



UNASHAMED 2019

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For the Church,
the Bride for whom Christ
will soon return!

INTRODUCTION

What is Christmas?

Last Christmas, I put together a small booklet that addressed the Gospel of Jesus Christ and how it related to six crucial topics that I felt were pertinent to the health of churches, especially in the state of Kerala where I live. This year, I hope to carry on this tradition and bring to you the next edition of *Unashamed* with six more topics that I believe require our attention. Having been called to work closely with a church plant myself, I am hard pressed to stick to Scripture on all these topics, and pray that the Holy Spirit gives strength, wisdom and courage to endure in this race.

As I mentioned last year, there is no fitter place to begin such a book than with the greatest story ever told, the Gospel of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ. Out of a desire to be unashamedly and unapologetically biblical, and to not be excessively exhaustive, I've limited myself to 6 topics that, I find, warrant our immediate attention. I've even limited my thoughts to a page for each topic. Ideally, this would constitute no more than a single day's read, and if it gets you thinking and searching for more, then I shall rejoice in the knowledge that this book has served its intended purpose. My prayer and simple desire is that God would use this volume of *Unashamed* to kindle in your hearts a sincere intent and desire to conform to the word of God. Anything that brings about such an outcome is solely owing to the work of Christ, and everything else would announce the shortcomings of a poor author and are best ignored.

* * *

Having arrived at the topic of 'truth' in a recent conversation with a non-Christian friend of mine, I made the observation that truth, by definition, is absolute. At first, she disagreed saying, "How can truth be absolute? If I have a certain view about something and someone else has an opposing view of the same issue, doesn't that mean that I have a truth and someone else another?". A lot of people believe this - that truth is not objective, but relative; that is, changing according to one's own perspective. So, I asked her this question: "if you say, 'Truth is relative!', then is that claim absolute or relative?" You see, such a declarative statement assumes that what the person is saying is, in fact, absolutely true. In order to establish that 'truth is relative', she had to use an absolute statement that presupposes such a thing as an absolute truth.

Therefore, the question I pose to you, the reader, is this - is it truth that is written in these pages? If not, then you will be wise to avoid this book entirely. But if what I tell you is the truth, then to walk away from what I am saying is to risk the danger of living a lie. Jesus said, **"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"**¹

Millions around the world, Christians and non-Christians alike, celebrate Christmas. It has been widely popularised as a season symbolising kindness and generosity. A season of giving and sharing; a season of hope and of mercy. It is the most awaited holiday in many countries. But what is it really? What is this celebration all about?

It is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, God incarnate. It is the celebration of God who came down from heaven in human flesh, born to a young virgin woman. Every Christian knows the story. Many non-Christians know the story. But why? Why did God come down? Why was all this necessary? To answer that, we must start at the beginning.

God is described in the Bible as One who exists eternally. That means that the existence of all things that we know and do not know, that we see and do not see; all of it finds their origin in the creative act of this God. He made all things, set all things, ordered all things and purposed all things. God exists as One Divine Being in three distinct persons - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we call Him, the Trinity. Each person in this Trinity is fully divine, but the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit and the Spirit is not the Father. They are three and yet, they are One. Impossible? No, impossible is too weak a word that fails before the might of who this God is.²

In 7 days, He created our world and everything in it. God created a good and perfect world, a world with no sin and no pain, a world of joy and pleasure, a world of peace and harmony. He created man and woman to rule over the earth and they were the most privileged of His creation, for they were created in His very own image - both Adam and Eve. But, this man and woman, the very first generation of all our ancestors, disobeyed God and broke the command of God, and, through their disobedience, brokenness entered the world. Sin gained a foothold in mankind, and all that was once beautiful was now filled with evil.

However, it wasn't anger that prevailed in the moments that followed the fall of man, but mercy. Mercy that stayed the hand of God from wiping them out permanently. God, even though He warned Adam of the consequences before the fall, acted in mercy and banished him to work and toil on the earth till the day he died. Little did mankind know or imagine how He would restore us, how He would remove our guilt. All that remained for humanity was to await that judgment of God where all men would perish under His wrath in the flames of His just and holy anger.

Through the shroud of this dark and hopeless destiny, the shepherds beheld the light of our salvation shine forth.³ Throughout history God spoke of this, of the hope for humanity, of the One who would come to save us from our sins, the Messiah. He came in human flesh, God incarnate, and He was called Jesus, the babe of Christmas. Jesus came to die. God, the Son died on a cross bearing our sin. Upon this cross, we see God's perfect justice, that should have fallen on us, fall on His only begotten Son, and we see God's perfect love in saving a people for Himself, those who believe in this Son. Yes, Jesus died, but death could not keep Him, its cords could not hold Him. On the third day, He rose up from the grave. Therefore the purpose of the Trinity has, and always will prevail.

This is Christmas! A celebration of God's great work for the salvation of man, for the glory of His Holy Name. To this God who does all things for His glory, the lover of our souls, be glory and majesty and honour and praise forevermore!

GOD BOX

How and why we must believe the Bible

“Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.”

— Martin Luther

This statement by Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms in 1521 was the crux of the entire Protestant Reformation. People began to question the teachings of men, which drove them to search for the truth elsewhere - in the word of God. As a result, they were held captive to the Word of God and not the doctrines of men. Today, 500 years later, the question before Christendom remains the same. Do we believe the Bible? Don't be fooled, though. This question does not simply deal with “why we believe the Bible”. It is dependent even on what we mean when we say, “we believe the Bible”. It is how we believe it that makes the difference. The vast majority of Christians will agree that the Bible is the word of God and that we must believe it. But do we? It is one thing to say that we agree on the centrality of God's word, and entirely another to believe His word and be transformed by it. Are we, like Luther, captive to the word of God? Or are we still captive to popes, councils, pastors, denominations or money, while we praise God with our lips and exalt His word with only our mouths?

I have heard many believers say that by giving such importance to the Bible, a person is, in effect, ‘putting God in a box’. They say that God is bigger than the Bible and that we must take care to not constrain Him, or His glory, within the four walls of a book. I humbly disagree. Yes, God is bigger than the Bible. Yes, His magnificence and splendour cannot be contained in any book. However, by giving supreme importance to the Bible, it is not that we have constrained God in this book. **It is that He cannot be separated from it!** The Bible is His word, and even though heaven and earth may pass away, not a dot of His word shall pass away.⁴ As God is divine, so is His word divine. That is why the Scripture is the sure foundation of all Christian faith and practice.⁵ Because popes, councils, pastors, denominations and programs are all bound to fail, but the revelation of God in the Bible shall never, ever, fail. Does that sound like a God constrained?

This infinite God whom we serve has chosen to reveal Himself to us. He did this by giving us a book. The words of this book, although written down by men, are God-breathed⁵ words that the Holy Spirit inspired in those men. Jesus, in His life, constantly modelled for us the way in which we must trust His word. It is interesting that Jesus, when tempted in the wilderness, quoted the written Scripture to resist the devil. You see, Jesus is God. Whatever He said would have, by definition, been the “word of God”. Yet, He chose to quote the Scripture from Deuteronomy in order that He may model for us how to run the good race and fight the good fight - by being captive to the word of God. Such was His modelling of love and devotion to God's word that the apostle John calls Him the incarnate Word who was God from the beginning.⁶

INTOLERANT TOLERANCE

What it means to be a tolerant person

“Intolerance is no longer a refusal to allow contrary opinions to say their piece in public, but must be understood to be any questioning or contradicting the view that all opinions are equal in value, that all worldviews have equal worth, that all stances are equally valid. To question such postmodern axioms is by definition intolerant.”

— D.A Carson

One of the biggest ‘mishaps’ of this present generation of millennials is that they think they are entitled. I place majority of the blame for that on the previous generation - my dad’s generation. He comes from a generation that had to work hard for everything, and, most importantly, had to reason for their beliefs in every public court of opinion. They weren’t entitled to anything. They worked and earned their way up. Having done so much to rise above the hurdles, and out of love for their children, they wanted to gift them a better world, or an easier world, one that was not filled with the obstacles they themselves had to surmount. A more tolerant world, perhaps? Therefore, they gave my generation everything we needed and everything we didn’t. It was win-win, in that we ran races we’d already won, because they gave out trophies to everyone before we had to fight for them. The price of individualism skyrocketed. Today, everybody wants to be heard equally and everybody wants to be accepted equally, and the word that’s thrown around to no end is ‘tolerance’.

As D.A Carson tells us, tolerance used to mean that if I had an opinion that opposed yours, I would still fight for your right to voice your opinion even if I disagreed with you. Intolerance used to be identified as a refusal to allow the opposing opinion to be voiced. Today, the entitled opinion refuses to allow the opposing opinion to be voiced, and they do this by accusing the opposition of being inherently intolerant! Therefore, the so-called freedom movements like those for LGBTQ rights, feminism, abortion, and others, suppress the voice of opposition in the name of freedom. And we the church are often dragged into this lie. In standing up and voicing their opinions and demanding tolerance, they expect tolerance to be the silence of the opposing voice. If I stand up and speak against abortion or homosexuality, the world will brand me intolerant just for stating what I believe. Never has there been such a gross misrepresentation of a word that’s meant for justice, such that it is now used to propel injustice.

Such cultural sins penetrate the Church in ways we do not expect. Many churches have opened their doors to such movements that the Bible clearly condemns as sinful and deserving of God’s judgment.⁷ Why? Because many churches feel that they need to be tolerant, according to the definition of this word in this generation. And even among church leaders, there is a growing demand for all opinions to carry equal value, and believers who question these opinions are by default categorised as being divisive, too doctrinal and intolerant.

What most people fail to realise is that, **according to this recent redefinition of the word, Jesus would be the one character in the Bible who was most intolerant.** That’s why the Roman gentiles and the Jewish scribes, two entirely opposite groups, unite to kill Him. He offended everybody. They had to silence Him.

MARRIAGE

The greatest ministry on earth

“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

— Paul, 1 Corinthians 13:13

Charles Spurgeon once said that marriage was the last relic of paradise left among men and that Jesus hastened to honour it with His first miracle. I remember, in my childhood years, always being eager to get married. When many of my friends played around with short-term relationships, I was constantly on the lookout for a wife. Many called me naive, some called me foolish. Somehow, to me it did not seem foolish or naïve. It felt like a significant turn one takes in life. It felt like an awesome adventure. As foolish as it may have seemed to the world, I persisted in my search, and I finally got my chance and entered into this holy and precious covenant two years ago.

A friend once asked me how I would sum up marriage based on these two years. I told him it was everything I expected and everything I did not. Two years may not seem like much but when I look around, especially in my generation, it's almost like dog years. My wife and I are amazed at how rapidly marriages are falling apart left, right and centre. I'm reminded, whenever I pray, of the words of the Psalmist, **“A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you”**.⁸ There are so many couples who are no more than two or three years into their marriage, and it's all falling apart before them. They hate it. They want out. Many couples seek out counsellors in hopes to save their marriages but end up being 'counselled' to file for divorce instead. Divorce has become a medication prescribed by secular counsellors to heal a broken marriage. A growing acceptance, in this generation, of divorce as being normative adds to the impulse to give up, by nullifying any consequences. The same voices of the world that called me a fool for wanting to get married, now urge married couples to give up.

Beloved, I can with all honesty say that I did not marry the perfect woman, and by no measure am I the perfect man. We fight, drive each other up the wall, act in un-Christian ways, and are tired more often than not. Two years together seems more than enough time to give up. So, it does not surprise me when I see marriages fall apart outside of the Church because outside of the Gospel there is no sufficiently justifiable hope or purpose in marriage. However, it shocks me when I see many Christians influenced more by the ways of the world than by the word of God, resulting in devastated marriages even among the community of saints.

We must not forget that marriage is not some man-made ritual. It is a holy and precious covenant instituted by God Himself. Even before the fall of man, God's gift to Adam, was a wife. It is God who declared that it is not good for man to be alone. Marriage can never be a selfish pursuit. In Ephesians 5, Paul explains that the husband must love his wife like Christ loves the church. What a calling! To be like Christ in this regard, brothers, is to lay down your life for your wife. Is there a more selfless act than that? And wives, likewise, are called to submit to their husbands as they would do to the Lord. Sisters, is there a more selfless act on part of a wife than to submit wholeheartedly to her husband? **“Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”**⁹

CHURCH HOP

Why it isn't always what it seems

“But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

— John, Revelation 2:4-5&7

The seven lampstands in the book of Revelation represent seven churches. The lampstands themselves symbolise the light of the Gospel. A church whose lampstand has been removed is a church that no longer has the Gospel, and, as a result, is no longer really a church. There is an existential meaning and a functional purpose that a church has, and a failure to fulfil this purpose is a failure of the church to represent Christ. Many churches run the risk of having their lampstands removed by God, and many others are past that stage.

Now, a church hopper is someone who hops from one church to another, a description that can apply to many professing Christians today. However, this term is also misused quite often. The key is in the motive. A church hopper is usually one whose reason for jumping churches is mainly that they are easily offended by anything they find disagreeable in a local church. It may be the choir that they don't like, or the order of worship, or the building, or the size – that it is too big or too small, or even the celebrity status of the preacher. None of these, in themselves, are sufficient grounds for anyone to look for another church. However, many of the voices that would agree with me in that statement, are also quick to ignore the very real problems that churches do have that legitimately warrant a ‘hop’ on the part of its members.

The most common expression is that no church is perfect. I agree. However, finding a perfect church is not the motive of all who hop. The question is not if a church is good or bad, perfect or imperfect. The question, really, is whether a church is healthy or unhealthy. For example, if one is convinced that he is currently in a church that is so obviously broken that God seems to have already removed the lampstand from it, it is wise that he leaves that church at the earliest. Considering any other church, in that case, how do you tell if it is healthy? This health is not measured based on attendance, singing talent, or outreach programs. It is measured by asking these questions: Does the church have a commitment to preach and teach the Bible accurately? Are you able to grow spiritually and is the church able to help you actively in that spiritual growth? Are you able to effectively give and work for the glory of God in that church? Mark Dever has written a very helpful book called ‘9 Marks of a Healthy Church’ where he lists, from his own pastoral experience, the top nine ‘marks’ of a healthy church. These nine marks include expository preaching, biblical theology, true gospel, authentic conversion, evangelism, membership, discipline, discipleship, and leadership. A person who genuinely seeks after these things will not be a serial hopper, although he may hop for the right reasons. However, one who seeks after trivial things will never be satisfied in his hopping. Remember what Jesus has promised - “**...on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**”¹⁰

PSEUDO CHURCH

Why para-church ministries are not the church

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

— Paul, Ephesians 2:19-22

Para-church ministries are those that do not strictly come under a particular local church. The growing trend in our time is that of many para-church ministries neglecting the importance of the local church. It isn't that they identify themselves as the church, but that they identify themselves as suitable replacements to the very concept of local churches. This is a dangerous trajectory. The first thing we need to keep in mind is that the Church is not an invention of man but a divine establishment founded by Jesus Himself. The common counter to this argument is that Jesus established the universal church bringing together all who are true believers on the planet, and that the local church is not ultimately a necessity or a priority, especially for one's spiritual growth. They would argue, for example, that my daily prayer with my wife every night is a gathering of two believers, and thereby constituting a church. Or that, if I meet with a few brothers once a week for prayer and fellowship, it's the church. My response to that is both yes and no.

Yes, because the universal church comprises of all the believing from all parts of the world, and therefore one could identify any such gathering as a church, although only in a general sense. The local church is a structured gathering of believers who have covenanted with each other (that is the key differentiation for me) and have submitted themselves to teaching, prayer, fellowship and the breaking of bread.¹¹ This local church was charged with the responsibility of training and equipping the believers (discipling them) and sending them out as light to the world. I would hesitate to call any gathering of believers a local church. In fact, I would refuse. The local church, in my study of the Bible is always associated with words such as teaching, sound doctrine, commitment, covenant, submission, discipline, eldership, membership, along with words like prayer, fellowship and gathering.

Para-church ministries must exist, but not as a replacement of the local church! Rather, they should serve as instruments that drive people to be plugged into healthy churches. They must serve with a vision to equip and build local churches to better care for their members. Remember that Paul did not write letters to para-church ministries. He wrote to local churches. Even when we consider his letters to individuals such as Timothy or Titus, we see Paul heavily instruct them on how to better equip local churches. First century Christians were not confused about this. They understood the mandate of Christ and that carried on by the apostles as being a mission to evangelise the world, plant local churches and raise leaders who would shepherd the people till Jesus, the true Shepherd returns to take us home.

WOLVES

Why they remain and prosper

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

— Jesus, Matthew 7:15-20

Beloved, do we need a more persuasive warning than this? These are the words of our Lord Jesus Himself. We must beware of wolves, and they are plenty among us. False prophets have arisen among the ranks of Christians and many have repeatedly found their way even up to the helm of our congregations. The entire focus of Christ in this passage is to help us identify these wolves, because, according to Jesus, these wolves cannot be picked out all that easily. They will “come to you in sheep’s clothing”, He warns. They will look like sheep - harmless, innocent, pure and genuine. It is the inside, that which we cannot plainly see, that is ravenous. In light of this truth, to judge preachers, pastors, church leaders, or even members, solely on the basis of their “sheep-likeness”, or even the appearance of spiritual giftedness, would be unwise. Instead, we are to look for their fruits.

The problem, among most evangelicals, is that they identify the anointing of a preacher or a fellow believer by these external features. How powerful are their sermons? How passionate are they? Or even, how energetic are their personalities? These are all important things, no doubt, but they are not by themselves sufficient to judge the authenticity of a true Christian. For that, you must look for their fruits. And for that, they must be subject to a local church where they fellowship, pray, and are held accountable. Only in such a community are hearts inevitably uncovered and lives laid bare and the true fruits of faith made visible. Wolves will thus be exposed.

Alas, if all that is needed to unmask the wolves in our midst is the existence of the local church, there would be none still among us, let alone leading some of us. **The main reason why wolves survive and sometimes thrive for long periods in churches is that congregations today are driven less by the word of God, and more by the will of man.** The programs, outreaches, mercy-ministries, councils and committees have taken more priority than the effective preaching and teaching of God’s word. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. This is equally true for the preacher as it is for every member who sits in the pew. In a church where the Word is exalted, the Spirit will work to sieve out the fake from the real. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of bone and of marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.¹² Therefore, church leaders ought not to be placed on pedestals. Instead, they must be held accountable and their lives proven to be fruit-bearing. They must lead by example, not just at the pulpit but away from it as well. Remember what Jesus said - that good trees do not bear bad fruit and bad trees do not bear good fruit.

Appendix :

1. John 8:31-32
2. Matthew 19:26
3. Luke 2:8-20
4. Matthew 24:35, Luke 21:33
5. 2 Timothy 3:16
6. John 1:1
7. Romans 1:24-27
8. Psalm 91:7
9. Ephesians 5:31
10. Matthew 16:18
11. Acts 2:42
12. Hebrews 4:12

Recommended Further Reading :

Taking God at His word - Kevin DeYoung

This Momentary Marriage - John Piper

9 Marks of a Healthy Church - Mark Dever

The Intolerance of Tolerance - D.A Carson

Why believe the Bible - John MacArthur

Systematic Theology - Wayne Grudem

The Treasury of David - Charles Spurgeon

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6 TOPICS

1 GOSPEL

This tiny little book, if one can call it that, is the product of an attempt to be unashamedly and unapologetically biblical, about some pertinent issues in the church today. Out of a desire to not be excessively exhaustive, I've limited myself to 6 topics that, I find, warrant our immediate attention, and even limited my thoughts to a page for each topic. Ideally, it would constitute no more than a single day's read, and if it gets you thinking and searching for more, then I shall rejoice in the knowledge that this book has served its intended purpose. My simple desire and humble prayer is that God would use this volume of Unashamed to kindle in your hearts a sincere intent and desire to conform to the word of God.

The Cross Purpose is a team of committed believers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, created for the sole purpose of unashamedly propogating the good news of God's redemptive work in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, with the prayer that the truth of His word would reform the hearts of His people to be light to the world and salt to the earth.

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