

# What Do Believe? Select Text

Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn

*"We sin because we believe the lie that we are better off without God, that His rule is too oppressive, that we will be free without Him, that sin offers more than God. This is true of every sin and every negative emotion."*

Time Chester

*"Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, **alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.** They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ! Assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."*

*"There is no sin greater than ignorance"*

Rudyard Kipling

## Intro

We have been going through a series on the gospel, and today is the last sermon in that series. We have looked at:

1. The Gospel Story from Genesis to Revelation, taking a look at how God's story has unfolded in His full revelation, and how it is about Him and His glory, and not about us.
2. How We "Gospel" One Another, where we were encouraged to "Bear one another's burden's" and "Spur one another on to love and good deeds."
3. How the Gospel Changes Us, which showed us that it is God and His power that saves us and changes us. We also saw that the gospel is not about personal transformation, but repentance for our sin, and trust that what Christ did on the cross is sufficient for our salvation.

Today we are going to take a look at five key truths that are important to our continuing growth in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Note:** This sermon is predominantly pulled from Tim Chester's book *You Can Change: God's Transforming Power For Our Sinful Behavior and negative Emotions* (Particularly Chapter five).

## From the Head...

"Behind Every Sin and Negative Emotion Is A Lie"<sup>1</sup>

*"The root of all behavior and emotions is the heart."* This is an important truth to understand. When we fail to understand that sin is a heart issue, we will see sin solely as an outward behavior and furiously work to curb behavior without dealing with the motives and underlying issues that cause the behavior. For instance stealing is an outward behavior that our society frowns upon, so it may behoove society to curb theft by changing the behavior of thieves; but the fact of the matter, we often steal because of greed, which many people are, but do not necessarily commit the act of theft. Or we lie (Outward behavior) because we fear man, or what will think of us (Inward thoughts).

As humans, we have all *"exchanged the **truth** of God for a lie"* (**Romans 1:25**), because we don't really believe that we are better off without God. We can do it better. This is the sin of the garden, not eating fruit. Adam set humanity onto a rebellious trajectory, by choosing to be his own god and run his own life. Man isn't the solution to his problems; he is the cause of them, and needs a new set of hard-wiring to live in this world differently, with a different set of paradigms helping him/her make decisions. We see this issue in **Ephesians 4:17-24**. Man's problem is futile thinking and ignorance. The ignorance Paul is talking about here is the ignorance of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, not personal *"Enlightenment!"* Note that this ignorance is due to the *"**Hardness**"* of our hearts. It's not more education we need to destroy this kind of ignorance, it is a heart change we need!! Many intelligent people are hateful and ignorant. It's not more education they need (*"Knowledge is Power"* may be true to gain power, but does nothing to fight the issues of our heart); they need a transformed pattern of thinking. Peter writes similarly to *believers in 2 Peter 1:9* when he says *"Whoever lacks these qualities (Christian Character) is so nearsighted that he is blind, **having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.**"* English preacher/theologian D. Martin Lloyd-Jones said this, *"Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?" 2 Corinthians 10:3-5* commands us to *"Take very thought captive!"* All too often, we allow our thinking to rule us, and we believe lies about who we are, who God is, what He has, or hasn't done for you. We are to *"Guard our hearts, because out of it is the wellsprings of life"* (**Proverbs 4:23**).

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Chester, *You Can Change*, pg. 81

What are the lies about God (Or fail to believe) that wreak havoc on our souls? **Psalm 62:11-12** reminds us that Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this; that **power** belongs to God (*Greatness and Glory*), and that to you, Oh Lord, belongs **steadfast love** (*Goodness and grace*).

### 1. God Is Not Great; So I Need To Take Control

Sometimes I live here! This is a blatant disbelief that God is sovereign and in control, and that He has the power to work out any situation we find ourselves in. We see horrible things taking place in the world, and we conclude that God is either not loving, or not powerful, or worse, neither. When we are freaking out over money, jobs, life's decisions, circumstances, etc. we are acting atheists. Even in death we are told, "*Not to grieve like the gentiles who have no hope*" (**1 Thessalonians 4:13**). God is greater than even death (**Romans 8:37-39; 1 Corinthians 15:55-58**). When we don't trust God's sovereignty, we will try to control our involvement; and quite often bring more harm to the situation.

### 2. God Is Not Glorious; So I Often Fear Others

I was going to change the wording of this, because we don't often use the word "Glorious," but as we (The Elders) pondered this word and the way it was being used, and I decided to stay with it, especially as Tim Chester uses it. If God is "Glorious" then we don't have to "Fear" others. How is this related? When God is seen in His glory, we no longer need to seek our own glory, which so often leads us to care and even fear what others think. Our fear of man causes so many issues in our lives. We are literally controlled by what others think, and since we are trying to please others so that we can gain a saving grace, we can no longer serve them. If I need you to be happy, I am using you (My children, wife, friends, etc) for my own good, and not their own. We become "needy," give in to peer pressure, become over-committed because we can't say no in fear that others will think lowly of us. We fail to confront sin, because we want others to like us. When we seek our own glory, we will always end up destroying God's! In our culture, we are told that we are the most important thing, yet we are a people full of anxiety and low "Self-Esteem." Culture's cure for poor self-esteem is to build that up with self-indulgent means, instead of bowing the knee to a big God. We become dependent then on the one thing or person that seems to bolster our self-esteem. As Tim Chester says, "*Low self-esteem is thwarted pride.*" Trying to bolster someone's self-esteem is just using a heart issue (Pride) to secure change. It only exacerbates the problem causing either an arrogant, prideful person, or a defeated one knowing that they don't "Measure up." The only way we can destroy our fear of man, is to rightfully fear God. Only God is worthy to fear (See **Isaiah 40:25**). In **Psalm 18** the Psalmist is meditating on who God is and what He has done.

### 3. God Is Not Good; So I Need to Look Elsewhere

This one for me is the hardest. My rebellion doesn't necessarily come from hardcore outward acts of debauchery, but they come from little mental indulgences that God may be powerful, and He may be sovereign, but He isn't good and loving. It causes fear (Since it is related to #1) and it causes me to seek joy in other things beside Him. It is easy to believe that God's desire is to rob your joy, when in actuality he is championing your Joy by demanding obedient allegiance to Him. **Hebrews 11:24-26** reminds us that joy found outside Christ is fleeting (See too **Jeremiah 2:13**). If we do not see God as good, we will look elsewhere for the "High Life." This is the debate Jesus had with the woman at the well in **John 4**. It is interesting how Jesus takes the story to worship. She was playing with sexual addictions trying to find happiness, but it kept coming up empty (5 Husbands), and Jesus spent most of the dialogue trying to get her to see that sex, nor religion (She tried to talk about worship location), was the answer, He (Jesus) was (See **John 7:37-39**). In a world of gross sin and horrible atrocities, it is easy to look toward God for an account of Himself, but as Job found out, we won't get one. He is God, and His ways are not our ways. St. Theresa of Avila sums it up in a quote in regards to the Lord's Prayer and God's subsequent will; "*Do you want to see what He does to those who pray 'Thy will be done' in sincerity? Ask His glorious Son, Who said this when He prayed in the garden. As the Lord uttered it with strong resolve and an entire will, the answer was to give Him such an overflow of travail, pains, sufferings, and persecutions, that at the end He gave His life by the death of the cross. See there, then, what God gives to those who love Him most. This is how we know what it is to know His will.*"<sup>2</sup> If we look only to a horizontal view of reality, we will only see pain and meaningless. It is only when God removes the scales from our eyes that we can truly see life vertically, and place our hope and our happiness in His sovereign and "Good" hands!

### 4. God Is Not Gracious; So I feel I need to Prove Myself

The parable of the "Prodigal Son" is often seen as relating to the son(s), whereas in reality it is a story on the grace of our Lord. We try so hard to please Him in religion, but we forget that our status with Him is not based on us, but on Him and His grace to us. We see this mostly in the oldest son's disdain for the graciousness of His Father. Only when we understand God's grace can we truly serve Him in love for and not for a reward. Tim Chester demonstrates the son's attitude in the following outline:<sup>3</sup>

## ***Restless Anger***

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<sup>2</sup> St. Theresa of Avila, *A Life of Prayer: Faith and Passion For God Alone*, pg. 71

<sup>3</sup> IBID, pgs. 99-101

*The older brother became angry and refused to go in" (Luke 15:28)*

### **Joyless Duty**

*"All these years I've been slaving for you" (Luke 15:29)*

### **Anxious Performance**

*"I never disobeyed your orders" (Luke 15:29)*

### **Proud Comparisons**

*"This son of yours has squandered your property with prostitutes" (Luke 15:30)*

### **...to the Heart**

Are you serving God with Joy? Are you mad at God because He hasn't "Come through" for you? Are you helping others so that they will praise you? Are you wracked in worry and anxiety because of circumstances in your life? Are you critical, and do you feel it is hard to forgive people that have "Wronged" you? Do you look down on others that don't measure up to your expectations and standards? Do you gossip about others? Do you fear what tomorrow may bring?

If you have answered yes to any of these questions most likely you are struggling with believing the truth of these attributes about God. When the gospel is about you, and God exists for your happiness, then it is sure that we need an attitude adjustment. When we begin to fully trust God in these areas, we will find the life and happiness we are looking for.

In order to grow in these areas we need to **first** grow in our trust of God, **secondly** we need to fight off temptations by reminding ourselves not that the temptations are sin, but that we fight it positively by reminding ourselves that we have all we need in Christ, and **lastly**, it is imperative that we exist in community and listen to godly believers with scripture open reminding us of all we have in Jesus.

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