

When you reach for a book to read, are you more inclined to read fiction or nonfiction? Well, when I was a kid, that answer was easy. There's a family picture of me as a toddler on the couch with a stack full of books—I was an early reader—and that stack was all fiction, of course, like you'd expect from kids' books.

For sure, I just couldn't get enough of books as a kid and fed that desire at the local public library and through the traveling bookmobile...remember that previous episode with the bookmobile story? Plus my mom let me order a new paperback each time the elementary school distributed a flyer of school-age books for sale. Wow—was that an amazing feeling!—longing for a new book and then actually receiving it! That was kinda like receiving a special package from Amazon today...I don't think an avid reader ever gets over the feeling of first hefting a highly-anticipated new book!

Now a mainstay at the time for kids of a certain middle-schoolish age was the Hardy Boys mystery series, with brothers Frank and Joe Hardy as amateur detectives. These came in a set of 58 original books that positioned exciting cliffhangers at the end of every chapter, clearly designed for the young reader to want to continue reading, right then! Of course, the end results were never in doubt—the Hardy Boys would solve the mystery! These books supposedly authored by Franklin W. Dixon were really written by ghostwriters—and what a disappointment it was when I found that out! Just like the Hardy Boys and the other characters in the books, the author Franklin W. Dixon didn't actually exist!

A bit later in life, I picked up on Sherlock Holmes—the famous London detective from the late 1800s—created from the creative juices of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. What a character Holmes was...or should I say "is"...since, for many, Holmes is more real to his fans than, say, the neighbor three doors down. A complex figure, Holmes is very intelligent while being moody at times, yet a man very relatable to readers. Still, Holmes is always a bit beyond our reach in his amazing skills and extraordinary powers of observation. But it was more than that, a lot more! He "saw" more than we see. He "heard" differently than we hear. He interpreted facts better than we interpret. He integrated the whole picture better than we pull it together. What an enchanting series of books and short stories that Conan Doyle wrote...and it's still a richly rewarding time to revisit Sherlock Holmes and his sidekick Dr. Watson with a short story or two in a book nook on a wintry evening!

Of course, there are other famous mystery writers with a huge following, from Agatha Christie to Raymond Chandler to John Grisham. As for me, I have squeezed almost all of that type of mystery-reading out of my schedule for a whole lot of real-world research and reading in and about the Bible, business, history, biography—whatever's about navigating and living life well, as unto the Lord! Of course, the astute reader recognizes that reading in modern times requires great discernment. That's because a lot of history and biography and daily headlines purport to be true when in fact they often are substantially untrue...with opinions often eclipsing true facts as the writers lead us to their desired answers to life's mysteries.

Hey, remember that old joke structure that starts with the phrase: "there are two types of people in the world'...? Then the amusing answer comes. One of my favorite answers comes from Daniel Pink: "Those who divide the people in the world into two types, and those who don't!" And that brings us to the Bible, because, with the Bible, there's often a very useful contrast to be had. And here it is: "There are two types of people in the world. Those who think the Bible is true and those who think the Bible is untrue." That's a pretty good starting point for finding where people often get direction in their lives. Of course, I totally fall into the "Bible is true" camp. The Word of God is truth. Period.

But in some poignant ways for believers who totally share a belief in that "Bible is true" perspective, that doesn't help much because—while the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit—serious followers of Jesus Christ can and often do have very different takes on the very same framework set before them. Perhaps the one person that we can safely say that was truly, consistently legitimate in having a "different take" is the Apostle Paul—he interpreted key Scriptures differently than many others! And the result is that a

New Covenant understanding apart from Paul's epistles would simply lack full focus and depth. God knew that—that's why Paul's epistles are in the Bible. Sadly, many find Paul's truths very inconvenient.

That's because, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul disrupted much of what's perceived as correct "religion." Paul simply had spiritual eyes to see and ears to hear, you know, the kind of mindset that the Bible tells all Christians to pursue! Here's a sampling of Paul's explosive Bible truths encompassing the law, grace, salvation, works, justification, being reconciled or severed from Christ, and all being one in Christ. And, hey, remember all of this is the highest form of solving a mystery...by the Spirit Himself! You talk about cliffhangers being solved! Listen carefully to these amazing Bible verses from the ESV.

- "Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more..." Romans 5:20
- "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." Ephesians 2:8-9
- "And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death..." Colossians 1:21-22a
- "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace." Galatians 5:4
- "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28

Wow, the Apostle Paul brings us truths that explode the self-centered religious expectations of humanity about who God is, what truths God has fully deployed, and the result of who we are in Christ! Now that's infinitely beyond stories revealing Sherlock Holmes' discerning powers upending readers' expectations.

Yes, the Bible's own cliffhangers take our breath away, reading far more powerfully than any simple Hardy Boys mystery! The triumphant, heaven-yielding insights of the Bible are mind-boggling, easily surpassing the fictional mysteries solved by fictional detectives. And Paul...empowered and taught by the Holy Spirit...unravels key mysteries of a full life in Christ. Indeed, Paul's writing in his epistles to believers works to transform what many "religious" people want to believe—from the law to sin to grace to justification. And beyond the best capabilities of the Hardy Boys or Sherlock Holmes, *all of Paul's renderings reveal and "solve" what can be a real mystery to us better than we could possibly fathom!*

Here's what Jesus said in Luke 10:24, "I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." Wow! And Paul was clearly led by the Holy Spirit as he edified believers, crafting his inspired words of the unparalleled narrative of the New Testament message, for as Paul himself wrote in Colossians 1:25-26, "...I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, *the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.*" Yes, the mystery, now revealed!

Of course, many unbelievers believe the key transcendent claims of the Bible are untrue. But fully-engaged, astutely-reading, and Spirit-hearing believers discern the greatest truths and revel in the unraveled mystery revealed in the greatest book ever! When you were a child, maybe you too were like I was—you would get a tall stack of library books to devour from cover to cover. But this very day, fellow believer, be encouraged: our stack of 66 books—bound together in the Bible—are far greater than anything the Franklin W. Dixons or the Conan Doyles or the Agatha Christies could ever give us.

So, let's dive in afresh to the living-and-active Word of God, and let the Holy Spirit help us read with "eyes to see" and "ears to hear!" That's the privilege of every believer! How. About. That.

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. Ponder the Pauline Scriptures detailed in this episode...and perhaps beyond. Is there some radical Bible truth that the Apostle Paul has divulged in Scripture that you have substantially ignored because it doesn't fit into your religious background or current religious dispositions? Or perhaps you have just "muted" a truth out of your life due to its inconvenience? Identify and discuss.
2. How do you personally ensure that you are "fully-engaged, astutely-reading, and Spirit-hearing" at the forefront of your that you do? Discuss.
3. Many of us work with people who are very smart and insightful without naming the name of Christ in their lives. How do you receive and process that knowledge while keeping the truths of the Bible supreme? Be specific.