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**Heb 4:12-13**

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

This scripture is pretty scary. To think that the Word of God is able to discern the truth behind our every thought, motivation, and intention is unnerving. We can fool others, and most of us have even fooled ourselves into believing things about ourselves that are just not true, but all is laid bare and open before the eyes of the Lord. Nothing is hidden; He sees it all and the Word of God reveals it all. The Word shines the light of truth on all aspects of the darkness that resides within our hearts and there is no place to hide, which is why we often choose to either not believe what the Word says or to marginalize it in our lives in such a way that it is reserved for mere “church” talk. Honestly, all of us struggle with letting the Word have its rightful place of *authority* over our lives.

Tonight we are going to walk under the spotlight of truth and I don’t think there will be any place for any of to hide—so tonight might get a little uncomfortable. We are going to talk about a subject that seems to be very hard for those who have grown up in the church doing the “Christian” thing to accept.

Last week we talked about clearing your temple of all the merchants, money changers, and illegitimate priests and temple assistants that have taken up residence in your Court of the Gentiles. We discovered that this is done by allowing the Word of God to become your *priority* and the ultimate *authority* over

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your life. Well this week we are going to put that to the test. I am going to teach you what the Word of God says about you, and you are then going to have to make the choice to either actively believe the truth—by aligning your choices with the Word of God—or reject, or marginalize, the truth relying instead on your own ideas, logic, or so called “spiritual” wisdom. Either way, this is a day of intersection between truth and choice.

We will back track one verse from last week just to maintain context and then close out Chapter 2 with the final two verses.

### ***John 2:23-25***

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.

Why do think Jesus was not willing to trust Himself to those who believed in His name? After all, they saw His signs, heard His words, saw what He was doing, and believed. Isn't that what Jesus wanted, to gather a group of true believers? So why do you think Jesus was so cynical and refused to entrust Himself to them?

The answer to this question is extremely uncomfortable, but Jesus had an insight and an understanding that so few people ever truly grasp. He knew the condition of the human soul and no one needed to tell Him how deep its darkness runs. Actually darkness does not even come close to describing the state of our heart. The

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condition of the human soul is nothing short of pure evil and it stands in absolute opposition to God. In the book of Job, God describes why man cannot be trusted.

***Job 15:14-16***

"What is man, that he should be pure, or he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, He puts no trust in His holy ones, and the heavens are not pure in His sight; How much less one who is detestable and corrupt, Man, who drinks iniquity like water!

Can you imagine? God does not even put trust in His Angels who are in His presence, so why do we—mere men and women—have such a high opinion of ourselves? Can you grasp what God has said about you? He did not say that deep inside there is good in your heart. He did not say that since you are His creation that you are an extension of God and therefore good. He did not say that you have love buried within and you just need to learn how to search it out and release it into the world. No! He says you are detestable, corrupt and you thirst for iniquity to satisfy the yearning of your body. Solomon describes heart of man as follows:

***Ecclesiastes 9:3***

Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives.

C.S. Lewis wrote a poem called "As the ruin falls" which Phil Keaggy adapted into a song, and I am going to read a few lines since I think it captures a bit of what

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God is trying to communicate to us.

All this is flashy rhetoric about loving you. I never had a selfless thought since I was born. I am mercenary and self-seeking through and through; I want God, you all friends, merely to serve my turn.

Peace, reassurance, pleasure, are the goals I seek, I cannot crawl one inch outside my proper skin; I talk of love, a scholar's parrot may talk Greek, But self-imprisoned always end where I begin.

And then just so we don't begin to try and find a way to squirm out of this reality and tell ourselves that that is not what the Bible is really saying, it is just speaking in metaphors, let's see what Paul says in Romans 8.

***Romans 8:6-8***

For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

According to Paul, it would not be an understatement to say that the soul of man hates God and loathes Him with the vilest intent. Going back to the light and dark metaphor, our heart is so dark and so void of light that there is nothing good, absolutely nothing good in the heart of man. In fact, properly understood, anything that derives from the heart of man stands in opposition to God, is not pleasing to

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God, can never be in alignment with God, and is at its root evil; which means that every expression which originates from the heart of man is by definition corrupted with evil. It is kind of like the way radioactivity works—it corrupts and it kills.

I know this is contrary to so many philosophies of the day—even many of those espoused within sects of Christianity. But this is the Word of God and we can no longer ignore it or marginalize it. We must be willing to wrestle with this truth for what we do with it will impact our ability to experience God.

So what does this mean for us? First of all, it means that we have to stop living in deception. According to the Bible, everything, and I mean everything, which does not derive from God is evil. I, for one, would never say that my life is always dominated by the Spirit of God. I can't say that; I wish I could but I can't. At the same time, I don't consider myself evil. I would never normally apply that label to my life. Do you consider yourself evil? You probably don't either.

This means that we are living in a deception and are our core beliefs are not in alignment with the truth. It means that we have become experts at convincing ourselves that what God says is not “necessarily” true. Oh sure, we can talk about the evil in the heart of man, but it is as if we are talking about someone other than ourselves. Subjects like these make for good “church talk” and theological debate. But it does not become personal such that the truth changes how we think about everything. According to the Bible, the ability for us to live in this denial and deception is uncharted.

***Jeremiah 17:9***

"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"

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Yes, nothing else is more deceitful than our own heart and no one can even begin to truly understand its ability and power to deceive us into believing things that are just not true; especially things about ourselves. We fundamentally want God to give us some credit for just being alive, for being a good person, for being made in His image, and for all our attempts at being a good Christian. No one likes to believe that all that they do is corrupted through and through. The implication of this truth is crippling to the ego and to the way we want to live.

But here is the truth: we live in a state of spiritual desperation; in an absolute need of God in all areas of our life. There is no way around it. So many of us in this room can barely begin to comprehend what this kind of desperation looks like or feels like. I can tell you, if you were to make this truth an issue of faith, you would be willing to quickly throw off all that does not derive from God—toss it away like something that is gross and disgusting. In fact, you would hate and loathe all that comes from you. The problem is you don't really believe it—at least not to the extent that God means it.

Consider the following scriptures about the fear of the Lord.

***Psalm 111:10***

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;

***Proverbs 1:7***

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;

Who does not want wisdom and knowledge? We all do; we all want to know how to best live our lives. It is clear from these verses that the gateway to this kind

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of understanding is the fear of the Lord. Now, look at what God says:

***Proverbs 8:13***

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil;

This means that if we really want to experience God, know His voice, and have His wisdom and knowledge that we have to hate all that is not of Him, including ourselves. Hate is one of the strongest words we have in our vocabulary and when applied to ourselves it stands in stark contrast to the ego-centric way of thinking that has been infused into our being by our “me” centered American culture and the “bless me” centered form of Christianity we have been taught.

After all, if Jesus was not willing to trust humanity, why should we? Why do we think we know so much more than He does? Why do we think He was talking about “them” and not ourselves? Why do we place so much confidence in our own ability to discern what is best for our lives? Why do we listen to our own wisdom, logic, and counsel and for the most part second-guess the Word of God? Why do we let our insecurities and dysfunctional thought processes have such authority over our lives?

The answer to all these questions is found in ***Jeremiah 17:9*** and the reality that our heart is desperately sick and has an unimaginable ability to convince ourselves of everything but the truth. As a result, our lives faintly resemble the character and nature of Jesus and His selfless love; especially compared to the “me, me, me” way of thinking, feeling, and living that tends to rule our lives.

So right about now, I hope that you realize that left to ourselves we have a big problem. After all, Jesus was not willing to trust those who saw His work and

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believed, so where does that leave us? I know this all sounds so negative and awful, but in reality it is good news, the best news. Our abject inability provides hope and a fervent expectation of experiencing God's miraculous intervention in our lives. We are simply unable to be good and to do it right; but God is fully able and He is our provision for all that we need. This takes us into Chapter 3, but before we move on, let me recap what we have studied and I will use this diagram to give a visible representation of this Biblical truth.

Every thought, every act, every motive, and every intention of our heart that derives, or originates in our soul, is not in alignment with God and can never be pleasing to God. Our mind and emotions are corrupted by our soul and are not to be trusted. Even our physical bodies submit to the commands of the dark master of the soul. Thus, we are in a state of absolute need, and despite the deceptions of our heart which attempt to convince us otherwise, our lives **MUST** be lived in unqualified dependence upon God.

If you choose to believe this truth, you will experience peace and rest—for real. Coming to grips with your utter depravity gives us hope for the life that Jesus promises comes from Him. But if you never fully accept this truth, you will always wrestle with God trying to force Him to be ok with who you are and demanding that He give you the life you want, according to your expectations of how He should act toward you.

This takes us into Chapter 3 and the story of an encounter between Jesus and a Pharisee named Nicodemus. As we read the text don't miss the imagery that John draws on—it is actually highlighted so you really can't miss it.



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*John 3:1-8*

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night

Let's stop there. Man, Nicodemus, ruler – interesting set of words. In Greek, the name Nicodemus means “victory of the people”. In other words, a man, who is ruler of the Jews—a leader—represents domination of all that is of man verses what is of God. He symbolizes victory for the people, which ironically dwell in spiritual darkness. Believe me it is no coincidence that this man came under the cloak of darkness. He did not want the light of day to reveal to others what he was doing. The book of John constantly uses light and dark as metaphors for what is of God and what is of man; that which is good and that which is evil.

...and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus also comes with feigned or contrived platitudes about Jesus and God. He is willing to say that He knows Jesus must come from God, actually in the Greek Nicodemus uses a verb that says “he sees” that Jesus comes from God, but it is clear he is not willing to go as far as saying he believes Jesus comes from God. If he truly believed God was in his midst, he would not be hiding in the darkness. Jesus then takes this phrase and throws it right back at Nicodemus and basically says: “you cannot see—it’s impossible for you to see, you live in darkness.” Not

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understanding what Jesus meant, Nicodemus again opens his mouth and quite frankly embarrasses himself.

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

By this question, Nicodemus proves Jesus point. He cannot see; he has no capacity to understand what Jesus is talking about. All he can do is communicate on the basis of earthly matters. The spiritual understanding of this so called "ruler of the people" is constrained by his own darkness. But Jesus just continues speaking words of light and says: "unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

A lot of people have put forth various interpretations of this verse. For example, concluding that the word "water" refers to: baptism as a symbol of spiritual regeneration; or to physical birth (in contrast to spiritual birth); or to the Word of God which is taken from *Ephesians 5:26* (cleansed by the washing of water with the Word) and *1 Peter 1:23* (you have been born again...by the Word of God). Maybe all of those are applicable; however, Jesus was talking to a Pharisee so I believe He used a metaphor that this learned Jew would fully understand.

In the phrase "water and Spirit," the word "and" is the Greek word "kai" which depending on the context can be understood to be additive or cumulative. So this phrase could be read as "water and Spirit" or "water—even Spirit." We might say, "water, a.k.a. (also known as), Spirit." Being a Pharisee Nicodemus would have

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understood Jesus' statement to be a reference to *Ezekiel 36:25-27* which speaks of how God would sprinkle clean water on their filth and put a new Spirit in their hearts.

*Ezekiel 36:25-27*

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

Cleansed from filthiness, a new heart, a new Spirit; the ability to walk in obedience to God; this sounds too good to be true—and it is. God is saying that since your heart is vile and corrupt through and through, He is going to start over and make you into something entirely new.

Please understand the implication of this truth. God is not going to fix what is old and corrupt, for it cannot be cleansed and it will always be in opposition to God. This is what Jesus means when He says that a person must be born again. Jesus will put His life and His Spirit into the person who chooses to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the only Son of God, and the one who died for their sins and was resurrected to new life. He will do this for the person who acknowledges that their heart is dark and asks Jesus to forgive them and make them new; thereby, surrendering control of their life to the living God.

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*John 1:12-14*

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

What a wonderful solution to the problem of our heart, God gives us something entirely new and in so doing we become His children. How does it happen? We really don't know how, we just know that it is real. That is why Jesus said:

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

I am sure you can remember a time when you were outside and all of a sudden a strong wind came up and hit you and you said: "wow where did that come from." You know you were just blasted by the wind, but you could not see it coming and you had no idea where it started; but you are unable to deny its affect on your life. Similarly being born-again is not something that you can tangibly see, but its effect is certain. The Holy Spirit of God miraculously moves in and makes His abode in your being and it is from this place that you begin and carry on your fellowship and friendship with God. It is at this point that you move from being an enemy to God to being His child.

I have tried to portray this effect in this diagram. This *New Creation* is holy, it is perfect, it is righteous, and it is the dwelling place or, keeping in line with last

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weeks teaching, the Temple of God. Being a holy place, it is naturally separate and distinct from your old nature, which I will refer to as your *Old Man*. Jesus said: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." In other words, there is no relationship between your *Old Man* and the *New Creation*. Your *Old Man* is still an enemy of God, will always be an enemy of God and will always desire things that stand in direct opposition to God.

This has been a cause for great confusion to people who become Christians. Because they do not understand what happened when they prayed and asked Jesus to be their Lord and Savior, they mistakenly assumed that God was busy fixing and cleaning up the *Old Man* trying to make Him acceptable to God. They mistakenly believe that they have to try and be good, do it right and be like God; yet, they are perpetually frustrated believing that God must not work for them because they are not changing very fast. This whole idea is a wrought with error which has crippled Christians from experiencing the power of the *New Creation*.

Consider how many times you have prayed asking God to change something in you; some part of your life that is not in alignment with God. I am sorry to inform you that those prayers will never be answered. God is not going to change your *Old Man*, period! Further, your *New Creation* does not need to be changed; it is already made in the image of God! This is so important to fully comprehend. You have been changed, the work is finished! The miracle power of creation was unleashed on your life and God has supernaturally imbued within you a new aspect to your being which is holy and perfect. Nothing else needs to be done! Now you just need to learn how to live from the *New Creation* denying the desires of the *Old Man*.

Do you understand what this means? This is glorious. It means that you don't have to wait any longer just hoping that God will change you. In addition, the

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things that hinder your walk with God do not require some long drawn out process of years and years to overcome. You can daily choose to walk by the Spirit and live from your *New Creation* and experience the life that is in the Spirit.

***Galatians 5:22-23***

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

These wonderful fruits can be yours if you choose to live in the *New Creation* and choose to be deaf to the thoughts, the desires, the hopes, the dreams, the fantasies, and all of the self-protective mechanisms of the *Old Man*, all of which are rooted in insecurity and pride. You have the ability—Jesus already did the work on your behalf.

You might be confused as to how this choice is made. Going back to the diagram, notice that the war between the *Old Man* and the *New Creation* is fought on the battlefield of your mind and emotions. Your body merely submits to whichever master is winning the war at any point in time. But do not be deceived, the battle is won not by trying to force the *Old Man* to behave godly through self-control, or by performing religious duties; rather, this war is won by believing in the Word of God and choosing to align your choices with the truth. That is it. The *Old Man* cannot win a battle against the truth; he only wins if you submit to his lies and deceit.

For example, contrary to what you feel, you must choose to believe that everything in your *Old Man* is evil and thoroughly corrupt—even all that seems so innocent, pure, genuine, lovely, and kind. You must choose to believe what God

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sees and what He says over and above what you might feel or reason. And, if you believe this truth, you will choose to silence the voice of the *Old Man* in your life. You will choose to deny his ways and instead trust in God to be who He says He will be in your life. This is the way to walk in the Spirit and win this war.

But you must choose, no one can choose for you. Now, the *Old Man* is going to kick, scream, freak out, and demand that you give it the attention and the authority it is used to having. But you don't have to submit to His voice. If you have been born again, the power of your *Old Man* to control you has been broken; now it is all a matter of choice—your choice!

***Galatians 5:16-17; 25***

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please...If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

If you walk by the Spirit you will not carry out the desires of your *Old Man*. There is no equivocation in this statement; it is a statement of fact. You will not, period! This is good news. God, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, will live His life in and through you and it will be wonderful. Now if you choose to continue to let your Old Man have dominance in your life, if you continue to respond to his thoughts, desires, feelings, and way of doing things, then unfortunately, he will control you and in a merciless way quench the voice and power of God in your life.

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Now, I want you to understand that walking in the Spirit is naturally supernatural. It does not require some weird religious ritual to accomplish. It is all about choice. That is why it is so important, as we discussed last week, that you let the Word of God be your *priority* and the ultimate *authority* in your life. You **MUST** learn the truth and then make choices about what you do, what you say, what you think, what feelings you will allow to dominate your being, and so on, all in accordance to what God has revealed in the Word. This is the pathway to life and experiencing God for real.

Now is the time for that intersection between truth and choice that I referred to at the beginning. You have been confronted with Biblical truth: all that derives from God in the *New Creation* is perfect, for God is perfect, and all that derives from your *Old Man* is vile and thoroughly corrupt. If you have not been born again, you now know why you must throw yourself in complete dependence upon God and accept the new life that He wants to give you; otherwise, you will die in your depravity and spend eternity separated from God. If, however, you have been born again, you now know why you must live in complete dependence upon God in order to experience Him and all the amazing promises He has made to you.

Your Old Man is a liar and deceiver. He has never been able to truly help you and what you have experienced so far in life just reveals how incapable he truly is. But the Spirit of God will breathe life into your weak, tired and worn-out bodies if you choose to set your mind and your emotions on the truth that comes from the Word of God, and choose to believe it.

Now that you know the truth; it's up to you to believe. It is up to you to choose to take action upon that belief and live according to the truth! This is God's pathway—this is the only way!

Let's Pray