

### What Is Your Job?

In the past few lessons, we have talked about judging and mercy; and because the things you learned in those lessons are hated so violently by so many, many objections have been invented in an attempt to refute them. But it's more than just objections from adversaries of the truth; you're going to have your own doubts, too.

When you start judging people, and they call you all manner of names, you're going to wonder. Wonder, did you do the right thing? Was there something more you could have done? Should you have left it alone? Will your judging force them into a corner where they make a bad choice for which God must destroy them?

Would it have been better to say nothing and let this person be sort-of good, rather than force them into a choice which may leave them far worse than before? Maybe if you'd been more patient with them, they would have understood in time?

There will certainly be no shortage of people telling you all of these things, and judging and condemning you for your judgmental attitude. The primary goal of this lesson is to set your mind at ease about these questions. That will happen when you understand more about your purpose, their purpose, and what God expects from you, in...

### LESSON 32: WHAT IS YOUR JOB?

You already have a leg up over the vast majority of the world, including Sabbath-keeping semi-churches of God, because you understand thoroughly if people don't make it in this life *they aren't dead forever*. Not only will they have a chance at a good life in the second resurrection, **they might even be happier there!**

Knowing – really knowing and believing – that the second resurrection *isn't such a bad place* is the greatest key to peace of mind. It gives you a perspective you just can't have when you think the choice is between bliss in heaven and eternal torture in hellfire. But before we get into just what God expects of us, we need to clear away a few smaller objections that will get in the way of explaining it.

### REBUKE NOT AN ELDER

Occasionally, particularly if you're young, people will pull out **1 Timothy 5:1-2** and throw it at you. At first, it looks pretty clear – you should never rebuke anyone older than you. But why didn't Paul mention that in the next letter to Timothy, when he told him to “*reprove, rebuke, [and] exhort*”? (**2 Timothy 4:2**). Was he only allowed to rebuke crowds if there was no one in them older than he was? Ridiculous.

Then there is a direct contradiction in the very same chapter – **1 Timothy 5:19-20**. Here, the context is about elders that are accused of sinning by two or more witnesses (**verse 19**), and if they are found to be sinning, they should be rebuked in front of everyone (**verse 20**).

Yet not 20 verses prior, Paul had said “do not rebuke an elder”, now he says “rebuke an elder that sins *in front of everyone*”! Clearly Paul didn’t contradict himself, but remember the context. Paul wrote these scriptures to Timothy, primarily for the purpose of telling him how to guide and correct *the church*! These books were not about interacting with the world, but with the church. So the statement “rebuke not an elder” has *nothing* to do with correcting elders in the world.

In the church, people should already be basically decent; their motives should be generally good. If someone who has been without blame for years makes an ignorant mistake, it is *wrong* to jump down their throat about it – whether they’re elder, in which case you talk to them like parents, or younger, in which case you talk to them as siblings.

BUT! That does *not* mean if someone who is older than you in the church sins repeatedly or rebelliously, you should not “*rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith*” (**Titus 1:13**). There is no age-limit on sin, stupidity, or carnality. God respects no person’s age, wealth, or position in the church (**Job 34:19, Galatians 2:6, Romans 2:11**, etc.). What is God’s rule? **Colossians 3:25**.

## DON'T BE A PHARISEE

You’ll often hear yourself characterized as a Christ-forsaking Pharisee who desires to be handcuffed to the law “which cannot save you”. You’ll hear it’s the spirit of the law, not the letter that saves you. You studied all of that back in Lesson 3. There is one particular example that wasn’t explained then, which should be now: **Luke 18:10-14**.

In this passage, a Pharisee was thanking God he wasn’t a sinner like this publican; the publican wouldn’t even lift up his eyes, but begged for God’s forgiveness. This is sometimes used to condemn judging, the reasoning being that the Pharisee was self-righteous and judged the publican; the publican wouldn’t judge the Pharisee, but only acknowledged his own sin. And God praised the publican over the Pharisee.

But that isn’t at all what was happening. The thing is *both of these men were severe sinners*. The Pharisee wasn’t keeping the law either! (**John 7:19, Matthew 23**, etc.). The difference being, the publican *acknowledged* his sin and begged forgiveness. The Pharisee *did not* acknowledge his sin, and thanked God that he was so much better than this other sinner, who in reality was probably a better person than he himself was! And that ties us neatly back to **Proverbs 28:13**.

What God was condemning wasn’t the Pharisee *judging* the publican; it was someone judging someone else when “*you who sit in judgement upon others are guilty of the same misdeeds*” (**Romans 2:1, Weymouth**), which is a principle we talked about a lot in Lesson 30.

## LOVE COVERS A MULTITUDE OF SINS

This primarily stems from **1 Peter 4:8**, which is a quote from **Proverbs 10:12**; and a similar argument comes from **James 5:20**. In both cases, the argument goes like this “love covers sins; therefore, if you truly LOVE someone, you will ignore their sins, and you won’t judge them!”

Clearly, that doesn’t square with the other scriptures. But the answer is pretty simple. If you read the context of the first two scriptures, it is not *sins against God*, but *sins against each other*. In other words, when I slap you without cause I sin against you, AND against God. Which means I must make amends

to both you and God individually. **1 Peter 4:8** and **Proverbs 10:12** are both talking about making amends with the other *person*, not with God.

Compare those scriptures with **Proverbs 25:8-10**, which you studied in the last lesson. Hatred stirs up strife by repeating tales to people, which are none of their business. But love “*discovers not a secret to another*”, and instead it *covers those sins!* Not by ignoring them, but by DEALING WITH THEM directly and privately, where they belong!

This idea is borne out in **Proverbs 17:9**. So “love covering a multitude of sins” doesn’t condemn judging, but gossip! In fact, it *requires* judging, and in the process, it encourages us to be willing to forgive the sins of others against us (**Matthew 6:12**) *when they have repented*, and never to speak of them again – which **1 Corinthians 13:4** bears out.

The other passage, **James 5:20**, has a different explanation; these are certainly sins against God. But the question is, **whose sins will be covered?** When you “convert a sinner”, and “save a soul from death”... does that hide a multitude of YOUR sins... or HIS? Most of the world reads it to mean it hides *your own sins*. But does that make sense? Apparently, many people will use this argument according to **Matthew 7:22-23**. *But it won’t work!*

If I get you to stop sinning, does that give me license to continue sinning myself? If I manage to get 10,000 people to keep the Sabbath, does that “cover my sin” so I can keep Sunday or commit adultery? Of course not! So it can only mean if you convert a sinner, you’ll save *HIS soul* from death, and *hide a multitude of HIS sins*.

If you just read **James 5:20** carefully, it’s obvious that judging is *required!* Without making a judgment that someone is sinning, how can you “convert a sinner from the **error of his way**”? If you haven’t first made a JUDGMENT that he is a “sinner” and his way “is in error”, you can’t! And if you don’t *confront him, and condemn his actions*, how can you possibly CONVERT him??

So how does that “cover a multitude of [his] sins”? Simple! If he is indeed “converted from the error of his way” then **he has repented!** If he has repented, how does God deal with his sins? **Psalms 103:10-12**. Notice the similar language “*as far as the east is from the west... He has removed our sins from us*”. That is not unlike saying God has “**hidden a multitude of his sins**”!

## LOVING GOD’S ENEMIES

On the other hand, the world believes we should love everyone, all the time. And while that is true from a certain point of view, it ignores some scriptures that must be reconciled. For example, the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, was a good king. Ahab, the contemporary king of Israel, was a *very* bad king.

When Ahab wanted to go to war, he asked Jehoshaphat for help; how did he answer? **2 Chronicles 18:3**. God saw to it that Ahab died in that battle, and when Jehoshaphat returned, a prophet had a message for him from God. How did God feel about his friendship with Ahab? **2 Chronicles 19:2**. The obvious conclusion from the rhetorical question is that we should *not* help the ungodly, nor “*love those who hate the Lord*”. There is a similar command in **Psalms 97:10**.

Now, obviously, since everything God does is love, we must love them as well *but not in the same sense*. The love of God, or of a Christian for an enemy won’t *hurt* that person, *or allow them to come to harm if they can avert it*. But Jehoshaphat wasn’t condemned for that; **Jehoshaphat loved Ahab as a friend, not as an enemy**.

It's one thing to feed a hungry enemy – whether your enemy, or God's – it's another to go hunting with him on weekends. It's one thing to refuse to slap your enemy back; it's another thing to pretend you are friends and go out drinking with him. We should *NOT* “love those who hate the Lord”, or “help the ungodly”.

If you see his car broken down alongside the road, you shall surely help him (**Exodus 23:5**). But you should *not* help him rebuild his hot rod. This is obvious, but misunderstood by most people. Now obviously, this doesn't mean you can't have carnal, unconverted friends (**1 Corinthians 5:9-10**). The world is largely deceived, and God can overlook their many faults through grace, because they are ignorant of the truth, and so can we.

**But if someone thinks he is your brother in Christ, then they are less deceived and therefore you must hold them to a higher standard.** The world can't really hate God, because they don't know anything about Him!

But if someone who is called a BROTHER, or who thinks of you as his spiritual equal, is a fornicator, idolater, and so on – then you cannot even eat with such a person (**verses 11-13**), much less be their close friend. And you certainly dare not say to them as Jehoshaphat said to Ahab “*I am as thou art, and my people as thy people*” – **because we do not love those who hate the Lord as friends. We love them only as enemies.** And you learned how to love your enemies in Lesson 28.

## WHEN SHOULD YOU JUDGE THEM?

How long after something comes up should you say something? Should you wait for a good time? **Ecclesiastes 8:11**. That basically says it all. The longer you wait, the more time it has to become settled in their hearts – and the harder it is to dig it out.

Another important verse is **Ephesians 4:26**. If you're angry about some sin someone has committed against you, deal with it promptly. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. God doesn't – that's why just at sunset every day, the priest offered the evening sacrifice to pay for the sins of the day. It's also why Paul said “*I die daily*” (**1 Corinthians 15:31**).

Incidentally, this sort of thing – connecting apparently unconnected scriptures across the Bible into one picture to make sense, like “let not the sun go down on your wrath” and the evening sacrifices – gets easier and easier the deeper you delve into the Bible. You'll see much more of that after another dozen lessons or so.

## WHAT IF THEY DON'T LISTEN?

When you speak the truth to people, some are going to listen and some aren't. The proportion is *heavily* slanted towards the latter group. And if you are conscientious about the job God has given all of us, to be the light of the world, you are going to wonder if you failed those people. If it was somehow your fault that they didn't listen. If you could have done more, or less, and perhaps then they might have accepted the truth.

There are certainly things you can do that can keep people from understanding God; you studied those in the last lesson, under the heading “Beware The Millstone” – basically, by sinning or being a poor example of the things you teach, you can turn away many from the truth. But we're moving beyond that now, and assuming you are an excellent example, doing everything you can to help people understand the truth. When people *still* don't listen, is that your fault?

When it comes to understanding what God expects from you in this area, I don't think any scripture is clearer than **2 Corinthians 2:14-17**. Read it carefully, in several versions if you can – KJV doesn't do it justice. **Verse 15** in particular – “*For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish*”.

The phrase “sweet savour” means “sweet smell”, and was used to refer to most of the sacrifices in the OT. When they burned, it made a sweet smell to God, just as we all love the smell of a good barbeque. So God is saying that when we try to teach people the truth, we smell like good BBQ to God, BOTH when we convert someone and they are “saved”, AND when we offend them and they are “lost”!

That's very shocking to most people. The world's churches agonize over all the “lost” souls out there, and only consider it a “win” if they manage to bring some new convert into their flock. We're different! We win *either way!* How is that possible? How could we rejoice when someone makes a choice to reject God and perish? Easy! **Because we understand what we're put here on this Earth to do!**

I'll explain that cryptic statement in the next segment. Meanwhile, let's continue with Paul's words in **verse 16**. He already said we're a sweet smell both in those who are saved, and in those who perish; now he says we are a sweet smell of death for the one; and a sweet smell of life for the other. **But God loves both smells!**

He concludes, “*who is sufficient for these things*”, or as other versions say “*Who is fit for such a task!*” (**Philips**), or “*for such service as this who is competent?*” (**Weymouth**). Translators disagree over what exactly this means, and commentators (as usual) are completely lost. It is arguable, but based on the context it seems to be saying “and who can do more than that?” – in other words, what servant can do better for his Master than to be a sweet savor in those he convinces, and in those who reject him as well?

This principle is found many places in the Bible, now that you know what you're looking for. God knew people probably wouldn't listen to what He told the prophets to say; just as He knows most people won't listen to what we tell them. So what did He tell Ezekiel? **Ezekiel 2:1-7**. God considered Ezekiel's message a success ***whether the people listened or not!***

Because either way, down the road – maybe even in the next life – they will know God sent them a prophet, and they rejected him. All Ezekiel had to do to “win” the argument was to speak what God told him to speak – in other words, to speak the truth.

You will argue with many people in your life if you are a true Christian. And what it means to “win” these arguments is a lesson in itself; but **2 Corinthians 2:14** gives us the short answer. God makes us ALWAYS triumph in Christ. We always win *as long as we speak the truth*, whether they hear us or not!

But now we come to **2 Corinthians 2:17**; seen in this context, it takes on a new meaning. You may have read it in the past as an isolated verse saying, “we shouldn't corrupt God's word” (duh!). But now that you read it in the CONTEXT of **verses 14-16**, it takes on new meaning because you can understand WHY Paul was saying that!

See, as you tell people the truth you will at first be appalled at how many don't listen. Your extremely low success rate will make you sure that you must be doing something wrong – even Paul felt like he might have made a mistake somewhere, because what he was doing didn't seem to be working. (**Galatians 2:1-2**).

This is natural, and even more natural to us today because of the Protestant teachings we're surrounded by. We instinctively expect there to be billions in the first resurrection – because the Protestants taught us that billions of saved dead were in heaven right now. But that isn't the case, and the real number is several orders of magnitude lower than that.

But that's not the point – the point is, when you see that the message Jesus gave you to teach (“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”) isn't working like you expect – when you find out that people, surprisingly enough, don't like being told everything they ever believed is wrong – you will be tempted to soften that truth. To make it easier to swallow – and hopefully “save” more people.

But when you soften the truth, you inevitably corrupt it from the pure form God gave to us. Because the only way to soften it so people will like it, is to allow them to keep more of their sins; judge them less; let them believe God is more tolerant, and that love is more important than the law.

And so **2 Corinthians 2:17** was a response to that attitude. Murdoch translates it excellently “*for we are not like others, who dilute the words of God; but as of the truth, and as of God, we speak in the Messiah before God.*”

Other preachers diluted the word of God so as not to offend people, in the hopes of “winning” more souls as so many do today. But Paul and company spoke the truth before God. “Take it or leave it”, to put it as a modern motto. **Because Paul realized he didn't need to dilute the truth to win – he won whether the people listened or not.**

But most ministers soften the truth, because the people constantly encourage you to soften it (**2 Timothy 4:3**), to make it easier to accept. This is why ministers today gradually “dilute the words of God” with words from Protestant preachers, commentators, authors – until there are only a few dozen of God's words in a given sermon, the rest being made up by men, and comments by men about other men's writings.

## SO WHY DOES GOD SAVOR THE PERISHING?

Above I promised to explain how God could love the smell created by someone rejecting the truth. It follows logically from what you've just read; many, many preachers, upon hearing the truth for the first time and believing it, won't teach it to their congregations because “if I taught that, I'd be fired! Better to stay here and do *some* good, than to lose my flock and not be able to help **anybody!**” – and another false preacher is born.

But God's definition of success is based on quality, not quantity. He'd much rather have a sinner offended by the truth and openly reject God, than have that same person pretending to be the brother of Christ and corrupting everyone around Him – a nice example of this is **Revelation 3:15-16**.

God would much rather someone was cold or hot – openly rebellious, or zealously obedient – than to be lukewarm, serving God and Satan at the same time (**1 Kings 18:21**), which is the definition of being double-minded (**James 1:8, 4:8**).

**Contrary to popular belief the Christian's job is not to save people.** This is a fundamental flaw in everyone's thinking. Satan is trying to “save” people because he thinks if he gets enough of the popular vote on his side, he'll prove to God that no one can obey God – which is why all his churches “*travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves*” (**Matthew 23:15 NKJV**).

So that's not our job. Our job isn't to get people to make the *right* choice. **Our job is to make them make ANY choice. And either choice they make, we have succeeded in our God-given task!**

Moses set this choice before Israel in **Deuteronomy 30:15-20**. Joshua put the same choice before Israel a generation later in **Joshua 24:15**. The same choice Elijah put before Israel in **1 Kings 18:21**, and Peter put before them in **Acts 2**. But here there is something worth looking at closer – what Peter said, how he said it, and how his audience reacted.

## SAME WORDS – TWO RESPONSES

In **Acts 2**, Peter was condemning his audience, saying in effect “you people murdered the Son of God” (**verse 36**), those Jews were pricked in their hearts (**Acts 2:37**). This upset them! It condemned them *and their conscience troubled them!* **The words of God's children should do this to sinners!** And these people responded to Peter's condemnation by saying “what shall we do?” – they wanted to repent, but didn't know how! So Peter told them, many were baptized, and you know the rest of the story.

But now read a very similar story, with a tragically different ending, in **Acts 7**. The story starts in **Acts 6:8**, with the deacon Stephen, who was full of faith and wisdom, and powerfully debated adversaries of the truth (**Acts 6:10**). So some of the Jews brought him before a council on trumped-up charges of blasphemy. **Acts 7** is his speech to answer the accusation.

After a masterful summary of the history of this religion, and how often the Jews and Israelites resisted the truth, he delivered his punch line in **verses 51-53**. This is, essentially, the same thing that Peter said in **Acts 2**, talking about “*the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers*”. How did they respond? **Acts 7:54**.

Notice the difference! Both Peter and Stephen told their audience they had murdered Christ! **And both audiences were pricked in the heart – they both felt condemned, and judged!** But Peter's audience asked for baptism, and Stephen's audience were so enraged they started biting him.

Then in response to his further “blasphemy” in **verses 57-58**, they were worked up into such a bestial rage that they put their fingers in their ears, and yelling and screaming they carried him out of the city and stoned him.

Why the difference? Both parties heard basically the same words. The bottom line of both speeches was certainly the same. Both were pricked in the heart – their consciences were deeply troubled by these words. But one group was moved to repentance, and the other was moved to murder. And the answer is *both groups made a choice. The words were the same – but different audiences made a different choice.*

See, Peter was speaking to people who were sincerely trying to obey God, gathering at Jerusalem for Pentecost. So those words helped them because “*He that is of God heareth God's words*” (**John 8:47**). On the other hand, who can't hear God's words? Same verse.

Stephen was addressing a different group of people. His audience was composed of the high priest and other important men in Judaism, those who had much to lose if the Christian religion took hold – their power and prestige. So when Stephen made a powerful, convincing argument to them that they could not resist, they had two choices.

1. Repent as the other people had and face loss of livelihood and respect... not to mention the great embarrassment they'd feel if they had to admit these uneducated hillbillies knew more about God than they did...
2. Or silence the messenger. Since he and his friends had already been ordered to shut up (**Acts 4:17-21, 5:27-29**), the only way to silence him was to kill him.

This choice wasn't made consciously in so many words. This is just how carnal people respond when they're backed into a corner, forced to either abandon their sins or shut you up. It happens today, every time you tell your sweet aunt that Christmas is pagan; she'll either repent, or she'll shut her ears – one way or another.

A lesson we all must learn is that most of these people you think are your friends today, will be among those stoning you if you back them into the right corner. Given the choice between giving up their sins and killing you, most would gladly kill you.

## THE CHOICE

But the key is, they must have that choice. It is very important to God that they can look back one day and know *“that a prophet has been among them”*. It's important that men are *“without excuse”* before God (**Romans 1:20**). It is very important that God be *“justified when He judges”* (**Psalms 51:4**).

As has been discussed several times in this lesson, if conversion and numbers in the church was God's goal, He could EASILY accomplish it. Not many people would resist if a three-story Jesus appeared at the foot of their bed one night and commanded them to follow Him. Nor if all Sunday-keepers started getting struck by lightning on the way into churches, would it be long before they started keeping the Sabbath.

Jesus could easily have gotten the entire world to follow Him when He was here, if He'd wanted to do so; He could have astounded them with miracles and amazed them with His wisdom. *But He didn't want that!* There are many pieces of truth you already know, and many more you don't, that are simply *fascinating* to the world!

But how does God feel about that? **Ezekiel 33:30-32**. There are many things I could teach that are ENTERTAINING! I get requests regularly for more prophecy lessons, because prophecy is EXCITING! And I could easily gather a large group of people who *“sit before my feet as one who plays a beautiful instrument”*, drinking in every word I say... **but not doing a single word God says!**

Prophecy is exciting, entertaining *and does not require you to look into your own heart and face the darkness you find there!* So of COURSE it's popular! But I don't want to ENTERTAIN you, I want to help you be CONVERTED into a child of God! Prophecy has its place, and in that place I teach it; **but mostly I'm here to show you where the Bible has the words of life. Not the words that show when, how, and where the “bad people” are punished.**

God doesn't want a group of sycophants following Him for entertainment; He wants people who follow Him for the Truth's sake. Take **John 6** for example; Jesus had a huge throng following Him around (**verse 2**) – possibly as many as ten thousand people following Him around on foot, since there were 5,000 men (**verse 10**). But when He realized they were there for the free food (**verse 26**), not because of the truth, He decided to “cull the flock” by teaching them some hard truths.

So in **verses 27-59**, particularly **verses 53-56**, He taught them some things *that He knew the unconverted among them could not accept!* Imagine how shocked a modern audience would be, if I



told them they had to drink my blood to be saved. Now multiply that by ten or so, and that's how those ultra-conservative Jews felt about it. It was more than shocking; it was simply horrifying. **And Jesus had to know that it would be.**

They were appalled, but if they had truly understood God's commandments about blood, they would have understood the truth. If they had truly had faith in Jesus, they would have known there *was* some explanation that made sense – they just had to ask. (Request the booklet “Why Is The Blood Reserved For God?” if you don't fully understand how Jesus could give them His blood to drink.)

And how did they respond? **Verses 60-66.** And how did the twelve react? **Verses 67-69.** Those who were there for entertainment, miracles, and free food *left him at that time.* Those who were there because they “believed and were sure that He had the words of eternal life” **could not be chased away by the truth! No matter how shocking it was!**

That leads us back to **Ezekiel 33:33**; these people who left Jesus after the sermon in **John 6** rejected a prophet of God. **And when the time comes, they will remember “there was a prophet among them” and they made the wrong choice!** And THAT makes what Jesus did a sweet savor to God!

An excellent proof of this comes from a prophecy God inspired about Jesus in **Isaiah 49:1-10.** When studying prophecy, *it's very important never to trust someone when they say “this prophecy is about <insert subject here>”.* If it *IS* about that, **the context will always prove that.** If the context doesn't prove it – they probably just made it up.

That said, when you read those verses, you should instantly think of many “bridges” to connect this prophecy directly to Jesus, like you learned how to do in Lesson 10. For example, compare **Isaiah 49:1** to **Luke 1:15, 31.** A perfect bridge!

Then compare **Isaiah 49:2** to **Revelation 19:15.** Then **Isaiah 49:6** to **Luke 2:32**, **Isaiah 49:9** to **Luke 4:18**, **Isaiah 49:10** to **Revelation 22:5**, **Isaiah 49:11** to **Revelation 7:17**; and so on. Suffice it to say, there is *no* question that this is indeed a prophecy of Jesus.

And in this prophecy, God speaks about what will happen if Jesus does *not* get all of Israel converted in **Isaiah 49:5.** Do you see that? EVEN IF “Israel be not gathered” to God – even if they're not all saved – “*yet I shall be GLORIOUS in the eyes of God*”, Jesus proclaims! **Because He knew He would be a sweet savor to God “in them that are saved, and in them that perish”, “whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear”.** And that's a powerful piece of understanding!

## THEIR CHOICE

As I said, it doesn't matter to us what choice they make; sure, we'd *prefer* that they make the right choice of course, but *it doesn't really matter* – God will do what's best for them, and their choices now will help Him determine just exactly what IS best for them.

If it was just about getting them to make the right choice, as I said, God would have done things very differently. **God only wants you to make the right choice for the right reasons**, or else it doesn't really mean anything. If you made the “right choice” because a missionary gave you free shoes or bought you a free lunch, *is that really a sign of good character?* **Or is it merely a willingness to follow whoever bids the highest price for your soul?**

God wants us to choose Him based not on a love of miracles, knowledge of prophecy, free food, not even from a fear of punishment, **but because we love the truth.** This is why “*it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe*” (**1 Corinthians 1:21**). If you reject the truth

because of the person preaching it, you aren't worthy to know the truth. And our job is to present a CHOICE to as many people as possible. **Which choice they make is between them and God.**

While it is important to present it as well as possible, with the best arguments and clearest explanation that we can, at the end of the day, *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). "And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers" (John 10:5).*

If you speak the words of God, His sheep will recognize that voice; however garbled it may be by your speech, however hidden it may be behind your unprepossessing face, God's sheep will hear God's words, and they won't listen to someone else's voice. And this leads us back to the sweet savor scriptures.

Those were found in **2 Corinthians 2**; but if you continue reading into **2 Corinthians 3**, you will see Paul hadn't finished this thought yet; in **2 Corinthians 3:7-16**, Paul talks about how these people who "are lost" are deceived; this veil over the truth prevents them from seeing clearly what God said. And the subject continues on into **2 Corinthians 4:1-4**, where Paul ties up our topic in **verse 3** saying *"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost"*.

They taught one gospel; they didn't teach one thing for this group, and another for that other group; and they always succeeded in God's eyes whether they saved people, or whether the people were lost; and now Paul tells us WHO can't understand, and why; **if the gospel makes no sense (if someone is still blinded by that veil), it is because that person is lost.**

That word "lost" is not a very good translation. BBE does a better job *"But if our good news is veiled, it is veiled from those who are on the way to destruction"*. They are not past tense "lost", *they are ON THEIR WAY to being destroyed – as all sinners are (Luke 13:1-5)*. They're on that wide road that leads to destruction.

But WHY are they blinded? How? **2 Corinthians 4:4** answers; the "god of this world" has blinded them. Now we've covered blinding often in this correspondence course, because it's very important, and almost completely ignored by every church. But now it's time to really get to the bottom of it. I haven't done it before now because this truth is pretty shocking.

## BLINDING

You already know that blinding allows God to give us grace; grace in turn allows us to live without being killed for our sins of ignorance. But the actual HOW of blinding is, for lack of a better word, a team-effort between God and Satan. To begin to understand this shocking statement, start in **1 Kings 22:19-23**.

Here, the God of the Old Testament – Jesus – is pictured on a throne ruling the Earth with all the angels gathered before Him. This was a then-current vision, not a future prophecy. There are several important things in this verse; first, God the Father wasn't here, so this wasn't in the "heaven of heavens". This was in Jesus' "office".

To compare it with the earthly temple, God the Father dwells in the most holy place in the back of the temple, behind the veil; Jesus dwells in the holy place in front of the veil, and the angels approach him there just as the priests approached God in the physical version. The temple was made to exactly fit this heavenly pattern, but that's another lesson.

Second, ALL the angels were present; both righteous angels and “lying spirits” (**verse 22**). Such mass-meetings of angels are also described in **Job 1:6** and **2:1**; it is almost certain that these took place on holy days, which were “*shadows of things to come*” (**Colossians 2:17**), and a part of the law which “*is only a pattern or reproduction of things that exist in Heaven*” (**Hebrews 8:5, Philaps**).

I say it’s almost certain, because on the literal Holy Days, the entire camp of Israel was required to assemble before God and have a “holy assembly” (**Leviticus 23**). Since these Holy Days are shadows of heavenly and future things, it is almost certain the angels also assemble before God’s heavenly temple on these regular Holy Days. And in these three references we have three separate days when angels all gathered before God, including Satan and other “lying spirits”.

Third, notice the stark contrast between how God rules His Kingdom and how the world thinks God rules. Here, God is asking for opinions! Deliberately soliciting advice from mere angels on how best to bring about the destruction of Ahab! Not only that, **but also accepting and following their advice!**

Don’t misunderstand; this isn’t picturing a democracy. God didn’t put the idea to a vote! But He encourages feedback from His servants and then decides on the approach which best fits His plan. This is a tremendous departure from the Catholic god, who is so austere and unapproachable that no being in the universe dares to say anything but “holy, holy, holy” to him.

The true God has nothing to fear from criticism or advice; when an underling suggests an idea, even if it’s wrong, it can only help everyone see the problem from more angles and come up with even better solutions! The Catholic/Protestant god is so insecure that the slightest questioning of his orders or ideas – even in your thoughts – makes him smite you with divine wrath.

Fourth, and back to our point, this pictures God accepting and encouraging an angel to lie to Ahab. The implications of this are enormous. First, God sets up a goal; “I want Ahab to die at Ramoth-Gilead tomorrow”. Then angels offer various ideas; one says “What if we do this?” another says, “what if we do that?” (**1 Kings 22:20**).

Then another angel – it doesn’t say whom, but it must be a fairly high-ranking angel, because of the confidence and swagger he showed in standing up before the Lord and saying “I will persuade him” (**verse 21**). Also, by that same proud attitude and the fact his suggestion was to break the commandments, it can be safely concluded this was a *fallen* angel. This is important.

So God asked “How?” (**verse 22**), and here it gets interesting. Most Bibles get this verse wrong; remember, translators are just people, and seldom understand what God meant by the words they translate. Especially in areas like this that challenge the dogma of their religion, they tend not to translate well. If you look in most Bible versions, it reads like God likes the plan, approves it, and sends the angel to lie to Ahab.

But the YLT, a brutally literal version, gives a quite different version of **verse 22** “*and he saith, I go out, and HAVE BEEN a spirit of falsehood in the mouth of all his prophets; and He saith, Thou dost entice, and also thou art able; go out and do so.*”

What’s important here is the tenses; most Bibles translate it future tense, as a command, like “go, lie, you’ll be successful”. But this version shows us the past tense makes a lot more sense. When God asked him how he was going to persuade Ahab, this spirit said he was ALREADY a “spirit of falsehood” in the mouth of all his prophets!

Now, he was just going to make the lies his prophet puppets told fit God's desired result – the destruction of Ahab. And God's response was something like “yes, you ARE a lying spirit; you ARE able to lie to Ahab and get him killed tomorrow; so go ahead and do it”.

In this way, God took a sinful spirit who was already bent on causing mischief *and used that spirit to accomplish God's desired results!* It wasn't as if God commanded a righteous angel to go out and break the law to achieve God's ends, which is how most versions translate it. This angel wanted to deceive Ahab already – so God gave him permission to do so.

## WHAT THE DEVIL WANTS

What does the devil want? **1 Peter 5:8**. What had Satan been doing when he came before God? **Job 2:2**. Does Satan desire to deceive people more than they already are? **Luke 22:31**. Did Satan resist Joshua (a type of Jesus, in fact the Hebrew form of the Greek name Jesus)? **Zechariah 3:1**. What do the fallen angels that serve him want? **Matthew 12:43-45**.

They are looking for a place to rest – a comfortable home where they are welcome. Just as God seeks a human temple, so do they. More on this in a future lesson. Who deceives the world? **Revelation 12:9**. Now obviously, the devil hasn't blinded everyone *completely*, but aren't we all blinded in part? **1 Corinthians 13:12**. What is it that blinds our eyes? **1 John 2:11**. So where does this darkness come from? **Ephesians 6:12**. Where were the sinful angels cast? **2 Peter 2:4**.

## ANOTHER CONTRADICTION

Does God dwell in light? **1 Timothy 6:16**. Is there any darkness with God? **1 John 1:5**. Does God lighten the darkness? **2 Samuel 22:29**. Does God know what is in the darkness? **Daniel 2:22**. Does God dwell in darkness? **1 Kings 8:12**. Do clouds and darkness surround His throne? **Psalms 97:2**.

There are several contradictory statements in there. God dwells in light, but He also dwells in darkness. But how can He dwell in darkness, if He lightens the darkness? And if there is no darkness with Him at all, how does darkness surround His throne? These contradictions are a GREAT THING because they mean we don't understand something – *and we're about to understand something new!*

The best way to explain it is to go back to the temple. There was a veil which sealed off the last third of the temple from everyone; inside this last third, the most holy place, was stored the Ark of the Covenant. On top of that ark was, essentially, a dime-store copy of the throne of God. There was the mercy seat in the middle, and two angels (“Cherubim”), one on each side (**Exodus 25:8-21**). God sat down between them (**Psalms 99:1**), and it was there God spoke with Moses (**Numbers 7:89**), and later, usually in symbol, with the high priests (**Exodus 25:22**).

The high priest was only allowed to enter this room once a year, on the Day of Atonement (**Leviticus 16:2**), and then God would appear in a cloud above the mercy seat. But God didn't supply the cloud! That came from outside the most holy place, from the incense-burner (**Leviticus 16:12-13**). This incense smoked up the room so that Aaron could not see the mercy seat, **to keep him from clearly seeing God, who dwelt in that cloud above the mercy seat!**

This place inside the veil was kept *dark* and when anyone entered, it was kept *very smoky or cloudy*. Thus, literally, God dwelt in the “thick darkness”. But there's more to this than that. **Remember, these are all shadows, symbols that are to teach us about HEAVENLY THINGS! (Hebrews 8:5).**

Does God like to hide Himself? **Isaiah 45:15**. You already read that darkness represents the works of the devil; the lies and deceptions he and his minions tell. **And God hides behind that darkness!** Go all

the way back to **Genesis 3**; when God asked Adam why he sinned, what did he say? **Genesis 3:11-12**. And what did Eve say, when He asked her? **Verse 13**. And what did the Devil say? **Verse 14**. The Devil had no answer! No excuse to offer! The buck stopped there!

Because Adam and Eve were deceived, God didn't kill them right away; Adam and Eve only saw God "through a glass, darkly". They were deceived. There was "smoke" between them and God! There was *darkness, which "clouded" their judgment!* **Satan was that darkness that clouded their judgment!**

If it hadn't been for Satan, Eve couldn't have passed the buck to him. If she hadn't been able to do that, she'd have had no excuse and God would have had to kill her. Of course, Satan didn't lie to Eve *to please God!* He lied to her to achieve his own ends! **But God used Satan's darkness to accomplish God's own goals! Just as He did with Ahab!**

## GOD USING DARKNESS

God has permitted rampant deceptions in the world today. Truly, God's throne is surrounded by so much darkness and deception that those who reject God in this time have a great deal of excuse before God. **And that is made possible by the darkness with which God surrounds His throne!** This was prophesied in **Isaiah 60:2**.

Has God sent a shaft of light to some of us? **Isaiah 42:16, 6-7**. Does that light *give us a choice* (no, I hadn't forgotten the point!)? **John 3:18-21**. When that light shined, who couldn't understand it? **John 1:5**. Those who couldn't understand it were *not God's sheep!* They were those who were "*on the way to destruction*"!

When such people hear the truth and reject it, what does God do? **1 Corinthians 5:5**. Do you see how much more MEANINGFUL that scripture is, now that you understand what's really going on behind the scenes? When someone rejects the truth, God deceives them. Not personally! **But by "delivering them unto Satan" so Satan can deceive them, just as he has wanted to from the very beginning!**

It means that, rather than building a hedge about them, as God built for Job (**Job 1:10**), rather than praying for their soul as Jesus prayed for Peter (**Luke 22:31-32**), God simply backs away, and lets Satan do what he wills with them (**Psalms 109:6-7**).

Satan does this to prove a point to God – that men can't obey God. God allows him to try to prove his point *because by proving it, Satan is unwittingly helping God protect these souls until the second resurrection where they might be saved!* (**Romans 11:32**).

Once they are again enshrouded in darkness as they were before God called them, they are protected against committing the unpardonable sin! Because once they are again deceived, God can forgive them when they eventually repent because "*they know not what they do*"!

And this brings us full circle back to **2 Corinthians 4:4** – the gospel is hid from them which are lost, because "*the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them*" – they are blinded by darkness, the god of this world, so that they cannot see that light!

Because if they don't want the truth, **God doesn't want them to have it!** Because if they had it, and rejected it, they'd have to die immediately! "*And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness*" (**2 Thessalonians 2:11-12**).

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

God deceives people, not so much by *sending* deception to them – but by letting the wicked angels do what they want to do anyway. Still, since God could stop it at any time, He is ultimately responsible for all these acts that He permits. This is why Jesus made those two sacrifices you learned about in Lesson 29. And this is why He is not ashamed to say *“I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.” (Isaiah 45:7).*

Reading commentaries on this verse, or the verses about God sending delusions or lying spirits, is an amusing lesson in how far men will reach to make the Bible fit their views. But it’s a simple fact – God says, “I create darkness”; “I create evil”. Because, unlike Satan, God realizes that sooner or later, the responsibility must stop somewhere. And it always stops with the one person who *could* have stopped the sin or the sinner, and didn’t. Jesus knew from the very beginning it was His burden to carry, and His alone.

Knowing He carries that burden, not us, relieves us from the worry over whether or not we get everyone “saved”. We aren’t responsible for these people’s choices. We can’t control how much God opens their mind – we can ask Him to open them, but we can’t *control* what He actually *does*.

**Remember – they are God’s children, not yours (Numbers 11:11-16).** Frustration over taking too much of the burden of parenting them – when that burden should have been God’s, not Moses’ – led to Moses’ sin later in life (**Numbers 20:10-12**). The same problem led Paul to act foolishly in **2 Corinthians 11**. But you’ll study more on that in the lesson on meekness and humility.

What job did God give us to do today? **Mark 1:17**. Fishers of men! Every Protestant quotes that all the time. *But what does it MEAN?* Think about it! Imagine yourself floating on a cloud, dropping a fishhook into a world full of people. Would EVERYONE bite? Would EVERYONE, once they took the bait, get reeled in – or would some wriggle free?

When you go fishing, do you catch one fish out of every hundred in the lake? Or is it more like one in a thousand, or one in a million? If you fish the oceans your entire life, do you catch every fish in the ocean? Or do you personally only catch perhaps a trillionth of the fish in the sea? **God’s analogies are well thought out!**

He didn’t expect us to catch every one. He expected us to preach the truth – to offer the bait. Those sheep who hear His voice will recognize a pearl of great price when they see one and take the bait. Those who don’t will snub the bait. It’s that simple. God considers it a win either way.

**Ephesians 5:8** *For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:*

We were once in darkness, like those we are trying to teach. Like them, we were once in bondage to Satan. But now we ARE light; not merely *in* the light, we ARE the light. We ARE the light of the world (**Matthew 5:14**). And what does light do? **Ephesians 5:11-13**. Light makes things clearer! It makes things appear as they really are. Light corrects darkness! Why was Paul sent? **Acts 26:18**.

The purpose of light is to show, condemn, and correct evil deeds. We are the light of the world; therefore, we should be showing, condemning, and correcting evil deeds. Some people will listen – some won’t – **and we helped both groups**. The one we helped to change today; the other we helped to change in the next life. Read **Ezekiel 20:42-43**.

In this prophecy of the second resurrection, God promises that Israel will remember their ways and their deeds and shall loathe themselves for the evils they did in this life. *And the more truth they saw and rejected in this life, the easier it will be for them to loathe themselves and repent and come to a knowledge of God in that life!*

So we speak the truth. Some will listen, some won't. **Acts 28:23-29** is a great example. He taught them all the same thing; some believed, and some didn't, and they argued back and forth among themselves *and God watched this process and remembered*. And when the time is right, those people will remember, too.

Another great example is after Jesus criticized the Pharisees for their traditions, and offended them. The disciples were very disturbed, and asked Jesus if He didn't realize His correction had offended the Pharisees (**Matthew 15:12**), and His answer is in **verses 13-14**. Those whom God has not planted in the church – the tares (**Matthew 13:24-43**) – will be rooted up. Sooner or later. If telling them the truth roots them up now instead of a decade from now, so much the better.

So Jesus said "let them alone". To paraphrase, "so what if they're offended by truth?" was His attitude. If those who don't love the truth are not offended now, they'll be offended later; it makes little difference in the long run. On the other hand, if they had loved the truth, they couldn't have been offended in the first place (**Psalms 119:165**).

As long as we speak the truth for their good, we cannot hurt them. They may hate us for it – but one day they'll realize we stood before God to speak for their good, to keep God from punishing them (**Jeremiah 18:20**) – and they rejected it. But we did our part to fulfill our responsibility as our brother's keeper.

And finally, look on their hatred as an opportunity. Paul said "*all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*" (**2 Timothy 3:12**). We need their hatred, because it is through those persecutions that we have an opportunity to shine. Jesus said we are blessed by Him when men call us all manner of vile names, shun us, and tell everyone we're the antichrist (**Luke 6:22**). **This will happen to any true Christian; not once, but many times.**

This is the job Jesus gave us in **Matthew 10:16-27**. That doesn't sound like an easy job, does it? And it isn't – unless you do it right. Jesus said His yoke was easy, and His burden was light (**Matthew 11:30**) – and it is... but only if you're pulling it in the same direction as He is pulling it!

Pulling side-by-side on that yoke with Jesus makes for an easy day's work; pulling in a different direction than He is, or trying to drag unconverted families and worthless possessions along with you will make it a very hard row to hoe indeed. We'll pursue that thought further in the lesson on meekness and humility.

Meanwhile, though the world will hate us, God has left us promises of ample reward both in the life to come, and even here in this life (**Mark 10:29-30**, to cite just one example). This life's blessings are less important than the future blessings, and so if we are doing something that might jeopardize those future blessings God will gladly withdraw the blessings of this life until we learn whatever lesson we need to learn; but the promises are there for those who will fulfill God's terms.

And if your situation gets really bad in one place, just follow Jesus' command; "*when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come*" (**Matthew 10:23**). **You won't run out of places to run to before Jesus comes back – that's a promise.**

This work is completely non-denominational and is meant to fulfill Christ's great commission to "*preach the gospel to every creature*" (**Mark 16:15**). **This publication is not to be sold**; "*freely ye have received, freely give*" (**Matthew 10:8**).

The Bible tells us to PROVE ALL THINGS, and The Simple Answers encourages people to do just that. If you cannot PROVE what you believe, you have no right to believe it! Many of the things we print are shocking because they are different from what you've heard, but if something we say offends or upsets you, we hope you will take the time to set aside your preconceived ideas and PROVE your point from the Bible to see if you truly have been right all these years.

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