

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Confusion or Peace?

*For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. (1 Corinthians 14:32)*

Paul wrote this verse in the context of spiritual gifts and the form and order of public worship and fellowship in a New Testament church. Paul's point regarding the Lord's consistent and moral character is confirmed on a much broader scale in Scripture. Some pagan philosophies and religions lean toward fatalism and depict their gods as causing opposite and inconsistent outcomes. Scripture never so describes our God. Paul follows this consistency in our study verse. He is the "Author" of some things, but He is distinctly not the "Author" of other things that are not compatible with His uncompromising moral character. Our God is not Yen and Yang, not "Yes" and "No." He is always consistent in action with His moral character. (2 Corinthians 1:19-20)

James 1:12-18 will serve as just one example of this broader point, especially Verse 15. God never causes sin or its root source. No believer in the God of the Bible can say with any degree whatever of Biblical support that God caused his sin for some mysterious greater good or according to a mysterious and altogether imaginary "Secret will." Occasionally advocates of the idea that God causes sin will attempt to side-step the problem by saying they believe that God doesn't cause sin, but He does "Purpose it." Advocates of this idea have yet to answer the obvious question. If God "Purposes" my sin, do I have any ability whatever to resist the sin? Or am I irresistibly programmed to commit the sin because God supposedly "Purposed" it? Contrary to the various "Blame God for my sin" ideas, James affirms the true source of sin. The conceived idea of sin is lust, not God, and the full term "Baby" that lust, not God, produces is sin. At times it seems that folks who are bound and determined to live in the shadows of their own lustful desires prefer to blame God for their sin rather than face their personal responsibility—and accountability—for their sin. If God causes sin, but also punishes it, on what basis can God righteously punish what He caused and what the puppet in His hand could not resist? Romans 3:1-8 deals with this very point in clear and strong words. The compromised and amoral pagan notion of fatalistic causation confuses God's moral character. On what moral grounds would God punish someone for doing what He irresistibly programmed them to do? And irresistible programming is the true moral consequence of fatalism. If God eternally purposed your act of sin and intends to use that sinful action

for His glory, can you resist the temptation, the actual sin? So your god causatively decrees your sin, but then punishes you for your action? The absurd epitome of moral confusion. Your god clearly punishes you for what he caused or "Purposed" you to do and you could not resist doing. It honestly seems that the wrong party is being tried and punished for sin in this twisted view of God and morality. Abominable!

If we maintain the focus of our study passage to the form and order of a church's public assembly, what do we learn from the context regarding actions that might result in confusion? Obviously, any failure to communicate clearly with edification from the pulpit to the pew crosses this line.

Paul forbids any waste of precious time in this way. One analogy that he uses to emphasize the point deals with the blowing of a trumpet signal from the commander to soldiers in battle. (1 Corinthians 14:8) In the setting of war, the sounds blown on the trumpet communicated a very specific directive to the soldiers; both the soldier who blew the message on the trumpet and the soldiers in the trenches had to know every detail of the message sent by each prescribed trumpet sequence. If the trumpet soldier merely chose to blow random sounds on the trumpet, the result in the trenches would be utter confusion. One soldier would say, "I think he meant 'A.'" Another soldier standing next to him would say, "No, I think he meant 'B.'" What would be the results in the trenches? Every soldier would chase off in his own imagination based on his private "I think he meant..." And utter chaos would follow, not to mention the defeat of the army. How sadly often in today's modern Christian culture do we hear very sincere people responding exactly as the imaginary soldiers in the trenches in this analogy. A dominant idea of the day is that any believer can merely choose to believe whatever he prefers so long as he believes it sincerely. Sincerity is not bad, but sincerity in error in no way diminishes the error. It is simply a sincere error, but just as much the error as if the person had embraced the idea with guile. Thus, the modern dialogue regarding Scripture or spiritual truths sadly exemplifies the very confusion that Paul forbids in this passage. Add the factor of human ego, and you will hear the words, "I've read the Bible more than you, so I know I'm right. If you disagree with me, you have to be wrong." The attitude relies far more on human ego than on Bible. The Bible

doesn't teach literally thousands of things contradictory to individual believers, but thousands of individual believers rely on their personal intellect and impose their private interpretations onto Scripture and then arrogantly try to coerce all other believers within their circle to go along with their private interpretations. They cannot distinguish their private interpretation from the words of Scripture, so they conveniently substitute their interpretation for Scripture and then claim impeccable knowledge of the Bible as theirs.

Scripture does not teach a despotic hierarchy of authority within the personalities of a faithful church. In fact it forbids such human-focused usurping of power. (1 Peter 5:1-2) No man by any Biblical office has Biblical authority to lord himself or his ideas over other believers. However, Scripture does impose a consistent pattern of teaching authority in a New Testament church in the person of the man who serves as that church's pastor. If members in a church decide they do not agree with the pastor and set up their own private "Pulpit" in the church dining area, or, as Paul warns (2 Timothy 3:6 and context), follow any course of sowing private discord among the church's members, the action contradicts this teaching order and Paul's warning against confusion in the church. Competing ideas imposed onto church members from contradictory "Pulpits" always bring confusion; never peace. Our typical church building structure has one auditorium and one pulpit in the front center of that auditorium. A healthy, Biblical church's culture follows this architecture.

Our modern culture adds endlessly to the opportunity of our adversary for confusion in a church. In my youth a man had to visit a church to try to impose his ideas onto its members, often following Paul's warning against creeping into houses. Today the disgruntled or self-serving member of a church needs only to click a few links on his home computer, and he can download and listen to any preacher he wants to favor, even if that man's teaching contradicts Scripture and his pastor's Biblical teaching. And I've seen enough examples on the internet to know that men who are errant in their ideas know quite adroitly how to hide their errors and to deceive the unsuspecting, naïve, or ego-driven believer. All too often "Internet" preaching and listening becomes entertainment preaching and listening. In this setting, a man's personality and speaking skill or wit become the teacher's powerful tools to deceive and mislead the unsuspecting. People become admiring rock star fans of the current popular preacher, at the same time scorning their perception of their pastor's everyday "Dare to tell me how to live my life" preaching. To borrow a cliché that my wife has occasionally used regarding such preachers and their conduct, believers who fall prey to this unbiblical culture need to remind themselves, "Elvis has left the building!" Stop fawning over the "Elvis"

preachers and return to God's model for your life and for your church.

As pastors mingle from one church to another, they often have occasion to quietly observe a church's health and habits. He may visit one church where all the members are loyal and loving toward each other, who study together to "mind" their own business. (1 Thessalonians 4:11) The next church he visits may be brimming with tensions just beneath the polite superficial surface. A preacher—in fact most visitors—can sense this mood, and they are quite happy to make their exit as quickly as possible.

Think for a moment about these two hypothetical churches. Why is one church so contented and peaceful while another church with members just as sincere is ready to explode? I suggest that our study verse answers the question. When a church collectively follows the Lord's leading and seeks to live under His guiding hand as revealed in Scripture, they shall inevitably overcome their personalities and their human tensions to the state of joyful peace. Paul affirms that the Lord is the Author of this peace. The folks in that other church refused to follow the Lord's guiding hand, each member preferring to orchestrate other people to gain the upper hand or to manipulate people to their way. In fact, I suggest that these folks are as fully complying with the opposite idea of our passage as the first church fulfills the "Peace" theme. They personify confusion, and Paul rebukes any notion that God is secretly the instigator or cause of that confusion. It is human ego that enriches the soil of carnality and one person's sinful ambition to gain preeminence over another believer. Not only does Scripture clearly state that God is not the cause of confusion in a church, but Solomon wrote that God "hates" discord in His family. (Proverbs 6:16-19) Jesus pronounced a woe upon the person by whom offenses enter into His family. (Matthew 18:7)

Whether by errant teaching or by contradicting Paul's requirement in our study context for simple and clear communication, the passage applies. God never causes or "Authors" confusion. He always appears in wondrous peace among believers. He is "...*there in the midst of them.*" (Matthew 18:20 and context)

When I first started preaching, I was blessed for several years with intimate fellowship and time with my uncle, a seasoned and respected elder in the church. One of his first words of counsel to me was simple. Never waste a congregation's time. "Get up. Speak up. Shut up." Keep self out of the way and the Lord always prominent in your message.

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor