

GOD'S WORD and OUR CONDITION

James 1:19-25

Our ministry, Christ Community Church, embraces the following “core convictions” -

God

1. We believe in one God, Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.

The Bible

2. We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is **without error** in the original writings, **the complete revelation** of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be **believed** in all that it teaches, **obeyed** in all that it requires, and **trusted** in all that it promises.

The Human Condition

3. We believe that God created Adam and Eve in His image, but they sinned when tempted by Satan. In union with Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God, and under His wrath. Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed.

If you don't mind, let's begin this morning with a bit of a quiz. A one simple question quiz that nobody can get wrong. Here's the question –

**When you think about the BIBLE
what word-picture comes to mind?**

Sometimes we call a word-picture a “metaphor,” which is a descriptive or pictorial image representing the nature of something else. For example

- ✓ David writes “We are **sheep**” in God's fold, or in his pasture, his grazing area. When God tells us we are “sheep,” that communicates something about our nature and our relationship with God.
- ✓ The man Jesus is described as a “**lamb**” in one place (a sacrificed lamb) but in another place he is described as **the “Lion”** of Judah.
- ✓ The Church is pictured as “**the bride**” of Christ
- ✓ Often in the Old Testament, the Lord is pictured as “**our fortress**” or “our rock.”

So, the BIBLE (i.e., God's Word) – how do you picture it? *The Bible* – likened to many things

- **breath** from God's mouth (2 Timothy 3:16)
- **lamp** to one's feet, a light on one's path (Psalm 119:105)
- **library** because that is literally what it is, a small, supernatural library of 66 books
- **mid-wife** who helps in the birth of life (James 1:18)
- **milk** for growth (1 Peter 2:2, Hebrews 5)

- **nail** which driven in brings firmness (Ecclesiastes 12:11)
- nourishing **food** (Jeremiah 15:16)
- **rock** foundation under a constructed dwelling (Matthew 7)
- **rules, commands, statutes, testimonies, precepts, laws** (Psalm 119)
- **seed** sown/planted in soil that brings a crop (James 1:21, Matthew 13)
- sweet **honey, drippings** from the honeycomb (Psalm 19:10, Psalm 119:103)
- **sword**, two-edge sword (Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12)
- **treasures** of gold and silver (Proverbs 2), to be mined and sought after
- pure **water** that cleanses and purifies (2 Peter 3:5, Ephesians 5:26)
- **wind and rain** which coming down from above sprouts life in the earth (Isaiah 55:10)

So many cool and helpful pictures reminding why the Bible is absolutely crucial to my growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

Recently, when looking for the word-picture that somehow captures the relationship between the 2nd and 3rd of our CORE CONVICTIONS (The Bible and Our Condition), the Spirit of God led me to this one. What's the description that weds both **what God says in the Scriptures** and **Who we are**? Unless I miss my guess, James, the brother of Jesus and an apostle in the 1st century church, was led by the Holy Spirit to land on the right metaphor. **A mirror.** The Bible and us. What captures our relationship with the Bible, and the Bible's relationship with us? **A mirror.**

James 1:19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

²¹ Therefore **put away** all filthiness and rampant wickedness and **receive with meekness** the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²² But **be doers** of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Today's teaching seeks to understand, affirm, and wed Articles 2-3 of our CORE CONVICTIONS.

Here's how the two convictions merge --

***Because the One True God has spoken
with unquestionable clarity
we who bear His compromised image
must respond with unconditional humility***

OK...so let's lean in closer.

**I. First, the One true God has spoken
with unquestionable clarity.**

And when I say that, I can already sense the objection. "Wait a minute, I'm not so sure that God has

spoken so clearly? I mean, if God has spoken so clearly, why are so many people confused about God or unsure about God.”

I'll push back, gently. Enough to contend that there is no doubt that God has clearly spoken in at least 4 ways:

God speaks 24/7 through the magnificence of what He has created

Psalm 19:1-4 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

Romans 1:19-20 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

God has clearly spoken throughout history various means

Hebrews 1:1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets

The truth is that when you read the Old Testament, you realize how very much aware the surrounding nations were aware of the Hebrew prophets' message. God spoke often and clearly to the ancient world.

But let's keep reading

God has spoken, and is speaking through His Son

Hebrews 1:2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

No one has made God more clear to humanity than God the Son, Jesus Christ. John said it, “No one has seen God. The only begotten God (i.e., Jesus), who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known” (**John 1:18**)

God speaks 24/7 in His creation. He has spoken through the centuries by the prophets. He has clearly spoken through His own begotten Son...and

God speaks through His written word

Psalm 19:7-11ⁱ

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped *for every good work*.

Please think a moment about the WEIGHT of what Scripture is saying. GOD HAS SPOKEN! In creation, through the prophets, by His Son, in the Bible. It's a CORE CONVICTION that

The Bible (James calls “the mirror”)

We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is **without error** in the original writings, **the complete revelation** of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be **believed** in all that it teaches, **obeyed** in all that it requires, and **trusted** in all that it promises.

So what does this CORE CONVICTION mean?

#1 It means that “the mirror” (Bible) is TRUTHFUL because of its source

As the verbally inspired Word of God,
the Bible is **without error** in the original writings

Years ago, a humorous story emerged from the city of Denver, Pennsylvania. For decades, anyone living within 5 or 6 miles of the local factory set their clocks and watches by the sirens the factory set off five days a week. At 5:30 AM, the wake up siren would begin the day, followed by “starting time,” and then “lunchtime”, and “quitting time” sirens.

But when the siren system was eventually disbanded, someone began reminiscing with the timekeeper about his job. He was asked, “What did you use to determine the exact time?” With a twinkle in his eye, the man reached into his pocket and pulled out a child’s Mickey Mouse watch.

MORAL OF THE STORY – some experts are not as authoritative as they seem.ⁱⁱ

The volume of books you have in your hands is no cheap watch made overseas that we just happen to be using in people’s lives. It is a library of “God’s breath,” a God who cannot lie, a God who chooses to speak truth which renews the way we think and sanctifies how we live.

#2 It means that “the mirror” is COMPLETE/ACCURATE about salvation

the complete revelation of
God’s will for salvation

In other words, this is the mirror into which we look to discover how we can be rescued from the penalty and consequences of sin. It answers the questions – better than any other source – of

what has happened to us, why we are confused and distant from God, and what God has done in his relentless love – through Christ and through Christ alone – to save us, to rescue us, to redeem us, to restore us. Put us in His family. To give us a chance at real life, today, and into eternity. The Bible – listened to, believed, and followed, makes God’s good news of rescue and restoration clear.

Not too long ago, a Kansas City pharmacist was charged with diluting life-saving cancer treatment drugs, Gemzar and Taxol, in order to make a larger profit. At the feet of pharmacist Robert Courtney were laid at least 20 felony counts, and he admitted to diluting the drugs over a 6 month period of time. Here was a man who held life-saving power in his hands, and yet for the sake of personal gain diluted it to the point where it could not truly help people.

The truth is that everyone has the cancer of sin, and only the gospel of salvation in Christ can eradicate it. This mirror in the hands of God’s Spirit can rescue anyone.

#3 It means that “the mirror” is the bottom-line EVALUATOR of what we know and do

**the ultimate authority by which every realm
of human knowledge should be judged**

Theologian Clark Pinnock dared to put it like this:

The distinctive mark of modern theology today is its dreadful ambiguity. The chaos of American theology today can be traced back to its roots in the rejection of Biblical infallibility. Preaching is [not to be] the act of unfolding our personal convictions. It is the duty of informing women and men of all that God has spoken. To move off from the pages of Scripture is to enter into the wastelands of our own subjectivity. Scripture plays an important role in the salvation of people. The Bible is a divinely provided map of the spiritual order. It contains the directions and markings to guide a person into reconciliation with God.ⁱⁱⁱ

Here’s the point: Depending on your core conviction about

- whether or not God has spoken truthfully,
- whether or not God can rescue and redeem you through Christ
- whether or not God’s Word will be the bottom-line authority in your heart and mind and life

you may looking for your bearings

- ✓ about what is right or wrong, about truthfulness or dishonesty
- ✓ about how made in the image of God human life is to respected or thrown aside
- ✓ about the use of your body sexually and what sexual expression is for
- ✓ about marriage and family
- ✓ how to use our possessions and money from our culture

either from an unquestionably clear God who creates us and knows us better than we know ourselves....or a shifting culture that most people admit is a mess.

Rate overall state of moral values?

Excellent – 2%

Good – 15%

Fair – 36%

Poor – 47%

* Getting better = 19%

* Getting worse – 77%

Gallup Research 2001-2019

Because the One true God has unquestionably clearly spoken...

II. Therefore, we who bear His compromised image must respond with unconditional humility.

The Human Condition We believe that God created Adam and Eve in His image, but they sinned when tempted by Satan. In union with Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God, and under His wrath. Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed.

“Hey David...what do you mean that we bear God's *compromised* image?” I mean that when you and I look in the mirror – the mirror of God's Word, we see two things.

#1 We see someone **wonderfully created in the image** of God. J.I. Packer puts it like this:

God's image in man is that we are personal, self-conscious, God-like creatures with a God-like capacity for knowledge, thought, and action, along with moral uprightness, and the capacity and responsibility to exercise (environmental) dominion over creation. We have also been made immortal.

#2 But we also see **that image-of-God compromised** by our own sinfulness

Packer (continues): *The Fall (in sin) diminished God's image not only in Adam and Eve but in all their descendants. We retain God's image structurally (our humanity is in tact) but not functionally, for now we are sin's slaves and unable to use our powers to mirror God's holiness.^{iv}*

J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.

Sin is not only a violation of the divine law...more profoundly it is violation of the expression of God's holy character. It is corruption of the goodness which the Creator originally imparted to His creatures, and especially, it is the corruption of the godliness with which God originally endowed man when He created him/her in His image.^v

Which points to the last statement of EFCA Article 3 - **Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed**. When in humility, we dare to listen to a God who continues to speak clearly, and when we in humility, take a look at ourselves in the mirror, we

discover how very much we need to be rescued, reconciled, and renewed in Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

May I ask you a simple question: ***Have you discovered the incredible benefit of humbly looking***

into God's mirror? Are your core convictions that God has spoken, and you need every day what

He is saying? James 1:21-25

James 1:21 Therefore **put away** all filthiness and rampant wickedness and **receive with meekness** the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²² But **be doers** of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Are you listening to Him, or ignoring? What place does this incredible resource have with you?

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ⁱ The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

ⁱⁱ From Erma Landis, *Christian Reader*, in Craig Brian Larson & Leadership Journal, *750 Engaging Illustrations*(Baker Books, 2002), 40.

ⁱⁱⁱ Clark Pinnock, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (October-December 1967)

^{iv} J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 71-73.

^v Carl F.H. Henry, ed., Chapter 16 "The Origin and Nature of Sin" in *Basic Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962)