

SECTION 2: HYPOCRISY, continued

Fear

Life, by definition, is sincere. It is not form; it is real. Life and form are opposed to one another, just as God's Spirit and the flesh are opposed to one another (Gal. 5:17). True life is found only in God's Spirit because His Spirit itself is life (Rom. 8:10), and all earthly forms are "in the flesh", as Paul would say it, because the flesh itself is a form.

When John the Baptist was born, his father Zacharias prayed a stirring prayer in which he expressed the deep desire of God's people everywhere. He said that in sending the Messiah, God would make it possible "that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life" (Lk. 1:74-75). Fear is a paralyzing force, but it is an inescapable part of the human condition; people everywhere feel the fear of death, of disapproval, and of suffering. People hide behind forms because they fear life more than they fear death. However, in love for us, God sent His Son to deliver us from our bondage to human fears (Heb. 2:14-15), and that liberty is such a gracious gift, and it came at such a price, that it is sin to refuse it. The apostle John said that those who remain fearful will be damned along with murderers, fornicators, and other wicked people (Rev. 21:8).

To hide behind forms is learned. Babies are not born with that knowledge, nor was Adam created with it. In the garden of Eden, Adam had not learned to put on an act when he ate the forbidden fruit and fear replaced the joy that he previously felt in God's presence. Therefore, he was sincere and confessed what he was feeling the next time God came to visit him and Eve:

Genesis 3

8. They heard the voice of the LORD God as He walked about in the garden in the evening breeze. And the man and his wife hid themselves from the face of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.
9. And the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"
- 10a. And he said, "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself."

That was an honest confession. Fear was a new feeling for Adam and Eve, and they hid from God because they felt it. There were no hypocrites in the world to teach Adam worldly wisdom; and so, Adam told the truth: he was afraid and was hiding from God. In his guilty bosom, there remained enough childlike simplicity to keep him from putting on a happy face and walking out to greet God as if all was well with his soul.¹ But while Adam was devoid of that kind of wisdom, his son Cain was not.

Cain was an evildoer (cf. 1Jn. 3:12), and somewhere along his ungodly path, he began to hide his sinfulness behind an appearance of uprightness because he feared being exposed. After Cain murdered his brother Abel and God asked him where Abel was, Cain put on an act of innocence and impertinently replied, "Am I my brother's keeper?" He was saying, in effect, "I have no idea where Abel is," pretending not to know. There was nothing inherently wrong with Cain's question; it might have been asked in all innocence under different circumstances. But in this case, the question was a lie because Cain himself had become a liar, and he was acting. He was hiding behind an appearance of innocence, unlike his father Adam, who admitted to himself and to God that he was guilty.

¹ Job said that Adam hid is guilt in his breast (Jb. 31:33), but there is no indication of that in Genesis.

In a previous chapter, I pointed out that it is the presence of God rather than His absence that most frightens men. That is the default condition of the human race, for all mankind inherited from Adam and Eve not only a sinful nature but also the fear that goes with it. And as Cain's behavior indicates, humans may quickly learn to hide their fear behind an appearance of good.

David was declaring liberty from fear when he declared, "I will not fear what man can do to me!" (Ps. 56:11), but that was not David speaking; it was the sinless Son of God describing the way he would live in this world of sinners. The Son did not want to suffer, but he made the choice not to allow fear to cause him to act the way men wanted him to act so that he could escape suffering. Nor did he want to die, but he loved his Father more than he feared death; so, he prayed, "Not my will, but yours be done" (Lk. 22:42) and went to the cross.

It is human nature to give in to fear and put on an act, but it is God's nature to overcome human fears, and with the strength which God's kind of life provides, we can be like Jesus and overcome the temptation to put on an act. Without the strength of God's life, our words, like a stage actor's, are determined by what others want us to say and our deeds are determined by what others want us to do, while our true selves remain hidden behind the expected forms.

Trained

As newborns, we were all sincere. We cried unashamedly when we were hurt or disappointed, and we welcomed compassion when it was offered. If a little child is frightened, he cries and runs to his mother. He is too busy living from the heart, too sincere, to pause to consider what others may be thinking about his tears. But the world took that innocence away from us; it trained us to hide our feelings and thoughts, and it does not take long for children to figure out how to act so as to please others and avoid consequences that they fear. Children being teased by other children on the playground is one of the thousands of ways they are trained to conform, to act the way others want them to act. They learn to survive by hiding their hurts, fears, and disappointments, and as time passes and the pressure continues, sincere feelings and thoughts are driven deep into children's hearts so that acting becomes their norm, too.

Love of form being the default condition of human society, the entire world trains us all to subsume our thoughts under acceptable forms. There are no exceptions. It is the way of the whole world. When Shakespeare wrote, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players," he was telling the truth. Every person on earth, whether intentionally or not, is putting on an act, except for the few sincere souls who have received God's kind of life and are walking in it. This is why James warned the saints that "the friendship of the world [whether it looks like it or not] is enmity against God" (Jas. 4:4).

We all were trained from our earliest years in the art of hypocrisy. With even the best of intentions, the humans around us pressured us to put on an act and to hide sincere feelings behind forms. At home, at play, at worship, and everywhere in public, everyone in this cruel world is taught that hypocrisy, or hiding behind acceptable forms, is less painful than sincerity, and we all have passed our hypocrisy on to others. Moreover, those who are generally considered good people do the most effective job of teaching hypocrisy to others, for they know the most acceptable and beneficial forms to follow.

Every newborn is by nature self-centered and demanding. Nothing—absolutely nothing—matters to an infant but his own fleshly comfort. Teaching children to act out an acceptable form is the world's way of managing their natural self-centeredness. Parents are teaching their children hypocrisy when they teach them to be courteous and dutiful, according to societal norms. But following proper form cannot create righteousness within a child, for it cannot change human nature.

Following proper form is an imitation of righteousness which “good” children learn to act out. School teachers are teaching hypocrisy along with other lessons when they enforce order in their classroom, for the self-restraint and submission to authority which they demand are contrary to the children’s human nature. They are merely forms which children are taught, and smart children quickly learn to use those forms to avoid shame or punishment and to gain favor with adults who can give them what they want. The hearts of courteous and obedient people, whether young or old, who have not received God’s life are still self-willed and self-centered; they have only learned to act contrary to their fallen nature. It is still beastly, for all its appearance to the contrary (cf. Jer. 10:14a; 2Pet. 2:12).

The “bad” people in society are those whose fallen nature is not restrained by form. They are not the accomplished hypocrites that the “good” people are, for they do not put on an act and hide their true nature behind acceptable forms. It is for that reason that they are frowned upon and ostracized by the “good” people. In extreme cases, authorities will intervene and punish them.

Because the harlots and other social outcasts of Jesus’ time were more real than the “good” people who despised them, Jesus got along with them better than with the “good” people, who had learned how to act. Murderers and other social outcasts are sinners, but they do not hide it. The “good” people of this world are also sinners, but they know how to hide it. Many of the “good” people in Israel despised the “bad” people for the same reason that they despised Jesus, namely, neither Jesus nor the “bad” people were hiding behind acceptable forms.² Jesus was truly good and was open about it, and the “bad” people were truly bad and were also open about it.

Many of the “good” people in this world still despise the “bad” people (and believers who are truly like Jesus), and many of the powers on earth still intervene and punish “bad” people (and believers who are like Jesus). Nevertheless, “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23) because no one is born into this world with God’s kind of life. We are all bad people in God’s sight until He shares with us His good Spirit and cleanses us.

Restraints

Though forms are contrary to the life of God, in a world of sinners, some forms are needed and helpful. A society’s required forms concerning fair business practices and etiquette, for example, are beneficial because they help avoid conflict. They compel people to act as though they love one another. Religious, political, and social forms play crucial roles in restraining man from acting according to his fallen nature, the way a fence or a chain restrains an aggressive dog. Such forms can prevent rash actions springing from passion, or actions based on maliciousness, covetousness, or the like. Throughout history, every time governments or societies have become unstable or collapsed, the restraint of forms has been loosened and the beastly nature of man emerged from behind the forms. In even the most civilized of societies, whenever forms are no longer in force, anarchy is the result.

Political forms, such as peace treaties between nations, are beneficial because they keep nations from waging war against one another. But earthly peace treaties are only a form of peace, not real peace. God said, “There is no peace to the wicked” (Isa. 48:22), and God is right. The condition which nations call peace is a form beneath which seethes the same envy and strife which led them to war in the first place. That scenario has been repeated many times in history; nevertheless, most humans still trust in form and will not repent and turn to God for real peace. No war on earth has ever ended by the warring nations coming together to plead with God to give them His kind of life so that wars will not return.

² Of course, “bad” people sometimes live by forms that differ from the forms “good” people live by. For example, street gangs and terrorist organizations have their own rules and their own strictly enforced codes of conduct.

Instead, men sign treaties and trust again in a form of peace, restraining for a while the hatred and strife that is still in their hearts.

No matter what men claim, strife is embedded in human nature, and man's kind of peace only appears to be peaceful. When sinful men cheat or fight, they are being true to their fallen nature; when they smile and shake hands, they are lying because that appearance of friendship is contrary to what is really in their hearts. Knowing this, Jesus refused to trust human confessions of faith in him because he knew what was in man (Jn. 2:23–25).³ Still, so long as earthly forms of peace are maintained, people benefit because fewer people get hurt.

It is to restrain passions that societies attach ceremonial form to significant events in life—birth, death, marriage, graduation, retirement, etc. Anniversaries of the birth or death of notable figures, dates of significant national events, and religious holidays are celebrated with special forms in order to direct and control the energies of the masses—a parade for this event, costumes for another, feasting and gift-giving for another, and so forth. None of it is real life; it is all form, an empty appearance of goodness; nevertheless, it does help to stabilize societies.

Little Children

In revealing His Son, God ended His act and fully opened His heart to us, and it is ungodly for us to hide any longer behind forms because God is no longer hiding from us. He is altogether who He has revealed Himself to be in His Son. The abundant life that Jesus suffered for us to have is life that gives us power to live from the heart again, like a little child. In fact, Jesus insisted that unless this happens, unless we stop acting and become as sincere little children again, we will never see the kingdom of God:

Matthew 18

2. When Jesus had called a little child to him, he stood him in their midst
3. and said, “Truly, I tell you, unless you are converted and become like little children, you will never enter into the kingdom of heaven.
4. Whoever humbles himself like this little child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

God's life gives us the courage to resist the intimidation of the world and be ourselves, as we once were when we were little children, but to have it be truly good this time, not self-willed and self-centered. When the love of God is “poured out in our hearts by the holy Spirit”, it draws us out of our hiding places to live again in childlike sincerity. The Spirit of God re-creates us as children of a Father who will not fail us, as siblings of a big brother who will always be with us and watch over us, and as members of a family whose influence is the opposite of that of the world. For when we as the family of God walk together in our Father's love, we encourage one another to live without fear of ridicule or betrayal.

Jesus overcame the world by living sincerely, by steadfastly being the person God created him to be. In spite of all he suffered, he remained determined to feel the feelings and think the thoughts that were in the kind of life God gave him and to finish the work God sent him to do. Jesus was childlike in that regard, and his meek, sincere attitude was an essential part of his overcoming the world. We will suffer the ridicule of the world, as Jesus did, if we follow his example; however, if we persist in childlike sincerity as Jesus did, we will be received by the Father, as Jesus was, and enjoy perfect peace and joy forever.

³ Neither Jesus nor humans have changed. It is the Spirit's witness, not man's that we must wait for in order to know who is born again. See *The Sound of the Spirit*, available for reading or download at GoingtoJesus.com.

Like many young men in this culture, I once prided myself for being “cool”, that is, I was proud of how well I could suppress my true feelings and of how convincingly I could act unconcerned about the feelings of others. As a young man, sometimes I would not—no, I was trapped by pride and I could not—let my own mother kiss me, for I lived in fear of sincerity, and her open, tender feelings were too real to fit into my act. They were embarrassing to me, even though they were showing me the way of genuine life in Christ. Shortly after she died, I, as a chastened and hurting young man, wrote this poem in memory of her:

I Prided Myself

I prided myself for the hardness
of my face.
Would not allow, for any cause,
its callous gaze tears to abase.

Looked coolly into watery eyes –
blindness to another’s pain.
Cruelty’s companion, and yet,
I longed to be whole again.

Whole, like the days of innocent play,
and, falling down,
bore no weight of anxious fear that minds
were contemplating my tearful frown.

And, oh, you knew. You knew.
You knew the goodness of hurting
for me, who hid in pales
and called my bondage liberty.

Wizened Healer came, scythe firm in hand,
mettle his to prove.
One swift stroke, the curing damage done,
callousness to remove.

Oh, could you see me now!
How you would rejoice to see
this brokenness, this need and want
of sympathy.

A gift most precious given.
Your desire at very long last fulfilled.
For me to feel! Cut, but open now
to be saddened, to be thrilled.

A purchased liberty.
The price, the deliverer’s loss.
And I on this side stand to give
to you, who paid the cost.

O cursed reaping! Now to know the joy
of joy and sorrow both,
while you, beyond the reach of my cry,
deserve to hear it most.

Those who walk in God's life with Jesus do not wait until it is too late to show their love for others. They cannot wait because God's kind of life compels them to live from the heart, and it teaches them that waiting to love is to not love at all. God is not waiting to pour out His love for us; He did that when He opened His heart on the day of Pentecost, pouring out eternal life from His bosom, like rivers of living water, into human souls. Now, God is only waiting for us to become childlike enough to open our hearts to Him and to ask Him for His kind of life. Jesus said to his disciples,

Luke 11

9. Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.
10. For everyone who asks receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened.
11. What father among you, when a son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or also a fish, he won't give him a snake instead of a fish, will he?
12. Or if he asks for an egg, will he give him a scorpion?
13. If you, then, being evil, know to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father who is in heaven give the holy Spirit to those who ask Him?

Sincerity

The most undervalued fruit of the Spirit is sincerity. Sincerity is as contrary to hypocrisy as God's life is. A sincere person is truly living because he is living truly, but a person who is living a life of hypocrisy, a life of appearance and form, is not living at all. We are truly living when we are living honestly with our neighbors, when what our neighbors hear from us comes from our heart, and when what they see in us shows how we truly feel. Especially is this needed in believers' relationships with one another. Paul gave this exhortation to the family of God: "Putting away lying, speak the truth, each one with his neighbor, for we are members of one another" (Eph. 4:25).

Sincerity is a fruit that Paul, surprisingly, did not mention in his well-known list of spiritual fruit:

Galatians 5

22. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, faith,
23. meekness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Without sincerity, those fruits of the Spirit cannot be used rightly. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit, but insincere patience has a devious motive. Wicked Absalom was patient. He waited two years before springing his trap and murdering his half-brother Amnon (2Sam. 13:23–29). Faith is a fruit of the Spirit, but insincere faith can be used to seduce souls, as the existence of false apostles proves. And Solomon warned his son to beware of insincere kindness, telling him, "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (Prov. 12:10). But sincerity's omission from the Galatian list of spiritual fruit does not mean that Paul failed to recognize its importance. In other places, he emphasized it greatly:

1Corinthians 5

7b. Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed for us,

8. so that we might keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

2Corinthians 1

12. Our boast is this: the testimony of our conscience, that with simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and all the more toward you.

The Greatest Hypocrite of All

Hypocrisy, the opposite of sincerity, is the hiding of what is within. It is not only the norm in this world, but before the Son was revealed, hypocrisy was also the norm in heaven. Before the Son was revealed, even God hid His innermost feelings and thoughts because He was determined that His beloved Son would have the honor of revealing them. As long as God kept His Son hidden, nothing anywhere, including God Himself, was exactly as it appeared to be. God, as it turns out, was the greatest actor of all. Everything that men or angels saw and heard from God before the Son was revealed was only part of an incomparably cunning performance by which God kept all the treasures of His wisdom and knowledge hidden until the appointed time. For millennia, God patiently and politely received wicked Satan into His presence, sending him on missions that were clearly important. Judging both God and Satan by appearances,⁴ many creatures in heaven came to the conclusion that God and Satan were alike, but they were fooled more by God's hypocrisy than by Satan's. God's holy and wise act, His magnificent performance, concealed the truth about Himself and Satan, and everybody and everything else, until the Son was revealed.

God's hypocrisy sprang from a humble heart full of love for His Son and for us; human hypocrisy sprang from fear; and Satan's hypocrisy sprang from pride and love of self. Because God was a hypocrite, the Son was exalted and we have the Spirit; because humans were hypocrites, they were lost souls; and because Satan was a hypocrite, he was cast out of heaven, along with the millions of angels who trusted him.

Paul wrote, "To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure" (Tit. 1:15). Because God is pure, everything He does is pure regardless of how bad it looks to humans, and because Satan is evil, everything he does is evil regardless of how good it appears to humans. Humans are not the standard; God is. As a dear brother in Christ, James Hammonds, once testified in our Assembly, "God can be right any kinda way He wants to." That is sound doctrine.

God is neither foolish nor weak. Nevertheless, Paul felt free to say that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1Cor. 1:25). In the same vein, we may say that the hypocrisy of God is more trustworthy than the sincerity of men, and any act that God puts on is more truthful than the honesty of man.

It is one of the most difficult lessons to learn, that nothing is unclean of itself (Rom. 14:14). Whether a deed is good or evil is altogether a matter of the heart; it has nothing whatsoever to do with visible form. Being a hypocrite does not make one either good or evil; the only question is, what kind of hypocrite are you: a hypocrite like God, for the good of others, or a hypocrite like Satan, for the good of self? Being a hypocrite is a holy condition if the hypocrite himself is holy, that is, if he is led by God's holy Spirit to put on an act (e.g., 1Kgs. 20:38–43). But a hypocrite who is not holy is a dangerous snare.

⁴ Jesus warned his detractors not to make judgments (of him) based on appearances (Jn. 7:24).

Anything

Anything can be sin because anything can be a form. Even prayer can be a form hated by God (Prov. 28:9). Playing loud, fast gospel music, raising one's hands to heaven, and shouting "Hallelujah" and "Praise God" can be as lifeless a form as a Roman Catholic Mass. The value of worship is not determined by its volume, whether loud or quiet; any style of worship is a form when the worshippers are not being led by the Spirit. God's people are exhorted to shout His praise and to worship Him with music and dancing (Pss. 33:1–3; 150). They are also exhorted to "be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10). Without the Spirit, no one knows when to do either. We must be led by the Spirit in order to please God in anything.

Paul said that "whatever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23b). On the other hand, whatever is done by someone led by the Spirit is holy because the Spirit is God (minus His body), and God is holy. The prophet Hosea's adultery with a married woman was holy because God commanded him to do it (Hos. 3), and so was Isaiah's fornication with a prophetess at God's command (Isa. 8:1–3).

What men call lying can be holy, too. God once sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint David to be Israel's next king, but Samuel knew that King Saul would kill him if he found out that he had anointed someone to take Saul's place. When Samuel pleaded with God to consider the danger He was putting him in, God told the reluctant prophet to lie (as humans would see it) about his reason for going to Bethlehem:

1Samuel 16

2. Samuel said, "How can I go? When Saul hears of it, he will kill me." But the LORD said, "Take with you a heifer from your herd, and say, 'I have come to make sacrifice to the LORD.'"
3. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do, for you shall anoint for me whomever I tell you."

God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2) because He can create. Whatever He says becomes the truth when He says it, even if it was not true before. Samuel's reason for traveling to Bethlehem was not to make a sacrifice, before God said it was. When God told Samuel to say that he was coming to Bethlehem to make a sacrifice, that commandment created a reason for Samuel to go there. After that, to make a sacrifice was Samuel's reason for going, and he obediently went to Bethlehem, offered a sacrifice there, and sent for Jesse and his sons to come to it (1Sam. 16:5). Samuel could not lie any more than God could when he said what God told him to say. It can hardly be overstated: A lie is a matter of the heart, not a matter of the syllables that proceed from the mouth, and God's heart is always pure.

Whenever something proceeds from God's mouth, it creates reality; the very breath of His mouth creates what it says (cf. Ps. 33:6). In the beginning, God said "Let there be light!" and light came to be because God is so holy that He cannot lie. When He said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of heaven, to separate the day from the night", the sun and the moon appeared, but only because God is so holy that He cannot lie. It is good to know that God cannot lie, but it is better to know *Him* so that you understand why He cannot lie.

God's Spirit does not lead men to sin, whatever it leads them to do, because God is without sin; still, it frightens God's children when the Spirit begins to lead them away from forms. Growing up in Christ requires courage, but that need not be a problem, for God will supply abundant courage to any of His children who will have it. Courage from God creates in us the faith we need to believe everything the Spirit says to our hearts and to do everything the Spirit leads us to do. Many a child of God has not believed the Spirit's voice because what it said did not agree with the Institution's form. How many, to this day, have not followed after the Spirit because to do so would have meant to leave the Institution and its forms! The man of God's exhortation to be fearless is as needed today as it ever was:

Hebrews 13

12. Jesus, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered outside the gate.

13. So then, let us go to him outside the camp, bearing his reproach.

We will certainly bear Jesus' reproach, especially from men of the Institution, if we dare to go to him "outside the camp", just as Jesus bore his Father's reproach by staying filled with His holy Spirit:

Psalm 69

8. I have become a stranger to my brothers and an alien to the children of my mother

9. because jealousy for your house consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you fell on me.

Jesus is calling upon us to believe that every work of God is holy, whether it be destroying the world with a flood, opening the eyes of the blind, or calling His children out of the Institution. As the Son joyfully testified through David, "The judgments of the LORD are true; they are altogether righteous" and "the works of His hands are truth and judgment" (Ps. 19:9b; 111:7). When we believe God as Jesus did, we will follow Jesus wherever he leads, even if he leads us away from the forms we have been taught are holy—and he will certainly do that, so that we might truly live.

Nothing that humans do in their own wisdom and power, even the best of them, is either holy or eternal. "Surely, men of low status are vanity, and men of high status are a lie. Laid in a balance together, they are lighter than vanity" (Ps. 62:9). When men boast of anything they have done, they are like a turtle on a busy highway boasting of its mighty shell. Romans were boasting of Rome as "the eternal city" even before Christians began to do so,⁵ but nothing on this earth is eternal. God alone has a place of eternal rest for His faithful children, and they will not be disappointed, for God "has prepared for them a city" (Heb. 11:16).

Righteousness is always and only a matter of the heart, and God's heart is perfectly pure all the time. In God is not even a hint of unrighteousness (1Jn. 1:5), and if we think we see any, it is only because we are judging Him by our own faulty standard. Even the heavens are unclean in God's sight (Job 15:15), and compared to Him, heaven's holy creatures are foolish and blind (Job 4:18). God humbles Himself to even look at things in heaven, much less at this wasteland of wickedness called earth (Ps. 113:6). God is the greatest of whatever exists, and He is completely unjudgeable because His thoughts and His ways are infinitely above the thoughts and ways of all His creatures, not just man's. The best that we can ever do is to believe and obey God, and the best that we can ever be is to be like His Son, but we can do neither without the Spirit.

⁵ The Latin poet Tibullus (c. 54–19 BC) may have been the first to use this phrase (Book II.5.23).

Control

Man is in control of every god that is worshipped with form because man is in control of the form. Baptists, Presbyterians, Catholics, etc., tell their Gods and their Jesuses when and how often they will have communion and whether they will use real wine or grape juice. They set the date and the time for their Gods and Jesuses to baptize someone with water. They tell their Gods and Jesuses who will be pastor, what doctrine the pastor will teach, and for how much money he will teach it.⁶ They also tell their Gods and their Jesuses who can and cannot be a church member. But the living God is in command of His kingdom.

In God's kingdom, God alone decides when and how often He has communion with His people, and it is always in the Spirit. He decides who and when to baptize with His life. He decides whom He will ordain to minister to His children, what those ministers teach, and how much money they will have for their labor. And He decides whom He will take into His kingdom and whom He will cast out. The true God sets all the standards for His kingdom. He takes orders from nobody, for He "works all things according to the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11), and He does all those things by His Spirit.

Even if we do not understand it, whatever God's Spirit is doing is good and right. Some Corinthian believers apparently were concerned that when the Spirit spoke in tongues through them, they might be saying something bad about Jesus, but Paul let them know not to worry, for "no one speaking in the Spirit is saying, 'Cursed be Jesus'" (1Cor. 12:3). Those who speak in tongues might not know what they are saying (1Cor. 14:14), but whatever the Spirit is saying through them is good (Rom. 8:26). When the Spirit is in control, God is in control, and it is God's control that the flesh does not want.

⁶ For a complete treatment of the subject of a pastor's wages, see my book, *Tithes and Offerings: The Right Relationship between a Pastor and His Congregation*, available for online reading at GoingtoJesus.com.