

Live in Light of God's Word

John 8:31-36

Rev. Brian Bill

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Last Sunday, a congressman, who calls himself a “pastor,” ended the opening prayer of the 117th Congress with these words: *“We ask it in the name of the monotheistic god, Brahma, and ‘god’ known by many names by many different faiths. Amen and awomen.”*

While I don’t make it a practice to critique a fellow pastor’s prayer, I was deeply troubled by what he prayed and have to speak up.

1. According to Hindu cosmology, “Brahma” is the creator of the universe and of all beings. I don’t understand how one who claims to be a “Christian pastor” could direct his prayer to a Hindu god. While Hinduism recognizes over 30 million gods, the Bible is clear there is one God, who created all things and who alone is worthy of worship (see Exodus 20:3-4). 1 Chronicles 16:25 says, ***“For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; He also is to be feared above all gods.”***

2. The Bible is absolutely clear that Jesus is the only way to Heaven. 1 Timothy 2:5: ***“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”***

3. “Amen” is a Hebrew word meaning “so it is” or “let it be,” derived from a verb meaning “to be firm or sure.” It is also translated as “truly” or “so be it.” This word serves as a declaration of affirmation after a time of praise or prayer as seen in Revelation 7:12: ***“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”*** Revelation 3:14 refers to Jesus as the ***“Amen.”***

Prayer to Almighty God in the name of Jesus has nothing to do with gender and to insert “awomen” at the end reeks of political correctness and not biblical correctness.

After sharing this as a post on Facebook on Tuesday, I was stunned to see it was liked over 745 times, over 835 have made comments and it has been shared some 550 times. This shows many others are concerned about doctrinal fidelity and the truth of God’s Word. This response encouraged me.

I begin today with some warnings and a plea for each of us to learn, love and live God's Word. I'm sounding the alarm about the increasing rejection of biblical truth, both outside and inside the church. Here are some trends I find deeply disturbing. You might want to buckle up.

1. While there's much to say about what happened at the Capitol this week, it's best to pray – which is what many of us did on Facebook Live Wednesday night and how we started the service today. I realize there is some debate about who the rioters were but one of the most troubling parts of this for me was seeing flags containing the name of Jesus as the Capitol was breached. What kind of message is being sent when posters declaring “Jesus Saves” are held high while people are fighting police and storming a government building?
2. Next weekend, we'll focusing on how Jesus loves the preborn. I don't understand how a pastor can be in favor of abortion since it involves the taking of a human life made in the image of God. One person said it would be like a fireman who is pro-arson or a medical doctor who is pro-poison.
3. The advance of “progressive Christianity,” with its roots in the Emergent Church, is invading congregations, leading to the redefinition of marriage and gender, as well as the doctrines of the Virgin Birth, the deity of Jesus, the Atonement and Hell. Here's a quote from the Progressive Christianity website: *“We affirm that the teachings of Jesus provide but one of many ways to experience ‘God.’”*

I appreciated the warning Alisa Childers shared in a post called, “5 Signs Your Church May be Headed Toward Progressive Christianity.”

- A lowered view of the Bible
 - Feelings are emphasized over faith
 - Essential doctrines are open for reinterpretation
 - Historic terms are redefined
 - The heart of the gospel message shifts from sin and redemption to social justice
4. The author of the recent “Passion Translation” claims that God downloaded the original languages to him: *“He breathed on me so that I would do the project, and I felt downloads coming, instantly...it was like, I got a chip put*

inside of me.” In addition, he claims Jesus promised to bring him to Heaven to give him a brand new 22nd Chapter of John that has never been discovered (The Gospel of John only has 21 chapters). I’ve reached out to YouVersion and have asked them to take this off their platform. We’ve been in dialog.

5. Some time ago, when I was praying with some pastors and ministry leaders in the community, I heard a leader pray something like this, “*God, please give us more revelation.*” I was deeply troubled because God has already given His revelation and put it in the Bible.
6. The prosperity gospel, with its promises of health and wealth, cheapens the gospel of grace and replaces the Savior with self, relegating God to a bellhop. Suffice it to say the prosperity gospel is a false gospel.
7. Religious self-help books, like those by Joel Osteen, Jen Hatmaker and Rachel Hollis, are filled with platitudes and me-centered spirituality, leading many to be deceived.

Perhaps you were saying “*Amen*” as I went through this list. Or maybe I’ve stepped on your toes and you’re saying, “*Ouch.*” Or maybe you disagree and are upset I called some of this out.

Here’s the real question. How do we know what is true and where do we find truth today? I submit our standard must be the inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word of God. God has spoken and He’s put it in a book. Our greatest need is to hear what God’s Word says to us because we’re facing so much spiritual confusion in the 21st Century.

Two weeks ago, we learned *if you want to grow, you have to let some things go.* Last week we defined a disciple as *someone who lovingly follows Jesus and intentionally helps others follow Him.* Is there someone who can help you lovingly follow Jesus? Have you reached out to someone else whom you can disciple? Today, as we continue in our series called, “Discipleship Matters,” we’ll discover how *a disciple learns, loves, and lives God’s Word.*

Turn to John 8:31-36: “***So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’³³ They answered him, ‘We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’³⁴ Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who***

practices sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ *The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.* ³⁶ *So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”*

The context is similar to a courtroom scene where the religious leaders are tangling with Jesus. The chapter begins with Jesus giving grace to the woman caught in adultery and then Jesus revealing Himself as the light of the world and the Son of God. Some reject Him but in verse 30 others **“believed in Him.”** In verse 31 Jesus speaks to the **“Jews who had believed Him...”**

James 2:19 says it’s possible to believe and yet not belong to Christ: **“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!”** It’s one thing to say you have faith, it’s another to actually follow Christ.

I see four descriptions of a disciple in verses 31-32. A disciple is one who...

- Grows
- Shows
- Knows
- Goes

1. Grows in God’s Word. The next phrase in verse 31 introduces a conditional clause: **“If you abide in my word...”** The word **“abide”** means, *“to dwell in, to remain in, to continue in, and to live in.”* It referred to staying in a house and becoming so in love with the place that the house becomes your home. Just as we’re to be at home in our houses, so too, we’re to be at home in God’s Word. We don’t just come to the Word as an occasional guest but we’re to move in and live there. We wake up there and return there every night. The idea is we’re to sit and soak in the Scriptures. Notice Jesus uses the singular **“my word,”** not **“my words,”** meaning He is referring to the sum total of all He has taught.

Jesus challenged the religious leaders in John 5:38: **“And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom He has sent.”** In John 14:23, Jesus said, **“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”** Here’s a question: *Is God’s Word at home in your heart?*

Listen to 1 Thessalonians 2:13: **“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”**

The word “*abide*” is used again in John 15:7: “*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*” Two verses later Jesus urges us to, “*abide*” in His love.

In the most extensive discipleship study ever done, LifeWay Research shared its findings after a decade’s worth of research. The scope of the project spanned eight countries with over 1,000 pastors and surveyed 4,000 Protestant believers in North America. Four discipleship insights rose to the top:

1. Discipleship is intentional.
2. Groups matter. A lot.
3. Reading the Bible matters more than anything else. It is the most important growth metric of all.
4. The discipline of Bible engagement impacts every other discipline.

Turning to Scripture should be an intuitive response for Christians and yet the American Bible Society’s annual *State of the Bible 2020* report found an alarming trend: “*A mere 9 percent of Americans read their Bible each day in 2019 – the lowest number in decades of research.*” It’s no wonder our morals and our doctrine are slipping.

Listen. The only way to detect error is to dwell in God’s Word and the only way to grow as a believer is to know the Bible. What’s your plan to grow in God’s Word this year? If you don’t have a plan, I recommend the Edgewood Bible reading plan found on our website or mobile app or our Resource Kiosk.

One pastor was quite vulnerable when he wrote: “*When I miss the Word for some days of neglect, my sight of Him becomes blurred, my savoring of Him becomes dull, and therefore, my showing Him – which is what I exist for – is diminished or forced.*”

This week, Pastor Kyle shared with me how our Mainspring Ministry is focusing on five disciplines for 40 days. I was reminded how the words “disciple” and “discipline” go together. Let me say it like this: *You won’t grow as a disciple without practicing the spiritual disciplines.*

- **Prayer.** Focused prayer on repentance, renewal, reconciliation, unity, spiritual growth, discipleship, missions, and unreached peoples.

- **Fasting.** Purposeful abstinence from food, certain meals, or other things that take up our time (i.e. social media, video games, certain hobbies, sugar, caffeine, etc.).
- **Scripture reading.** Following a Bible reading plan focused on Jesus, discipleship, and disciple making.
- **Scripture memorization.** If you need help selecting verses, there is a new memory verse on the Edgewood Bible Reading plan each month or you can use the study called, “Growing in Christ.”
- **Discipleship.** *A disciple is a believer who lovingly follows Jesus and intentionally helps others follow Him.* This includes accountability and regular meetings to study the Bible using the “Growing in Christ” book and doing life together.

Would you consider following the lead of our young adults by incorporating these disciplines into your life? As we grow in God’s Word, we will show we are true disciples because a *disciple learns, loves and lives God’s Word.*

2. Shows you are a true disciple. In the last part of verse 31, Jesus teaches it’s possible to make an emotional decision without becoming an actual disciple: ***“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.”*** It’s one thing to believe Christ and have good feelings; it’s another to receive Christ by faith and follow Him faithfully.

True disciples live in God’s Word and allow God’s Word to live in them. When Jesus challenged His disciples with some difficult discipleship demands, He asked if they wanted to stop following Him. Peter spoke up for the team in John 6:68: ***“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”***

The word ***“truly”*** means, *“really”* or *“certainly.”* A ***“disciple”*** is literally a *“learner,”* one who is being mentored by the Master. It also denotes *“one who follows another’s teaching.”* Thus, a disciple is a life-long learner who lives out what he or she is learning from the teacher.

When we grow in God’s Word, we will show and know we are true disciples because a *disciple learns, loves and lives God’s Word.*

3. Knows the truth. Now look at the first part of verse 32: ***“And you will know the truth...”*** Incredibly, Jesus references truth seven times in this section. Since this verse is often taken out of context, it’s important to realize truth is not primarily a principle or a philosophy or a platform; it’s a person and His name is

Jesus. John 14:6: ***“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*** Pilate’s question to Jesus still echoes down through the centuries when he asked in John 18:38: ***“What is truth?”*** Sadly, truth was standing right in front of him and he missed it! We live in a society that has trouble with truth, don’t we?

If you want to know the truth, get to know the One who is Truth and then follow the truth of what He says in His Word. I’m fascinated by how many times Jesus uses this phrase, ***“Truly, truly,”*** which means, *“Very truly.”* In John’s gospel alone He says it 26 times! Jesus always tells the truth about our condition, our need for salvation, how to be born again, how to pray, how to forgive, how to love, and how to live on mission.

In a world filled with lies, half-truths, confusion, and uncertainty, Jesus prays this for His followers in John 17:17: ***“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”***

When we grow in God’s Word, we will show and know and then go because a *disciple learns, loves and lives God’s Word.*

4. Goes in freedom. Hear now the second half of verse 32: ***“...and the truth will set you free.”*** Jesus came to set us free from sin as spelled out in Romans 6:22: ***“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God...”*** 2 Corinthians 3:17 says, ***“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”***

The Jews, who were listening to the Lord, didn’t like hearing they needed to be set free, so they pushed back in verse 34: ***“We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is that you say, ‘You will become free.’”*** They must have forgotten their history because they were slaves in Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon and were now living under Roman rule. Also they had a warped view of their own sinfulness, thinking that because they kept some rules, they were good to go.

Before leaving this passage, Jesus gives a warning and then a welcome.

- **Sin leads to bondage.** In verse 34 Jesus says, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.”*** They thought they were spiritually superior, but Jesus made it clear that everyone is in bondage to sin. You cannot be freed from sin until you admit you are enslaved to sin.

- **The Son is the bondage-breaker.** Listen to verse 36: ***“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”*** This is more evidence that the Son is truth itself because verse 32 says, ***“the truth [the Son] will set you free.”*** Galatians 5:1 states, ***“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”***

Action Steps

How should we respond? Listen to these words from A.W. Tozer: *“Each generation of Christians must look to its beliefs. While truth itself is unchanging, the minds of men are porous vessels out of which truth can leak and into which error may seep to dilute the truth they contain. The human heart is heretical by nature and runs to error as naturally as a garden to weeds...the heart that fails to cultivate truth and root out error will shortly be a theological wilderness...”*

Here are some action steps.

1. Develop a plan to soak in the Scriptures. Since many of us struggle with Bible reading, I wanted to pass along a helpful concept I heard just this week. View your Scripture reading as *proactive intake* and *reactive intake*.

- **Proactive intake.** Discipline yourself to read every day so you know what’s in the Bible. Jesus assumed the Scriptural knowledge of His disciples when He referenced Old Testament characters. One example is found in Luke 17:32: ***“Remember Lot’s wife...”*** In order to remember, you must know it in the first place. Are you reading the Bible proactively every day? Beth and I are really enjoying reading the Chronological Bible together.
- **Reactive intake.** When you go through difficult times, allow the circumstances of life to drive you back to the Scriptures. When dealing with doubt or disease or death or discouragement, allow the Bible to be your balm. David experienced this in Psalms 119:71: ***“It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.”***

These approaches work together because your proactive reading will help you know where to read when you need some reactive intake.

I’ve been challenged by a quote from R.C. Sproul: *“Here, then, is the real problem of our negligence. We fail in our duty to study God’s Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it*

is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy.”

2. Study how the Savior viewed Scripture. Recently, I wrote down five ways Jesus anchored His teaching to the Word of God. I’m sure you could find more.

- Jesus told religious leaders they were wrong because they didn’t know the Scriptures (Mark 12:24)
- Jesus told others the Scriptures bear witness about Himself (John 5:39)
- When tempted by the devil, Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy three different times (Matthew 4:1-11)
- Jesus came to fulfill Scripture (Matthew 5:17-18)
- Jesus spoke of the Old Testament as an historical record of people and events – Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:4), Jonah and the great fish (Matthew 12:40), Noah and the flood (Matthew 24:37-39)

3. Take Pastor Ray Pritchard’s class on Revelation. You can access this class beginning this Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at 7pm this week through our Go Team partner, Keep Believing Ministries’ Facebook page or YouTube channel. BTW, this was delayed a week because Ray and Marlene got Covid.

4. Test the teaching you hear. Not every bestseller is the best book to read, not every podcast is worth your time, and not every popular preacher is worth listening to. 1 John 4:1 says, ***“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*** That means you should check what I say as well.

When our daughter Megan was just seven or eight years old, I sat down with her to review a video from a popular preacher. While I was eagerly taking notes, she turned to me and said, *“Daddy, this doesn’t sound right. I don’t think he’s being biblical.”* She was spot on and had caught error before I did. He’s now a full-fledged heretic. The best way to spot a counterfeit is to be familiar with the real deal.

We need to know the truth of the Bible if we’re ever going to spot error. I’m told when bank tellers are trained to recognize counterfeit money, they simply are given genuine money and told to familiarize themselves with how it looks, how it feels, and how it smells. That way, when counterfeit cash shows up, they are quick to spot it.

5. Don't become spiritually sleepy. As we established last week, it's impossible to coast into Christlikeness. Romans 13:11 says, ***“Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”*** It's time to live on mission by obeying the Great Commission!

Sometimes we take the Word of God for granted and don't value it the way we should, like a young man who was getting ready to graduate from college. Philip eyed a beautiful sports car in the dealer's showroom, hoping his father would purchase it for him. Each day leading up to the big day, he looked for signs from his dad to see if he had purchased the car. After the graduation ceremony, the father summoned his son to his private study. A proud father handed his son a wrapped gift box as he expressed his feelings about such a big accomplishment. Intrigued, but to some extent disappointed, the son unwrapped the box to reveal a leather Bible with his name embossed on the lower right-hand cover.

He raised his voice and shouted at his father, *“You got me a Bible for graduation? With all the money you have, you got me this?”* The son left the Bible on his dad's desk and stormed out of the office. His relationship with his father was fractured from that day forward and he never apologized for his outburst. Years passed and the young man went on to run a successful business, have a family, and live a comfortable life.

One day he received a message stating his father had died from a massive heart attack. The son was in charge of the estate, so he needed to come home to execute the wishes of his father.

As soon as he arrived, regret overwhelmed him. Searching through the papers on his father's desk, he came across the Bible he had received for graduation still in the original box. Tears streamed down his face as he flipped through the pages. He noticed a bookmark next to a verse that his father carefully underlined: ***“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him”*** (Matthew 7:11).

As he closed the Bible, he felt something stuck to the back cover. It was the key to the sports car he had wanted with the tag of a local dealer's name on it. Inscribed on the tag was his graduation date and the words: ***“PAID IN FULL.”***

Some of God's richest blessings are packaged in the Bible. Unfortunately, many Christians will live and die without ever experiencing them, simply because they don't open it every day.

Will you learn it and love it and live it by growing, showing, knowing and going?

Some people believe that all religions are the same. David Platt illustrates how Christianity is different in a conversation he had with two guys who followed different religions.

"It's almost like you guys picture God at the top of a mountain and we're all at the bottom: 'I may take this path up and you may take this path up...but in the end we'll all be in the same place.' They smiled and said, 'Exactly. You understand.'

Platt then said, 'What if I told you that the God at the top of the mountain didn't wait for us to find our way up to Him, but He actually came down to where we are?' They responded, 'That would be great.' To which he replied, 'This is the difference. What we find in the Bible is the story of God who has not left us alone to try to find our way to Him, but He has come to us and He has made the way to us through Jesus.'

You can have the assurance right now that your sins are "paid in full" because Jesus made His way to you. He died on the cross for your sins and He was raised on the third day.

Put your faith in Him today and lovingly follow Him every day...then intentionally help someone else do the same.

Amen and Amen!