



I AM ... CONFUSED; JESUS IS ... THE LIGHT

John 8:12

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We live in an age of confusion.

We are confused about what to eat. Are eggs good or bad for you? Can I drink a glass of wine to help my arteries keep clear or will it give me cancer? What is a good carb anyway? And the latest study tells us that *zero* calorie sodas actually make you fat! Should we legalize marijuana to stem the over-incarceration epidemic or will that become a gateway drug for our young people? Let's take a moment to see what you are confused about these days.

Into this "knowledge void" enters an endless array of experts that claim to be able to clear it all up. But these so-called experts only add to the confusion because they all claim, with equal force and passion, to know the truth. But they can't all be right. These voices thrive on obfuscation, creating truly troubling real-life outcomes such as reduced voter turnout, since our trust in the system is eroded, people lack confidence that their vote counts.

Perhaps the most pernicious and clear case was the tobacco companies preying upon people's innate mistrust of the government to convince people that it does not cause cancer. Millions died as a result; twenty million Americans, since the 1960s, have died. The confusion society has created and the simultaneous erosion of trusted sources of information have real, long-lasting, and deadly outcomes.

Confusion is a plague. And the cure is Christ.

In John's gospel Jesus declares,
*I am the light of the world; he who follows me
will not walk in darkness, but will have the
light of life.*

By coupling the phrase "I AM" with "light of the world" Jesus is claiming that part of the core of God being the great "I AM" is to dispel darkness. In fact,

we learn this in the first chapter of the Bible! Remember that in Genesis, in the beginning, the very first act of creation was light. God said "let there be light", and there was light. As light races out from the Sun at breakneck speed, Christ speeds out from the eternal God, revealing truth for our world darkened by confusion and chaos.

As the light of the world, Jesus conquers confusion by teaching us how to discern which voices we can trust and how to act in the face of debilitating confusion.

*Jesus teaches us how to discern which voices we
can trust more than others.*

Since we live in a world of voices that are vying for our attention and allegiance, that thrive by keeping us in the dark or perhaps illuminating only a portion of the truth, we need our Lord's guidance to learn whom to listen to.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. ...every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit." We learn whom to trust not based on what they say but on the outcomes, "the fruit", of their actions. Jesus is teaching us not to be fooled or confused by what people say they believe.

In Matthew 21, Jesus' authority is challenged by the chief priests and the elders. In this instance, they represent those who align themselves with proper beliefs about God but that have completely failed to internalize the Spirit of God. Jesus is confronting a crowd of people who have been brainwashed to believe that true faith rests in agreeing with and following ritual laws, so he proceeds to tell them a parable of two sons. Their father tells them to go work in the vineyard. One says he will go and does not, the other refused but

later changed his mind and went. Jesus asks “Which did the will of the father?”

That first son is like someone who may have the right beliefs and align themselves with what you believe to be the truth about the world. But, when push comes to shove, their actions do not reflect this belief. Jesus tells us that we cannot trust this person as a source of information. What people *do* is the true measure.

Another way to express Jesus’ sentiments comes to us from the famous UCLA basketball coach, John Wooden... “The true test of a man's character is what he does when no one is watching.”

Benjamin Rogovy is the perfect example of that bad fruit who did terrible things when people couldn't see. He operated the *Christian Prayer Center* website on which you could find testimonials that prayer brought healthy babies, winning lottery tickets, money for mortgage payments, and clean HIV tests and cancer scans. He seemed like an upstanding man and over one hundred thousand people agreed and trusted him because of his beliefs.

It turns out it was a complete lie. God bless him, if you know what I mean! ABC News reported that “Investigators said that fake religious leaders, stock photos and the fictitious testimonials were used to entice nearly 165,000 people between 2011 and 2015.”

But, if you know of Jesus’ way, you could have ferreted him out. We know he was a false prophet because the fruit he bore was personal gain and Jesus tells us servanthood, not self, is a mark of his followers. He charged people \$35 for prayers and tricked people into recurring payments by offering them “continued blessings” and, as a result, was ordered to pay back 7 million dollars. A true wolf in sheep’s clothing.

Think about your various sources of information: newspapers, websites, news shows, social media outlets. Consider the fruit they are producing. Is it the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy,

peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, generosity, and self-control? Or, at the very least, the fruit of justice? Or is it a spirit of discord, of enmity, of harsh judgement? It is hard to trust any source of news these days because, in the end, it seems like they are all another form of Benjamin Rogovy: in it for the almighty dollar.

Jesus teaches us how to act in the face of debilitating confusion.

With so much confusion about whom to trust, it can be terribly hard to know what the right action is. In fact, we can become debilitated into inaction, afraid and confused of unintended consequences. Like diet soda or the glass of wine, we are not really sure what is best.

Take, for instance, the person with that cardboard sign asking for money for food. We know we should be generous and help others, so we give it to them. Perhaps we think they are going to buy alcohol with that money, instead of food. In fact, I had one person become angry with me when I offered to buy them food, instead of give them money for food. Of course, there is the argument that even giving them food could simply be enabling them. What is the right thing to do?

Perhaps you, like I, have pulled up to a stop light, saw that person with the cardboard sign, and began weighing your decision. What should I do? I checked my wallet. I found some change. But I still was not sure. I tried not to catch their eye since I had not yet made up my mind. I have the money. I can afford it. But before I could act, the light turned green, the traffic began racing past, and I simply drove on. Too late. I let the green light make my decision for me.

But it wasn't really too late, was it? I could have gone back. Perhaps there was even a part of me that knew that light was going to change soon and get me out of my predicament. Maybe I was simply fooling myself into thinking I was trying to make a decision based in righteousness.

Being frozen into inaction is a real thing. The good news is that we don't need some grand,

deeply-rooted insight to begin to take action. It can just be taking one step at a time.

If you have to cross a frozen lake in the midst of snowstorm and you can't see the other side, you don't wait until you have charted out your course to move. Otherwise you would never make it. Instead, you know what to do, you look for those footprints. And you take one step at a time, stepping precisely in the same spot.

This world is so filled with competing voices that you may find yourself frozen in place. Jesus gives us those steps when confusion freezes us into inaction and they come from the Sermon on the Mount.

- “Turn the other cheek” that is, overcome evil with good
- “Be reconciled to your brother” that is, be an agent of peace and reconciliation
- “Give to all that ask” that is, be generous
- “Take the log out of your own eye” that is, do not be too quick to judge others
- “Pray for those who persecute you” that is, love everyone, not just those who love you

By living out our lives one step at a time, based on Jesus' words, then, over time, confusion will dissipate. Clarity will emerge from seeing that the pattern of life Jesus gives us is the one that will bring true life to the world. Following these steps will not clear up the confusion about each individual action, rather it will help us to see what God actually asks of us – actions born from a heart of love, faith, and trust; love for God and love for our neighbor.

In a world of confusion, there is the light of the world that illumines our mind with the truth of God, mobilizing us to act in His name. Reflect that light in all that you do. Amen.