

7 Biblical Truths You Won't Hear in Church*

**But Might
Change Your Life*

DAVID R. RICH

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The Truth Is Out There

I think I first heard the phrase “The truth is out there” in the ’70s while watching some show about UFOs and life on other planets. The show suggested there was some elaborate cover-up scheme at work to suppress the truth that UFOs really existed—a scheme that included the highest levels of our government. I was fascinated, but not to the point where I actually bought into their theories (though some of my friends are convinced to this day that “the truth is out there somewhere”).

The truth is, the truth is out there, but we need not look to the sky to find it. It can be found on bookshelves, nightstands, and dressers around the world. It’s the Bible. God has never tried to cover up the truth. There may be some things we won’t understand this side of heaven, but the truth is all there in Scripture. The Bible

was given to us to strengthen our faith and hope in the Lord. It's key among the many glorious tools God uses to draw us closer to Him. The more I read the Bible, the more fascinated I become by it. Another name for it might be "everything you've always wanted to know about everything." Every subject of significance can be found in the Bible in some form.

However, my most interesting discovery about God's Word is that it is written for both the beginner and the advanced. It seems to adapt itself to its reader. There are easy-to-grasp stories and truths for the new believer—and there are more complex parables, prophecies, and truths for the mature Christian. Some truths are so complex that even theologians can't seem agree as to their meaning. At various stages of my life I've read parts of the Bible that were completely over my head. They might as well have been in the original Hebrew and Greek. I wouldn't know what I was reading—only later would I come back to it and understand it clearly and fully. I can't explain this any better than anyone else, but I've come to realize that understanding doesn't come from exhausting study alone. It comes from God. It comes by revelation. The Pharisees knew Scripture, but they didn't know truth. Martin Luther taught seminary for years before he came to understand what he taught. The same can also be said of the apostle Paul. It wasn't until he was struck with revelation that he came to know the truth.¹

God reveals certain things to us at certain times, and sometimes the light goes on and we understand. Other times, we must simply accept His Word at face value, even when we don't understand what we've read. The deeper implication here, and one Paul certainly understood, is that knowing Scripture doesn't necessarily guarantee knowing truth. There are lots of learned Bible scholars in the world who will dispute even the existence of

Jesus. Knowledge is not the answer. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians that “knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know” (8:1-2). Those are pretty strong words, but his meaning is clear. Worldly wisdom may come from knowledge, but spiritual wisdom comes only by revelation.

A Close Encounter in San Francisco

The best example of this I can think of is drawn from my personal experience. I’ve been a believer for as far back as I can remember. I grew up an active member of my church and cannot recall an exact moment when I first believed. Reading the Bible hasn’t always been a habit in my life, but I paid attention to my pastor’s sermons and had an above-average understanding of what it said...so I thought.

It was the summer of 1996. By then, I was a grown man—three kids, two cars, and one house. I had been speaking professionally for ten years and had written my first book. I knew what I knew. My ideology was set—that is, before I had dinner one night in San Francisco with a speaker colleague of mine named Glenna Salsbury. Glenna is no ordinary speaker. At that time she was already in the speaker Hall of Fame, and she holds a master’s degree in theology from Fuller Seminary.

There were a handful of us at dinner that night, but the three of us at my end of the table somehow got on the subject of religion. It’s said that sex, politics, and religion are the three subjects you should avoid if you want to steer clear of controversy, but that didn’t deter us. I remember the conversation starting out pretty bland at first. But before we knew it, we were debating spiritual time bombs such as predestination, free will, and the permanency

of salvation. The conversation was sometimes loud, occasionally thoughtful, frequently argumentative, but altogether stimulating. With a demeanor as subtle as hitting me over the head with a sledgehammer, Glenna challenged every belief I've ever had about God. She had the gall to tell me that as far as God is concerned, I was as perfect as I'll ever be! How could that be? I hadn't been a particularly big champion for God. I had never been through seminary. I hadn't won that many souls for Christ. I had never been a missionary or even a regular Sunday-school teacher. I'd even missed my share of worship services altogether. How could I be perfect in God's eyes? She must have been off her rocker. And that one was one of the milder truths she hit me with.

I left the dinner table that night and went straight to the hotel copy of the Bible in my room with the sole intent of finding passages to prove Glenna wrong. I just knew I would find enough evidence to confront her the next morning and preserve my system of beliefs. There was only one problem. I couldn't do it. The deeper I dug into the Word, the more intrigued I became. I can't say I agreed with all she said yet—that took years—but I was convicted enough to want to know more!

Beginning a Journey

That was the start of a five-year journey for truth that included weekly phone calls and e-mails to Glenna. Every time I thought I understood one point, I found a passage that seemed to contradict it. I felt like a ratchet wrench. Every time I made one click forward, I'd wind up going two clicks back. God chose to reveal His truths to me very slowly and deliberately despite my prayers to the contrary. I've never been a patient person, to say the least, and I wanted to fit all the pieces together overnight. But

that's not always the way it works. Some things take time. I began to understand exactly what Paul meant when he wrote in his first letter to the church in Corinth, "I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able" (1 Corinthians 3:2).

Which leads me to the present day. My writing this book doesn't mean in any way that I have all the answers. I certainly do not. I continue to learn and relearn every day as the Lord leads me. My sole aim for writing these words is to serve as a catalyst to drive people to the Bible to discover what the Lord may be trying to show them. The truths that I present in this book have completely energized my faith and strengthened my love for God. They may have the same effect on you; but even if you do not agree with my words, hopefully they will strengthen whatever you may believe. It's more important than ever to know what you believe and why you believe it. Dare to be like the Bereans "who searched the Scriptures daily" to see if what Paul was saying was true (Acts 17:11).

The Truth Presents a Challenge

We're living in an age of the religious smorgasbord. Many simply pick and choose what feels right to them, regardless of whether or not it is grounded in real truth. Some of the blame for this must fall squarely on the shoulders of the modern church, although its roots can be traced back to the time just after the resurrection. Now don't misunderstand me. There are many excellent churches across America that teach the truth and nothing but the truth. I speak in such churches all the time. There are many that are doing awesome things for the kingdom of God and are led by wonderful people. I go to such a church. My pastor is a shining example of how God uses people to lead others. He

I've witnessed too many sermons that could just have easily been given in a corporate boardroom rather than a place of worship. They were filled with tried and tested self-help recipes that I myself have been dishing out to corporate audiences for almost 20 years.

teaches straight from the Word and isn't afraid to tackle the tough issues.

But that isn't the case everywhere. Many churches I've visited and heard from very purposely shy away from truths that may ruffle a few feathers. The apostle Paul warned of the day when people would not believe the truth but rather those who would tell them what their "itching ears" want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3). I've visited many churches where people don't even bring a Bible and where the pastor preaches a sermon without referencing a single

scriptural passage. I've witnessed too many sermons that could just have easily been given in a corporate boardroom rather than a place of worship. They were filled with tried and tested self-help recipes that I myself have been dishing out to corporate audiences for almost 20 years.

Part of the reason for my ministry today is because I've grown leery and weary of the entire self-help movement of which I've been a part. I have an increasingly hard time standing in front of people telling them how to be successful without telling them how they can live successfully in Christ. And too many pastors have jumped on this popular bandwagon. I've even heard one sermon based around the old notion that God helps those who help themselves. That may sound right on the surface, but it's not biblical truth.

More on that later, but too many churches have become so vanilla in their teaching that one has to look real hard to find any glimmer of truth in it. I can only wager an educated guess

as to why so many teach what feels good rather than what is actually true. My guess is fear. Fear of losing a parishioner, fear of losing money, and fear of not being popular head the list. I've personally known pastors who have admitted to being afraid of tackling the tough issues for fear of the backlash that may result. Fear is natural, of course; some fear is even healthy. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews might have felt this fear when he wrote,

The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is the discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (4:12).

The truth can be sharp, and many churches have sacrificed truth for the appearance of peace and harmony. This flies in the face, however, of what Jesus warned us of in Matthew 10:34, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword." The truth is out there, and it can hurt when it exposes something we've kept hidden.

Two Perspectives on Truth—and They're Both True

Many try to avoid the challenge of the truth in another way. From the results of a 2001 Barna Research survey,² it's reasonable to conclude that about 78 percent of adult Americans don't believe in absolute truth (nor are they sure what they do believe, it seems). Therefore the Bible cannot contain such truth.

I even once had a debate with a gentleman who cited the Bible itself as a case for no absolute truth. His argument was that the Bible was contradictory and therefore could not contain absolute truth. Such arguments make me shake my head in disbelief, but

it's a common misconception. Many people do believe the Bible contradicts itself, so how could it be true?

There are countless passages that, if held up side by side, do indeed appear to be saying completely opposite things. For example, 1 John 4:8 says that "God is love," yet it says in Isaiah 45:7 that God "creates calamity," and in Malachi 1:3 and Romans 9:13 that God hated Esau. It doesn't make any sense. That is the only logical conclusion you can come to when you take passages out of context and hold them up side by side. You'll never find a full understanding of the truth by looking at individual passages. That will only bring frustration and lead to misinterpretation.

However, when you study the Bible in total, you will find that nowhere does it contradict itself. We may not understand it all, but that doesn't make it contradictory. Shortly after the verse in Isaiah that tells us God "creates calamity," Isaiah 55:8 warns us, "'My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways. My ways' says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.'" Right after Romans 9:13, in which God says He hated Esau, is Romans 9:21: "Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?" I don't necessarily understand this any better than you might, but I get what God is saying. He's saying He is God and we're not. Period. He doesn't have to make sense to us. Both passages are biblically accurate and completely noncontradictory. From our perspective, He's the potter and we're the clay. And from His perspective, it's all out of love.

This gets us to the heart of the matter. Fueling the debate over biblical contradiction is the fact that the Bible does teach truths from two perspectives. There's our very limited human perspective, and there's God's infinite perspective. It's not a

matter of one being right and one being wrong. Both are right, but obviously God's perspective is the one that matters. Here's an illustration: When reporters interviewed soldiers who landed on the shores of Normandy in World War II, they found they all pretty much thought the same thing—that they were doomed. They were doing their duty but didn't have an overwhelming sense of optimism, to say the least. However, when interviewing those who flew overhead in air missions, the reporters discovered they said almost the opposite. They knew right away the mission would be a success. The only difference between those on the ground, who thought the mission was doomed, and the ones in the air, who knew it would be successful, was perspective. We're like the ground troops. We can only see the things in our limited line of sight. God sees everything. The Bible teaches truths from both perspectives.

Who's Holding onto Whom?

Another way to look at this is shown by an analogy I ran across a few years ago, I believe in one of R.C. Sproul's wonderful books. I've since come to call it "the analogy of grips." It's one that everyone who has ever taken a child grocery-shopping can relate to. When a person is escorting a child across a crowded parking lot by the hand, there are two grips at work. The first is the child's rather questionable grip on the guardian. If your children were like my children, their grip was undependable at best. Sometimes they would grip firmly, while other times they did everything in their power to break free.

The strength of their grip would come and go with mood swings, but it didn't matter—because there was a second grip also at work. That was the guardian's—my—grip on the child.

Thank God, for the child's safety was not based on the child's grip, but on the guardian's grip. Recalling my own experience, there were times I clung to my child's hand by just their pinky finger. My knuckles were white with effort, but they weren't going anywhere. I saw to that. Sure, from their perspective they were imprisoned slaves—but from my perspective, they were safe in my care. There were two grips—albeit one was sometimes rather questionable—and two different perspectives for the same occurrence.

The same is true of the Bible. It teaches truths from both perspectives. There's no doubt it does contain passages that teach us as God's children how to have a tighter grip on the Father. But there are also truths that teach us we are firmly safe in the Father's hand. He's got us no matter how hard we sometimes try to get away. Sure, we feel closer to God when we're gripping back, but that's only a human feeling. Parents don't love their children less when they're misbehaving. The child may be punished, but parents love their children no matter what. Ideally, parents try to teach their kids how to behave, not to earn favor and love, but to learn how to reciprocate love and be responsible people.

I refer to the parts of the Bible that teach us how to grip back as "child's grip" passages. St. Augustine called them exhortations. They are practical and tactical. Conversely, I call the parts that teach us to find peace and rest in God's guardianship "Father's grip" passages. It's important to know and recognize which passages are which. Otherwise, we can become obsessed with gripping when we should be resting and vice versa. Both are important.

In too many churches, however, gripping is all that's talked about. In fact, too much emphasis on gripping the Father's hand can promote trying to please God with good works. And that's

not what the passages were meant to promote. The child's grip passages are there to help us *feel* closer to God—not to actually *make* us closer to God. Believers are already as close to God as they'll ever be. (More on that later on.)

An unbalanced preoccupation with child's-grip passages can keep Christians from finding peace and rest. I've known many believers who are obsessed with gripping. They want to grip firmly all the time, and they beat themselves up when they can't do it. They always wonder whether they're gripping hard enough and whether they should be using the other hand. One woman even told me she feared if she didn't always keep a tight hold, God might let go. She told me that her pastor once told her that could happen if she stopped coming to and giving to the church. Nothing could be further from the truth, but she remained nervous and fearful despite my attempts to reassure her with the truth—that God wasn't about to let go.



A theologian once lamented to me that most people don't want to know the truth, but only what sounds and feels right. He further commented that controversy was not good for the church. The image that comes to mind is that of Jack Nicholson on the stand in *A Few Good Men*, saying, "You can't handle the truth." I beg to differ. We not only can handle it; we want it. The problem is, it's been all too hard to find.

That's precisely why I am compelled to write this book. There are plenty of books to read and places to go that will further the cause of common beliefs and popular religion. But people are craving the plain, unadorned truth. The truths I write about are some of the more challenging ones the Bible has to offer, and

some people have simply chosen to stay away from them. My goal, though, is not to convince you, or even convict you of truth. That only comes by revelation. But I do hope to inspire you to go to the Word, just as I was inspired that night in San Francisco. The Bible is and always has been our only source for truth. The truth is indeed out there. And who knows—it just might set you free.³