

DJ HILL



A

CELEBRATION

OF

CREATION



AN APOSTOLIC VIEW OF IDENTITY AND GENDER

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Essential Truths

My daughter has started to enjoy balloons. There is a problem though. She does not want me to tie the string around her wrist to ensure the balloons do not float away. She thinks it is uncomfortable, and she does not understand the potential danger of losing the balloons. Instead of following the direction I, as her father, am trying to give her, she ends up letting her balloons float away. Like her, we all have a choice to follow God's directions. He gives them to us with the best of intentions because He wants what's best for us. Even if we do not fully understand everything that's written in Scripture, we should still listen to the words of a heavenly, loving Father who wants the best for us.

To be *Apostolic* means to follow the teachings and lifestyle of the apostles. The apostles walked with Jesus and followed His teaching in the first century. Today, we learn about the Lord by reading the Bible. As David K. Bernard writes, "If we believe in God, we should also believe in God's Word."¹ His Word reveals He has a magnificent, incomparable love for us. He gave us His Word because it is the best thing to aid us in being educated, equipped, and empowered to follow after Him. His Word helps

us not only to understand the importance of our choice to follow Him but how to live out that choice each day.

We do not just follow some Scripture; we follow all of Scripture.

As Apostolics, we do not just follow some Scripture; we follow all of Scripture because we believe all of Scripture comes from God. The Bible is infallible and timeless (Psalm 100:5). Again, in the words of David K. Bernard, “While the

human writers chose words that reflected their language, culture, personality, circumstances, and experiences, God guided the process so that each word accurately conveyed His message.”² You may have heard it said that we have a “high view” of Scripture; this means we believe the Word of God to be *absolutely true*. The Bible is the foundation on which we build our lives. In so doing, we follow after Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. His Word helps us not to guess what is right, but we are led by His grace (Proverbs 3:5–6).

The Bible is comprised of both the Old and New Testament. The Old Testament points forward to the Cross while the New Testament points backward to the Cross. While discussing preaching, Charles Spurgeon once said that when he uses a Scripture he makes a beeline to the Cross. Many Scripture verses have the potential to contribute to our understanding of God’s redemptive act on the cross. That sacrifice should entirely change our lives. We live for Him because He died for us. We live holy because He died for us. We love others because He died for them.

Acts 20:28 declares that He loves us so much that He purchased the church with His own blood. He not only died for us, but He rose again as evidence of His power over the grave. As the primary source of our communication with God, reading the Word of God is vital for us to establish a healthy relationship

with our risen Savior. In so doing, we are invited to be a part of God's redemptive story. And our willingness to follow His Word is tied to a promise: Jesus is coming back for the church. And just like in the days of Noah, whoever is a part of the church will be saved. (See Matthew 24:37–39.)

We will know how to be part of the church by following God's Word, and it can be trusted: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right" (II Timothy 3:16, NLT). A more literal meaning of the word *inspired* from this verse is "God-breathed." The Bible helps us interpret the world around us and helps us in our day-to-day lives as we live in a relationship with Him. That is why it is so important to view the world through the Bible instead of viewing the Bible through the lens of the current culture. Prevalent cultural ideas should not define how we live. Isaiah declared, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; . . . [and] those who are wise in their own eyes" (Isaiah 5:20–21). Instead, God's Word should shape and order our world. Just as God spoke the world into existence in Genesis 1, even so God's Word gives us a worldview (or a lens for seeing the world) based on the way the Lord ordered Creation.

The enemy can use negative cultural attitudes to muddle God's plan and affect our worldview. If you wear sunglasses with a green tint, then everything you look at will have a green tint to it. The same is true for any other color-tinted sunglasses. The world around you is colored by the lens you look through. We must be diligent to ensure that we look at the world through the lens of the Bible.

The world can distort our view on how things should be. For example, slavery was permitted by southern states in the US in the first half of the nineteenth century. If you looked at the world

through the lens of many of the residents of those states during that time, then you might have wrongfully agreed that slavery and racism were acceptable. From a biblical worldview, we can search the Scriptures to learn that slavery is wrong and evil and still is. God created everyone in His image. The Lord delivered the Israelites so they would not be people enslaved by the Egyptians. Paul hoped the slave owner Philemon would receive the runaway slave Onesimus as a brother in Christ rather than as his property. Paul also spoke of being freed from the spirit of bondage to show that being spiritually enslaved to sin was wrong. And if slavery was wrong spiritually, then it must have been wrong naturally. Still, Paul faced the challenge of speaking to a Greco-Roman culture built on slave labor. He had his work cut out for him in preaching the gospel of freedom. Though it might feel more comfortable to just agree with the majority at times, we must guard ourselves from this error. We could be going against the truth of the Word of God by agreeing with the world. An Apostolic approach to the Bible gives us an accurate lens we can use in viewing the world.³

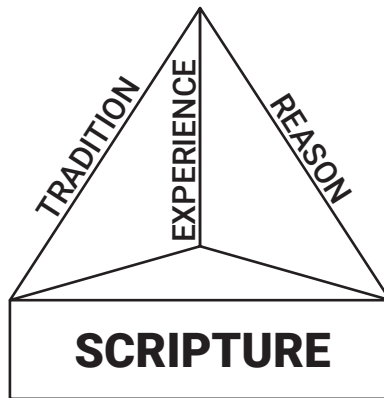
If we do not listen to everything God says, then we run the risk of allowing ungodly arguments and deceitful imaginations to guide our thinking (II Corinthians 10:5). If we are fully submitted to the Lord, then we will view the world through the positive reality of the grace and power of God rather than negatively as something we have constructed in our minds. Jesus will truly be Lord of all. As Paul declared in II Corinthians 7:1, we have amazing promises when Jesus is Lord and we “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” But we must ask ourselves an important question: How can we call Him Lord, but not follow what He says? (Luke 6:46). If we give Him authority, then our lives should prove that we believe His Word is absolute and essential truth.

We will recognize that God wants us to be completely committed to Him by following His Word and His will. Willingness to live for God means radically following His Word.⁴

I have used these points in the previous paragraphs to show that our lives must be built on the Word of God. We must approach and interpret the Bible accurately to understand God's intent through it.

Learning an Apostolic Approach

Many Apostolics pursue truth using Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. This method is derived from John Wesley, and it helps us with a balanced approach to establishing our worldview.



Apostolics strive for doctrinal correctness when working on comprehending a verse. The best approach is to start with the foundational principle that Scripture interprets Scripture. We should read the verses and chapters before and after a specific verse we are studying to better understand it. If you only read and heard preached Matthew 4:9, it might sound pretty good. It reads, “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” You might think that receiving the world for

bowing down and worshiping is a great deal. However, if you read the verses around verse 9, you will quickly realize that the devil is the one doing the talking, and he does not offer anything worth destroying our relationship with Jesus. Instead, we want to begin our study of a Scripture passage by studying its context.

We do not just read a verse . . . but we search for context.

We do not just read a verse and create a system of beliefs from it, but we search for context. Context is essential to understanding God's intent in His Word. When we read a passage of Scripture we should ask questions such as: What is the setting? Who is the audience? What is the author's reason for writing? What is the principle God is trying to teach through the text? What application does this have in my life? These questions will give us a more thorough understanding of the text. David K. Bernard once wrote on social media, "We seek to understand what the biblical authors attempted to communicate as they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. We also recognize that the Spirit inspired the message to apply to future generations beyond the full understanding of the authors."

We should draw meaning from the text instead of adding our own meaning to the text. Too often we look for Scripture that favorably interprets a particular passage based on how it aligns with our preconceived understanding of the text. We should not build a doctrine or guideline from a verse taken out of context. To have a proper Apostolic worldview, we must use the entirety of Scripture as a foundation to view the world around us.

We also use reason or logic to understand what the text says. While the Lord has given us the ability to think critically, we also rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit to complement that ability, as that is a benefit of being filled with His Spirit. (See John 14:26 and I Corinthians 2:12–14.) Reason helps us realize why certain things are the way they are. Reason helps us understand

why it matters who we date when we consider the story of Samson. Some might believe that Samson's desire for a Philistine woman contradicts the Lord's prohibition against dating unbelievers because both the Lord and Samson's parents allowed the engagement despite objections. Just because God allows something to happen does not mean God endorses it. God and Samson's parents were not trying to make him miserable or withhold something pleasurable from him. They were trying to protect him from negative influences that could destroy his ministry and life since he was special. It would be wrong to interpret Samson's story as being about tough parents not letting you date whoever you want to date. Samson needed to be more careful in his choices because he would one day meet a woman named Delilah who had ulterior motives. When using an Apostolic approach on a story such as that of Samson, logic should tell you to be cautious in your approach to dating because one mistake can ruin a lifetime of commitment and a bright future. Though God's ways and thoughts are above ours, there are patterns and logic within the supernatural.

Without faith or obedience to God's Word, the laying on of hands while praying for others can seem weird. However, Jesus did a lot of stuff that might seem weird to us, yet it worked because He demonstrated its power and effectiveness. So although we use reason to better understand Scripture, there may be times when it does not make sense. Yet we can always trust what God has said. We should never let what we see or feel make us forget what He said. So while we use reason, our entire belief system is not built on reason alone. It is also built on Scripture, tradition, and experience.

Tradition is the next step in our approach to understand Scripture. Because some branches of Christianity give too much emphasis to tradition, we must recognize that tradition never

supersedes the authority of Scripture. Slavery and racism were a tradition for many years (even among those who considered themselves to be Christians, unfortunately), but thankfully God's church allowed Scripture to supersede the traditions of carnal men. Tradition assists us in finding patterns that could help us better understand Scripture. We can ask questions like, "What is the pattern throughout church history," "why did the older people in my church live that way," and "what happened to people that did not adhere to that verse?" These questions will help us grasp the Scriptures better.

Tradition teaches us that God can use anybody. God does not allow our past to disqualify us from being made righteous and having a purpose. The apostle Paul is a biblical example. Your pastor is a present-day example. God has always used imperfect women and men. This is a truth found in the Bible (Ephesians 4:11–12). Tradition supports the reality that God calls people out of darkness into light to shine His love to others (I Peter 2:9). We need to celebrate the fact that God's call also applies to us, and we can experience His forgiveness and purpose. Traditions supported by scriptural principles should be followed.

We believe that God confirms His Word, and we are able to experience what the text declares. People are experiencing being born again, according to John 3:3–5 and Acts 2:38, every single day! It all happened because people do not just want to read the Bible, but they want to live the Bible. We believe and see miraculous healings because we want to experience Mark 16 and John 14:12. We see infillings of the Holy Spirit and revival becoming a "traditional" part of the Apostolic movement, but these occurrences go beyond tradition because they are the life of the church. If the Bible declares that something should be experienced, then we should do everything we can to experience it.

Reason, tradition, and experience are part of the glasses we wear to help us interpret the Word of God in the context of the world around us. These glasses make up our biblical worldview so we can perceive the world as God wants us to see it. We also need to realize that we bring something to the Bible. We have biases and personal experiences, and these can influence the way we read the text. A person may have experienced being hurt by someone in the church. Even though this can be terribly painful, consider this: I do not allow the one rude person at the grocery store to stop me from getting groceries ever again. The same is true for church; even if someone hurts us, we should not let that experience prevent us from going to church. We bring a lot to the text, but just as the text supersedes tradition, our interpretation is superseded by the intention of God through the text: “For Scripture to fulfill these purposes, we must accept its teaching as truth. Its meaning cannot simply be contingent upon readers, or it would not be able to correct us.”⁵ We must be honest and admit that our biases can be wrong. We must not allow our bias to supersede what the Bible declares. Every word in the Bible has meaning and authority over our interpretation and experiences. His Spirit leads and guides us to understand His Word (John 16:13). I agree with what David K. Bernard once said, “While careful study can help anyone understand the basic teaching of Scripture, to appreciate its true significance and make proper application to our lives, we need the illumination of the Holy Spirit.” Understanding God’s Word is more than just head or heart knowledge; it takes His Spirit revealing truth to us (I Corinthians 2:10–16). An Apostolic approach to Scripture helps prevent us from nitpicking at words and missing the point because the full context often helps us better discern the meaning of Scripture.

Practicing an Apostolic Approach

Let's look at two verses in particular to practice the principles we have discussed so far. John 3:16–17 declares, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” At first glance it seems as if the text is simply saying that God loves you. He proved His great love for you by dying on the cross so you could have a saving relationship with Him. Let's use an Apostolic approach to Scripture to ensure this is what the text means instead of just speculating about what the text means. Remember, we want to have an accurate understanding of Scripture and using an Apostolic approach will accomplish this goal.

The first step is to use Scripture to interpret Scripture. Are there other Scripture verses that support our initial understanding of the depth of God's love for us? Luke 19:10, Romans 5:8, II Corinthians 5:19-21, and many other verses support the undeniable truth of God's love. Not one verse contradicts that fact. The entire Old Testament is a story of God drawing His people into a saving relationship with Him so that they could affect the world around them. They were meant to live faithfully for God and attract others to Him as well. The entire New Testament is the account of how God came in flesh to die for the sins of the world. He established His church as a way to attract others to Him as well. So Scripture supports our initial understanding of John 3:16–17. We must remember that we also bring something to the text. Sometimes our feelings can get in the way of believing that God loves us, but our feelings do not change the truth that God loves us. The Bible is one big story that we fit into that tells about those who have fallen away from the grace of God, how He paid the price for us to be restored to a right relationship

with Him, and our part to play in helping others be restored to Him once we are. So though we might feel distant from God, or even shame, we must remember that we do not have to feel guilty because He died for our sins (Romans 8:1). We must allow the Word of God to supersede our feelings, and we must trust that He loves us. No matter how broken we may feel at any given moment—whether because of our sin or someone else’s sin—Scripture is clear; God loves us.

Scripture is clear; God loves us.

Now that we have confirmed our initial understanding by other Scriptures and biblical principles, the second step is to use reason to support our growing understanding of John 3:16–17. It is reasonable to think that the God who created us as His special creation truly loves us. It is just as reasonable to think that God, who manifested Himself as the man Jesus Christ and died for us to be saved, loves us. It is reasonable to know that God loves us because we can sense His presence. His love is shown in how He created the world to have a relationship with us. His love is shown in that He died and rose again to have a relationship with us.

The third step to correctly approach Scripture is tradition. Does God loving us contradict what has been believed and preached by the apostolic church since He created man and woman? Is there a clear pattern in history that makes us feel like He does not love His creation? Maybe on this topic we would need to consider the bad that is in the world. Yes, there is evil in the world, but that was never God’s intention. He allowed us to have a choice and free will. Free will created the potential for wrong and evil to happen. Adam and Eve decided to disobey God in the Garden of Eden, and from this action, the devil started to unleash evil in the world. Even with this reality, we can still determine that God loves us. He plans to rapture His

church and rescue us from the evil of this world to live with Him for eternity. All throughout history, there have been indications that God loves humanity and is reaching to reconcile us back to Him. Tradition does not contradict our understanding of John 3:16–17 found through other Scriptures, reason, and now tradition. History and many books point to the reality that God loves His creation. Though human corruption invents new ways to do evil, God’s love pierces through to reach people. Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, many people found a relationship with God because they realized hope can only be found in Him. God has used men and women throughout history to be the microphone that echoes His love to anyone who will listen. No matter what is happening in the world, God has used the church, His body, to reach others so they can experience His love. We should celebrate our churches and be a part of the mission of the church by leading others to Jesus.

Scripture, reason, and tradition all affirm that God loves us according to John 3:16–17. The final step is to look back at our experiences to test if this biblical principle is true. For me personally, I know that God loves me because He forgave me of my sins and saved me. I love to experience His presence and the immense joy that comes from a relationship with Him. By following Scripture and worshiping Him in spirit and in truth, I can experience Him. My experience affirms God’s love for me, and I can personally affirm God’s love in the context of John 3:16–17.

God loves us. An Apostolic approach to Scripture more than affirms this enduring truth. No sin is too great. No mistake is too hopeless. God loves us. Even better, God wants a relationship with us. He proves this desire because He died for our sins. In this selfless sacrifice, also called the “good news” or the “gospel,” He provided a way for us to enter into a saving relationship with Him. You might have struggled with anxiety or even depression

from things going on around you, but God is there for you. No matter the darkness, the light of His love will pierce through any situation. If you need more affirmation of His love, there are many examples in the Bible.⁶ It is wonderful to know that He loves us.

Thank God we are able to find truth and we don't need to rely on our subjective experiences. Truth is obtainable through an Apostolic approach to Scrip-

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ture. God is not hiding truth or reality from us, but sin does blind us from recognizing that His Spirit is drawing us away from our feelings and carnal desires and drawing us toward His Word and truth. No society, government, system, cultural bias, or person can stop us from finding God. Creation leads everyone to God if they are willing to follow and be led (Romans 1:20). Creation is our teacher to find God. His Word can be a light to our feet to direct us to Him (Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 3:5–6). John 1:1 declares, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” God’s Word is reliable, represents unbiased reality, and can be understood by others.

Humans are often led by their feelings and desires, but God wants us to be led by His Spirit and Word. Culture changes, but God’s Word does not change (Matthew 24:35; Hebrews 4:12). God is all powerful (Matthew 28:18), but He gave humans free will. As David K. Bernard says, “God wanted their obedience, but for it to be real it had to be chosen freely.”⁷ Our obedience to God gives us freedom from the consequences of sin and frees us to enjoy living for God.

Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience all affirm the essential meaning of John 3:16–17: God loves us. Now that we have practiced an Apostolic approach to Scripture, we can use this approach to help us understand every passage of Scripture.

Some verses and principles are more complex than others, but we can seek help from our pastor or godly role models to better understand difficult passages. God will show us the truths of His Word as we earnestly seek Him.

Essential Truth and Gender

This book seeks to help you understand the truth that there are two separate, distinct, and unchangeable genders by using an Apostolic approach to Scripture. The Bible does not lead us into contradiction and confusion. God created two genders: male and female. We will review four different parts of the Bible (Creation, the Law, the life of Christ, and the letters of Paul) to show how all of Scripture affirms this truth. These four sections will also help us demonstrate key points as they appear throughout different eras of biblical history.

This holistic approach reveals that it is important not to just read bits and pieces of the Bible and draw conclusions. We must read the context surrounding each verse. In doing so, we will have a thorough, biblical view of identity and gender.

Review

The Bible is not a truth; it is *the* truth. It is *absolute truth*, and it is essential for us to know and be guided by. It is the Truth of truths just as Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. Everyone has unique experiences and feelings; however, those can be subjective, meaning biased or based on personal feelings. A subjective idea may not be fully true. In contrast, God's Word is always objective, meaning completely factual and impartial to feelings. Your feelings are real, but that does not mean that they accurately portray reality.

I remember a time when I was younger and I really liked this girl. My feelings told me that she liked me as well. However, the

reality was that she did not like me. I did have those feelings, but they did not portray reality. Do not feel sad for me; years later, I was able to marry my best friend, Natalie. At the time, my feelings painted one picture that turned out to be false. Our experiences do not trump the universal truths of the Word of God. You might feel that God does not love you, but that is 100 percent false. Your feelings do not always accurately portray reality. As we learned in this chapter in our Apostolic approach to John 3:16–17, God does love you.

The Bible is “living,” meaning the Lord’s words are “living, spiritual expressions of His person and character” as a resurrected Savior, and we can interact with the Word through prayer and Bible reading (Hebrews 4:12).⁸ We are able to approach the text and have a discourse to discover its truths. The eternal truths of the Bible are outside of time, meaning they not only fit in their original contexts but in all contexts. Truth precedes time and philosophy. Remember, the most important lens we should use to evaluate our understanding of every significant issue we encounter is His Word. Everything we learn should be built on the foundation of His Word.

By using His Word as a lens to gain understanding, we can enter into a saving relationship with Jesus and become fully devoted followers of Him. This book seeks to use His Word as our primary lens. In doing so, we can resolutely affirm the truth that there are only two genders.

Essential Truth

To celebrate God’s creation, we must believe, understand, and follow the truth of the Word of God.