

## Our Trusted Source Of Truth (Part Two)

Accepting Hard Times

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Given 06-Sep-14; Sermon #1230

A major push to undermine the Bible began roughly 140 years ago, when Julius Wellhausen, a German theologian and Biblical scholar, tried to reconcile what were thought to be inconsistencies in the text of the Old Testament. He published a book that set out his “four source” hypothesis for the origin of the Pentateuch. He kept himself narrowed in on those five books of Moses, which he said Moses did not necessarily write.

This came to be known as the *Documentary Hypothesis*. The sources of these documents that made up the Pentateuch became labeled as J-E-D-P. “J” was the *Yawehist* author; “E” was the *Elohists* author; “D” was the *Deuteronomist* author; “P” was the *Priestly* author.

Later on, they began combining these, “JE,” “DP,” and other things, so that you had not only these four major authors who wrote these documents, but you had redactors, which are basically editors, added to the mix. It really confused things, and scholars are still debating this today.

I am not really interested in the Documentary Hypothesis, I think it is pretty much “bunkum.” But I am interested in the fact that it provided much of the impetus for the heightened interest in Biblical criticism.

Over the last century or so, this criticism, all of which—and I mean *all of which*—is based on suppositions conceived in the minds of men. They are just thinking about these things, theorizing. All of this has eroded trust in God’s Word.

So now, we have come to the point, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that millions, and even millions of *Christians*, people who confess that they believe God, and they say that they have come under the blood of Christ—believe that Scripture is of human origin. Now these are mostly mainstream Christians, you will not find many fundamentalists who believe this. But there are many millions out there who have this belief.

What they think is that what has come down to us, in the form of the Holy Bible, is simply the writings of a small and often subjugated Middle Eastern people that has somehow been preserved by tradition through the ages, so that we have it today. Any

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idea of divine authorship is, to these people, simply laughable. “No, men did that.”

Any idea that the teachings found in it have any kind of authority, and some would even say, any kind of relevance, is not even to be entertained. All that they think they can get out of it is a kind of human wisdom. If they have taken God out of the equation, then that is what it must be.

So they do not treat it with the deference that it should be treated.

The problem, from the side of the critical scholars, is that they insist on two foundational premises that, to our minds, doom their effort from the start. I have to grant them that these two basic assumptions are entirely rational. By that I mean, just from a humanistic point of view.

These two foundational principles are:

(1) They decided early on that they would treat the Bible like any other book. It was nothing special. It was to be treated with the same kind of care or not-care that they would give to any other book or writing from antiquity.

(2) They reject out of hand anything that they cannot see, hear, smell, taste, or touch. In other words, they apply scientific methods, as they have fashioned them, to an issue of faith. They apply their physical senses to a matter of the spirit. The first thing that this does is push God right out of any part in their thinking, because can they see God? No. Can they hear God? No. Can they smell, taste, or touch God? No. So God does not even enter into the equation.

Some of these Biblical scholars call themselves “Christian,” but they are so steeped in the scientific method, and this rational way of looking at it, that they have concluded that it is okay to have this kind of cognitive dissonance, two ideas in their minds simultaneously that are totally opposite to one another.

In treating the Bible like this—as just any other book—in such a rational way, they cheat. I have read enough of their writings to determine this, they cheat by holding the Bible to a far higher standard than any other writing of antiquity. They will say that it is just like any other book, and they are going to treat it like any other book. But when it comes down to it, they treat it as different, so they lend something of the Bible’s transmission or accuracy to a higher standard than they would, for example, the writings of Ptolemy, or Julius Caesar, or somebody along that line.

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For instance, some of them will find a variant. A variant is not an error, it is just a difference between one text and the other. So they will find this variant and they will pounce on it, saying something like, “See there! The Bible contains errors! Because this text doesn’t agree with this other text. So it can’t be from God, it must be human, because if we understand what we think about God, that He’s perfect, then He wouldn’t have made a mistake, so this proves that it’s human.”

Or they will find one manuscript that leaves out a verse, or even a whole passage of Scripture, and they will declare, “The added text isn’t original! Strike it from the Bible! It’s not authentic.”

But, have them see such a thing, such a variant, such a difference, in the works of Homer, or Plato, or Aeschylus, or Tacitus, or Juvenal—any writer from history, and they would never do such a thing. They would say, “Oh, that’s just a copyist error.”

So they treat the Bible to a much higher standard.

The Bible, though, is very well attested. The text of the Bible is so verifiable that we can be confident that we have a faithful, reliable copy, in translation, of what the original writers penned, back in the 1<sup>st</sup> century specifically, for the New Testament. So many ancient manuscripts of the New Testament exist, and there are 5,838 just in Greek—that is nearly 6,000 manuscripts—this number makes it virtually impossible for there to be any error.

If you have nearly 6,000 manuscripts, and you can look at them side by side, you can see how each of the copyists penned these things, you can pretty much figure out what the original said, because there is such a great deal of agreement between all of these 6,000 documents.

Let us get this in perspective. 5,838 New Testament Greek manuscripts are available to scholars to look at, compare, figure things out. The next ancient document with the most manuscripts is Homer’s *The Iliad*. Do you know how many of those there are out there? It used to be thought that there was about 650 or so of them. After they have done some collating and figuring out, they have found out that there are actually 1,758 ancient copies of *The Iliad*. That is 4,000 fewer than New Testament Greek manuscripts!

That is the one that is second place to the New Testament Bible. The average number of manuscripts for ancient authors of a particular work is twenty. Some are far fewer. More than that, one of the things that is necessary for understanding accuracy of what was transmitted from the original to all of these copies that we have, is the time gap

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between the writing and the copy. How many years between the time Luke penned Luke and Acts, and the first copy that we have of Luke or Acts?

For *The Iliad*, the time between the writing and the first copy is between 350 and 400 years. In the New Testament, 50 years, and some believe that it actually is much closer to 25 years.

There is one little bit of parchment, or it might be papyrus, that is part of Mark, that has been dated to as early as 125 A.D. There is even one bit out there that some scholars are saying is before the fall of Jerusalem, so that would bring it down to almost immediately after the originals were written.

It makes the nearly 6,000 New Testament documents much more accurate, to be closer to the original than these other ancient manuscripts. That is just Greek manuscripts. The New Testament was copied in many of the languages of nearby countries, including Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic, Latin, Coptic, and several others as well.

Get this: the total number of manuscripts in these other languages is now about 18,000. So we have nearly 6,000 Greek documents, but we have 18,000 other than Greek ancient documents that have portions or much of the New Testament. 10,000 of that 18,000 are Latin copies. If we add those numbers together, we get at least 24,000 copies of the New Testament from ancient sources. That is a lot!

Somebody totaled up the number of pages of the New Testament that we have from ancient text, and it came out to 2.6 million pages of ancient evidence for the New Testament.

So we have hundreds, if not thousands, of witnesses for each book of the New Testament. You can see how there is really no doubt, or there should be no doubt, that what we have sitting on our laps is what was given. No other ancient writing even comes close to these numbers.

Let us just say that suddenly, inexplicably, all of the Bibles in the whole world disappeared. We could no longer refer to them. Did you know that we could still reconstruct the entire New Testament, from the writings of what are called the Church Fathers, that is, those men who lived in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, who wrote things that we still have that we can look at. They wrote about the Bible. They wrote about the church.

One scholar estimates that combined, if we took all of the works of these church fathers,

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they penned about one million quotations from the New Testament, and it would be no problem to reconstruct the entire New Testament, from just their works. The same scholar estimates that 43% of those New Testament quotations are in manuscripts that date from before 250 A.D., meaning that they are within about 150 years of the end of the New Testament, making them very reliable.

There are differences in some of these texts. I told you they call them variants. About 80% of the variants that are found among all of these New Testament documents are differences in spelling. Many of them are differences that are like the American spelling of the word *honor* versus the British version of that same word, *honour*. They are pronounced the same, and they are the same word. They are just spelled slightly different.

It is also said that less than 1% of variants are considered to be meaningful. What they mean by that is that there is a “significant” difference between texts. But do you know, none of them have to do with doctrine? None of them really change the meaning of the text. Some of them maybe drop a word out, or put a word in, but that is about it. It does not really make a great deal of difference to the reading.

So just how accurate is the Bible? How reliable is it?

Greek scholars have estimated the accuracy, based on all of these variant readings across these thousands of manuscripts, from a low of 98.33% accurate—that is 1.67% inaccurate—to a high of 100% accurate.

Biblical scholar F.F. Bruce wrote, “If the New Testament were a collection of secular writing, there authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt.”

If we want to talk about the Old Testament, I do not necessarily need to say much about it, but the Dead Sea Scrolls near similarity with the Hebrew text that we have now shows that the accuracy of the Old Testament is similarly near perfect.

All of this accuracy, all of this preservation of the text, points to a divine hand, ensuring the transmission of His Book throughout human history, and that certainly counts for something. What it means to us is that we can trust God’s Word. It has come down to us essentially unchanged. It is what God wants us to read, it is what God wants us to hear, it is what God wants us to trust.

We are going to pick up from where I left off in my last sermon. Last time I spoke about Pontius Pilate, saying “What is truth?” Then I veered off into how easily we can be

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deceived, because of all of the information that is pouring out on us every day, from all of the sources that we have, especially now the Internet. It just throws information at us that we would not have been able to believe just a few years ago. It is 24/7, and not just on the Internet, but TV, and radio, and all of those other ways that we can get information. We have these little hand-held computers that we strap onto our hips or carry in our purses that allow us to be informed about whatever at any time.

And that makes truth—and hearing and knowing the truth—so much more vital to us now, because we have got to be able to weed the truth out of the weeds of information that is coming at us all of the time. As I said in that last sermon, I believe that this truth versus deception issue is our most urgent problem in the world and in the church. We have to be able to discern the truth.

Where do we go for the truth? The Bible. It is our only reliable source of truth. And if what we hear does not match the words of God's scriptures, then we should not believe it. We should not follow it. We have got to take care that we keep the Bible as our basis for perceiving what is true and for doing what is true.

**Psalm 119:137-144** Righteous are You, O Lord, and upright are Your judgments. Your testimonies, which You have commanded, are righteous and very faithful. My zeal has consumed me, because my enemies have forgotten Your words. Your word is very pure; therefore Your servant loves it. I am small and despised, yet I do not forget Your precepts. Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth. Trouble and anguish have overtaken me, yet Your commandments are my delights. The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting; give me understanding, and I shall live.

This stanza focuses on the proper thinking process of a person who is under some form of stress. He is going through difficulties: the passage mentions troubles and anguish, that he is small and despised, and that he is consumed by zeal in the face of unbelievers. It is a Hebrew way of saying that he is under great stress in combatting evil. His zeal is always up to confound the liars, to do what is good in the face of evil. But that is a stress, when you have to be totally consumed by defending against evil things, against wickedness, against deceit and deception. It is a man under stress.

What he does here is lay things out in the proper order in his thinking. His answer to his problem, at least in terms of how he is going to approach things, is first, he starts with God Himself:

**Psalm 119:137-138** Righteous are You, O Lord, and upright are Your judgments. Your testimonies, which You have commanded, are righteous and very faithful.

So he starts with God. God is righteous, God is upright—and that is going to make all of the difference in the world. This leads to his second point, which is that God's Word, God's testimonies, His declarations, the things that He has told us, are righteous and very faithful.

Start with God—who is God? He is righteous, and wonderful, and true. Everything that He tells us, through His Word, is similarly righteous, and wonderful, and true. We can trust what He says, and what His instructions are. That provides the basis for how He is going to act.

But he has to get his mind straight first, that God is great, and awesome, and true, and faithful, and upright, and righteous, and all of those good things, so he can transfer those same ideas to God's Word and get strength and instruction from those words. Those are the things that are going to get him over the hump of these problems. His mind, then, gets set in the proper way. He realizes that God's Word is very pure, as he goes on to say in verse 140. It is truth itself, which he says in verse 142: "Your law is truth." He says that just increases his regard for it, and his devotion to it, because he knows he can trust it. He says, "Therefore Your servant loves it" and "Your commandments are my delights."

In verse 144, he asks for understanding of God's Word, because he realizes that only through it comes real life, abundant life, and we can add, eternal life. The only way to live that is going to bring any kind of goodness and blessing comes through the instruction from God Himself through His Word.

That is the mindset that we must have. God first! God has revealed Himself through His Word. They are both perfect, they are both true, they are both faithful, and they are righteous altogether. So we can trust—and if we act on it, then the good things, the blessings, God's providence, all of those things are going to flow from that trust and that belief, and that following of the Word of God.

In John 6:63, Christ echoes this in a very concise way, after He talks about being the bread of life, and that we have to eat of Him and drink His blood. The Jews misunderstood; they were thinking physically while He was speaking in a spiritual metaphor that we need to ingest Him and His words. That is how we are going to have

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life; that is going to empower us.

**John 6:63** It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

Just what the psalmist said. He asked for understanding, because he knows that is the way to live—in them is life. We find that Jesus confirms that there is great power in God's Word. His words are especially powerful.

People out in the world can look in the Bible, and they can find a truth, and if they follow that truth, it gives them wonderful blessings. In that case, it is not even combined with the Spirit of God, it is just the words themselves, the truth, the wisdom that is there, that will make their lives much better, if they follow it.

But then you add the Spirit of God, in a person who has given himself to God and His way, and it comes out as wonderfully powerful in his life, because not only does he have the power to see it and understand it, he has the power to *do* it, in a way that the person in the world does not. He can get the meaning out of it that they cannot, and make connections with other parts of God's Word that are going to enhance his understanding, and enhance the blessing that God's words and instructions give to him.

Not only that, God's words and instructions lead us to eternal life. How do they do this? Part of it is they point out profound and necessary truths that prompt us, push us, to change our thinking and our behaviors. In doing so, in this process of change, God, with our cooperation, forms His own character in us.

That is what knowing God is all about—being, and thinking, and behaving as God does. He does this through His Spirit, by His Word. It gets us to understand these things, and gets us changing the way we approach life, the way we think about things: what our goals are, where we are headed, and how we are going to get there.

As we make these changes, and grow in character, we become more like God, and that is the essence of eternal life. Living as God lives, living to the same quality that He lives. It is an impossible thing to do in the flesh, but it is what we are moving toward. We are moving toward being like Him in every way that we possibly can. In the resurrection, He will make up the difference.

Trusting in God's Word, and acting upon God's Word is vital to our Christian lives. We *must* do it. We *must* trust this word.



Let us go to a memory scripture in Numbers 23. Too bad it is out of the mouth of Balaam, but he says some truth here.

**Numbers 23:19** God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

Hold onto that fact that God does not lie, and if God says something, He will bring it to pass. Notice what Paul writes to Titus as he opens his letter:

**Titus 1:1-3** Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior.

There is one thing that we can be absolutely sure of: God does not lie. He is incapable of lying, because He set His will to always speak the truth. Everything He says or writes in His Word is true. It is totally accurate, it is pure. It can be trusted. If He says He will do a thing, we can bet our last dollar that it will come to pass. There is no reason to doubt Him. All of His promises, and all of His threats—He will make good.

He says nothing idly. He says nothing that He does not mean. He says nothing that He will not back up. As the passage in Titus 1 says, God has promised eternal life to His elect. If they follow the truth, and grow in godliness, which they can see in His Word, He will give eternal life to them. You can take that to the bank.

Paul says that God has manifested His Word mostly through preaching. He is speaking of how the Word of God was conveyed to the people of the time. Either they could not read or they did not have their own personal copies of His Word, so it was preached to them. We can add reading and studying to that today, with all of our copies of the Bible. That is how God has manifested His Word to us.

By this means—by hearing the preaching, by reading God's Word, and studying into it—all of this is ingesting His Words into our minds and making them a part of our lives. Our journey to the Kingdom of God is fueled. That is what we base what we do upon.

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It sounds easy. God's Word is here in the book, and if we read it and study it, all is well. But this means that we have to accept the truth of what God says. Just because it is available to us, and it is being preached at us, and we may be reading and studying it, does not necessarily mean that we are going to accept it. That goes in spades for doing it. And that is for something that is easy to hear, and especially for those things that are hard to hear.

We like to think that we are open to what God says, but really, are we? Human nature wants to hear easy things. It wants to hear things that it can just plug right in and do immediately—and sadly, that is the state of American Christianity right now. They want to hear easy things, things that will not rock the boat.

Did you hear Victoria Osteen, and her ridiculous comments that she made a week or two ago? Listen to what she said: “Do good for your own self. Do it because God wants you to be happy. When you come to church, when you worship Him, you're not doing it for God, really, you're doing it for yourself, because that's what makes God happy.”

The Osteens have essentially turned the worship of God into this wonderful thing for the self. Doing it all for yourself, it is not for God. God does not need any worship, He does not necessarily want any worship, He just wants you to be happy. So do it your own way, so that you will be happy, and that will make God happy, too.

It is a silly, saccharine, meaningless deception. I am not sure what to call it.

God talks about this. The children of Israel have done this in the past. Isaiah 30 talks about Israel leading up to its fall in the 700's B.C.

**Isaiah 30:8-11** Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and note it on a scroll, that it may be for time to come, forever and ever: That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the Lord; who say to the seers, “Do not see,” and to the prophets, “Do not prophesy to us right things; speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits. [Tell us lies, sweet little lies, that is what we want to hear.] Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.”

Do you know what they are saying? “Get God out of the country.”

That is horrible. That is what the people of this country are doing. They do not want to

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follow the law of God, they do not want to follow the teachings, even of their own churches, as corrupt as some of those may be. They just want to hear smooth things. They do not want to hear what is coming, what God is going to do in terms of their sin. They do not want to hear that. They say, "Get out of the way. Move off the path. Let's get God out of here, because we don't want to hear it. We don't want to hear what He has to say, because it's difficult."

Ezekiel is another one who faced this. He had to go through all kinds of stuff for God. Lie on one side for a long time, then lie on his other side, and do all of these things that made him look like a fool, and preach.

**Ezekiel 33:30-32** "As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, 'Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.' [That sounds pretty good, but what is the reason they are there?] So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them.

That is the way the world is right now. It is also like this in some parts of the church. They want to hear something that is soothing and nice, and tickles the little gray cells, it itches their ears, but they do not want it to go any further. They do not want to do what God tells them to do, what is going to make their lives a blessing. They do not want to hear the truth. They have veered off, and all they want is pleasant things. They want to hear the special music, but they do not want to hear the "You need to do this" part.

They do not want to hear the truth spoken to them at all. They would rather hear something that is smooth and easy to accept, easy to digest, some sort of platitude that will make them feel good, but really mean very little to their spiritual lives. As it says in Ezekiel, if they must hear them, they will nod, and smile, and say, "Give it to 'em, preacher!" but do nothing. It is not for *them*. They do not have such problems. They are "good people."

But remember this: assent is not acceptance. Agreement is not obedience.

We have to be different. We have to be better than that. We have to accept what God

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says, and we have to obey it. It is no good just to hear it. Now faith comes from hearing, but we have to follow through in faith and do it.

We have to see and hear God's truths, even the hard ones, even the ones that make us cringe. We have to believe them, and we have to do them. As His chosen people, we have to show ourselves to be separate, meaning different, set apart. A people who not just hear, but do.

We have to be especially accepting of God's truth. We have to always come at with the mentality that if God says it, it must be right, and we need to do it—no matter what it is.

A good example of this is Herbert Armstrong. He had no idea what the holy days meant, but he saw that God said that you need to keep them. And so he kept them, and it was seven years before he finally understood that those holy days mapped out God's plan—and *of course* you needed to keep them, because if you did not keep them, you had no idea what God was doing. You needed this repetitive teaching every year, you needed to go through Passover, Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles, and the Last Day. You had to go through them every year to figure out and remember where God is headed and where you are in that plan.

We have to have that same humble approach to God's Word. If God says, "Do it," even if we do not understand why we do it, we should do it. That is difficult. It is tough. I always think of Raiders of the Lost Ark, the third one, where he has to step out onto that invisible bridge in faith. He did not know that there was going to be anything there to catch him. He took that proverbial leap or step of faith, and he was caught and supported, and he could move forward. And when he looked back, he could see it. Remember, he threw the sand on it, and it revealed it from the other side.

That is what happens with us. When we do what we are supposed to do, and we get to that other end, we look back and say, "Oh, yeah, I can now see how this all works, how it all applies, why we should do it." But up until that point, we have to just go and do it in faith.

We have to take the difficult path, if it is required of us to live the truth God reveals in His Word. Sometimes it is not difficult, sometimes we can figure it out. Sometimes we can assent to it, and say, "Oh yeah, I should do this, and it's easy."

But there are times when it is difficult, and even if it is difficult, we have to do it if it is going to make the way to the Kingdom of God better. If it is going to enhance our journey to the Kingdom of God, we have got to do it.

What are some of the hard truths of Christianity? We are going to spend the remainder of the sermon reviewing some of these hard truths, and I think it will become apparent why so many in this world reject God and His truth, even the ones who claim to be Christians. We are going to see that even these basic concepts that God presents in the Bible are hard for human nature to accept.

We have come a long way. Hopefully, we are converted members of the church, and we have done and accepted most of these truths that I am going to present. But there are a few, as we get toward the end, that maybe we need to think about a little bit more, because they are still hard truths for us today.

Let us start with the one that I think is the hardest one of all to accept. You may wonder about this one, wonder about the way I estimate how hard it is, but I do believe that for the human mind, this is the most difficult. This is the one we have to jump over first, and it may be the tallest that we have to jump over.

**Isaiah 43:10-13, 15** “You are My witnesses,” says the Lord, “and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no savior. I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you; therefore you are My witnesses,” says the Lord, “that I am God. Indeed before the day was, I am He; and there is no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it? . . . I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.”

This is the great obstacle that most people have. There is only one God, one Lord, one Savior: the creator of Israel, the King of all things. On top of that, this Being is all powerful. No one can stop Him. No one can even obstruct Him, and certainly, no one can reverse His work.

The fact of God, that He exists, and that He is so powerful, and that He is over all, and adding to that, the necessity of obeying Him, are impossibly difficult to accept. Human nature does not want to accept anything greater than it. Human nature wants to be lord, master, savior, king. We do not want to give our fealty to anyone or anything. When confronted by the power of God, we puff our chests out, and say, “Alright, give it to me! I can take you on.” We do not realize that we are nothing, and He is everything.

But we cannot see Him, we cannot hear Him. We have to accept that this great Being is,

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and that He has the instruction that is going to give us life, and eternal life. But we do not even want to believe that He exists, because we do not want to bow down to Him.

But we must. That is a hard truth.

Most of us are over that. With God's help, we got over that barrier.

But it still happens, it pops up every once in a while, when something happens in our life, and we totally forget God and try to do everything ourselves. We try to be the master again. We try to rule. We are sovereign in our own lives, and we push God to one side. We have to learn this, over and over and over again, throughout our conversion.

A corollary to this is just a few chapters back in chapter 40. God is once again trying to get Himself across to the people of Israel.

**Isaiah 40:15a** Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket. . . .

Do you understand what He is talking about? A bucket, capacity of maybe five gallons, that you get from Lowes or Home Depot, for paint or whatever. One drop in that bucket is what God compares *all* of the nations of the earth to.

**Isaiah 40:15b** . . . and are counted as the small dust on the scales;

He is talking about weighting something, let us say a bunch of wheat, and the wheat gets thrown out of the balance, and he says all the nations are what is left over, the dust that is still coating the scales after all of the rest of it has been dumped out.

Are you feeling small yet?

**Isaiah 40:15c-16** Look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn [The whole country of Lebanon is not sufficient to burn.], nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering.

You cannot give God enough! You cannot make a sacrifice large enough to truly impress God.

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**Isaiah 40:17** All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless.

So big obstacle # 2, similar to big obstacle #1, which is God is great in everything, is that we are nothing at all. We are totally worthless. If all of the nations of the world are as little as this in God's eyes, we are infinitesimal specks of nothingness, if that is even such a thing. We are specks of insignificance.

Several, times, God calls us "dust." Dust we are, and dust is what we are going to return to. Do you realize that all of humanity, in God's language, is named "dirt?" His name for us is *adam*, and that means "earth." We are just dirt, compared to Him.

Does that not prick your pride a little bit, your vanity? "I'm something. When I was in Little League, I batted .425, I was a good ball player." God says, "You are nothing. You hit three home runs in one game. I created the Earth."

See the difference? God says, you have got to accept this truth, that you are nothing and worthless, and that He, on the other hand, is everything and great, because that puts the proper perspective on things so that we give Him the honor that He deserves and we make the changes that we need to make to please Him. It is just a wonderful thing, that we dusty, dirty individuals can even please Him at all.

**Jeremiah 17:9-10** "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings."

Not only are we essentially nothing and worthless, sheer vanity, we are also deceitful and wicked, and not just wicked, we are *desperately* wicked. Beyond the fact that we are worthless, we are *evil* and worthless. It is the kind of thing that you scrape off your shoe when you go through the mud. It is ick, you do not want it, it is worth nothing.

Humanity is nearly incorrigible. Certainly we are incorrigible without God's intervention. God says that He then examines us, He evaluates us. As a just and righteous God, He gives us what we deserve. He judges us by what we do, how we live, how we treat our fellow man—and that cannot be good for us, because we do not live well, we do not do right, and we treat each other horribly. So He says, "You've got it coming, unless you change."

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**Romans 3:9-18** What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

**Romans 3:23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

**Romans 6:23** For the wages of sin is death. . . .

And then it says:

**Romans 6:23** . . . but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What he is telling us is that we are so despicably wicked, that if there were not some kind of intervention by God Himself, we would all—we already have—been subject to the death penalty. We do not have eternal life, unless God gives it to us. All we could expect was a very definite death. It would be all over. That is what we would deserve.

No matter how good people may think they are, no matter how much they contribute to charity, or how many hours they volunteer to the soup kitchen, men are sinful through and through. They are not righteous, they do not understand God’s way, they do no real good. All have strayed from the truth. All are under the dominion of sin. No one comes even close to the goodness and glory of God. And that is a hard truth, because people tend to think that they are essentially good.

But they are not. They have to get over this self-love, and figure out that they are actually pretty low-down people, scum.

I was going to go to I Samuel 12:1-7, where Nathan came to David and told him the story of the lamb, and David says, “I would have that man killed!” And Nathan turns around and says, “You are the man!” Even David had to be brought up short by God, he



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was still enslaved to sin in certain areas of his character. By his own admission, he was guilty of capital sin. He needed to repent before God, and he would have to face the consequences of his transgressions. He would have to face the death of that child, and he would have to face years and years of family conflict.

What I am trying to say to us is, just because we have been justified by the blood of Christ does not mean that we are perfect. We have to repent continuously, because in the flesh, we are still subject to sin, we are still subject to backsliding. It could get really bad in some people. And if we think we stand, we are probably guilty of self-righteousness, and we will be brought up short, just as David was brought up short.

If you think that you can go before God and say that you are righteous, please read the book of Job.

Think about the Jews, in John 8:44. They thought that they were in God's palm, they were so good and righteous. They were the chosen of God, and He said, "You are of your father, the devil. You are liars and you are murderers, just like him." Think about that. What would He say to us, as God's elect?

Maybe it is time we read Revelation 2 and 3 again, because that is God's estimation of His own church! And we like to think that we are in the "good church."

You better think again, and read the book of Job again, and understand that God wants a holy and righteous people. He is not going to give us a pass if we hold onto sin and are not zealous for good works, because that means we are not repenting, and we are not really becoming like His Son.

What He wants to see, we find here in Romans 6.

**Romans 6:16-19** Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

I think you get my drift. Just as enthusiastic as we were, before our conversion, to run the way of this world, we need to be just as zealous now to run the way of God. All the way to holiness, and not slacken our pace, and not think that we are pretty good, just the way we are.

You might want to jot down Colossians 3:1-10, because that is where Paul says set your things on the above, where God and Christ are, and then he turns around and says “Put to death your members that are leading you to sin.” Are we willing to put to death the sinful parts of our natures? Have we really chased our evil inclinations out? Have we done what is necessary to rid ourselves of sin, or are we satisfied with our present “not too bad” shape?

You might want to also jot down Hebrews 6:1-8 and Hebrews 10:26-31. In those two passages, Paul is very clear in telling us that if we willfully sin after we receive the knowledge of the truth, there is no more sacrifice for sin. You cannot crucify Christ twice for yourself! One sacrifice!

If you hold on to some area of sin, and do not repent of it, that could keep you from the Kingdom of God. We have to forsake all sin, and we have to be humble enough to beseech God to show us our sins, and to give us the strength to overcome them. We do not want anything standing in the way of our union with Christ in the Kingdom of God. You do not want to face God and His judgment, because God is a consuming fire, he says in Hebrews 10:31.

Be careful! Find the sin and root it out. What this takes is what we see in Romans 12.

**Romans 12:1-2** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

This is one of the great hard truths of the Bible: we have to give up our lives completely, while we are still alive. God asks for sacrifices in the Old Testament that were killed, but we have to give up our lives in life, to serve God. *We are not our own.* We saw, we are slaves of righteousness. We are God's—body, soul, and spirit, as they say. It is only reasonable that we do this, as Paul says in verse 1. It is only reasonable for us to give ourselves in totality to God, because He paid with everything He had to redeem us. Christ gave Himself, and it is only reasonable that we are required to give ourselves,

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too.

Our time, then, now and to the future, is to be engaged in being transformed by God in our minds, in our characters, to become like the perfect man, Jesus Christ. That is our job. That is the hard truth that we have to face every morning when we wake up. It is another step in the journey to be like God's Son.

Finally, another hard truth, but a more positive one from God's Word.

**Romans 8:31-32** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

You may say, "That's not hard to accept at all." But it is! It is hard, in a good way. Do we really believe this? It is hard to think that the God of all of the universe, the God who created all things, who held back the waters of the Red Sea, who raised His Son from the dead, could be completely and decisively on our side.

It is hard to fathom, that no matter who or what stands against us, as powerful as whatever it is may be, He is greater. God is greater, stronger, more capable, to give us the help and the victory that we need to overcome the problem.

It is hard to get through our thick skulls that He is willing to provide *whatever* we need, so that we could overcome and finish our course. He was willing to give His own Son for this! If He was willing to give Him for our eternal life, what then would He not give to help us along the way?

Can we accept that? Can we believe that? Can we make use of that? Can we thank God for that?

It is the truth. All of these things that I have mentioned have been truths. Most of them things that the world will not accept, but they are part of God's Word, part of His instruction for us to live with Him, eternally in His Kingdom.

Will you accept them? Will you use them?