



A Conversation With a Friend From My Earliest Days in the Faith.

Not so long ago I deactivated my Facebook account. I've already [explained](#) my reason for that, and I 'm not going to revisit that now. I deactivated my account, but I didn't delete it. At some point I may reactivate the account, but right now I'm not planning on it.

Deactivating a social media account is a big break. Sometimes people notice. But, once you've done it, how can you ever know unless they have another way to reach out to you? Well, one of my best friends has my phone number and she sent me a text message to make sure I'm OK.

You have fallen off[f] the face of the earth again. I trust you are OK and just either bored with Facebook or frustrated with people in general. I miss your comments.

The conversation grew from there, but since I was at work I really couldn't give it the attention she deserves. I promised I would explain myself here, and we could use the comments thread to continue it.

Since my site is publicly available, some ground rules: I moderate comments. I won't publish any of her comments that she wants to remain private. I also won't publish any comments from any readers that go off topic or are in any way disrespectful of my friends, not that she would post such in the first place. That last is for the occasional visitor who doesn't know me or my friends.

Second: I'm explaining myself to her, and anyone else who is interested. She doesn't need to explain herself to me, or any of my readers, although if we disagree I would like to understand her reasoning.

Having said that, let's get on with it. (The "quotes" that follow are not exactly what my friend wrote, they've been edited for clarity. If I misrepresent anything she said she can and should correct me.)

I see some of what you say but you have always come at things from a completely different angle than anyone I know. I have to ask you what you have been studying in the word that has led you to some of the conclusions of what others believe based on what they post.

Here's where I think one of our first misunderstandings shows up. I don't draw conclusions about what others *believe*. I draw conclusions about what they *say*. I also draw conclusions based on the implications of what they say, or at least what I infer from what they say.

Often what a person says or writes has some bearing on what they believe. I'm not so sure that is the case when they repost something someone else has written or when they repost or "share" a "meme" or picture on social media. Nevertheless why "like" or "share" or repost something you don't agree with, or like?

Jesus said what comes out of the mouth comes from a man's innermost being or heart (Matthew 15:18). He was talking about foul and corrupt communication defiling a person rather than what they eat if you look at it in context, which brings up another point I'll get to in a bit. My point here though is that what we say, "like", "share", post, repost, or write reflects who we are and what we believe.

Nevertheless no man can truly know what's in the heart of another. Paul, when he wrote about the wisdom imparted to the mature believer asked "who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him?" (1 Corinthians 2:11). Now Paul was using this to point out that no one can know the mind of God, except the believer who also has the Spirit of God living within him, but his question remains. How can I, a mere man know what another man believes? I can't. But I can still examine what he says.

Other than what a person says they believe I don't have to take what they say at face value. When I was a young man, I was also somewhat naïve and gullible. This extended not just to political matters (something I've [written about elsewhere](#)), but to just about everything. I've since learned to distrust most of what I read and hear until I've looked at it more closely.

This is, in part, why I come at things from a different direction than most people you (replying directly to my friend here) know. I don't immediately trust what I read or hear, except from *exactly one* source. I can't say that I don't occasionally fall for a line or that my judgment of what to trust and what not to is infallible, but I try to avoid that where I can. My advice to you is to examine everything anyone says closely, and make up your own mind. This applies as much to anything I say as to anything someone else says.

Now when a person says that they're a Christian I'll take that at face value. After all, it's not for me to say whether the Lord has saved them or not. But when someone says they're a Christian I have to start looking at what else they say, particularly regarding matters of faith. We are commanded to test the spirits. (1 John 4:1).

Now the casual comment someone makes isn't necessarily something to pounce upon, but doctrinal statements are another matter. So when someone claiming the name of Christ posts, "likes", "shares", or reposts something having a religious or even philosophical tone we really should look at it with discernment. We should also be careful to do so before we post, "like", "share", or repost that same material.

So, what is the standard we should judge the things we read or hear by? I noted earlier that there is *exactly one* source that I trust without question. That's the word of God, the Bible. I generally trust my pastor, but I don't accept his word as "the word of the Lord" without comparing it to what the Bible actually says.

I'm not saying that I'm better at interpreting the Bible than he is, but Paul said "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:8) Therefore we are duty bound to examine closely what we are taught. Luke even commended the believers in Berea for having this attitude.

Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. - Acts 17:11

This is why I check these things and look at them closely. I've wandered away from the truth many times in my life. I've been deceived many times, slowly at first with a little bit of error and then faster and faster as error accumulated upon error. I thank God though that he drew me back and put me under sound teachers. I thank him that he gave his Holy Spirit to open the scriptures to my mind and heart. I thank him that he continues to draw me back when I stray and when I fall into error.

James said "For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body." (James 3:2). So I know we will all (myself included) fall into error or interpret scripture incorrectly on occasion. When this happens to our brothers and sisters it's our duty to point the way to the truth gently and with care for ourselves as well. (Galatians 6:1)

I'm not so sure that I succeed at the gentleness part. That's yet another reason I've deactivated my Facebook account. I know I have a tendency to hold my opinions in higher regard than I ought to. I try to ground my opinions in scripture, and I try to remain teachable. But I'm afraid that doesn't always manifest itself in the way I talk to people or write.

In any case, on to your next question...

Why do we all have to fit in a certain mold? Hasn't God called us all to salvation if we believe in his son Jesus?

I don't think that we all have to fit in a certain mold, and I'm grateful for the tremendous diversity of people and the diverse gifts that God has put in his church. However, I don't think that everyone who says they believe in Jesus believes in the Jesus described in the Bible. Nor do I think that a mere intellectual assent to Jesus' existence and station as the son of God is sufficient for salvation. Remember, "Even the demons believe—and shudder!" (James 2:19). A saving faith will result in good works, not that we are ever saved by our works.

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. - James 2:14-17

Faith without works is dead. The works we do are evidence to ourselves and to the world of the saving grace and glory of God. But again, our works do not ever purchase our salvation. We are saved by grace, *through* faith. But even that doesn't come from us. The faith that saves us is the gift of God, and has nothing to do with what we have done in the form of works (Ephesians 2:8-9). But a true faith will result in obedience to Christ.

We are commanded to test ourselves to be sure that we are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). For a relatively short course on the ways we can test ourselves, look to 1 John 1-5.

Perhaps (and only perhaps, if you had something else in mind don't leave this alone) by asking why do we all have to fit into one mold, you are referring to 1 Corinthians 12:28, because you go on to ask...

Some are teachers, some are shepherds, some workers, some warriors. In that won't each one have different callings of what they might have to have faith for? Won't each one have to learn how to walk in faith for healing, faith for riches, faith for provision in poverty?

Earlier I mentioned context when referring to Matthew 15:18. I'd like to bring that up again. No verse of scripture stands alone. Nor can they be interpreted alone. But sometimes reading in context requires more than just one or two verses on either side of what we're reading. For this particular passage (1 Corinthians 12:28), I'd like to start a bit earlier... let's start with verse 12...

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say,

“Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

- 1 Corinthians 12:12-28

“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body”, and “all were made to drink of one Spirit.” Whether we have different gifts, or different callings, we all share the same Spirit. We all share the same needs, and the same faith. It’s not one faith for healing, and another for riches, and another for provision in poverty.

In fact, this notion of “walking in faith for healing, faith for riches, and faith for provision in poverty” is one of the things that caused me to fall away for a while. I think it’s a rather dangerous and deceptive idea. We don’t have “faith for” anything, we have “faith in” Jesus, the only begotten son of God. We have faith that while we were yet sinners he came to seek and save us from our sins. We have faith in his propitiatory sacrifice on the cross, in his death and resurrection.

We don’t have “faith for” anything, instead we have *hope* for healing and other things in this world and the next. The thing is, we are not promised prosperity in this world. We are not promised health in this world. What believers *are* promised *in this world* is that “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12).

I am not saying that we shouldn’t pray for healing, we should (James 5:13-18). I’m not saying that we shouldn’t pray for provision in poverty. We are commanded to ask the Father for those things we need, and not to worry about anything (Philippians 4:6). When we ask

the Father, we can certainly expect good things, but our prayers and our faith don't amount to a guarantee that we'll get what we want. But we will be given what we need.

Consider the apostles themselves. They had faith enough to heal the sick, raise the dead, escape from prisons and more. Yet they all suffered persecution, torture, and with the exception of John were executed for their faith. They endured hardship, nakedness, hunger, and poverty. (2 Corinthians 11:24-27)

Were they less faithful than we are? If our faith is the power to bring us health and wealth ("faith for healing, faith for riches") then why didn't they have these things? Clearly it wasn't God's will. Remember the thorn in Paul's flesh? (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

We talked about God's blessings. We should be grateful for them. You said:

I believe that he [Joel Osteen] teaches the salvation of Jesus and the blessings of the Father that are available to those who follow him. Prosperity is more than money, and I have heard him teach that it is health and family. It is God blessing you as you try to lose weight. It is him blessing you and giving you favor at work or being there and giving you grace to walk through difficult times. I have listened to several of his sermons and find most of it scriptural.

Self esteem can be like money. It's not the money it's the love of it. It's not the self esteem, it's the pride.

Let's look a little closer at that shall we? First of all, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." (James 1:17). God does bless us in many ways, including the ways you listed. But we are no less blessed when we cannot lose weight, or when we don't find favor at work. Our true blessing isn't to be found in this life, but at Jesus' coming.

As for self-esteem, I really don't value it as much as many people do. It is by its very definition pride in oneself. Aren't we called to esteem others as more important than ourselves? Aren't we warned that pride goes before destruction? (Proverbs 16:18).

You are right that money isn't of itself evil, but rather the love of money is a root of evil. Let's look at that in context.

If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. But godliness with contentment is great

gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. - 1 Timothy 6:3-10

“Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.”, and “people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, *imagining* that godliness is a means of gain.” Having wealth and prosperity isn’t a sin. But the Christian shouldn’t focus on earthly riches and prosperity. Our faith isn’t for riches. Nor should our hope be (1 Timothy 6:17-19). At least, not on this earth. “But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.” (1 Timothy 6:11)

Finally the last part you sent said:

The important thing is do you believe that Jesus is the son of God, and have you asked him into your life. Then are you walking in what he has called you to. And above all, after you have accepted him, are you walking in his love that covers a multitude of sins.

There is only one Gospel. There is only one path to the Father. That path is narrow, and few find it. The way to the Father is of course Jesus. There’s no other way. And nobody comes to Jesus unless the Father draws him.

Many would teach that the gospel is about prosperity in this life, that you can have “your best life now”. It’s not. The gospel is about the glory of God, how in his infinite holiness he required a punishment for sin. It is about his love, for his son and for us that he would offer up his son as a sacrifice for our sins. It’s about his wondrous power by which he raised Jesus from the dead, so that we too can have life in him. It’s about his ultimate wisdom in having planned all of this before the foundation of the world. It’s not about us, and what we want. It’s about Jesus and the glory of God.

It’s not merely whether we have asked him into our life. It’s whether we have seen the weight of our sin, repented of it and begged him for forgiveness. It’s whether we acknowledge him not only as the Son of God, but as our creator, Lord, and master. It’s about walking in obedience to him, and in his love.

You say that when we walk in love it covers a multitude of sins, and that’s true. But when we love others it’s not our sins, or at least not our sins alone. The love that covers a multitude of sins does so because it leads others to Jesus.

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. - 1 Peter 4:8

How does love covers a multitude of sins?

My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. - James 5:19-20

This is why we should look at what we believe and teach, and why we should examine what others teach. We want people to know Jesus, not just to feel good about themselves. We want to see them saved from their sins.

That's something only God can do, but it's a privilege to be a part of it. But I just can't say that in the space of a Facebook post, or on a "meme".