life (John 5:39,40).*

Sadly, many who embrace any of the false gospels of today feel far more comfortable and edified with **religious knowledge and forms** than with a relationship with the PERSON who gives life.

What do you think about the statement that the true Gospel is our Father's acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice for our sin rather than our response to it? How does this statement differ from gospel presentations you've heard in the past?

The Hebrew prophets foretold Jesus' coming as Messiah. What specific Old Testament scripture passages are you aware of that corroborate His fulfillment of these prophecies?

THE FATHER AND JESUS Part 2. Discerning the True Gospel from False Ones:

Our Father's Covenant —
*A Trust-filled Pilgrimage of Love
(Not a life of rule-keeping!)*

"Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!'"

These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings.

Such regulations indeed have an

appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence"
(Colossians 2:20-23).

This fact bears repeating: The early Church understood salvation as a *process* or *pilgrimage*. A pilgrimage has a beginning and a desired end.

Our goal as followers of Jesus is to ultimately be found faithful and to hear our names proclaimed to the hosts of heaven.
No one can accomplish this without the indwelling Holy Spirit.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, God expressed His heart's desire for an ongoing love relationship with the Israelites:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength (Deuteronomy 6:4,5).

All of God's interaction with His people emanated out of love. In the Newer Testament this is summed up in 1 Corinthians 13.

But many of the misguided Israelite leaders in what we call the "**Judaizing Stream**" perverted our Father's desire into a series of rules and obligations designed to earn salvation only if precisely followed.

These men, epitomized by many of the Pharisees, cherished religious form over relationship with God. Their structure of religious practice is known as "**legalistic perversion**." Unlike the trust-filled obedience of their father Abraham as he related to God, legalists focus on

rule-keeping rather than the intimacy of relational responsiveness.

Legalistic perversion is egotistical. The individual believes in his heart, "I can fulfill these requirements *on my own*. I don't *need* God's intervention." That self-sufficiency is driven by pride. Zechariah 4:6 tells us otherwise: "*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,*' says the LORD Almighty."

[For more on legalistic perversion and self-justification see our video or script: [Certain Of What We Do Not See; Satan's War Against Us \(Part 3\): Self-justification and Lawlessness.](#)]

How would you articulate the difference between legalistic perversion and a life of obedient trust that evidences the Spirit's work in you?

What motivates *your* walk with our Lord? What evidence in your life would convince a jury that He lives in you?

Can you identify any boundary fences of traditions or rituals from your past that may have hindered you from pressing on in spiritual freedom?

Place a check mark next to the indicator that best describes you.
Discuss your answers with someone who knows you well.

COVENANT GOSPEL

- Fully aware of your own sinful depravity
- Sin grieves your heart
- Ongoing desire for intimacy with our Father
- Bible is a life-giving resource to glorify the Father
- Ongoing heart change by the Holy Spirit
- Living sacrificially for Jesus;
- Others see dramatic difference in you from before
- Worship expressed from a cleansed, exuberant heart
- Fellowship gathering spurs you on to greater courage
- Prepared and eager to represent Jesus in the world
- Confident of the Spirit's indwelling
- Life empowered by the Spirit

FALSE GOSPEL

- I'm okay just as I am
- Hardly conscious of sins
- Father God barely considered, or no relationship at all
- Bible studied for knowledge, not a way of life
- Same motivations / no heart change
- Avoid suffering, rejection at all cost; Jesus irrelevant
- No substantial difference from world's values
- Worship is self-pleasing; no regard for repentance
- Service attendance epitomizes your religious expression
- Apathetic toward the salvation of others
- No assurance of the Spirit's presence
- Religious life based on own efforts