

# *The Difference*

(Sermon Notes) By Warren Zehrung – 3/1/2014

What is the difference between the world's Catholic and Protestant Christians, and the true Christians within the Church of God? The question becomes more difficult for some when asked the difference between good Christians in the world and weak Christians in God's Church?

There is a great **difference** between those who are converted and those who are not. The apostle Paul warns Timothy to look out for those who do not have knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 3:7).

## **2 Timothy 3:**

**5** Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

How can we tell the difference between true Christians and those who are not? The answer has to do with God's Spirit and things spiritual. When we speak of the "spiritual" realm, let's understand that the spiritual transcends this earthly world of ours. So much of what we deal with in religion has to do with concepts that are not physical, but spiritual.

If we are to understand the will of God, it is imperative that we distinguish **the difference** between the things of this present evil world and the things of God. That is spiritual discernment. Those without spiritual discernment deny that it even exists. It is there – but those of the world cannot see it.

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul had to explain that it was necessary for true Christians to **differentiate** between the two concepts – physical and spiritual. He described how the spiritual domain of God the Father and Jesus Christ superseded the physical things of this world. Paul had to enlighten the brethren of the fact that the spiritual presence of God is **more real** than the visible world that human beings live in.

When called by God into the Church, Christians are to grow from their initial unconverted carnal state to the point of having greater spiritual discernment as their conversion increases. They are to grow in grace and knowledge.

Just before He died, Jesus explained how it was that Christians would be able to begin to have spiritual discernment by having God's Holy Spirit dwelling in them. Jesus said,

## **John 14:**

**17** Even the Spirit of truth; [God's Holy Spirit] which the world cannot receive, because it cannot see it, neither knows of it: but ye know it; for it dwells with you, and shall be in you.

What is the difference between Christians in the world and Christians in the Church? I do not think it is a question that can be answered by a great many brethren today.

We keep the Sabbath – but so do the Seventh Day Adventist.

We keep the clean and unclean food laws – but so do the Jews.

We were baptized by total immersion – that's the way the Baptist do it.

We go back to Herbert W. Armstrong – Well, so does Grace Communion International – headed up by Joe Tkach Jr., they have ties with the Worldwide Church of God and Herbert W. Armstrong and they call themselves an evangelical Christian denomination.

We preach the Gospel. Do the meager efforts of a few men on TV and the internet – constitute preaching the Gospel?

What if – for the sake of spiritual insurance – did all those things like we did – would that make him a good Christian? There are many churches in the world that keep a PART of God's truth – but not ALL of God's truth.

What makes any set of brethren – the True Church? Is it a matter of preaching the True Gospel? Is it a matter of being repentant?

Those who have put on their thinking caps would say: "They have to be called, chosen and faithful to the end! Including being repentant, getting baptized, having hands laid on them, keep Passover, and have their feet washed, and eat Unleavened Bread – and go to the Feast. That ought to do it...

The truth of the matter is that many within God's Church who believe that they "have it made" are going to be seriously disappointed when Jesus returns. Why else do the Scriptures say:

**Matthew 8:**

- 12** The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Too many within God's Church have failed to mature spiritually and sufficiently to realize that True Christianity goes far beyond a show of religious customs.

This world is unable and unwilling to follow and live by the doctrine of Jesus so they cannot see True Christianity.

**Hebrews 6:**

- 1** Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,  
**2** Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

We are warned to avoid this world's Christianity like the plague.

**2 Corinthians 6:**

- 17** Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

The world is not repentant – they just talk a good game. But sometimes they are so generous and giving...

Some TV evangelists seem so genuine and sincere...

When I was a young man I worked for the Sisters of Charity. They had taken a vow of poverty. They owned nothing. And yet they worked hard, they laughed and smiled – and they served continuously.

I didn't meet anyone in God's Church like that when I came in. It was confusing to me. I remember asking my first Pastor in God's Church – he was barely 30 years old. He knew everything about the Bible and I knew next to nothing. I said to him, "They are so good, and pure, and loving – why would God reject them?"

He explained to me that God, indeed, would eventually call them to salvation – and unlike some of us they would be able to embrace the truth instantly and be converted – and enter the Kingdom of God.

But, what they were living – that was not True Christianity. What was missing in those sweet little nuns, I wondered???

I heard saying like, "True Christianity is dead unto sin, and **alive unto God**. but it was hard to understand what that meant.

Brethren, each of us wants the **sacrifice of Christ** so that our sins are covered and forgiven. For us to be in a covenant relationship with God the Father and with Jesus Christ - That is a completely **individual** relationship.

My dad had a large beautiful fig tree in his back yard down in Louisiana. It was the most beautiful fig tree I have ever seen. It was a very large "Black Mission Fig Tree." Google that for a treat.

I was surprised at the Feast some years back to find out that some long-time ministers had no idea what a fig tree looked like.

The branches on my dad's fig tree extended out and swooped down to the ground forming somewhat of a tent under its large broad leaves. You could crawl up under that fig tree in the summer and it was 15 degrees cooler than out in the sun.

### **Amos 7:**

**14** Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit:

Sycamore here is a Fig tree. Gatherer is the translation of *bo/ec* which means to **cultivate**.

When I came into the Church and found out about Amos, I taught my dad how to make the already delicious Black Mission figs – even more sweet and delicious. You don't pick it but you **prick** it with a sharp awl like a thorn, a nail or an ice pick. The Prophet Amos was a fig-pricker by trade. He would climb all over the fig tree – punching these little holes in the end of each fig before it was fully ripe.

The outlet hole in the end of the fig then oozes the sweet honey nectar of the fig - making it sweeter and discouraging predator insects.

My dad tried it with **mixed** results. He said, "The figs that I pricked got a lot sweeter – but those are the ones the birds came and ate up!

Before Jesus began His public ministry there was a man in Palestine who went under a fig tree to pray in the coolness and privacy afforded by the fig tree's low hanging branches.

His name was Nathanael. In the synoptic Gospel accounts Matthew, Mark and Luke, we find that Bartholomew is mentioned as one of the twelve apostles, but Nathanael is not. However in the Book of John, Nathanael is mentioned, but Bartholomew is not. That is because Nathanael and Bartholomew are one and the same.

Nathanael's name means Gift of God – and that is good and appropriate because we will be speaking of a number of gifts of God that we do not always mention.

Nathanael had **not** yet been taught by Jesus **how** to pray, but he was fervent, zealous, and passionate in expressing to God his heart's desire. Nathanael had not yet learned that Jesus was the **way**, the **truth**, and the **life**.

#### John 14:

**6** Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

Nathanael knew of the God of the Old Testament – and he believed and hoped for the promises of God. Beneath the fig tree Nathanael had been praying – – before He met Jesus Christ. He was praying about many great things - the **Messiah** to come, the **salvation** of Israel – – and he **unilaterally** entered into a pact with God.

Nathanael prayed like this. "God, please show me the way, the truth, and the life.

- I hereby yield my entire future to you
- my life
- my possessions
- my very will I submit to **your will** for me
- only show me where and how to **know** you and how to follow you.
- I reserve nothing for myself
- I repent of my sins and folly
- I seek **to do** only your will, amen."

Nathanael went through an epiphany – an awakening -- a realization about the Plan of God and the Purpose of God. Nathanael went through his own repentance process with an intense personal disclosure to God of yieldedness to the way of God.

Nathanael prayed, "Take me - I'm yours - do with my life as only you wish, O my Lord."

Nathan acted diligently, seriously and profoundly to give up his life's aspirations - and to unilaterally say to God,

"Take me - **use** me, I'm yours - spend my life for your purpose O God."

Unknown to Nathanael, God was indeed calling him to conversion. Let's look at this section where Jesus had prayed intensively and in a focused and concentrated way before He selected His disciples.

John the Baptist pointed out Jesus to Andrew and Peter and said "He's the Lamb of God: That's Him – right over there – that's the Messiah – the Lamb of God!

**John 1:**

- 37** And the two disciples heard [John the Baptist] speak, and they followed Jesus.
- 38** Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where do you live?
- 39** He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.

It was 4:00 pm in the afternoon – starting to get late in the day.

**John 1:**

- 40** One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was **Andrew**, Simon Peter's brother.
- 41** He first found his own brother Simon, and said unto him, **We have found the Messiah**, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.

Christ ...The One who is **anointed** to restore all things.

**John 1:**

- 42** And [Andrew] he brought [Simon Peter] him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jonah: thou shalt be called **Cephas**, which is by interpretation, A stone.

Jesus immediately started calling Peter, "Rocky" – a stone, because Jesus knew where He was going way before it was time to establish His Church.

Matthew 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter (a little stone), and upon this **rock** I will build my church; and the gates of the grave shall not prevail against it.

**John 1:**

- 43** The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.
- 44** Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.
- 45** Philip found **Nathanael**, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

We have found the Messiah – the Lamb of God – Jesus of Nazareth! Brethren, finding the Messiah should be every man's want and desire. We have found him, - Jesus of Nazareth! Nazareth??? Nathanael questioned! Nathanael was initially skeptical about the Messiah coming from the little non descript town of Nazareth.

**John 1:**

- 46** And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.
- 47** Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!

What a **strange** comment by Jesus for a first meeting! In whom is no **guile**! ... A sincere man without deceit.

Nathanael was taken aback by Jesus' astute observation.

**John 1:**

**48** Nathanael saith unto him, Where do you know me from? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou were **under the fig tree, I saw you.**

That was impossible! – no one could have seen Nathanael concealed underneath the fig tree – and certainly no one could have possibly known the deep silent communication between Nathanael to God alone. Nathanael thought, "How could anyone know that I had made a commitment to follow God – no matter what?!"

**John 1:**

**49** Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, **you are the Son of God**; thou art the King of Israel.

How did Nathanael know that Jesus was the Son of God? Later Peter would have a similar encounter with Jesus.

**Matthew 16:**

**17** And Jesus answered and said unto [Peter], Blessed art thou, Simon Barjonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

Nathanael took the fact that Jesus knew the most secret thoughts of his mind **as evidence** – He realized that only God could have known his private prayer.

Nathanael **recognizes** Jesus as "the Son of God" and "the King of Israel."

Jesus treats Nathanael's response with a little bit of humor – telling Nathanael that he will see much greater miracles and works of God.

**John 1:**

**50** Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, you believe? thou shalt see greater things than these.

We are looking into the difference between people in the world and those who have been called by God. We are looking into the difference between converted and unconverted.

**Luke 9:**

**62** And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

I would like to read a poem to you. This poem could be a metaphor for our calling:

**John 6:**

**44** No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

**John 6:**

**65** And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.

There is the way of the world – and there exists God's Way - the way less traveled by.

This could easily be a poem about our life's choice that will make all **the difference**. The title of this short poem is:

**"The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost**

**"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;**

**Then took the other, as just as fair  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that, the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,**

**And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.**

**I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood and I —  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference."**

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When we are called by God we are confronted with a fork in the road. The **choice** we make determines the **very life** that we will live – and there is **no looking back** as we just saw in Luke. We are free to choose, but we do not really know beforehand what we are choosing between. God tells us to Count the cost – because you can't go both ways.



**Luke 14:**

- 28** For which of you, intending to build a tower, sits not down first, and counts the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

The unconverted protestants are not graced with the ability to chose - they are like **Yogi Berra** who inexplicably quipped, "When you come to a fork in the road -- **take it**. (Right of Left???) When God calls us – He tells us which path to choose.

Do not take the path of this world that leads to folly and destruction. It is only after conversion that we can look back and see how blessed we truly were to be called to the *strait and narrow path*. In Romans 6 we begin to see "The Difference."

**Romans 1:**

- 16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is **the power of God unto salvation** to everyone that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.
- 17** For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Before Faith, God **grants** us **repentance**.

**Acts 11:**

- 18** When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles **granted** repentance unto life.

The gentiles did not work up repentance on their own - neither do we.

**Acts 5:**

- 31** Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to **give repentance** to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

Repentance is a gracious gift from God - we don't do it all by ourselves.

**Romans 2:**

- 4** Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God **leads** thee to repentance?

The bible reveals that it is God who takes us by the hand and **leads** us to repentance. Those examples should suffice for repentance being a gift!

God also **grants** us **faith**.

It is the same with Faith in Jesus Christ - we did not suddenly decide to believe **on our own** to work up Faith that He is the Savior of mankind:

**Ephesians 2:**

- 8** For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the **gift** of God:

We need to **read and heed** very carefully – or we'll read right over these important points.



**Romans 12:**

- 3** For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as **God has dealt** to every man the **measure** of faith.

You see that it is - a little here and a little there - that is why Bible study is so important.

**1 Corinthians 12:**

- 8** For to one **is given** by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;  
**9** To another [is given] **faith** by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

Faith is from God - First to us - then back to God and then back to us again as we grow in grace and knowledge.

**Romans 6:**

- 1** What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

Paul is asking the rhetorical question - "Should we keep on sinning and sinning so that God can keep on forgiving us, and forgiving us, over and over again - that grace may abound? The world is in sin. They believe that "the more you sin - the more God can show His greatness to forgive" - that is a gross misunderstanding of God's grace.

**Romans 6:**

- 2** No Way!. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

Paul here is going over our baptismal covenant - where we pledged and vowed to lay our lives down for the very first - of many times - **just** as Jesus did for us.

**Romans 6:**

- 3** Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

OK - there is a vital lesson here for us to see.

**Romans 6:**

- 4** Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Jesus Christ died - we also must die daily - **living sacrifices** - these are the terms of the New Covenant - of which we are even now a part.

**Romans 12:**

- 1** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a **living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Paul reiterates verse: 4 Emphasizing our reward. It we bury to old sinful man in a watery grave - the promise is that we will be resurrected to eternal life just as Christ was.

We detest, abhor and loathe the old sinner that we were.

### **Romans 6:**

- 5** For if we have been planted together [buried together – Christ and us] in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

“Likeness” means we will **be like He is**: That’s incredible!!!

### **1 John 3:**

- 2** Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be **like him**; for we shall see him as he is.

Our baptism pictures being crucified with Jesus Christ. Christ died for us.

But here is what I want you to ask yourself: Who do we die for? Here’s the answer. We die for the same people Christ died for.

Our baptism pictured – us being crucified like Jesus. Who we were (body of sin) ceases to be – that old man is crucified. The sinful flesh is put to death.

### **Romans 6:**

- 6** Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.  
**7** For he that is dead is freed from sin.

We overcome sin. We rule over our mind, heart and body. We cease being slaves to sin. God has some fantastic promises for those who overcome this evil world and its attitudes.

### **1 John 5:**

- 4** For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.  
**5** Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

Revelation 2 Please turn to see some **wonderful guarantees** God has set before us.

**Overcoming** the world is not easy – it is not simple – in fact, it is **impossible** to do on our own. We cannot overcome sin by our own power. It takes God’s Holy Spirit working in us – that is why we must receive God’s Spirit. Like Repentance and Faith – God’s Spirit must be given to us.

### **Revelation 2:**

- 7** ...To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

### **Revelation 2:**

- 11** ... He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

**Revelation 2:**

- 17** ...To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

**Revelation 2:**

- 26** And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

**Revelation 3:**

- 5** He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

**Revelation 3:**

- 12** Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

**Revelation 3:**

- 21** To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

What difference does it make what path we choose?

**Romans 6:**

- 8** Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:
- 9** Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dies no more; death hath no more dominion over him.
- 10** For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he lives, he lives unto God.

This verse :10 applies to us as well as to Jesus.

**Romans 6:**

- 11** Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Like Nathanael we pledge our entire life and self to God's service – that's dead indeed unto sin – that is in total obedience to God and His Law – that is yielding our desires in favor of God's Way.

Like Nathanael did - we too must have a unilateral commitment to God to entirely yield our lives to His will - even dying - loving our lives less than what God has in store for us.

**1 Corinthians 2:**

- 9** But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

That baptismal vow constitutes our personal and individual covenant or vow to God. Again - God acted first with His calling and the repentance He granted us - and the faith in the sacrifice of Christ that saves us - that too, God granted us - we did not work that up of ourselves - it is a gift of God's graciousness.

Therefore we are to live our lives according to God's perfect way - His commandments - his Feasts - His Laws - His sacrifices - as Jesus gave us example. We must overcome the world as Jesus has overcome the world.

We must examine ourselves as to what we are doing wrong.

**Psalm 51:**

**7** Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

We must die daily. Every day is a Christian battle that we must fight and win with the help of God's Holy Spirit. We must endure until the end.

**Matthew 24:**

**13** But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

**Romans 6:**

**11** Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but **alive unto God** through Jesus Christ our Lord.

At this point you have become a True Christian.

You have repented.

You have faith.

You **believe** that Jesus is able to set you free from the penalty of your sins.

You have been baptized – burying the sinful man.

You have had **hands laid on** you and received a token of God's Holy Spirit.

You are being led by God's Holy Spirit. Now, there remains the Christian battle of Overcoming. No more can sin rule our lives. We do not overrule sin in our lives – God in us does it. Jesus overcame the world.

**John 16:**

**33** These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have **overcome** the world.

**Romans 6:**

**12** Let not sin therefore reign / rule in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

**Romans 8:**

**5** For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

**Romans 8:**

**9** But ye are **not** in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.

**Romans 8:**

- 11 But** if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you.
- 12** Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.
- 13** For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.
- 14** For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.
- 13** Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.
- 14** For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

God is working in a Christian's life with all of His gifts.

**Romans 6:**

- 15** What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.
- 16** Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?
- 17** But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.
- 18** Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

What is the Difference?

Brethren – Choose wisely!

End: The Difference