



# TRUTH

“... thy word is truth” (John 17:17)

October 2018

## WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE MIGHT ACCEPT AND OBEY THE GOSPEL?

We hear a lot today about how experts in crime detection and prevention make use of past cases, past experiences, and statistics to develop a “profile” for the type of person who is most likely to commit a particular crime. What about the profile of one who is a “likely candidate” to become a Christian?

The Lord wants His followers to preach the gospel to every person of every ethnic group under heaven (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15). As we go about the task of trying to reach the lost, are there certain physical characteristics or social backgrounds of people which help us profile them as prime candidates to submit to the gospel?

When we read the Bible, we see that people from a wide variety of *religious* backgrounds became followers of Jesus. Some Samaritans, who believed in the God of heaven but accepted only a small portion of the Old Testament scriptures, believed on Jesus (John 4:39-41). A great number of devout Jews, including some who were priests, gave up Judaism to become Christians (Acts 2:5,41; 4:4; 6:7). Crispus, who was the chief ruler of a synagogue, believed on the Lord, as did his family (Acts 18:8). Saul of Tarsus, the great persecutor of God’s people, surely shocked the saints when he obeyed the gospel (Acts 9,22,26).

Simon of Samaria, who had been a sorcerer/magician, believed and was baptized (Acts 8:9-13). Some Gentiles who already believed in God, like Cornelius, received the gospel when they heard it (Acts 10,11). There also were Gentiles who formerly worshipped idols, but cast aside their man-made “gods” to serve the true God (1 Thessalonians 1:9). We also read of those who, though they previously had been immersed, were baptized again when they heard God’s truth (Acts 19:1-7). In addition, there were converts like Timothy who were blessed to be raised in a family in which some older family members possessed genuine faith (2 Timothy 1:5).

From the above considerations, it is obvious that those who became disciples of our Lord in the first century were not all from the same religious background. While we recognize that in many cases today those who have been “brought up” with vigorous training in false religions may be totally

uninterested in God’s truth, it still is our duty to try and teach them the gospel.

Jesus’ first-century disciples certainly had a great variety of *occupational* backgrounds. Some of His earliest followers were fishermen (Mark 1:16-20). Some were tax collectors (Mark 2:14,15; Luke 19:1-10). Others were business people like Lydia (Acts 16:14,15), soldiers like Cornelius (Acts 10:1), or government officials like Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7,12). One was a prison-keeper (Acts 16:25-33). Dionysius was one of the rulers of the Areopagus/Mars Hill in Athens (Acts 17:34), Luke was a doctor (Colossians 4:14), Zenas was a lawyer (Titus 3:13), and Onesimus was a runaway slave (Philemon 10-17). Brothers and sisters, regardless of our personal occupation, our co-workers/colleagues need the gospel and are prospects for conversion!

What about the *educational* background of members of the church in the days of the apostles? Some were highly-educated, like Luke the beloved physician and Zenas the lawyer. On the other hand, the Jewish leaders looked on Peter and John as being “*uneducated and untrained*” (Acts 4:13).

What about the *financial* background of those converted to the Christ? Some were wealthy (1 Timothy 6:17). Others were poor (James 2:5). Yet others lived in deep poverty (2 Corinthians 8:2).

Throughout history, not many folks who have been noble, wise, or mighty by worldly standards have humbled themselves and obeyed the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:25-31). Yet, some have, including some great Christians of our generation. We understand also that being less educated or less wealthy is no guarantee that one will be interested in doing God’s will.

So, what is the profile of the person who is most likely to obey the gospel? Sinners of all religious backgrounds, all educational backgrounds, all social backgrounds, and all financial backgrounds *need* the gospel. And, some sinners from all backgrounds *obey* it when they hear it. You and I, brothers and sisters, have been given the charge to teach them God’s truth. Let us be busy doing so, always seeking for those who have a noble and good heart (Luke 8:15).

-- Roger D. Campbell

## THE ISRAELITES THOUGHT IT WAS A GOOD IDEA

The twelve spies had returned from their forty-day outing to the land of Canaan. When the Israelite nation heard their report about what they had seen in the land of promise, the people murmured against the Lord and expressed a desire to return to Egypt. In response to their complaining, Jehovah pronounced a punishment: they would be in the wilderness for forty years (Numbers 14:33-35).

Following that, the ten spies who had given what the Bible calls an “evil report” died in a plague. After hearing about the forty-year punishment which the nation would endure and seeing the death of the spies, Israel mourned greatly (Numbers 14:39).

At that point, they formulated a plan. The Bible says, “*And they rose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, ‘Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised, for we have sinned’*” (Numbers 14:40). It was a positive sign that they acknowledged their sin. But did their confession come from sincere hearts that were ready to forsake their sinful behavior and submit to God during the rest of the time He would grant them to live on earth? Their subsequent behavior would answer that question.

What did the Lord think about the Israelites’ plan to go fight against the Canaanites at that time? “*And Moses said, ‘Now why do you transgress the command of the LORD? For this will not succeed. Do not go up, lest you be defeated by your enemies, for the LORD is not among you’*” (Numbers 14:41,42). Those were not Moses’ personal sentiments. He later reminded his people why he had told them what he did: “*And the LORD said to me, ‘Tell them, Do not go up nor fight’*” (Deuteronomy 1:42).

Did you notice that the Lord said if the Israelites *did* go up to fight against the Canaanites, He would not be among them? Why would He not be among His people? Hear Moses’ explanation: “. . . *you shall fall by the sword, because you have turned away from the LORD, the LORD will not be with you*” (Numbers 14:43). When men forsake the Lord, it is certain that He will not be with and bless them.

So, the Lord said their proposed mission would be a failure (“*this will not succeed,*” 14:41), He said He would not be with them (14:42,43), and He directly commanded them, “*Do not go up*” (14:42). How much clearer could it be? Would the Israelites choose to comply with God’s instructions, or would they choose to rebel? Moses later recounted the course of action which they decided to take: “*So I spoke to you: yet you would not listen, but rebelled against the command of the LORD, and presumptuously went up*

*into the mountain*” (Deuteronomy 1:43). The result was disastrous, as the Canaanites came out and drove them back (Numbers 14:45).

The Israelites’ mission failed. It was not because they lacked bravery. It was not because the Canaanites had better weapons and superior fighting skills. Israel did not succeed because the Lord was not with them, and He was not with them because they rebelled against Him. Decades later, Moses reminded the people about this incident, saying, “*Then you returned and wept before the LORD, but the LORD would not listen to your voice nor give ear to you*” (Deuteronomy 1:45). Humans can shed ten thousand tears and they can cry out to the Lord from sunrise to sundown, but if they are rebellious, He will not hear them, will not bless them, and will not forgive them.

When God said, “*Do not go,*” Israel’s conduct showed that their mentality was, “Oh, yes we will!” Hundreds of years later, King Saul disregarded a clear command of the Lord and was told, “*For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you . . .*” (1 Samuel 15:23).

When humans try to “go it alone” by depending on their own wisdom and disregarding God’s instructions, certain catastrophe will follow. When it comes to life, including spiritual and moral matters, human beings do not have the capacity to chart the best course. As Jeremiah declared, “*O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps*” (Jeremiah 10:23). Despite God’s appeal to the Israelites not to charge up to take on the Canaanites at that time, they marched ahead anyway. The bottom line: they did exactly what they wanted to do. They thought it was a good idea. People, some of whom are members of God’s family, struggle at times to accept this reality: “*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death*” (Proverbs 16:25). What sounds good, feels good, or looks good to the minds of humans may, in fact, be destructive and sinful. Israel learned that lesson the hard way.

“I do not see the problem. God promised to give Canaan to the Israelites. All they did was go engage the Canaanites. What was wrong with that?” The timing. When the Lord says, “Do not go,” it is not the right time to go! The Israelites’ conduct makes it look like they were trying to “make up” for their sinful complaining by doing something special. No one corrects past mistakes by rebelling against God!

-- Roger D. Campbell

## HOW MANY PEOPLE WROTE THE BIBLE, AND OVER HOW LONG OF A PERIOD OF TIME WAS IT WRITTEN?

Perhaps you have wondered about these matters, or maybe you have been asked about them and were not sure how to go about giving an appropriate answer. An acquaintance of mine recently called and asked me both of those questions.

From the outset, let us recognize and acknowledge that nowhere within the text of the Bible do we find God's direct answer to either one of these inquiries. Despite that, using the information that *is* given to us in God's word, we can come up with a general, "ballpark figure" for each of these two matters under discussion.

All Scripture was given by inspiration of God (2 Timothy 3:16). The spokesmen/prophets of God who wrote His word in human language were guided in their writings by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20,21). In some cases, the human writers of a particular book of the Bible identify themselves; in other cases, the human writer is not named. For a biblical book to be "anonymous," however, does not alter either the source or inspiration of its message.

Let us consider first how many humans were used to write the New Testament, as that situation is more cut and dried. Well, there were Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. There is strong evidence that Luke wrote the book of Acts. After that, from Romans to Philemon, the apostle Paul was the writer. Add the names James, Peter, and Jude to those disciples we already noted. How many writers are we up to? Eight, correct? The book of Hebrews is the one book of the New Testament about which there is a lack of clarity concerning its human writer. If Paul wrote it, that would be a total of eight people who wrote the New Testament. If someone other than Paul or the other writers whom we have mentioned wrote it, that would be nine writers.

What about calculating how many men of God wrote the Old Testament? There is less certainty in our response. The writers of the Old Testament books would include Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Job, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the men who wrote the last fourteen books from Ezekiel to Malachi, with each book bearing the name of its writer. How many Old Testament writers did we just note, either by naming or describing them? I counted twenty-four.

There are several books in which the writer is not named, and we have no way of knowing for sure who wrote them — books such as Judges, 2

Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles. So, if we say about eight men wrote the New Testament, then we add to that number the twenty-four Old Testament writers we noted above, that would be a total of thirty-two. If we further add in a few more unidentified writers, that might make the total number of Bible writers to be about 35-40 men.

From the writing of the first Bible book to the penning of the last, how much time passed? There are clear indications that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible (Genesis to Deuteronomy), sometimes called "the Pentateuch," "Torah," or "the books of Moses." Those five books were like one unit, so references to Moses as the writer of the law (Numbers 33:2; Joshua 23:6; John 7:22; Mark 12:26) would point to him as the writer of all five of those books.

Solomon became king in about B.C. 971. He began construction on the temple in the fourth year of his reign (1 Kings 6:1). In that same verse, it is written that the year in which he started the temple construction was 480 years after the Israelites left Egypt. Thus, if we put the starting point for the building of the temple as B.C. 967, the time of Israel's exit from Egypt would have been around B.C. 1447 (figured by adding 480 to 967; some conservative-minded Bible students estimate the date for the exodus from Egypt as about B.C. 1490). We recall that Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years, so the historical date for their entrance into Canaan was approximately B.C. 1407.

It would appear that Moses' writing of the Pentateuch took place somewhere between B.C. 1447 and B.C. 1407. What about the final portion of God's word? The book of Revelation was written in the latter half of the first century, with a number of people thinking it was written in the late 60's, while many more think John wrote Revelation in the mid-90's A.D.

Let us do our final calculating. From around B.C. 1450 (Genesis) to the latter portion of the first century A.D. (Revelation) was more than 1500 years. Some would suggest it was closer to 1600 years. That is the general time frame in which the Almighty, all-wise God of heaven chose to reveal His will through His inspired spokesmen. Thank God for His word that continues to be a lamp for our feet and a light for our path (Psalm 119:105).

-- Roger D. Campbell

## Galatians 2:11-14 – LESSONS FROM PAUL’S REBUKE OF PETER

Simon Peter was an apostle of the Lord Jesus, as was Paul. Both of them preached the gospel to Jews and Gentiles, though Paul did more of his work among the Gentiles, while Peter carried out more of his labors among the Jews (Galatians 2:8).

Here is what Paul penned about one situation that involved him and Peter: “*Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed*” (Galatians 2:11). Let us consider some lessons which we can learn from the course of action taken in this matter by these two apostles.

We will look first at Peter. As we noted above, he had done something for which “*he was to be blamed.*” Wait a minute. If Peter was a genuine apostle of the Christ, how could he mess up? Was he not guided by the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit guided Jesus’ apostles to communicate the gospel without mistakes, both orally and in writing. But, the Spirit did not take over their minds and make their choices for them in their personal lives. When preaching, Peter’s message was perfect. In his own life, he had the freedom to make his own choices, and when humans do that, even when they show forth a pattern of being faithful servants of God, they still will make some mistakes.

In this case, of what sin was Peter guilty? Paul labeled it as hypocrisy (Galatians 2:13). A hypocrite is one who is an actor, a stage player, a pretender. The person whom we see performing as a character in a theatrical performance is a different person in real life. In the same way, a hypocrite is one who is very different in his heart than the impression that he wants others to have of him. He is a pretender.

Notice this about Peter’s hypocritical mistake: it had an influence on others. When others saw Peter, who definitely would have been counted as a leader, acting like a hypocrite, some of them joined him in his misdeed: “*And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy*” (Galatians 2:13). Yes, our choices, whether helpful or harmful, can have an influence on others. That is especially true for those who are in the role of leaders.

What led to Peter’s sin in this instance? Others may have affected his thinking, but the bottom line is, it was fear that led him to behave like he did. The Bible says Peter stopped associating with Gentiles, “*fearing those who were of the circumcision*” (Galatians 2:12). When we allow fear to take over our hearts, we do not make healthy choices. As he was walking on water, fear entered Peter’s heart and he began to sink (Matthew 14:30,31). Do you remember that? And when he denied his Lord three times, what

was going on inside Peter? He was fearful. God does not want us to live in fear of what might happen. Instead, He wants us to put our trust in Him, cast our cares on Him, and make choices which glorify Him.

Now, what about Paul’s action in dealing with Peter? First of all, what Peter had done could not be justified, nor could it be swept under the carpet as if it had never happened. It happened. It influenced others. It had the potential to bring great harm to the Lord’s work. You see, there was a point when Peter was spending time with Gentile Christians and treating them like they were on equal footing with Jewish saints and were “part of us.” Then, because he was afraid of what some Jewish Christians might think about him, Peter started treating those same Gentiles as if they were *not* “part of us” (Galatians 2:12).

Kudos to Paul for having the courage to stand up to Peter “*to his face*” (Galatians 2:11). In fact, Paul rebuked his fellow-apostle “*before them all,*” that is, in the presence of others who were involved (Galatians 2:14). If a brother or sister in the Christ has sinned against me in a personal matter, that is between me and them and I should attempt to resolve it in a private manner. That is what Jesus taught (Matthew 18:15,16). What Paul describes in Galatians 2, though, was not a matter of Peter sinning against Paul. His was a sin against the Lord that had been committed in such a way that it was a corrupting leaven, having a widespread, evil effect on the thinking of others (Galatians 2:13). Paul “called Peter out,” so to speak, in front of others, the intention being to bring about repentance and limit the damage done. It is a biblical approach to follow the instruction of 1 Timothy 5:20: “*Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.*” Paul’s rebuke of Peter was not done in an effort to try and make Peter look bad (Peter already had done that all by himself), nor was it done to make Paul look superior. Paul did it to help Peter, help Barnabas, and help the church.

The Bible says, “*He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue*” (Proverbs 28:23). There are indications that after Paul rebuked Peter for his hypocrisy, they still thought highly of one another, and neither labeled the other as unfaithful or unreliable. That says a lot about both of those men. Are we listening?

-- Roger D. Campbell

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