

# Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule

Series 1-20

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## **Introduction**

This series exists because, after watching the modern “fruit inspector” movement grow like mold across evangelical pulpits, I reached a point where silence started feeling like complicity. For years I’ve watched a particular style of preaching—popularized, rewarded, exported, and copied—turn the local church into a spiritual courtroom, turn the gospel into a probation contract, and turn the believer’s conscience into a revolving door of fear. The longer I listened, the more the pattern became unmistakable: the preaching was always loudest where Scripture is meant to be clearest, and it was always most severe where God is meant to be most settling. At a certain point, you stop calling that “discernment” and start calling it what it is—bondage dressed up in Bible words.

The title “Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule” is not a gimmick. It’s the fairest way to handle a man who constantly measures others by “the fruit test,” by suspicion, by “proof,” by the interrogation of assurance, and by a tone that treats peace with God like presumption. When someone makes himself the public prosecutor of Christianity—pronouncing verdicts, questioning conversions in bulk, calling confidence in Christ “dangerous,” and making self-examination the currency of spirituality—he invites the same scrutiny he aims at everyone else. Jesus said, “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged” (Matthew 7:2). That is not an insult; that is a principle. And if a man insists on applying it to the whole church, then it must be applied to him as well.

I’m doing this because the gospel is not a fog machine. God did not send His Son to make salvation harder to understand than calculus. The New Testament does not speak about eternal life as a “maybe,” a “we’ll see,” or a “prove it later.” It speaks in plain verbs and settled promises. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36). “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). When a preaching system trains people to distrust those plain words—no matter how often it says “grace”—it is preaching another gospel in practice, because it relocates peace from Christ’s finished work to the believer’s internal performance meter.

This series also exists because I've watched the fruits—real fruits, measurable fruits—show up again and again. I've watched tender consciences get shredded while hypocrites learn to imitate the approved vocabulary. I've watched honest believers become quiet because honesty becomes dangerous in a suspicion culture. I've watched churches learn to interrogate instead of evangelize, to police instead of pastor, to accuse instead of restore. I've watched “seriousness” become a mask for confusion, where people leave sermons emotionally rattled but doctrinally foggy. And I've watched young men mimic the tone—without understanding what it does to people—until the export spreads into other pulpits and hardens into a generational pattern.

What I mean by “trial” is not a tabloid spectacle. It is a doctrinal and pastoral examination. Scripture commands righteous judgment in the right category. Jesus said, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). Paul said, “He that is spiritual judgeth all things” (1 Corinthians 2:15). And the Bible is not shy about testing preaching, testing spirits, and exposing corrupt methods. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). The issue is never whether we judge; the issue is whether we judge by the Book, with clear categories, without crossing into guessing motives and playing God with hearts.

So this series is about one simple question that cuts through all the noise: what gospel is functioning underneath the language. A system can say “saved by grace,” yet function like probation by making assurance depend on performance. A system can say “Christ alone,” yet train people to trust self-analysis by turning the believer inward as the main evidence. A system can say “holiness,” yet produce fear, performance, and spiritual pride by making sanctification the price of sonship instead of the fruit of sonship. Scripture says, “To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:5). If a method cannot let Romans 4:5 mean what it says without surrounding it with hedges and suspicion, then the method is not guarding the gospel—it is altering it.

This is also about recovering biblical categories that have been intentionally blurred. The Bible distinguishes justification from sanctification. It distinguishes salvation from rewards. It distinguishes chastening from condemnation. It distinguishes fellowship from sonship. It even gives the sobering category that a believer's works can burn and he can “suffer loss,” yet “he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:15). That verse alone exposes the lie of “salvation-by-proof,” because it proves salvation is not identical to the believer's service record. A preaching system that erases those categories inevitably turns every warning into “you might be lost,” because it has no other tool in its toolbox.

And yes, this series is confrontational on purpose, because the damage is not theoretical. The local church is where sheep bleed, and wolves don't always show up with fangs—they show up with “discernment” talk and “fruit test” talk that gradually relocates trust away from Christ and into the believer's ability to satisfy a preacher's definition of “real.” That is why the apostle warned about minds being “corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3). The serpent doesn't have to deny Christ outright; he just has to complicate Christ until the sinner can't rest in Him.

Here is what “fruit” means in this series, and I'm stating it plainly so nobody can pretend to misunderstand it. Fruit is doctrinal fruit: what does the message train people to believe about salvation, assurance, repentance, sanctification, chastening, and the Christian life. Fruit is pastoral fruit: what does it do to consciences, to confession, to restoration, to the weak, to the struggling, to the young believer. Fruit is relational fruit: what kind of church culture does it create—hospital or courtroom, shepherding or policing. Fruit is generational fruit: what kind of preachers does it reproduce—evangelists or interrogators, pastors or inspectors.

This series is not written to entertain a crowd; it is written to clear the fog. It is written so a man sitting in the pew—who has been tortured by “maybe you're not saved” preaching—can finally put his feet on solid ground. It is written so the gospel can sound like good news again. It is written so believers can stop treating peace with God like a sin and start treating it like the result of justification. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). That peace is not earned by performance; it is granted by God on the basis of Christ's finished work.

And it is written as a warning to the next generation of pulpits. If you teach men to build Christianity on suspicion, you will get a generation that cannot preach assurance without apologizing for it. If you teach men to treat believers like suspects, you will get churches full of actors and hypocrites who know how to mimic approved “marks.” If you teach men that the gospel is a maze, you will create perpetual seekers who never rest, because you have surrounded the door with conditions God never put there. But if you preach the gospel the way the apostles preached it—clear, direct, and anchored in Christ—you will get believers who can say what God said without stuttering: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36).

So “Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule” is a consistency trial. It is a biblical cross-examination of a method and its measurable outcomes, judged by the same standard it demands from others, weighed against plain KJV Scripture, and brought to a conclusion that forces a clean contrast: probation religion versus promise, fog versus clarity, performance versus peace, suspicion versus sonship, and self-inspection versus looking

unto Jesus (Hebrews 12:2). If that contrast offends somebody, good—because the true gospel is offensive precisely because it is simple, humbling, and leaves man nothing to brag about but Christ.

## **1 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - The Fruit Test Turned Back on the Fruit Tester**

### **Introduction**

There is a strange sickness in modern preaching where a man can make a career out of questioning everybody else's salvation and still be treated like the gold standard of holiness. Paul Washer has built a public ministry on the posture of the interrogator, the fruit inspector, the spiritual detective who walks into a room and assumes most of the people are lost unless they can satisfy his terms. He does not just warn about false professions, he makes suspicion a virtue, and he makes assurance sound like presumption. That may feel refreshing to people tired of syrupy religion, but the flesh loves a harsh judge as long as it is judging somebody else, and the devil loves anything that keeps a Christian looking inward instead of looking unto Jesus.

Now a Bible believer is not afraid of judgment when it is righteous judgment. The Bible commands it. "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). The Bible also warns about wolves, hypocrites, false prophets, and deceivers, and it tells the church to mark them. But the same Book that tells you to judge also tells you that judgment has a rule, and that rule comes back around. "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:2). If a man spends his life measuring everyone else's conversion with his own yardstick, then he has invited the world to pick that yardstick up and lay it across his own ministry.

So that is what this series is going to do, and it is going to do it without gossip, without rumor, and without cheap shots. This is not about motives we cannot see. This is about doctrine we can hear, method we can observe, and fruit we can measure. Paul Washer has taught people to judge trees by their fruit, so we will judge his tree by the fruit it produces, and we will do it by the King James Bible. The issue is not whether he can scare a crowd. The issue is whether his preaching produces the fruit God produces, which is faith resting in Christ, assurance grounded in promise, and holiness flowing out of gratitude, not fear.

### **1. The Rule He Uses and the Rule God Uses**

Paul Washer's rule, as it shows up again and again, is that a man must prove he is real. The language varies, but the effect is the same. A profession is treated like a suspect. Assurance is treated like arrogance. The hearer is pushed to search for internal evidences, emotional experiences, patterns, and present-tense performance to validate what God has already said about believing on Christ. That is not the same thing as warning hypocrites. That is building a whole system where the sinner is not invited to rest in the promise, but trained to doubt the promise until he can meet a standard of "realness" that the preacher approves.

God's rule is simpler and stronger because it is built on Christ, not the hearer. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). Not temporary life. Not maybe life. Everlasting life. God's method for giving assurance is not to tell the believer to stare at his own pulse. God's method is to tell the believer to trust God's testimony. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). If the Bible says the believer can know, then any preaching method that makes "knowing" sound suspicious has already drifted off course.

That is why this series starts with the rule. You do not have to guess motives. You just listen to the standard being applied. And when the standard is, "You cannot be sure unless your life proves it," the standard itself is on trial. Because the Bible says assurance is rooted in Christ's finished work and God's promise, not in the believer's ability to satisfy an ongoing inspection. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works" (Ephesians 2:8-9). A gift you have to keep proving you deserve is not a gift, it is a wage with religious makeup on it.

## **2. Righteous Judgment vs. Playing God**

The first dodge people use when a public teacher is questioned is to cry, "Touch not the Lord's anointed," as if discernment is rebellion. That line is a refuge for cowards and con artists. The Bible commands discernment, and it commands judgment in the right categories. We are not judging whether Paul Washer has private feelings we cannot see. We are judging doctrine that has public consequences. The apostles told believers to test and to prove. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1). That is not a suggestion, that is a command.

But righteous judgment has boundaries. We judge teaching by Scripture. We judge fruit by outcomes. We judge a prophet by what he produces. "Beware of false prophets... Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:15-16). That is Jesus Christ talking. He did not say, "You shall know them by how intense they sound." He did not say, "You shall know them by

how many tears they shed.” He said fruit. Fruit is visible. Fruit is measurable. Fruit is repeatable. Fruit shows up in the people shaped by that ministry.

Now here is the uncomfortable part for the fruit inspector. If you stand in the pulpit and constantly question other people’s salvation, then you have established a culture where salvation is always on trial. You trained people to do that. You taught them to. So when they apply that habit back to you, you do not get to complain that they are being “judgmental.” You planted judgment. You watered judgment. You preached judgment. You sold judgment as maturity. And Scripture says a man reaps what he sows. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

### **3. Defining Fruit the Biblical Way**

A lot of men talk about fruit and mean “behavior I like.” That is the Pharisee’s definition. Real biblical fruit starts inside and flows outward from the right root. The root is faith in Christ. The fruit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance (Galatians 5:22-23). That list is not a threat list. It is a growth list. It is what the Spirit produces when a believer is walking in the Spirit, not what a preacher produces when he is scaring a crowd.

Biblical fruit also includes gospel clarity. When the gospel is preached correctly, people understand what saves and why it saves. They learn to point to Christ, not to themselves. They learn to say, “Christ died for our sins... and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). They do not learn to say, “I think I am saved because I feel enough sorrow, and I passed enough internal examinations, and I can show you enough evidence.” When the gospel is clear, the conscience finds rest in the blood. “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Romans 5:9).

Biblical fruit also includes pastoral fruit, which is what happens to believers over time. Do they grow in grace, or do they grow in anxiety. Do they become stronger in faith, or do they become addicted to introspection. Do they learn confession and restoration, or do they learn hiding and performance. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). Boldly is a Bible word. If a preaching system makes believers afraid to be bold with God because they are never sure whether they belong, that system is producing the opposite of what Hebrews is commanding.

### **4. The Measurable Outcomes of Inspection Christianity**

When a ministry makes “proof” the currency of Christianity, it always produces the same predictable outcomes. The first outcome is a church full of people who cannot rest. They

are always checking themselves, always re-reading their own feelings, always replaying their conversion story to see if it was real enough. They do not have peace with God as a settled doctrine, they have peace as a rare emotional moment. But the Bible makes peace a settled result of justification. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). If justification happened, peace is the legal result, even when the emotions fluctuate.

The second outcome is performative spirituality. When suspicion is treated like discernment, people learn to act saved. They learn which phrases to say, what posture to take, what kind of sorrow to display, and what kind of testimony gets applause. The hypocrite thrives in that environment because he does not have to be holy, he just has to be convincing. Meanwhile the honest believer suffers because honesty is punished. If you admit struggle, you risk being told you were never saved. So people hide, and the church becomes a stage. That is the exact opposite of what grace produces, because grace makes confession safe. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9).

The third outcome is unstable converts, not because new believers are not real, but because they were never anchored in promise. They were anchored in the preacher’s mood. They were anchored in a crisis moment. They were anchored in fear. Fear may make a man run to an altar, but faith makes a man rest in Christ. “For we which have believed do enter into rest” (Hebrews 4:3). If a man “believed” but never entered rest, something is wrong with what he was told to believe.

## **5. The Difference Between Warning the Lost and Wounding the Saved**

Any preacher worth his salt will warn the lost. The Bible is full of warnings. The lake of fire is real. Judgment is real. Hell is real. But a preacher is supposed to handle Scripture like a physician, not like a butcher. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God... rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Right division is not just dispensations, it is categories. It is knowing when a text is addressing lost men and when it is addressing saved men, when it is condemning and when it is correcting, when it is warning about damnation and when it is warning about discipline.

Inspection Christianity blurs those lines, and that is where it becomes destructive. It takes warnings aimed at hypocrites and uses them like a whip on the sheep. It takes passages about fellowship and turns them into passages about eternal destiny. It takes chastening and turns it into condemnation. The believer is not corrected as a son. He is threatened as a stranger. But Scripture speaks to believers as sons. “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6). If your

preaching method makes believers afraid to call God “Father” because they are never sure they are His, you are not producing the Spirit’s cry, you are choking it.

This is why the fruit test matters. The Holy Spirit does not produce a Christian culture where peace is treated as suspicious and joy is treated as shallow and assurance is treated as pride. The Holy Spirit produces faith. The Holy Spirit produces love. The Holy Spirit produces stability. “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro” (Ephesians 4:14). A ministry that tosses believers to and fro with constant doubt is not feeding them, it is shaking them.

## **6. The Gospel on Paper vs. the Gospel in Practice**

A man can say “grace” and still preach probation. A man can say “faith alone” and still make works the functional proof that decides whether faith was real. The trick is not what is said in a statement of faith. The trick is what is produced in the hearer’s conscience. The gospel in practice is what people walk away believing about how a man is saved and how a man can know he is saved. If they walk away thinking, “Christ saves, but I cannot be sure unless I can demonstrate enough evidence over time,” then the practical gospel is not grace, it is grace plus a lifelong evidentiary burden.

The Bible does not talk that way. The Bible roots assurance in God’s record, not your record. “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 John 5:11). God’s record is not your work. God’s record is His Son. When Paul Washer’s method trains people to measure salvation by their ongoing spiritual performance, it relocates confidence. It moves it off Christ and onto self. That is why it produces either pride or despair, because those are the two natural fruits of self-focus.

That is also why this series can be run as a consistency trial. Because if a man insists on inspecting everyone else’s fruit to determine whether they are saved, then he has established a principle that he cannot escape. The same principle says we must ask what his ministry produces and whether that production aligns with the gospel of grace. “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (Matthew 7:18). Those are Christ’s words. The fruit inspector does not get an exemption from the rule he uses.

## **7. The Case Statement for the Whole Series**

This opening essay is not the verdict, it is the opening statement. The case is that Paul Washer’s public ministry, by method and emphasis, has produced a recognizable fruit pattern that is out of harmony with the New Testament’s promise-grounded assurance and Christ-centered rest. The case is that his method trades simplicity for suspicion, rest for anxiety, and discipleship for interrogation. The case is that the fruit of his preaching is not

just “holiness,” but a culture where holiness is used as a salvation detector rather than as the outflow of salvation.

Over the next nineteen essays, the series will define the standard clearly and apply it consistently. We will judge doctrine, not secret motives. We will judge repeated outcomes, not isolated anecdotes. We will judge by the Book, not by personality preference. We will ask what kind of Christians this ministry tends to produce, what kind of churches it tends to shape, what kind of conscience it tends to form, and whether that conscience looks like Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and First John, or whether it looks like an endless courtroom where the believer is always on trial.

And the whole time, the Bible will remain the measuring rod. If someone does not like it, they can argue with Scripture. Because the issue is not whether Paul Washer can preach hard. The issue is whether the gospel he functions on matches God’s gospel in practice. “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8). That is not a gentle verse. That is a courtroom verse. And it belongs in a series where a man’s rule is being turned back on him.

## **Conclusion**

The fruit test is biblical, but it has to be applied biblically. You do not get to use “fruit” as a club to beat the saints and then cry foul when someone applies the same test to you. If Paul Washer has trained thousands of people to treat assurance as suspicious and to treat self-examination as the pathway to certainty, then the fruit of that training becomes part of the evidence. If that training produces fear-driven Christianity, performative spirituality, and unstable believers who cannot rest in Christ’s promise, then the tree is not as healthy as the advertising says it is.

This series is not trying to be clever. It is trying to be clear. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not an interrogation room. It is an open door. It is a finished work. It is a promise from God that stands whether your feelings stand or not. “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13). Saved means saved. Not “saved if you can later prove you were saved.” Not “saved if your performance stays above a certain line.” Saved. If a ministry method makes Romans 10:13 feel like a maybe, then that method is corrupting the plain meaning of Scripture.

So this first essay sets the gavel on the bench and establishes the rule of evidence. The rule is his own rule, and it is God’s rule too. “With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matthew 7:2). Paul Washer has measured others by suspicion, by proof, by

evidences, by ongoing inspection. Now we will measure his ministry by the same standard, and we will do it with an open Bible, a steady hand, and no fear of man.

## **2 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - The Gospel of Doubt: When Assurance Becomes a Sin**

### **Introduction**

There is a kind of preaching that sounds like courage but produces cowardice, sounds like holiness but produces hysteria, sounds like discernment but produces distrust. It is the preaching that takes the one thing God meant to settle a man's soul, and turns it into something he is afraid to possess. It takes assurance, the blessed knowledge that Christ saved you and you are His, and it treats that knowledge like pride. It treats peace like a red flag. It treats rest like laziness. It treats confidence like presumption. And it leaves the average hearer living with a spiritual knot in his stomach, like a man holding a ticket in his hand but being told he might not be allowed in the door after all.

That is the atmosphere Paul Washer has helped cultivate across a wide section of modern evangelicalism, whether people will admit it or not. He has trained a generation to equate certainty with arrogance, to equate assurance with self-deception, and to equate the simple faith of the gospel with a shallow, cheap thing that must be upgraded by fear and suspicion. Now nobody denies that there are false professions. Nobody denies there are tares among wheat. Nobody denies that the devil plants counterfeit. But the question is not whether counterfeits exist. The question is what God's remedy is. And God's remedy is not to steal assurance from the believer and replace it with a lifetime of self-inspection.

The Bible was written to produce knowledge, stability, and settled confidence in Jesus Christ, not a religion of maybe. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). That verse is not a footnote. It is a nail driven into the floor of the Christian life so a believer can stand. If a preaching system makes that nail loose, the whole room starts shaking. This essay is about that shake. It is about the gospel of doubt, the gospel of maybe, the gospel that never lets a man rest, and the ugly fruit it produces in the conscience of God's people.

### **1. The Sin of Making Peace Suspicious**

There is a wicked inversion that happens when a preacher trains people to treat peace as suspicious. The Bible presents peace as a fruit of justification and a normal mark of faith resting in Christ. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1).

That peace does not mean a man never grieves or never struggles or never gets convicted. It means the legal warfare between the sinner and God is over because Christ made peace through the blood of His cross.

But when assurance becomes suspicious, peace becomes a problem. A believer starts thinking, "If I feel settled, maybe I am deceived." That makes the Christian life a permanent tension. It makes rest feel dangerous. And it makes God's promises feel like traps. That is exactly opposite the character of God. God gives promises so men can stand on them. He does not give promises so men can fear using them.

This is why the gospel of doubt is so damaging. It does not merely warn the careless. It trains the careful to mistrust God's comfort. It turns the believer into a man afraid to accept a gift because he thinks accepting it might reveal arrogance. But faith is receiving. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). Sons are not suspects.

## **2. The Weaponizing of "Many Will Say" Against the Believer**

A favorite fear tool is the passage about "many will say" and false professions, like "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord" (Matthew 7:21). That warning is real. It is serious. It is aimed at false professors who trusted works and religion. But the gospel of doubt uses that passage like a shotgun, spraying it into the congregation in a way that keeps true believers perpetually uncertain.

The irony is that Matthew 7 is condemning people who trusted their works. They are saying, "Have we not prophesied... cast out devils... done many wonderful works" (Matthew 7:22). That is works confidence. The answer is not to make believers doubt Christ's promise. The answer is to preach Christ plainly so people stop trusting their works. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). The very warning used to fuel doubt is actually a warning against the kind of system that makes performance the evidence of acceptance.

When a believer hears "many will say" and then is trained to fear that he might be one of those "many" every time he struggles, he is being mis-taught. A believer should fear trusting works. He should not fear trusting Christ. "He that hath the Son hath life" (1 John 5:12). That is not a complicated sentence. It is a clean verdict.

## **3. The Habit of Keeping Salvation Always Up for Review**

One of the most telling fruits of this style is that salvation is always up for review. The believer is never allowed to say, "I am saved," without a preacher somewhere saying, "Are you sure?" as if certainty is the enemy. But Paul the apostle did not talk like that. He spoke

with settled language. “I know whom I have believed” (2 Timothy 1:12). He did not say, “I hope I believed right. I think I might have believed. I am waiting to see whether I endure enough.” That is not apostolic speech.

The gospel of doubt makes a believer treat his past conversion like a shaky story. He keeps revisiting it, trying to find the “realness” moment, trying to find the perfect proof. But salvation is not built on the perfection of your memory. It is built on the truth of God’s word. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). The Christian life is lived by faith, not by replaying a spiritual video tape until you feel satisfied.

This constant review habit also creates a shallow Christian culture. Instead of moving on to the deep things of God, people keep circling the same fear loop. They remain stuck at the doorway, never entering the house. But the Bible calls believers to grow. “Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection” (Hebrews 6:1). That does not mean abandoning the gospel. It means building on it. A system that keeps people stuck in doubt is a system that starves growth.

#### **4. The Confusion of Fellowship and Sonship**

A major engine of doubt is confusing fellowship with sonship. A believer can lose fellowship without losing sonship. David lost fellowship. He did not lose sonship. He prayed, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation” (Psalm 51:12). He did not say, “Restore unto me salvation.” He said joy of salvation. Joy can be lost. Fellowship can be broken. Salvation in the New Testament is a birth, and a birth is not undone by a bad week.

When a believer sins, the Bible gives him an Advocate. “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). Advocate is family. It assumes relationship. The gospel of doubt tends to treat sin in the believer as a reason to question whether he was ever saved, rather than a reason to correct him as a child. That produces fear, not repentance. That produces hiding, not confession.

This is where the pastoral damage becomes measurable. Christians stop being honest. They become afraid to admit struggle. They fear that struggle equals proof of damnation. But the Bible expects believers to battle. “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh” (Galatians 5:17). That conflict is normal. The question is not whether conflict exists. The question is whether you are being taught to fight as a son, or tremble as a stranger.

#### **5. The Holy Spirit Produces Boldness, Not Spiritual Panic**

The Spirit of God produces certain things that are recognizable. He produces love. He produces power. He produces sound mind. “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but

of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). That is a direct hit on the gospel of doubt. Fear is not the Spirit’s primary tool for believers. Conviction, yes. Fear as a constant environment, no.

When the gospel of doubt dominates, believers become panicky. Their mind is not sound. Their confidence in prayer is weak. Their joy is fragile. Their stability is thin. They interpret God’s fatherly correction as rejection. They interpret conviction as condemnation. They interpret temptation as proof they are lost. That is not sound mind. That is spiritual anxiety.

The Bible invites believers to come boldly. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16). Boldly is not presumption when it is based on Christ’s blood. Boldly is faith. A system that makes boldness rare has quietly attacked the priesthood of the believer and the sufficiency of the blood. A believer does not come boldly because he is good. He comes boldly because Christ is good.

## **6. The Difference Between Warning the Lost and Feeding the Sheep**

The Book gives different food to different people. A lost man needs the gospel. A saved man needs discipleship. A rebellious believer needs rebuke. A broken believer needs comfort. A false teacher needs exposure. But the gospel of doubt often uses the same knife for everything. It treats the sheep like goats because it is afraid of goats. That might feel “safe,” but it is unfaithful. A shepherd who beats sheep to scare wolves is not a good shepherd.

Jesus did not treat His disciples like strangers. He corrected them, yes, but He did not keep threatening that they might not belong. He said, “Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). Written is settled. Names are not written in pencil and erased every time you stumble. And the New Testament emphasizes that the believer is sealed. “In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13). Sealed does not mean “sealed until you fail the fruit inspection.”

If a ministry’s regular tone toward believers is suspicion instead of shepherding, something is wrong. It may produce a reputation for seriousness, but it does not produce the fruit of the Spirit. It produces a congregation trained to fear. That is why the fruit test must include pastoral outcomes. It is not enough to say true words. The method matters because it shapes consciences.

## **7. The Finished Work Must Stay Finished**

Everything comes back to the finished work. “It is finished” (John 19:30). Either Christ finished the payment or He did not. If He finished it, then the believer’s peace is legitimate because it is based on the payment, not on the believer’s performance. If the believer’s

peace is treated as suspicious, then the payment is being treated as insufficient in practice.

The gospel of doubt often talks about the cross, but it makes the cross the doorway into a lifelong inspection where your assurance is always on trial. That quietly makes your ongoing performance part of the foundation. It puts you back under a form of law, because law always says, "Prove it." Grace says, "Receive it." "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14). Under grace does not mean under suspicion.

When a man believes the gospel, he is justified, and justification is a legal declaration by God. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth" (Romans 8:33). That is courtroom language. Once God justifies, who is going to reverse it? A preacher with a microphone? A mood swing? A season of struggle? No. The believer's standing is anchored in God's verdict, not in his own emotional weather.

## **Conclusion**

The gospel of doubt is not just a style issue. It is a doctrinal issue because it changes where assurance lives. It moves assurance from Christ to self, from promise to performance, from God's record to man's record. And the fruit of that relocation is predictable and measurable. Tender consciences get tormented. Babies in Christ live under a cloud. Hypocrites learn to perform the signs. The church becomes a courtroom instead of a family. The believer's eyes turn inward instead of upward. And a system that produces those fruits cannot be defended by shouting the word "holiness" louder.

Biblical assurance is not arrogance. It is faith in God's testimony about His Son. "He that hath the Son hath life" (1 John 5:12). The believer is commanded to know, commanded to stand, commanded to come boldly, commanded to rejoice, commanded to rest in the finished work. If a ministry method makes those commands feel dangerous, then the method is teaching people to distrust God's comfort. That is not reverence. That is unbelief dressed up in a tie.

So in this trial, the charge is not that warnings are wrong. The charge is that the remedy has been corrupted. The charge is that assurance has been treated like a sin, when Scripture treats it like a gift. The charge is that the gospel has been turned from good news into a probation system. And the standard of judgment is the same standard Paul Washer applies to others. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:2). If his preaching produces doubt as a culture, then the fruit test has already spoken, and it is not speaking well.

### **3 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - “Examine Yourself” Misused: Self-Inspection as a Substitute for Christ**

#### **Introduction**

There is a difference between a man who tells you to look in the mirror and a man who tells you to live in the mirror. The Bible uses self-examination like a tool, like a flashlight, like a short check at the right time for the right reason. But Paul Washer’s preaching culture has helped turn self-examination into a lifestyle, and not the healthy kind, but the obsessive kind, the kind that replaces the simplicity of faith with a perpetual internal audit. Instead of a sinner being told to look to Christ and live, he is trained to look to himself and guess. Instead of learning to rest in God’s record, he learns to distrust God’s record, because his feelings and his performance are treated like the real evidence.

That is how you can have a generation who talks like they are “serious” about God and still cannot enjoy God. They can quote verses, attend conferences, weep at sermons, and still live like spiritual orphans, always checking whether they belong. And the tragedy is that this is sold as maturity, when it is often just fear with Bible words. It is sold as discernment, when it is often just suspicion with a microphone. It is sold as holiness, when it is often just self-focus disguised as reverence.

The Bible does command examination, but it never commands a man to examine himself as a substitute for believing God. It never commands a man to use self-inspection as the foundation of assurance. The foundation is Christ and the promise of God. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life” (John 5:24). That verse was not written so believers could keep wondering whether they believed correctly. It was written so believers could know they have everlasting life and stop living like every bad week is a trial date in heaven’s court.

#### **1. The Real Meaning of “Examine Yourselves”**

The verse that gets weaponized is plain enough. “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves” (2 Corinthians 13:5). That is Scripture. Nobody is disputing that it exists. The issue is how it is handled, and whether it is being used the way the Holy Ghost used it. Paul was writing to a specific church with a specific problem, and he was addressing a context where apostolic authority was being questioned and sin was being tolerated. It is one thing to use that verse as a targeted corrective. It is another thing to turn it into a permanent lifestyle command for every believer in every moment.

When Paul wrote Corinthians, he did not write to get saved men to doubt salvation every Sunday. He wrote to correct carnality, disorder, false spirituality, and doctrinal confusion. The same epistle that says examine yourselves also says, “But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 6:11). That is settled language. Washed is not probation. Justified is not a maybe. When a preacher uses 2 Corinthians 13:5 to dissolve that settled language into an endless question mark, he is not being cautious, he is being careless with the Book.

The Bible’s call to examination is not a call to spiritual paralysis. It is a call to honesty in the right moment. It is like the Lord’s table where Paul warns about taking it unworthily and tells believers to judge themselves so they will not be judged (1 Corinthians 11:31). That is a specific context, and the goal is correction, not condemnation. If a man turns every spiritual struggle into a reason to question whether a believer is saved, he is using examination as a weapon instead of a tool.

## **2. Self-Inspection Replaces the Simplicity of Faith**

The gospel is simple on purpose because God saves sinners, not scholars. “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel... how that Christ died for our sins... and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). That is not a complicated message. It is not an internal scavenger hunt. It is news. It is an announcement. It is a finished work presented to a sinner who has nothing to bring but need.

But an inspection-driven culture turns the gospel into a psychological process. It trains a man to look for the correct level of sorrow, the correct intensity of brokenness, the correct pattern of victory, the correct kind of hatred for sin, and the correct emotional response to preaching. Instead of the sinner asking, “Did Christ die for me, and did God promise to save the believer,” he is trained to ask, “Did I feel enough, did I repent enough, did I mean it enough, was my faith real enough?” That is not faith, that is self-trust in a lab coat.

The Bible never tells a man to be saved by analyzing his own analysis. It tells him to be saved by believing God. “For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3). Abraham was not told to examine whether he believed. He was told to believe. And he believed God, not himself. The gospel of self-inspection subtly changes the object from God to man, and once the object changes, the whole thing becomes unstable, because man is unstable.

## **3. Assurance Grounded in Christ, Not in the Conscience**

The conscience is not a reliable throne. The conscience can be weak, seared, educated wrong, trained wrong, and condemned by lies. That is why the Bible roots assurance in

God's record, not in your inner weather. "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:11). That is the anchor. God's record. God's gift. God's Son. It does not say, "This is the record, that you felt enough conviction last Tuesday."

Yet the inspection culture makes assurance feel like a reward you earn by maintaining a certain level of spiritual performance. If you are doing well, you feel more sure. If you are struggling, you feel less sure. If you are dry, you feel terrified. If you are tempted, you feel condemned. That is not the Bible's assurance model. The Bible's assurance model is faith in the promise. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Written means objective. Know means settled. Eternal life means not temporary.

A man who cannot distinguish between the believer's standing and the believer's condition will always ruin assurance. A believer's standing is fixed in Christ. A believer's condition fluctuates as he grows, fails, repents, learns, and fights. When a preacher makes condition the proof of standing, he makes assurance impossible for the very people who need it most, the babes and the broken. That is not pastoral care. That is spiritual cruelty disguised as discernment.

#### **4. The Revolving Door of "Re-Salvation" Experiences**

One of the most obvious fruits of this system is the revolving door. People keep "getting saved again" in their mind. They keep returning to the altar in fear. They keep re-telling their testimony and trying to find the moment it finally became real. That does not produce disciples. It produces spiritual hostages who cannot move forward because they are always re-litigating whether they entered the family.

But salvation is not a mood. Salvation is a birth. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1). A birth is not repeated every time the child misbehaves. A birth is a fact. Once a man is justified, the legal verdict does not change with his feelings. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth" (Romans 8:33). If God justified, who is the preacher to keep reopening the case file every week?

The Bible does teach restoration, confession, correction, chastening, growth, and discipline, but all of that happens inside sonship, not outside it. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). Advocate assumes family. The revolving door system does not treat the believer as a son who needs correction. It treats him as a stranger who needs to prove he belongs. That is why it produces endless spiritual resets, because the believer is never allowed to settle down and grow.

## **5. Weakness and Dry Seasons Misread as Damnation**

Every believer who has walked with God longer than five minutes knows the Christian life includes dry seasons, dull feelings, spiritual fatigue, and battles that do not vanish overnight. The Bible is honest about that conflict. “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh” (Galatians 5:17). That war is not a sign you are lost. Often it is a sign you are alive. Dead men do not fight.

But inspection preaching trains people to interpret weakness as proof they were never saved. If you struggle, you must be counterfeit. If you relapse, you must be lost. If you are dry, you must have never been real. That kind of thinking is not Scripture, it is spiritual superstition. David had seasons where his bones waxed old through his roaring all the day long (Psalm 32:3). Elijah sat under a juniper tree and asked to die (1 Kings 19:4). Those were not proof they were lost. Those were moments of weakness inside a real relationship with God.

The Bible’s answer to dryness is not to question whether you belong. The Bible’s answer is to return to the means of grace, to prayer, to the word, to fellowship, to confession, and to obedience as a son. “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation” (Psalm 51:12). Notice the wording. Joy can be lost. Salvation is not described as lost there. When a preacher teaches people to interpret every dark night as proof they are damned, he is doing the devil’s job for him.

## **6. Self-Inspection Becomes a Counterfeit Sacrament**

There are churches that have turned baptism into a sacrament that allegedly saves you. There are churches that have turned confession to a priest into a sacrament that allegedly cleanses you. And there is a modern evangelical version that turns introspection into a sacrament, a ritual you must perform constantly to maintain a sense of acceptance. It is not officially called a sacrament, but it functions like one. You do not feel right with God unless you complete your internal audit. You do not feel safe unless you review your fruit. You do not feel secure unless you detect enough evidence.

That is a counterfeit because it places something in the believer’s hands as the method of peace. In the New Testament, peace is in Christ’s hands. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). The conscience is cleansed by blood, not by analysis. “How much more shall the blood of Christ... purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14). Purge means cleanse. Dead works include religious self-salvation efforts, and obsessive self-auditing can become one of them.

This is why the preaching method matters. A man can talk about grace and still train people to live on works, not works for salvation on paper, but works for assurance in practice. Once that happens, the believer's peace is no longer based on God's promise. It is based on his own ability to produce a convincing inner report. That is unstable by nature, and it makes Christianity a treadmill, not a walk.

## **7. The Fruit Test Applied to the Culture It Produces**

Paul Washer likes to say you know a tree by fruit. Fine. Then measure the fruit. Does this style of preaching produce believers who look to Christ and grow, or believers who collapse inward and obsess? Does it produce stable Christians grounded in the promises of God, or does it produce nervous Christians who cannot enjoy the promises because they are afraid assurance is pride? Does it produce honest confession and restoration, or does it produce hiding and performance?

The fruit of inspection culture is measurable. It produces a class of tender believers who are tormented, always questioning, always doubting, always fearing they are deceived. It produces a class of spiritual performers who learn how to imitate the signs, because the environment rewards external seriousness more than quiet faith. It produces congregations that confuse intensity with spirituality, where the man who trembles the most is assumed to be the most real, and the man who rests in Christ is suspected of being shallow. That is backward. The more a man trusts Christ, the more settled he should be, not the more terrified.

The Bible's fruit is different. The Bible's fruit includes love and joy and peace. The Bible's fruit includes sound mind. "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). If a method produces fear as a culture, it is not the Spirit's signature. The Spirit convicts believers to restore them, not to erase their sonship and keep them guessing.

## **Conclusion**

Self-examination is biblical in its place, but it is demonic when it becomes a substitute for Christ. The Bible never told a sinner to analyze himself into salvation, and it never told a believer to audit himself into assurance. It told the sinner to believe, and it told the believer to know. "I know whom I have believed" (2 Timothy 1:12). That is not presumption. That is faith speaking like faith.

The moment a preacher turns "examine yourself" into the main engine of assurance, he has quietly removed the believer from the solid ground of God's record and placed him onto the shifting sand of his own feelings and performance. That is why it produces the revolving door. That is why it produces fear-driven Christianity. That is why it produces a generation

that cannot tell the difference between conviction and condemnation. The devil does not mind a church that talks about holiness if he can keep that church chained to doubt.

So the charge in this third trial essay is simple. Paul Washer's inspection culture has misused self-examination until it functions like a counterfeit sacrament, and the fruit shows it. It does not primarily produce believers who look unto Jesus and grow in grace. It produces believers who look unto themselves and guess. And if Paul Washer insists on judging others by fruit, then his own method must be judged by the fruit it produces, and that fruit reveals a gospel atmosphere where assurance is treated like a sin and self-inspection is treated like the Savior. That is not the Holy Spirit's work, and it is not New Testament Christianity.

#### **4 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - Lordship by Another Name: When Works Sneak Back into the Verdict**

##### **Introduction**

The devil has never needed to get Bible believers to deny grace out loud. He just needs to get them to relocate grace in practice. He is perfectly happy to let a preacher say the right vocabulary, faith, grace, Christ, cross, mercy, and then quietly smuggle in a second foundation underneath it all, a foundation made of performance, proof, and personal track records. That way the preacher can still sound orthodox while the hearer slowly learns to live as if his obedience is the real security deposit that keeps the account open. The end result is a gospel that talks like a gift but functions like probation.

That is what happens when a man can deny works-salvation verbally while producing a works-centered conscience practically. He will say, "We are saved by grace," but then he will teach that you cannot know you are saved unless your life meets a certain standard of obedience, seriousness, victory, and visible fruit. So works are not the cause of salvation on paper, but they become the gatekeeper of assurance in the mind. That is how works sneak back into the verdict without ever being called works. They are renamed. They are called evidences, marks, proof, validation, perseverance, and credibility. But the conscience hears one message, do more, show more, prove more, and maybe you can finally breathe.

The apostolic gospel does not work like that. It gives peace with God first, and then from that settled peace it produces growth, discipline, and good works as the fruit of sonship. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"

(Romans 5:1). That peace is not handed out as a trophy after years of performance. It is the legal result of justification. If a preacher's framework cannot give that peace now to the believer who has trusted Christ, then whatever else it is, it is not the apostolic gospel in practice, because the apostles did not preach a gospel of maybe.

### **1. The Two-Voice Gospel: Grace Spoken, Performance Imposed**

A preacher can talk grace and still preach pressure. The trick is not what he says in a doctrinal statement, the trick is what he trains the listener to rely on when the devil whispers in the night. When the conscience is attacked, does the believer run to Christ's blood and God's promise, or does he run to his own track record and try to find enough evidence to quiet the fear. That is where the real gospel is revealed, because the real gospel is the one you cling to when you are not performing well.

The New Testament makes the ground of justification painfully clear. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Romans 4:5). God justifies the ungodly, not the improved. That verse does not say God justifies the man who first proves he is godly by visible progress. It says the man who worketh not, but believeth. So if a preaching system teaches men that they cannot know they are saved unless they can point to a certain level of obedience, then that system has quietly moved the ground from believing to behaving.

That two-voice gospel is deadly because it produces confusion that feels like seriousness. People begin to think the gospel is deeper when it is harder to understand. They begin to think peace is shallow when it comes quickly. They begin to distrust simplicity because they have been trained to associate simplicity with deception. But God is not playing games with sinners. When He says "everlasting life," He means it. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). Everlasting life is not a lease agreement renewed by monthly payments of performance.

### **2. Works as the Gatekeeper of Assurance**

Here is the practical move. Works are not presented as what saves you, but as what lets you know you are saved. That sounds harmless to the average ear until you realize what it does to the conscience. If I cannot know I am saved unless I see enough obedience, then obedience has become my assurance mechanism. And whatever becomes your assurance mechanism becomes your functional savior, because it is the thing you trust to quiet condemnation.

The Bible's assurance is grounded in God's record, not your progress report. "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:11). The record is not your week. The record is Christ. God's record is objective, written, settled,

outside your emotional weather. When a preacher teaches believers to look primarily at their obedience to decide whether they are saved, he has inverted the record. He has trained them to treat their life as the evidence that judges God's promise, instead of treating God's promise as the foundation that judges their life.

That inversion produces exactly what you would expect. It produces Christians who fear every failure as a possible proof they were never saved. It produces Christians who hide sin rather than confess it because confession feels like self-incrimination in a courtroom. It produces Christians who confuse conviction with condemnation. Yet the New Testament speaks to believers as those who have an Advocate. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). Advocate is not probation language. Advocate is family language. It assumes sonship and deals with fellowship, not the cancellation of salvation.

### **3. Justification and Sanctification Blended Into One Verdict**

A big part of this confusion comes from collapsing justification and sanctification into one blended verdict. Justification is what God declares about the believer because of Christ. Sanctification is what God works in the believer after he is saved. If you keep those distinct, you can preach holiness without corrupting grace. If you blend them, you will inevitably teach people to use sanctification progress as the evidence that they are justified, which makes sanctification a requirement for peace rather than a result of peace.

The Bible separates them. It tells the believer he is justified and then calls him to walk worthy. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1). Then it tells him, "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Ephesians 4:1). The order is not accidental. Peace first, walk second. Identity first, growth second. A son learns to obey because he is a son, not in order to become a son.

When sanctification is treated as proof that justifies the conscience, the conscience becomes a slave. It cannot rest. It is always measuring whether the sanctification is sufficient to validate the justification. That is a treadmill. It is also the exact opposite of how Paul talks. He tells the Corinthians, a messy church with real problems, "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified" (1 Corinthians 6:11). He did not say, "You will be justified after you prove sanctification." He spoke the verdict and then dealt with the mess as a pastor. That is New Testament Christianity. Verdict first, correction after.

### **4. Lordship Language as a Trojan Horse**

The phrase lordship is not the villain by itself because Jesus Christ is Lord whether a preacher likes it or not. The problem is how lordship language is used as a Trojan horse to sneak works into the gospel without calling them works. It becomes a way to redefine

saving faith into a lifelong contract of surrendered obedience that must be demonstrated or the salvation is questioned. So faith is no longer trust in Christ's finished work. Faith becomes a complex package of inner surrender, ongoing performance, and visible transformation that must keep proving itself.

The Bible does not define saving faith as perfect surrender. It defines it as believing God. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3). Abraham's life produced fruit, yes, but the righteousness was counted at belief, not after a lifetime of proving. The moment a man says you cannot know you are saved until your obedience shows a certain standard, he has made obedience the interpretive key to justification. That is not teaching holiness. That is turning holiness into a gate.

Lordship preaching often brags that it is protecting the church from false converts, but its fruit shows something else. It tends to create two classes, the proud and the crushed. The proud think they see enough evidence in themselves, so they become confident, not in Christ, but in their seriousness. The crushed see their failures, so they despair, not because Christ is weak, but because their evidence is weak. Both are looking at self. Neither is resting in the Savior. Yet the Bible says, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Author and finisher means He begins it and He completes it. That is not the language of probation.

### **5. The Peace Test: What Does the Message Produce**

The gospel produces peace with God, and peace with God is not optional. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1). If a message cannot produce that peace in the believer who has trusted Christ, then either the believer is being robbed or the message is not functioning as gospel. The peace test is a practical test because it exposes whether the preacher is preaching Christ as sufficient or Christ as a starting point for a self-proving project.

This does not mean believers never battle doubts. It means the cure for doubt is not self-inspection as a sacrament. The cure for doubt is returning to the promise and the blood. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14). Redemption is not a feeling. Forgiveness is not a mood. It is a legal reality purchased by blood. If a believer is told he cannot have peace until his life improves enough to satisfy a fruit inspection, he is being taught to seek peace in self, not in blood.

Apostolic preaching produces confidence in Christ and then calls the believer to holiness from gratitude, not from panic. "For the love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Corinthians 5:14). Love constrains, not dread. The gospel of performance constrains by fear, by threat, by constant suspicion. That is why it produces either hardened pride or exhausted despair. A

gospel that cannot give peace does not produce holiness. It produces either hypocrisy or hopelessness.

## **6. The Pride Class and the Despair Class**

The fruit of this framework is visible in the types of people it creates. One group becomes self-righteous, not in the obvious Pharisee way with long prayers and public fasting, but in the modern evangelical way where they pride themselves on being serious, broken, disciplined, and not like those shallow Christians. They are always talking about how few are saved, how many are deceived, how dangerous assurance is, and how strict the marks are. They feel safe because they think they have the marks. That is confidence in flesh wearing a spiritual mask.

The other group is the despair class. They are the tender believers who actually love the Lord, but they cannot enjoy Him because they are always afraid they are counterfeit. They can never rest. They can never say, "I know." They are trained to treat certainty as pride. They are trained to see their failures as evidence that maybe they were never saved. They are crushed under a burden they were never meant to carry. Yet the Bible says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). If the preaching method gives no rest, it has missed the Savior's invitation.

Both classes are produced by the same root error. Assurance has been made dependent on the quality of the believer's works rather than the sufficiency of Christ's work. That is why the proud look proud, and the crushed look crushed. The proud think they have enough evidence. The crushed think they do not. Both are measuring themselves. But the Bible says, "For they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12). That is what this system trains people to do, measure, compare, audit, and then call it holiness.

## **7. The Apostolic Pattern: Gift First, Growth Second**

The apostolic pattern is not complicated. It is settled salvation received by faith and then sanctification pursued by grace. The believer is a son, then he learns to walk like one. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6). The Spirit does not cry "maybe." The Spirit cries "Father." The Spirit of adoption does not live in a house of suspicion.

The New Testament also teaches sealing. "In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). Sealed is not the language of conditional acceptance. Sealed is not the language of "prove it weekly." Sealed means God has marked the believer as His. Chastening may come. Correction may come. Discipline

may come. But the foundation remains Christ's finished work and God's promise, not the believer's ability to maintain a convincing life narrative.

When works sneak back into the verdict, the gospel becomes unstable and the Christian life becomes a courtroom. When works stay where God put them, as fruit after salvation, then good works become sweet, not stressful. They become the overflow of gratitude, not the price of assurance. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Ephesians 2:10). That verse comes after "Not of works" (Ephesians 2:9). God put it in that order so nobody gets confused. A system that confuses it is not helping saints. It is enslaving them.

### **Conclusion**

The charge in this fourth essay is not that holiness is unimportant. The charge is that holiness has been turned into a gatekeeper of assurance, which makes works the functional verdict even when they are denied as the cause. That is lordship by another name in practice. It talks grace, but it trains performance. It talks faith, but it demands proof. It talks Christ, but it relocates confidence into the believer's progress. That is not how the apostles preached, and it is not how the Holy Ghost comforts.

Apostolic gospel preaching produces peace with God and then calls for holy living from that peace. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1). If a man's system cannot give peace to the believer who has trusted Christ, then his system is not functioning as gospel, because the gospel is good news, not a lifelong suspense story. The believer may need rebuke, correction, and chastening, but he does not need his salvation re-tried every time he fails, and he does not need his assurance held hostage by a performance standard.

So when Paul Washer measures others by fruit and by evidence and by outward confirmation, he invites the same measurement back on his own method. The fruit of validated-by-performance logic is visible. It produces a proud class and a crushed class. It produces Christians who either trust their seriousness or distrust their salvation. It produces churches where peace is suspicious and assurance is rare. And by the rule he uses, that fruit is enough to indict the system, because a gospel that cannot give peace with God is not the apostolic gospel in practice, no matter how many times the word grace is spoken from the pulpit.

## **5 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - Repentance Rewritten: From a Turn to Christ into a Lifetime Contract**

### **Introduction**

Repentance is a Bible word, and because it is a Bible word the devil has always tried to hijack it. He does not have to erase it, he just has to stretch it, warp it, and load it with requirements God never put on it until it becomes something a sinner cannot do without already being saved. Then he can preach repentance all day long and still keep men from Christ, because the “repentance” he is demanding is not the repentance the apostles preached. It is repentance rewritten into a lifetime contract, a total life overhaul demanded up front, proof before peace, fruit before faith, a sinner required to bring a cleaned-up heart to the Savior who came to clean hearts.

That is the practical danger when repentance is preached as an entry requirement that must be demonstrated before a man is permitted to rest in God’s promise. It sounds holy. It sounds strict. It sounds like it will protect the church from hypocrites. But it quietly changes the gospel invitation from “Come as you are and receive” into “Fix yourself enough to qualify.” It takes the sinner’s eyes off Jesus Christ and puts them on his own tears, his own reform, his own seriousness, his own ability to prove that he is sincere. And that is not repentance unto life, that is self-salvation with religious vocabulary.

The New Testament does not call sinners to come to Christ as self-reformers. It calls them to come as needy sinners who believe God. The Philippian jailer asked the most important question a man can ask: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” and the answer was not a checklist of pre-conversion transformation. The answer was, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:30-31). That is not a shallow answer. That is the answer. Any preaching that turns repentance into a lifetime contract before the sinner can have peace is not clarifying the gospel, it is clouding it.

### **1. What Repentance Is and What Repentance Is Not**

Repentance is real, but it is not what modern performance religion often makes it. Repentance in Scripture is a turning, a change of mind, a change of direction, a movement from self to God, from darkness to light, from unbelief to faith. It is not the sinner proving he can live like a mature Christian before he is allowed to become a newborn babe. The Bible does not demand that the dead man demonstrate life before he receives life. “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). Quickened comes from God, not from the sinner’s pre-salvation improvement plan.

The moment repentance is defined as “total life overhaul that must be demonstrated before you can be sure,” repentance becomes a moving target that crushes the tender and

flatters the proud. The tender sinner says, “I can’t tell if I repented enough.” The proud sinner says, “Look how deeply I repented,” as if repentance itself becomes a badge of merit. But the Bible will not let repentance become a merit badge because salvation is a gift. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

God does not call repentance to compete with Christ. He calls repentance to point to Christ. When repentance is preached rightly, it is the doorway that turns a man away from his idols and toward the Savior. When it is preached wrongly, it becomes the idol itself, a sinner staring at his own sorrow trying to decide whether it is sufficient currency to purchase peace. That is why repentance must be defined by Scripture, not by the preacher’s emotional expectations.

## **2. The Biblical Relationship Between Repentance and Faith**

In Scripture, repentance and faith are not enemies. They are companions. A man cannot genuinely turn to Christ without turning away from whatever he was trusting. That is why the gospel call can be described in different ways without contradiction. Sometimes the Bible says “repent.” Sometimes it says “believe.” Sometimes it says “turn.” Sometimes it says “receive.” But the object remains the same: Christ and His work. “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). That verse does not make repentance a self-reform contract, it makes repentance a direction, toward God, with faith toward Christ.

When repentance is preached as sorrow itself, men are trained to trust their sorrow. When repentance is preached as reform itself, men are trained to trust their reform. But when repentance is preached as a turn to God that culminates in faith in Christ, men are trained to trust Christ. That is the difference between gospel preaching and moralism. The gospel gives a Savior. Moralism gives a measuring stick.

The clearest picture of this is the simplicity of the invitation. “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12). Receiving and believing are not described as advanced spiritual achievements. They are the humble action of a needy sinner taking God at His word. Repentance supports that. Repentance does not replace it. Repentance does not stand in front of the cross and demand paperwork before the sinner may enter.

## **3. When Repentance Points Sinners to Christ**

Repentance preached biblically drives a sinner out of himself. It exposes his false confidence and brings him to Christ as the only hope. The publican in Luke 18 did not come with a speech about how much he had already changed. He came with a plea for mercy.

“God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13). Jesus said that man went down justified. That is repentance and faith functioning as God intended: a man seeing himself truthfully and casting himself on God’s mercy.

The prodigal son is another picture that exposes the modern mistake. He “came to himself,” he turned back, he went home, and he confessed he was not worthy (Luke 15:17-21). That is repentance. But notice what did not happen. He did not clean himself up first and then apply for sonship. He returned in rags. The father did the clothing. The father did the restoration. The father did the ring and the shoes and the feast. That is how salvation works. The sinner comes back ruined, and God does the restoring.

Preaching that points sinners to Christ will always keep the finished work central. “Christ died for our sins... and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The sinner is not told to bring evidence that he has already become a different man. He is told that Christ can make him a different man because Christ already paid for his sins. Repentance is not a pre-payment plan. Repentance is the turn that ends at the cross.

#### **4. When Repentance Points Sinners Back to Themselves**

Now watch what happens when repentance is inflated into a lifetime contract. The sinner is told, directly or indirectly, that he cannot come until he has the right kind of sorrow, the right intensity, the right length of brokenness, and the right early track record of victory. That turns repentance into a threshold. And thresholds are poison because they move. One preacher wants tears. Another wants restitution. Another wants total surrender language. Another wants radical lifestyle change before you can be confident. So the sinner never knows when he has done enough to qualify, which means he never rests in Christ, he rests in his own uncertainty.

That kind of preaching creates self-reformers, not believers. Men start trying to clean their life so they can come to Christ “properly.” But if a man can clean his life enough to qualify, what does he need a Savior for? The gospel invitation is not “Become worthy and then come.” The invitation is “Come, and He will make you clean.” “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Rest is offered at the beginning, not after the sinner has proven he can hold the contract.

This is where the fruit becomes measurable. A repentance-as-contract system produces people who endlessly circle the doorway. They are always trying to feel right before they come. They are always trying to repent right before they believe. They become experts in their own inner life and novices in Christ. That is not the Spirit’s work. The Spirit glorifies

Christ. “He shall glorify me” (John 16:14). A method that glorifies the sinner’s internal process has already drifted.

## **5. The Threshold Error Produces Pride or Despair**

If repentance is treated like an entry requirement that must be demonstrated, you will always produce two classes of people. You will produce the proud class who believes they have done it well, who can testify about how deeply they repented, how radically they changed, how serious they were, and how different they are from the shallow crowd. That is not humility, that is religious pride wearing sackcloth. It is the Pharisee in Luke 18 thanking God he is not like other men (Luke 18:11). A man can boast in “brokenness” just as easily as he can boast in fasting.

You will also produce the despair class, and that is the class that should break a pastor’s heart. These are the tender ones who know their sin, who fear God, who want truth, and who cannot ever feel settled because they keep hearing that their repentance might not be real enough. They confess, they cry, they try, they fail, they spiral, and they conclude that because they struggle they must be lost. That is not repentance. That is torment. “He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18). Fear dominates where love has been replaced by performance.

The apostolic gospel does not produce those two classes because it puts the confidence in Christ, not in the sinner’s process. The believer’s boasting is removed because the foundation is Christ. “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14). When repentance is preached as a turn to Christ, the proud are humbled and the tender are comforted because both are pointed to the same Savior.

## **6. The Right Place for Life Change**

Nobody who believes the Bible denies that salvation changes a man. Salvation produces new desires, new direction, new affections, and it will produce fruit over time. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17). The difference is not whether change matters. The difference is where you place the change. If you place change as a condition for coming, you have moved it into the wrong slot. If you place change as a result of coming, you have kept it where Scripture keeps it.

The Bible’s order is consistent. Peace first, walk second. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Romans 5:1). Then, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Ephesians 2:10). Created in Christ comes before the good works. That is not accidental. God wrote it that way because religion always tries to reverse it. Religion wants works first so it can boast. God gives grace first so no flesh can glory.

When repentance becomes a lifetime contract, life change gets dragged into the courtroom as evidence to prove justification rather than fruit that follows justification. That is why Christians under that system often hide their struggles. They are not hiding because they love sin. They are hiding because the culture punishes honesty by questioning salvation. Yet the Bible expects believers to confess and be restored. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9). That verse is written to the family, not to strangers. A gospel that turns family correction into eternal suspicion has misunderstood the Father.

## **7. The Straight Gospel Call Must Stay Straight**

The New Testament’s gospel call is not complicated, and the preacher who complicates it is not deep, he is dangerous. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). That is the apostolic answer to the salvation question. It is not “believe and then prove for years before you may know.” It is not “repent until you reach a threshold and then maybe believe.” It is believe, and thou shalt be saved. Saved means saved.

Repentance, preached rightly, serves that call by turning a man away from his false refuges so he can actually believe. Repentance preached wrongly competes with that call by making repentance itself the thing the sinner trusts. That is why the fruit of inflated repentance is often not more faith, but less faith. Men talk about repentance constantly, but they never rest in Christ. They never speak like Paul spoke: “I know whom I have believed” (2 Timothy 1:12). They speak like probationers, not sons.

So when the fruit test is applied to a repentance-as-contract framework, the question is straightforward. Does it send sinners to Christ with clean confidence in God’s promise, or does it send sinners into themselves to measure their sorrow and their reform to see if they qualify? A gospel that keeps men from peace with God is not functioning as the apostolic gospel, no matter how many Bible words are used to decorate it.

## **Conclusion**

Repentance is not the enemy, but repentance rewritten becomes the enemy of the gospel. When repentance is inflated into a lifetime contract required before peace is permitted, it stops being a turn to Christ and becomes a turn inward, a sinner trying to manufacture enough seriousness to be allowed to believe. That is backwards. That is law-thinking with repentance vocabulary. And the fruit of that reversal is always the same: pride for the ones who think they did it well, despair for the ones who know they did not, and a whole crowd kept from the sweet simplicity of resting in the Savior.

The Bible’s repentance points to God and culminates in faith in Christ. “Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). The Bible’s gospel call stays

plain. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). The Bible’s assurance is not a trophy for the best performers, it is the believer’s right to know God’s promise is true. “That ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Those are not optional words.

So the case in this fifth essay is not built on personality, it is built on function and fruit. If repentance is preached in a way that keeps sinners from peace and keeps believers from assurance, it is being misused. And if a teacher insists on judging everyone else by fruit, then the fruit of his repentance framework must be judged by that same rule. When repentance is turned from a turn to Christ into a lifetime contract, the contract becomes the savior, and Christ gets pushed into the background. That is not revival. That is religion wearing gospel clothes.

## **6 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - The “New Relationship with Sin” Trap: Holiness Turned into a Salvation Detector**

### **Introduction**

There is a way to preach holiness that makes saints holy, and there is a way to preach holiness that makes saints hide. There is a way to warn against false professions that clears the air and points men to the cross, and there is a way to warn against false professions that puts a fog machine on the pulpit and makes every struggling believer wonder if he is damned. The difference is not whether sin is serious. The difference is whether the preacher keeps the Bible categories straight. When holiness is turned into a salvation detector, the church stops being a hospital for sinners and becomes a courtroom for suspects. The sinner does not learn to confess. He learns to perform.

One of the most repeated modern slogans is that a “real Christian” will have a “new relationship with sin.” That phrase can be true in a basic sense because the new birth changes a man’s direction, his conscience, and his inward warfare. But that phrase can also become a trap when it is used like a shifting yardstick that no one can measure consistently. It becomes a vague, elastic standard that can be stretched to condemn whoever the preacher wants to condemn and to keep tender believers permanently uncertain. It is one thing to say sin will not have dominion in the believer’s life. It is another thing to turn every struggle into evidence of damnation.

The New Testament does not handle sin in believers by erasing their conversion every time they fall. It handles sin with fatherly chastening, confession, restoration, discipleship, and

growth. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). That verse is not written to lost men trying to become sons. It is written to people already in the family who need cleansing in fellowship. The gospel produces a place where confession is safe because the blood settled the courtroom. When suspicion-driven preaching dominates, confession becomes dangerous because fear punishes transparency. That fruit is measurable, and it tells you whether the method is shepherding sheep or training actors.

### **1. The Phrase That Sounds Right and Becomes a Weapon**

The phrase “new relationship with sin” sounds spiritual because it recognizes that conversion is not merely mental agreement. A saved man does not love sin the way he used to. He is convicted. He is checked. He is changed in direction. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). That is true, and no Bible believer needs to apologize for it.

But the moment that phrase becomes a test of salvation rather than a description of sanctification, it stops helping people and starts trapping them. The Bible gives clear, objective grounds for assurance in Christ and God’s promise, and then it addresses growth as the fruit that follows. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36). Everlasting life is not awarded after you demonstrate the proper relationship with sin. It is possessed by the believer because it is in the Son, not in the sinner’s performance.

When the phrase becomes a weapon, it is used like this: if you struggle too much, you are lost; if you relapse, you are lost; if you battle a certain sin longer than the preacher expects, you are lost; if your progress is not impressive enough, you are lost. That is not how the apostles handled believers. The apostles rebuked believers, corrected believers, restored believers, and disciplined believers, but they did not turn every failure into a re-trial of sonship. “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). Advocate assumes family.

### **2. Dominion Versus Conflict in the Christian Life**

The Bible does teach that sin’s reign is broken. “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14). Dominion is rule, mastery, ownership. The believer is no longer a slave. That is a doctrinal statement about standing and authority. It is not a promise that the believer will never experience fierce conflict, stubborn habits, or painful seasons of defeat while he learns to walk in the Spirit.

The Bible also teaches the believer will have conflict. “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other” (Galatians 5:17). That war does not prove you are lost. In many cases, that war proves you are alive. A dead man does not wrestle. A dead man drifts. The presence of conflict is not the same thing as the presence of dominion.

When a preacher collapses dominion and conflict into one category, he creates spiritual confusion. The believer who is battling thinks the battle is proof of damnation, so he despairs or hides. The hypocrite who is not battling learns to imitate the language of battling because battling sounds like authenticity in that culture. The Bible’s language is clearer than that. It says you are dead to sin and alive to God, and then it commands you to reckon it so and yield accordingly (Romans 6:11-13). That is discipleship language, not courtroom suspicion language.

### **3. Chastening Is the Father’s Tool, Not the Judge’s Sentence**

One of the clearest ways to tell whether a man understands the Christian life is how he handles chastening. The New Testament teaches that God chastens His children because they are His. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Hebrews 12:6). Chastening is proof of sonship, not proof of lostness. It is the Father correcting His child, not the Judge condemning a criminal.

When believers fall, the Bible’s categories are confession, cleansing, restoration, and correction. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9). That is fellowship maintenance inside a relationship. The gospel of suspicion tends to treat sin as evidence that the relationship never existed. That produces panic, not repentance. It produces concealment, not confession.

A pastor who understands chastening can rebuke hard and still leave the believer standing on Christ. He can say sin is wicked, and he can say God will deal with it, and he can say you may lose joy, peace, fellowship, power, and testimony, and he can say God will whip you if you belong to Him. But he does not have to constantly hint that the believer’s salvation is in question every time the believer bleeds. The Father’s whip is not the Judge’s gavel. The Bible keeps those separate.

### **4. The Honesty Problem: Fear Creates Performers**

Here is where fruit becomes visible and unavoidable. In a grace-grounded environment, believers confess because confession is safe. They do not confess because sin is harmless. They confess because the cross settled their acceptance and the blood cleanses their fellowship. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). Boldly is a Bible

word. Mercy and grace are offered at the throne, not withheld until the believer proves he deserves them.

In a suspicion-driven environment, honesty becomes dangerous. If the unspoken rule is that struggle equals lostness, then transparency becomes self-incrimination. So believers learn to manage appearances. They keep quiet about battles. They use safe language. They talk about victories but not defeats. They present a curated life. Not because they love sin, but because they fear condemnation from the very people who should help restore them. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one” (Galatians 6:1). Restore is the command, not re-check his salvation.

That is why this “relationship with sin” yardstick can become spiritual poison. It claims to produce holiness, but it often produces hypocrisy. It claims to expose false converts, but it often trains real converts to hide. It claims to protect the church, but it often turns the church into a stage. That is measurable fruit, and by the standard of “judge by fruit,” it indicts the method.

### **5. The Bible’s Pattern: Identity First, Growth After**

The New Testament begins with what God did, then commands you to live accordingly. That order matters. “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14). Redemption and forgiveness are stated as present possessions grounded in blood, not as prizes earned by behavioral progress. Then the believer is told to put off and put on, to mortify, to yield, to walk, to grow, to serve, and to fight.

When a preacher turns holiness into a salvation detector, he reverses the order. He makes growth the evidence that grants peace rather than the result of peace. But the Bible says peace is the legal result of justification. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). The believer grows because he has peace, not to obtain it.

This reversal also confuses people about what to do with failure. In the biblical pattern, failure is met with confession and restoration, then renewed obedience. In the suspicion pattern, failure is met with a question mark over the new birth, and the believer spirals inward. He stops looking at Christ and starts looking at himself for signs. That is not how Paul disciplined churches. Paul called saints to maturity while addressing their carnality as saints, not as suspected strangers.

### **6. The Shifting Yardstick Cannot Be Consistent**

If the “relationship with sin” standard were truly objective, it would be measurable. But in practice it becomes a shifting yardstick. One man’s struggle is allowed because it is

respectable. Another man's struggle is condemned because it is embarrassing. One man's timeline is considered normal. Another man's timeline is considered proof of false conversion. One man's temperament is considered brokenness. Another man's temperament is considered pride. The standard drifts because the standard is not Scripture, it is the preacher's impression.

Scripture is more honest than that. Scripture records saints failing in ways that would make modern auditors faint. David committed adultery and murder and was still God's man, disciplined severely but not treated as never having known God (2 Samuel 11-12). Peter denied the Lord with oaths and curses and was restored by Christ Himself (Luke 22:61-62; John 21:15-17). Corinth was full of carnality, yet Paul addressed them as "brethren" and "sanctified" while rebuking them sharply (1 Corinthians 1:2, 3:1-3). The Bible does not erase conversion every time a man collapses.

If a preacher's standard cannot handle the Bible's own portraits of saints, then the standard is too strict in the wrong direction. Holiness is not minimized by admitting saints can fail. Holiness is strengthened because the remedy becomes biblical: confession, chastening, discipleship, accountability, and grace-driven growth. A yardstick that declares people lost every time they fail does not produce holiness. It produces fear, hiding, and performance.

## **7. The Fruit Test on the Method Itself**

Now apply the stated test back to the system. If a method trains people to interpret struggle as proof of damnation, what will it produce? It will produce hidden sin because honesty is punished. It will produce masked shame because transparency is dangerous. It will produce performative spirituality because acceptance is tied to appearances. And it will produce a church culture where the most honest people feel the least safe, while the best actors look the most spiritual.

But the gospel produces the opposite. The gospel produces confession because grace provides safety. The gospel produces restoration because Christ is an Advocate. The gospel produces growth because the believer is not trying to earn sonship, he is learning to walk as a son. "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). If the culture's dominant spirit is fear and suspicion, that is not the Spirit's signature.

So the question is not whether holiness matters. The question is whether holiness is being used in the right place. Holiness is the fruit of salvation, not the entrance fee. Holiness is the Father's work in His children, not the sinner's résumé to qualify for adoption. When holiness is turned into a salvation detector, it stops functioning as sanctification and starts

functioning as a counterfeit gospel, because it relocates confidence from Christ's work to man's performance.

## **Conclusion**

The "new relationship with sin" phrase can be a helpful description when it is kept in its biblical place, but it becomes a trap when it is turned into a salvation detector. The Bible teaches a believer will have conflict, will need growth, will need correction, and will sometimes fall hard, and the Bible's remedy is not to erase the new birth but to apply fatherly discipline and restoring grace. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth" (Hebrews 12:6) is not a sentence of condemnation, it is proof of sonship and proof of love.

A suspicion-driven system produces predictable fruit. It trains believers to hide because fear punishes transparency. It trains hypocrites to perform because performance earns acceptance. It undermines honest confession because confession becomes risky. It quietly swaps a family atmosphere for a courtroom atmosphere. That fruit is not the fruit of the Spirit. It is the fruit of fear, and fear is not the engine of New Testament sanctification.

So the case in this sixth essay is plain. Biblical preaching produces confession and growth because grace provides safety, while suspicion-driven preaching produces concealment and performance because fear punishes honesty. And by the very "fruit test" standard often invoked in these discussions, the method that consistently produces hiding, shame, and spiritual acting stands condemned by its own outcomes. The gospel sets men free to be honest so they can be healed, and any system that makes honesty dangerous has stopped functioning like gospel, no matter how loudly it shouts about holiness.

## **7 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - First John as a Hammer: When Fellowship Passages Become Damnation Passages**

### **Introduction**

The devil loves the First Epistle of John because it is sharp, it is clean, it is black-and-white, and it has no patience with antichrist doctrine. It draws lines that modern Christianity hates, light and darkness, truth and lies, Christ and antichrist. That epistle will expose a fake teacher, a fake spirit, and a fake gospel quicker than most of the commentaries that men hide behind. But the devil also loves it for another reason. If he cannot erase it, he will twist it. If he cannot deny it, he will weaponize it. And one of the most common twists is to treat First John primarily as a salvation test to deny assurance rather than as a family letter written to believers about walking in light and enjoying fellowship.

That misuse turns a pastoral letter into a prosecution brief. It takes family language and uses it like a courtroom transcript. It takes fellowship passages and turns them into damnation passages. Then every time a believer stumbles, every time a saint struggles, every time a Christian has a dry season, the epistle is dragged out like a hammer to crush assurance and to suggest that inconsistency equals lostness. The result is not holiness. The result is fear. The result is concealment. The result is a church full of people who know how to talk right but do not know how to be honest, because honesty feels like self-incrimination.

The Holy Ghost tells you why He wrote First John, and the purpose statement destroys the whole suspicion system in one sentence. “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Not that you may guess. Not that you may hope. Not that you may live in suspense. That ye may know. If a method of preaching uses First John to make knowledge rare, peace suspicious, and assurance dangerous, then that method is misreading the book, and the fruit of that misreading will show up in the people who sit under it.

### **1. The Purpose of the Epistle Is Fellowship and Joy**

John opens the letter like a man writing to family, not like a prosecutor building a case file. He talks about what they have seen and heard and handled, and then he tells you his goal. “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). Fellowship is the theme right out of the gate. Not adoption. Not justification. Fellowship. That is relationship language, family language, communion language.

Then he says, “And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full” (1 John 1:4). Joy does not become full by keeping believers unsure whether they are saved. Joy becomes full when a believer knows he belongs, walks in light, stays clean in fellowship, and enjoys the Father without living like a spiritual orphan. If a preaching system turns First John into a constant threat, it will never produce full joy. It will produce a nervous religion where the saint is always bracing for the next accusation.

The epistle teaches that fellowship can be hindered and restored, and that is exactly what believers need to hear. “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another” (1 John 1:7). That is not a salvation verse being used to question whether a man is born again. That is a fellowship verse teaching saints how to stay clean in the relationship they already have. When you make every fellowship passage into a salvation trial, you erase the very category John is emphasizing.

### **2. When “Liar” Verses Are Treated Like Hell Verses**

John uses hard language because lies are serious, especially religious lies. “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1 John 1:6). Notice what is being claimed. Fellowship. That is not the same as claiming to be born again in the legal sense of justification. Fellowship is relational closeness and honest walking. A believer can lie about fellowship while still belonging to God. That lie damages communion, not adoption.

Then there is the famous line, “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar” (1 John 2:4). Preachers love to throw that verse like a spear. But the issue is not whether the verse is true. The issue is the category. John is not teaching that one act of disobedience equals damnation. John is teaching that a man claiming intimate knowledge of Christ while living in habitual darkness is lying about his condition. That can apply to a hypocrite, and it can apply to a saved man who is acting like a hypocrite. The epistle itself proves it is addressing believers because it says, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father” (1 John 2:1). That is written to people in the family.

The hammer-method takes those “liar” verses and applies them indiscriminately to tender believers, turning every inconsistency into an argument that they were never saved. That creates a church where the safest thing is to pretend you never struggle, because if you admit struggle, you get labeled. But the Bible expects believers to struggle and to confess and to be restored. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9). That is not a threat. That is a promise to sons.

### **3. Confession and Cleansing Are Family Mechanics**

First John teaches that a believer’s fellowship with God depends on walking in light, and walking in light includes honest confession. John does not write, “If you sin, you must question whether you were ever saved.” He writes, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). That is the cleansing mechanism for saints. It is not a re-salvation ritual. It is the Father’s washbasin.

The hammer-method avoids that simplicity because it prefers suspicion to cleansing. Instead of saying, “Confess and get clean,” it says, “Maybe you are lost.” Instead of producing repentance that restores fellowship, it produces fear that drives concealment. A believer who thinks every failure proves he was never saved will not confess freely. He will either hide or he will spiral into despair. Neither produces steady sanctification.

John also balances the seriousness of sin with the provision for sin. “And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). Advocate is not

courtroom language for strangers. It is family language. It means the case has been settled in terms of condemnation, but fellowship still needs maintenance. When a preacher uses First John to prosecute believers instead of to restore believers, he is fighting against the letter's own structure.

#### **4. The Epistle Does Expose Antichrist Doctrine**

This is where lazy critics get embarrassed, because First John absolutely does expose false teachers and antichrist doctrine. John says there are antichrists. John says they went out from us. John says to test the spirits. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1). That is discernment. That is protection. That is a needed warning in the last days.

John also says, "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22). That is not a verse designed to terrify a saved man who had a bad week. That is a verse designed to unmask doctrinal deceivers. John has categories for antichrist doctrine, and he has categories for believers needing fellowship correction. If you blur those, you will end up treating sheep like wolves and wolves like sheep.

The right use of First John is surgical, not sloppy. It is used to expose the spirit behind a message, to defend the doctrine of Christ, and to call believers to walk in light. It is not used as a weekly assurance demolition tool. John's purpose statement will not allow that. "That ye may know that ye have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). God wrote it to help believers know, not to keep believers guessing.

#### **5. Knowing Eternal Life Versus Enjoying Fellowship**

A believer can possess eternal life and still fail to enjoy fellowship. That distinction is the key that suspicion preaching refuses to keep. Eternal life is a possession received by faith in Christ. "He that hath the Son hath life" (1 John 5:12). Fellowship is the daily experience of walking in the light and staying clean. John spends the early part of the epistle dealing with that fellowship reality, because saints need it.

When a believer sins, he does not lose eternal life. He loses joy, peace, and fellowship until he gets clean. That is why John says, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (1 John 2:3). That verse is about the experiential knowledge of fellowship, not the legal reality of justification. The hammer-method takes experiential knowledge and turns it into legal salvation status, as if the believer's present obedience is the judge of whether Christ's blood was sufficient.

The epistle gives you the balance. It tells you to walk in light, and it tells you there is cleansing when you confess. It tells you not to sin, and it tells you there is an Advocate when you do. It tells you to love the brethren, and it tells you to test the spirits. It is a family letter with sharp edges because families need truth, not because sons are on probation.

## **6. The Fruit of Using First John as a Constant Prosecution**

Now we apply the fruit test to the method. If a church is trained to read First John like a prosecutor, what will it produce. It will produce believers who are afraid that any inconsistency means they are liars and therefore lost. It will produce Christians who treat peace as suspicious. It will produce a culture where the Christian life feels like a constant trial. The saint is not learning to grow. He is learning to defend himself.

And when the culture becomes prosecutorial, honesty dies. People learn quickly that transparency gets punished. If admitting a battle makes you a suspect, you will stop admitting battles. You will wear a mask. You will talk about victory in vague terms. You will quote the right phrases. You will avoid real confession. That is why suspicion-driven holiness often produces concealed sin rather than conquered sin. Fear does not cleanse the conscience. Blood cleanses the conscience. “How much more shall the blood of Christ... purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14). A conscience purged by blood can be honest.

Biblical preaching produces confession and restoration because grace provides safety. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16). Suspicion preaching produces concealment and performance because fear punishes transparency. “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). When fear becomes the dominant spirit in a church culture, something is off, and First John is being used incorrectly.

## **7. The Method Under Its Own Standard**

If a preacher insists on the harshest reading of every text to judge others, the method itself must be weighed by what it produces. The Bible allows righteous judgment in the sense of judging doctrine and fruit. “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16). But that fruit test cuts both ways. You do not get to use it like a whip on everyone else and then refuse it when it touches your own method. “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged” (Matthew 7:2). That is a rule, and it applies to pulpits as much as it applies to pews.

The broad outcome of the hammer-method is visible wherever it dominates. It produces a Christianity that talks about holiness constantly and yet cannot produce the atmosphere of sonship, peace, and honest confession that the New Testament describes. It produces Christians who are more skilled at appearing spiritual than at walking in light. It produces

believers who are more practiced at self-auditing than at looking unto Jesus. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2) is replaced with looking unto self for signs.

This is not a call to deny holiness. First John does not deny holiness. This is a call to put holiness in the right place. Holiness is fruit, not the judge of salvation. Holiness is the Father’s work in His sons, not the entrance exam for adoption. When First John is used as a hammer to deny assurance, holiness becomes the judge, and Christ’s finished work becomes a footnote. That reversal is not apostolic, and it cannot produce apostolic fruit.

## **Conclusion**

First John is not a toy, and it is not a club. It is a family letter written to believers so they can walk in light, enjoy fellowship, avoid deception, and know they have eternal life. John tells you his goal plainly. “That ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). He also tells you the remedy for sin in the believer plainly. Confess and be cleansed (1 John 1:9). He tells you the provision plainly. An Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). Those are not the words of a man trying to keep saints in suspense.

When First John is treated primarily as a salvation test to deny assurance, the book is being misused. The fruit of that misuse is measurable. It produces churches where peace is suspicious, where inconsistency is treated like damnation evidence, and where the Christian life feels like constant prosecution. It produces hidden sin and performative spirituality because fear punishes transparency. That is not the Spirit’s signature, and it is not the atmosphere of grace.

So the verdict in this seventh essay is not an attack on holiness, it is a defense of the gospel and the proper handling of Scripture. The Bible does expose hypocrites and antichrist doctrine, and First John is a sword for that work. But when the sword is swung blindly, it wounds sheep and strengthens wolves. The apostolic pattern is clear. Assurance rests in Christ’s promise, fellowship is maintained by walking in light and confessing, and holiness grows as fruit inside sonship. When a method reverses that order and uses First John as a hammer to deny assurance, the method stands condemned by the very fruit test it loves to preach.

## **8 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - Chastening Confused with Condemnation: Using Hebrews 12 to Keep People Guessing**

### **Introduction**

Hebrews 12 is one of the sweetest chapters in the New Testament for a saved man who has ever been whipped by God and wondered if the Lord still loved him. It is not a chapter written to keep saints in suspense. It is not a chapter written to turn the Christian life into a parole hearing. It is a chapter written to take a believer by the chin, lift his face up out of the dirt, and remind him that the very hand correcting him is the hand that adopted him. When chastening is preached right, it produces gratitude and stability, because the believer learns that God's correction is proof of sonship, not proof of rejection.

But religion has a way of taking a Father's whip and turning it into a Judge's gavel. It takes the doctrine of chastening and uses it as a fear lever. It teaches people to interpret every trial, every hardship, every season of dryness, every inward conviction, and every correction as evidence that they might not be saved. That is not Bible comfort. That is spiritual cruelty dressed up as seriousness. It trains believers to live like prisoners who are always awaiting disownment, instead of sons who are being trained for holiness.

The Holy Ghost did not leave the meaning of chastening vague. He stated it plainly. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6). That verse does not say whom the Lord doubts he chastens. It does not say whom the Lord is testing for possible adoption he scourges. It says whom the Lord loveth. Love is the motive. Sonship is the category. If a preacher turns Hebrews 12 into a tool to keep believers guessing, he has taken a passage meant to stabilize and turned it into a passage used to destabilize.

### **1. What Hebrews 12 Actually Teaches**

Hebrews 12 sits in a context of endurance and faith. You are told to run with patience, to lay aside weights, and to look to Jesus. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). That is the believer's focus. Not looking unto self. Not looking unto the preacher's yardstick. Looking unto Jesus. The chapter is built to move the believer forward, not inward.

Then the chapter addresses hardship. It does not pretend the Christian life is painless. It tells you the Christian life includes correction, training, and even scourging. That is strong language. But it explains the reason. God is dealing with you "as with sons" (Hebrews 12:7). The whole point is to interpret pain through the lens of sonship. Hardship is not proof you are rejected. Hardship can be proof you are owned.

When a man reads Hebrews 12 like a prosecutor, he misses the whole structure. The chapter is not questioning whether you are a son. The chapter is explaining why sons get corrected. It is not saying, "If you are chastened you might be saved." It is saying, "If you are chastened you are a son, because fathers chasten sons." That is why it says, "If ye be

without chastisement... then are ye bastards, and not sons” (Hebrews 12:8). The lack of chastening, not the presence of chastening, is the warning sign in the passage.

## **2. Chastening Is Proof of Sonship, Not a Threat of Rejection**

The language of Hebrews 12 is unmistakable. “For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” (Hebrews 12:7). The category is father and son, not judge and defendant. A father corrects because the relationship is already established. A judge condemns because the relationship is legal and punitive. God is not acting as a judge toward His children in Hebrews 12. He is acting as a Father toward His sons.

That is why the chapter calls chastening love. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6). Love is not a threat. Love is not revocation. Love is not God holding the believer over hell to see if he will behave. Love is God refusing to let His child destroy himself without intervention. When chastening is preached right, it makes a believer say, the Lord did not leave me. The Lord came after me.

The fear-based twist makes a believer say the opposite. It makes him think, maybe the Lord is correcting me because He is not sure I belong. Maybe this trial means I am on probation. Maybe this pain means He is about to disown me. That is not Hebrews 12. That is the spirit of bondage all over again. Yet the Bible says, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption” (Romans 8:15). Adoption produces assurance, not suspense.

## **3. Condemnation and Correction Are Not the Same Thing**

One of the most damaging habits in modern preaching is confusing condemnation with correction. Condemnation is the verdict on the lost. Correction is the training of the saved. Condemnation says you are guilty and rejected. Correction says you are mine, and I am going to change you. The Bible separates these categories. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Now means now. No condemnation means no condemnation. If a preacher teaches believers to interpret correction as condemnation, he is contradicting Romans 8:1.

The believer can be rebuked sharply, chastened painfully, and still be secure in Christ. That security is not a license to sin. It is the foundation for growth. A man who knows he is a son can repent honestly because he is not bargaining for acceptance. He is returning to fellowship. A man who believes he is under condemnation will either despair or pretend. He will not grow cleanly, because his relationship with God has become a courtroom instead of a home.

Hebrews 12 even tells you the purpose of chastening. “He for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness” (Hebrews 12:10). Profit is not damnation language. Partakers is not probation language. Holiness is the goal, but holiness is produced by a Father’s training, not by a Judge’s threats. When you turn the Father into an inspector waiting for a reason to disown, you have not produced holiness. You have produced slaves.

#### **4. The Cruelty of Interpreting Every Trial as a Salvation Question**

The practical cruelty shows up when trials come. A believer loses a job, faces sickness, experiences spiritual dryness, or gets corrected by Scripture. Under a fatherly model, the believer says, the Lord is teaching me, refining me, humbling me, guiding me, and correcting me as a son. Under a suspicion model, the believer says, maybe I am lost, maybe this proves I never believed, maybe God is punishing me as an enemy. That second interpretation does not comfort. It crushes.

The Bible gives believers categories for suffering that do not involve questioning salvation every time the wind blows. You can suffer because you live in a fallen world. You can suffer because you are being tried. You can suffer because God is correcting you. You can suffer because you are being trained. But the New Testament’s answer is not, keep guessing whether you are a son. The New Testament’s answer is, endure as a son, and keep looking to Jesus. “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6). Love does not revoke. Love corrects.

The preacher who uses chastening language to keep people uncertain is not helping them endure. He is draining their spiritual blood. He is turning hardship into a perpetual identity crisis. Instead of the believer learning to say, my Father is wise and kind, he learns to say, my Father is an inspector and I am never sure I belong. That is not the Holy Ghost’s work. The Spirit cries, “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15). He does not cry, “Maybe.”

#### **5. The Prisoner Mindset Versus the Sonship Mindset**

The fruit test here is pastoral and obvious. One method produces sons who trust their Father and grow. The other produces prisoners who fear their inspector and shrink. The sonship mindset says, I am His, and because I am His, He will not let me run wild. The prisoner mindset says, I do not know if I am His, and every correction might be a sign that I never was. That is a deadly way to live, and it is not New Testament living.

The sonship mindset produces honest confession because confession is safe. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9). Safe does not mean soft. It means secure. The blood settled the condemnation question. The Father is dealing with fellowship and training. That security creates the courage to tell the truth and change.

The prisoner mindset produces hiding. If the atmosphere teaches that correction equals possible damnation, then transparency becomes self-incrimination. People learn to curate their spirituality. They learn to talk like they are always winning. They learn to keep the real battles private. That does not produce holiness. That produces hypocrisy. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). Mercy belongs to sons, not suspects.

## **6. Emotional Manipulation Disguised as Spiritual Intensity**

A preacher can intensify fear and call it revival. He can use chastening language to heighten emotion, to keep the room tense, to keep people trembling, and to make certainty feel arrogant. That is a form of manipulation, even if it is not intentional. It trains people to associate spirituality with anxiety. The more you shake, the more you must be real. The calmer you are in Christ, the more suspicious you become. That is backwards, because faith produces stability, not perpetual panic.

The Bible’s comfort is not shallow. It is blood-deep. It tells a believer to examine himself in proper contexts, to repent when he sins, to fear God in reverence, and to pursue holiness. But it does not teach that the believer must live under a constant cloud of uncertainty to be humble. Humility is not doubting God’s promise. Humility is believing what God said and confessing what you are. “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6). A humble man can still say, I know I am saved, because God promised it.

Chastening preached rightly magnifies fatherly love. It teaches a believer that God is committed to his growth. It teaches that pain is not pointless. It teaches that the Lord’s correction is proof He has not abandoned you. Emotional manipulation preached through chastening magnifies fear. It teaches a believer to interpret every hardship as a threat. That does not sanctify. That traumatizes. “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). Sound mind is not produced by constant suspense.

## **7. The Plain KJV Pattern of Comfort, Correction, and Stability**

The New Testament pattern is consistent. Assurance is grounded in Christ and God’s record. “These things have I written unto you that believe... that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Chastening is grounded in love and sonship. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6). Condemnation is removed for those in Christ. “There is therefore now no condemnation” (Romans 8:1). The Spirit’s voice is adoption, not bondage. “Ye have received the Spirit of adoption” (Romans 8:15). The pattern is not complicated unless a man chooses to complicate it.

Correction is real. The Lord will whip His children. He will also restore them. He will also teach them. And He will do all of that without revoking the gift He gave when they believed. “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish” (John 10:28). Never is never. If chastening is preached as a threat of revocation, then John 10:28 becomes meaningless in practice, and the believer is left with a God who speaks promises with one side of His mouth while holding a cancellation notice with the other. That is not the God of the Bible.

So the standard is simple. Does the teaching produce sons who trust their Father and grow, or prisoners who view God as an inspector waiting for a reason to disown them. Hebrews 12 was written to produce endurance and holiness through the comfort of sonship. If a method uses Hebrews 12 to keep people guessing, it has changed the chapter’s function from comfort to control.

### **Conclusion**

Chastening is one of God’s greatest proofs that salvation is real, because it shows the Father will not leave His children alone. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6). That is comfort, not terror. That is commitment, not revocation. It is God saying, you are mine, and I am going to make you holy, even if it hurts. A believer who understands that will repent, confess, grow, and endure with patience, because he knows the hand correcting him is the hand that adopted him.

When chastening is confused with condemnation, the doctrine is turned inside out. Trials become threats. Correction becomes a salvation question. The believer is trained to live in suspense. That produces the prisoner mindset, and the fruit is predictable: fear, hiding, performance, and spiritual instability. That is not how the Spirit of adoption works. The Spirit cries, “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15), not “Maybe.”

So the verdict in this eighth essay is plain. Hebrews 12 is not a tool to keep people guessing, it is a comfort to keep people enduring. It is not a threat to revoke salvation, it is proof that the Father is training His sons. And any method that uses chastening language to intensify fear instead of magnifying fatherly love and correction is out of step with the plain KJV pattern of comfort, correction, stability, and assurance grounded in Christ. The Lord chastens His children because He loves them, and a gospel that cannot let a believer rest in that love is not producing New Testament fruit.

## **Introduction**

There are churches where you walk in and you can breathe, because the gospel is the air in the room. You can confess, you can be corrected, you can be restored, you can grow, and you can do it without living like you are on trial every Sunday. Then there are churches where you walk in and you can feel the cold. The sermon may have the right words, but the atmosphere has a different spirit. It is not the Spirit of adoption. It is the spirit of suspicion. In that room, everybody is a detective and nobody is a physician. The church stops being a hospital for sinners and becomes a courtroom of spiritual prosecutors.

That courtroom culture does not arrive overnight. It grows out of constant “Are you really saved?” preaching, preached not as an occasional warning to the hypocrite but as a permanent lens through which every saint is viewed. The gospel becomes less like a settled verdict and more like an ongoing investigation. Assurance becomes suspicious. Peace becomes a red flag. A settled believer is treated like a presumptuous believer. And the moment that atmosphere sets in, discipleship gets replaced with interrogation. Instead of helping people walk with God, the culture trains people to perform for approval.

Biblical discernment is real. It is necessary. The New Testament warns about wolves, antichrists, false apostles, and deceiving spirits. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). But biblical discernment operates within the stability of the gospel, not against it. It protects the flock while feeding the flock. It does not turn the flock into suspects. When suspicion becomes a virtue, the church becomes a courtroom, and the fruit of that culture is measurable, relationally, emotionally, and doctrinally.

### **1. The Gospel Creates a Home, Suspicion Creates a Courtroom**

The gospel produces family language. “Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15). That is not a courtroom cry. That is not a parole cry. That is a child’s cry. The gospel makes the church a home where the saved man can grow, be corrected, and be restored as a son. A son can be rebuked hard and still feel safe, because his standing is anchored in Christ, not in his performance.

Suspicion preaching changes the operating system. The church becomes a place where everything is interpreted as evidence. A man’s testimony is cross-examined. His tears are evaluated. His vocabulary is policed. His facial expression during the altar call becomes a clue. His struggles become suspect. And instead of a shepherd feeding and guiding, you get an investigator interrogating and testing. That is not how the apostles built churches.

Paul told saved people they had peace with God because they were justified by faith. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”

(Romans 5:1). He did not say peace is arrogant. He did not say assurance is a red flag. He gave peace as a present possession grounded in Christ. When a church treats peace like presumption, it is not being reverent. It is being unstable.

## **2. Suspicion Becomes “Spiritual,” and Mercy Becomes “Compromise”**

Once suspicion becomes spiritual, mercy gets relabeled as weakness. A compassionate pastor is treated like a compromiser. A believer who comforts a struggling saint is treated like he is enabling sin. The culture starts to think harshness is discernment. It starts to think severity equals holiness. It starts to confuse being hard on people with being hard on sin. But the Bible does not equate harshness with spirituality. It equates love with spiritual maturity.

The New Testament says, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness” (Galatians 6:1). Spiritual men restore. They do not interrogate. They do not treat a wounded sheep like a wolf. They restore in meekness, not because they think sin is no big deal, but because they know restoration is how holiness actually grows.

Suspicion culture cannot do Galatians 6:1 well, because it punishes transparency. If a man confesses, he risks being labeled. If he is labeled, he is treated as possibly lost. So he learns to hide. That is how suspicion produces more sin, not less. It drives sin underground and teaches saints to wear masks. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). Mercy is not compromise. Mercy is God’s method.

## **3. People Start Policing Vocabulary, Not Shepherding Hearts**

The courtroom church becomes obsessed with phrases. People listen for shibboleths. They evaluate each other’s “sound.” They start to treat certain words as proof of authenticity and other words as proof of deception. One man says “relationship” and gets suspected. Another man says “lordship” and gets applauded. One man says “assurance” and is treated like a shallow believer. Another man says “I’m terrified I might be deceived” and is treated like a serious believer. That is not New Testament discipleship. That is groupthink with Bible jargon.

The Bible teaches that words matter, yes, but it also teaches that charity is the bond of perfectness. “And above all these things put on charity” (Colossians 3:14). Charity means love, and love produces patience. Love produces long-suffering. Love expects growth. Love does not demand instant maturity from babes. Paul told the Corinthians, “I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal” (1 Corinthians 3:1). He called

them brethren while correcting them. He did not call them suspects while interrogating them.

When vocabulary policing replaces shepherding, discipleship dies. Discipleship requires time, patience, teaching, correction, and restoration. Interrogation requires suspicion, pressure, and constant testing. The church must decide which one it is going to be. A hospital can be clean and still be compassionate. A courtroom can be strict and still be unjust.

#### **4. Emotional Reactions Become Evidence, and Christianity Becomes Theater**

In a courtroom church, emotions become evidence. If you weep, you might be real. If you don't weep, you might be hard. If you respond intensely, you might be broken. If you respond calmly, you might be proud. The result is predictable. People learn how to act. They learn how to appear "under conviction" because that appearance is treated like proof. They learn what expressions get approval. They learn what tone gets accepted. The church becomes a stage, not a sanctuary.

But the Bible never made outward intensity the currency of authenticity. The Bible made faith in Christ the ground of salvation. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). Everlasting life is not measured by how much you shook in a service. The Bible also teaches that spiritual fruit grows over time, and growth is not always loud. Some of the deepest work God does in a man is quiet. "That ye may be sincere and without offence" (Philippians 1:10). Sincere is not the same as dramatic.

When Christianity becomes theater, honesty becomes dangerous. People start fearing exposure more than they fear sin. That is not holiness. That is image management. A suspicion culture can accidentally train hypocrites to thrive because hypocrites are good at acting, and tender believers to suffer because tender believers are honest. That is upside down. The gospel is supposed to unmask hypocrites and heal honest sinners, not the other way around.

#### **5. Discipleship Gets Replaced by Interrogation**

A courtroom church is always asking, "Are you really saved?" instead of asking, "How can we help you grow?" The focus shifts from feeding sheep to testing sheep. But a shepherd's job is not to stand at the gate and constantly question the sheep. A shepherd's job is to lead, feed, protect, and heal. The New Testament calls pastors to do that work. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof" (1 Peter 5:2). Feed, not prosecute.

The apostles did warn about false brethren and wolves, but they did not build church life around suspicion. They built church life around doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers (Acts 2:42). They taught the gospel clearly, they disciplined blatant sin, and they restored repentant believers. That produces stability. That produces growth. That produces joy. John said the goal was joy. “That your joy may be full” (1 John 1:4). Full joy is not produced by constant investigations.

A church cannot be healthy when every struggle is treated as a possible proof of damnation. That is not how families function. A father does not make his child prove adoption every time the child disobeys. He corrects him because he is his child. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6). Chastening is family correction, not a salvation detective tool. A church that does not understand that will keep saints in bondage.

## **6. The Export Problem: When Suspicion Is Packaged as a Virtue**

When a ministry exports suspicion as a virtue, it will produce a generation that confuses harshness with discernment and thinks mercy is compromise. You will see it in how people talk online, how they talk to new believers, how they treat church members who struggle, and how they respond to anyone who has peace. They will act as if certainty is arrogance and humility requires doubt. But humility is not doubting God’s promise. Humility is believing God and confessing your need.

The Bible does not treat assurance as pride. It treats assurance as the intended result of faith in God’s record. “These things have I written unto you that believe... that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Know is the word. If assurance is always suspect in a culture, that culture is not producing the result God intended when He wrote Scripture. It is producing a counterfeit humility, a humility that is really unbelief dressed up as caution.

This exported suspicion also creates a harsh relational climate. People start to suspect motives rather than address doctrine. They start to read hearts rather than correct actions. They start to treat questions as rebellion. They start to treat weakness as hypocrisy. That kind of culture does not protect the flock. It eats the flock. Paul warned about that spirit. “Take heed... that ye be not consumed one of another” (Galatians 5:15). Suspicion is a consumption engine.

## **7. Discernment Must Serve the Gospel, Not Undermine It**

True discernment is anchored in the gospel and flows from it. It protects the gospel from corruption and protects the flock from wolves. But discernment does not undermine the gospel’s stability. A church can be discerning and still be safe for confession. A church can be strict on doctrine and still be tender with sinners. That is what the New Testament

models. The church is supposed to be “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), not the pillar and ground of suspicion.

The gospel gives stability first. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Romans 5:1). Then it calls for holiness from that stability. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Ephesians 2:10). If a culture treats peace as a red flag, it reverses the order. It turns holiness into the judge and peace into the suspect. That is the exact reversal that produces courtroom churches.

A church cannot be healthy when assurance is treated as arrogance and peace is treated as danger. That mindset is not spiritual maturity. It is spiritual anxiety. And spiritual anxiety does not produce spiritual fruit. “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). A sound mind is not a mind that lives under constant suspicion.

## **Conclusion**

The culture of suspicion is not a minor issue. It is a social fruit that reveals what a preaching method is actually producing. When “Are you really saved?” becomes the dominant sermon flavor, the church shifts from a hospital to a courtroom. Relationships change. People police vocabulary. Emotional reactions become evidence. Discipleship becomes interrogation. Confession becomes dangerous. And hypocrisy becomes easier, because actors thrive in courtrooms.

Biblical discernment is necessary, and it must remain sharp. The church must test doctrine, expose wolves, and refuse antichrist spirits. “Try the spirits” is in the Book (1 John 4:1). But that discernment must operate within gospel stability, not against it. The Bible was written so believers can know they have eternal life (1 John 5:13) and can walk with God in light, confession, and growth. A culture that makes assurance suspicious is not producing what Scripture was written to produce.

So the verdict in this ninth essay is straightforward. A ministry method that exports suspicion as virtue will create a generation that confuses harshness with discernment and thinks mercy is compromise. It will build courtrooms, not churches. And by the very fruit test that such methods love to invoke, that culture stands condemned by its own outcomes, because the gospel produces sons who can breathe, confess, and grow, while suspicion produces prisoners who hide, perform, and live like God is an inspector waiting for a reason to disown them.

## **10 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - The Intensity Illusion: When Volume and Tears Replace Clarity**

### **Introduction**

There is a difference between a preacher having spiritual authority and a preacher having emotional force. One comes from truth handled clean, rightly divided, and aimed like a rifle at the conscience. The other can come from personality, volume, pacing, grim tone, and the power of atmosphere. Spiritual authority leaves a man seeing Christ more clearly than he saw Him before, because “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Emotional force can leave a man shaken without being settled, stirred without being saved, and terrified without being taught, because the flesh can react strongly to fear even when the message is not clear.

The modern ear is easily impressed by intensity. A preacher can create the feeling of holiness by urgency, sternness, and emotional pressure, even while mixing Bible categories and blurring the gospel. The crowd equates “seriousness” with “soundness,” and they assume that if a sermon hit hard, it must have been right. But the Holy Ghost is not measured by decibels. Truth is not proven by tears. And a preacher’s passion is not a substitute for a plain message. Paul said, “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33). If the end product of the preaching is confusion and dread, then whatever else it is, it is not operating like apostolic gospel clarity.

The fruit test here is not complicated. Do people leave with a clearer understanding of faith in Christ and the finished work, or do they leave with a foggy sense of dread and a new list of internal checks to perform. The gospel call is plain, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). If intensity makes that plain call harder to see, then intensity has become a veil, not a virtue. The Spirit’s work is not measured by how hard the sermon landed emotionally, but by whether truth is made plain and Christ is lifted up as sufficient, because “he shall glorify me” (John 16:14) is the Spirit’s signature.

### **1. The Flesh Loves Force, but the Spirit Loves Light**

The flesh can be moved by fear without being converted by faith. A man can tremble at hell, feel crushed by guilt, and still not understand the gospel, because trembling is not trusting. Felix trembled under Paul, but trembling did not equal salvation (Acts 24:25). Emotional impact is not the same thing as spiritual illumination. The Bible says the god of this world blinds minds (2 Corinthians 4:4), and blindness is not cured by louder shouting; blindness is cured by light.

That is why apostolic preaching majors on clarity. Paul said, “But even if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost” (2 Corinthians 4:3). The goal is not to hide it behind intensity,

but to make it plain so faith has an object. A sermon that produces a strong reaction but leaves the gospel fuzzy has produced motion without direction. That kind of motion is dangerous because it can be mistaken for conversion.

The Spirit of God does convict, but conviction is not confusion. The Spirit convinces of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8), but He also points to Christ as the answer. If the sermon produces fear without producing a clear Savior to run to, it has left the sinner in the dark with his fear. The gospel does not leave men with themselves. It gives them Christ, “Christ died for our sins... and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), and it calls them to believe God’s testimony about His Son.

## **2. Intensity Can Cover Mixed Categories**

A preacher can sound powerful while mixing justification and sanctification, condemnation and chastening, discipleship and salvation. The crowd hears heat and assumes there must be light. But heat can come from personality, and light comes from Scripture handled honestly. When categories are mixed, the listener leaves with an unsettled conscience that thinks it is being humble because it is afraid, while in reality it has been trained to doubt God’s promise.

God’s order is stable. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Peace is the legal fruit of justification, not the trophy of long-term performance. Then sanctification grows from that settled standing. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Ephesians 2:10). When a sermon uses intensity to push sanctification into the role of proof that grants peace, it has reversed the order, and the reversal will always produce instability.

Intensity also allows a preacher to avoid defining terms. Words like repentance, surrender, brokenness, fruit, and lordship can be used in ways that sound holy while remaining vague. Vagueness plus intensity is a deadly combination because the listener supplies his own meaning and then panics under it. The Bible’s gospel words are not meant to be foggy. God said “that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Knowing requires clarity, not ambiguity.

## **3. Emotional Pressure Can Mimic Conviction**

Conviction is the Spirit showing you what you are and what Christ is, and then drawing you to the Savior. Intimidation is pressure that drives you inward, drives you to perform, drives you to prove something, or drives you to react so the room will accept you. The two can feel similar in the moment, but they bear different fruit afterward. One produces faith and peace. The other produces dread and self-auditing.

The Bible's conviction does not replace the gospel with a checklist. It brings a man to Christ. The Philippian jailer did not receive a long list of internal checks. He received a plain answer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). That answer does not minimize holiness. It establishes the only foundation from which holiness can grow. A man cannot build sanctification on uncertainty, because uncertainty undermines obedience by making everything a self-justification project.

When emotional pressure dominates, people often confuse being overwhelmed with being saved. They remember the night they cried, the night they were terrified, the night they responded, and they cling to the event as proof. But salvation is not clinging to an event. Salvation is believing a Person and trusting a finished work. "Who hath saved us... not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace" (2 Timothy 1:9). Intensity can produce memories. Only truth produces faith.

#### **4. The Dread After the Sermon Tells on the Method**

A sermon can "hit hard" and still fail the fruit test if it leaves people with dread instead of Christ. If the average listener leaves thinking, I need to go home and run internal tests to see if I'm real, then the sermon has trained self-inspection more than it has trained faith. The Bible warns against measuring yourself by yourself, "For they measuring themselves by themselves... are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12). Yet that is exactly the habit that foggy-intense preaching often produces.

The gospel produces a different outcome. It produces peace with God, then growth. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). That does not mean there is no correction. It means the condemnation issue is settled in Christ. If a sermon leaves believers living under condemnation feelings as if they are spiritual, something is wrong with the emphasis.

Dread also produces secrecy. If people think honesty will get them labeled, they hide. But New Testament holiness grows in the light. "If we walk in the light... we have fellowship one with another" (1 John 1:7). A church built on gospel stability can handle confession because the blood is central. A church built on intensity without clarity often becomes a place where people talk big in public and bleed in private, because fear has replaced grace.

#### **5. Seriousness Is Not a Substitute for Scripture**

A man can be serious and still be wrong. A man can be stern and still be mistaken. The Pharisees were serious. They were strict. They were intense. They were also blind. Jesus said, "Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matthew 23:15). That is what happens

when zeal is detached from truth. The crowd confuses the heat of religion with the light of revelation.

The apostolic pattern is not entertainment, but it is also not manipulation. Paul said, “We are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity... speak we in Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:17). Sincerity is not shouting. Sincerity is clean handling. And Paul said, “Not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth” (2 Corinthians 4:2). Truth manifested is truth made plain.

That is why the emphasis must stay on clarity. If a preacher’s “seriousness” becomes a cover for confused categories, then seriousness is functioning as camouflage. People leave impressed by the tone while ignorant of the doctrine. But ignorance dressed up in fear is still ignorance, and ignorance cannot produce stable faith. “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Freedom is the fruit of truth, not the fruit of intensity.

## **6. The Crowd Can Learn to Equate Fear with Godliness**

When a culture is trained to treat assurance as arrogance, fear becomes the badge of humility. People begin to think that if they are uncertain, they must be honest, and if they are confident in Christ, they must be presumptuous. That is a subtle inversion, because the Bible treats confidence in God’s promise as normal for believers. John wrote so believers may know they have eternal life (1 John 5:13). Paul said, “I know whom I have believed” (2 Timothy 1:12). Those are not arrogant statements. They are faith statements.

Fear has its place in reverence, but fear is not supposed to be the engine of the Christian life. “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). A sound mind is not a mind trained to suspect its own salvation every time it fails. A sound mind is anchored in Christ and then taught to walk.

When fear is praised as godliness, hypocrisy grows. Tender believers become anxious and quiet. Bold hypocrites learn to speak the language of fear to appear authentic. They learn to say the right phrases, I’m terrified, I’m broken, I might be deceived, because that vocabulary earns credibility in that culture. Meanwhile genuine assurance is treated like a warning sign. That is backward fruit, and backward fruit reveals a backward emphasis.

## **7. The Spirit’s Work Is Christ-Centered Clarity**

The Holy Spirit magnifies Christ. “He shall glorify me” (John 16:14). If the end of the sermon is the listener staring at his own inner life as the ultimate evidence, then Christ has been pushed to the side in practice. The Spirit does not create a generation of people obsessed with themselves. He creates believers who look unto Jesus and then grow. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). That is the direction.

The Spirit's work also produces stability. The gospel gives peace, not perpetual suspense. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1). The Spirit of adoption produces a child's cry, not a prisoner's dread. "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15). When preaching leaves people feeling like God is an inspector waiting to disown them, it is not magnifying adoption; it is reviving bondage.

So the fruit test stays simple. Does the preaching make the truth plain and Christ sufficient, or does it impress the flesh with intensity while leaving the gospel blurred. Conviction that ends in Christ is biblical. Intimidation that ends in self is not. When volume and tears replace clarity, the sermon may feel powerful, but it will not produce the steady fruit of clear faith, clean assurance, honest confession, and joyful holiness.

## **Conclusion**

Intensity is not the enemy. A preacher ought to preach like eternity is real, because it is. Men are going to heaven or hell, and that is not a game. But intensity without clarity becomes an illusion. It can impress the flesh while leaving the gospel message blurred. It can create the feeling of holiness by urgency, sternness, and emotional pressure, even while mixing categories and training believers to live under a fog of dread. That is not spiritual authority. That is emotional force, and emotional force can move crowds without making disciples.

The Holy Ghost does not measure sermons by how hard they hit emotionally. He measures them by whether they manifest truth and glorify Christ. The gospel is not a mood. The gospel is news. "Christ died for our sins... and that he rose again" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The call is plain, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). If a preaching method leaves people with a new list of internal checks instead of a clearer view of Christ's finished work, it has failed the fruit test, no matter how intense the delivery was.

So this tenth essay draws the line where Scripture draws it. Conviction is not intimidation. Seriousness is not soundness. Tears are not truth. Volume is not authority. The church cannot afford to confuse emotional pressure with spiritual power, because the end of that confusion is a generation that equates fear with godliness, treats peace as a red flag, and misses the Savior who actually gives rest. "Come unto me... and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28) is still Christ's invitation, and any preaching that makes that rest feel dangerous has traded gospel clarity for the intensity illusion.

## **11 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - “You Are Not a Christian”: Reckless Verdicts and the Sin of Playing God**

### **Introduction**

There is a kind of preaching that is bold because it is biblical, and there is a kind of preaching that is bold because it is theatrical. Both can sound fearless. Both can sound “prophetic.” Both can make a crowd gasp. But only one of them is actually safe in the hands of a sinner preaching to sinners. When a man stands up and pronounces sweeping declarations over hearers as though he can reliably sort sheep from goats in bulk, he is doing something the Bible never authorized him to do. He may be correct about the spiritual danger in the room, but he can still be reckless in the way he plays God with people’s eternal destiny.

The Scripture does give marks of false teachers, patterns of rebellion, and warning signs of hypocrisy. It is not wrong to warn. It is not wrong to judge doctrine. It is not wrong to call sin what it is. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly” (2 Thessalonians 3:6). The New Testament is not sentimental. It is sharp when it needs to be sharp. But it also draws a boundary line that every preacher is commanded to respect: do not judge what God did not reveal, do not pretend you can read hearts, and do not act like your pulpit tone is the same thing as divine omniscience.

The fruit of broad condemnations is predictable, and it proves the method is defective. Some people harden themselves against correction because they feel unjustly attacked, so they stop listening altogether. Others crumble into despair because they can never satisfy the preacher’s moving standard of what a “real” Christian looks like, so they live in perpetual suspicion and spiritual paralysis. Meanwhile, hypocrites learn how to imitate the approved outward signals so they can survive in that culture. That is why this essay presses a simple point: bold is not automatically biblical. Spiritual authority is proved by faithfulness to Scripture, not by dramatic pronouncements, because “the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient” (2 Timothy 2:24).

### **1. The Difference Between Warning and Verdict**

The Bible commands preachers to warn, but it never authorizes them to replace God’s final verdict with their own. A warning says, this path leads to destruction, repent and believe. A verdict says, you are damned, case closed. The New Testament’s preaching to lost men is not, “I have determined your destiny.” It is, “God now commandeth all men every where to

repent” (Acts 17:30). A faithful preacher can preach hell hot and still keep the invitation clear.

Jesus preached warnings that cut like knives, but even Christ’s words show you the difference between exposing hypocrisy and pretending to read what only God can see. He said, “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16), which means you can judge visible fruit, doctrine, and behavior. But the same Lord warned about a judging spirit that plays God and ignores its own corruption. “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matthew 7:1). That is not a command to suspend discernment. It is a command to stop acting like a judge of hearts while you refuse to judge your own sin.

A preacher can say, if you are trusting your works, you are lost, because that is a doctrinal statement grounded in Scripture. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:5). He can say, if you deny the Son, you are antichrist, because John said so (1 John 2:22). But when he looks across a crowd and says, “You are not a Christian,” as a sweeping verdict based on outward impressions, he crosses into territory God reserved for Himself.

## **2. The Bible’s Boundary on Judging Hearts**

Scripture draws a hard boundary around judging motives and hearts beyond what God reveals. Paul told the Corinthians, “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts” (1 Corinthians 4:5). The counsels of the hearts are not the preacher’s jurisdiction. That is the Lord’s courtroom, not the pastor’s.

James made it even plainer. “There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?” (James 4:12). That verse is not teaching soft tolerance of sin. It is teaching humility about the limits of human judgment. A preacher is a man. He is not the lawgiver. He is not the final judge. He is a messenger of the Judge, and messengers are accountable if they add to the message.

The New Testament does command believers to judge in the right way. “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). Righteous judgment means judging what God has defined: doctrine, conduct, and fruit. It does not mean assuming omniscience. When a preacher issues reckless verdicts as though he can see who is regenerate by looking at faces and reactions, he is judging according to appearance while claiming righteousness.

## **3. The Marks of False Teachers Are Real, But They Are Not a License to Bulk Condemnation**

The Bible gives marks of false teachers, and it tells you to separate from them. “Beware of false prophets” (Matthew 7:15). “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers” (2 Corinthians 11:13). “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus 1:9). A shepherd must protect the flock. That part is not optional.

But those marks are designed to expose teachers and doctrines, not to empower a preacher to pronounce eternal destinies on random hearers like a spiritual TSA agent. When John says, “They went out from us, but they were not of us” (1 John 2:19), he is describing a manifest departure that revealed something. He is not telling pastors to treat every struggling believer as an undercover unbeliever.

The Bible’s method is evidence-based where God gives evidence. If a man denies Christ, rejects the gospel, spreads heresy, lives in open rebellion, and refuses correction, the church can act. It can rebuke, discipline, and separate. But none of that requires the preacher to play God with final destiny pronouncements, because church discipline is temporal and corrective, not omniscient and final. Even in discipline the goal is restoration when possible. “Restore such an one in the spirit of meekness” (Galatians 6:1).

#### **4. What Reckless Verdicts Do to People**

When you train a crowd to accept sweeping condemnations as spiritual, you create two predictable reactions. The first is hardness. A man who is unjustly attacked often stops listening to anything, including truth, because the delivery feels like injustice. He does not say, I need to repent. He says, I refuse to be manipulated. That is tragic, because sometimes the man truly needs correction, but the recklessness of the verdict inoculated him against receiving it.

The second reaction is despair. Tender consciences collapse under the weight of a moving standard. They can never be sure they are “real” because the preacher’s tests are not anchored to God’s promise but to the preacher’s expectations. They become spiritual accountants, counting feelings, counting reactions, counting wins, counting failures, trying to determine whether they are saved based on internal measurements. That is not how the New Testament builds assurance. God wrote, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Know is the goal.

And then there is a third outcome that rarely gets admitted: hypocrisy gets smarter. When the culture rewards certain outward signals, hypocrites learn to perform those signals. They learn the right phrases, the right posture, the right vocabulary. Meanwhile, honest believers feel unsafe being honest. The result is a church that looks intense but is not

clean, because fear is not the same thing as light. “If we walk in the light... we have fellowship one with another” (1 John 1:7). Light produces honest confession; intimidation produces stage acting.

### **5. The Biblical Alternative: Clear Gospel, Clear Warnings, Clear Categories**

The apostolic way is not weak. It is clear. It preaches sin plainly, judgment plainly, and Christ plainly. It does not use ambiguity to keep people trembling. It gives a Savior and an invitation. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). That is not a suggestion. That is a promise tied to a Person and a finished work. “Christ died for our sins... and that he rose again the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The gospel is news, not an emotional exercise.

Then the apostolic way teaches believers to grow without turning every failure into a salvation retrial. The Bible has categories for believers who sin: confession, cleansing, chastening, restoration. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9). “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6). Those passages are written to people in the family. They are not written to keep people guessing whether the family exists.

The preacher who keeps categories straight can preach hard and still be faithful. He can warn hypocrites without crushing babes. He can expose false gospels without turning every saint into a suspect. He can protect the church without making the church a courtroom. That is what righteous judgment looks like: doctrinal clarity paired with pastoral faithfulness.

### **6. Turning the Mirror: If Verdicts Are the Method, the Method Must Judge Itself**

Here is where the so-called “fruit test” cuts back on the hand that swings it. If a man trains himself and his followers to pronounce final verdicts on others, then the method itself must be examined by its public outcomes. “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged” (Matthew 7:2). That is not a threat for lost men. That is a principle for anyone who loves to judge. If you make verdicts your virtue, you have invited the verdict of Scripture on your approach.

The question is not whether warnings are needed. They are. The question is whether the method produces the fruit the New Testament produces. Does it produce believers who rest in Christ and grow steadily, or believers who live under a fog, constantly auditing themselves, constantly fearing exposure, constantly confusing peace with presumption. Paul said, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Romans 5:1). If your method makes peace suspicious, you have drifted from apostolic emphasis.

A method that glorifies dramatic pronouncements often attracts an audience that loves the drama. They begin to equate harshness with discernment and mercy with compromise. They become quick to condemn and slow to restore. But the Bible says spiritual people restore. “Ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness” (Galatians 6:1). If the exported fruit is a culture of suspicion, verdicts, and theatrical severity, then the method is proving something about itself.

## **7. Bold Is Not Automatically Biblical**

A man can be loud and wrong. A man can be stern and mistaken. A man can be dramatic and still be carnal. Spiritual authority is not proven by how hard you can hit a crowd. It is proven by faithfulness to Scripture and the fruit of that faithfulness. Paul told Timothy, “Preach the word” (2 Timothy 4:2). Not preach your impressions. Not preach your ability to read faces. Preach the word. The word can cut without you pretending to be omniscient.

The servant of the Lord is commanded to avoid the very spirit that reckless verdicts cultivate. “The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves” (2 Timothy 2:24-25). That is not softness. That is biblical strength under control. It is truth with a shepherd’s heart. It is correction aimed at repentance, not condemnation aimed at applause.

Even when dealing with those who err, the Bible points to recovery, not theatrical destruction. God can grant repentance “to the acknowledging of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:25). A preacher who constantly declares people lost in bulk is not aiming at repentance; he is aiming at reaction. That is why this essay insists on a simple measurement: dramatic pronouncements may look bold, but Scripture calls for faithful handling, clear gospel proclamation, and righteous judgment confined to what God actually reveals.

## **Conclusion**

Reckless verdicts are not a sign of spiritual authority. They are often a sign of spiritual impatience, and sometimes a sign of spiritual pride, because the preacher begins to act like he can see what only God can see. The Bible gives marks of false teachers and patterns of rebellion, and it commands discernment and separation where needed. But it also warns against judging hearts beyond what God has revealed. “Judge nothing before the time” (1 Corinthians 4:5) and “There is one lawgiver” (James 4:12) stand like two sentries at the gate, telling every preacher where he must stop.

The fruit of broad condemnations proves why God drew that boundary. Some people harden themselves against correction because they feel attacked unjustly. Others crumble into despair because they can never satisfy a moving standard of “real.” Hypocrites learn to perform, and tender believers learn to hide. That is not New Testament holiness. That is a

courtroom culture replacing a family culture, and it destroys discipleship by replacing it with interrogation.

So the point of this eleventh essay is not to deny bold preaching. It is to demand biblical preaching. Bold is not automatically biblical. Tears are not truth. Volume is not authority. Spiritual authority is proved by faithfulness to Scripture, clarity of the gospel, and pastoral fruit that matches the apostolic pattern: peace with God through faith in Christ, growth through correction and restoration, and discernment that protects the flock without turning saints into suspects. If a man makes verdicts his virtue, then by his own rule he must accept this: the method will be judged by its fruit, and Scripture will not call reckless pronouncements righteous simply because they were loud.

## **12 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - The Confusing Invitation: Calling Sinners While Telling Them They Cannot Come**

### **Introduction**

There is nothing complicated about God's doorway into salvation, and any preacher who makes it complicated is tampering with the door. Men love to build a fence around the cross, then stand at the fence acting like a bouncer, deciding who is "ready," who is "broken enough," who is "serious enough," who has felt the right degree of sorrow, and who has passed the invisible inner check-list. But the apostles did not preach a fenced-in Christ. They preached a risen Christ and a clear command: believe God. The gospel is not a maze. It is news. It is a promise. It is a verdict offered freely to sinners who cannot save themselves.

And yet you will hear invitations where sinners are urged toward Christ while simultaneously being trained to doubt that they can truly believe unless they first experience certain inner changes or spiritual sensations. They are told to come, but then they are told they cannot come unless they come the "right" way, and the "right" way is defined in a way that keeps moving. They are told to believe, but then they are told their believing is probably counterfeit unless it is accompanied by a certain depth of agony, a certain flavor of repentance, a certain level of surrender, or a certain evidence of future obedience. So the sinner stands at the door, and the preacher has put a guard dog in front of it.

The fruit test here is evangelistic and painfully obvious. Does the preaching produce straightforward conversions grounded in Christ's promise, or does it produce a perpetual class of seekers who never rest because the entry door is surrounded by conditions, warnings, and uncertainty. The Bible's invitation is plain. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,

and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). It does not say, believe and then wait to see if you felt enough. It does not say, believe and then spend ten years wondering if you were allowed to believe. It says believe, and thou shalt be saved. If a man can preach a “call” that makes that promise hard to grasp, then his invitation is confused, and confusion is not the Holy Ghost.

### **1. The Apostolic Invitation Was Clear and Direct**

When the apostles preached the gospel, they spoke like men delivering a king’s decree, not like men offering a psychological experiment. Peter preached Christ crucified and risen and called his hearers to respond (Acts 2). Paul preached Christ and called sinners to faith. The Philippian jailer asked the question every sinner needs answered: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). The answer was not a maze. The answer was not a list of inner sensations. The answer was a sentence: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). That is apostolic clarity.

The reason it is clear is because the responsibility is placed where God placed it: on the hearer to believe God’s testimony about His Son. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36). That is not mysticism. That is not a riddle. That is a promise. A sinner is not asked to produce spiritual life to qualify for spiritual life. He is asked to believe the One who gives it.

The Bible does not apologize for this simplicity. It celebrates it. “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:5). That verse crushes every system that tries to make the sinner perform before peace is permitted. God justifies the ungodly, not the cleaned-up, not the pre-qualified, not the spiritually impressive. If an invitation cannot allow an ungodly man to come as ungodly, then it has ceased to be the apostolic invitation.

### **2. When the Invitation Becomes a Prerequisite Maze**

A confusing invitation usually sounds spiritual because it uses biblical words, but it uses them like fog. The sinner is told, come to Christ, but then he is told, you cannot come unless you repent “enough,” unless you surrender “enough,” unless you are broken “enough,” unless you have the right “heart posture,” unless you have the right “inner change” already in motion. That turns the gospel into a pre-salvation sanctification program. It puts the cart before the horse, then blames the horse for not pulling.

The gospel already includes repentance as a change of mind that turns a man from self and idols to God, but repentance is not preached in Scripture as an emotional quota that must be met before God will save. The sinner is commanded to repent because God is true, and the sinner’s mind is wrong. But repentance is never set up as a mystical sensation that

must reach a certain intensity so the preacher can approve the conversion. The gospel call is a command to believe and a promise to save, because “God... now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30). Commands do not require prior qualification. They require obedience.

The danger of the prerequisite maze is that it quietly relocates faith from Christ to the sinner’s internal state. The man is no longer asking, is Christ sufficient. He is asking, am I sufficient. Did I feel enough. Did I fear enough. Did I hate sin enough. Did I surrender enough. And the moment the sinner is trained to look inward for a threshold, the simplicity of the gospel is gone, because the sinner is now trying to save himself with the right kind of repentance experience.

### **3. Responsibility Without Confusion: God Commands, Man Responds**

The New Testament does not treat sinners like helpless puppets who are forbidden to believe. It treats them as responsible rebels who are commanded to believe. That is why the apostles preached commands, not riddles. “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:31). “This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 3:23). A commandment to believe would be cruel if believing were impossible in the way some preaching implies.

The clarity of the gospel does not deny the necessity of the Spirit’s work. No man comes without God drawing, and no man understands without God illuminating. But the preacher is not called to stand between the sinner and Christ and speak like a gatekeeper. The preacher is called to deliver the message faithfully, because the message itself is God’s means. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16). The power is in the gospel, not in the preacher’s ability to manage the sinner’s emotional state.

A clear invitation tells a sinner the truth: you are a sinner, you are guilty, you cannot save yourself, Christ died for your sins, Christ rose again, and God promises eternal life to the one who believes. That is why John wrote, “He that hath the Son hath life” (1 John 5:12). Not he that hath the correct inner sensations hath life. He that hath the Son hath life. You receive the Son by believing God’s record. “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself” (1 John 5:10). The witness follows faith; it is not the prerequisite for faith.

### **4. The “Seeker Class” Fruit: People Who Never Rest**

One of the most damning fruits of the confusing invitation is the creation of a permanent seeker class. These are people who sit under the preaching for years, terrified, always “seeking,” always “coming,” always “responding,” and yet never resting in Christ’s promise

because they were taught that resting is dangerous. They are told assurance is presumption, so they stay in suspense. They are told confidence is pride, so they remain uncertain. They are told peace is a red flag, so they learn to distrust peace. That is not New Testament evangelism. That is spiritual purgatory.

The Bible's gospel produces rest because Christ finished the work. "For by grace are ye saved through faith... not of works" (Ephesians 2:8-9). "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1). Peace is not earned by proving you are real. Peace is the legal fruit of justification. If an invitation cannot bring a sinner to peace, it has not brought him to the apostolic gospel in practice.

This perpetual seeker class also produces strange behaviors. People begin to cling to constant altar moments, repeated crisis experiences, repeated "re-dedications," because they were never taught that faith is anchored in God's promise. So they keep seeking a feeling strong enough to settle them. But feelings do not settle a conscience. Blood settles a conscience. "How much more shall the blood of Christ... purge your conscience" (Hebrews 9:14). If the invitation keeps pushing seekers toward experiences instead of toward Christ's finished work, it will never produce settled believers.

### **5. When People Cling to an Experience Instead of a Promise**

Confusion in the invitation often results in people anchoring salvation to the moment they felt the most fear, the most sorrow, the most tears, the most intensity. They say, I know something happened because I shook, I cried, I panicked, I felt a crisis. But a crisis moment is not the same as saving faith. Fear can be real without faith being clear. Judas had remorse without salvation. "Then Judas... repented himself" (Matthew 27:3). That word describes regret, but he did not believe. Tears can exist without truth. Emotion can exist without conversion.

The Bible never tells a sinner to trust his experience. It tells him to trust Christ. It tells him to trust God's record. "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:11). The record is objective. It is outside of you. It is God's testimony. When a preacher makes the invitation conditional on inner sensations, the sinner starts treating inner sensations like the record, and the record becomes secondary.

That is why the clearest antidote to experience-based salvation is promise-based gospel preaching. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life" (John 6:47). That sentence is either true or it is not. If it is true, then the sinner who believes has everlasting life, regardless of whether his conversion was loud or quiet. If a method trains sinners to distrust that promise unless they felt enough, then the method has undermined the Lord's own words.

## **6. Conditions, Warnings, and Uncertainty Around the Door**

A biblical preacher warns about false conversions, yes, but he does not place the warning signs in a way that blocks the door. He does not preach as though the primary danger is that sinners might believe too easily. The primary danger is that sinners will not believe at all. Christ said, “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40). The obstacle was not that the door was too open. The obstacle was unbelief.

The confusing invitation builds an atmosphere where the sinner thinks, I must not come unless I come perfectly. But the gospel is for sinners who cannot come perfectly. That is why Christ invites the heavy laden. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). He did not say, come after you have achieved the right internal changes. He said come, and I will give you rest. The rest is on the other side of coming, not the prerequisite for it.

Warnings must be placed where Scripture places them: as truth that protects without paralyzing. The preacher can say, false professions exist. The preacher can say, examine what you are trusting. The preacher can say, if you are trusting works, you are lost. But he must still be able to say plainly, if you will believe on Christ, God will save you now. The gospel promise is not, seek forever. The gospel promise is, believe, and be saved. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36).

## **7. The Evangelistic Fruit Test: Clear Conversions or Endless Seekers**

If the preaching produces straightforward conversions grounded in Christ’s promise, you will see people who can say, I believed God, and I have peace with God through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). They will not all mature at the same pace, but they will have a settled foundation. Their growth will be discipleship growth, not salvation anxiety. Their failures will be handled by confession and chastening, not by erasing the new birth every time they stumble.

If the preaching produces endless seekers, you will see people who cannot say they know they have eternal life. They will talk about moments, feelings, fears, and experiences, but they will not talk about the record God gave. John wrote so believers may know (1 John 5:13). If a method produces a culture where knowledge is rare and uncertainty is praised as humility, then the method is failing God’s stated purpose for Scripture.

And when the invitation is confused, the crowd often becomes addicted to intensity. They equate fear with godliness and miss the difference between conviction and intimidation. Conviction points to Christ and produces repentance and faith. Intimidation points to self and produces paralysis and performance. That is why the fruit test is so valuable here:

confusion in the invitation does not merely inconvenience sinners; it shapes the entire church culture into a place where rest is suspicious and peace is treated like arrogance.

## **Conclusion**

The apostles preached a clear invitation that placed responsibility on the hearer to believe God, and that clarity stands in judgment over every invitation that feels like a maze of prerequisites. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31) is not a complicated sentence, and any preaching that makes it hard to understand has drifted from apostolic simplicity. God’s doorway into salvation is not surrounded by mystical conditions. It is opened by Christ’s blood and entered by faith.

When the invitation is mixed and confusing, it produces a perpetual seeker class—people who hover near Christ but never rest in Him, because they are trained to distrust peace and to chase sensations. That confusion often drives people to cling to an experience, a crisis moment, or a fear reaction, because they were never taught to anchor faith in God’s promise alone. But God did not tell sinners to trust their tears. He told them to trust His Son. “He that believeth on me hath everlasting life” (John 6:47). That promise is either the anchor or it is useless.

So the verdict in this twelfth essay is plain. A confusing invitation is not a deeper gospel; it is a foggy gospel. It does not produce stable conversions grounded in Christ; it produces endless seekers grounded in uncertainty. The Holy Spirit’s work is not to make the entry door harder to find. The Holy Spirit’s work is to glorify Christ and make the truth plain. And any preaching that calls sinners to come while simultaneously training them that they cannot come unless they first meet invisible prerequisites is not helping sinners come to Christ—it is standing in front of the door with religious conditions, and that is exactly the kind of confusion God is not the author of.

## **13 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - The “Perseverance” Pressure: Making Endurance the Evidence That Saves**

### **Introduction**

Perseverance is a good word when it is kept in its place, and it becomes a deadly word when it is promoted into the place Christ reserved for His blood. The Bible does call believers to endure. It does call saints to continue. It does warn against hypocrisy and apostasy. But the Bible never teaches that a sinner is saved by beginning in Christ and then staying saved by finishing in his own continuation. When perseverance is preached as the

proof that validates salvation, endurance becomes a co-savior. It stops being fruit and starts being the verdict. And once endurance becomes the verdict, salvation becomes an unpaid internship that may or may not turn into employment at the end of your life.

The apostolic gospel does not speak like that. The apostolic gospel speaks like a gift that is received at conversion, not like a trophy handed out after a lifetime of performance. “For by grace are ye saved through faith... not of works” (Ephesians 2:8-9). A gift is received, not earned. And eternal life is called eternal because it is life that does not end, not life that might end if you fail to meet the endurance quota. Jesus said, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish” (John 10:28). Never is a present-tense promise anchored in the Giver, not in the receiver’s stamina.

The fruit test here exposes what happens when perseverance becomes the proof. Assurance disappears in the present, because the final evidence is always in the future. So believers are trained to say they cannot truly know until the end. That turns Christian living into anxiety management rather than faith walking. It produces a Christianity where peace is postponed and fear becomes the engine. And you cannot preach “eternal life” while functionally teaching “maybe life,” because the Holy Ghost wrote, “that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13), not that ye may hope you have it if you hold on long enough.

### **1. Scripture Calls Believers to Endure, But It Does Not Define Endurance as the Saving Proof**

The Bible calls saints to endure because saints face real opposition. The Christian life involves warfare, chastening, trials, and discipline. “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:3). That is spoken to a saved man, not to a sinner seeking salvation. Endurance is part of discipleship. It is not the entrance requirement for justification.

Scripture also speaks of continuing in the faith in the sense of stability and growth. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Colossians 2:6). Receiving Christ happens at conversion. Walking in Him is the life that follows. When a preacher reverses those, he makes walking the proof that you received. He makes the fruit the root. That is the exact inversion that breeds uncertainty.

The Bible’s order is consistent. Salvation is received by faith, then obedience grows out of that salvation. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Peace is the legal fruit of justification. If perseverance is made the proof that grants peace, then peace is no longer the fruit of faith; it becomes the reward of endurance. That is not the gospel; that is probation.

## **2. When Perseverance Becomes a Co-Savior**

Once perseverance becomes the validating proof, Christ's finished work is no longer sufficient to settle the conscience. A believer's eyes shift from Christ to his own future performance. He stops resting in the record God gave, and starts watching himself like a stock chart. If he is up this week, he feels safe. If he is down next week, he panics. That is not walking by faith. That is living by spiritual metrics.

The Bible teaches that salvation is grounded in Christ's work, not in the believer's endurance. "Who hath saved us... not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace" (2 Timothy 1:9). It teaches that the believer is kept by God. "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1 Peter 1:5). If God keeps the believer, then perseverance is not the condition of keeping; it is the fruit of being kept.

When perseverance is elevated, the gospel becomes two-part. Christ does the first part, and the believer must do the second part by continuing well enough to prove the first part was real. That is the "co-savior" system, and it is spiritual poison because it sneaks works into the verdict while pretending to preach grace. It says, saved by grace, validated by endurance. That is a works-system in a suit and tie.

## **3. "Eternal Life" Cannot Mean "Maybe Life"**

God chose the words carefully. He did not call it "conditional life." He called it "eternal life." John said, "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:11). The record is not your performance. The record is God's testimony. The life is not in your perseverance. The life is in His Son.

Jesus said, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Notice the verbs. Hath. Shall not. Is passed. That is present certainty, not future suspense. If a doctrine of perseverance trains people to speak as if they are only "potentially saved" until they die, it is contradicting the Lord's own language.

The Holy Ghost wrote Scripture so believers can know. "These things have I written unto you that believe... that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Know is not postponed to the end. Know is now. If perseverance is preached in a way that removes knowledge now and replaces it with maybe later, then it is not perseverance being preached; it is uncertainty being sanctified.

## **4. The Present Assurance Problem: When the Evidence Is Always in the Future**

If the final evidence is always in the future, then present assurance becomes impossible by design. The believer is told, you cannot know you are saved because you have not finished.

But the Bible does not say you are saved at the end of your life. The Bible says you are saved when you believe. “For by grace are ye saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). Not “will be saved” if you continue. Are saved.

Now, a man can deny Christ, abandon doctrine, and expose himself as a hypocrite. That is true. But Scripture handles that by exposing false profession and false teachers, not by turning every believer’s daily struggle into a salvation question. God gives believers categories for failure: confession, cleansing, chastening, restoration. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us” (1 John 1:9). “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6). Those are family mechanisms, not courtroom mechanisms.

When perseverance teaching erases those categories and replaces them with suspicion, it creates a generation that cannot grow cleanly. Growth requires security. A son who knows he belongs can repent without bargaining for acceptance. A prisoner who thinks his acceptance depends on his future performance will either despair or pretend. That is why the fruit of this doctrine is not holiness, but anxiety.

### **5. Anxiety Management Christianity Versus Faith Walking**

Faith walking looks outward. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). Anxiety management Christianity looks inward. It constantly checks the pulse, checks the signs, checks the trend lines. It does not say, Christ is sufficient. It says, I hope I am sufficient. That is not faith; that is self-absorption dressed as seriousness.

The Spirit of God does not produce a religion of fear. “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). A sound mind is anchored in Christ’s promise and then taught to obey. A fearful mind is trained to treat peace as danger and assurance as arrogance. That is why this perseverance pressure often flips virtues upside down. Confidence becomes pride. Rest becomes laziness. Peace becomes presumption. Fear becomes humility. And the whole thing becomes backward.

Paul describes the Christian life as service flowing from a purged conscience. “How much more shall the blood of Christ... purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14). If the conscience is never purged, if it is constantly on trial, then service becomes dead works. It becomes proving, not worship. And that is exactly what happens when endurance becomes the evidence that saves.

### **6. Biblical Endurance Comes From Security, Not for Security**

The Bible teaches endurance, but it roots endurance in security. A believer endures because he is kept, not to prove he might be kept. “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”

(Philippians 1:6). God began the work. God performs the work. The believer participates, yes, but the foundation is God's commitment, not the believer's stamina.

Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice... and they shall never perish" (John 10:27-28). That promise is the foundation that produces endurance. A sheep that knows the Shepherd will keep him can follow through valleys without thinking the Shepherd is looking for a reason to disown him. A sheep that believes he might be discarded at any moment will live in panic, not endurance. Panic is not perseverance. Panic is fear.

The New Testament also calls believers to "continue in the faith grounded and settled" (Colossians 1:23), but the very phrase assumes a grounded foundation. Grounded and settled is not a man who is uncertain. Grounded and settled is a man anchored in Christ. Endurance is discipleship strength, not salvation evidence. When endurance is preached as salvation evidence, it undermines the very stability endurance requires.

### **7. The Practical Fruit: Postponed Peace and Engineered Fear**

When perseverance becomes the proof, peace is postponed. The believer cannot say with Paul, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1), because the system will not allow peace until the system gets its final evidence. So the believer is trained to live in suspense. That suspense is then called humility. But it is not humility. It is unbelief in God's record.

Fear becomes the engine. Fear drives prayer. Fear drives obedience. Fear drives church attendance. Fear drives altar calls. Fear drives self-examination. But fear is not the New Testament engine. Love is. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Gratitude is. Peace is. The assurance of sonship is. "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption" (Romans 8:15). When fear is the engine, the fruit is not clean holiness; the fruit is performative holiness, because the motive is self-preservation.

And by the fruit test that the perseverance-pressure crowd loves to use, this system condemns itself. It produces unstable believers, endless self-auditing, postponed peace, and a culture that confuses anxiety with godliness. The gospel does not produce that. The gospel produces rest in Christ, then growth. "Come unto me... and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). If your "eternal life" message cannot produce rest now, it has become "maybe life" in practice.

### **Conclusion**

Perseverance is a biblical call for believers, but it becomes a doctrinal corruption when it is treated as the proof that validates salvation. Scripture calls saints to endure, but it does not make endurance the co-savior. Salvation is a gift received at conversion, not a prize handed

out at death after a lifetime of successful continuation. “For by grace are ye saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8) is present, not postponed. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36) is a promise, not a probation.

When perseverance becomes the proof, assurance disappears in the present, because the final evidence is always in the future. Believers are trained to say they cannot truly know until the end, and Christian living becomes anxiety management rather than faith walking. That kind of system produces fear as the engine and postpones peace as if peace is dangerous. But the Holy Ghost wrote Scripture so believers may know they have eternal life (1 John 5:13), and God is not the author of confusion, but of peace (1 Corinthians 14:33).

So the verdict in this thirteenth essay is blunt. A man cannot preach “eternal life” while functionally teaching “maybe life.” He cannot preach Christ as sufficient while making endurance the validating evidence that saves. That produces a Christianity where peace is postponed, fear becomes the engine, and the believer’s eyes are trained off Christ and onto himself. And by the very rule used to judge everyone else, that system fails its own fruit test, because it does not produce grounded, settled saints resting in the record God gave; it produces trembling probationers who will not call God’s promise true until they see their own performance at the finish line.

## **14 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - The “Marks of the Saved” Industry: Creating a Checklist Christianity**

### **Introduction**

There is a strange religious industry that has grown up in the last few decades, and it thrives on one thing: turning the new birth into a diagnostic chart. It takes the glorious, finished work of Jesus Christ, and instead of letting that work be the anchor of the soul, it turns Christianity into a constant medical exam where everybody is checking symptoms. The gospel becomes less about what Christ did and more about what you can prove. And the minute “marks” and “signs” become the main message, you have built a system that can never give a sinner rest, because the very point of the system is to keep the sinner and the saint in a permanent state of self-assessment.

God did not save men so they could spend the rest of their life staring at themselves like a man staring into a mirror trying to see if he looks saved today. The Bible says, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). That peace is not supposed to be a rare luxury reserved for the “strong.” It is the legal

result of justification. But the checklist industry quietly replaces that peace with an endless audit. It teaches men to ask, “Do I have enough hatred for sin? Enough love for holiness? Enough brokenness? Enough seriousness? Enough evangelistic boldness? Enough visible fruit?” and the answer is always, “You can’t know yet,” because the checklist must remain profitable.

The fruit test here is psychological and spiritual, and it never fails. It produces pride in the “strong,” because the strong always find something to brag about, and it produces despair in the weak, because the weak always find something to condemn themselves with. It destroys the simple joy of salvation because joy requires a settled conscience, and a settled conscience requires an objective anchor. The Bible’s anchor is not your symptom list. The Bible’s anchor is Christ. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). If your preaching makes the Christian stare at his own heart more than he looks to the Savior, you are not producing saints; you are producing either Pharisees or wrecks.

### **1. When “Marks” Replace the Message, Christ Gets Crowded Out**

The first problem with the “marks of the saved” industry is that it crowds out Christ while claiming to preach Christ. It can say “Jesus” a hundred times and still functionally teach people to trust their spiritual temperature. The sinner hears Christ mentioned, but he leaves thinking about himself. He does not leave saying, Christ is sufficient. He leaves saying, I wonder if I am sufficient. That is not gospel preaching. That is religious introspection.

The New Testament centers salvation on the object of faith, not the quality of the believer’s internal life. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36). That verse does not say, he that believeth and also can demonstrate enough symptoms hath everlasting life. It says he that believeth. The moment you replace that simplicity with a symptom-based system, you have shifted the ground from Christ to the believer.

God gave a record, and the record is not your performance chart. “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 John 5:11). The record is objective. It is outside of you. It is God speaking. The marks industry teaches people to treat their inner life like the record, and then it wonders why everybody is unstable. A man cannot anchor his soul to himself and call it faith.

### **2. Collecting Symptoms Instead of Learning Scripture**

When “marks” become the center, believers stop being students of Scripture and become collectors of symptoms. They don’t ask, what did God say. They ask, what does my heart feel. They don’t ask, what is the gospel. They ask, do I feel broken enough. And the more

they collect symptoms, the more the symptoms become their religion. They live like spiritual hypochondriacs, always checking for signs of life while ignoring the life God already promised.

The Bible does tell believers to grow, to obey, to walk in the Spirit, and to bear fruit. But it never teaches that growth is the foundation of peace. The foundation is justification by faith. “To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:5). That verse destroys the checklist mentality because it tells you plainly that God justifies the ungodly, not the already-improved.

The marks industry turns the Christian life into a constant self-cross-examination where every weakness becomes evidence against salvation rather than an opportunity for sanctification. But God has categories for believers who fail. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9). That is not written to keep saints in suspense. It is written to keep saints walking in the light. If the main message becomes “prove you’re real,” confession becomes dangerous, because honesty becomes self-incrimination.

### **3. The Checklist Moves, So Assurance Dies**

A checklist is never satisfied because it is not designed to be satisfied. If you are told you need hatred for sin, how much hatred qualifies. If you are told you need love for holiness, how much love proves it. If you are told you need evangelistic boldness, how bold is bold enough. If you are told you need fruit, how much fruit meets the standard, and who measures it. The answer is always unclear, because the system needs uncertainty to survive.

That is why assurance dies under a checklist system. The evidence is always in the future, the standard is always moving, and the believer can never say, “I know.” Yet God wrote Scripture so believers can know. “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Know is God’s word. Suspense is the checklist industry’s word.

Jesus did not talk like a checklist salesman. He talked like a Savior. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24). Hath, shall not, is passed. That is settled language. If a system cannot allow settled language, it is not operating like the New Testament.

### **4. Pride in the “Strong” and Despair in the Weak**

Every checklist produces a class system. Some people become the “strong” because they are disciplined, intense, driven, and outwardly consistent. They can check boxes. They can speak the approved vocabulary. They can display the approved emotions. They become the model Christians in that culture. And if you do not think that produces pride, you have not read your Bible. “For they measuring themselves by themselves... are not wise” (2 Corinthians 10:12). Checklist religion is self-measurement with a religious accent.

The “weak” in that system are often the tender, the bruised, the traumatized, the new believers, the slow growers, and the ones fighting battles they are ashamed of. They do not look impressive. They struggle. They fail. They repent. They get back up. And instead of being treated like sheep needing care, they are treated like suspects needing proof. That crushes them. It teaches them that weakness is evidence of damnation rather than a place where grace teaches and heals.

But the New Testament’s pattern is different. The strong are commanded to carry the weak, not crush them. “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Romans 15:1). A church that turns “marks” into the main message will violate Romans 15:1 as a way of life, because it will treat weakness as unacceptable rather than as something to bear and restore.

### **5. Holiness Is Real, But “Marks” Make It a Salvation Currency**

The checklist industry pretends it is defending holiness, but what it actually does is turn holiness into a currency for assurance. Holiness becomes the proof you trade in to feel saved. That is not holiness. That is spiritual capitalism. It trains men to obey so they can feel safe, not to obey because they love Christ. But the Bible says, “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Love is supposed to be the engine, not fear.

Biblical holiness grows out of a settled relationship, not out of a threatened relationship. When a man knows he is justified and adopted, he can pursue holiness without using holiness to justify himself. “For by grace are ye saved through faith... not of works” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Then the next verse says believers are created unto good works (Ephesians 2:10). Works belong in the life. They do not belong in the verdict.

When “marks” become the main message, believers start confusing justification and sanctification. They treat sanctification as the proof that makes justification feel valid. But justification is valid because God declared it valid on the basis of Christ’s blood. “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Romans 5:9). Blood settles the case. Marks do not settle the case. Marks are the fruit that grows after the case is settled.

### **6. The Joy of Salvation Gets Replaced by Suspicious Seriousness**

The New Testament expects joy in the Christian life, not as shallow happiness, but as the fruit of peace with God. John wrote, “These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full” (1 John 1:4). Full joy does not thrive in a culture of constant suspicion. A man cannot rejoice in Christ while constantly wondering if Christ will accept him. That is not rejoicing. That is religious anxiety.

Checklist seriousness often masquerades as reverence, but it functions like a permanent gloom that treats peace as arrogance. Yet the Bible calls peace a normal Christian possession. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Romans 5:1). Peace is not spiritual pride. Peace is God’s legal declaration applied to the conscience. If a system cannot tolerate peace, it is not producing what the gospel produces.

The Holy Ghost is not the author of that suspicious gloom. “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33). When the main message becomes “marks,” confusion increases, because the believer is always trying to interpret himself. The Bible was not given to make you obsessed with yourself. It was given to make you know Christ, trust Christ, and grow in Christ. Any preaching that turns the Christian life into a perpetual identity crisis is producing fruit opposite of the Spirit of adoption, because “ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15).

## **7. The Biblical Pattern: Christ Centered, Growth Expected, Discipleship Patient**

The biblical pattern starts with a clear gospel and a clear promise. It does not start with a list of symptoms. It starts with Christ crucified and risen. “Christ died for our sins... and that he rose again the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Then it calls sinners to believe. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). That is not checklist language. That is promise language.

Then growth is expected, but growth is taught through discipleship, patience, correction, and restoration. The church is told to restore the fallen in meekness. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness” (Galatians 6:1). That verse assumes that saved men can be overtaken in faults and still be brethren. Checklist Christianity does not handle Galatians 6:1 well because it treats faults as evidence of being lost rather than as occasions for restoration.

And the believer’s focus is not supposed to be inward obsession. The focus is Christ. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). When Christ is centered, the believer can confess honestly, repent cleanly, obey gratefully, and grow steadily. When “marks” are centered, the believer either turns into a Pharisee who loves his marks or a wreck who hates himself for lacking them. Either way, the system produces extremes, because it is built on the wrong center.

## **Conclusion**

The “marks of the saved” industry produces a checklist mentality because it preaches symptoms more than it preaches the Savior. It trains believers to become collectors of proof rather than students of Scripture, constantly asking whether they have enough hatred for sin, enough love for holiness, enough brokenness, enough seriousness, enough boldness, and enough visible fruit to qualify. And because the checklist is never clearly satisfied, assurance dies in the present while peace is postponed to some imaginary future when the believer finally feels “real enough.”

The fruit test is obvious. This system produces pride in the “strong” and despair in the weak, and it often destroys the simple joy of salvation. It breeds either Pharisees or wrecks. It cannot help it, because it has moved the center from Christ to man. But the biblical pattern is not man-centered. It is Christ-centered. “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 John 5:11). A record is something you trust, not something you perform.

So the verdict in this fourteenth essay is plain. Holiness is real, but holiness is not the currency of the verdict. Fruit is real, but fruit is not the root. Marks exist, but marks are not the message. Christ is the message, and the gospel is the ground. If a system makes “marks” the main message, it will inevitably breed either Pharisees who brag or wrecks who despair, because it has replaced the peace of God with a checklist that can never save, never settle, and never satisfy.

## **15 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - The Missing Doctrine of Rewards: Confusing Loss of Fellowship with Loss of Salvation**

### **Introduction**

One of the easiest ways to wreck a church is to take the New Testament tool belt God gave pastors and throw half of it in the trash. If you ignore chastening, ignore fellowship, ignore rewards, ignore the Judgment Seat of Christ, ignore the difference between sonship and service, and ignore the difference between condemnation and correction, then you are left with one blunt instrument: “You might be lost.” That becomes the sermon’s catch-all diagnosis for everything from backsliding to depression to immaturity to a season of temptation. And when all you have is one hammer, every spiritual problem looks like a nail, so every believer gets treated like a suspect.

The Bible does not run the Christian life like that. It gives categories. It gives discipline within the family. It gives restoration. It gives consequences that are real without being damnation. It even gives the sobering truth that a believer can suffer serious loss and still be saved, and that category is not a loophole for sin; it is a protection for the gospel. The Holy Ghost said, "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Corinthians 3:15). That verse alone detonates the performance-contract mentality that treats salvation like a probationary lease.

The fruit test here is pastoral stability. When preachers collapse every warning into "you might be lost," they erase the biblical tools God gave for correction within sonship. They replace fatherly chastening with courtroom suspicion. They replace restoration with interrogation. They replace the joy of salvation with perpetual anxiety. And that is not only exhausting, it is unbiblical and spiritually abusive, because "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace" (1 Corinthians 14:33), and the Spirit of adoption does not produce a religion of permanent fear (Romans 8:15).

### **1. Rightly Dividing Sonship, Fellowship, and Service**

If you cannot tell the difference between a son and a servant, you will preach like a tyrant. A son's standing is settled by birth. A servant's reward is measured by service. The New Testament teaches both, and it keeps them distinct. A believer is adopted into God's family by faith in Christ. "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15). That is family language. That is not contract language.

Fellowship is the enjoyment of the relationship, not the existence of the relationship. A child can break fellowship with his father without ceasing to be his child. That is why John tells believers how to walk in the light and maintain fellowship. "If we walk in the light... we have fellowship one with another" (1 John 1:7). And when fellowship is broken by sin, the remedy is confession, not re-salvation. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9). That is written to family members, not to strangers.

Service is where rewards enter. The believer serves out of gratitude and love, and God measures that service for reward. When a preacher erases rewards, he is forced to make salvation do the work rewards were designed to do. So every exhortation becomes a salvation question, every warning becomes a damnation threat, and every correction becomes "prove you're saved." That is bad theology and cruel pastoring.

### **2. The Bible Has a Category for Believers Who Fail Without Being Lost**

The New Testament is not naive about believers failing. It does not pretend every saved person will be steady and impressive at all times. It gives instructions for believers overtaken in faults. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual,

restore such an one in the spirit of meekness” (Galatians 6:1). That verse assumes the man is a brother. It assumes he is saved. It assumes he failed. And it commands restoration, not re-condemnation.

The Bible also gives the doctrine of chastening, not as proof of possible damnation, but as evidence of sonship. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6). Chastening is family correction. It is not courtroom condemnation. If you preach chastening as though God is threatening to revoke salvation, you have turned a comfort into a terror and a father into an inspector.

And the Bible gives the warning passages their proper place: they are real, they are sharp, and they are necessary, but they are not all salvation threats. Many warnings deal with fellowship, testimony, discipline, and reward. When a preacher refuses those categories, he will interpret every warning as “you might be lost,” and he will train the whole church to do the same. That produces spiritual paranoia, not spiritual maturity.

### **3. The Doctrine of Rewards Protects the Gospel From Becoming a Contract**

If you remove rewards, you have to make salvation do what rewards were designed to do, and that turns salvation into a performance-based contract. But Scripture gives rewards precisely so you can motivate obedience without corrupting grace. The believer is saved by grace, then rewarded for service. “For by grace are ye saved through faith... not of works” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Then the believer is created unto good works (Ephesians 2:10). Works follow salvation; they do not purchase it.

The Judgment Seat of Christ is where the believer’s works are evaluated for reward, not where his salvation is put on trial. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10). That is written to believers. And the evaluation is about “the things done in his body,” not about whether Christ’s blood was sufficient. If you ignore this doctrine, you will treat the Christian life like one long anxiety test where the believer is trying to prove he is real instead of trying to serve Christ with a free conscience.

The clearest protection verse is 1 Corinthians 3, where the Spirit tells you that a believer can suffer loss and still be saved. “If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:15). That verse does not excuse sin; it warns about wasted life and burned work. But it also safeguards the gospel by telling you the man’s salvation is not identical to his service record.

### **4. Loss of Fellowship Is Real, and So Is Loss of Joy**

When a believer sins, there are consequences, and they are not imaginary. Fellowship can be broken. Joy can be lost. David, a saved man, prayed, “Restore unto me the joy of thy

salvation” (Psalm 51:12). He did not pray, “Give me salvation again,” because salvation is God’s gift. He prayed for restored joy, because joy can be stolen by sin.

A preacher who lacks the doctrine of rewards and fellowship will not know how to pastor this. He will see a believer who has lost joy, lost spiritual appetite, lost boldness, lost testimony, and instead of applying biblical restoration and chastening categories, he will say, you might not be saved. That is like diagnosing every sickness as death. It is theological incompetence dressed up as discernment.

The New Testament expects believers to walk with God in light and to keep short accounts. “If we walk in the light... the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). It also expects that when believers fail, they can be corrected and restored without making the whole Christian life a constant salvation audit. If the only category a preacher has is “lost,” then he cannot shepherd; he can only interrogate.

### **5. The Difference Between Condemnation and Correction**

Condemnation is a legal verdict. Correction is family discipline. The Bible says plainly, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). That does not mean there is no correction. It means the condemnation issue has been settled at Calvary. The believer is not living under a death sentence; he is living under a Father’s discipline.

Hebrews 12 teaches that discipline proves sonship. It says if you are without chastisement, you are bastards and not sons (Hebrews 12:8). That is not a threat to saved people; it is a statement about the Father’s dealings with His children. The Lord corrects those He loves. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6). If you preach that as though chastening means “maybe you’re not saved,” you have confused the entire chapter.

This confusion is what creates spiritual abuse. The preacher uses texts meant to stabilize sons and uses them to terrorize sons. He turns fatherly correction into courtroom suspicion. He teaches believers to interpret every hardship as a sign of possible damnation. That is not how the Spirit of adoption operates. “Ye have received the Spirit of adoption” (Romans 8:15). Adoption produces love and trust, not perpetual dread.

### **6. When All Warnings Become “You Might Be Lost,” Spiritual Growth Gets Crushed**

Warnings are in the Bible because believers need them, but the warnings function like guardrails, not like trapdoors. They keep the saint from wrecking his life. They warn him about consequences. They warn him about false doctrine. They warn him about the flesh. But if you interpret every warning as “you might be lost,” you create a culture where every stumble becomes a salvation crisis. That crushes growth.

Growth requires security. A believer who knows he is a son can confess, repent, and get restored without bargaining for acceptance. A believer who thinks his acceptance depends on his performance will either despair or perform. He will either quit or fake it. That is why suspicion-driven preaching produces hidden sin. People learn that honesty gets them labeled, so they hide their struggles and polish their image.

The Bible's pastoral tools are designed to produce honest confession and steady growth. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us" (1 John 1:9). "Restore such an one" (Galatians 6:1). "Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly" (2 Thessalonians 3:6) is even there as a corrective measure, and notice it says brother. Brother means saved. The Bible can correct saved people without erasing their salvation. A preacher who cannot do that is not rightly dividing.

### **7. The One-Hammer Ministry and Its Measurable Fruit**

When the doctrine of rewards is ignored, the preacher has only one hammer, and every spiritual problem becomes "prove you're saved." A believer struggles with lust, and instead of biblical counsel, accountability, chastening categories, and restoration, he is told his struggle proves he is probably lost. A believer falls into depression, and instead of comfort, instruction, and help, he is treated like a suspect. A believer has a season of dryness, and instead of being fed, he is interrogated. That is not shepherding. That is spiritual policing.

The fruit is measurable. Assurance disappears. Peace gets postponed. Joy gets treated like presumption. Fear becomes the engine. People become actors. Hypocrites thrive because they can perform the outward marks. Tender believers suffer because they are honest. Churches become courtrooms, not hospitals. And the whole time, the gospel gets blurred because salvation is treated like a contract that must be continually validated by performance.

But the New Testament does not preach "maybe life." It preaches eternal life. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). And it says believers can suffer loss and still be saved (1 Corinthians 3:15). That is not hyper-grace. That is Bible. It protects the gospel from being turned into a performance contract while still warning believers that disobedience costs fellowship, joy, testimony, and reward. It is the exact balance that the one-hammer ministry cannot achieve because it refuses to keep Bible categories distinct.

### **Conclusion**

The doctrine of rewards is not a side topic for nerds; it is one of God's guardrails for keeping the gospel pure while still calling believers to holy living. When growth, chastening, reward, and judgment are not rightly divided, serious failure gets treated as evidence of damnation instead of being treated as a matter of discipline, loss of joy, loss of testimony, and loss of

reward. Scripture plainly speaks of believers suffering loss while still being saved (1 Corinthians 3:15), and that category protects the gospel from becoming a performance-based contract.

The fruit test is pastoral stability. When preachers collapse every warning into “you might be lost,” they erase the biblical tools God gave for correction within sonship. They replace fatherly chastening with courtroom suspicion, and they replace restoration with interrogation. That creates a church culture of anxiety management instead of faith walking, where believers are exhausted, confused, and terrified of honesty because honesty gets them condemned.

So the verdict in this fifteenth essay is straightforward. Ignoring rewards does not make a ministry more holy; it makes a ministry more abusive, because it forces salvation to carry the weight of every exhortation and every warning. It turns the Christian life into an endless attempt to prove the new birth instead of a grateful life of service flowing from a settled conscience. The Bible gives better tools. It gives adoption, fellowship, confession, chastening, restoration, and rewards. And when those tools are used, believers can be corrected without being condemned, warned without being terrorized, and exhorted without having the gospel turned into a checklist contract that Christ never wrote.

## **16 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - The Pride of “Discernment”: When Harshness Becomes a Spiritual Badge**

### **Introduction**

There is a kind of religious pride that never shows up wearing a crown. It shows up wearing a scowl. It shows up quoting verses with a sneer. It shows up calling everyone else “deceived” while congratulating itself for being “awake.” And the most dangerous thing about it is that it can grow in church circles while everyone applauds it as holiness. In that environment, harshness becomes a spiritual badge. Suspicion becomes a virtue. Cynicism becomes “discernment.” And the whole thing becomes a counterfeit spirituality that feeds the flesh while pretending to defend the faith.

Real discernment is biblical. The Bible commands it. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). It warns of false teachers, wolves, and seducers. It tells you not to be naive, not to be gullible, and not to tolerate heresy. It even says plainly, “He that is spiritual judgeth all things” (1 Corinthians 2:15). But the same Bible

that commands discernment also exposes the flesh's ability to hijack discernment and turn it into arrogance, because the flesh loves nothing more than feeling superior.

The fruit test here is relational and it never lies. Does this kind of teaching produce humility, patience, careful doctrine, and shepherding love, or does it produce spiritual snipers who assume the worst about others and feel righteous for doing so. Jesus said, "A tree is known by his fruit" (Matthew 12:33). If the fruit is a culture of accusation and superiority, then something in the root system is corrupted. And if a public ministry exports that culture, it cannot escape the same test it loves to apply to everyone else.

### **1. Discernment Without Humility Becomes a Weapon of the Flesh**

Discernment is meant to protect the flock, not inflate the ego. The moment a man's "discernment" makes him feel important, he is in trouble. The flesh loves to be the expert. The flesh loves to be the one who sees what others don't see. And once that feeling takes hold, the person is no longer seeking truth to help people; he is seeking faults to confirm his superiority. "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth" (1 Corinthians 8:1). A puffed-up discerner is not a protector; he is a vandal.

The Bible's judges are commanded to judge righteously, not theatrically. "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Righteous judgment is anchored to what God actually said, with evidence and clarity, not with guesses about motives and hearts. The counterfeit version uses Bible words to justify assuming the worst. It calls suspicion "wisdom" and calls mercy "compromise." That is not righteousness. That is flesh.

And the Bible warns that even when you are dealing with someone overtaken in sin, the spiritual response is restoration, not swagger. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). If your discernment never produces meekness, then it isn't spiritual discernment. It is a personality trait pretending to be a gift.

### **2. The Fear-Based Culture That Feeds the Harsh Spirit**

Fear-based ministry culture trains people to look for threats everywhere, and after a while they start needing threats to feel spiritual. They become addicted to suspicion. They feel "safe" only when they are accusing somebody. They think peace is presumption. They think joy is shallowness. They treat kindness like weakness. And they begin to wear harshness like holiness because harshness feels like strength.

But God did not give believers fear as their operating system. "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). The sound

mind is stable. It is grounded in Scripture. It is not easily manipulated. When fear becomes the engine, the mind becomes unstable, and unstable people are easy to steer with accusations.

A fear-based culture also changes how people speak about other believers. Instead of giving the benefit of the doubt where Scripture allows, they automatically assume deception. Instead of addressing doctrine carefully, they throw labels. Instead of dealing with individuals responsibly, they speak in broad condemnations. That is not biblical discernment; that is spiritual mob behavior with Bible vocabulary.

### **3. How Harshness Becomes a Badge Instead of a Sin**

Harshness is easy to confuse with righteousness because harshness looks decisive. It looks brave. It feels like a man “isn’t afraid.” But the Bible never taught that cruelty is courage. The Bible never taught that arrogance is boldness. The Bible says, “The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves” (2 Timothy 2:24-25). If a man’s ministry produces strife as a lifestyle, he is disobeying a direct pastoral command.

Harshness becomes a badge when people start believing that cutting others down proves they are spiritually sharp. They equate sarcasm with discernment and contempt with purity. They learn to speak like prosecutors instead of shepherds. They begin to enjoy being the one who “calls people out,” because it gives them social power in the group. That is the flesh. That is not the Holy Ghost.

The Bible exposes this spirit as a form of pride. “Only by pride cometh contention” (Proverbs 13:10). When a ministry’s atmosphere is constant contention, constant suspicion, constant accusation, it is not because the Spirit is “moving.” It is because pride is feeding itself. The Bible does not glorify that. It condemns it.

### **4. Real Discernment Stays Close to Scripture and Clear Categories**

Real discernment is not vague. It is precise. It does not rely on vibes, tone, or impressions. It relies on what God said. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). A discerning believer can show you chapter and verse. He can make distinctions. He can separate doctrine from personality, error from immaturity, rebellion from weakness.

Real discernment also keeps Bible categories intact. It knows the difference between a lost man and a carnal brother. It knows the difference between chastening and condemnation. It knows the difference between fellowship issues and salvation issues. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). If a believer sins,

that sin breaks fellowship, damages testimony, invites chastening, and can cost reward, but it does not automatically erase sonship. A man who cannot make these distinctions will preach suspicion as though it is discernment.

And real discernment does not need to be dramatic to be effective. Truth is sharp enough on its own. “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). A preacher who constantly relies on harshness to create impact is confessing that he does not trust the sword to do its work. He is adding theatrics to compensate for a lack of clarity.

### **5. Counterfeit Discernment Is Often Just Arrogance With Bible Words**

Counterfeit discernment loves labels more than labor. It loves the rush of being “right” more than the responsibility of teaching. It loves the feeling of superiority more than the burden of souls. It will condemn a man quickly, but it will not do the hard work of instructing, restoring, and building. It is quick to say “false,” but slow to handle Scripture carefully.

The Bible warns about this kind of tongue. “Speak not evil one of another, brethren” (James 4:11). That does not mean you cannot expose false doctrine. It means you cannot live on slander and accusation as though it is your spiritual diet. James goes further and warns about playing God with judgment. “There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?” (James 4:12). If a man’s discernment has turned into constant evil speaking, constant assumption, constant superiority, he has wandered into sin and called it a gift.

Counterfeit discernment also tends to be selective. It will be ferocious toward the weak and flattering toward the strong. It will be harsh toward strangers and soft toward allies. It will overlook contradictions in its own camp while magnifying minor issues in others. That is not biblical consistency. That is tribal pride. And tribal pride is flesh religion.

### **6. The Relational Fruit: Spiritual Snipers and the Death of Charity**

When harshness becomes a badge, relationships in the church rot. People stop correcting one another with care and start shooting one another with suspicion. They become spiritual snipers. They aim for the worst interpretation. They stalk for mistakes. They treat questions as threats. They treat struggles as proof of hypocrisy. And because nobody wants to be the next target, everybody starts performing.

But charity is supposed to govern the body. “Charity suffereth long, and is kind... is not puffed up... thinketh no evil” (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). Charity does not mean tolerance of heresy. It means a disposition that is patient, careful, and not eager to assume the worst.

When a ministry produces a culture where people “think evil” first, that ministry is producing fruit opposite of charity.

This is why the fruit test matters. If the output is suspicion, superiority, and accusation, then whatever the input claims to be, the output proves the root. Jesus did not say, “A tree is known by its intentions.” He said, “A tree is known by his fruit” (Matthew 12:33). If the fruit is relational poison, something is wrong in the doctrine-and-method mixture feeding the tree.

And the practical damage is severe. Weak believers hide. Honest believers shut down. New believers get confused. Struggling believers despair. Hypocrites flourish because they know how to talk. The church becomes a courtroom instead of a hospital. That is not the New Testament pattern. The New Testament pattern is restoration, edification, and truth spoken with spiritual care.

### **7. Turning the Test Back: A Ministry Must Own Its Exported Culture**

If a man’s public influence trains people to be harsh and proud, he cannot dodge responsibility by saying he never told them to be proud. Fruit does not require explicit permission to grow. It grows from what is repeatedly emphasized, modeled, and rewarded. If the crowd learns that harshness gets applause, harshness will multiply. If the crowd learns that accusation is “discernment,” accusation will become a spiritual badge.

This is where the “fruit test” turns back on the fruit tester. If the method produces a culture of accusation and superiority, then the method is corrupted. “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged” (Matthew 7:2). If a preacher measures everyone else with suspicion and harshness, then Scripture will measure his method by the same standard. The question is not whether he uses Bible words. The question is whether the Spirit’s fruit is showing up.

The Spirit’s fruit is not a culture of spiritual snipers. The Spirit’s fruit includes meekness and temperance (Galatians 5:23). The Spirit’s fruit includes peace (Galatians 5:22). If the exported culture is constant suspicion and strife, it is not the Spirit’s signature. It is the flesh wearing a clerical collar.

### **Conclusion**

Real discernment is necessary, biblical, and commanded. It is grounded in Scripture, marked by clarity, and governed by righteousness and charity. It judges doctrine by the word of God, it separates from false teaching, and it protects the flock. But counterfeit discernment is often just arrogance with Bible words, and it produces a predictable

personality fruit: harshness worn like holiness, suspicion worn like wisdom, and superiority worn like spiritual maturity.

The fruit test is relational and it tells the truth when people lie. If the teaching produces humility, patience, careful doctrine, restoration, and edification, then it is acting like New Testament discernment. If it produces spiritual snipers who assume the worst, enjoy accusation, and feel righteous for contempt, then something is wrong in the root system. “A tree is known by his fruit” (Matthew 12:33) is not poetry; it is a law.

So this sixteenth essay delivers a hard but fair verdict. When harshness becomes a spiritual badge, discernment has been hijacked by pride. And when a public ministry exports a culture of accusation and superiority, it cannot hide behind its claims of holiness, because the fruit is speaking. The Holy Ghost never needed arrogance to defend truth. He gave the church a sword, not a swagger. He gave pastors a command to be gentle and apt to teach (2 Timothy 2:24). And any “discernment” that ignores those commands is not discernment at all. It is pride wearing Bible words and demanding applause.

## **17 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - The Neglect of Simplicity: Complicating What God Made Plain**

### **Introduction**

One of the easiest ways to spot a counterfeit gospel is not by how much Bible it quotes, but by how much fog it manufactures. God does not need fog. The Devil does. The Lord makes the way of salvation plain because sinners are not philosophers; they are condemned criminals who need a pardon. The New Testament does not treat the gospel like a graduate-level puzzle. It treats it like good news that must be announced clearly so a child can understand it, a dying man can grasp it, and a guilty conscience can rest in it. When a preacher turns that plainness into a maze, he is not deep. He is dangerous.

The Bible’s language is simple on purpose. It says believe. It says receive. It says call. It says trust. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God” (John 1:12). “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart... thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9). That is not ambiguity. That is clarity. The gospel is offensive precisely because it is simple and humbling, because it tells a proud sinner he cannot contribute anything but his need.

But certain preaching styles treat simplicity as shallow, and they treat clarity as suspicious. They constantly introduce extra layers of introspection and qualification, as if the door is too open and the danger is that sinners might actually believe God too easily. The fruit test here is clarity. Do people walk away able to articulate the gospel in a straightforward sentence, or do they walk away describing a fog of self-examination, “realness,” and uncertainty. Because when simplicity is despised, you are already halfway to another gospel, and “another gospel” is not an upgrade; it is a curse (Galatians 1:6-9).

### **1. God’s Plain Way Versus Man’s Complicated Way**

God’s way is plain because God knows sinners. Sinners will hide behind complexity if you let them. They will use theological puzzles to avoid the simple act of faith. That is why Scripture keeps coming back to plain statements and plain invitations. “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13). Not might be saved. Shall be saved. That is God speaking.

Man’s religion is always complicated because it always needs room for pride. Pride cannot stand a simple gift. Pride demands a role. Pride demands a contribution. Pride demands a measuring stick. So man’s systems surround the gospel with conditions, categories, and secret thresholds. They say, yes, believe, but only if your believing has the right emotional quality, the right depth, the right kind of repentance, the right kind of surrender, the right kind of seriousness. That turns faith into a performance and turns grace into a wage.

The New Testament does not talk like that. It says, “To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:5). That verse is the death of complicated religion. It tells you God justifies the ungodly by faith without works. Any system that cannot leave Romans 4:5 alone has already decided it wants something besides grace.

### **2. The New Testament’s Simple Verbs: Believe, Receive, Call, Trust**

Look at how God speaks when He is offering salvation. He does not say, analyze yourself until you find proof. He does not say, perform enough inward sorrow until you qualify. He says, believe. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36). He says, receive. “As many as received him” (John 1:12). He says, come. “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). He says, call. “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13). Those are simple verbs because salvation is not a laboratory experiment; it is a rescue.

The simplicity is not a weakness. It is a feature of grace. Grace humiliates the flesh by removing the flesh’s contribution. That is why Paul said, “For by grace are ye saved through faith... not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). The system that

complicates salvation always reintroduces boasting somewhere. It might not call it boasting, but it becomes boasting in “depth,” boasting in “brokenness,” boasting in “sincerity,” boasting in “marks,” boasting in “perseverance.” It creates a spiritual class system.

God’s simplicity also protects weak sinners. A dying thief on a cross did not have time for a checklist. He needed a Savior. “Lord, remember me” (Luke 23:42), and Jesus answered with certainty, not suspense. “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). That is how God speaks when God saves. If a preaching style cannot speak like Christ spoke to the thief, it is not apostolic clarity; it is religious fog.

### **3. How Introspection Becomes an Extra Layer of “Qualification”**

Introspection has its place in the Christian life, but it is not the gatekeeper of assurance. When preachers constantly introduce inner qualifications—“real repentance,” “real brokenness,” “real surrender,” “real seriousness”—they train sinners to look inward for permission to believe. And the moment a sinner is looking inward for permission, he is no longer looking to Christ for salvation. He is trying to find a state of mind that qualifies him. That is salvation by self-diagnosis.

The Bible does tell believers to examine certain things in specific contexts, but it never turns self-inspection into the currency of Christianity. The gospel call is not, examine yourself until you feel safe. The gospel call is, believe God’s record. “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself” (1 John 5:10). The witness follows faith; it does not authorize faith. If you reverse that order, you have turned faith into the reward of an experience instead of the response to a promise.

And this is why complicated systems produce endless seekers. The seeker is told, come, but he is never given a door he can actually walk through, because he is told he cannot know he came rightly until he sees enough evidence later. So he keeps circling the door, collecting feelings, collecting fears, collecting crisis moments, and he never rests. But Christ said, “Come unto me... and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). If your method cannot produce rest in Christ, it has not delivered Christ’s invitation; it has delivered a maze.

### **4. Clarity Versus Fog: The Evangelistic Fruit Test**

Here is the simplest test any honest man can apply. After hearing the preaching, can a person articulate the gospel in one clear sentence, or can he only describe a fog. The apostolic gospel can be stated plainly: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again, and God saves the sinner who believes on Him (1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Acts 16:31). That is

not reductionism. That is Scripture. Paul called that message “the gospel” and he said it saves (1 Corinthians 15:1-2).

If the preaching produces fog, people talk like this: “Well, I’m seeking. I’m trying. I’m not sure if I’m real. I’m waiting to see if I have the right repentance. I’m afraid my faith is counterfeit. I’m afraid my assurance is presumption.” That is not what the New Testament produces when the gospel is preached clearly. The Bible says, “These things have I written unto you that believe... that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Know is clarity. Fog is confusion. And “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Clarity does not mean cheap grace. Clarity means the gospel is not mixed with discipleship requirements and not clouded with psychological hurdles. The moment a preacher makes the gospel harder to state than the Bible makes it, he is not protecting the gospel. He is altering it. And the moment the gospel is altered, it is no longer the apostolic message; it is a counterfeit with biblical perfume.

### **5. When Simplicity Is Mocked as Shallow, Pride Is Already Running the Room**

Religious pride despises simplicity because simplicity offers no place for religious ego to hide. If a man is saved by believing on Christ, then the man has nothing to boast about. He cannot boast in his repentance. He cannot boast in his surrender. He cannot boast in his seriousness. He cannot boast in his moral reform. He can only boast in the Lord. “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:31). That is humiliating to the flesh.

So pride responds by calling simplicity “shallow.” It calls clarity “dangerous.” It calls assurance “presumption.” It calls peace “arrogance.” It calls joy “emotionalism.” Then it replaces these with seriousness, intensity, and suspicion, because suspicion gives pride a role. Suspicion lets a man feel spiritually superior while he is actually disobeying the Spirit of adoption. “Ye have received the Spirit of adoption” (Romans 8:15). Adoption produces sonship, not permanent suspicion.

Paul warned about exactly this kind of corruption. He said he feared “lest... as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3). Notice what the serpent attacked: simplicity. Subtlety corrupts simplicity. The Devil does not need to deny Christ outright; he just needs to complicate Christ until the sinner can no longer rest in Him.

### **6. Another Gospel Often Starts as “The Same Gospel, But Deeper”**

False systems rarely announce themselves as false. They announce themselves as “more serious,” “more thorough,” “more careful,” “more discerning,” “more biblical.” They say, yes,

salvation is by grace, but you must define grace the way we define it, and you must define faith the way we define it, and you must define repentance the way we define it, and you must define assurance the way we define it, and when you get done, the sinner is no longer trusting Christ; he is trusting the system's definitions and his own ability to measure up to them.

Paul said that when you add to the gospel, you ruin it. "I marvel that ye are so soon removed... unto another gospel" (Galatians 1:6). Another gospel is not always a different Jesus by name; it is often a different Jesus by function. It is Christ plus something. Christ plus proof. Christ plus endurance. Christ plus performance. Christ plus "realness." And once the plus sign shows up, you have moved away from grace.

The Bible's gospel is not "Christ will save you if you can prove you are real." The Bible's gospel is "Christ saves the sinner who believes." "But to him that worketh not, but believeth" (Romans 4:5). "He that believeth... hath everlasting life" (John 6:47). Those verses are not shallow. They are the power of God. The preacher who cannot preach them plainly without hedging has already begun to drift.

### **7. The Offense of Simplicity: Why the Gospel Humiliates the Flesh**

The gospel is offensive to religious flesh because it tells the flesh to sit down. It tells the flesh it cannot contribute. It tells the flesh it cannot earn. It tells the flesh it cannot brag. That is why the gospel is simple. It is simple because it is humbling. A child can believe it. A scholar can stumble over it. A drunk can receive it. A moral man can hate it. Because it does not flatter anyone.

This is why complicated systems love to create a "quality of faith" doctrine. They say, it's not enough to believe; you must believe the right way, with the right quality, with the right degree, with the right depth. That turns the sinner back into a performer. It takes the offense away from the flesh because it gives the flesh a part to play. But the Bible says, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). Mercy does not negotiate with pride.

The New Testament keeps bringing the sinner back to the Person, not the performance. "He that hath the Son hath life" (1 John 5:12). Life is in the Son, not in your spiritual resume. And if a preaching style cannot keep the sinner's eyes on the Son, if it constantly turns the sinner inward to analyze himself, then it has shifted from gospel preaching to psychological religion. It has replaced the simplicity in Christ with subtlety, and subtlety is the serpent's native language.

### **Conclusion**

God makes the way of salvation plain, while false systems complicate it, surround it with conditions, and cloud it with ambiguity. The New Testament uses simple language about believing, receiving, coming, calling, and trusting, because salvation is a gift that must be received, not a puzzle that must be solved. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31) is not shallow; it is Scripture. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36) is not dangerous; it is God’s record.

The fruit test is clarity, and clarity tells on every system. If people walk away able to state the gospel plainly—Christ died for our sins and rose again, and God saves the sinner who believes—then the preaching has done what apostolic preaching does (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). If people walk away describing fog, self-examination, “realness,” and uncertainty, then the preaching has introduced layers God did not introduce. And when simplicity is treated as shallow, you are already halfway to another gospel, because Paul warned that minds can be corrupted “from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

So this seventeenth essay closes its case with a blunt conclusion. The true gospel is offensive precisely because it is simple and humbling. It leaves man nothing to brag about. It forces the sinner to come empty-handed. Any system that cannot tolerate that simplicity will inevitably build a maze so the flesh can feel involved. And the moment the maze is built, the sinner is no longer being pointed to Christ as sufficient; he is being pointed to himself as a project. That is not the Spirit’s work. That is subtlety. And subtlety is the serpent’s signature.

## **18 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - Public Persona vs. Pastoral Spirit: The Difference Between Boldness and Bullying**

### **Introduction**

A man can build a public ministry the same way a comedian builds a set: he learns what gets the biggest reaction and he leans into it until the reaction becomes the product. In the preaching world, that product is often sharpness, severity, and the kind of viral intensity that makes a crowd gasp and a clip spread. And if a man is not careful, that public persona becomes a brand, and the brand becomes the master, and the Spirit of God gets pushed to the side because the brand is paying the bills. Then the preacher no longer asks, “Is this faithful to Scripture,” he asks, “Will this hit hard.” That is where a public persona can begin to distort pastoral priorities.

The Holy Spirit produces firmness, yes, but it is a firmness that carries balance, clarity, and shepherding care. It is not contempt. It is not domination. It is not impatience disguised as zeal. Paul said, “Preach the word... reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2). Notice the balance. Reprove and rebuke are there. But so is exhort. And so is longsuffering. And so is doctrine. The Spirit’s firmness has a spine, but it also has a heart.

The fruit test here is spiritual tone over time. Does the ministry produce stable believers who grow in grace, or does it produce followers who either idolize harshness or break under it. Because bullying dressed as boldness is still bullying, and spiritual authority is measured by fidelity to Scripture and genuine shepherding, not by how hard the preacher can hit the crowd. A tree is known by its fruit, not by its volume.

### **1. The Marketplace of Public Preaching and the Temptation of the Brand**

Public preaching has a marketplace, whether people admit it or not. A certain style sells. A certain tone spreads. A certain severity gets shared. And once a man learns what gets clipped, he is tempted to preach to the camera instead of to the conscience. He is tempted to craft moments, not shepherd souls. He becomes a manufacturer of intensity.

But the Bible never instructed pastors to become performers. It instructed them to become stewards. “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). Faithful means measured by the Book, not by the crowd’s reaction. A man may be bold and still be faithful, but if he is bold for the sake of a reaction, he is no longer a steward; he is a salesman.

That is why public persona is dangerous. Persona is what you do on stage. Pastoral spirit is what you do when nobody is clapping. Persona can be engineered. Pastoral spirit is revealed. When a man’s “boldness” only shows up in public and disappears in private shepherding, you are watching a brand, not a pastor.

### **2. The Bible’s Boldness: Firmness With Balance and Longsuffering**

Biblical boldness is not tantrums with verses. It is firmness anchored to truth, delivered with a conscience that fears God more than men. The apostles could speak sharply when necessary, but they did not make sharpness their identity. Paul said, “We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children” (1 Thessalonians 2:7). That is not a weak man talking. That is a spiritual man describing the tone of genuine ministry.

A real pastor can rebuke. He must. Paul told Titus to “rebuke them sharply” in certain contexts (Titus 1:13). But even that sharpness is not a permanent personality. It is a tool used when needed, not a brand to be worn. The same New Testament that gives rebuke

also commands tenderness. “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient” (2 Timothy 2:24). Gentle is not optional. Patient is not optional. Apt to teach is not optional. A man who ignores those and calls it “boldness” is not obeying Scripture.

And the command in 2 Timothy 4:2 is the key balance: “reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” Longsuffering is how you treat weak sheep. Doctrine is how you keep rebuke from becoming personal contempt. Without longsuffering, rebuke becomes cruelty. Without doctrine, rebuke becomes emotional bullying.

### **3. The Flesh Can Mimic Firmness With Contempt and Domination**

The flesh can imitate almost anything spiritual. It can imitate zeal. It can imitate seriousness. It can imitate conviction. And it can imitate firmness. But when the flesh imitates firmness, it adds contempt. It adds impatience. It adds domination. It wants to control the room. It wants the crowd to feel small so the preacher can feel big.

That is why bullying can hide behind “prophetic boldness.” The bully loves the language of righteousness because righteousness gives him cover. He can insult and call it discernment. He can dominate and call it authority. He can demean and call it holiness. But the Bible exposes that spirit. “Only by pride cometh contention” (Proverbs 13:10). Contention is the bully’s atmosphere. Pride is the bully’s fuel.

And the Bible warns pastors not to lead with domination. Peter told elders not to be “lords over God’s heritage” (1 Peter 5:3). That is a direct strike against bullying. A pastor is not called to be a spiritual overlord who crushes the sheep with his personality. He is called to feed the flock, guide the flock, protect the flock, and correct the flock with Scripture, not with intimidation.

### **4. Boldness Speaks to Sin and Error; Bullying Targets People**

Biblical boldness is aimed at truth and error. It speaks to sin as sin. It exposes false doctrine as false doctrine. It warns the flock about wolves. It does not need to humiliate people to make a point. It does not need to build its power by crushing. It aims to heal the flock, not to entertain the crowd.

Bullying, on the other hand, targets people. It personalizes everything. It turns sermons into public prosecutions. It makes an example out of the weak. It uses fear as leverage. And it creates an atmosphere where the sheep feel that honesty is dangerous. But biblical preaching produces confession because grace provides safety. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9). A culture of bullying produces concealment, because fear punishes transparency.

Jesus is the perfect example of boldness without bullying. He could smash hypocrites when necessary, but He could also carry bruised reeds without breaking them. He did not confuse the two. The bully confuses them because the bully only has one mode: domination. The Holy Ghost has discernment.

### **5. The Tone Over Time: What the Ministry Reproduces in Followers**

The best way to judge a public persona is not one sermon clip; it is what that persona reproduces in followers over time. If the tone produces stable believers who grow in grace, who love the Book, who can articulate the gospel clearly, who confess sin honestly, who restore the fallen meekly, that is a good sign. “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18) is the Spirit’s trajectory.

But if the tone produces followers who idolize harshness, who treat cruelty as courage, who become spiritual snipers, who police each other’s vocabulary, who assume the worst, who equate fear with holiness, then the ministry is exporting a spirit, not just doctrine. Jesus said, “A tree is known by his fruit” (Matthew 12:33). If the fruit is a culture of accusation and superiority, then the root system has a problem.

And if the tone produces people who break under it—people who live in constant dread, people who cannot rest in Christ’s promise, people who are always re-checking whether they are “real,” people who are afraid to say “I know” even though God said believers can know (1 John 5:13)—then the tone is not shepherding. It is crushing. The Shepherd leads. The bully drives.

### **6. Spiritual Authority Is Measured by Fidelity to Scripture, Not by Crowd Impact**

Crowd impact is cheap. Any entertainer can move a crowd. Any politician can move a crowd. Any demagogue can move a crowd. Emotional force is not spiritual authority. The Holy Ghost measures authority by fidelity to Scripture. “To the law and to the testimony” (Isaiah 8:20) is the standard. Not to the volume and to the tears.

Paul described his own ministry with fear and trembling, not in the sense of cowardice, but in the sense of dependence on God rather than performance. He said his preaching was not “with enticing words of man’s wisdom” but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (1 Corinthians 2:4). The Spirit’s power does not require bullying. The Spirit’s power requires truth.

And Scripture lays a direct command on the minister’s temperament: “The servant of the Lord must not strive” (2 Timothy 2:24). Must not. That is not a suggestion. A man who makes striving, fighting, and public domination his calling card is violating the command

while claiming to defend the Book. The Bible does not need a bully to defend it. It needs a faithful steward.

## **7. The “Hard-Hitting” Addiction and the Loss of Pastoral Priorities**

A preacher can become addicted to hitting hard because hitting hard feels like doing something. It feels effective. It feels powerful. It creates immediate reactions. But pastors are not called to chase reactions; they are called to build disciples. Pastoral priorities involve feeding the flock, grounding them in doctrine, restoring the fallen, and teaching them how to walk with God in daily faith. That kind of work is slow. It is patient. It is longsuffering. It does not make for viral clips.

So the hard-hitting persona starts to crowd out the slow shepherding work. The preacher begins to prefer shock to clarity, severity to instruction, condemnation to discipleship, suspicion to stability. And the people learn the same preference. They become addicted to the hit. They confuse the punch with the power. They confuse emotional impact with spiritual growth.

But the New Testament’s goal is not to keep believers perpetually rattled; it is to ground them. “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro” (Ephesians 4:14). A ministry that keeps people permanently tossed is not maturing them. It is controlling them. And control is the bully’s tool, not the shepherd’s tool.

## **Conclusion**

A public preaching persona can become a brand, and a brand will reward sharpness, severity, and viral intensity because those things spread. But the Holy Ghost does not measure ministry by how hard it hits the crowd. He measures it by faithfulness to Scripture and by shepherding fruit over time. Biblical firmness has balance, longsuffering, doctrine, and real care for souls (2 Timothy 4:2). It can reprove and rebuke, but it can also exhort, restore, and cherish (1 Thessalonians 2:7; Galatians 6:1).

The flesh can mimic firmness with contempt, impatience, and domination. That counterfeit spirit will produce followers who idolize harshness, wear suspicion like holiness, and become spiritual snipers. It will also produce casualties—believers who break under fear-based pressure, who cannot rest in Christ’s promise, and who live in a fog of “realness” tests rather than in the peace of justification (Romans 5:1; 1 John 5:13). A tree is known by its fruit (Matthew 12:33), and fruit is the honest witness a brand cannot edit.

So the verdict in this eighteenth essay is blunt. Bullying dressed as boldness is still bullying. And spiritual authority is not measured by how severe a preacher can sound, how sharp he can be, or how viral his intensity becomes. It is measured by fidelity to the Book and

genuine shepherding spirit—by feeding the flock, correcting with patience, restoring with meekness, and producing stable believers who grow in grace instead of followers who either worship harshness or collapse under it.

## **19 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - The Dangerous Export: How His Message Spreads Bondage Through Other Pulpits**

### **Introduction**

The most dangerous part of a bad system is not the man who built it, but the men who copy it. One preacher can do damage in one place, but a preaching method that becomes a template can be exported into hundreds of pulpits, multiplied through conferences, clips, and imitation disciples. Then it stops being “one preacher’s tone” and becomes a culture. It becomes a species of ministry. It becomes a contagious way of handling Scripture and handling people. And once it becomes contagious, the damage is no longer local. It becomes generational.

That is why this nineteenth essay widens the lens. The issue is not merely one man’s personality. The issue is a pattern that replicates. The Bible says, “A tree is known by his fruit” (Matthew 12:33), and the fruit is not only the converts a preacher claims; it is the kind of preachers he produces and the kind of churches that grow under his influence. A teaching can be recognized by the predictable disciples it creates. A method that centers on doubt and fear will reproduce doubt and fear. A method that centers on suspicion will reproduce suspicion. And a method that turns the pulpit into a courtroom will reproduce spiritual prosecutors who think they are shepherds.

The fruit test in this essay becomes generational. If the export produces more interrogators than evangelists, more inspectors than shepherds, and more fear than faith, then the message is not building churches; it is building spiritual courts. And the tragedy is that younger men imitate the tone without understanding what it does to people. They think severity equals authority. They think intensity equals holiness. They think suspicion equals discernment. They learn the method, but they don’t see the casualties, because the casualties often suffer quietly, ashamed to admit they are crushed by what everyone else is calling “powerful preaching.”

### **1. How a Method Becomes a Template and Stops Being Personal**

When a preaching style becomes famous, it becomes repeatable. Men don’t just quote it; they adopt it. They don’t just appreciate it; they imitate it. And that is how a method

becomes a template. Once it becomes a template, it no longer matters what the original preacher intended. The imitators will copy the parts that get applause. They will copy the sharp lines, the condemnations, the intensity, and the public verdicts, because those are the parts that “work” in the flesh.

But the Bible does not measure ministry by what “works” in the flesh. It measures ministry by faithfulness. “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). If the template makes young men faithful to a tone more than faithful to Scripture, then the template is already corrupt. If it teaches them to chase impact more than clarity, then it is training performers, not pastors.

And a template changes the meaning of success. Success becomes reaction, not discipleship. It becomes numbers, not nourishment. It becomes “did it hit hard” rather than “did it feed the flock.” But the pastor’s job is not to hit the flock. The pastor’s job is to feed the flock. Peter was told, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:17). Not interrogate my sheep. Not terrify my sheep. Feed them.

## **2. The Imitation Disease: Young Men Copying Tone Without Pastoral Spirit**

A young preacher can imitate tone in a month. Pastoral spirit takes years. Tone is external. Spirit is internal. Tone is easy. Spirit is costly. Spirit requires patience, suffering, prayer, and love for people that does not depend on applause. And the danger of a popular severe style is that it teaches young men they can skip the slow work of shepherding and still be called “bold.”

But the New Testament tells you what a minister must be like, and it does not read like a viral clip. “The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient” (2 Timothy 2:24). Must not strive. Gentle. Apt to teach. Patient. Those are not optional adjectives. Those are commandments. And when young men are trained to believe that harshness is holiness, they will violate these commands while congratulating themselves for being “faithful.”

This is how the export spreads bondage through other pulpits. A harsh method does not stay with the original voice; it gets amplified in weaker hands. The imitator is usually less balanced, less experienced, and more insecure, so he uses severity as a substitute for authority. He bullies to feel bold. He dominates to feel strong. And the flock pays the price.

## **3. The Predictable Disciples: Inspectors Instead of Evangelists**

A gospel-centered ministry produces evangelists, because the gospel is good news and good news naturally spreads. If a man is thrilled that Christ saved him freely by grace, he wants others to receive that gift. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be

saved” (Acts 16:31) becomes a message he can say with confidence. “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13) becomes a promise he can offer without hedging.

But a fear-centered method produces inspectors, not evangelists. It trains men to look for proof more than to proclaim Christ. It trains them to interrogate conversions rather than preach conversions. It trains them to treat sinners like suspects. And when that is the culture, evangelism becomes paralyzed because the preacher is never sure who is “real,” and the hearers are never sure they are allowed to be sure.

This is why the export is so dangerous. It does not just affect the people in the pew; it reshapes the people in the pulpit. It creates a generation of young men who are better at diagnosing than declaring, better at questioning than preaching, better at prosecuting than pleading. They can say “Are you really saved?” with confidence, but they cannot say “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36) with the same boldness, because their method has taught them to fear certainty.

#### **4. The Species of Church Culture It Builds: Spiritual Courts, Not Hospitals**

The church is supposed to function like a hospital for sinners and a training ground for saints. It is supposed to restore the fallen, feed the hungry, and strengthen the weak. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault... restore such an one in the spirit of meekness” (Galatians 6:1). Restoration assumes family. Meekness assumes love. That is the New Testament’s tone.

But a suspicion-based export builds spiritual courts. Everything becomes a trial. Every weakness becomes evidence. Every struggle becomes a salvation question. Every hard season becomes a proof test. And soon the church is not a place where people confess and get help. It is a place where people hide and perform. Confession becomes dangerous because it can be used against you. So people stop confessing. They stop being honest. They become actors.

That is the opposite of what grace produces. Grace produces honest confession because the conscience has a safe place to come clean. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us” (1 John 1:9). When fear rules, confession disappears. And when confession disappears, hidden sin grows. The export claims it is producing holiness, but it often produces secrecy. That is not holiness. That is survival.

#### **5. A Message Recognized by Its Output: More Fear Than Faith**

The Bible never tells a church to operate on fear as its daily fuel. It warns about the fear of God in the sense of reverence, yes, but it does not teach believers to live in constant dread

of being disowned. “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). A sound mind is not perpetually uncertain. It is grounded in God’s promise.

A message that exports fear will create certain outcomes. Assurance will be treated as presumption. Peace will be treated as suspicious. Joy will be treated as shallow. The believer will be trained to distrust the simple promise of God. But God wrote so believers can know. “These things have I written unto you that believe... that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). If an exported method creates a culture where knowledge is taboo and certainty is mocked, it is working against the stated purpose of Scripture.

And over time, that produces a kind of Christian who is always self-focused. He is always scanning himself. He is always checking his “realness.” He is always looking for evidence. That is not faith. Faith looks outward to Christ. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). When a method trains people to look inward as the main compass, it breeds spiritual instability and then calls that instability “humility.”

## **6. The Hardening Effect: The Pattern Replicates and Intensifies**

Here is what happens when a severe template spreads. It rarely softens in the copies. It intensifies. The imitators are trying to prove they are faithful to the template, so they turn the volume up. They become more severe than the original voice. They become more absolute. They become more trigger-happy with verdicts, because verdicts are what make them look “bold.”

This is how patterns harden over time. The method produces a culture of accusation, then that culture produces preachers who are proud of accusation, and then those preachers train their people to accuse, and then the whole thing becomes normal. It becomes the church’s tone. It becomes the identity. And at that point, even the Bible texts about gentleness and meekness sound foreign, because the culture has been disciplined into hardness.

But hardness is not spirituality. Paul warned Timothy that in the last days men would be “without natural affection” and “fierce” (2 Timothy 3:3). Fierceness is not a virtue. And when fierceness is celebrated as discernment, you are watching a church drift into a spirit that Scripture marks as a danger sign, not a badge of honor.

## **7. The Corrective Standard: What It Should Produce if It Were Healthy**

If the preaching were healthy, it would produce clarity in the gospel. People would be able to state it plainly. Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), and God saves the sinner who believes on Christ (Acts 16:31). If the method were healthy, it

would produce growth in grace. “But grow in grace” (2 Peter 3:18) would be visible in patience, humility, and stability, not only in intensity and suspicion.

If the method were healthy, it would produce shepherds, not interrogators. The pastor would know how to correct a believer without erasing sonship. He would know the difference between chastening and condemnation. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). He would know how to restore, not just how to accuse. He would know how to feed, not just how to strike.

And if the method were healthy, it would produce evangelists, not inspectors. It would produce men who can offer God’s promise confidently, not men who are terrified of certainty. Because certainty in God’s promise is not presumption; it is faith. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36) is not arrogance. It is Scripture.

### **Conclusion**

The problem is not merely “one preacher.” The problem is a pattern that replicates. When a method becomes a template, it gets exported into other pulpits, and the imitators often copy the tone without the pastoral spirit. They learn severity as a shortcut to authority, and they train churches to operate like spiritual courts instead of hospitals. Over time the export produces predictable disciples: more interrogators than evangelists, more inspectors than shepherds, and more fear than faith.

The fruit test becomes generational, and it is devastatingly honest. If the export produces a culture where assurance is suspect, peace is taboo, joy is mocked, and believers are trained to live in constant self-audit, then whatever the method claims to defend, it is spreading bondage. God did not give the church the spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7). God wrote Scripture so believers can know they have eternal life (1 John 5:13). And God’s shepherding pattern is restoration with meekness, not domination with suspicion (Galatians 6:1).

So this nineteenth essay delivers its verdict with a wide lens. A tree is known by its fruit (Matthew 12:33), and this tree’s fruit is not only the immediate hearers—it is the next generation of pulpits that repeat the same tone, the same suspicion, and the same fog. When the export keeps producing more prosecutors than pastors, it is not building churches. It is building spiritual courts. And that is not revival. That is replication of bondage.

**20 of 20: Paul Washer on Trial by His Own Rule - The Verdict: A Different Gospel in Practice, a Different Spirit in Effect**

## **Introduction**

This series has not been built on rumors, gossip, or the cheap thrill of taking shots at a name. It has been built on a rule that gets used constantly in modern pulpit culture: “Judge the tree by its fruit.” That rule is biblical in its proper place. Jesus said, “A tree is known by his fruit” (Matthew 12:33). The problem is that men who make themselves professional fruit inspectors often forget that the rule cuts both ways, and that “with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged” (Matthew 7:2). If a preacher measures the whole Christian world by his own yardstick, then that same yardstick must be turned back onto his own message, his own method, his own disciples, and his own practical outcomes.

Over nineteen essays, the case has been laid out like a courtroom record, not to entertain the flesh, but to force clarity. We have examined what happens when “proof” becomes the currency of Christianity, when assurance is treated as presumption, when self-examination becomes a counterfeit sacrament, when repentance is inflated into a lifetime contract, when First John is wielded like a hammer to keep believers guessing, when chastening is confused with condemnation, when spiritual harshness is glorified as discernment, when simplicity is mocked as shallow, and when a public persona becomes a template that spreads suspicion through other pulpits. The question has never been, “Does the man use Bible words.” The question has been, “What gospel is functioning underneath the words.”

Because the New Testament does not leave salvation vague. It does not treat the gospel like a fog machine. It speaks in plain verbs and settled promises. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36). “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). That is God’s language. And when a system, whatever it claims, trains people to distrust those plain words, it may still call itself “sound,” but in practice it is preaching a different gospel and producing a different spirit.

### **1. The Standard: God’s Plain Gospel Versus Man’s Probation Gospel**

God’s gospel is not an invitation to probation. It is an announcement of a finished work. “Christ died for our sins... and... rose again the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). That message is not a starting line for a lifelong audition to see if you were real. It is a declaration that a Savior has done what sinners cannot do. When the jailer asked what to do, the apostle did not hand him a checklist. He said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). That is not probation language. That is promise language.

A probation gospel can talk about grace and still function like law. It says salvation is by grace, but it trains the conscience to feel safe only when performance looks good. It says

you are saved by faith, but it makes assurance depend on the believer's spiritual trend line. It says Christ is sufficient, but it keeps smuggling in the idea that you cannot know you are His until you can prove you are His. That turns the gospel from a gift into a contract and turns the Christian life into anxiety management.

The New Testament refuses that confusion. It says, "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Romans 4:5). That verse is not a slogan; it is a verdict. God justifies the ungodly by faith without works. If a system cannot allow Romans 4:5 to settle the conscience, then it will keep inventing spiritual conditions so the conscience never rests.

## **2. The Core Contradiction: Claiming Christ While Training People to Trust Self-Analysis**

The practical gospel of a system is revealed by where it tells people to look for peace. If it tells them to look to Christ's finished work, it is apostolic in effect. If it tells them to look to themselves, it is another gospel in effect, even if it uses orthodox nouns. Paul warned about minds being "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3). That corruption is often subtle, because it does not deny Christ; it complicates Christ until the sinner is no longer resting in Him.

The Bible says the record is outside of you. "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:11). The record is God's testimony, not your internal temperature. Yet "inspection religion" teaches people to treat their feelings, their sorrow, their level of victory, their seriousness, and their "realness" as the functional record. Then the believer becomes trapped in perpetual self-examination, and his spiritual life becomes a revolving door of doubt.

But the Spirit of God did not save men to keep them looking at their own navel. He saved them to look unto Jesus. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Faith does not stare at itself. Faith looks at the Savior. When a preaching method trains people to stare at themselves as the main method of assurance, it has shifted the center away from Christ, and that is the very definition of a different gospel in practice.

## **3. The Assurance Issue: When Peace With God Is Treated Like Presumption**

The New Testament teaches that justification produces peace. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Peace is not arrogance. Peace is the legal result of justification. If a system makes peace suspicious, it is attacking the very thing Romans 5:1 declares. And it does it with religious language, calling certainty "presumption," calling assurance "dangerous," and calling rest "cheap."

God wrote Scripture so believers can know. “That ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). That is not an advanced privilege reserved for a spiritual elite; it is the stated purpose of God’s writing to believers. When a system replaces “know” with “maybe,” it does not produce humility; it produces bondage. It does not produce reverence; it produces dread. And dread is not the Spirit of adoption.

The Spirit of adoption produces sonship confidence, not courtroom terror. “Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15). When a ministry culture trains believers to approach God like a suspicious inspector who might disown them, it is not producing the Spirit’s family tone. It is producing fear as a controlling mechanism, and “God hath not given us the spirit of fear” (2 Timothy 1:7).

#### **4. The Holiness Confusion: Sanctification Turned Into the Price of Sonship**

Holiness matters. The Bible calls believers to holiness. The Bible commands obedience. The Bible warns against the flesh. None of that is in question. The issue is where holiness belongs in the order of salvation. Holiness is fruit, not root. Holiness is the result of sonship, not the price of sonship. If a man makes holiness the gatekeeper of assurance, he has quietly turned sanctification into a co-savior.

The New Testament keeps the order clear. “For by grace are ye saved through faith... not of works” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Then it says believers are created unto good works (Ephesians 2:10). Works belong. Growth belongs. Obedience belongs. But they belong after the verdict, not as the verdict. When a system teaches people they cannot know they are saved until their obedience reaches a threshold, it is functioning as a works-based assurance system, even if it denies works-salvation verbally.

The Bible also gives a category that destroys the probation mindset: “If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:15). That verse does not encourage sin; it warns about wasted life and burned work. But it also protects the gospel by proving salvation is not identical to the believer’s service record. A system that has no room for 1 Corinthians 3:15 will inevitably turn every failure into “maybe you were never saved,” because it has erased God’s own categories.

#### **5. The Pastoral Outcome: Fear, Performance, and the Birth of Spiritual Pride**

A message that keeps people guessing will not produce honest confession; it will produce performance. When believers learn that struggle is interpreted as proof of damnation, they hide. They learn to speak the approved vocabulary. They learn to display the approved emotions. They learn to perform “brokenness” because brokenness becomes a currency.

And hypocrisy thrives in that environment because hypocrisy is simply the art of looking acceptable under an inspector's gaze.

But the Bible's pastoral pattern is different. It produces confession because grace provides safety. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9). It produces restoration because the church is told to restore the fallen in meekness. "Restore such an one in the spirit of meekness" (Galatians 6:1). It produces stability because God is "not the author of confusion, but of peace" (1 Corinthians 14:33). When a ministry culture produces constant confusion and constant fear, it is not producing the Spirit's normal fruit.

And here is the other predictable outcome: spiritual pride. A performance culture always creates a "strong class" that thinks it has the marks and a "weak class" that despairs because it never feels safe. The strong become proud of their seriousness, proud of their harsh discernment, proud of their intensity, proud of their "soundness." The weak become crushed, and the crushed often get blamed for being crushed. That is not sanctification. That is Pharisee-making. And it is exactly what happens when "marks" replace Christ as the center.

## **6. The Replication: When the Method Becomes an Exported Template**

The fruit of a ministry is not only the immediate hearers; it is the disciples it reproduces. When a preaching method becomes a template, younger men imitate the tone without carrying a shepherd's spirit. They learn that sharpness is authority, severity is faithfulness, and suspicion is discernment. They become interrogators instead of evangelists, inspectors instead of shepherds, because the method trains them to doubt conversions more than preach Christ.

The New Testament's shepherding tone forbids that kind of domineering spirit. "Neither as being lords over God's heritage" (1 Peter 5:3) is plain. The servant of the Lord "must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient" (2 Timothy 2:24). When the exported method produces striving as a lifestyle and harshness as a badge, it is not maturing pastors; it is reproducing a fleshly spirit under religious cover.

And the generational fruit is devastating. Churches become courts. The pulpit becomes a prosecution desk. The people become spiritual detectives. Peace is treated as suspicious. Assurance is treated as arrogant. Joy is treated as shallow. The gospel becomes harder to state than the apostles stated it. That is not reform. That is drift. And drift does not happen by denying the Bible; it happens by misusing it until it no longer functions the way God wrote it to function.

## **7. The Biblical Alternative: A Clean Gospel, a Settled Conscience, and Real Growth**

The biblical alternative is not soft preaching. It is clear preaching. It is not antinomianism. It is rightly divided truth. It starts with the finished work of Christ. “Christ died for our sins... and... rose again” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). It calls the sinner to believe. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36). It gives assurance on God’s promise. “That ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). And it anchors peace in justification. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Romans 5:1).

Then it teaches sanctification as the fruit of sonship, not the price of it. It teaches confession and restoration as family realities, not salvation re-auditions. It teaches chastening as love, not as a threat of disowning. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6). It teaches rewards and loss as real without turning salvation into probation. “He shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved” (1 Corinthians 3:15). That is Bible balance.

And it produces a different kind of church culture. It produces evangelists who can speak plainly because the gospel is plain. It produces shepherds who can correct without crushing because they know the difference between correction and condemnation. It produces believers who can confess without terror because they know their Father does not revoke adoption every time they stumble. It produces humility without despair, holiness without performance, and discernment without pride. That is what the New Testament produces when it is believed and preached as written.

## **Conclusion**

This series has now reached its closing argument, and the verdict is delivered using the very category that has been used on others: what is the practical gospel being preached, what does it produce, and does it align with the plain words of Scripture. When a system claims grace but functions like probation, it is preaching a different gospel in practice. When it claims Christ but trains believers to trust self-analysis, it is shifting the center away from the Son and corrupting minds from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3). When it claims holiness but produces fear, performance, and spiritual pride, it is not producing the Spirit’s fruit; it is producing flesh wearing Bible words.

The New Testament gospel is clean enough to state in one breath and strong enough to settle a guilty conscience. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36). “That ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Romans 5:1). If a preaching system cannot allow those verses to mean what they say without surrounding them with hedges, warnings, and suspicion, then it is not guarding the gospel; it is altering it.

So the final contrast is left on the table, stark and unembarrassed. On one side is fruit-inspection religion, where proof replaces promise, self-analysis replaces faith, and holiness becomes a salvation detector instead of salvation's fruit. On the other side is the simplicity of the New Testament gospel: salvation by grace through faith in Christ's finished work, assurance grounded in God's promise, and sanctification as the outflow of sonship, not the price of it. And when you lay them side by side, the fog clears, the conscience finds solid ground, and the whole probation gospel is seen for what it is: another gospel in practice, and a different spirit in effect.

## **Conclusion**

This series ends the way it began: not with a wink, not with a rumor, and not with a personality contest, but with a Bible open and a simple question on the table—what is the practical gospel being preached, what does it produce in real people, and does it match the plain words of Scripture. A man can say “grace” a thousand times and still operate like probation if he trains consciences to fear peace, distrust assurance, and treat sanctification progress as the receipt that proves salvation. A man can say “Christ alone” and still move the center of gravity onto self-analysis if his listeners leave staring inward, measuring “realness,” and living under the impression that God's promise is too risky to believe without checking their own pulse first.

The burden of this entire project has been clarity. God is not unclear about salvation. The New Testament does not speak in riddles when it comes to how a sinner is saved, what eternal life is, and why believers can know. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31) is not a suggestion and it is not a probation contract. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36) does not mean “has it if he later proves it.” And “that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13) does not mean “that ye may live your whole life guessing.” When a preaching system makes those verses feel dangerous or “too simple,” it has already begun corrupting minds “from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3), because the true gospel is offensive precisely because it is simple and humbling.

So the final aim of this series is not merely to expose a man, but to expose a method and its fruit, because that method has become an export—copied, repeated, and hardened through other pulpits until whole churches become spiritual courts rather than hospitals. The fruit has been predictable: more inspectors than evangelists, more interrogators than shepherds, more fear than faith, more performance than peace, and more spiritual pride

wearing the costume of “discernment.” And when that fruit multiplies, the issue can no longer be brushed aside as “just his style.” A tree is known by its fruit (Matthew 12:33), and fruit doesn’t lie.

This series also closes with a clean alternative, because the Bible never tears down without building. The alternative is not soft preaching; it is straight preaching—rightly divided, gospel-centered, and conscience-settling. It is salvation by grace through faith, not of works (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is justification that produces peace with God (Romans 5:1). It is assurance grounded in God’s testimony about His Son (1 John 5:11-13). It is sanctification as the fruit of sonship, not the price of it, with chastening as the Father’s love, not the inspector’s threat (Hebrews 12:6). It is discipleship that restores the fallen in meekness (Galatians 6:1), corrects with patience and gentleness (2 Timothy 2:24), and trains believers to look unto Jesus, not into themselves as their savior (Hebrews 12:2).

If this series repels some people, that is the point. A fog machine gospel must be repelled by a clear gospel. A probation religion must be repelled by a finished work. A culture of suspicion must be repelled by the Spirit of adoption. And when the dust settles, the reader should be left standing on solid ground, able to say what God said without stuttering: I’m not saved because I performed well enough to impress an inspector; I’m saved because Jesus Christ died for my sins, was buried, and rose again, and God promised everlasting life to the sinner who believes on His Son (1 Corinthians 15:3-4; John 3:36). That is the verdict that matters. That is the gospel that lasts. And that is the only message worthy of a pulpit.