Knife to a Gun Fight

Misinterpreting the Purpose and Place of The New Testament

McCraney
For those who love the knife and want to wield it well . . .
Knife to a Gun Fight

McCraney
Law or Love
that hearts are won?
By Flesh or Spirit?
By Knife or Gun?
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An Admission

When it comes to teaching and sharing insights about the Word of God every presenter has to ask themselves, “Will I focus on and promote false hope or will I choose to promote unadulterated truth?” Promoting hope builds religious empires; presenting truth comes at a very high price.

We know that Jesus came to earth to bring a message of hope. But had He made hope His primary message He would have fulfilled the desires of those around Him by being a Messiah who would deliver the Jews from Roman bondage and rule. Focusing on truth, Jesus explained that the emancipation He provided would liberate them from sin and death – a message of truth that did not meet their hopeful expectations. Of course, He was rejected. In this we clearly see that Jesus placed teaching truth over perpetuating false hope - a demand that remains upon all pastors and teachers today.

As a self-described and self-appointed pastor/teacher I have to constantly seek to rightfully balance preaching and teaching Jesus (and Him alone) as our hope while never backing away from the painful realities present in a contextual view of the Bible. For example, where many believers today want to continue to believe in miracles (like those that were performed in Jesus' day), I tend to suggest that those miracles were pictures of the spiritual healing Jesus would continue to perform after that age; that the greatest miracle of our age is when a dead, sinful heart comes to life through faith in Him.

Likewise, Christians today tend to hope that Jesus is coming back to rapture and save them from this evil world. And while I accept all believers' views on end
times and refuse to separate or castigate anyone for these respective stances, I also refuse to teach this “message of hope” when the Bible clearly (in a contextual sense) proves otherwise.

This truth, however, tends to strip the hope believers have in His eminent return – a hope, in my estimation, that was false from the get go and is actually based on hope in an "event" that Jesus will bring, rather than in Jesus Himself. And the list goes on and on.

I am convinced that those who love and/or embrace false messages of hope (over the painful truth) “have their reward.” Even if the falsehoods in and of themselves appear harmless. In other words, if a lie serves to uplift and support a believer in their walk with Christ through this world I tend to believe that the lie will have served its purpose - but since it is of this world, in the world to come it will carry no weight.

God seeks those who seek Him in Spirit and in truth. If the truth takes a backseat to false messages of hope I can’t help but believe that there will be cost – not in terms of punishment but of eternal reward.

Why my insistence in presenting hard, contextual, biblical truths over promoting (false) hope? I am convinced that God created me in such a way (through nurture and nature), and that I cannot help but seek to know, teach, and promote truth over everything else – no matter how painful or how high the cost is for the instruction. Don’t get me wrong. I’m not suggesting that I am an honest man. I have – and continue to – lie, mostly as a means to escape discovery or scrutiny for things I want to remain obscured. I don’t like this about myself (nor excuse it), and though I try hard to be an
honest man in all things I am not above telling a lie to escape pain or discovery.

That being said, I am ardent in seeking and teaching all truths about God, religions that claim to speak for Him, churches that bear His name, community, politics, corporations, systems, philosophies – whatever – as openly and as transparently as possible – no matter what the fallout or cost might be.

I was born charming and affable. More as a means to survive and get my way then out of love for others. As the middle child of six I was a natural peacemaker who sought to please and make friends wherever they could be found. Over the course of time and through experiences I found traumatic to my person, I discovered that the world, and its systems, institutions (and the people who support them), could not be taken at face value, and therefore could not to be trusted. Would I manipulate and charm them? Certainly. This was part of my nature. But I never trusted any of them.

These seeds of mistrust may have come from my parents who, trying to raise their family upright and strong, could only show conditional approval of me rather than an unconditional acceptance. I learned that in order to be praised and accepted by Mom and Dad, I had to comply and conform to their expectations and opinions of things – to do otherwise produced alienation and reproach. In my mind, this system could not be trusted or confided in in any meaningful way, and so my relationship to them was in many ways perfunctory. I don’t blame them or hold any sort of grudge for this approach. They did their best and provided many wonderful things for me out of unconditional love and acceptance. But an environment of complete openness
was not encouraged nor rewarded, and so I saw it as faulty.

The same was true of organized religion. In every situation, from my LDS upbringing to my conversion to Christianity and attendance at Calvary Chapels, there was never an environment of unconditional acceptance (of lifestyle, thought, expression or truth), but there were always demands for compliance, conformity, and allegiance to culture, tradition, established doctrines and practices. Something is still wrong, I would think, and I could not allow myself to play a real part of any system that refused open dialogue, freedom of thought, and opinions that challenged the status quo. And so I never really belonged. The same was true of Evangelical Christianity writ large – or of any religious institution. To me they were all out to serve themselves, and their teachings, doctrines, and view of scripture proved it.

It goes without saying that commercial corporations were no different in my eyes and that they too (as do organizations of every ilk) have their ways, tried and true - and to differ or challenge them was anathema to the established order. And so I was never going to fit the corporate model of things – and never could.

In the end, there was nothing under the sun that would or could fulfill my desire for unconditional love, the freedom to search and challenge, the ability to see and think as I was lead – except one.

The Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In Him I discovered total and unconditional acceptance - received through faith – of my person, personality, ideas, failures and perspectives. In Him there is complete and total safety. Not in ideas about Him. Not in theories
concerning Him. Not in doctrines or disputable matters orbiting around Him. Just in Him.

In the case of “Jesus alone” I was willing, because of who He is and His unfailing love and unconditional heart for me, to place my utter and complete faith, hope and allegiance in and upon Him. He is true. He never disappoints. He does not force. He is not self-serving. He is not hypocritical. He does not ostracize over failures or rambling thoughts. He understands rebellion, challenge, seeking. He is the Rock. Immovable. Sure. Complete. Unchanging. Him and Him alone.

By and through this direct relationship with Him I have been able to stand against errant traditions, false religions, insipid interpretations, and long established orthodoxy that have forever gone unchallenged, but are routinely promoted by keepers of tradition and the status quo. Please know I do not challenge for challenge's sake. I actually abhor upsetting the apple cart and seek for peace and unity among all the faithful. But I cannot help but “see” failures where they reside, and am driven to expose any untruth, no matter how much false hope is destroyed, in the process. May God forgive me where I am wrong.
The alarm on my phone rings – its five forty in the AM and I rise, brush teeth, shave, dress, grab a banana and I’m off to my morning destination.

McDonalds.

Del Taco.

Carl’s Jr.

Einstein’s bagels.

Monday through Saturday I’m there – from 6 am to 11 am straight. Why these places? 1) The Diet Coke refills – to keep me awake. 2) The Ambiance – overhead music, the people coming and going, and other white noise. 3) I can’t work at home – too many distractions, and 4) since I don’t eat the food, it’s cheap.

Eleven o’clock comes and I’m off to exercise, and by 1 pm I’m back at some other food establishment or another – but never the same as morning.

Crown Burger

Rumbi’s

Rubio’s

Super Mex

World Burrito

Chipotle

From 1 pm to 5 pm. Why these places? 1) Change of scenery. 2) Diet Coke refills. 3) The Ambiance. 4) They’re cheap (because sometimes I will eat the food).
What am I doing for these nine hours in these public food locations? Some sort of activity that revolves around the study, reading, preparing or explaining of . . . the Bible. It’s my life, what I do. What I love. And it is what I have done (to some extent or another) for the past thirty three years.

I mention this not to set myself up as an expert in biblical studies – I’m not. I struggle with understanding biblical languages and cannot memorize passages verbatim if my life depended on it. But I do adore the Book – all of its contents – and having read a large number of fiction and non-fiction writings over the course of my life I maintain that the Bible is superior to all of them. How? I ardently maintain that the Bible is the Word of God. I believe it is His “living” Word and that it has an ability to transform and wash the souls of those who read it by the Spirit. I am certain that reading its contents lends more to the spiritual maturity of souls than any other Christian activity. I believe studying its contents is the means by which faith grows (which is a precursor to an increase in agape love). And I suggest that no other book on the face of the earth has the capacity to transform the human soul like the “Word of God.”

But I am also convinced (supported by the content I present in this little book) that the Bible ought to be seen more as a map (for believers today) rather than as a collection of rules or covenants that must be embraced in order for people to be accepted and/or made acceptable to God. I do not believe this wonderful map should be used to govern gatherings of people or to legislate religious activities, because the Book was not written to us today – it’s a compilation of writings written to other believers of that day and of that age.
Again, because humans are saved by grace through faith it is difficult for me to see the Book as a volume of musts (like a book of Laws), but as a map full of routes and paths and roads that lend direction to all types of people seeking to know the only true God and His Son who He has sent. In this manner the Bible becomes highly subjective as does the individual faith of the person reading it. In my estimation every objective material demand taken from the Bible and assigned to others has been a fail, excepting the command to believe on the Lord and to love. Everything else has led to nothing but division, infighting and ugliness among denominations and followers of Christ. Truly the Word of God is “sharper than any two-edged sword,” but this could not mean, in light of New Testament instruction, that believers ought to use the book to kill each other.

The title “Knife to a Gunfight” is a play on words relative to this topic. In this writer's opinion, believers have been using the Bible as a knife on other believers (and on all those who disagree with them outside the fold) when in reality we ought to use the Spirit (gun) and its fruit (love) to fight our battles. When it comes to helping others understand the simplicity of the Good News many Christians are guilty of bringing “A Knife to a Gun Fight.”

In other words, in the Christian world most believers and churches have tried to take a book written to others from another place and time and demand a literal and material application and conformity – an approach that has proven historically to be an absolute fail and an impossibility in the realms of continuity and uniformity.
Because I ardently endorse Subjective Christianity (over what some believe is an Objective faith), I do not expect the ideas and insights contained in this book to be embraced by any, all (or even some believers) as gospel truth. I present them as a means to open up thought and give people who are troubled by denominational division and the inability Christians have to truly agree on anything an alternative view for reading, using, and loving the Bible. Along the way I also hope this information will give believers enough reason to let denominational differences die a quick death and allow all who claim Jesus as Lord the benefit of the doubt – regardless of their various interpretations of the Word.

"Knife to a Gunfight" is not the end-all solution to the problems found in Christianity today. People being people will forever cling to traditional thought and believe themselves to be better in the sight of God for the choice. But it is my hope to lend some views that will give rise to a more rational understanding and approach to this beautiful faith in Christ, which is wonderfully described in His Word the Bible.

Shawn McCraney
Park City Utah (Del Taco)
Thanksgiving Day - 2015
ONE- Take the Dogma out and Shoot it in the Head

We opened up our first live-stream television program of 2015¹ with the following:

“I want to begin tonight’s program with some reiterations. If you come to our Sunday gatherings here in Salt Lake City you would discover that our weekly focus is on the Word of God (in its entirety) and from the best contextual view we can muster. We believe this approach is paramount in our lives and in this ministry to others. I do NOT want this fact to be lost amidst all the ancillary information that we discuss on this show this year.

When I say 'ancillary' I mean any disputable doctrine, teaching, or practice that is not 'faith in Christ and love for God and man.' To us these 'other things' are absolute NON-essentials in the realm of true Christianity. Did you hear me? I do not believe anything truly matters between Christians but faith in Christ and love for God and Man.

Faith and love.
Faith and love.
Faith and love.

If someone professes Jesus as their Lord and Savior and loves God and man, I consider them and their professions acceptable, and them as my brother or sister in the Lord. They are welcome in my life as such. These people may fail in their faith, they may fail in the love and they may profess all manner of crazy beliefs. In other words, they may be Calvinists, dogmatists, legalists, or Mormons. They could be

¹ Our ministry began and continues to be a media based ministry reaching to people around the world online and includes four programs aired every week (see www.hotm.tv for more information).
Baptists, Methodists, humanists, or Seventh day Adventists – but if they profess faith in Christ Jesus and love for God and man, they are my brother or sister in Him . . . whether they like it or not and whether or not they see me in the same way.

Doctrines divide. And none of us – none of us – none of us – have everything right. If you agree with this then the only viable approach remaining for professed Christians – knowing that we all see through a glass darkly – is to love.

Those who hate, attack, and malign me and my ideas; those who call me names or who besmirch my faith – I refuse to hold any animus for them but instead choose to follow the example of our Lord and to love them.

I hope this is clearly understood as we move forward into this year of 2015."

We then had a prayer before I continued:

“Another thing I want to reiterate before we begin talking about the Bible for the next few months is my absolute love for this book – the Word of God. This is not rhetorical and I think I have evidenced this love by the time I have spent (and continue to spend) between its covers.

Why do I love the Bible – above all other books ever printed? I love it because it was composed in real time, by real people, reporting both real history and real events, and yet written in conjunction with the Spirit of God. I believe it is His Word to us. I love it because its settings are not metaphorical nor the product of imaginary minds. All the contributing books are founded in real brick and mortar, real flesh and blood, real issues between a God who loves us and fallen Man who continues to fail.

I love the Bible because while I believe the men who wrote the Bible used their own minds to choose the words they employed, I simultaneously believe God inspired their minds
on what topics to discuss. I therefore find the narrative 'God-breathed.' Inspired. As a result I too am inspired when I read it and hear it taught. These 'inspirations' help me overcome the flesh in which I reside. They help 'wash' away the former things of my person, and regenerate dead concepts in my flesh with living ones of the Spirit.

I believe there is power in the Word of God as the messages are applied by the Holy Spirit to the souls (the minds, wills, and emotions) of human beings – especially to them that believe. I am certain that this type of transfiguring or transforming power can only be had by those who have the ability to consider the contents of the written word by the Spirit.

I do not think there is any power in the ink and paper or in the printed words (in or of themselves), but it is by and through the Holy Spirit that the Bible’s multiplicity of messages become life changing and have the power to regenerate and change lives for the better. Therefore, when combined with the power of the Holy Spirit, I am convinced that the Bible has the capacity to redirect lives and serves a great purpose in God’s plan of redeeming humankind from the effects of the Fall.

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2 2nd Timothy 3:16-17 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

3 1st Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

4 John 17:17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.
Again, I accept the Bible as sufficient to teach all men what God wants us to understand about Him and about ourselves – no matter the language, the translation, or the version. Additionally, I believe the Bible is a perfect book in the sense that it is complete. My understanding of this may differ from others because I believe whatever a person happens to be reading at the time is complete for them at that moment – and therefore perfect. I believe this because the Bible is His living word. In other words whether a babe, or a mature believer, or the most spiritually elevated soul is reading the book, the words BY THE HOLY SPIRIT work on and with them according to their ability to understand. Such a view allows us to accept a new believer's ideas or positions and the mature Christian's views as both being viable, and good and right – though they will vary.

So where many believers think it is important to debate Bible translations, manuscript evidence, word choice or definition, and even the books that have been included in the Bible (as compared to those that were rejected), I believe God has provided us with a remarkable book of uncontested influence and power."

Now, remembering all that I said in that first show what would you think of me if I said something like, “I don’t think the book of Revelation is really a necessary book in the Bible?” Would it shock you? Make you angry? Cause you to throw this book (and me) away? Well get yourself ready because this does happen to be my opinion. Granted, I accept the book of Revelation and I read it and appeal to its contents, but I am of the opinion that because it was written to the seven churches specifically for that exact time and their circumstances, because it deals with events that I believe related to

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5 Philippians 2:16 Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain.
Jesus' coming in 70 AD and His warnings to those people directly, and because it has caused more people to get so wrapped up in trying to understand its obscure contents, the book is not of as much, shall we say, value as many of the other books in the collection.

Let me push this idea out a little further.

Given all that has gone on falsely in the name and cause of the book of Revelation – from David Koresh at Waco to millions and millions of dollars spent on movies and books and teachings that are often completely errant and misleading – am I wrong to suggest that I think the book does not have “as much purpose and value” as say, Romans, or Luke, or Galatians? Perhaps more to the point, “Am I less of a Christian because I think this? Am I not to be trusted? I mean, having read this opinion do you automatically reject me now as a brother?”

Many would. Many do. Many have and many will.

Here’s the point I’m trying to make (or the question I am trying to get answered):

While admitting that the Bible contains the Word of God, while it is sufficient to lead all people to the truths God wants us to have, how emphatic are we to be about its contents? In other words are we supposed to take it as a whole (in this day and age) and really try to enforce all of the tenets contained therein? Are we supposed to dogmatically insist that what it says must be applied now to the lives of believers in the exact same way that it was written? Is it so wrong to differ on the importance of content – since we have to admit we certainly differ as to the interpretation and meaning of the content, right? In fact, are the contents of the Bible to be spiritually
understood by readers today or are the contents supposed to be physically applied and played out too?

Exactly how are we to view, and use, and apply the contents of this wonderful, beautiful book into our lives? The Amish say literally. Others say exactly. Some say figuratively, and still others suggest that the stories are representative for our communal good! Is the Bible a thousand pages of demands that must be kept to please God and live with him again?

I’m sure some of you have already recoiled at my views on Revelation. Would it surprise you to learn that the founder of the Protestant revolution, Martin Luther, felt the same way? And not just about Revelation but Hebrews, II Peter, a couple of John’s epistles, and especially Jude and James?

This is what Luther said about James’ epistle:

“Though this epistle of St. James was rejected by the ancients, I praise it and consider it a good book, because it sets up no doctrines of men but vigorously promulgates the law of God. However, to state my own opinion about it, though without prejudice to anyone, I do not regard it as the writing of an apostle, and my reasons follow. In the first place it is flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture in ascribing justification to works (2:24). It says that Abraham was justified by his works when he offered his son Isaac (2:20); Though in Romans 4:22-22 St. Paul teaches to the contrary that Abraham was justified apart from works, by his faith alone, before he had offered his son, and proves it by Moses in Genesis 15:6. Although it would be possible to 'save' the epistle by a gloss giving a correct explanation of justification here ascribed to works, it is impossible to deny that it does refer to Moses' words in Genesis 15 (which speaks not of Abraham's works but of his faith, just as Paul makes plain in Romans 4) to Abraham's works. This fault proves that this
epistle is not the work of any apostle. In the second place its purpose is to teach Christians, but in all this long teaching it does not once mention the Passion, the resurrection, or the Spirit of Christ. He names Christ several times; however he teaches nothing about him, but only speaks of general faith in God. Now it is the office of a true apostle to preach of the Passion and resurrection and office of Christ, and to lay the foundation for faith in him, as Christ himself says in John 15[:27], 'You shall bear witness to me.'? All the genuine sacred books agree in this, that all of them preach and inculcate [treiben] Christ. And that is the true test by which to judge all books, when we see whether or not they inculcate Christ.

For all the Scriptures show us Christ, Romans 3[:21]; and St. Paul will know nothing but Christ, I Corinthians 2[:2]. Whatever does not teach Christ is not yet apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching. Again, whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were doing it. (ibid). But this James does nothing more than drive to the law and its works. Besides, he throws things together so chaotically that it seems to me he must have been some good, pious man, who took a few sayings from the disciples of the apostles and thus tossed them off on paper. Or it may perhaps have been written by someone on the basis of his preaching. He calls the law a 'law of liberty' [1:25], though Paul calls it a law of slavery, of wrath, of death, and of sin. Moreover he cites the sayings of St. Peter [in 5:20]; 'Love covers a multitude of sins' [1 Pet. 4:8], and again [in 4:10], 'Humble yourselves under the hand of God' [1 Pet. 5:6] also the saying of St. Paul in Galatians 5[:17], 'The Spirit lusteth against envy.' And yet, in point of time, St. James was put to death by Herod [Acts 12:2] in Jerusalem, before St. Peter. So it seems that [this author] came long after St. Peter and St. Paul. In a word, he (James) wanted to guard against those who relied on faith without works, but was unequal to the task in spirit, thought, and words. He mangles the Scriptures and thereby opposes Paul and all Scripture. (that last line was
removed in the post 1530 translation.) He tries to accomplish by harping on the law what the apostles accomplish by stimulating people to love. Therefore I cannot include him among the chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him. Therefore I will not have him in my Bible to be numbered among the true chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him. One man is no man in worldly things; how then, should this single man alone avail against Paul and all Scripture."

And this is what Luther said about the epistle of Jude:

"Concerning the epistle of St. Jude, no one can deny that it is an extract or copy of St. Peter’s second epistle, so very like it are all the words. He also speaks of the apostles like a disciple who comes long after them [Jude 17] and cites sayings and incidents that are found nowhere else in the Scriptures [Jude 9, 14]. This moved the ancient Fathers to exclude this epistle from the main body of the Scriptures. Moreover the Apostle Jude did not go to Greek-speaking lands, but to Persia, as it is said, so that he did not write Greek. Therefore, although I value this book, it is an epistle that need not be counted among the chief books which are supposed to lay the foundations of faith.”

If I said these things today the self-appointed defenders of the faith would have my head (or at least seek to have it online and in chatrooms around the world)! Of course the reply would be, “You, Shawn McCraney, are not Martin Luther.” To which I would remind them that there is not one bit of difference between ‘saved Luther’ and ‘saved me,’ not one bit of difference between Luther’s authority and mine, not one bit of difference between Luther as a fallen man and me as well. Or between anyone else for
that matter. We are all just members of the Body of Christ. Period. Christ is our head. We are governed by His Spirit. And for reasons unknown to me we have allowed ourselves to believe somehow that all free thought must be quelled, questioning and criticism of modern approaches to “Christianity” must be condemned, and that the contents of the Book are not only concrete but they are to be used to kill and crush all who wonder out loud. I am of the opinion that this, among other things, needs to change.

Now, what would your reception of me be if I admitted that there were some books that were NOT included in my Bible that I think should have been!

“What!,” the Evangelical fundamentalists would cry, “first you want to take away from the Bible by removing Revelation and now you want to add to it?”

Once again did you know that Luther, while removing certain books (like James and Jude) from his Bible version actually included a bunch of books that ARE NOT found in our Bibles today?

Really?
Really.

So on the one hand Luther, having decided that some books were not worthy of inclusion in the Bible (books that have come to be known as his “antilegomena” - Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation) he also decided that there were books that ought to have been included in his Bible (which are called the Deuterocanonical books and which, simply put, are books not contained in the Hebrew Old Testament (which are known as the protocanonical standards)).

Here are the deuterocanonical books that Luther included in his Bible:
The book of Tobit
Judith
Additions to Esther (Vulgate Esther 10:4-16:24)
Wisdom (or Wisdom of Solomon)
Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira (or Sirach or Ecclesiasticus)
Baruch, including the Letter of Jeremiah (Additions to Jeremiah in the Septuagint)
Additions to Daniel
Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three Holy Children (VulgateDaniel 3:24-90)
Susanna (Vulgate Daniel 13, Septuagint prologue)
Bel and the Dragon (Vulgate Daniel 14, Septuagint epilogue)
1 Maccabees
2 Maccabees

So now, what if I got up today and petitioned people to really study the book ‘Bel and the Dragon’ because it is so inspiring! What would the Evangelical fundamentalists say and do in response? We hold the Bible up and say it must be taken contextually, as a whole, without private interpretation and we repeat that “the Bible defines itself,” but if we include Luther’s books (and exclude those he rejected) how are we to comply with these demands?

I bring all this out as a means to pull back on the dogmatic positions we have taken in the body today. I am using these arguments as a means to hopefully help relax us a bit on the concrete stances we insist upon and to try and understand some things about the Bible we love and its application in our lives.

Just to clear the air, I’m not suggesting anything unreasonable to Christianity or the Bible. I love the Lord
Jesus and His Word. I maintain the fact that He is God incarnate, was put to death on a cross, resurrected on the third day, ascended into heaven, and reigns over His kingdom today. I embrace the biblical idea that human beings are saved by grace through faith, and that those who are saved will learn to love. But I think we need to appeal to a more reasonable approach to our use of the Bible as we push in to a more reasonable and loving faith toward each other.

Demanded doctrines, dogmatism, and dictates arbitrarily stripped out of the book and posted on the walls of church manifestos only serve to divide and destroy. There is a better way, and within this book we will explore this way by examining the history, construction, and stated purposes of the Bible itself.
TWO- The Bible Club

The following is a resolution that was actually submitted to vote in the Oklahoma state government:

"WHEREAS, the people of Oklahoma have a strong tradition of reliance upon the Creator of the Universe; and

WHEREAS, we believe our economic woes are consequences of our greater national moral crisis; and

WHEREAS, this nation has become a world leader in promoting abortion, pornography, same sex marriage, sex trafficking, divorce, illegitimate births, child abuse, and many other forms of debauchery; and

WHEREAS, alarmed that the Government of the United States of America is forsaking the rich Christian heritage upon which this nation was built; and

WHEREAS, grieved that the Office of the president of these United States has refused to uphold the long held tradition of past presidents in giving recognition to our National Day of Prayer; and

WHEREAS, deeply disturbed that the Office of the president of these United States disregards the biblical admonitions to live clean and pure lives by proclaiming an entire month to an immoral behavior;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we the undersigned elected officials of the people of Oklahoma, religious leaders and citizens of the State of Oklahoma, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world, solemnly declare that the HOPE of the great State of Oklahoma and of these United States, rests upon the Principles of Religion and Morality as put forth in the HOLY BIBLE."
Reading the above Resolution I have to wonder: “Will any reader that has not come to understand the True and Living God through His Only Begotten Son respond favorably to this Resolution or unfavorably?” Will those who are getting the abortions and the divorces and are having the illegitimate babies (etc., etc.), after reading these articles, find themselves more attracted to the Good News or less? In my estimation when Jesus gave His life He sent apostles out to preach the Word not write it. In other words, we reach unbelieving people by the preaching of the Good News, and the Bible, once people have come to believe, becomes our spiritual map. But not before. In other words the Bible has no legitimate purpose or bearing on those who have yet to believe. And if this is the case, why on earth would believers appeal to its contents (or at least to how they interpret its contents) in a public document submitted to a government institution and apparently under the auspices of representing all the residents of Oklahoma?

Let’s take a minute and examine the last article of the Resolution, which says:

"NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we the undersigned elected officials of the people of Oklahoma, religious leaders and citizens of the State of Oklahoma, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world, solemnly declare that the HOPE of the great State of Oklahoma and of these United States, rests upon the Principles of Religion and Morality as put forth in the HOLY BIBLE."

Regarding that last line, “that the HOPE of the great State of Oklahoma and of these United States, rests upon the Principles of Religion and Morality as put forth in the HOLY BIBLE,” I have a few questions:

To which “Principles of Religion and Morality put forth in the HOLY BIBLE” are these fervent believers speaking?
They have freely appealed to the Holy Bible, applied it to their specific cause and purpose, and have claimed that the Great State of Oklahoma (and the United States as a whole) rests upon the Principles and Morality of its contents. As a sold out believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, I want to know how they would collectively define these “principles and moralities.” Are they talking about the Principles and Morality of Polygamy or Monogamy? Are they talking about principles of unending forgiveness or that of an eye for an eye? Are they using the Bible to encourage people to love one another and to refrain from judging, or do they use the contents to justify wiping out the things in human existence that annoy and irritate them?

The Bible says that if children dishonor their parents they should be put to death. Is this what they mean? The Bible says that women should be silent in church. The Bible says that we should respect and submit to leaders in government who are put in office over us? Are the authors of this Resolution following their own Bible when they criticize the President of the United States?

When will Christians realize that the Bible is a gift from God to encourage and guide individual believers, and not a manual for believers to use to beat and attack either each other or those who do not subscribe to its contents? How on earth will we ever get people to want to seek its contents if we use it as a club?
THREE- By Whom, to Whom, from Where and Why

So what is this Bible? We’ve all heard that it is a collection of books, right? Sixty six of them (at least). Who wrote these sixty six books? Men. I am very well aware that these men were inspired by the Holy Spirit when they wrote. When they wrote. God did not move the pen, He did not make the ink or the paper or papyrus, nor did He choose the terms or sentence structure – these were the choices and works of Man. God, by His Holy Spirit, moved these respective authors to write. And I believe they wrote, as moved, about things God wanted them to cover. But they each appealed to their own background and experience, and used their knowledge of language and educational levels to report on the things they were moved to cover. This is why Paul’s use of the Greek is different from Peter's or John's.

And where were these men writing from? The South Seas? Canada? Russia? The United States? Of course not. They were authors that for the most part came from a very limited geographical area – at first about 6000 square miles, which spread out to around 12,000 square miles before it included Paul’s missionary journeys.

The earth’s land surface is about 57,000,000 square miles, so the geographical area the Bible speaks primarily about and speaks from (excepting Paul’s missionary journeys) is about 1/100th of a percent of the earth's total land mass. Now, admittedly, this is all really irrelevant. I mean the actual crucifixion took place over a land mass of about five feet squared and its significance is
incalculable. But I am merely building a case and this point is just one note to the big picture.

Then we must ask, “To whom was the Bible written?” For some reason many Christians currently are under the impression that the Bible was written specifically and primarily to us today. This could not be further from the truth. There is not a single verse in the Bible where God says the words that were being written were to us today. Not one. This point is certainly not irrelevant. Context is one of the primary factors in comprehending scripture, and the fact that the revelations (especially of the New Testament) were written to the believers of that day and that age and that time speaks volumes when it comes to our understanding and application of them now.

Admittedly there are a few subtle passages that generally allude to the scripture being for us today but they are really scant. Instead we’ve entire books (again, especially in the New Testament) that were written to the Saints at . . . Rome, Thessalonica, Galatia, (etc., etc). We know this because the authors say as much.

In Acts, Luke addresses his writings to a figure named “Theophilus,” (the same person to whom he addressed his Gospel). Paul says plainly in the epistle we call Romans:

“To all that be in Rome . . .”

1st Corinthians? “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth . . .”

—_____________________

6 Romans 15:4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.
2nd Corinthians? “unto the church of God which is at Corinth . . . “

Galatians? “unto the churches of Galatia.”

Philippians? “to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.”

Colossians? “To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse.”

1st and 2nd Thessalonians? “unto the church of the Thessalonians.”

1st and 2nd Timothy? “Unto Timothy,” and “to Timothy.”

Titus? “To Titus.”

Philemon? “unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellow laborer, and to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house.”

James? “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.”

1st Peter? “to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.”

2nd John? “unto the elect lady and her children . . . ”

3rd John? “unto the well beloved Gaius . . . ”

Revelation? “to the seven churches which are in Asia.”

The books that address no specific audience at all are Hebrews and 1st John, and the only books that specifically suggest that the contents of the book are to all Christian readers include Ephesians, 2nd Peter and Jude, which say:
Ephesians: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.”

2nd Peter: “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ:"

Jude: “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:"

For the biblical literalists, who suggest believers must take every word and directive in the Bible exactly for what it says, we would have to discount every New Testament book with the exception of possibly the Gospels, Ephesians, 2nd Peter and Jude, as the rest have either been specifically addressed to other people or have no specific address at all. When it comes to the Bible we realize (thus far) that:

• it was written by men who lived in that time under the inspiration of God,

• it was written by men who lived in a very limited geographical area (relative to the rest of the world),

• these men addressed their words to very select groups of people – first, to the Nation of Israel (in the Old Testament) and then to the Saints at that time who believed in Jesus (the New Testament), with the exception books being Ephesians, 2nd Peter and Jude, which appear to have been addressed to all believers everywhere.
We must also remember that when the New Testament writers spoke of scripture they were almost always referring to the Old Testament. There was no New Testament content for years after Jesus ascended, and then once the letters and epistles and gospels got underway, it was a still a number of decades before they were available or known outside of where they were initially addressed, centuries before the books were gathered up, and a millennia plus before they were made available to the world at large (more on this later).

One final point has significance in the face of all we have said. The best way to summarize this point is to say that God related and responded to the Nation of Israel physically or materially (as reported throughout the Old Testament), and once Jesus (the Nation's promised Messiah) came and accomplished His work among them (again, physically), God began to relate to people spiritually. Let me try to flesh this out.

We note that in His covenant with Abraham, God promised him that he would have countless (literal, physical) children which would spring forth from his only true “son of promise” – Isaac. Isaac then had a literal flesh and blood son (Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel), and Israel had twelve literal sons which constituted the twelve tribes of Israel (or the Nation of Israel).

What did God give these tribes to govern and keep them? Laws. Physically written in stone through a living prophet named Moses. These laws (in many ways) related to the Nation materially. And as the Nation grew so did the physical application of the Laws. First of all, these laws were “written in stone,” delivered by a man in flesh and blood, and they described the material construction of an actual temple (along with
other commands) that related to the material side of life – diet, sanitary practices, Sabbath-observances, dress codes, and the like.

The Nation of Israel was a very physical nation and it operated through very material means in its relations with God. God even promised them an actual physical Messiah who would be literally born (according to a very physical genealogy) and who would live a real physical life, eat material food, turn literal water into literal wine, perform literal miracles, suffer physically, shed genuine human blood, die a physical death, resurrect physically from the grave, and physically ascend into the heavens with a promise that He (“this SAME Jesus”) would return in the same way He left – through the actual sky and in actual material clouds.

In 70 AD, as promised and described throughout the Old and New Covenants, all of the physical and material elements of this Nation of Israel – the Temple, the Genealogies, and the very people (millions of them) were wiped out by the Romans at the physical return of the Lord.

Where does this leave believers who were not from the House of Israel – gentiles, as it were – those of us who were NOT of that physical world with its promises of material blessings and curses? In other words, with the utter destruction of the material elements of the Nation of Israel, was the church Jesus came to establish to continue on with an emphasis on the material or did the focus of His Kingdom shift from a material emphasis to a spiritual? I would adamantly suggest the latter and say that God now relates to the world spiritually (more on this later too).
In short, Christ’s kingdom today is spiritual, and it is known and perceived by the Spirit – and not by or through the things of the flesh. When viewed in this manner we begin to see how the baptisms that John the Baptist performed were so utterly inferior to the baptism of the Spirit (and of fire) that Jesus would bring in comparison – so much so it caused the Baptist himself to admit that he wasn’t worthy to “even tie the man’s shoes.”

Have you ever considered that God so loved the World that He sent us His Only Begotten Son and that His Son was all God (spirit) and all Man (material)? And that after His Son ascended into heaven that God sent the Holy Spirit (Spirit) and the Written Word (material) – which is another manifestation of His Son? If you have considered this let me ask you something – When Jesus walked the earth did He want to be known by His flesh or by the Spirit that was in Him? Was His flesh impervious to being misunderstood? Not in the least. In fact, in His flesh He had nothing that Man would desire. He was merely seen as the carpenter’s son. But how about by His Spirit? That is how Jesus was

7 Luke 3:16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

8 Isaiah 53:2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.
“known” when He walked the earth as that is how He is known today.

As said, the Bible is the literal history of this God working in and through this physical economy. However, sprinkled through the New Testament narrative are passages that directly speak to an ultimate spiritual end of the Kingdom of God which abides in the heart of the individual believer, and not in brick and mortar edifices that insist on managing matters with flesh and blood authority or material demands.

If I am correct in this point of view, every Christian ought to start rethinking the purpose and point of the brick and mortar church, ecclesiastical leadership (so called), and any and all ordinances (or rituals or tithes or demands) placed upon them by such.

Now, it is one thing to claim that the Bible presents a history of God working in and through the physical Nation of Israel and that we all live in a spiritual abiding church today, but it is quite another matter to support it by scripture.

So let me offer up nine sets of passages from the Word of God that endorse my position. At least this is how I read them. See if you agree.

We’ll begin with 1st Corinthians 15:46-48.

Admittedly this is not a super strong support for my position but, in my opinion, there is an allusion to the whole idea in the words of Paul, who writes:
46 "Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly."

Taking all the other passages into consideration I see Paul alluding to a simple set of principles. The natural or earthly came first. I would call this the content of the Bible record. Then the “heavenly” (or spiritual) came second, when everything shifted to the human heart by the Spirit. Consider it.

The second set of scriptures are also from Paul and are also in 1st Corinthians 2:10-16. These get a bit more to the point. Speaking of the glories in heaven that eye has not seen nor ear heard, Paul says:

10 "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."

May the Spirit guide.
In Hebrews 8:10 we read the following. And since we know that by faith we are now spiritually “all Israel,” it pertains to believers today. And this is what the writer says:

10 "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

Doesn’t that sound like a spiritual church or body? Don’t those passages seem to suggest that it is the Spirit that is teaching us what we ought to know and not men, not laws, not brick and mortar, but laws written on our hearts? I think so.

How about a short one? We read it, memorize it, but have you ever really considered it? In Ephesians 1:3 Paul says:

3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”

The Nation of Israel, under the Law, were promised blessings in this earthly realm. But Paul seems to suggest here that God blesses us now with “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”

Of course throughout the Bible we read of wars and warfare and battles and physical skirmishes, don’t we? The entire Old Testament is a witness of these battles which serve as types and pictures for spiritual believers today. In Jesus, however, all of this is gone (at least it
should be) and the wars and skirmishes are wholly spiritual. Consider Paul’s words in Ephesians 6:10-18. Consider the weaponry of warfare described, the approach to the warfare, and how we engage in it:

10 "Finally, my brethren, (Paul says) be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. (none of which are physical) and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

Every whit of this advice is spiritually based, founded on spiritual matters, and drawing from heaven. So many Christians today continue to believe we ought to be at war with other in the flesh – protesting, arguing, warring against this threat or that – not so. Our weapons of warfare are spiritual, and not against “flesh and blood.”

What about Peter? Speaking of Jesus he wrote:

1st Peter 2:4 "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, (and then, speaking of believers, he says) Ye also, as lively
stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

More spiritual applications – which is what matters. From the heart. Peter here mentions a spiritual house. Listen to Paul in Ephesians again. He has been talking about gentiles and their alienation from God’s chosen people and then he continues:

Ephesians 2:19 “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together growth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

Again, this speaks to a spiritual body of believers – which is the true body. The brick and mortar, in most cases, just gets in the way by virtue of their material agendas. But let me end with what I believe slams the door on any appeal that suggests that a visible church is mandated today. The passages are not easy to grasp right off the bat so let me walk us through them. They’re found in Hebrews chapter 12 beginning at verse 18.

In the book the writer is constantly reminding his audience that the New Covenant is FAR better than the Old – and he supplies them with a number of examples on how. At verse 18 of chapter 12 he appeals to the gathering of the Nation of Israel around Sinai when Moses went up to the Mount to get the Law. And He says to these New Testament believers:

Hebrews 12:18 “For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a
trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

Now, what the writer is saying is you are part of a New Covenant; you haven't come to a dark and terrifying mountain that burned with fire, and black smoke - from which the Nation of Israel heard and trembled at the voice of God, so much so that even Moses did exceedingly fear and quake in the presence of all of that. Then he goes on and says, “But . . . .”

Hebrews 12:22 "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."

Now take a minute and look at the writer's description of this New Mount that believers come to in this day and age. Mount Sion, “the city of the living God,” “the HEAVENLY Jerusalem,” and to an “innumerable company of angels,” “to the general assembly of the firstborn, WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN . . . .” This is a very different scene then what the Children of Israel faced, right? He goes on, saying:

Hebrews 12:25 "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: whose voice then shook the earth: but
now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the
earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more,
signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of
things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken
may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot
be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God
acceptably with reverence and godly fear."

Look at the verbiage. The writer describes a kingdom
that “cannot be shaken.” Where would such a kingdom
exist? In the heavens, in the human heart by the Spirit?
Sure. But this kingdom would not be found in the
constructs of a “visible church.” Visible churches are
shakable. Pastors and Elders' boards are shakable.
Statements of faith and policies are shakable but not the
real Kingdom. Not the invisible church.

The idea is not radical. And I’m not talking about the
elimination of Christian gatherings. But I am suggesting
a revision of what people have allowed organized
Christian gatherings to become – physical institutions
that are self-sustaining and full of material mullarky.
Deconstruction Now!
FOUR- Okay, it’s a shameless plus – but a good one

I realize that this is a book and that your direct expectations of it is to read the information provided herein and in this specific format. I am about to deviate from this system of delivery and try and convince you to put the book down (or if you are reading it on a media device that you switch the device off) and find a means to tap into the internet. If you don’t know how to do this (probably because of age) get someone to help you.

Then I’m asking you to get online and through your search engine go to:

www.hotm.tv

Now click on “Episodes” and when all the years where we have produced shows pop up click on “2015” and under 2015 scroll down to:

2/10/2015 432 Episode 432 The Bible – part IV (and click on this).

You can either watch the whole program or scroll ahead to right after the prayer and begin watching at this point in the production.

Following the above suggestions will help you get the most out of what is included in the rest of the book. I am also having you do this because I want to introduce you to a segment of the ministry of which you may not be aware – our online programs.

To date we have produced nearly 500 hour long shows that will cause you to think, question, and debate (within your own mind) the way you have understood
Christianity and the manner in which it has been presented to you. Many of the earlier shows are about Mormonism relative to Christianity so if this is of no interest to you look into the episodes that begin in 2013 and thereafter. Start in the first shows of 2013 and work your way to the present.

Additionally, by going to the site you will discover links to our sermons found at www.campuschurch.tv. I want to invite all people to consider our verse by verse teachings through the Bible as a means to experience Christianity without religion. There are hundreds of teachings aimed at teaching you, the viewer, the Bible. Nothing more. So you can watch and hear the Bible be taught without any obligation or demand – it’s just the Word presented in the best contextual form possible and you are left to live your Christian life as so lead by the Spirit. We tend to think these teachings will bless you and your life so I am trying right here in the middle of this book to get you exposed on how to access them.

Finally, we all learn differently and you might discover that where this book is helpful you will gain a lot more through another content delivery system like these audio/video teachings we’re recommending.

If you resent this shameless plug then pretend that chapter four doesn’t exist, move on to chapter five, and keep reading as you expected to do when you started with this book. But in my estimation these additional avenues of information will only add to your knowledge and take nothing from the insights of this material book. It’s up to you to see if you agree.
When I was in the Calvary Chapel School of Ministry it was a time when there was a lot of debate over whether Calvary Chapel had become a denomination. Apparently Chuck Smith worked very hard for the church not to be denominationally inclined and did a pretty good job (for a while) in protecting the Calvary Chapel approach “to doing church” from what we all know is the inevitable when people gather in Jesus' name – separatist positions, division and denominationalism. Of course the inevitable did occur – and most assuredly churches that bear the Calvary Chapel name are, in fact, just another denomination today.

The fault lies with Chuck writing a book titled *The Calvary Chapel Distinctives*, which articulates a series of distinct positions which serve to define the church's point of view on a number of doctrinal and practical matters. These “distinctives” are purposed to determine whether a pastor will be allowed to use the Calvary Chapel name and its unique dove logo in the establishment of a church.

In the Table of Contents of the actual book we can read about what pastors must teach and believe if they are to be accepted and considered a Calvary Chapel. The topics include:

God’s Model for the Church

Church Government

Empowerment by the Spirit

Building the Church God’s Way
I am not going to articulate what is involved in each of these headings but just know this – they are “distinctives” of being a Calvary Chapel and they do represent the Calvary Chapel denomination. But again, we have to be fair – denominations are inevitable whenever people sit down and read the Bible and disagree or agree on its purpose, application and interpretation. I mean if we really think about it, Jesus Himself started a denomination when He said:

*John 8:24* “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.”

With those words He literally divided the world up into two camps – those who believe that Jesus is "I AM" and those who don’t (who will wind up dying in their sins). I have said on numerous occasions how much I stand against denominationalism in the Body of Christ. But is it possible to avoid it? No and yes. Let me explain.

We cannot avoid belonging to a denomination as Christians – that denomination is known as the Body of Christ – and to belong to it, and to be a part of it, there
are standards and doctrines and points that divide its members from the rest of the world.

I’ve done a lot of swimming in my life and have spent no small number of hours in public pools. Many of them employ a rope with small plastic buoys which they stretch across the pool as a means to separate the shallow end from the deep. We might liken the Body of Christ to all those who remain on the "shallow end" side of the rope. Go past the rope, and into what the pool managers have determined to be the “deep end,” and we could say that such a person or denomination has left the Body of Christ and entered into deeper, more treacherous waters – waters that certainly cannot be considered Christian.

I would suggest that belonging to this singular body or denomination (staying in the "shallow end") is based on spiritual factors established between God (by the Holy Spirit) and individuals. It is in this sense that denominationalism cannot be avoided. All Christians are of the "shallow end" denomination. All.

We like to gather our little flocks in this corner or that, but in the end we are all not only in the same pool but we are all behind the line and standing on the same safe surface. The trouble is, with all the different views and opinions shared in this limited area, fights break out and cause greater divisions in the end of the human pool.

Once a person has become a member of the Body of Christ (by faith) I would suggest there is, in fact, an approach that will avoid further division. This “way” has existed since Christ established His church, and it is high time believers begin to demand it be embraced rather than what has happened through denominational
divisions around the world. As people have on occasion asked me,

“Aren’t you just starting another denomination?” I think the better question ought to be,

“What makes what you are suggesting ANY different or better than what ALL the other denominations and sects have done for the past two thousand years?”

Let me try and humbly explain:

First, we are not doing anything different than what has been going on since Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to earth. All we are doing is pointing out what has been going on by virtue of the Holy Spirit ever since He came. Secondly, in pointing out what has always made up the Body of Christ, we simultaneously allow for the natural deconstruction of what men have tried to implement in and around the Body along the way. I am not mandating such deconstructions, but know that in approaching Christianity through the Holy Spirit, such divisions will fade away naturally.

This natural deconstruction will start as believers begin to read the Bible as once having physical application but now having primacy in and by the Spirit. Let me try and explain this through a comparative.

Let's begin by listing the major factors that play into brick and mortar denominationalism.
### TRADITIONAL OBJECTIVE

#### DENOMINATIONAL STANCES

*Almost all Christian denominations agree on...*

The Gospel or Good News defined.

**But then using the Bible they all take various stances on...**

- Authority and ordination
- Baptism (water and Spirit)
- Confession (of sin)
- Church governance
- Women’s roles (or lack thereof)
- Dress and grooming
- Diet and/or forbidden items
- Forbidden and allowed lifestyles
- Dating rules and standards
- Tithes and giving
- Sabbath day and Lord's day
- Political activity or allegiances
- Soteriological stances
- Service form and substance
- Approaches to music/worship
- Approaches to prayer
- Serving and service hours
- Building plans and architecture
- Programs for mid-week for all sorts of groups including
  - Fathers and mothers
  - Couples
  - Teens
  - Singles
  - Children
  - Nursery
  - Addiction
Got all of that?

The list can get pretty tedious and therefore extremely divisive – with almost every diverging denomination using the Bible to substantiate their claims and justify breaking off or dividing from other believers.

Here in 2015 we have over 35,000 denominations and almost 2000 years of proof that when men and women get together to “interpret the Bible,” the end result is division. Now just suppose for a minute that every believer, since the establishment of the Apostolic church (and by the power of the Holy Spirit) down to this very day, made the spirit-lead decision to

1. Love (in word and deed) all people no matter what they individually believed, and,
2. Especially chose to love (meaning they make a priority of loving) those people – no matter what they believe or teach – who claim Jesus as Lord and acceptance of the Gospel.

What do you suppose would be the outcome? I would suggest it would not only be what God desires of all those who are His, but it would be the very environment we expect to find in heaven. Let’s look again at our illustration.
## TRADITIONAL OBJECTIVE

### DENOMINATIONAL STANCES

**ALMOST ALL CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS AGREE ON . . .**

The Gospel or Good News defined.

**But then using the Bible they all take various stances on . . .**

- Authority and ordination
- Baptism (water and Spirit)
- Confession (of sin)
- Church governance
- Women’s roles (or lack thereof)
- Dress and grooming
- Diet and/or forbidden items
- Forbidden and allowed lifestyles
- Dating rules and standards
- Tithes and giving
- Sabbath day and Lord's day
- Political activity or allegiances
- Soteriological stances
- Service form and substance

## SUBJECTIVE CHRISTIANITY

Absolute love and unity founded upon Jesus as Lord and the Good News alone.

Nothing more. Nothing to fight or divide over. Just Jesus as Lord and the Gospel.

Everyone has the right to express and live this personal faith in whatever means they wish according to their own understanding of the Word.
In my estimation, this approach on the right (what I am calling, Subjective Christianity) will propagate love in the Body and ultimately remove divisions causing people to step up and decide for themselves what they are going to believe and do with their faith and what they will reject.

One final point:

Let’s say the entire world embraced this approach – which (again) I believe represents what God has had rolling forward since the beginning of the Body. But let’s say that all the brick and mortar churches and their pastors actually get the guts to firmly implement this attitude and approach to doing church - meaning that the pastors actually check their theological pride at the door and allow *all positions and practices to flourish freely, even within the walls of their respective church locations.*

Naturally, the pastors will teach from how they understand scripture, and they will not only allow but they will encourage their congregates “to test all things, and to only hold fast to what is good;”⁹ to admit that they may be wrong on certain positions - no matter what those positions are - and that they believe all people should believe and practice their faith as they are lead. What would happen?

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⁹ 1st Thessalonians 5:21-22 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.
First, all the churches could begin to experience a deconstruction, and the walls their members have erected between themselves and other believers will come crumbling down. This would be a wonderful event, right? If only it could last. But in time (because we are human) someone somewhere will pop up and say,

“I think we need to rein everybody in.”

Or a group will get together, indignant at the fact that some people are dabbling in scary matters, and they will determine that someone needs to take control. And a new sect or denomination will be born.

With new “distinctives.”

And new demands.

And new laws.

And revised theologies.

Because that is what people do. It’s what Constantine did.

And the lazy fearful masses – wanting to give up the heavy responsibility to think and act before God for themselves – will flock to these new leaders and join in the call for reform. We will always have religious zealots in the flock. Reason and love, in their minds, are a form of selling God short and there is very little we can do about it – except present a united front, one that relentlessly allows for zealotry and unreasonable Christian views as views that are welcomed – so long as Jesus is Lord and the Gospel is upheld.
In any case, history tells us that the growth and success of a new upstart group will draw other people in who also want the same power and control exercised in their ranks and the cycle starts all over again. It’s the reason why we have over 35,000 denominations today that all claim to represent “the best way to God.”

And then down the road, at some point in time, someone may come along and say,

"None of these divisions matter. The only thing that matters is that Jesus is embraced as Lord and the Good News is affirmed."

And this is exactly where we are right today. The only way to prevent the cycle from repeating itself is to get believers everywhere to see the Bible in another way – not as a manual of demands but as a book of ten thousand maps providing spiritual guidance to all who seek God to know the True and Living God and His Son whom He sent.
I want you to try and imagine that all the white space (in the frame below) represents the entire (nearly) two thousand years of Christian history – except the black dot in the center of the white.

Right in the center we have, represented in a black dot:

- The creation
- The Nation of Israel
- The arrival of their promised Messiah
- His life, death, resurrection, ascension
- His giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost
- The ministry of the empowered twelve apostles to reach all possible from the house of Israel – who He came for
- His return with judgment upon those who rejected Him and salvation for all who trusted in Him in 70 AD

So the entire white part within the frame represents the entire one thousand nine hundred and sixty five year history of Christianity. And again, the black dot represents the Old Testament biblical narrative, the birth and ministry of Christ, the Apostolic church and everything that happened up to the destruction of...
Jerusalem in 70 AD. Got all that? Now let’s start to look at some facts.

There are two general stances in the world of Christianity today on how things must be done and how things must be governed in the Christian church (or body). In the face of the two I would like to strongly and boldly suggest that there needs to be three.

The first stance claims a direct line of apostolic authority stemming out from this black dot. In this we have the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the LDS Church (which claims that the authority to act in God’s name was restored through a man named Joseph Smith). If any of these claims are true, then Protestant Christianity has NO right to exist, period.

Again, if either the Roman Catholics or the Eastern Greek Orthodox or the LDS claims of a Restoration of authority are legit, the rest of the Protestant community has to shut the heck up and fall in line with one of these systems.

Now I have personal issues with the claims coming out of all three of these institutions, and the list of issues is long but this is their stance and quite frankly I think we have to admit that when it comes to proof and reason there is far more merit to their claims (in terms of legitimacy) than to what the Protestants use to support their own declarations of authority. (We’ll get more into this in a minute).

The second stance out there is the Protestant stance. Now the history is vast and multifaceted, and it would take thirty volumes to adequately flesh out the players and chronology. So I’m not going do attempt that. But let’s sort of try and just summarize how this western rebellion, known as the Reformation, came into being.
Remember, remember – most churches today demand conformity and accountability of their congregates. Challenge the pastor and his teachings, refuse to accept something as true (as they see and teach it) and you may find yourself invited to leave or even kicked out of a specific church. But also remember that this was the very attitude the founders of the Protestant Reformation had when they challenged the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

Okay, it would be really naïve to believe that Martin Luther, in the face of almost 1500 years of religious history, was the first to challenge the Roman Catholic empire. There is an entire period of history (often disputed by the Catholics) that says revolutions occurred prior to Luther including the rebellion of other men who proceeded Luther, like Peter Waldo, Wycliffe and Jan Hus.

But to simplify, things really got legs when an Augustinian Monk named Martin Luther challenged the authority of Roman Catholicism and nailed what was called his "95 Thesis" to a church door at Wittenberg, Germany. Among other things, Luther criticized the Catholic practice of selling what were called "indulgences." He also said that "the Pope had no authority over "purgatory," and that the Catholic doctrine of the "merits of the saints" had no biblical foundation. In time these first criticisms widened to cover many of the doctrines and devotional practices that the Catholics considered acceptable.

Soon Luther was joined by the likes of guys like Zwingly and Calvin and other early Protestant Reformers, and the whole "Reformation" lasted about 131 years (from
1517 until 1648), and included some real devastation and death (as it culminated in what is known as the "Thirty-Years War").

I would suggest none of this ought to have ever happened (either from the Catholic side or the Protestant) and all of it could have been entirely avoided if the third approach to Christianity had been embraced post 70 AD. Remember, the Protestant Reformation was the result of regular men and women who said,

“What the church is presently doing in the name of God and Christ needs to be challenged.”

We must remember that those who were doing the challenging were believers in Jesus Christ! They were not “bad believers” (though the Catholics might suggest otherwise), neither were their intentions evil. They saw a problem and addressed it. And it seems that all of them had intentions that were aimed at honoring God and making things better not worse.

Also remember that almost one thousand five hundred years of tacit acceptance of things from the Catholics had passed before such a reformation took hold of the hearts of people and during much of that time some very unattractive acts and unbiblical teachings about God were generally accepted by the masses as normative.

Three hundred sixty years have passed since the days of the Reformation. Are we to believe that the reformers had everything right and that nothing they set in motion ought to be challenged? Additionally, is revisiting and challenging things today any worse than their challenge of things back then? I don’t think so.

Isn’t it strange that religious men and women today hail Luther and Calvin (and others) as heroes of the faith, but the church in their day railed on them as enemies of God, anti-law, and needing to be accountable? And yet
in our day and age the powers that be (and often the believers in general) do the very same thing to men and women who challenge the status quo now.

Let me lay out what Protestantism stands for (particularly in opposition to those who take the first authoritative stance to doing church). First, most Protestant churches emphasize

“The universal priesthood of all believers.”

This implies the duty, even the right, of the Christian laity to not only read the Bible on their own but to also take part in the government and other affairs of the Church. This position is intended to oppose the hierarchal system which puts the essence and authority of the Church in an exclusive priesthood, and makes ordained priests the necessary mediators between God and the people.

For me, and in almost all of its applications, the Protestant claim of a "universal priesthood of all believers" is downright comical. If they really believed this they would never exclude women in any way from any position in the church.10

Secondly, there still remains within the ranks of Protestant faiths the idea that the Pastor or Reverend or Preacher has some sort of authority over the people that other believers or congregates don’t. The degree to which this is embraced depends on the denomination, but a large number of Protestant denominations, while claiming to reject the Catholic ideas to a “priestly authority” and to embrace “a priesthood of all

10 Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.
believers,” still think certain men are more qualified than others to prepare communion, pray, collect offerings and the like.

If there is "a priesthood of all believers" let there be "a priesthood of all believers" – which means among believers there is absolutely no hierarchy or order or special privileges.

A few other distinctive stances the Protestant Reformers took against the Catholic church included what were later named the “Solae.” There were eventually five of them. I say "eventually" because there were initially three and then I think they grew to five. "Solae" means alone in Latin.

The first "Solae" is “Scripture Alone.”

It is from this idea that Protestants establish four other positions on the Bible which include:

• that “its teaching” is needed for salvation (what they call necessity);
• that all the doctrine necessary for salvation comes from the Bible alone (what they call sufficiency);
• that everything taught in the Bible is correct (what they call inerrancy);
• and that, by the Holy Spirit overcoming sin, believers may read and understand truth from the Bible itself - though understanding is difficult - so the means used to guide individual believers to the true teaching is often mutual discussion within the church (this they call clarity).
"Sola Scriptura," in my opinion, is the all-together convenient belief that the Bible has always been the supreme source of authority for what is thought to be a physical church. We will soon see this to be farce.

The early churches of the Reformation believed in a critical, yet serious, reading of scripture and in holding the Bible as a source of authority higher than that of “church tradition.” The Protestant Reformers also rejected some of the traditions of the Western Church because they did not find justification for them in the Bible.

This is the one "Sola" I want to explore – actually criticize - not because I want to, in any way, devalue the import and value of the Bible in an individual believer’s life, but because I want to try and further strip it from the hands of men and women who think they have the right to interpret it on behalf of the individual.

I’ll explain the multiplicity of problems with the Protestant use and interpretation of this particular "Sola" in the remainder of the book. But let me wrap up the other "Solae" here and now. After "Sola Scriptura" there’s

(Justification by) Faith Alone (or "Sola Fide")

This "Sola" states that faith in Christ is sufficient alone for eternal salvation. Though argued from scripture (and is therefore a consequence of "Sola Scriptura," ) "Sola Fide" is probably the guiding principle of the work of Luther and the later reformers.

Because "Sola Scriptura" placed the Bible as the only source of teaching (and not the traditions of men), "Sola Fide" epitomized the main thrust of the teaching the reformers felt was lost in Roman Catholicism. It is this stance – "Sola Fide" – that I believe needs to be taken up
a notch – as a means to remove the brick and mortar and men from the claim that faith alone saves.

"Solus Christus:" Christ alone.

Again, while I wholeheartedly agree with this “Sola,” I have to laugh at it in the face of today’s Evangelical approaches. Early Protestant Reformers had some hearty disdain for the Catholic Pope as the representative head of the Church on earth (which certainly flies in the face of the biblical teaching that Christ is the only mediator between God and Man). Yet somehow men have crept back in and put themselves (and their insights on doctrine and authority) back in the mix, allowing themselves to loom over the lives of individual believers in a number of areas, including the interpretation of doctrine.

"Sola Gratia:" Grace alone.

Remember it was the Protestant revolt against the Roman Catholic way of doing things that launched the Reformation and it was at least perceived that Catholics were making works AND God’s grace the recipe for salvation. The reformers posited that salvation is a gift of God (i.e., God's act of free grace), dispensed by the Holy Spirit and made possible by the redemptive work of Jesus Christ alone. How could grace alone co-exist with faith alone – they seem to cancel each other out, doesn’t alone mean alone? We’ll talk more of this later.

"Sola Gloria" ("Soli Deo Gloria"): Glory to God alone

This stance says that all glory is due to God alone since salvation is accomplished solely through his will and action — not our own - and certainly not the church (its authority, its rituals, or its demands). Again, in the face of modern circumstances there seems to be a disconnect between the claim (Sola Gloria) and the practice.
Ironically, in the face of the way many churches operate today, all of these "Solae" have effectively been marginalized to some extent or another, and men (with their theologies and standards and Bible bludgeoning) have moved more toward the stances of the Catholics or Mormons or Greek Orthodox than away from them. Or they have become so utterly licentious and worldly as to toss all the goodness of the "Solae" to the wind and replace them with elements of the world (and not Christ).

We will now return to the lynch-pin of the five "Solae" – "Sola Scriptura."
SEVEN- Subjective Points of View

In chapter five we pointed out that there are two essential ways Christianity has approached “doing church” and church authority -

1. those that claim apostolic authority like the Roman Catholics, the Eastern orthodox and the Mormons (who claim the authority was restored to them in the 1830’s) and,

2. the Protestant claims which said (back then) that authority (otherwise known as the Christian priesthood) is “shared by all believers,” and is not centralized in one institution. (A position to which most Protestants have not remained true.)

Roman Catholic apologists today suggest that the Church started with “Pope Peter” governing, and that scripture could not be taken alone but instead the traditions and standards of the Church had to be included in worship in order to maintain . . . order. To support this Catholic apologists often point to the vast number of Protestant denominations and their infighting to prove that "Sola Scriptura" leads to religious anarchy. As a means to show the need for both scripture and Church tradition, they quote early church Fathers who said things like:

**Athanasius (300-375)**

“But beyond these sayings, let us look at the very tradition, teaching and faith of the Catholic Church from the beginning, which the Lord gave, the Apostles preached, and the Fathers kept." (Athanasius, Four Letters to Serapion of Thmuis, 1:28).

**Basil (330-379)**
"Now I accept no newer creed written for me by other men, nor do I venture to propound the outcome of my own intelligence, lest I make the words of true religion merely human words; but what I have been taught by the holy Fathers, that I announce to all who question me. In my Church the creed written by the holy Fathers in synod at Nicea is in use." (To the Church of Antioch, Epistle 140:2).

Ambrose (340-396)

"Wherefore all other generations are strangers to truth; all the generations of heretics hold not the truth: the church alone, with pious affection, is in possession of the truth." Ambrose, Commentary of Psalm 118,19 (A.D. 388).

Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386)

"But in learning the Faith and in professing it, acquire and keep that only, which is now delivered to thee by the Church, and which has been built up strongly out of all the Scriptures... Take heed then, brethren, and hold fast the traditions which ye now receive, and write them and the table of your heart." Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, 5:12 (A.D. 350).

Gregory of Nyssa (330-394)

"And let no one interrupt me, by saying that what we confess should also be confirmed by constructive reasoning: for it is enough for proof of our statement, that the tradition has come down to us from our Fathers, handled on, like some inheritance, by succession from the apostles and the saints who came after them." (Against Eunomius, 4:6).

These quotes are admittedly powerful and if we take them at face value we might convince ourselves that the Church was to continue, was to be established on scripture, and was to thrive on Church tradition and
lines of apostolic authority, as these five early church fathers suggest.

But we have to note that all of these quotes came after the council of Nicea, when the established, power-laden “church” had already claimed the authority and import of maintaining brick and mortar centrality. I would suggest that in the face of this institutional environment it is natural that these religiously minded men would take such a stance.

But let’s consider these positions seriously. In so doing we have to ask ourselves, “Are these quotes proven valid by history?” In other words, have any of these churches that claim authority – with their men, history, tradition and practices - have any of them proved impervious to corruption (which, to me, would illustrate God’s hand in their existence and prove His approbation of their existences)?

See, if God’s church was managed by tradition and authority, I would think we would have an incorruptible history to prove it. Unfortunately, quite the opposite narrative exists – which can be affirmed by just a cursory study of the history of Roman Catholicism, Mormonism, and even Greek Orthodoxy. Of course these religious institutions, as a means to defend their sordid histories, practices and doctrines (using the name and approbation of God) defend themselves by saying things like,

“Well, God is working with fallible men who are imperfect to bring about His perfect will.”

The trouble with this defense is that (in my estimation) these “line of authority” religions, who claim the need for men to be under authority, utterly fail to justify their existence in light of their sordid, secret, fallible histories.
Compare them, however, with individual believers – genuine, from the heart, salt of the earth believers – who throughout history (and irrespective of the church they attend) have, by the Spirit and faith, actually remained uncorrupted!

So having shown how ineffectual the claim is that Jesus’ church needs men and traditions of men in order to survive, we are now left with the Protestant idea that "scripture alone" is “the final authority.” Before presenting the issues with "Sola Scriptura" I want to use something that has inundated social media because it perfectly illustrates how and why the Protestant approach and their version of "Sola Scriptura" will always be a fail.

You have all probably seen the picture by now – a dress sitting in a window of a London shop. Here it is:
What colors do you see represented in the dress? My daughters see the dress as absolutely blue and black. I find their views ridiculous and was adamant that the dress is white and gold. What do you see?

Here is a picture of the dress from another angle – proving it is definitely black and blue.

What’s the deal? Are we victims of Photoshop or trick photography? Apparently the photograph is a one in a million shot that captured the dress in a way that the spectrum is right on the border between where some people’s minds will translate the colors to white and gold but others will see it as black and blue – its real colors. The point is NOT that the dress is actually black
and blue. Neither is the point that some see it as white and gold. The amazing lesson we get from this situation is that people can, will, and do see and interpret things differently - honestly believing that what they see is, without question, correct. If people can do this over two colors of a simple dress in a London shop window, what will be the result when we take a book of ancient writings, written in ancient languages, translated into thousands of different languages, and composed in 1,189 chapters, 31,102 verses, and more than 788,000 words?

The only viable way for the world of Christian believers to approach this faith is subjectively, by the Spirit, and without any condemnation for other people and their differing views.

How about one more example. Six words. Ready?

“I did not say you stole.”

Now, from what I can tell there are at least six ways to read and interpret these six words.

1. “I did not say you stole.” (But Jim did.) Got it? The emphasis on “I” in the sentence alters the entire meaning of the line.

2. “I did not say you stole.” (Meaning, I haven’t yet said you stole – but I’m about to.)

3. “I did not say you stole.” (An absolute denial of the phrase.)

4. “I did not say you stole.” (But I wrote it in an affidavit.)

5. “I did not say you stole.” (But I did say Sarah did.) And finally,

6. “I did not say you stole.” (But I did say you raped the mailman.)
Translate these six words into one of 6500 languages spoken in the world today and imagine the complexity of the responses and interpretations. Now take the Bible. It’s not just six words, but 783,000 plus. Multiply that by 6500 languages and we’ve got a world trying to agree on over five billion terms. Don’t get me wrong, it is possible for all of us to come to a unity of the faith. But that will occur by and through the Spirit and never, ever by the flesh, the intelligence of Man, or people placing themselves in authority over others as a means to enforce singular views.

And here’s the catch – when the Spirit is present and in control, the fruit of this Spirit is? That’s right, love. Therefore the Spirit of Godly, unconditional, agape love is the only way for the true Christian body to function. The Words in the book are a guide which, as long as we are in flesh, will be subjectively understood. The end-game is therefore Subjective Christianity with the rules of the game being love.

As a means to roll this approach out more fully, let’s examine more of the failures of "Sola Scriptura."
EIGHT- The Spirit is Primary and Preferential

In talking about "Sola Scriptura" we are really talking about the Rule of the Christian faith. Again, Catholics, Greek Orthodox and Mormons say it’s their priesthood, traditions, authority and interpretation of scripture. But we illustrated to what their priesthoods and religious histories have amounted. Protestants, in response, have said that the rule of the Christian faith is the Bible alone but we illustrated that that has only amounted to 35,000 different denominations and divisions. In the face of all of this I suggest that the rule is a totally subjective faith, with the Holy Spirit reigning in love. Maybe we could summarize this approach as:

1. The Spirit is Primary and Preferential,
2. The Word is Secondary and Referential,
3. Traditions are (at best) deferential, and
4. Men and Mortar is inconsequential.

How to support this very brash summary? We have to look more seriously at the utter failure of the Protestant teaching of "Scripture alone." And this is going to come by first looking at the historicity of the New Testament.

When the New Testament writers spoke of scripture they were talking about the Old Testament. The only exception we have to this is when Peter referred to Paul’s writings.\textsuperscript{11}

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{11} 2nd Peter 3:16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.
\end{footnote}
I am not suggesting (in the least) that the epistles were not inspired, but here is my point - Jesus never commanded the twelve to write anything. Have you ever considered this simple fact? I realize we could say that as head of His church He certainly did (by the Holy Spirit) but my point is Jesus gave primacy to the act of preaching and teaching not writing. Again, we have to note that Jesus Himself, while walking on the earth, never wrote anything either (except for in the dust, which I believe was a very telling gesture). Anyway, Jesus also taught and preached. Writing was certainly part of the Jewish tradition so it wasn’t like He would have been doing something out of the ordinary should He have chosen to put His words in ink. But instead, when it came to Jesus and the apostles, what did He (and they) actually do?

In *Matthew 28:19-20* Jesus commissioned those He had trained to go and *teach* in His name, making disciples of all nations.

In *Mark 16:15* we note that the Apostles are commanded to go and *preach* to all the world.

And in *Luke 10:16* we read that whoever *hears* the seventy-two, “*hears*” our Lord.

Nowhere do we see the Lord commissioning His Apostles to evangelize the world by writing in His name. The emphasis is always on preaching the Gospel, not on printing and distributing it. I would suggest the reason is that the written word is not for the unbeliever but for those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. But more on this later.

As a teacher of the Word I have always found myself stymied when I read *Romans 10* beginning at 13 which says:

13 "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not*
believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"

Why doesn’t Paul say,
"... and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not read? and how shall they read without a writer? And how shall they write unless they be sent?"

Listen, there are probably few bigger proponents of the Bible than myself. But the apostolic church was not founded on written word – it was founded on spoken word and the workings of the Holy Spirit. Why?

Because until someone has spiritual eyes they cannot even comprehend the written word. The written word was written to believers in that day and age and not to non-believers. And so we preach and teach, and people hear, and their hearts are touched and changed by the Spirit. Only then can the written word have reasonable and practical application.

So that is the first point. The writings of the New Testament were never commanded by Jesus and for good reason. The Gospel, and the conversion of people to it, was by hearing (faith comes by hearing) and by the Holy Spirit.

The second point to consider is this:

If there was ever a time when the written word was needed as a whole – ever – in the history of Christianity, it was in the first 100, 200, 300 years. But what did God have in place at that time – was it His Word? Old Testament, yes but to these converts to Christ God had
something far more effective – the Holy Spirit. In fact, God kept the entirety of the New Testament out of the hands of almost all believers for the first 300 years of His urch (and more reasonably for a whole lot longer). Think of all of the people who were swayed away and lost due to heresy in the early days of the church – from the Gnostics, to Judaisers, to Arianism, etc., etc. – wouldn't a complete and accepted New Testament have been of the greatest value? Obviously not. Because they had the Holy Spirit working on and in them in abundance – and they had the continued right to choose.

So when and where Luther and Calvin cried "Sola Scriptura" 1500 years after Christ ascended, God Himself had another means to govern at a time when the people needed guidance the most. By His Holy Spirit. Sans the New Testament.

If God governed by His Holy Spirit from Pentecost on through the first few hundred years, why did men think they had the right to say that scripture alone settles all things some 1500 years later?

Have you ever asked why the Protestant Reformers never said, "Sola Spiritus" or "Sola Agape?" In effect what they said was "Sola LAW" – "Sola Paper and Ink" – and it was a mistake the moment it was embraced.

A third point:

Scripture says all believers are of “one faith, one Lord, and one baptism.” Anyone who has spent any time in the Word knows this is possible only by the Spirit. When Jesus prayed the intercessory prayer in John 17 He asked that those men would be one. One of the biggest failures of the man-made "Sola Scriptura" premise is that it has created tremendous division – which is the work of Satan and not of God.
Go online today.

The division and vitriol that falls from the lips of people who claim, verse in hand, that they are followers of Jesus, is hard to believe. This is the result of human beings looking to written words and making their interpretations of them superior to love. It’s the result of turning the New Testament into the New Law instead of the Word of God truly serving (as a two edged sword) to divide soul and spirit in individual believers and as a map to their respective spiritual walk with God.

From the Garden of Eden God has always longed for people to love Him and to love each other freely. Laws – from those given the Children of Israel to those imposed by religious people today – will always appeal to the flesh of human beings which causes us to create systems of religion, and in the end promote things antithetical to the Spirit of harmony and love. Human beings, as Spinoza said, hate a vacuum. In the absence of absolutes (which, admittedly, living by the Spirit has a tendency, at times, to produce – especially in Christian babes or the unsaved) the reformers glommed onto the New Testament and made it the New law, forgetting that Jesus had already given one – to love. In so doing the Reformers were not really promoting "Sola Scriptura" in its entirety. Reformational Sola Scripture wound up being ‘Scripture alone’ so long as people completely agree with our interpretation of "scripture alone."

So the Catholics claim that Apostolic authority was (and is) used to keep order and peace. We’ve seen what that produced. The Mormons claim Apostolic restoration was needed to ensure conformity to the revealed word. We’ve seen what that produced. The Protestants claim "Sola Scriptura." How come we never admit what that has produced?

Luther himself bemoaned the results of his own actions, saying,
"Unfortunately, it is our daily experience that now under the Gospel [his] the people entertain greater and bitterer hatred and envy and are worse with their avarice and money-grabbing than before under the Papacy."

If the doctrine of "Sola Scriptura" were true, effective, and capable of doing the will of God (which is to produce the fruit of the Spirit - harmony, unity, peace and above all love), then the results of it would be seen in Protestantism past and present. In reality, the results of "Sola Scriptura" mock the Lord’s prayer for unity of mind, doctrine, and peace - as today we have utterly contradictory beliefs and practices, and thousands of Protestant sects and denominations that all claim to use the Bible as their only guide.

Of course, the claim by defenders of "Sola Scriptura" is that they only differ in what they say are non-essential or peripheral matters, but casual analysis proves this to be a myth. There are major differences on baptism – its purpose and meaning and mode; salvation – how and when it comes, whether it can be lost or not, and who initiates it, God or Man; on works, on Sabbath observances, even on the nature of God and Jesus Christ.

Christianity, lived subjectively by and through the Spirit, has never lost a soul, never killed anyone, never pushed any true believers to divide over doctrine. Genuine Christianity has always been "one faith, one Lord, one baptism." Christianity has been manifested in love – for two thousand years through the hearts, lives and words of those who truly live it. But religious men have always made true Christianity something else – and in the case of "Sola Scriptura" they have used the very Word of God to create that “something else” in their own image.

When Jesus said in Matthew 12 that “by the fruit the tree is known," I would strongly suggest that whether we apply this test to Catholicism, Mormonism, or Protestantism there is a fail. And since a good tree cannot produce bad fruit we have to call all of these trees bad. But the Spirit
has only and always produced good fruit from Pentecost on - it is therefore the only good tree, and is the only source we can turn to as a means to actually live a truly Christian Life.

Having said all this I realize very well the fear that comes with this proclamation.

“But what about people who say things like, “Jesus isn’t God? Or that God has a body, or that water baptism is necessary for salvation?”

Love.

“But, but, but . . . what about the people who come into the flock on Sunday and are proclaiming heresy? Who are living in sin? Who smell of alcohol or the gange?”

Love.

“What about . . . ?” (that’s right, it’s love).

Remember, the fruit of the Spirit is love. And the Body is Jesus’ body. Conversion, growth, unity, and discipline are all in the hands of the Holy Spirit . . . in and through love – which pours out unconditionally from us. Not Law. Not by words which can be misinterpreted and debated and challenged ad nauseum. Not by feigned authority or claims on tradition.

“But what about the Word?”

We teach the word relentlessly! We teach it and we preach it and we appeal to it as a reference to all we believe. We spend all of our time in it. It’s the Living Word! But it – and disputes over it – can NEVER take precedence over:

Patience
Longsuffering
Joy
Gentleness
Temperance
Faith
Meekness
Longsuffering
Love.

The Spirit is primary and preferential. The Word is secondary and referential. Religious Traditions are (at best) deferential, and men and their mansions of mud are inconsequential . . . in fact, they often do more to get in the way of God than assist Him in His work.

One final point (we have a whole bunch more coming), and I’ll make the point by saying something rather outrageous:

The whole idea of "Sola Scriptura" is manifestly man made and in complete contradiction to the Word and ways of God. How can I say this? Literacy rates over the course of Christian history. Let me explain.

Literacy, for much of human history, directly correlates to affluence and social status - which relates to material wealth, which relates to human intelligence and often education. When the Protestant Reformers boldly proclaimed “Sola Scriptura” it was as though they were saying: "The Gospel (and all that is important to Christianity) will forever be in the hands of the affluent, those with social status, and therefore those with intelligence and education."

It’s also as if they were tacitly stating that the educated ought to 1) be in power in the church (because they can read) and 2) those who have the ability to read would, again, understand God better than those who couldn’t. The natural result and outflow of these stances would be the power in the Protestant churches falling on the educated – which was frequently the case – even today. There are two major problems with this stance.

First, literacy rates. Estimations around the world are that between the 4th and 5th century, until around the 17th century, world-wide literacy rates hovered at around
15%. That means 15 people out of every hundred could read! Even as recently as the 1800’s literacy rates remained really low, and it wasn’t until the early 1900’s that world-wide rates started climbing - the average still hovers at only around 60%.

So based on literacy rates alone MOST of the Christian history has been shrouded in illiteracy! In my estimation this makes for a very aloof God, who sends His Son down to save us, sends his apostles (mostly uneducated) out to share the Good News, but then, in a very illiterate world, centers the sole authority of the Good News in a book very few people can read!

But even more to the point – Christianity is not a faith of the strong. It never has been. It’s a faith of the weak, the base, the despised, the foolish things and people of the world. Wouldn’t a loving God, who is seeking to reach people who are the most humble and uneducated, reach them through means like preaching, His Spirit, and love, rather than written words that most of the weak, abased, and foolish have never been able to read let alone comprehend? I mean I meet very intelligent people, even today, who cannot understand holy writ, and the Protestant stance of "Sola Scriptura" is supposed to be the cure all!?

In the end, "Sola Scriptura" is ultimately a claim that keeps the power and control of religion in the hands of the educated. I am not against education. I’m certainly

12 1Co 1:26-29 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.
not against the Bible being read, taught, and used as reference and map to all Christian living. I am a Pastor who teaches the word weekly – and uses educational tools to do it. But my point is to show – to prove – the illogical nature of "Sola Scriptura" when it is literally applied to the former and even the modern world.
I’ve made several points against the 16th Century stance called "Sola Scriptura." Those points include the facts that:

1. Jesus never wrote anything nor commanded that His apostles write anything but instead told them to preach and teach.

2. If there has ever been a time that the New Testament was needed, it was in the first 100-300 years. But God didn’t provide it then – instead He gave His Holy Spirit.

3. The Holy Spirit has always served to unify and bring true believers together – never divide. "Sola Scriptura" has done more to divide and ostracize and kill in the church than almost any other tenet – and we gave a quote where even Luther admitted to this.

4. We question the logic of "Sola Scriptura" in the face of world-wide literacy rates. Certainly, the Holy Spirit was reaching people who were poor and uneducated everywhere, but world-wide literacy rates for most of Christian history prove that the New Testament had about as much meaning in the hands of most people as a diamond in the hands of an infant.

So let’s keep adding to our list, but before we do let me reiterate (I’ve learned that reiteration is really important amidst change) that the Word is a wonderful gift from God. Its import in the growth and personal sanctification of believers cannot be overstated. But it
has to be seen and used referentially and in relation to the Spirit, and never as Law . . . never as our primary source of relating to others – especially non-believers. And never as the code for doing brick and mortar church.

Because the Spirit is primary and preferential, Christianity is entirely subjective and of the Spirit. We have a phrase we appeal to as humans when it comes to making a decision about something – we say, “We are weighing things out in our mind.” The line invokes imagery where we are placing the data from one side of an argument upon one side of a scale and the data from another side of the argument on the other side, and we are measuring them against each other as a means to see which position carries the most weight. In matters of the Spirit this is a very important exercise, one relative to the Berean’s that is referred to as “testing all things.”

I’m bringing this forward because as Christians, who are dealing with spiritual matters, we can see the validity of weighing, comparing, and seeing what makes most biblical sense in terms of truth. If, as some suggest, we allow physical elements to infiltrate into our spiritual estimation of the Christian faith, we run into trouble.

In other words, if we were going to examine Christianity and representations of Christianity physically – i.e. comparing or weighing out the differences between the Catholics verses the Mormons or the Baptists against the Presbyterians - what would (or what could) we put on a literal scale? Only material things, right?

We’d have to take all the buildings, and uniforms, and gold, and land, and congregates of the Catholics and weigh them against all the same tangible assets of the Mormons. Amazingly enough some people actually
try to do this when comparing which church “is better” or more respectable.

To any Bible reading Christian the notion of weighing out the physical attributes of different religions is utterly preposterous because the physical is irrelevant. Better put, the physical can serve as a counterfeit to real Christianity which is lived and executed from the heart by the Spirit and not through the flesh.

Any appeal to the physical within Christianity – staffing, budgets, building size, numbers of missionaries, assets under control – is all fluff, is of this world, is not of the Father, and gets people flexing muscles that God tends to mock. Even when it comes to the physical Word of God, Paul said in 2nd Corinthians 3:3 that believers (their love and faith) are the “epistles of Christ.” Listen closely:

“Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.”

Do you realize what this says? Words written with ink on paper are really no different than words carved on stone. They all serve as external laws which, in the end, serve to divide and at best create either lawbreakers or proud law keepers. When the Law is written on the human heart there is no need for anything external to take precedence. So again, we use the written Word REFERENTIALLY but the Spirit is PREFERENTIAL. And we would NEVER let words “written in ink” cause division between people who love the Lord and embrace Him as Savior and King.

Why is this the way the New Covenant has been established? Listen again to Paul in 2nd Corinthians 3:6 where he says, speaking of Jesus:
“Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

The letter killeth! Did you hear that? What do you think "Sola Scriptura" is? Letters! And as a result the Body has been avulsed to the point where its members are all living independently of each other (off synthetic life support) rather than as a cohesive whole in love! This is what "Sola Scriptura" has accomplished – killing. And the killing continues every time some pastor takes the New Testament contents and uses it to beat people into doctrinal or practical submission.

Speaking of the physical verses the spiritual, we are also presented with an issue very few people get very excited about when I present it to them but it is a telling proof of why the Spirit must reign and not the letter or the physical. I call it the "Utter Allure of the Tangible."

Here’s the deal. If God was presenting a physical, tangible model through the New Testament that we were to adopt today, then the notion of stasis would and should prevail. What I mean by this is if God authored the ideal of building a brick and mortar church with a certain set of repeatable concrete doctrines, this model would expand out into the world through replication - as this would be what God desired. This is what Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Mormonism and the Jehovah’s Witnesses try and suggest. That God is a God of Order and growth and He does, in fact, have a true church or institution on earth.

This approach is extremely logical and seems to merit the approbation of people who love order, power and history. Change within this institutional approach is typically very, very slow because maintaining control,
power and tradition is paramount to appearing stable and orderly, which are very important characteristics of monolithic religious institutions.

Interestingly enough we don’t have to look at the giant monolithic religious empires to see this approach embraced. It happens in almost every church that believes the written letter of the New Testament is the new law of the faith. How does this happen?

Through what I call, the "Utter Allure of the Tangible."

Let’s say a man named John is called of God to teach the Word by the Spirit in his home. He does it, and people begin gathering to hear him use his God-given skills. In time John makes a stance on a New Testament tradition. He makes a stand on a New Testament law. He makes a stand on a New Testament order. For argument’s sake, let’s say these stands, again, taken from the New Testament narrative include:

1. Communion every week
2. No fornicators are allowed, and
3. Only men can teach

Again, these are just examples – there are dozens and dozens more that churches today stand upon and present as biblical in their Doctrinal Statements, Mission Statements or Statements of Faith. These statements lend to the idea that a church is really following God because, by golly, they have actually written out (in INK) more rules of what they believe and more standards that they uphold based on their interpretations of the Bible.

In any case and over time, more and more people come to hear John teach. They really like his style and learn quickly that John and the church (now incorporated by
the state with tax exempt status) represent and reflect their ideals -

“Our church has communion every week just like they did in the early church!”

“And we don’t allow fornicators to fellowship with us – because Paul told them to separate company in one of his letters.”

“And we don’t let women teach!”

In time the members build a beautiful brick and mortar edifice. John is earning a nice income. Benefits are had. Tradition is strong and secure. The church has a tremendous outreach to Ghana and to the poor downtown. They feed the homeless every Saturday and provide housing for six widows. Got all that? All from the written rules. All by establishing and maintaining standards.

But one night, something remarkable happens to John. The Holy Spirit blows in to his heart and says:

“John, John, I want you to go another direction with the church.”

John is stunned as the Holy Spirit continues to speak.

“See, your rule of fornicators being unwelcome is no good, John, because it is making those who are fornicating liars and hypocrites secretly remain in your pews, and it is making those who are honest about their sin angry and rebellious at God. Change this, John. Oh, and you’re gathering on Sunday? I want you to move it to Saturday. No more Sunday services.”

“but, but, but why?” John asks.
“Because I am telling you this is what you need to do,” comes the reply. “Oh yeah, and John, about women not teaching... there is a woman named Jan. She knows Me and my Word. Have her teach every other week John. Got all that?”

John initially resists but in time the messages are clear. However, there is a problem. It’s called the "Utter Allure of the Tangible." You see, they have a building they built. And they have a staff they pay. And they have so many things they are doing (such as serving the poor, etc.), that to change these things is going to "rock the house" so to speak. Change will cause people who have been with them for years to abandon ship. It will uproot all they have believed was important. It will destroy everything upon which they have been known to stand!

And so John says no. He allows himself to believe that those ideas must have just been playing tricks with his mind. He does, however, mention the promptings he had to his board, but they reason with him from the written Word and prove that this would be foolish. So nothing changes.

When the Holy Spirit is not in charge from the beginning, and the physical is allowed to play any sort of role in the church or ministry, the "Utter Allure of the Tangible," of the physical, will almost always win.

It is rationalized as “wisdom.”

It is called “prudent.”

And “remaining true to what God has called them to do.”

Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit moves where it wants to go, and cannot be “Man”ipulated anymore than the wind can be redirected. It might call a person to dress in loincloth and leather and eat grasshoppers. It
might lead a person to a horrible death on a cross. It might tell a person to sell all they have and follow Christ.

But when the "Utter Allure of the Tangible" is allowed to enter the picture, the Holy Spirit is typically compromised – as is its effectiveness in our lives, church, and ministries.

Listen carefully - when a pastor has proclaimed that God is a Trinity, he has very few options to see God in any other way. His own self-preservation precludes him from allowing himself or others to even question the (man-made) notion.

When a pastor has taught that hell is eternal and that God has, from before the foundation of the world, decided who will go there and who won’t - when a pastor has taught that Jesus is coming back any day now, or that God only wants to save some and not others – whatever it is – that pastor has inadvertently boxed himself in and walls himself off from the influence of the Holy Spirit. Generally speaking, that pastor has fallen prey to the "Utter Allure of the Tangible."

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13 I believe the man-made doctrine of the Trinity is disputable and that believers ought not be confined by its tenets in order to be seen as lovers of God and Christ.


15 (see book, It’s Not the End of the World, Alathea Press, by Shawn Mc Craney)

16 (go to www.hotm.tv under Episodes 2013 (October-November) Calvinism and Mormonism)
Seeing Christianity as a “physical thing” - a thing to be managed and governed rather than a spiritually dynamic, fluid experience in the hands of God - goes a long way in allowing this tragedy to occur. This leads me to another point for your consideration. It has to do with the infighting and division over doctrine and practice that has occurred because of "Sola Scriptura."

Stop for a minute, extract yourself from thinking about religion and look at the world in terms of culture. From every nation, every state, every island we have a vast array of cultural traditions surrounding us. God has allowed this as much as God has created innumerable varieties of flowers and animals and insects, right? So the Japanese have kimonos and sake and tempura and Samurai; as the Brits, and the Germans, and the Italians, and the Scots, and the Polys all have their customs, and dances, and foods and languages etc. All over the world – different cultures.

Every now and again one country or another might rise up and get to thinking that their customs and dances and foods are superior to all the others. There often arise squabbles and fights and even wars when this occurs, with the victors often imposing their ways upon the losers. I point this out to describe the spirit of domination that thrives in the hearts of humankind. Most people are subject to prejudice – even xenophobic ideas – about other peoples, countries, races, and cultures. Sometimes the bias can get so deep it turns to hatred – even genocide.

But again, at the heart of it lies an attitude of “we know more than you, our ways are better than yours,” even, “we are doing things the way God wants them done,” right?
When this thinking reaches its most demented levels, one people-group can even come to see other people groups as less than human, of not having any value, and even deserving of torture, suffering and death.

Now, there are four things everyone in every culture, land, and clime needs to survive: blood, oxygen, water, and food. All humans – no matter what they do culturally – need blood, oxygen, water, and food. We often include shelter, clothing, or love in this description but these can be excused depending on circumstance.

So let’s look at the world's Christian churches.

All different denominations. All different approaches. Some wealthy, some despotic some rife with ritual, some stark. We have religions where people dress up, faiths where people dance, faiths where people don’t, and on and on and on. Amidst it all there are always those churches that look around and think they are superior to others. They are actually willing to go to war and even kill other believers – as a result of these evil perspectives making a home in the heart of those who embrace them. But in the end every one of these Christian faiths (around the world) rely on the same four elements to thrive:

The shed blood of Christ

The Holy Spirit

The living water

The bread (or Word of God).

When we focus on the brick and mortar and use "Sola Scriptura" to physically dictate what goes on in brick and mortar, we wind up spending time thinking we are best and the rest of the world is failing. But when we step
back and allow the Spirit to reign we cannot help but see that all who are His are His by the blood, are kept and lead by the Spirit, are gathered to drink the living water, and to feast on the living Word.

Another point . . .

If Christianity was in any way based on the physical (authority, rites, doctrines), then all approaches and claims at authority and rites and doctrines would have to be examined by everyone before they could determine which approach was correct. Let me explain.

One of the problems with the atheist claim that there is no God is that the claim is supremely arrogant. To say, “There is no God” one has to essentially believe they know (or have explored or looked into) everything possible and have seen firsthand that God does not exist. For example, when someone tells me "there is no God," I ask if they have looked under the sandstone rocks in Saudi Arabia.

“No, why?” they ask.

“Well, I heard that God hides under those rocks sometimes so until you have looked there how could you say he does not exist?”

So let’s say they fly to Saudi Arabia and look under the sandstone rocks. And He’s not there. So they come back and report, “There is NO God! I went and looked in Saudi Arabia under the sandstone rocks and He’s not there at all! Ha!”

“Well,” we might reply, “have you looked under the lava formations off the coast of the Big Island in Hawaii? And then, as long as you are searching, if He’s not there, look under the cushions in my grandma’s back yard chairs in
Seattle, then on top of Kilimanjaro, and then along the I-15 between Vegas and Death Valley.”

You see, to say that "there is NO God," a person has to have really explored all the possibilities of where God could be . . . before making such a blatant statement that He is not.

The same is true when people say, “I have found the true brick and mortar church!” because in order to say they have found the true brick and mortar church they have to have explored all brick and mortar churches and all their claims at doing things right. This is impossible. And God knew it would be impossible. So He made His church of a Spiritual nature, not a physical one.

Let me give you an everyday example of how this looks from a scene in everyday modern life.

Many of us have email accounts. In those accounts we are often hit with hundreds of outrageous claims – most of them proving to be false – in something called spam. Few have time to investigate the claims of every email we receive so what do we do? The same thing we typically do with junk mail. We quickly sift through and locate the emails that are suspect – and we delete them without ever investigating their claims or promises. Why? There aren’t enough hours in the day to keep up with all the promises. And so we typically let our friends and relations and media sources vet the things we will give attention to and put the rest away in a file called suspect – the trash.

When and if we come to believe that God has somewhere established on this earth a brick and mortar system, with authority, and proper governance - a true
body of teaching, we might say – we would all have to search through every claim and representation around to make certain we find it.

That is what objective Christianity created through "Sola Scriptura." "Sola Scriptura" is like a man saying, “I have to experience every woman on earth before I can choose the wife for me, because there just might be one out there that is superior to last – so I must investigate them all.” While some men have actually sought to undertake this approach it’s not feasible or possible.

But Subjective Christianity, one governed by the Spirit, is far more logical, reasonable and applicable. It is like a man finding one woman who is truly his soul mate and sticking with her no matter what. Get it?

To claim that the Word Alone will tell us how to do Church is a fail of epic proportions because it will always lead to these impossible and unreasonable results, debates and uncertainties. It will lead to constant debate, and an unrelenting search for absolute truth – when all the while God has already delivered it in His Son.

See, God, knowing we all see the world in different ways, and that we all understand and relate to Him in like manner, purposely didn’t establish His church on more laws written in ink, but sent His Spirit to fill us with love.

When love is what guides we do not need to experience or test or try or explore every claim. Love makes all the decisions and quells the uncertainty of endless doctrinal disputes. So the man who wants to find his life’s perfect mate doesn’t need to explore and test and try every woman, he simply needs to let genuine love manifest itself and the decision is made for him.
No looking under every rock.

No exploring every church and their claims of teaching the truth and offering perfect practice. Love becomes the doctrine, the practice, the deciding factor on every divisive issue. And in this, the ultimate will of God is done.
Okay, we are talking about Subjective Christianity as being the only viable solution to the mess Christianity has been in (and continues to be in) relative to division, dogma and denominationalism. We have been trying to explain why the teaching of "Sola Scriptura" (the Protestant teaching that the "Scripture alone" will establish the rule of faith for the body) is a fail. Before we get into the actual creation and compilation of the New Testament (and its availability or unavailability to the masses), there are a few more considerations that must be approached.

First, Christians often find themselves saying things like,

"The Bible is inerrant, and the Word of God, and is completely reliable."

I think these proclamations are true – the original manuscripts are inerrant, they were inspired, and the Bible can be relied upon to teach us all the things God wants us to know when it arrives by the Spirit. The trouble with these blanket statements is they are either taken so zealously or so flippantly it’s hard to know how to apply them in real time.

Let me give you an example.

If we take the Gospel accounts of the last supper, this is a summary of the information provided to us:

- Jesus sent two – Peter and John – to go and prepare the Passover.

- They asked Jesus where to prepare and Jesus tells them, “Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters.”
• He tells them, "Then you shall say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?""

• Jesus says, "Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready."

• So they did and made preparation.

• And in the evening Jesus and the rest showed up to eat.

• There was wine, bread, certainly other foods including a sauce made with raisins, dates, and garlic.

Got all that?

So, now we “do” communion in church – I mean most Christian churches hold some sort of communion, right? My question(s):

• Are we supposed to have “two” prepare it?

• Do we have to do it “in the city?”

• Does the place we hold it in have to be owned or run by another person?

• Do we also seek for one bearing a pitcher of water?

• Do we have to ask the water bearer where the location of the room he has for our meal to be held is?

• Does the room have to be upstairs?

• Does the room have to be furnished?
• Are we supposed to eat it in the evening?

• Should there be wine, bread, certainly other foods including a sauce made with raisins, dates, and garlic?

Now, obviously this is an extreme, hyperbolic exercise . . . or is it? Here’s the point -

Many, many believers (appealing to "Sola Scriptura") say that believers have to take every single word of the Bible as inspired. They say that every word has application. They say we live by every single word that the Bible contains. If this is the case, shouldn’t we do things exactly how Jesus did them? If you say, “yes, we have to do everything they did as it is written in the Bible,” I would say you are in for a world of bondage – the very thing Jesus came to set you free from. But if you say that we can skip some of the things Jesus and the apostles did, I have two questions for you:

1. Which things? and

2. Who gets to decide which things are kept and which are abandoned?

If we say that we let either “reason” or “the Scripture” decide I would say this is the reason we have 35,000 denominations around today. Again, the only way to see these is to see them subjectively and grant all people the right to practice and believe them as they wish. In other words, if one group is trying to replicate and live by everything in scripture and another group lives only by faith in Jesus, it’s all acceptable – as long as there is love in His name for God and one another.

Many people will try to appeal to the early or apostolic church to find the model on how to do church, but we
have to note that Christianity did not spring forth fully formed. It changed, swayed, morphed, and literally shifted focuses over the course of its existence. His body is dynamic not static. Christians often pick on the LDS for the shifts of focus in their faith and practice but the Body is guilty of nothing less.

Additionally, have you ever noticed that the Holy Spirit has remained available and unchanged since Pentecost but the Manuscripts of the Word have not . . . that we don’t even have any of the original manuscripts? Why? Because they are material and they will fade, be altered, change, and decay. Defenders of "Sola Scriptura" will say things like,

“That’s because God wants us to live by faith.”

I would respond by saying that it is because God wants us to place our focus and emphasis on the Spirit and use the Word referentially not primarily. When we take the Word of God and use our interpretations of it on each other or when we wrongly use it on non-believers who cannot even comprehend its contents, we have lost sight of its beauty and the important purpose it plays in our lives. God has called us to be “lovers not lawyers.” We have not been saved or justified by our doctrines or knowledge. We are saved by grace through faith. And the study of the Word not only increases faith with the increase of faith comes an increase in an ability to love.

Losing sight of this, many in the church today have come to believe that doctrine, knowledge, and even advanced degrees justify us before God. But throughout scripture we read things like:
1st Corinthians 8:1 “Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.”

1st Corinthians 13:2 “And though I . . . understand all mysteries and all knowledge . . . but have not love, I am nothing.”

1st Corinthians 1:22-23 “For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.”

Our Bibles, instead of being a most magnificent source and reference to learn and read the Words of God in the context they were given (and as a means to increase knowing and loving Him) have become a New Law, with our knowledge and demands for people to read it as we read it ruling the day instead of simple faith and love.

Did you know that scripture – the New Testament – was originally written as prose? That the manuscripts were long bunches of paragraphs (at best)? That’s how they were written. If we would have received them in this way (and read them in this way) today we would have had an easier time of seeing the “big picture” of the narrative. Of seeing the Bible as a discourse in God's redeeming love.

So what happened? Man happened.

And men decided to take God’s word and break it up into chapter and verse – which was a very Greek and a very legal way to read and examine things. Ever read a legal document – they have 28 numbers at the left of a double lined margin. Why? For Logic. Reasoning. Argument. Debate.
When the New Testament was put into chapter and verse, (and it is doubtful this was intended) the end result was the same. Instead of reading the “Zeitgeist” or Spirit of the Word, we started to use it to argue, tear, bite and divide over every verse, line and word. So where the Spirit of the Book from the beginning says, “Love God” and “Love others” men, loving to be right, have become lawyers instead of lovers, and use the Bible to divide, dominate, and win debates on disputable matters.

Hebrews 4:12 says:

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

I hail the positive truths this passage represents and use it to show the great import the Word has in the lives of individual believers. We read it and it serves to divide the worldly elements of our soul from the heavenly influences of the Spirit. Praise God. At the same time I would suggest that this same word of God, if used improperly, can be used and abused to the point that it becomes a dagger that is used to kill instead of bless.

In my mind, believers have an opportunity to really love others unconditionally and set divisional arguments aside, or we can take the opportunity to harm, cut, divide, and assault. In the area of outreach, apologetics, and instruction of each other, we might wonder if we are showing up armed with God’s power – love – or with a knowledge of the Word which we wield as we would a sharpened knife in a street fight.
A final thought. The study of language is very, very complex. If you disagree read Wittgenstein, Chomsky or Jacques Derrida. In addition to seeing the world around us from our particular chosen vantage points, we also, due to fear, laziness and an attempt to simplify things, often take very complex matters and assign them simplicity so we can cope in their presence. Christians often respond to this uncomfortable fact by saying things like,

“If the Bible says it, I believe it, and that’s all there is too it,” right? In the dogmatic mind of the zealot maybe this certainty is comforting but I am not always so convinced by this response. Let’s take a word from the Bible as an example. Just one word. Beauty.

To begin with, when we hear or read a word, we all take the term into our minds and it enters into our soul after being filtered by our experience, our education, our temperament, and even our mood and hormones (at the time). Additionally, the person’s intelligence also plays a role into how they will interpret and understand and approach the word in question. It’s interesting, but when we read, it is an individual event. We do it ourselves. Alone. And what we face are singular words, strung together into sentences, and forming paragraphs, and all we have is our own series of subjective filters to comprehend what the things we are reading mean.

This is just another reason why "Sola Scriptura" is such a fail.

Now the Catholics would respond to this thought and say, “That’s right, Shawn, and this is the reason why we need men called and ordained of God to clarify and teach the Word, because it is NOT open to private interpretation.”
But again, what has this approach given us? Doctrines and practices like transubstantiation, a perpetual virgin named Mary, and priests who don’t marry (which has proven to create all manner of ugliness). Obviously – men in authority overseeing and creating doctrinal interpretations haven’t saved us, have they. What to do?

Let’s take the Word and have those who have been blessed by God to teach it to teach it – to the best of their ability. The Word of God is then presented into the subjective minds of all listening and they, hopefully by the Spirit, discern on some level or another what is true, they discard what they believe is not, and then they allow (and this is key) for everyone around them to have whatever opinion they want on the issues as well.

So, let’s get back to that word "beauty."

It isn’t used much in the New Testament – four times I think – but here’s one:

*Romans 10:15* “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things."

One group of people may read this literally, and think of the actual feet of preachers being beautiful. Of that group there are those who will think beautiful feet would be pedicured and lotioned and soft. Others may think the feet are tough and apostle like. Some may envision male feet, some female. In the study of beauty the Greeks taught that we could categorize them as having proportion, symmetry, balance, and harmony. But we also have the fact that beauty is in the eye of the beholder,

is it not? I personally find things that are considered beautiful by the masses very unattractive and things that many believe are unattractive to be the most beautiful
things on earth. Who’s right? Of course when it comes to feet there will then be a group who will believe the beauty of the feet is to be seen metaphysically – as in God sees those who He sent (as they move their feet to go out) as beautiful in His eyes. Beautiful feet, in this case, represent sacrificial feet - feet that embody the heart of those seeking to please God.

There will be some in the group who might include elements of any of these perspectives into their observation and interpretation of “beautiful feet,” but who will also consult other scripture and recognize that this may be an example of a Hebraism, or phraseology taken from the Jews.

Some may read Adam Clarke’s commentary on the passage which says:

"Dr. Taylor remarks on this quotation, which is taken from Isaiah 52:7 that 'feet are variously used in Scripture, and sometimes have respect to things internal and spiritual.' For as the life of man and the practice of piety are compared to walking (Psalm 1:1) so his feet may signify the principles on which he acts, and the dispositions of his mind. Ecclesiastes 5:1 says, 'Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God.' Agreeably to this, the feet of the messengers in Isaiah and of the apostles in this verse, may signify the validity of their mission-the authority upon which they acted, and any character or qualifications with which they were invested."

Some will read the Greek and discover that the Greek words for "beautiful feet" are “horaos” (meaning “belonging to the right season” “flourishing” and or “beauteous”). Others will discover that the Greek word “pooce” also means foot but has two meanings,

“How flourishing is the foot.”

or

“How belonging to the right season is the foot of them.”

Got all that? And there’s more.
But here’s the point – everyone is entitled, according to their faith, their intellect, their world view, their tastes, their understanding, and the Spirit working on them, to understand and see these words as they want. Because they will anyway.

"Sola Scriptura" says that scripture defines everything but scripture says that it is of “no private interpretation.” These two claims – when applied to human beings – is a recipe for division and disaster. The ONLY solution remaining is for Christians to patiently, lovingly allow and enjoy all views – whatever is being discussed – so long as the Gospel has been agreed upon, that Jesus is Lord, and Love is seen as the new commandment.
ELEVEN- Queries

Whenever someone embarks on new or controversial territory there are often misunderstandings that crop up along the way, and if they are not addressed as the presentation rolls along the subject can often take on a “life of its own,” and end up creating so much misunderstanding that the initial purpose and presentation is lost.

In the face of all you have read thus far I received some emails that indicate some people are misunderstanding my purpose and intentions. I thought I would share these emails here as a means to respond to some of the things you might be wondering about too.

The first series of questions come from a Pastor named Van out of Spokane, Washington. He wrote:

1. “In your opinion is the Bible the Word of God? Is the Bible able to transform our life with the power of the Holy Spirit? Is the Bible living and active in the sense of being Holy Spirit inspired?”

My response:

• The Bible is certainly the Word of God.
• The Bible is able to transform human life in conjunction with the Holy Spirit.
• The Bible is living and active in the sense of being Holy Spirit inspired.

2. “Are the writers of the New Testament considered to be equal with the writers of the Old Testament in the sense of being inspired by God?”

• The writers of the New Testament were as inspired as the writers of the Old – certainly.
However, I would say that the purpose of the writers was different and the application of the words they respectively wrote differs too. In my estimation the writers of the Old Testament wrote both of their own times and then (often) blindly of times and ages to come. Generally, their words pointed primarily to the coming promised Messiah and His work among the Nation of Israel. The things they wrote were fulfilled in, or at least launched by, Jesus Christ. The writers of the New Testament, on the other hand, spoke of the arrival, life, ministry, death, resurrection and promised return of the same Messiah and the Good News He authored for the sake of the world – first to the House of Israel and then to the Gentile nations.

- The fact that all writers of the Old and New Testaments were inspired does not mean what they wrote automatically has direct application to people living outside that age. Think of it this way: though the Old Testament prophets were inspired when they wrote, and the people of New Testament times were able to see that what they wrote spoke of the Messiah, we cannot say that all that they wrote applied to the New Testament believers in Christ. For example, the Old Testament prophets wrote extensively of the Law but context tells us that believers in the Apostolic church were not under the Law and therefore those things were NOT applicable to them. The same is true with what was written in the New Testament to the believers at that time and those words having direct application to us today! It’s ludicrous to try and make it all fit. And since we can’t make it all fit, then we have to admit that some of what was written applies and some does not. This is why Christianity is wholly subjective and up to the individual and the Spirit because no church or
leader has the right or ability to tell anyone what is what – get it?

Pastor Van continues -

3. “If (and I emphasize if) you do not believe the Bible is completely inspired by God then why would you read it if it was inspired by man?”

- While I do believe the Bible was penned by inspiration, I also believe that the men with whom the Holy Spirit worked pulled from their own views and skills and ideas and purviews to pen the words the Holy Spirit moved them to write.
- In other words, I believe the men God chose to inspire added their respective flavor to the words written.
- This is not a bad thing or deleterious issue. It just is. Peter’s Greek is not as refined as Paul’s, and James is often much more difficult to exegete than John.
- Additionally, these writers, while inspired, were writing primarily to the believers of that specific day and time. They were under some very unique pressures and faced situations that we do not – at least not in the same way. This has to be remembered when we read the Word and try to assign all of its contents to ourselves.

4. “I completely understand and agree you’re teaching on the Holy Spirit. But I also teach that the Holy Spirit can never contradict the word of God. I would teach that the Holy Spirit and the original writings of Scripture are equal–would you agree with that?”
I would suggest that the Holy Spirit is superior to the written Word – but in a few limited ways. Take the two – the Holy Spirit and the written Word of God. Then choose one to govern the world since the Pentecost. Which would you choose? Now think about this. For me it would be the Holy Spirit hands down, for the following reasons:

- That’s all most of the early church ever had, it’s all most of the church between 70AD and 1550 AD had, and the Holy Spirit brings love and peace and unity where the Word creates division. So in terms of superiority over the life of an individual, I would take the Holy Spirit. Fortunately for us we don’t have to choose and have been blessed with both.

- I would also suggest that the Holy Spirit (whose fruit is love) is irrefutable, whereas there are a thousand ways to Sunday to interpret the Word (especially when we consider original manuscripts, ancient languages, modern languages, modern translations, and the like). This makes access to the Spirit of far more value that written texts.

- Finally, the Holy Spirit, when in full force and alone, causes people to love – that’s its fruit. The Word – alone and without the Spirit – causes people to divide. Doctrine does not save and knowledge is limited, but love cannot be beat – and that is the fruit of the Spirit that proves it is of God.

And Pastor Van’s last question:

5. “For me to say that people should only depend on the Holy Spirit and not the Bible as the Word of God (but that it’s just a good book to learn from) it is very easy for people to come up
with all sorts of weird stuff. Joseph Smith would be the greatest example of the last couple hundred years.”

This brings me to a very important but greatly misunderstood point in our discussion of "Sola Scriptura." I have never ever suggested we do away with the Bible in the least. For some of you I am sounding like a broken record but I take the Bible hand in hand with the Holy Spirit. God did not send Jesus in Spirit alone. He sent Him as the visible physical Word, full of Spirit and Truth. He has not left us with Spirit alone now but has blessed us with the visible printed Word. But in the life and presence of even Jesus what was He known by – His flesh or the Spirit within Him? How as He discerned? Spiritually, right? God’s way of giving us two witnesses in His Son is mirrored in Him leaving two witnesses of Him as well – the Spirit and the written Word. All I am suggesting is the doctrine of "Sola Scriptura" is a fail, in part because by virtue of its name alone (scripture alone), it excludes the Spirit. I just believe that we would all be better off if we agreed that the Spirit (of love) is primary and the printed Word is secondary. Never disregarded. Not omitted. But placed in a secondary position to the fruit and direction of the Spirit.

We then had a number of calls into our streaming television program questioning even the idea that there are unresolved issues that people war over in scripture today. This was shocking to me. Let’s say that there are four people standing in the back of a non-denominational church after service one Sunday and they have all been “in the Word” for twenty years plus. One man believes that any mode of water baptism ought to be received by every Christian. Another believes water baptism must be by immersion and must be
received by every Christian on earth. A third believes water baptism ought to be performed on children, and the fourth rejects the need for any gentile to ever be baptized in water.

When I gave this example over the air one caller insisted that if these four men “continually go back and let the Word decide for them the truth of the matter” that the Bible would and could resolve it. My response to him was twenty years of being in the Word had not brought them to unity in the faith, so we know that biblical confrontation is not going to change these men’s minds. I reiterated over the air,

“All these men love the Lord. They all teach salvation by grace through faith but they all see water baptism differently. What ought to prevail?”

Our caller repeated: “They all need to get back into the Word.” This was his "Sola Scriptura" response. I tried another approach.

“Let’s forget our characters standing at the back of a church and being individual men. Let’s say that we are in a large convention center hall. It’s a Christian religious convention. Represented there are “Ultra-dispensationalists” (who reject water baptism all together), “Immersionists” (like the Anabaptists or Baptists who not only insist upon water baptism, they insist upon a certain mode), a "Calvary Chapelist" (who will accept any form of water baptism), and an "Orthodox Presbyterian" (who administers it to infants and adults alike).

Each of these denominations have teams of scholars. They all have their own research. They all read the Bible. And they all differ. What to do?”
Believe it or not – our caller, repeated (again), “Well, we just have to turn to the Word and see what it has to say.”

We certainly need to read the Word. We certainly need to strive to understand it. But we must begin to recognize that God has not made many things abundantly clear, and I would suggest that He has made things this way because He wants us to get along in love by His Spirit. So whether we are talking about four differing views from four people standing in the back of a church or four churches represented at a religious convention, the answer is to allow all the differences, and embrace the love.

One last email - from Mike.

"Hi Shawn,

First let me say that over the last couple of years, I guess, I've appreciated your show and your insights regarding Mormonism. I've learned from you a lot of things about Mormonism that I otherwise wouldn't have known."

(Let me pause a moment and point out how often emails and communications come to us this way these days. They almost all say something to the effect of:

“We really, really liked you and agreed with you when you hated on the Mormons. You were so smart, so funny, so intelligent – goodness, God used you. But now that you are picking on MY beliefs I find you to have suddenly become quite stupid, and failing, and heretical!”

I haven’t changed folks! I’m the same guy, same attitudes, same insights, same world view. I just pointed the focus and scrutiny at our own house. Anyway . . . Mike says . . .
“I've been debating over the last several weeks whether or not to address what you've been saying about Christianity and the Bible, and after hearing last night's broadcast, I thought I'd take the plunge. I'm not even sure where to start, and you've probably heard what I'm going to tell you anyway, but I'll jump right in and see where the Lord leads. I won't address everything you said last night, but I'll respond to a few things that came to mind when I watched your show this morning.

POINT ONE

First of all, ever since you started your shows on Christianity, it seems that as often as possible you ascribe impure or otherwise evil motives to the Christians of the past. Why not give the early church the benefit of the doubt?"

1. First, I look at the Word and compare it to what the men and councils said and did, and I see corruption.

2. Second, I look at the History of the early and the ancient churches' fruit - remembering that a Good Tree Cannot Produce Bad Fruit - and I see corruption.

3. Third, I look around today at the offspring of these early Christians, and I see corruption, and

4. Fourth, I am not a fan of humanity and pretty much believe that the mass of men will work for self-interest over selflessness.

Additionally, I would turn the question on you and ask,

“Why would you give the church the benefit of the doubt in the midst of all of this evidence?”
POINT TWO

“As an example from last night, you mentioned the chapters and verses into which the New Testament was organized and compared that to a deposition, asking why the text had to be broken up and asserting that it was for purposes of argumentation (at least that's how your comment came across to me)."

• It came across wrongly to you. The result is argumentation – same with the Greeks' and with Lawyers' delineation of their written words.

• I’m sure those who broke the scripture up into chapter and verse were really trying to make it more manageable and digestible, but in the end it has done as much to obfuscate as to clarify. I would think that God had those who wrote sacred scripture write it the way we ought to read it. But this is a side issue to your point. The result was argumentation, not the intent.

POINT THREE

“You also mentioned arguments about the meanings of words (beauty was your example). Personally, I think this is a smokescreen, as I've never heard anyone accused of heresy simply because they differed with someone on the meaning of beauty in either the OT or NT.”

• I used beauty as an example of how words and their meanings are not easily agreed upon among people – that’s all. So where we might disagree over the meaning of a single word, genuine believers have a hard time disagreeing on the fruit of the Spirit.

Mike goes on,
“As an example, I remember watching your 'Inquisition 2014' with Jason Wallace (a Presbyterian) and Dale Finley (a Free Will Baptist). According to Brother Wallace, those two are friends and brothers in Christ. One practices foot washing (if Brother Finley holds to traditional FWB teachings) while the other doesn't (I've never heard of a Presbyterian church that does). So there are things on which Christians can differ that don't necessarily cause division.”

- Let me stop here again. Our viewer uses an example of two brothers who have found it within themselves to not let divergent practices separate them. I’m all for it. It’s what I am pushing for here. This was my point in my example of the word “beauty.”

He adds,

“Yes, people argue about the most ridiculous things (because we are sinners) and this is true even if one is born again. However, most legitimate scriptural disputes can be settled with literal, historical, grammatical, and contextual study of Scripture.”

- In actuality the most legitimate scriptural disputes cannot be settled with literal, historical, grammatical and contextual study of scripture. Mike is certainly allowed to think this is the case and I accept him as a brother in faith but the claim is comedic.

He continues,

POINT FOUR

“You also mentioned Greek. Greek is important for the study of the NT. The NT was written in a particular language and in a particular context. The apostles didn't need to go to
seminary to study Greek, because they already knew it. The Bible is more than just a book, but it's a book nevertheless. It amazes me the number of Christians who, if they were taking a course in French literature at a university would insist that their professor knew French, and yet a lot of churches today don't seem to care whether or not their pastors know Greek and Hebrew.”

• Okay, pause. Mike – I teach the Word twice weekly – three times if you count this show. I appeal to the original language constantly as my call from God is to teach. Again, you have missed the point I was trying to make. We have Greek scholars from here to Greece who disagree. I am not against the highest levels of scholarship Mike - from the pew to the pulpit, to Oxford and Yale, and anywhere else. But while scholarship certainly assists in rendering the Word it is not everything nor does it solve differences. Why? Because scholarship can’t solve differences - it cannot be the solution – the Spirit is. This is my point. The fruit of the Spirit is love - not intelligence, not education, not information, not words. Spirit. Try not to get lost in the quagmire that can come from discussions like this. I realize that it is messy and flies in the face of tradition, but the traditional approaches have proven (PROVEN) to create some very bad situations that are contrary to what scripture says.

POINT FIVE

“You mentioned the Lord's Supper (communion, Eucharist, whatever you want to call it) and you asked a series of rapid fire questions about whether we should have it with date/garlic sauce (not sure where that came from. That's not in
Scripture), whether we should have it in an upper room, etc. Again, context has to rule here.

- Stop. I am in agreement with you, Mike. But so what? You and I agree. And all the other points Mike will make will fall into the same category - Mike and I agree. But while we may agree, there are those who will not. Go back to the baptism discussion we opened up with - there are hundreds of denominations that do not agree! My example of the Lord’s supper was simply to illustrate a point. There are a thousand others.

- The question is who decides? Can anyone? Obviously not. So what does this tell us, Mike? We have to appeal to another authority, a higher authority, a better authority that can, will, and has solved ALL disputes dead in their tracks - the Holy Spirit and its fruit of Love.

But Mike goes on . . .

POINT SIX

“As far as 'Sola Scriptura' goes, this is not just a Calvinist doctrine but a biblical one. Jesus and the apostles quoted Scripture extensively to make their points. Jesus Himself viewed ancient Scripture as relevant to those of His own day, even telling them that God spoke to them in the ancient Scriptures (Matthew 22:31). You did acknowledge in one of your shows that Peter acknowledged that Paul’s writings were Scripture, and they are. While it’s true that in a sense when we read Paul’s letters, we’re reading other peoples' mail, he did expect his letters to be read in other churches (Colossians 4:16).

- These words (of Mike’s) were the most unsettling to me in the context of all we have
said. Again – I love scripture – I use and teach scripture – I trust in the message of scripture. But to say that "Sola Scriptura" is a biblical doctrine? "Sola Spiritus" is far more a biblical doctrine than "Sola Scriptura," brother. The Word was NEVER meant to be taken alone. That is what SOLA means, Mike - alone. And your use of Colossians 4:16 to say that “Paul expected his letters to be read in other churches” - lets actually turn to the passage and see what Paul wrote. He said,

“And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.”

• First of all, this in no way supports the notion that Paul knew his letters were going to be collected and published to the entire world. I’m blessed they were, but all this passage says is, “share this epistle with the church of the Laodiceans and read the epistle I sent them.” Additionally, Laodicea was very close geographically to Colosse and so they must have been experiencing similar troubles. “Share the letter with each other,” Paul writes. Also, where is this epistle Paul thought it significant enough to tell them to read? John Wycliffe included it in his bible – did you know this? But it was since removed. Why? Forgeries. Possible forgery. Some have said the letter is actually Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians. But bottom line - we don’t know. Just another FYI in the long and convoluted history of the New Testament narrative. But having provided it don’t get my
intent wrong. The Bible is a gift from God for us today. But we have to deal with it reasonably.

Mike ends his email with,

“I appreciate your frustration with the modern church, and yes, there are many things that need to be addressed, but . . .”

Now listen to what he accuses me of doing,

“But turning the Bible on its head, creating smokescreens, and asserting subjectivism isn't the way to do it.”

And at this point I am left without a response.
TWELVE- Three Main Factories

Let’s continue with a discussion about apostolic succession and authority. It’s a bit of a reiteration but an important one when it comes to subjective Christianity. There are three main schools of thought when it comes to authority and apostolic succession floating around out there today. I would suggest that there is a fourth that has been ignored but remains the most viable.

The first claim is that the Apostles were the ones with authority from Christ to establish His Church and oversee its establishment. From this perspective the Catholics claim a continued succession of Popes authorized to reign in Jesus' name – and they have an apparent line of individuals proving connection to the original apostles (meaning to Peter upon whom they believe Christ built His church).

The reason apostolic authority is important when we read the New Testament is because it is obvious from the narrative that these twelve men were purposely trained by Jesus, imbued with power, and established churches according to their oversight and inspiration. Reading the New Testament and taking it literally, there is little wonder why many people believe apostolic authority is necessary today.

The second line of thought was that this line of authority (and the church along with it) became corrupt as the original apostles were killed off, and that God reformed the whole mess – a movement initiated by a Catholic Priest whose name was Martin Luther and then carried forward by a number of others after him. Where the Catholics said there must be a continuation of the visible physical church and its authority (which streamed directly from the original apostles), the Protestant claim...
was the standards of faith come directly from the Bible and not from men or church.

In a sense this early reformation was truly a nascent form of *Christianarchy* as Luther had no right or authority (as religious men describe authority today) to do what he did. I personally find Luther’s bravado refreshing and in complete harmony with Mark 9 - where Jesus tells His disciples who wanted to discipline a guy who was not “with them” (but was doing things in Jesus’ name) to “leave him alone,” that “if he wasn’t against Him he was for Him.” What’s troubling about Luther’s actions is that similar actions taken by disgruntled believers today are not heralded as courageous or brave but heretical and cultic.

Luther’s acts were also a form of Christian Subjectivity because what Luther said and taught were certainly his subjective views, which were obviously in conflict with the objective faith of Roman Catholicism. Unfortunately,

Luther and the other reformers who introduced "Sola Scriptura" to the world actually introduced a corrosive by-product of the idea as well - endless divisions.

The third approach occurred through what we might call the Restorationist movements popular in the early 19th century and seen in groups like Alexander's *Church of Christ*, Ellen G. White’s *Seventh Day Adventists*, Russel’s *Jehovah’s Witnesses*, and Joseph Smith’s *Mormonism*. Each of these groups – plus dozens of other lesser knowns – use the New Testament (in part) as their standard of faith in addition to the “inspired” writings and insights from their leaders. In other words, they use the Bible and the claims that the Holy Spirit has directed them to new revelatory standards of faith. But like the
Catholics (and most Protestant faiths), these Restorationist groups have also morphed into top down authoritarian institutions which demand rigid conformity to their way of doing and believing.

Let’s liken these three approaches to Christianity today to three factories.

![Diagram of Catholic, Protestant, and Restorationist factories]

Three factories all producing “believers.”

They all do the same thing. They say:

1. We demand “conformity” to how we see things (to their respective approach).

Now remember, there have been billions of people, over the course of Christian history, who have stepped into these religious institutions seeking God, wanting God, and loving God and have accepted what these institutions have demanded of them as a means to please God.
2. All of these institutions also “claim authority” (from God) to make the demands of conformity upon their respective members. Some might say that the Protestants don’t claim authority but this is incorrect – they just claim it from the Bible – and use their interpretation of the Bible not one bit less than the Catholics use tradition.

3. They all appeal to the Bible – in one way or some form or another! Even the Restorationists use the Bible in conjunction with what their leaders have to say in addition to it but all of them appeal to the same book and claim to be in harmony with its tenets! And then

4. They all resist, refuse, and/or even mock the views and approaches of the others institutions! In Jesus name!
And what do each of these institutions produce?

Notice that all of them have taken well-meaning people into their institutions and then pushed them back out into the world with their particular brand of faith stamped on their minds and hearts. And remember all of these institutions have been filled with people - billions of them collectively and since the ascension of the Lord Jesus - who have ardently sought God or at least sought Him to some degree or another through Christ.

All of these people have, while alive, found themselves under the thumbs of these institutions in some manner or another -

5. Doctrinally
6. Ceremonially
7. Financially
8. Morally, and
9. Liturgically

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And billions upon billions have died – gone to God – believing (to some degree or another) that their factory had instructed them in the correct way, that they had the right baptism, the right view of God, the right take on the teachings of Jesus.

Step back with me – while all claim some sort of an exclusivity on the standards of faith, we have to admit that all three houses cannot be right – at least not in everything. We might even admit that none of them are right. Now before we hit on what I would suggest is the only solution – which is a non-solution really – there is an approach that inserted itself into all of this mess as a means to bring peace.

It’s called Universalism and it is propagated most publicly in an organized religion called Unitarianism. The subject is a large one and can, like the three major factories, be broken up into Christian Unitarians on one end and Universal Unitarians on the other (with all manner of nuanced alternatives in between).

I do not include, however, what is considered this “liberal division of thought” as a "factory" approach. Because of the general belief in every faction of Universalism that Jesus was not God, I personally see the movement as utterly failing, and therefore ought not be included in the discussion of the standards that govern the Christian faith. Jesus plainly said to the Pharisees that if a person dies and does not believe that He is “I AM” they would die in their sins. Without going into a whole exegetical analysis of this verse I would suggest that for Jesus to refer to Himself as "I AM" was the same as Jesus referring to Himself as God.
Some may believe me narrow minded on this but . . . too bad. If Jesus wasn’t God incarnate then He was just a man. And if just a man, the end result would be all men ought to all be able to save themselves, another fact outside the pale of Christian thought.

For this reason and many more I exclude Universal Unitarianism’s standards of faith from the mix. So, is there another option out there that speaks to the apostolic authority question, the view of scripture, the appeal to the Spirit as a standard of faith? I think so – I call it Subjective Christianity.

This being said it’s really easy to come up with some half-cooked theory or philosophy on how to see the world of Christianity. People have been doing it for centuries on end. The real question is can I substantiate and support this view using the Biblical narrative of Jesus calling and sending apostles out, and the New Testament content and what it describes? This is where Preterist eschatology comes into play and why this view is so important to a cohesive view of the Subjective approach to faith.

Not long ago I had a pastor write and say that he thought our views on Subjective Christianity were good but that I was “harming my stance” (which promoted the Subjective view) by maintaining what he viewed as “the arbitrary unprovable objective view that that Jesus returned in 70 AD.” While I admit that this view is certainly open to interpretation, and that I could be wrong about it - and that no matter what a person believes relative to eschatology, it’s not a hill to die on when it comes to our faith in Christ Jesus - the Preterist view goes a long, long, long way in solving what men and their history of organized Christianity have not been able to solve.
Before I quickly summarize the view and why it works so well in response to the three factories, let me encourage every reader to go online to our archives at www.hotm.tv and click on 2014 episodes to watch (and critique) thirteen programs titled, “When does the Bible say Jesus will return?” These programs provide all the supports to the idea that Jesus returned with judgment (as He said He would) to His apostolic church – and within a generation from when He said it.

So how does the Preterist view support Subjective Christianity and all the debates over what governs the standards of faith in the Body today? Try and see it this way -

The Catholics (and the LDS) are correct when they see the apostles as being the ones with the power and authority. But they are incorrect in thinking that power and authority was going to be passed down through a string of Popes or a restoration of other men. The Lord’s chosen were certainly chosen to reach to the House of Israel before destruction – and to reach the Gentile converts (through Paul) at that time and as prophesied.

All the epistles and letters were to the believers in that day encouraging them to be faithful, to hang on in faith, and to wait patiently for His promised arrival. These special witnesses were killed off (as Jesus told them they would be), except for John who may have remained until the end of the age – which was the age of the House of Israel which ended in 70 AD with the destruction of the Temple, the genealogies, the priests, the sacrifices – all of the physical stuff related to the Jews - gone.

If we allow ourselves the right to see all of scripture as having taken place and as having direct primary
purpose to the believers in that day and time, we will
give ourselves the ability to understand what it looks
like and means not only to be a follower of Jesus today
but how to now actually do genuine, spiritual church.
However, if we continue to go along and believe that
Jesus is still coming back for His church, and that
scripture was written to us today as a material guide to
follow physically we, as a body, will forever be filing
into one of these three (or four) factories to receive their
imprint on how to “do church,” and how “to believe,”
and how "to act."

It is my hope to get believers to begin to see that our
history of attempts to do church have been an utter fail
because they all exist on a faulty premise – that the Bible
was written for us here and now by the Apostles, that
authority remains in the hands of men to exercise upon
others as intermediaries, and that Jesus is still coming
back to gather up His church. So, what does this “other”
approach suggest? Here goes –

10. That the twelve apostles were sent by Jesus to
reach out to the House of Israel (and Gentiles
through Paul) before He returned, as promised,
in 70 AD to collect His church which “the gates
of hell did not prevail against.”

11. That the letters they wrote to the believers in
different parts of the ancient area were to
encourage and guide them during the trials they
faced.

12. That the Word of God, once it was collected as a
whole and ultimately agreed upon in terms of
content can serve as a spiritual measuring stick to test all things. However, we must concede that the contents are all Spiritually applied and not physically mandated as it’s the Spirit which governs individual believers today, and

13. That every believer is individually responsible for what they accept and deem as truth according to their susceptibility to the Spirit of God which, above all things, moves men and women to faith and love.

In the face of all of this I maintain that the Protestant view of "Sola Scriptura" has been a fail and we have provided a number of different examples as to why. How about one more before we launch directly into the New Testament and its place in the Body. Ready?
THIRTEEN- Scattered Considerations

Before we get into our topic more deeply I want to point out that when I talk about Subjective Christianity I am NOT preaching relativism or attempting to convey the virtues of postmodern thinking. Understand clearly that Truth (with a capital T) is not subjective at all – nor is it “relative.” Truth is Truth and God is the author of it. The fact of the matter is Christianity is entirely objective as it comes from the source – God. Again, God’s Truths are what they are and they do not vary nor change. Moral relativism says that truth is relative to the people, culture and situation at hand. It says “my truth is my truth and your truth is your truth.” Hear me clearly - I am NOT suggesting this at all.

However, what is highly subjective is our understanding or comprehension of God’s objective Truths as they shine down upon us. In Subjective Christianity, the claim is NOT that we all have our own version of the truth but that we really don't know much at all. Related to this Paul says,

“And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.”

He also points out that in the human experience with Christ our understanding is limited,

“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” 1st Corinthians 13:11-12

17 1st Corinthians 8:2
Scripture also supports these varied levels of understanding when it talks about believers being babes, young people, or parents in the faith. In other words, as we mature, some have the ability only to drink the milk of the Word while others quickly learn to chew and digest the meat.

Because humans are so frightened by instability, insecurity, and uncertainty they glom onto some things and never let go – like a drowning man when thrown a life preserver. Where we might reassure people that it's best to stay away from the sea during storms, that it is wisdom not to go overboard, or that once you have a lifesaving device in your arms to never let go, Jesus invites us to walk on the water during the storm and without anything but Him to guide us – and save us when we sink.

But we all approach the sea in different ways.

The point of Subjective Christianity is to suggest that believers exercise patience and love when dealing with people who have views on biblical matters that differ from what they have come to believe themselves. It is a position that suggests that when we can agree on things, we heartily agree; and when we can't, we love – no matter what the subject. Many Christians are willing to divide not only on the disputable matters but also on what Christians have come to say are “non-negotiables” in the faith. Naturally, what are deemed “non-negotiable” all depends on who is asked to define them, but I would suggest that when people are presented with "non-negotiables" unconditional love is threatened. And when love is conditional and threatened then the

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18 1st John 2:13-14
opportunity for misguided people to grow and change their minds is lost.

Let me give an example from my own ministerial experience.

For the first ten years in ministry we were focused on reaching LDS people with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Having come from forty years in the faith I understand some of the hurdles Mormon people face when exiting their church, and one of the biggies surrounds the term "Trinity" and the creedal definition of the word.

Christians around the world have embraced the term and definition, and believe the Bible supports their views. And they may be right. May. This being said, I stepped back and, in an effort to reach searching Latter-Day Saints, taught that we could set the term "Trinity," and even the man-made definition of it aside. It was NOT a hill to die upon. I justified this position in the following ways:

1. Creedal Trinitarianism uses non-biblical language written by men to describe the ontology of God. In ministry to the LDS, using biblical terms is important.

2. God Himself never describes or defines Himself in scripture by the term "Trinity" or by the creedal definition of it.

3. As a means to get searching LDS people to let go of the man-made descriptions they have been fed on the make-up of God, it was only fair that we Christians do the same.
4. I believed that I was safe (and theologically sound) by explaining God only in terms that the Bible describes Him and without any further conjecture.

In the face of these things (and more), I decided to come out and explain to our viewing audience that I had some issues with the term "Trinity" and its creedal definition. I’m not sure I can properly explain the repercussions my person and the ministry experienced in the face of this announcement. The attitude was “shoot first, ask questions later,” with all the venom being spewed from Christian people, some of whom once considered me a friend. The online forums, the Facebook posts, the emails, and the accusations were relentless and accusatory – to the point that we were even threatened physically.

In this situation a core non-negotiable was threatened and the believers reacted accordingly. Suppose another approach to the whole matter was assumed by the believers. The reaction they presented conveyed urgently and almost violently that my views on the term and concept of "Trinity" were placing all of Christianity in jeopardy – that I was going to hell and could not be considered a brother in the Lord. Have I not been saved by grace through faith on Jesus? When did the term "Trinity" become part of the Good News and its potency to redeem? What if my brothers and sisters patiently and kindly permitted me to set this man-made definition aside? Would Jesus have been insulted? Would the Gospel be in jeopardy? I mean, is the "Trinity" necessary to embrace for a person to be right with God? Think about it.

The whole of Objective Truth can be summarized in one Greek word – "agape." Going back to Paul’s words
about knowing and knowledge, let’s bring in a little more context. He said,

“Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of him.”

In my estimation – which again, may be debated – but in my estimation Christianity is summed up as faith (in Him) and love (for Him, through Him, by Him and for others).

A second unrelated principle has to do with end times. In the previous chapter I mentioned the Preterist view. The third but unrelated principle to quickly cover is the dating of the NT Books.

A fourth unrelated principle has to do with biblical emphasis. One way (and I realize it’s not the most scientific approach), but one way we can determine what is of greatest importance in the Bible is to take words and count them as a means to illustrate focus of a book. In other words if we took War and Peace and did a word count and discovered that death or dead is mentioned most (and Jesus least) we could reasonably say from this comparison that the overall focus of the book was death, right?

So what happens if we take the top most used words in the Bible and place them on a balancing scale, what would we find?

19 To understand the Preterist view through the Bible go to www.hotm.tv and download, “It’s Not the End of the World” at no charge.
The number one word is GOD, LORD, JESUS – by a landslide – 2600 plus times.

Next in line (in terms of use) – FAITH – 501 times.

Next is SPIRIT – 385 times.

The next is LOVE – 230 times. After this there is Father, Sin, and Heaven – all above 200 . . . and then we drop into words used under 200 times – which are also very significant but just not used as much.

So we have God (including Jesus), Faith, Spirit, Love.

I think this says a lot.

Finally, a fifth unconnected but important principle to discuss. It has to do with perspective on how to see the Bible, its contents, and what we are really dealing with.

Let’s call this illustration “A Man on a Hill.” Use your imagination and go with me now.

A man has been walking for days and he arrives at a very steep hill. He is carrying an Old Testament. The year is December 70 AD. He opens the Old Testament and reads

_Ecclesiastes 1:4_ “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.”

And he begins to climb up the hill.

He has heard that the prophecies of the Old Testament in his hands have been fulfilled. That the promised Messiah was born some 74 years earlier. As he climbs he thinks about all he has heard and believed about Jesus – His birth, and His life aimed at reaching the
House of Israel. And that this Messiah came to them as a people as had been promised. Yes, in coming for them He saved the whole world, but He came first for and to the House of Israel.

As he climbs he remembers how he learned that this Messiah taught and called twelve apostles, and how He promised them that He is coming back – to the House of Israel. And, as he climbed toward the top, the man recalls that these apostles asked the Messiah to teach them of His return and how He said,

Matthew 24:34 “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.”

The climbing man also heard that the Messiah was killed but rose from the dead on the third day. That He then ascended into heaven. And that an angel told the apostles that He would be coming back in the same way. He heard that these very same apostles took His message out and shared it with as many as would hear – in the House of Israel. That He had come for them, that they killed Him, and that He was coming back - with judgment. But most importantly that they could be saved from the wrath to come if they would but receive Him.

The man, just about to the top of this hill, remembers reading letters from these apostles where they warn, and warn, and warn of His coming.

Paul said in Romans 13:11 -

“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.”
Then he wrote in *Philippians 4:5* -

"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."

James said in *James 5:8* -

“Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.”

The writer of Hebrews said, *Hebrews 10:37* -

“For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”

And Peter said, *1st Peter 4:7* -

“But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.”

The climbing man had heard that the apostles were right – that He did come back, and just before reaching the top of the hill the man recalls the *Revelation* John received on behalf of the Seven Churches in Asia minor. He remembers the opening words to THOSE seven churches:

Where in *Chapter 1* verse 3 the writer says, “*the time is at hand.*”

And in *chapter 1* verse 7 it says, “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.”

And how the book ends with five reiterations of His eminent return.

*Revelation 22:6* says, speaking to the contents of the revelation,
“the things which must shortly be done.”

Then verse 7,

"Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book."

Then verse 10,

"And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand."

And at verse 12 he reiterates.

"And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

And then in the second to last verse of the book (the last book of the Bible) we read,

Revelation 22:20 "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen."

And then how John adds in the very last verse:

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

And the man crests the top of this high hill, and overlooking Jerusalem what does he see?

Over one million corpses. Jews. The House of Israel. He sees the magnificent temple utterly leveled – all the genealogies burned up and lost forever. He sees the City of David destroyed. Weeping echoes through the valley and he realizes the Book in his hands is done. Complete. The promises to the House of Israel, over. Their city has been wiped out. The genealogies irreplaceably destroyed – they don’t even know who they are in terms of tribal lineage!
Now he understands that there is no difference between a Jew and a Gentile, between males and females, who believe in Christ. That generation of God and the Nation of Israel has passed. And then he recalls the second half of that verse from Ecclesiastes, which says, “but the earth will last forever.”

And he turns from Jerusalem and looks to the west. Above him is Antioch. Out from Him is Ephesus, Corinth. Over one thousand six hundred miles away is Rome. He ponders on the future of what the man Jesus did on the cross. The message has gone out to many in those areas. He knows the Holy Spirit will continue to draw all seekers to Christ. But he also knows much will be “Man”ipulated.

He wonders about apostolic authority?

“It’s gone,” he thinks – unless John is still out there - “but once John is dead there’s no more of that,” he reflects.

"Oh but what about men the apostles chose?" Yes, there are some of them out there too . . .

There’s Clement of Rome . . .

There’s Ignatius of Antioch . . .

There’s Polycarp of Smyrna.

But they will all be replaced and ultimately overtaken by men far less their caliber.

Okay, he thinks, what about the writings of the Apostles. Those are good, those are trustworthy. But . . . he realizes that they are all over the place, that they are not really agreed upon, and amidst them there are so many
forgeries and counterfeits it will be another 200 years before a defining collection is made!

But wait! He cries in his heart, we have the Didache. (But that’s not completely sound).

The Shepherd of Hermes. Later Ireanius will be considered canon, and included later in the codex Sinaiticus. It will really be important - with its 5 visions, 12 mandates, and ten parables, right?

The man sighs. And as he walks down the hill, with Jerusalem to his back, he realizes very well that his faith, and that of his family - his children and grandchildren - is not in the hands of men. It’s in the hands of God. By faith he and his will walk. They will yearn to hear the Word and by the Spirit they will receive and grow. He knows that just as the Nation of Israel was commanded to believe the Messiah would come, and those alive during His life would have to believe that He was there, it would be necessary for the man and his to trust that He not only came, but that He finished it all.

That the earth will abide forever, that His Kingdom was not of this world, and that the seekers of truth would always hear His voice . . . and follow Him.

In faith and in love.
FOURTEEN- Dating Revelation (but not marrying her)

Whether you realize this or not we have been moving toward showing that the Bible is a literal history of God’s dealing with material ancient Israel, but today it serves as a spiritual guide for those who believe on His Son. Key to accepting this teaching is when the books of the Bible were composed – especially the book of Revelation. The thinking goes something like this -

If the books of the Bible were truly and primarily written to the believers of that day then all of them (included in the New Testament) had to have been written BEFORE the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Why? Because if they were written after the 70 AD destruction then they were obviously written to believers who were around AFTER God poured judgment upon the Nation of Israel and therefore the Bible is materially applicable to believers post 70 AD.

I would suggest that the Bible was not primarily written to anyone but the believers of that day and age, and that since that age has been wiped out the contents of the Book do not apply to us materially but as spiritual directives to learn and live by today.

While not a hill to die on – after all, what we believe relative to this does NOT alter the fact that we are still here justified by faith – but if the Preterist view is correct it will go a long way in helping Christians today approach the faith spiritually and in a new and living way, rather than through what has been attempted in the past.

One of the arguments against the Preterist view (that all things in the Bible have been accomplished) is the claim
that the book of Revelation was composed well after the destruction of Jerusalem, proving that the Apostles were writing instructions to the church AFTER Jerusalem was destroyed. If this was the case, then Preterism is a fail and so is the spiritual, subjective approach to the faith as we are still part of a material, objective church. So let’s take this chapter and look at that dating of Revelation.

Now, a couple of things. Admittedly, the dating of all the New Testament books is a debatable issue. And it is doubtful we will ever agree on the subject completely. Because of this I would suggest the dating debates have little to do with my views – and I would instead suggest that

1. the content of the New Testament books (what is said in them),
2. the context (to whom and where the things were said),
3. and the secular history surrounding what was said,

are far more imposing on my stance than the debatable “datings” of the books themselves. That being said, however, the dating of the single book of Revelation is very important to the Preterist view – and here’s why. A Preterist believes that the events of Revelation HAVE already occurred and a futurist believes that the events described in Revelation are still headed our way. If Revelation was written before 70 AD this fact will go a long way to support the Preterist position because we could at least say that the destruction of Jerusalem occurred AFTER it was written, therefore supporting the idea that the book and its contents were complete. If Revelation was written even one day after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD then it obviously had nothing to
do with Jerusalem’s destruction and therefore has application to a day in the future – as the futurists claim.

In other words (and to reiterate),

If Revelation was written pre-70 AD we can easily assign its content and the fulfillment of its content to God's judgment on Israel. If we date it late, we have ample evidence that things are not finished and we had better maintain a pure physical church for Jesus to come back and get.

Presently we have a later dating of Revelation (after 70 AD which was when Jerusalem was destroyed) and an earlier dating (pre-70 AD). As mentioned last week, those who hold to the late dating of Revelation typically assign its authorship to be around 95-96 AD.

This was a year when a man called Domitian Caesar reigned. This dating was determined by the following statement made by Irenaeus (AD 130 to AD 202), as quoted by Eusebius, the church historian, in AD 325. Now note two things about this quote – it came from two men – one (Eusebius) in 325 AD quoting another (Irenaeus) who lived one hundred and twenty three years earlier (and was speaking of an event that supposedly took place nearly two generations before that)!

Here is Eusibius’ quote taken apparently from Irenaeus:

"We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign."

To add fuel to the disputable nature of this quote we ALSO have to note that Irenaeus did not witness what
he actually wrote about. He was referring to Polycarp (who, according to tradition, knew the Apostle John). Additionally, we are not sure if the "it" Polycarp was referring to was John, the visions he saw, the name of Anti-Christ, or the book itself. Also we do not know if he meant that the book was written at that time or not. This single statement, which comes to us by three separate people separated by three centuries, is at best hearsay and is certainly obfuscated by time and tone. But it is this statement alone, amidst all of this uncertainty, that serves as the evidence to support the "late date" theory of the dating of the book of Revelation.

I prefer to let the Bible tell me when the book was written. So, let’s turn to the contents of the book itself and see if we can discover internal evidence for the dating of it. Some points are stronger than others.

POINT #1 John must prophesy again.

In Revelation 10:11 we read that John "must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings."

If Revelation was written in AD 95-96, John would have been over ninety years old. In that day and age ninety was ancient and traveling was brutal. Not that God couldn’t have supported him in such labors but it typically would have been very difficult for him to travel to the various "nations and...many kings" to preach. However, with Revelation written earlier, John would have been in his mid-60's and at that age, his traveling would have been more reasonable.

POINT #2 The Seven Churches in Asia

Chapter one verse four proves that John wrote Revelation to a specific group of churches in Asia. The importance of this statement cannot be overlooked (even though it has been by many scholars). There is only one small
window of time in which there were only seven churches in Asia. The early AD 60's. The apostle Paul established nine churches in that area, but only seven were addressed in Revelation. The reason for this is that the cities of Colosse, Hierapolis, and Laodicea were all destroyed by an earthquake around AD 61. Laodicea was rebuilt soon afterwards, but the other two cities were not. This left seven churches in Asia during the five years just prior to the beginning of the Roman/Jewish war.

Of particular importance is the message to the church of Philadelphia found in Revelation 3:7-13. In verses 10 and 11, Christ told John to inform them that an "hour of temptation" was "about to come upon all the world," (i.e., the Roman Empire "GE," not the "KOSMOS"). Christ then told them that He was “coming quickly” and that they should “hold fast.” The reason this is important (besides the fact that this was directed to an actual church in the first century) is that the first persecution of Christians took place under Nero Caesar in AD 64. Another reason Revelation could not have been written after 70 AD.

POINT #3 The Temple was still standing

As mentioned last week one of the most compelling proofs that Revelation was written before Jerusalem was destroyed is the fact that the Jewish temple was still standing!

Revelation 11:1-2 says,

"And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.”
How do we know that this was the temple of the first century and not some future one? First, there is not one verse in the entire Bible that speaks of a "rebuilt" Jewish Temple. Not one. That alone should be proof enough. Nevertheless this passage is very similar to Luke 21:20-24.

'And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. or these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.'

Notice that Jesus told the disciples that they would see this event. They had asked Him about their temple (Luke 21:5), and Jesus told them it would be destroyed before their generation passed away (Luke 21:32).

Notice again what Jesus said in verse 24 of Luke, that "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles." This is the same thing Christ told John in Revelation 11:2!

Therefore, since the disciples' generation has long since passed away, Revelation must have been written before the nations trampled Jerusalem under foot in AD 70.

POINT #4 The Tribes of the Earth

Most writers consider the theme of the book to be Revelation 1:7. It reads,

Revelation 1:7  "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all
kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen."

This verse is very similar in context to Matthew 24:30,

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes (same Greek word as Revelation 1:7) of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

Standing alone this is not conclusive by any means but from it we can see that just based on the language a case can be made; since Matthew 24:30 is a verse that speaks of “the fall of Jerusalem” and the Revelation verse is very similar, we can suggest that they are speaking of the same thing – and therefore had to be written prior to the date of its fall.

Also notice the language of Revelation 1:7- it refers to those who "pierced him."

Although we know that the Romans crucified him and pierced him, the apostles accused the Jews of the act in Acts 2:23 and 36. In fact Peter says that "they" crucified Jesus.

Acts 3:15; 4:10; and 5:30 say the same thing.


Paul, in 1st Corinthians 2:8, speaks of the “Jews killing the Lord.” Again, in I Thessalonians 2:14-15, Paul speaks of the Jews that killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets.

From this we might suggest that the Book concerns itself with the Jews, who were utterly dispersed or killed in 70 AD.

When Revelation 1:7 refers to all the "kindreds of the earth" ("kindreds" is from the Greek word "phule," which means "tribe"). This is a direct allusion to the Jewish
tribal system. Now, we must identify, from Scripture, who those "tribes" were. To do that, we must keep in mind this simple rule of interpreting the Bible: let Scripture interpret Scripture.

This we can easily do by looking at Zechariah 12:10-14. There we read,

"And I will pour upon the...inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son...In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem...And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; All the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart."

Obviously, this is the foundation for John's statement in Revelation 1:7,

"every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth (or land) shall wail because of him."

Zechariah was saying that the "tribes of the land" would mourn for "Him whom they had pierced." Who were those tribes? "The inhabitants of Jerusalem" – not the world at some future date. From these things (and more) we can see that one of the main purposes of the Revelation to the seven churches was to reveal Jesus to the Nation of Israel. The place of this final revealing would be Jerusalem and it would be to those who pierced Him.

This is not a general reference to the Jewish nation, who today are not one bit different in the eyes of God than every Gentile, but was a reference to Christ's
contemporary generation - a generation that was destroyed in AD 70 by the Roman Legions.

POINT #5 The Woman

The next thing that we need to look at is "the woman" found in Revelation chapters 17 and 18. John wrote that he saw a "woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (17:6). The "woman" had this name written on her forehead: "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (17:5).

The angel said that "the woman" was a poetic symbol of "that great city" (17:18); in whom "was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth." (18:24).

Then John wrote, "Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her… Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all." (18:20-21).

So who was this "woman?" This "great city?" John gives us a clue in Revelation 11:8, where he wrote,

"And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified."

This shows us, as we saw above, that John was referring to the Jerusalem of his day. To prove this assertion we need to look at the term "Sodom" that John used to describe it. This was a "figurative" name describing her spiritual condition rather than an actual location. Letting the Bible interpret itself, we find this is a reference to Jerusalem.
In Isaiah, chapter 1, after declaring that he had a "vision... concerning Judah and Jerusalem" (verse 1), Isaiah wrote, "Hear the words of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom."

In Jeremiah 23:14, because of the adulterous prophets, God said that Jerusalem and her inhabitants were "all of them unto me as Sodom."

Then what about the reference to "Egypt?" Nowhere in the Bible is Jerusalem called "Egypt." However, the first century generation of Jews were also in an exodus. While Old Testament Israel's exodus was from the bondage of Egypt, the New Testament Israel's exodus was from the bondage of the Old Covenant Law - housed at Jerusalem. In this I think we have a fairly clear reference to Jerusalem, that "Sodom," that "Egypt" being referred to in Revelation.

POINT #6 The Sixth King

So far we have seen that Revelation deals with the revealing of Jesus to first century Israel. As we've also seen, "the woman" John saw was first century Jerusalem. Of all the points made in this chapter this is the one people seem to understand best and accept. In Revelation 17:10 we read,

“And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.”

The "kings" spoken of were the rulers of the known world of John's day (the Roman Empire), since the Jews had "no king but Caesar." These "kings" were not ruling at the same time, for as the text says "five fell," meaning that five of those kings had come and gone. Then "one is," referring to the "king" who was ruling at the time Revelation was written. This is where we have one of the clearest proofs for the dating of this book. If we simply
examine the list of Roman Emperors, we will be able to
determine who the sixth king was, and the time
*Revelation* was written.

These are the Roman Emperors (in order):

1. Julius Caesar;
2. Augustus;
3. Tiberius;
4. Gaius (Caligula);
5. Claudius;

and the sixth emperor, the one who "NOW IS"
was...

that’s right, Nero.

And when did Nero reign?

From 54AD to June of 68AD. AGAIN,

*Revelation 17:10* says,

“And there are seven kings: five are fallen (we named them),
and one is (Nero), and the other is not yet come; and when he
cometh, he must continue a short space.”

That would be a man named Galba who would reign
only six months after the horrid Nero; Nero, the man
who did terrible things to Christians, had Peter and Paul
put to death, and whom God used to destroy the Jews in
Jerusalem. It was Nero who was in power and gave the
command to Vespasian to destroy Jerusalem.

Historically, Nero is the one that persecuted Christians
beyond all comparison. John’s banishment to Patmos
was itself a result of the great persecution of Nero. This
was the "sixth king" mentioned in *Revelation*, proving
beyond any doubt that *Revelation* was written before the
Roman/Jewish war.
POINT # 7 The Song of Moses

To anyone familiar with the Law of Moses and Jewish tradition, Revelation 15:2,3 will have meaning. It says that those martyrs "who had come off victorious from the Beast" were singing "the Song of Moses." The first thing we have to ask ourselves is if these martyrs spoken of here are to be Christians living today, why are they singing "the Song of Moses?" How does the song go? Where are the words found? Well "the Song of Moses" is found in Deuteronomy 32:1-43. The Jews were to sing this song to remind themselves of what would befall them "in the latter days" (Deuteronomy 31:29).

The song specifically talks about "their end" - the end of the Jews (Deuteronomy 31:20), and details their destruction by a consuming "fire" (verse 22), "famine" (verse 24), "plague" (verse 24) and "bitter destruction" (verse 24). In it God calls them a "perverse generation" (verses 5 and 20), and says He will "render vengeance" upon them and "vindicate His people" (verse 41 and 36 respectively).

Why would Christian martyrs of the 21st century be singing this song? They wouldn’t.

POINT #8 The Element and References to Time

As we pointed out, this is a Revelation of Jesus Christ who tells John that the fulfillment of the prophecies of this book was “soon.” Right off the bat in Revelation 1:1 and 3, John informed his readers, the seven churches of Asia (verse 4), that the contents of this volume "must shortly come to pass." The content of this book. Again – take note! John did not write that some of the events, or even most of the events must “shortly” take place. He wrote that all of the events contained in Revelation "must
shortly come to pass." Why? Why must those things "shortly come to pass?"

Because "the time (was) at hand."

At hand for whom?

The seven churches of Asia, specifically, and to the church of the first century in general.

The time for what was at hand?

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ."

Then, as mentioned last week, in Revelation 22:6, John wrote that the Lord sent an angel to John "to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done."

Here, at the end of the book of Revelation, John recorded the exact same message that he did in chapter 1. Have you ever noticed this? Again, this emphasizes that all of the events contained in Revelation were about to take place in the first century — not stretched throughout time, and certainly not for any future generation.

In Revelation 22:10, the angel of the Lord said to John,

"Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand."

Another proof that the events of Revelation were about to take place in the first century. However, another element was added to this warning. Do you recognize it? The angel told John not to seal the Scroll. Why is this important?

To get our answer we have to let scripture explain, so let's look at the book of Daniel. After Daniel had received visions concerning his people (the Nation of Israel), he was told, "thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (12:1). Daniel is then told how they would be rescued — by resurrection - and
some would be rewarded with "everlasting life" and others with "everlasting contempt" (verse 2). But then, Daniel is told something very peculiar. In Daniel 12:4, Daniel was told, "shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end." We have to refuse the temptation to believe that when Daniel says "the time of the end" it is the same as "the end of time." There is a huge difference between "the end of time" and "the time of the end."

So the time of the end of what and for whom? Verse 1 told us that Daniel's visions were concerning the Nation of Israel, not mankind in general. Next, Daniel saw two angels talking about the fulfillment of all that he had seen (verse 6).

One asked the other, "How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?" The answer was, "when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished." (Daniel 12:7).

But Daniel could not understand what they meant, so he asked again, "When?"

This is what the angel said in reply:

"Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end."

Did you know that there is only one other place in the Bible where "a sealed book" is referred to? Revelation, chapter 5 which says,

Revelation 5:1 "And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals."

The reason this has direct bearing on Revelation 21-22 is that Daniel was told to "seal his book" concerning the end "for it pertains to many days in the future" (Daniel 8:26),
but John was told not to seal his book "because the time is at hand" (Revelation 22:10).

The end of Old Covenant Israel was at hand. The end of that world or age. All things written had to be fulfilled by the time Jerusalem – that age, that world, fell. Then, speaking of timing, in Revelation 21:12 Jesus says to John:

"And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

Notice that Jesus did not say that "when I come, I will come quickly," He emphatically said that He was coming "quickly." But He also said something else. He said “that His reward was with Him to give every man according to his works.”

Now some state that this has not happened yet. However, we AGAIN must let Scripture interpret Scripture and so we turn to Matthew 16:27-28, Mark 8:38-9:1 and Luke 9:26-27. Did you know that Jesus said the exact same thing in these three verses that He did in Revelation 21. Again, in Revelation 21, He said He was coming and "he shall reward every man according to his works." But, Jesus also said in these three verses,

"There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."

Notice that Jesus tied His coming to the lives of His disciples. And that He said that some of his listeners would not die until He came. So to whom was He coming? Those alive within that generation. And what will be their reward?

Daniel told us the "rewards" would be that some would be resurrected to "everlasting life" and others to "everlasting contempt."
POINT #9 No mention of the Destruction of Jerusalem to the Seven Churches

We mentioned this earlier, but to believe that Revelation was written after the destruction of Jerusalem – a destruction spoken of anciently all the way back to Deuteronomy and was so utterly devastating to the House of Israel - yet Jesus never refers to it in this book is not empirical evidence but it is really, really odd. I suggest that had the Book of Revelation been written after 70 AD there would be mention of the temple destruction somewhere within its pages.

POINT #10 Conclusion

If a person doesn't believe the first three verses of Revelation (i.e., the near expectation of the events), neither will he believe the rest of the book. For if a person is unwilling to accept the time constraints of the text, the rest of the document can mean anything that the reader desires.

If the Apostle John was banished to Patmos under the reign of Nero, as the internal evidence indicates, he wrote the book of Revelation about AD 68 or 69, which was after the death of that emperor.

If all the books of the New Testament were written after 70 AD why do they speak as if Jerusalem is still standing – temple and vibrant community intact?

It is of interest that in the Syrian version of the book of Revelation, first published in 1627 (and, afterwards in the London Polyglot), we find the following inscription:

"The Revelation which God made to John the evangelist, in the Island of Patmos, to which he was banished by Nero Caesar."

This places John’s hand to paper well before 69AD.
Drop the tradition. We claim to love the Bible and to use it and rely on it, “Sola Scriptura,” how about we start letting it speak for itself by the Spirit instead of by the traditions and fears and myths of Man?
In the last chapter we used the Bible itself to show the dating of Revelation. We did this to establish the fact that the contents of the Bible – the communications written to people at that time and the material applications of them – have been fulfilled. This does not mean in the least that the Bible is lacking purpose and meaning today. Not at all. But how are we to view the Bible if all the prophecies and contents were complete by 70 AD?

Most respectable Christian churches today take the New Testament and approach it in a horribly off-putting and impossible manner, saying things like,

“This is the New Testament. It is the Word of God and for a person to be right with God they have to comply with all that this New Testament says – individually and as a church.”

The intimation is that in order for a person to be saved they have to know, embrace, and apply all the contents of the New Testament, and the New Testament winds up becoming synonymous with the Good News. This is a tremendous mistake and leads to all sorts of problems.

First of all, if this approach was correct there is an implication that the New Testament can be agreed upon. This is not true – even down to something as seemingly simple as water baptism. Then there is the fallacy that “all the contents” of the New Testament can be lived and played out perfectly.

First understood perfectly then lived perfectly? Not gonna happen. And if we really think about these positions the whole world is going to hell and the Good News is not so great because nobody understands or lives the entirety of the New Testament perfectly. At this
point many Christians would suggest, “the point is to try to understand and live the New Testament.” If this is true then why not just try and live the Law and let God make up the difference between our attempts and failures. Some believe this is actually what the Gospel of Grace means. Not so. Fortunately for us, conformity to every point of the entire New Testament narrative is NOT required for salvation. Nor is understanding the theological concepts described therein. So what is?

Faith.

In what? Jesus - whose life and Gospel is summarized in the New Testament narrative. What is this Gospel? Generally speaking, it’s the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our Easter celebrations are really celebrations of the Good News. If we want to get more specific and take the full New Testament definition of the Good News into account I might suggest that the Good News could be defined as,

“God so loved the World that He gave us His Only begotten Son that whoso believes in HIM – in His Sonship, in Him being “the I AM,” in His death, resurrection, and His ascension to Glory – will not die in their sins and will therefore be saved from afterlife misery.”

(beat)

That’s Good News. Forty-five or so words. If that’s too heavy for you, try thirteen words:

“Our faith in Him saves us from sin and grants believers life eternal.”

1. Our faith
2. In Him
3. Saves us
4. From sin
5. And Grants
6. Believers
7. Life eternal

It is a message that the believers in the apostolic age preached to non-believers. They didn’t write it to them. They spoke it to them. And what was spoken and taught (and what happened in their journeys) was recorded in the New Testament.

Receiving the message by faith made (and makes) non-believers believers.

I’m not going to prove this tonight, and there are seven or eight passages that seem to suggest otherwise (although they can be argued through the Greek), but the Gospel is never preached to believers in the New Testament. It is preached to unbelievers. Believers were instructed by and through the epistles of the Apostles later gathered and compiled into the Bible.

Believers are taught by teachers of the Word.

Unbelievers are evangelized by preachers of the Word.

In the King James Version of the New Testament there are 788,280 English words. The Gospel – the Good News – can be reduced down to around 40 of them – give or take. That leaves 788,240 words that serve another purpose.

Looking at this in an even more dramatic fashion, there are 138,020 Greek words that make up the New Testament. These have been amplified to 788,280
English words. That’s a lot of filler between the two translations isn’t it?

My point is what is essential to salvation is faith (from the heart) applied to the construction of only forty-five New Testament words.

“God so loved the World that He gave His Only begotten Son that whoso believe in HIM – in His Sonship, in Him being the "I AM," in His death, his resurrection, His ascension to Glory – would not die in their sins but would have life eternal.”

Isn’t that simple?

We note that the Good News includes nothing about "Trinity," nothing about hell being eternal, nothing about the Second coming, nothing about Arminianism, nothing about Calvinism, nothing about Ipsiimus Verba, nothing about water baptism, nothing about attending church, nothing about paying tithes, nothing about supporting the church picnic. The Good News, which is believed unto salvation, is all focused on Jesus Christ and His life’s work.

Paul said in 2nd Corinthians 11:3,

“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”

In chapter two of Colossians Paul writes a number of things “lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.” And he adds,

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” (Colossians 2:8)

In verse 16 of the same chapter Paul adds:
“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things about to come; but the body is of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.”

Finally the writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 13:8-9 says,

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.”

In the reception of the Good News there is absolute and total unity – a unity intended by God for all men in the name of His Son. It is a unity that binds us by His Spirit in the knowledge of Christ. This is possible because the Good News has been so simplified. There is little room to debate. Oh, we try – we want to make borders and make sure everyone sees everything as we see it – but the Good News is really amazing in that people really receive it by faith or they don’t. If we don’t, we have not been adopted into the Body of Christ. If we do, we have. In this manner God has used the simplicity of these forty words to show that He can take a million people of a thousand languages and dialects, from a million lifestyles and interests and tastes and cultures, and make them one – in Him.

That’s radical isn’t it?

The closest thing we have to it is music as a unifying power - a magnificent song can temporarily unite millions of people in a similar but short-lived way. But unity in Christ is far more influential, lasting, and
invasive than a song, because He is everlasting, His effects don’t fade, His love does not dim, and faith on Him only grows as it is fed. It is to the feeding that the rest of the New Testament words have application.

The main forty are preached to save.

The remaining 788,000 plus are taught to believers to renew them in their minds.

Paul puts it this way,

2nd Timothy 3:16-17 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

We note that a man of God is not a man of God until he has been regenerated by the Spirit and made such. The Gospel is received by faith, and salvation is granted to unbelievers. The rest of the New Testament is given “by inspiration and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and in instruction in righteousness that he (the man of God) may be complete, thoroughly furnished unto all GOOD WORKS.”

The forty-five or so word Gospel represents only the first distinct part of the New Testament narrative. It is like a life raft that is tossed out to the unsaved who are drowning in the stormy seas of life. The Gospel is the gate wherein we enter the Kingdom of God – by faith on Christ Jesus. The other 787,000 words are debatable, non-essential instructions (relative to salvation) for those who have already been received into the Kingdom. You heard me right – they are all non-essential to salvation.

Look at it this way -
Suppose a man falls down in front of you with a heart attack and there is a card available with forty or so words that tell you how to administer CPR. You scream for someone to hand it to you but they instead hand you a fifteen volume set of medical journals. All you need, at that time, is the simple instructions that will save this dying man’s life.

The card is the Good News in a spiritual sense. Nothing more. You bring people to life by the application of it, and it alone. Let’s say you finally get the card with these simple words and you administer CPR and the man lives. He is now part of an elite group of people who have been saved by CPR and nothing more. Suppose that Disneyland has a special day reserved for anyone whose life has been saved by CPR – they get into the "Magic Kingdom" on that day for free. Nobody else – only those whose life has been saved by CPR. So the "Magic Kingdom" is filled with people who all share the exact same reason as to why they were let into the park for free that day – they had CPR administered to them, their body responded to it, and they were given a second lease on life.

While inside the "Magic Kingdom" the people in this unique group may differ on what they should be eating now that they have been revived by CPR. They can debate on what “CPR-saved” people should wear, or how they should live, but the commonality is that they were all saved by CPR which allowed them into the "Magic Kingdom" in the first place.

Everything else – everything - is ancillary, often debatable, and has no bearing at all on the fact that they are IN the park as people saved by CPR.

Got it?
This is the simplicity, the beauty, the primary message in the New Testament – nothing else. It is reception of this message that saves people and gives them entrance into the Kingdom here (and hereafter).

Denominations may add water baptism but water baptism is not part of the forty-five word Good News. They might add the need to accept creeds, the "Trinity," they might demand a signed laundry list of other demands once a person has been saved, but the Gospel is the GOOD NEWS.

Listen -

It was this Gospel that was preached by Peter at Pentecost. None of the Pauline epistles or Jude or John or Peter’s Epistles or Hebrews even existed at this point – and three thousand souls were what ????. That’s right, they were saved. There was NO New Testament around for them to understand and live. Just receiving and believing the Good News. I am making this point to try and help establish the New Testament order of information.

FIRST, the New Testament gives us -

*Salvation through the preaching of the Good News to non-believers, and*

SECOND, the New Testament give us -

*Teaching on “the disputable matters” to those who have been saved.*

Did you know that nowhere in the New Testament do we read that the Gospel is taught? How do you teach news? You shout it. You preach it. You speak it and you lay out the simple instructions on how to resuscitate a
dying man back to life. You don’t sit down and lay out every required belief and practice – that’s called religion.

And then once the Good News has been received, and a person has been given life through Christ by the Holy Spirit through grace, THEN and ONLY then do the remaining words have purpose – and that purpose is to help the saved grow. Again, never in the New Testament do we find the Good News taught in a gathering of believers. What we do find is teachers and instructors (in the non-essentials) guiding believers. Never are there teachers of the Good News or preachers of the non-essentials.

If we call someone “a preacher” we refer to an Evangelist who shares the Good news with others OUTSIDE the body of believers. And if we call someone a “teacher or shepherd” we are referring to someone who is teaching from the rest of the manual to those who have been saved.

But take note of the ratio - the amount of Biblical information God has NOT made requisite to salvation compared to what He has.

Why?

I think the reason is ingenious.

We are all capable, able, and equipped – depending on genetics, education, experience, spiritual inclination, study, maturity and growth – to learn and grow in faith and love. Some are slow in growth, some very fast. So God saves all of us through the same gorgeous indisputable essentials of Christ – the Good News. But as a means to reveal Himself in deeper and richer ways, the rest of the New Testament narrative is revealed to all who are saved in different strengths and in a variety of
depths – like the parables of the Lord. It is here where we discover the Subjectivity of the faith. It is here, again, that we are forced – if we are His – to love our brothers and sisters who all belong to the CPR club but think differently than we do about how to live, now that we have been revived.

I am personally petitioning all believers of every ilk to fully embrace all as brothers and sisters in the Lord who by faith have received the Good News – and to let love abide amidst all the rest.

All the rest.
SIXTEEN- What is the Good News?

So again, what is the Good News, really? And who is it for?

A man walks into a room full of people. He steps to a microphone and says,

“I have some good news.”

Most, if not all, of the people will look up to him with interest to hear what this good news is all about. They will want to know how this news will apply to them – how it will affect them . . . make their lives better. The scripture talks about the “good news.” Is it for everyone in the room or only for a few? If only for some of the people in the room is the News really, truly good?

Imagine a family sitting at the dinner table. The Beazley’s. Dad and Mom and their three kids – Katie, Kari and Henry. They really love each other, they sacrifice for each other, vacation together, sing songs as a family as they travel along the highways and byways of life. This is a family that really trusts their Dad’s views and opinions. And Mom – Mom is not only the lifeblood of the home, she truly sacrifices her all for their common good.

So there at the dinner table Dad makes an announcement. He says,

“God has given our family some really Good News, you guys.”

“What is it Dad?” Henry asks happily, eyes full of trust and wonder.

“Well, son, Katie and Kari and I have been saved by Jesus Christ. Isn’t that wonderful! Isn’t that great news?”
Henry looks at his mom. “What about us, Dad?”

Dad replies. “I’m sorry son. But there’s no Good News for you . . . or Mom.”

Again, can the Good News really be good if it wasn’t for all members of the Beazley family? We understand how Dad and Katie and Kari might think it was Good News in the end, but would Mom and Henry? Of course Mom and Henry could be happy for Dad and Katie and Kari, but could Dad and Katie and Kari really even see the news they’ve received as good being Mom and Henry aren’t recipients of it as well?

And that is just one family sitting around one dinner table. Now let’s look at the world – let’s look at everyone who has ever been born since Adam and Eve all the way down to the latest member of the human race born one millisecond ago. Is the Christian Good News good – in the face of the world’s human family . . . or not? Isn’t Christianity a faith of love and selflessness. Can you see how unloving and selfish the Good News turns out to be if we as believers think it is only for us (and nobody else)? You know, that "Jesus saved me, but He didn’t save you. So too bad. Hell is waiting."

Like Henry and Mom, how could the world see the “Good News” as “good” in this situation? But more to the point – how do we who have received it see it as such? Some allow themselves to see it as Good by laying the whole thing on God and claiming He is the author of the system – and that as recipients of the Good News we prove our allegiance by praising Him for choosing us for heaven but denying the rest of the world and sending them to hell. We relish the fact that billions will suffer immeasurably for eternity saying, “this is God’s will,” only because we see ourselves on the
winning side. But how many would praise God if He had not "chosen" them for the Good News but instead chose them to burn in hell forever? I would suggest that when Christians relish in such attitudes it is one of the most egregious forms of taking the name of God in vain. I would also suggest that such thinking is not God honoring but is an affront to His sovereignty and love and longsuffering; that the highest honor any Christian can bestow on Sovereign God is to acknowledge that He so loved the world that He sent His Only begotten to save it – and that this is exactly what He did - save it.

Mom, Dad, Katie, Kari and yes, Henry too.

All by and through His Son – only by and through His Son, but in the end – every knee will bow, God will have His Sovereign will accomplished, and He will be all in all.

Now this . . . is Good News I can share.
SEVENTEEN- Baptism? Oh, that’s an easy one.

Last week I had a rather aggressive young man (at least he sounded young) who asserted a number of things about the application of the Bible in the Christian life. I maintain that there are passages that could be taken literally (and at face value), and that there are passages that we could view (in terms of culture) as not having any real application at all in this day and age. Quite frankly, most things in the Bible are debatable and therefore, in my estimation, very few things ought to be dogmatically demanded – if any.

Our caller (he had called in on our live-streaming show) argued that my approach was “untenable,” and tried to pin me down to name specific examples from the Bible that could be demanded and specifics from the biblical narrative that could be excluded from demand. I tried to explain to him that for me to name specifics that must be included (or excluded) would only create another list – and therefore another denomination - which is what Subjective Christianity avoids because it allows for all approaches to faith to exist between the believer and God, and, no matter what, refuses to insert itself in the beliefs people entertain, explore or hold dear. What was it that Paul said? Oh, that’s right,

1st Corinthians 2:1-2 "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

I suggest that the Gospel is the only standard – the Good News – which is Christ, the author and finisher of the
faith. I would add that if the Holy Spirit has regenerated a person we don’t need to worry or police their beliefs - God will do it. We just need to teach, and encourage, and love. Let’s turn to the Word for an illustration to prove my point and consider the much discussed topic of . . .

. . . baptism.

We have a Bible. And we have a topic that in the Christian world has a place in this Bible, right? For some the topic of baptism is huge and involves the very salvation and eternal life of believers. For other believers the topic is an absolute non-event. Isn’t this a stunning fact of the Christian faith? That some good, well-read believers insist that people be baptized or they will not go to heaven, and other good, well-read believers insist that it is a non-event in the life of a follower of Christ. What to do? Do we make our stands and the associated accusations that come with them? Do we divide? Do we criticize and condemn?

We could have a thousand people representing their respective doctrines reading this book right now and we could possibly have at least fifty different views on this seemingly straightforward topic. In the end we could end up with at least 20 different denominational approaches to baptism alone.

Just allow yourself to entertain the different factors that play into the topic.

Are we talking about water or Spirit?

If water . . .

Who can baptize?

Can women baptize?
Do we baptize infants?

What is the minimum age?

Does a profession of faith have to occur prior to?

Does water have to be fresh or can it be in a stagnant pool?

Can it be in a salty sea?

Should people wear white, be naked, wear a suit or dress? A swimsuit?

Does the person submit or are they taken down by the baptizer?

Are they taken down at all?

Is it a pouring, a sprinkling or an immersion?

Are prayers said prior to?

Are words uttered?

What if a foot comes up?

All of the above (plus many more factors not listed) are only speaking of baptism in water!

Certainly the Bible speaks of baptism, but just as certain are the uncertainties that are produced when it brings the subject up. The fact that Jesus was baptized is enough to make some say water baptism is necessary. For others the context of why Jesus was baptized (and by whom) reveals much more.

Jesus told the Apostles in the Great Commission to go forth, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit – and yet we never read of the
Apostles ever doing this – they merely baptized in Jesus' name. What gives? Who’s right? What are we to do?

Does this disturb you? Or maybe you, in all your wisdom and ability, have decided that you have the answer to the baptism question and everyone else had better fall in line with what you believe? Oh? You don’t care either way? Excellent. You accept anyone’s approach to this subject as long as Jesus is involved and you leave it all up to God? If that’s the case, welcome to Subjective Christianity. People who demand conformity to their special little opinions hate this. They want certainty. But when it comes to almost every Christian topic there is very little certainty. But what certainly does exist are differences of interpretation, paradox, and even contradiction. As a means to provide people with certainty the denominations and sects make doctrinal and practical stands – but all of them are open to interpretation.

In the face of this there are those believers who think that they can look to church history to determine how things must be approached. They study the Greek and the early church fathers. So let’s take that approach relative to baptism.

As stated, the canonical Gospels report that Jesus was baptized—a historical event to which a high degree of certainty can be assigned. In some denominations water baptism has been called a sacrament and/or an ordinance of Jesus Christ. In others, baptism is also called "christening," and in even others the word "christening" is reserved for the baptism of infants.

The usual form of baptism among the earliest Christians was for the candidate to be immersed, either totally (submerged completely under the water) or partially
(standing or kneeling in water while water was poured on him or her). While John the Baptist's use of a deep river for his baptism suggests total immersion, pictorial and archaeological evidence of Christian baptism, from the 3rd century onward, indicates that a normal form was to have the candidate stand in water while water was poured over the upper body.

Other common forms of baptism now in use include pouring water three times on the forehead - a method known as affusion. Martyrdom was identified early in Church history as "baptism by blood," enabling martyrs (who had not been baptized by water) to be saved. Later, the Catholic Church identified something called “a baptism of desire,” by which those who were preparing for baptism but died prior to it actually being received were considered saved. As evidenced in what is a rather common Christian practice (infant baptism), water baptism has been almost universally seen by Christians as having some tie to literal salvation. This was the case until the 16th century when Zwingli denied it as a necessary. Today, some Christians, particularly Christian Scientists, Quakers, The Salvation Army, and Unitarians do not see water baptism as necessary and do not practice the rite at all. Among those that do practice water baptism, the differences are vast in view and mode. Almost all Christian sects baptize "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (following the Great Commission), but there are a few who baptize in Jesus' name only. And where more than half of the world’s population of Christians baptize infants, there are close to half of the remaining Christians who believe water baptism is only right or true if received by believers - something an infant couldn’t be. And again, some say the head must be
washed, others say total submersion (or at least partial) is requisite.

When a study like the above proves insufficient to settle the debates many turn to word origins for support.

The English word "baptism" is derived indirectly through Latin from the neuter Greek concept noun "baptisma" (Greek βάπτισμα, "washing-ism"), which is a neologism (a new word) in the New Testament derived from the masculine Greek noun "baptismos" (βαπτισμός) which is a term for ritual washing in Greek language texts of Hellenistic Judaism during the Second Temple period (such as the Septuagint). Both of these nouns are derived from the verb "baptizō" (βαπτίζω, "I wash" a transitive verb), which is used in Jewish texts for ritual washing, and in the New Testament both for ritual washing and also for the apparently new rite of "baptisma." The Greek verb "baptō" (βάπτω), "dip", from which the verb "baptizo" is derived, is in turn hypothetically traced to a reconstructed Indo-European root "*gʷabh-", "dip". The Greek words are used in a great variety of meanings and because of the variety of meanings and applications we are not going to come to a stable approach through a study of the original language.

So then some turn to the Biblical history of water baptism.

Baptism seems to have originated from Jewish purification rituals which were required for all sorts of things including conversion to Judaism, and which were repeatable. And while John the Baptist came and offered “a baptism of repentance,” Jesus had no need to repent and so we must see his baptism as serving or fulfilling a different purpose – possibly all “the righteousness under the law.” And while it was John the Baptist who
baptized Jesus Himself, Paul distinguished between the baptism of John ("baptism of repentance") and baptism in the name of Jesus, intimating that they were two very different things. In fact, those who were baptized by John were later re-baptized in Jesus' name, an event that speaks volumes about the need for John’s baptism (of repentance) in the church at all. Looking to Jesus’ relation to water baptism some have, despite of the evidence just presented, taken His baptism as a sure sign that a person must receive water baptism to enter into heaven. (The LDS take this stance). Again, in my estimation, if someone believes that water baptism is necessary to get into heaven they’d better do it. I’d even perform the baptism for them, but I would never teach such a thing or believe it myself. Remember, the earliest Christians were Jews and washings were woven into the faith from which they exited.

Paul, however, said of water baptism that he was pleased he didn’t even do it (with a couple of exceptions) and added that he instead focused on “preaching the Gospel,” a clear inference that water baptism is NOT part of the Good News.

So history doesn’t completely solve the water baptism debate does it? Let’s look to actual religious tradition. The earliest Christian baptisms were probably by immersion of some sort, meaning full or partial, but other modes were also used. The first recorded liturgy of baptism is found in Apostolic Tradition written down by Saint Hippolytus of Rome who lived from 170–235AD. In others words, by the year 235 AD (and probably before) this is how the event of Christian water baptism was described:
“At the hour in which the cock crows, they shall first pray over the water. Then the person comes to the water, the water shall be pure and flowing, that is, the water of a spring or a flowing body of water. Then they shall take off all their clothes. The children shall be baptized first. All of the children who can answer for themselves, let them answer. If there are any children who cannot answer for themselves, let their parents answer for them, or someone else from their family. After this, the men will be baptized. Finally, the women, after they have unbound their hair, and removed their jewelry. No one shall take any foreign object with themselves down into the water.”

By the third and fourth centuries, baptism involved catechetical instruction as well as exorcisms, laying on of hands, and the recitation of a set creed. These things continue to this very day in some form or another. I’m going skip over all the evidences of how water baptism “devolved” and pick the subject back up in the sixteenth century where Martin Luther held to the Catholic idea that water baptism was a sacrament, but where the Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli considered baptism and the Lord’s supper as merely symbolic. Then the Anabaptists denied the validity of baptisms that were done outside their group and re-baptized converts who accepted their ways alone. From here every opinion and approach bloomed as "Sola Scriptura" took hold of the hearts of some believers - hundreds of opinions on the purpose, place, and approaches to water baptism flooded over the Christian landscape.

Of course the diversity of opinions on the subject led to Restorationist groups stepping in (like the LDS, the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Seventh Day Adventists) in the 19th century all claiming to restore everything to its proper order – water baptism included.
At this point I think it is important to admit that I am pretty well aware of Paul tying water baptism to “being buried with Christ” and the symbolism of immersion. I fully understand “outward evidences of inward faith” and the concepts of public profession. I also have witnessed firsthand great meaning in the rite of water baptism and personally consider it a gift of God for believing people to enjoy. But what I think (and what I know) and my opinions are not only irrelevant in the scope of the subject, they are in opposition to what many other sound believers think they know about the subject too. Wherein lies the truth?

The liturgy of baptism for the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, Anglican, and Methodist denominations makes clear reference to baptism not only as a symbolic burial and resurrection, but an actual supernatural transformation - one that draws parallels to the experience of Noah and the Ark and the passage of the Israelites through the divided Red Sea. Catholics believe that baptism is necessary for the cleansing of the taint of original sin, and for that reason infant baptism is a common practice among them. The Eastern Churches (Eastern Orthodox Church and Oriental Orthodoxy) also baptize infants. Most Orthodox approaches to the faith believe that baptism removes what they call the ancestral sin of Adam. Even Orthodox Presbyterians baptize infants.

Anglicans believe that water baptism is the entry into the Church and therefore allows baptized believers alone the access to all rights and responsibilities, including the privilege to receive Holy Communion. According to evidence which can be traced back to the year 200, sponsors or godparents were also present at water baptisms vowing to uphold the Christian education and life of the baptized.
Baptists argue that the Greek word "βαπτίζω" originally meant "to immerse," so they interpret most Biblical passages concerning baptism as requiring submersion of the body in water. Baptist Churches baptize in the name of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. However, they do not believe that baptism is necessary for salvation; but rather that it is an act of Christian obedience.

Some "Full Gospel" charismatic churches (such as Oneness Pentecostals) baptize only in the name of Jesus Christ, citing Peter's preaching baptism in the name of Jesus in Acts 2:38. These believers actually provide proofs from 200 AD that show believers were baptized in Jesus' name alone until the development of the man-made title for God known as "Trinity." In a document published by the World Council of Churches in 1997 we read the following written attempt to harmonize the Christian stance on baptism as it says:

"...according to Acts 2:38, baptisms follow from Peter's preaching baptism in the name of Jesus and lead those baptized to the receiving of Christ's Spirit, the Holy Ghost, and life in the community: 'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers' as well as to the distribution of goods to those in need."

I would remind the authors of this attempt that in Acts 2:42 Peter was speaking to 3000 Jews and that the application of water baptism had a much different meaning than it did when performed on Gentiles under Paul, who, remember, did not care to even participate in the ritual. Because the Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Methodist and Lutheran churches (as well as the LDS and some Protestant groups) teach that baptism is a sacrament that has actual spiritual and salvific purposes,
most of them include key criteria to accompany water baptism which must be complied with for the baptism to be valid (or to actually serve to help save the soul).

I’m not going to even begin to explain the different words each group insists must be used to make the water baptism valid. There are rules for water type, water applications, water amounts, memberships associated with water baptism, and on and on and on. Then there is the question of who or what denomination will accept the baptisms performed by other denominations.

Quakers - who as a people love God and the Lord Jesus Christ - reject all forms of water baptism. They cite their interpretation of Matthew 3:11 to explain that John the Baptist’s baptisms with water were nothing compared to the spirit baptism Jesus would bring. My cousin is a bigwig in the Salvation Army. Does he love the Lord? Seems to. Believe in the Lord? Again, yes. But they say "no" to water baptism as well.

Hyperdispensationalists, or those who typically only accept Paul’s epistles as having application today, also reject water baptism (among other things). I have a chart here that I printed which details some of the more prominent views on water baptism from various faiths claiming Jesus.

For a number of years now – actually for almost two millenia – people have claimed that the Bible determines everything for us clearly. These Pollyannaish folks make the most absurd claims about “possessing the truth,” belonging to a “true” church, or having the ability to know how things ought to be interpreted. It’s the stance of every scholar, every church, and every person who thinks that the Bible clearly explains things. Again, I would strongly suggest
that the Bible is truly clear on one central message – Jesus. And even that singular subject is open to debate.

So what do we do in the face of all of this?

Allow me to appeal to the Subjective Christian response to something like water baptism.

To those who seek water baptism, we provide it. To those who reject it, we don’t. Those who want immersion are immersed, those who want sprinkling or pouring or living waters or pool waters get it. And those who want a program and singers or those who want to be baptized alone – yes. Sure. Absolutely.

“What’s that?” You say? “you want your sister to baptize you?” Why not!

“You want to share your testimony before hand?” That’s A-OKAY with us.

“You want to be baptized in Jesus’ name alone? The Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Father and Son period?” Have at it. No problem. We’re here to support you in your faith.

“You mean it’s up to me?” comes the question.

“Yes, it is,” comes the reply.

“But . . . why?”

“Because your faith and walk is between you and God, that’s why,” comes the reply.

“Does it matter . . . you know . . . how I do my baptism?” comes the final question.

“What matters is why you are doing a baptism to begin with?” comes the answer.

After a few seconds the person replies. “Because I believe in Jesus.”

“Then let’s do this thing,” comes the reply.
None of what I am about to share affects my faith in the living God or His Son. I believe that most of these things I am about to present have very reasonable explanations.

My purpose in showing them here is to illustrate how paradoxical the Bible can be in the minds of human beings and how God has allowed, in the paradox, for people to have very different views and opinions of all things Christian. For example, we have the stance that God is “all knowing” in the Bible – there are no surprises in His book, right?

*Genesis 1:31* says,

“And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.”

But then . . .

*Genesis 6:6* says,

“And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.”

In *Exodus 33:23* we are shown that God “can be seen and heard”

but

Jesus says in *John 1:18* that “no man has seen God at any time.”

*Acts 1:24* says that God “knows the hearts of men”

but

*Deuteronomy 8:2* says,
“And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.”

We almost all agree that God is “all powerful,” right? I do.

Jeremiah 32:27 supports this, saying,
“Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?”

But when we read Judges 1:19 it says,

“And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.”

Again, it’s not that we cannot understand these things – my point is to show that in the face of these conflicts comes differences of opinion and in the end, subjective stances. In the previous chapter we used water baptism as a vehicle to prove the point but we’ve even experienced push back on this with people saying that the issue of water baptism could be solved if people would only search the Bible with pure intentions. Admittedly scripture does admit to our ability to know that we are His, that we have been saved. But it is also clear that,

“we walk by faith, not by sight,”
(2nd Corinthians 5:7)

That . . .

“we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” (Romans 8:24)
And that, as Paul said,

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” (1st Corinthians 13:12)

Not only do claims of knowledge puff up, they lead to dogmatic law – and where there are fixed laws, there is the total potential for sin. We can stop “sining by dogma” by placing dogma and differences on the altar and, trusting in God and His loving grace, give each other a break.

How about some more examples of paradox in scripture?

Malachi 3:6 says that God is unchangeable but Jonah 3:10 claims He is changeable.

Psalm 92:15 says that God is impartial but Romans 9:11-13 says He is partial.

James tell us that God gives freely to those who ask. Jesus supports this in Luke 11:10 saying,

“For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”

Sounds certain. But John 12:40, citing the Old Testament says,

“Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.”
Proverbs 8:17 admits that God “is found by those who seek him” but Proverbs 1:28 plainly says that God “will not be found by those who seek Him.”

Numbers 32:13 says that God's anger is “fierce and endures long,” but Psalm 103:8 says that God’s anger “is slow and endures but for a minute.”

Jesus prayed in Matthew 6 that God would not “lead them into temptation” but James 1:13 says “God tempts no Man.”

Again, I am a lover of His word, and realize that context is everything in understanding it, but paradox does exist therein and this fact alone endorses the idea that Christianity is entirely subjective, that the Word of God cannot be taken dogmatically (or enforced as a New Law), and that we need to try and approach our view and application of it with love and faith rather than rules and demands.

In Exodus 20:4 God says this about making images,

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”

But in Exodus 25:18 God commands,

“And thou shalt make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat.”

We also know that Moses made a brass Serpent (etc., etc.).

What is right? What is wrong?

Jesus said plainly in Matthew 7:1-2, “judge not” (“krino" in the Greek).
But Paul in *1st Corinthians* 6:2 says, “judge” ("krino")

The Nazarite vow prohibited certain men from cutting their hair. Paul says that “*long hair on a man is a shame.*” No work was to be done on the Sabbath under penalty of death, but Jesus clearly broke the Sabbath day and justified his disciples in doing the same.

Baptism? Baptism?! (see chapter 16)

Sabbath day?

There’s a reason why some believe “Sunday rules” ought to be obeyed and others disregard them all together – too much information to even attempt to diffuse this war.

Paul says in *Ephesians* 6:2,

“*Honor thy father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise).*”

Jesus, in *Luke* 14:26,

“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”

Paul recommends wine to Timothy. *Proverbs* and *Psalms* endorse alcoholic drink. Of course *Proverbs* also warns against consuming alcohol at all. This is the beauty of the book, not the problem with it. As we see it this way we put an end to trying to use the book against each other as a hard and fast rule!

In *1st Timothy* 2:12, *1st Corinthians* 14:34, and *1st Peter* 3:6 women’s rights are denied.
In Judges 4:4,14,15 and 5:7 and Acts 2:18 and Acts 21:9 and Paul’s benediction to the Saints at Rome, they are affirmed.

Jesus says there is an unpardonable sin in Mark 3:29. But Acts 13:39 says, “And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

Again! Again! Again! Can these things be reasonably explained? They can. But the reasonable explanations are not all embraced by all believers so we have to have patience, and acceptance, and allow for all believers in Christ to believe and see things as they are inclined.

Genesis 8:22 says that “seed time and harvest were never to cease,” but by the time we get to Genesis 41 “seed time and harvest ceased for seven years.”

Who hardened Pharaoh’s heart – God or Pharaoh himself? Of course it all depends on which verse you read in Exodus.

Speaking of Exodus, chapter 9:3 & 6 and 14:9 say that “all the horses died in Egypt.” Exodus 14:9 tells us “not all the horses in Egypt died.”

Numbers says that 24,000 died of the plague. 1st Corinthians 10:8 says it was 23,000.

The two thieves reviled Christ on the cross but according to Luke 23:39 only one of the thieves reviled Christ.

The entire resurrection accounts in the Gospels cannot - cannot - be reconciled. I don’t care how many hoops are jumped through to try and reconcile them, it's not possible.
Certainly, we can come to some general conclusions, but they are not consistent (which, again, I don’t mind in the least).

Speaking of the resurrection, how many women came to the sepulcher -

One?  \( \text{(John 20:1)} \)
Two?  \( \text{(Matthew 28:1)} \)
Three?  \( \text{(Mark16:1)} \)
More?  \( \text{(Luke 24:10)} \)

How many angels?
What did they do?
On what day of the week was Jesus crucified?

Friday?
Thursday?
Wednesday?

Does it matter?  It does to a lot of people - so we can either divide on these things due to the arrogance that says our views are correct, or we can step back, differ to potential ignorance, embrace all people and their divergent views, and choose to love unconditionally - refusing to make doctrine, theology and praxis the priority, but instead simple faith and pure love.

When did the apostles receive the Holy Spirit?  “Oh, that’s an easy one – on the day of Pentecost.”  If that’s so explain \text{John 20:21-22} which says,

“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.  And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.”
I’ve heard the interpretations of these two passages. I’ve been presented with the views but they are all just opinions from men! We don’t freaking know. We can guess, we may be correct on our explanations. But if we don’t know we cannot divide on such things.

Were the disciples commanded immediately after the resurrection to go into Galilee as Matthew 28:10 says or were they commanded to go and tarry at Jerusalem (as Luke 24:49 suggests)?

When Jesus appears to Paul, did his attendants hear the miraculous voice, and stand speechless (as Acts 9:7 suggests), or did they not hear a voice but fall prostrate (Acts 22:9)?

Was Keturah Abraham's wife as Genesis 25:1 says or was she Abraham's concubine (1st Chronicles 1:32)? There is a difference.

2nd Samuel 24:1 says that David was tempted by the Lord to number Israel but 1st Chronicles 21:1 says that Satan did the tempting.

What is your opinion? Are you allowed to have an opinion on this or does the Bible tell us clearly what we MUST believe. I came out of a religion where I was spoon-fed dogmatic facts and I embraced them all as if they came from the mouth of God Himself. Almost every one proved to be a lie, an obfuscation of the truth, or simply the interpretation of other men and women who thought about the dogma before I was allowed to do the same. And where real information was not available to the people in that faith they had no problem making stuff up and calling it truth. Whenever a contradiction arose it was passed off as "not a contradiction at all," but something that God did not want us to know.
The exact same situation exists in Evangelical Christianity writ large. This does not mean that God is not real, or the Bible is not His Word or good or valuable. But it certainly suggests that our approach to the written Word cannot be dogmatic.

2\textsuperscript{nd} Samuel 24:9 says that the number of fighting men of Israel was “800,000; and of Judah 500,000.” But 1\textsuperscript{st} Chronicles 21:5 says the number of fighting men of Israel was 1,100,000; and of Judah 470,000. In my estimation this was due to scribal error in numbering. But I could be wrong. Something's wrong. Is it us or is it our faulty appeal to "Sola Scriptura."

1\textsuperscript{st} Kings says plainly that David never sinned except in the manner of Uriah. But 2\textsuperscript{nd} Samuel says David sinned in numbering the people.

In John 10:30 Jesus says, “I and my Father are one.” In John 14:28 He adds, “for my Father is greater than I.”

Trinitarians conveniently explain this – but are there other viable explanations?

Luke 2:13 tells us that Jesus' mission was peace. Matthew 10:34 says it was not.

In John 8:18 Jesus says, “I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me.”

But in John 5:31 He says, “If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.”

Exodus plainly teaches that “Children are punished for the sins of the parents.” (Exodus 20:5) But Ezekiel also plainly
states that "Children are not punished for the sins of the parents." (Ezekiel 18:20)

And what about the biggies? The things that cause people to break from fellowship? The items that cause faithful believers to point fingers and cry, “Heretic!”

Man is justified by faith alone OR
Man is not justified by faith alone.

It is impossible to fall from grace OR
It’s possible to fall from grace.

There is to be a physical resurrection of the dead or the resurrection of the dead is entirely spiritual?

The Earth is to be destroyed (2 Peter 3:10, Hebrew 1:11, and Revelation 20:11) or the Earth is never to be destroyed (Psalm 104:5 and Ecclesiastes 1:4)?

Is the Christian yoke easy? If so how are we to take . . .

John 16:33
"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

2nd Timothy 3:12
"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

Hebrews 12:6,8
"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"
Proverbs tells us that wisdom is a source of enjoyment. Solomon – the one with a gift of wisdom from God, says it is nothing "but vexation, grief and sorrow." (Ecclesiastes)

Laughter is commended and laughter is condemned in the same book – Ecclesiastes.

How are we to interpret . . .

Romans 14:14
"There is nothing unclean of itself."

2 Timothy 3:16
"All scripture is inspired."

Didn’t Paul say in 1st Corinthians 7:6, “I speak this by permission, and not of commandment.”

And didn’t he say in the same chapter just six verses later, “But to the rest speak I, not the Lord:”

And again in 2nd Corinthians 11:17, “That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord,“

In the errant vein of "Sola Scriptura" believers claim that every single word in our Bibles today is His – but Paul himself suggests otherwise.

Then when are we going to get rational when people say, “The Bible is the inerrant Word of God.”

We will ask, “Which Bible?”
Is it the King James? The NIV? If the King James, is the one translated into German as infallible as the one translated into Spanish? Is an American Standard in Japanese or French as inerrant as our Modern English translations, as our street language Bibles, and the hundreds of others out there in the world that are being read and used by others? Exactly which Bible are we talking about when we say, The Bible?

Let’s wrap this up with a few more challenging sets of passages. Ready?

Matthew 10:34
"Think not that I come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."

and

Matthew 26:52
"... all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

Proverbs 13:22
"A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children..."

and

Luke 12:33
"Sell that ye have and give alms..."

Psalm 112:1-3
"Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord... Wealth and riches shall be in his house..."

and

Matthew 19:24
"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."
Exodus 20:13
"Thou shalt not kill."

and

Exodus 32:27
"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side... and slay every man his brother..."

Exodus 20:8
"Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy."

and

Isaiah 1:13
"The new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with: it is iniquity."

Ephesians 2:8-9
"For by grace are ye saved through faith... not of works."

and

James 2:24
"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."

John 5:28-29
"... the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and come forth..."

and

Job 7:9
"As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more."

Matthew 6:19
"Lay not up for yourself treasures upon the earth..."

and

Proverbs 15:6
"In the house of the righteous is much treasure..."

Genesis 32:30
"I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

and

John 1:18
"No man hath seen God at any time."

Proverbs 3:13
"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding."

and

Ecclesiastes 1:18
"For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

Psalm 145:6
"The Lord is good to all."

and

Isaiah 45:7
"I make peace and create evil. I the Lord do all these things."

Matthew 5:22
[Jesus said] "Whosoever shall say Thou fool, shall be in danger of hellfire."

and
Matthew 23:17
[Jesus said] "Ye fools and blind."

2 Kings 8:26
"Two and twenty years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign."

and

2 Chronicles 22:2
"Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign."

Ecclesiastes 1:4
"... the earth abideth forever."

and

2 Peter 3:10
"... the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

Jeremiah 3:12
"... for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever."

and

Jeremiah 17:4
"Ye have kindled a fire in mine anger, which shall burn forever."

James 1:13
"... God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."

and

Genesis 22:1
"And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham."

Proverbs 8:17
"Those that seek me early shall find me."

and

Proverbs 1:28
"Then shall they call upon me but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but shall not find me."

Numbers 23:19
"God is not a man, that he should lie."

and

Ezekiel 24:9
"And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet."

Exodus 3:21,22
"When ye go, ye shall not go empty; but every woman shall borrow of her neighbor, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver and jewels of gold, and raiment; and ye shall put them on your sons and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians."

and

Leviticus 19:13
"Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbor, neither rob him."

Matthew 6:28, 30-34
"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin... if God so clothe the grass of the field... shall he not much more clothe you? Therefore, take no thought, saying what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? Or wherewithal shall we be clothed?... Take, therefore, no thought
for the morrow."

and

I Timothy 5:8
"But if any provideth not for his own, especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

Matthew 5:16
"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works."

and

Matthew 6:1
"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them."

I Kings 8:22
"And Solomon stood before the alter of the Lord, in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven..."

and

Matthew 6:5
"When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men..."

Exodus 20:8
"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

and

Romans 14:5
"One man esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in
his own mind."

*II Samuel 6:23*
"Therefore Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no child unto the day of her death."

and

*II Samuel 21:8*
"The five sons of Michal, the daughter of Saul.'

I am able, in my mind to contextually understand why these paradoxical instances occur in scripture. They make sense through study and by the Spirit and pose no serious rupture to the strength of the Word. But not all believers agree – and not all believers ever will. This is the point.

I am convinced that God uses the Word and all the various interpretation to give believers opportunities to love above all things. We are like a dozen children placed in a room with games and food and televisions and computers and are expected to get along and make sense of how everything ought to work. In the end, while most children will have ideas and insights on what they think is best, what will make the situation really work is love – and not what individuals believe is right or best.

One more point in the face of all these things (and there are dozens more) - we speak of "Sola Scriptura" but in my estimation the premise does not allow for growth and maturation of spiritual things, and as a result we experience even more dogma and demands. We are all growing, as believers, in the Lord – in strength and in knowledge.

Some are babes who nosh on milk. Some are mature who gnaw on meat. Our time in the Word, our walk,
our experiences, our natural dispositions, our weaknesses in the flesh, and sin all play into how we as believers see, interpret and ultimately understand the Word.
NINETEEN- The Books of the Early Church

In chapter five we touched on the various religious claims on Apostolic authority – remember? We talked about the Catholic view, the Protestant view and the Restorationist views. We showed that each of these groups –

• demand conformity to their respective views
• claim to have authority to do what they do
• appeal to the Bible (and claim to be in harmony with its tenets), and
• they all resist, refuse, and/or even mock the views and approaches that the others maintain.

In the midst of all the appeals to authority (using the Bible and biblical history to justify themselves and their efforts at controlling people, their beliefs and their practices), the reality is God has been in control of His church and believers by and through His Spirit – not through the written manual or man’s various interpretations of it. Quite frankly I think we have to seriously ask ourselves,

"Has our use of the written manual done more to unite believers or divide them?"

Think about this seriously for a moment and let me ask it again, "Has our use – our interpretation and application – of the written manual done more to unite or divide believers?"

To reiterate, the problem is NOT with the written manual. It is the most profound Book ever compiled and reading it by the Spirit transforms lives. But it is our understanding of its history, place and purpose that lends to it being used improperly.
Let me turn to a map to help illustrate what I mean. Examine the following map closely – especially the locations where the New Testament books were penned.

Remember, the books of the New Testament were written in a day when there was no printing press, no mass produced paper, no easily produced ink. Additionally, the mode of transportation was typically by foot, at times by horse, and when bodies of water were involved, by ship. So let’s talk about some of the information the map provides. Looking to the left of the map we discover Rome – the place where six books of the modern New Testament were written (Ephesians,

Rome is about 1,434 miles from Jerusalem. Between these two places (with the exception of Babylon where 2nd Peter was presumably penned) lay six cities where the other books of the New Testament were written. In Jerusalem, five New Testament books were composed and part of a sixth (John) and seventh (Acts). To the north of Jerusalem we have Antioch (where Paul wrote to the Galatians) and then Ephesus (where parts of Acts were written, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John and 1st and 2nd Corinthians).

To the west of Ephesus we find Patmos (part of John and Revelation) then Corinth (Romans and 1st and 2nd Thessalonians) and finally Nicopolis, which rests across part of the Mediterranean Sea from Italy (1st Timothy and Titus).

We have to remember that the early church (the Apostolic Church) did not have a New Testament. Certain believers in certain cities had access to certain letters and Gospels but they were not all available for at least a hundred years plus – and then there was debate on which were legitimate and which were not.

Additionally, there were hundreds of counterfeit Apostolic letters floating around which muddied the canonical waters to an extreme. Naturally, there are exceptions to these points as Peter considered Paul’s writings to be scripture, so admittedly, it didn’t take long for some of the letters to have an influence in other parts of the land - but not all of them were copied and distributed to all of the believers.

This being said, what did believers have? The Holy Spirit, apostolic direction, and elders in the faith who
were chosen by the people to oversee the local church. The point-blank question we have to ask ourselves today, relative to the Bible, is when was the New Testament

\[ a. \text{ Agreed upon in terms of content?} \]

\[ b. \text{ And available to the majority of believers who came out of the Apostolic church and beyond?} \]

These two points are very important because today we claim the need to use “the entirety of the Bible” to establish all things but if the entirety of the Bible was not available to the majority of believers until 100, 200, 300 or even 1500 years later, why have we let the Word take such a literal hold on believers thereafter? I mean we either take the Bible as a whole or we don’t. Which is it? In other words, if we are going to claim "Sola Scriptura" and maintain that the Bible is God’s perfect guide, I think it’s important to know when its contents were agreed upon and when those contents were made available to all Christians.

If we take the date of the death of the last living apostle (John) and we mark the date the Bible contents were both agreed upon and available as a COMPLETE SET to believers, and we ask: “What guided believers between those two dates?” My purpose is to show that the claims of "Sola Scriptura" brought about in the Reformation are fallacious. We are not under “the letter” or words “written in ink,” but live according to the Spirit and appeal to the manuscript evidence available to supplement our insights and understanding.

As a means to kind of highlight some facts taken from actual church history, let me rattle the following off for your consideration:
• Around 80 AD a book called the “Didache” was written. It was included in what is called the Apostolic Fathers collection. While beneficial, the "Didache" contained heresy.

• Ever hear of Clement, the fourth Bishop of Rome? He wrote the “Letter of the Romans to the Corinthians” - also of the Apostolic Fathers collection, but not part of our New Testament canon today.

• Around 100 AD came the "Epistle of Barnabas" (also in the Apostolic Fathers collection). At the same time the "Epistle of Jude" was rejected by some early Christians because it quotes the apocryphal "Book of Enoch."

• Between 100-150 AD we got the “Apocryphon of James,” “Gospel of Mary Magdalene,” “Gospel of James,” “Infancy Gospel of Thomas,” “Secret Gospel of Mark” (books that the Jesus Seminar people today call the "Complete Gospels").

• 110-130 AD Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis, wrote "Expositions of the Sayings of the Lord," which is widely quoted by the Apostolic Fathers. Why? Why not quote the New Testament itself? Why quote these strange writings?

• 110-160? Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, wrote his “Letter to the Philippians” (also quoted by the Apostolic Fathers – again why? Why weren’t the Apostolic Fathers quoting Paul and Peter and James?). Could it be because they weren’t available or known?

• In 150 AD the "Shepherd of Hermas," was also written in Rome and heavily quoted by
Apostolic Fathers AND contained crazy stuff. (Again, why?)

• 150-200 AD other books were composed, the “Unknown Berlin Gospel,” “Gospel of Peter,” “Oxyrhynchus Gospels,” and “Dialogue of the Savior.”

• As early as 170 AD? Dionysius, the bishop of Corinth claimed that Christians were changing and faking his letters as he also claimed they had changed the Gospels.

• 170 AD a guy named Tatian blended the Gospels into one. It was called the “Diatessaron” (which means Harmony).

• By 185 through 350 AD Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, 3 John were excluded from what was considered the inspired writings of the New Testament BUT the “Wisdom of Solomon,” and “Apocalypse of Peter” were included.

• 199-217? AD Caius, a presbyter of Rome, rejected Revelation, said it was written by Gnostic Cerinthus.

• 218-258 Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, claimed Christians were freely forging his letters to discredit him.

• 223? Tertullian became known as the "father of the Latin Church." Why? Because he coined “trinitas,” “tresPersonae,” “una Substantia,” “VetusTestamentum,” “NovumTestamentum.”

• Around 250 Origen said that Jesus and God were one substance, (which was accepted at the First Council of Nicaea in 325) – by the way, Eusebius claimed that Origen castrated himself
for Jesus based on his understanding of Matthew 19:12. Now think about this – the man cut his man parts off due to his misguided interpretation of one verse and yet we accept his views on the ontology of God?

• 312 while gazing into the sun Constantine says he sees a cross with the words, “by this sign conquer.” Constantine was later called the 13th Apostle and an “equal to the Apostles.”

• 313 Edict of Milan: Constantine establishes toleration of Christianity.

• 313 Lateran Palace given to Pope Miltiades as his residence by Constantine.

• 321 Constantine decrees Sunday as state "day of rest."

• 325 The First Council of Nicaea (go read about it on your own).

• 325 Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, ordered built by Constantine.

• And then around 330 AD Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, is the first to cite the twenty-seven books of our modern New Testament as canonical.

If the last apostle (John) died at 100AD and the first accepted proclamation claiming which books of the New Testament were canon was in 330, that leaves 230 years of Christian believers not knowing which books were acceptable and which were not.

• But then in 363-364 the Council of Laodicea decided Revelation was not inspired and limited the New Testament to twenty-six books.
• In 400 AD Jerome's Vulgate (his Latin edition of the Bible) was published.

• However, if you were a Syrian Christian your New Testament (written in Aramaic) would have only included twenty-two books – and would have excluded 2\textsuperscript{nd} Peter, 2-3\textsuperscript{rd} John, Jude, and Revelation.

• By 451 the Council of Chalcedon, the 4th ecumenical council, declared that Jesus is a "Hypostatic Union:" both human and divine in one (which is known as the "Chalcedonian Creed"). And we’ll stop with this final gem –

• Around 500 AD incense was first introduced into Christian church service.

Next week we’ll pick the history up when the Protestants say, among other things, “no more incense.”
TWENTY- Erasmus

From the contents of chapter nineteen it’s fairly obvious that this beautiful gift from God we call the Bible was not as readily agreed upon or settled when we might have believed. Why is that important? To help prove that "Sola Scriptura" is a misnomer and that OUR view of the place and purpose of the Bible (not the Bible itself or its contents, but our use and misinformation about the Book) has in many ways been in error – and needs to change in order for believers to not only appeal to it in the Spirit that it was intended, but not allow the contents of the Book to divide followers of Jesus Christ any more. Such Christian unity will only occur when we appeal to the Bible properly. In my estimation we have to remember a few things.

First, it is the Spirit that gives life and the letter that killeth. This means we do not have a new law written in ink to guide us but one written in our hearts and reaffirmed by the Spirit. Second, we do not worship the Bible, we worship God. And God is love. And as worshippers of God we seek to love. If our use of the Bible is leading us to actions and attitudes of non-love we are applying the contents of the book incorrectly. I suppose I am suggesting that we see the Bible (and our use of it as Christians) like a medical doctor would view his medical books. Yes, they are filled with wonderful and insightful information, yes they assist in diagnosis of sick people, and yes they give great insight regarding treatment, but doctors still have to walk in to an examining room, work and engage with people and use much, much more than book knowledge in dealing with human beings. "Sola Scriptura," in the face of Christian
love, has an ability to create Christians who do not see the need of a bedside manner – or the need to think or act outside the box. Third, I think it is really important to stop romancing the Bible with superlatives like "inerrancy" and "infallibility" when those terms are always and only assigned to the original manuscripts. Since this is the case, why do we repeat these phrases about a Bible we will never hold in our actual hands?

Instead, let’s give the Bible credit where credit is due but step away from hyperbole that is not based in reality.

Let’s jump ahead now from where we left off in chapter nineteen (when Jerome gave us the Latin Vulgate) to the year 1380, when an Oxford trained professor and theologian named Wycliffe, an outspoken critic of the established church, took the Latin Vulgate and with the help of his followers (known as the Lollards) produced dozens of English language manuscript copies.

At the time the Pope was so infuriated by his teachings and translation of the Bible into English, that forty-four years after Wycliffe had died he ordered the bones to be dug-up, crushed, and scattered in the river! Is Wycliffe’s Bible what we use today? No. It was written in what was called Middle English, and because it was a translation from the Vulgate it not only included all of the deuterocanonical (or Apocryphal) books from the inter-testamentary period, it also contained tirades against clerical abuses and Anti-Catholic views regarding their sacraments (Penance and Eucharist), their use of relics, and their demands for clerical celibacy.

In 1450 a man named Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press and the first book to ever be printed was a Latin language Bible, printed in Mainz, Germany. The invention of the movable-type printing press meant that
Bibles and books could finally be effectively produced in large quantities in a relatively short period of time. This event was an essential precursor to the success of the Reformation and its revolt against the Catholic church.

In the 1490’s another Oxford professor (like Wycliffe) named Thomas Linacre, who was the personal physician to King Henry VII and VIII, decided to learn Greek. Now remember the year - 1490. The original manuscripts were written by 100 and it took 1390 years for someone to step forward and give us something from the Greek other than the Vulgate. What was happening to believers during those 1300 plus years? Did God lead them? Of course He did. The whole way - without proper biblical influence they were lead! That is part of the whole point! "Sola Scriptura" draws a line in the sand that was irrelevant prior to 1390! And God allowed it to be this way.

After reading the Gospels in Greek, and comparing it to the Latin Vulgate, Linacre wrote the following in his diary,

“Either this (the original Greek) is not the Gospel… or we are not Christians.”

The implications of this statement are frankly amazing. Linacre clearly shows that the Bible that had been taught and used for a thousand years by the Roman Catholics was in serious error in light of the Greek manuscripts he was consulting. Apparently the Latin version had become so corrupt that it no longer even preserved the essentials of the Gospel … and the Church was still threatening to kill anyone who read the scripture in any language other than the one they controlled - Latin! Let’s let this little fact put the timeline in perspective. A year or two after Linacre wrote the above, Columbus sailed the "Ocean Blue" and discovered the Americas.
Hearing of the discoveries of Linacre, a scholar of enormous intellectual capacities stepped forward. Erasmus. Of all the reformers, I admire the life and work of Erasmus the most. I’m not going to go into how he got his name and all that, but just know he was born in the 1460’s in Holland. He received a high education in a series of monastic or semi-monastic schools. At the age of nine, he and his older brother, Peter, were sent to one of the best Latin schools in the Netherlands. In a daring step, the principal of his school decided to introduce Greek to the students – the first known time Greek was available at levels below university level. It is said that during this time he obtained a personal relationship with God.

Erasmus was ordained to the priesthood at the age of twenty-five but he never seemed to really “live it” due to personal problems he had with the religious abuses he observed around him. It is believed, due to some letters discovered written in his hand, that he fell in love with another man named Servatius Rogerus. Many Evangelicals resist this information today and say it is used by the homosexual agenda to legitimize their lifestyle, so I thought I would let you decide for yourself by citing excerpts from letters written by Erasmus’ own hand. Because the letters are so long I’m including some of the more apparently convincing lines extracted from the first seven letters.

The first letter's theme is all about how it was a shame that Erasmus and Rogerus couldn’t see each other more often but that at least they could exchange letters. The question was asked by Erasmus, “do you love me?”

To quote Erasmus directly from this letter:

“If it were possible, I should have wished you might care for me as I do for you and that you might feel the pangs of love for
me as sharply as I am constantly racked by my yearning for you.”

The second letter could be summarized as Erasmus saying to Rogerus – “I can see that you’re very upset; why won’t you tell me about it?” And a quote from that letter:

“It is my very special love for you, sweetest Servatius…”

“Indeed, I suspect...that you have not yet become persuaded by my supreme love for you.”

The third letter has Erasmus complaining that Rogerus promised to write but hadn’t. And a quote from it:

“For every person who is at leisure is caught up in love’s longings, love being the ‘sickness of an unoccupied soul’.”

The fourth letter can be summarized as asking, “Why do you refuse to return my love, or even tell me your feelings?” And a quote:

“Considering that my affection for you is and always has been so deep, dearest Servatius,...”

The fifth letter can be summarized as: “I’m deathly despondent over your refusal to talk to me.” (No quote)

The sixth letter is all about, “Thanks for the letter. I’m so happy. Please don’t be coy anymore.” A quote from it says:

“I beg you earnestly, O ‘half my soul’, by that extraordinary love I bear to you, not to cast me down again into the pit of sorrows.”

And the seventh and final letter is a “Sorry I haven’t written” letter with the line:

“Farewell, and continue in your love for me.”

The way some people excuse these expressions away as not being homosexually driven is to say that we don’t understand the way men related to each other back in that day. But . . . we do. We have other letters from men
back in the day and they don’t say things like, “I am constantly racked by my yearning for you.”

Others suggest that Erasmus, young and learning, was developing and practicing his writing style, or that what appear to be homoerotic declarations of love between men were frequent in that culture and do not indicate real homosexual intent. Admittedly, we don’t know – and I only think it matters in relation to how we tend to want to frame the character of those who contributed to the Bible. In any case, due to Erasmus' skill in Latin he was granted a special dispensation by Pope Leo the 10th to set his religious vows aside for scholastic pursuits in Humanities.

In 1499, while in England, Erasmus was particularly impressed by the Bible teaching of one John Colet who pursued a style more akin to the early church fathers than the scholars of the day because he studied and appealed to the Greek. Erasmus was prompted to master the Greek language, which would enable him to study theology on a more profound level and to prepare a new edition of Jerome's Bible translation. On one occasion he wrote Colet,

"I cannot tell you, dear Colet, how I hurry on, with all sails set, to holy literature. How I dislike everything that keeps me back, or retards me."

Erasmus was a driven man. He preferred to live the life of an independent scholar and made a conscious effort to avoid any actions or formal ties that might inhibit his freedom of intellect and literary expression. Throughout his life, he was offered many positions of honor and profit throughout the academic world but declined them all, preferring the uncertain but sufficient rewards of independent literary activity.

From 1506 to 1509, he was in Italy; in 1506 he graduated as "Doctor of Divinity" at the Turin University and he
spent part of the time as a proofreader at the publishing house of Aldus Manutius in Venice. He was soon exposed to a great deal of criticism from religious ascetics, academics and clerics who were hostile to his interest in literature and religious reform, and the morals of those involved in the Renaissance which Erasmus loved. He felt called upon to use his learning in a purification of the doctrine by returning to the historic documents and original languages of sacred Scripture. In the process he tried to free the methods of scholarship from the rigidity and formalism of medieval traditions, but he was not satisfied stopping there. His revolt against certain forms of Christian monasticism and scholasticism were not based on doubts about the truth of doctrine, but he saw himself as a preacher of righteousness by an appeal to reason, applied frankly and without fear of those in authority. Because Erasmus intended to remain faithful to Catholic doctrine he appeared to believe he could therefore criticize everything about it. Erasmus was so ensconced in the humanities that at one point he was corresponding with more than five hundred men in the worlds of politics and thought. So there is some background on the man Erasmus - his ways and life.

The first New Testament printed in Greek was part of what was called the "Complutensian Polyglot," named after the University it came from, and "polyglot" meaning a number of translations, side by side, in one. But it was not published first because those in charge were waiting for the Old Testament portion of it to be completed. When word got out that the "Complutensian Polyglot" was about to be completed, Erasmus got wind of its eminent publication and got anxious. He had been aggressively working for years on two projects – one was a collation of Greek texts and the other was a fresh Latin New Testament. If the "Polyglot" was to be published prior to his work, sales and reception would suffer. In addition to a passion for a fresh Latin revision
of Jerome’s Vulgate, Erasmus said this about his Greek translation work,

“But one thing the facts cry out, and it can be clear, as they say, even to a blind man, that often through the translator’s clumsiness or inattention the Greek has been wrongly rendered; often the true and genuine reading has been corrupted by ignorant scribes, which we see happen every day, or altered by scribes who are half-taught and half-asleep."

Looking at the work of the man in retrospect we might say that Erasmus sought to "synchronize" or "unify" the Greek and the Latin traditions of the New Testament by producing an updated version of both simultaneously.

In modern parlance, Erasmus made the two traditions "compatible." This is clearly evidenced by the fact that his Greek text is not just the basis for his Latin translation, but also the other way around - there are numerous instances where he edits the Greek text to reflect his Latin version.

For example, since the last six verses of Revelation were missing from his Greek manuscript, Erasmus translated the Vulgate's version back into the Greek. He also translated the Latin text into Greek wherever he found that the Greek text and the accompanying commentaries were mixed up. Erasmus said his work was "rushed into print rather than edited," resulting in a number of transcription errors. After comparing what writings he could find, Erasmus wrote corrections between the lines of the manuscripts he was using and sent them as proofs to a man called Froben, his publisher.

His hurried effort was published by his friend Froben in Basel in 1516, and thence became the first published Greek New Testament. Erasmus used several Greek manuscript sources because he did not have access to a single complete manuscript. Most of the manuscripts were, however, late Greek manuscripts of the Byzantine textual family and Erasmus used the oldest manuscript
the least because "he was afraid of its supposedly erratic text." He also ignored much older and better manuscripts that were at his disposal presumably for the same reason.

His second (1519) edition, used by Martin Luther in his German translation of the Bible, was written for people who could not understand Latin. Together, the first and second editions sold 3,300 copies. By comparison, only 600 copies of the "Complutensian Polyglot" were ever printed - in all probability because it was printed after Erasmus' work.

Erasmus' first and second edition did not include 1 John 5:7–8 which is known today as the "Comma Johanneum." Those verses say,

“For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.”

Erasmus had been unable to find those verses in any Greek manuscript, but one was supplied to him during production of the third edition. That manuscript is thought to be a 1520 creation from the Latin Vulgate, which likely got the verses from a fifth-century Trinitarian biased copy in the possession of the Catholic church. In June of 1927 the Roman Catholic Church decreed that the "Comma Johanneum" was open to dispute and it is rarely included in modern scholarly translations today.

Erasmus' third edition of 1522 was probably used by William Tyndale for the first English New Testament. It was also the basis for the 1550 Robert Stephanus edition which was used by the translators of the Geneva Bible and King James Version of the English Bible. Erasmus published a fourth edition of his translation in 1527 which contained parallel columns of the Greek, Latin Vulgate and Erasmus' own Latin translations. In 1535
Erasmus published the fifth (and final) edition which dropped the Latin Vulgate column but was otherwise similar to the fourth edition. Later versions of the Greek New Testament by others, but based on Erasmus' Greek New Testament, became known as the "Textus Receptus" or the "Received Text," the source for the King James.

Proving his loyalty to Roman Catholicism, Erasmus dedicated his work to Pope Leo X as a patron of learning, and regarded this work as his chief service to the cause of Christianity.

Now ask yourself – “What did you notice about all of that information?”

What did you note about the condition of the Vulgate in 1500? What did you notice about the insights Erasmus had into its condition and the insights others had into the condition of the Greek manuscripts to which they were appealing? What did you notice about the person of Erasmus and the fact that it was his work that contributed greatly to the creation of the King James Bible in 1611? What did you notice about the "Johannine Comma" – which is the single most declarative statement on the "Trinity" in scripture? Is it part of the inspired word or was it added?

The point is not to demean the Bible. The point is to help us see it for what it is, which will help us use it and apply it properly in our lives as Christians today. His Word is true. It is a gift. But it is not exhaustive, it is not without error in marginal ways, it is the best we’ve got but we have not always had it, and we’re really fortunate to have it now. When read with the Spirit of love and eyes of faith it changes lives, it renews the mind. But, like a medical journal, it must be used appropriately, in a timely manner, and applied in a
reasonable way. We do not worship the Bible nor do we allow its contents as license to treat others badly.

Finally, these facts about the Bible in no way justify man’s attempts to create another book of “scripture” (like the Urantia or Book of Mormon) – that is just foolishness. It remains the single most remarkable Book on the face of the earth, and a direct gift from God. Creating mythology as a means to counter the difficult issues related to its history is like the parents of a troubled child thinking a mannequin would be a suitable replacement.
Erasmus wrote a number of other books in addition to his translations of the Bible from the Greek and Latin. By the 1530s, the writings of Erasmus accounted for ten to twenty percent of all book sales in Europe. Credited to him are the adages, "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king" and "Pandora’s Box."

In the Christian area he wrote a book called, “Handbook of the Christian Soldier" (1503) which was translated into English a few years later by a young William Tyndale. In this little book Erasmus outlines the views of the normal Christian life, a subject he was impassioned about. To this man of great letters and learning, to this man whose translation of Greek manuscripts was used to compose the King James Bible, the greatest complaint against Christianity (as it was practiced in his day) was what he called, “formalism” and which he described as “going through the motions of tradition without understanding their basis in the teachings of Christ.” That is an amazing insight from a practicing faithful Catholic. To Erasmus, formalisms can teach the soul how to worship God but they can also serve to hide or quench the spirit. His assessment was dead on when it came to the latter and he cited monasticism, saint worship, war, the spirit of class and the foibles of society as some examples.

In another book – which admittedly bordered on satire – he extolled the reading of scripture “as vital because of its power to transform and motivate toward love,” and he summarized his view as saying that “the New Testament is the law of Christ people are called to obey and that Christ is the example they are called to imitate.”

Erasmus didn’t limit his studies to ancient language and writing books. He also labored greatly on the works of the early church fathers, including Jerome, Hilary, St.
Augustine, and among the Greeks the works of Irenaeus, Origen and Chrysostom. He even wrote a book that responded to Niccolo Machiavelli’s, "The Prince." Where Machiavelli said a leader would gain more by operating through fear, Erasmus countered by saying that a leader would gain the most by operating in love. As open and critical Erasmus was of Roman Catholicism, he was faithful to it – always seeking to improve it from the inside rather than fight it from without. But in the heat of the spirit of reform there was a constant pressure on Erasmus to abandon the Catholic Church and join Luther. For his refusal he has my greatest respect because he did not let zealotry blind him to the good Roman Catholicism produced, but merely challenged it to change the bad.

As stated, the work of Erasmus (and his New Testament translation) helped fan the flames of Martin Luther and his Reformational activities which began in the year following the publication of Erasmus' New Testament work. As we are well aware, the issues that separated Catholicism and Luther’s nascent Protestantism produced a tremendous amount of rancor between the two, and before long there was great pressure on all curious souls to choose sides. It was at the height of Erasmus’ literary career that he was approached to do the same (and of course to choose Luther). But Erasmus’ approach was to not care about sides, but to instead critique and openly criticize whatever he believed was unsupported by scripture (and the early church fathers) no matter who said it or what “side” they represented. I admire this too about the man, and have never understood all or nothing hatred or endorsement for something just because it’s the side a person leans toward.

In all Erasmus’ criticisms of clerical follies and abuses, he always maintained – to the death - that he was not attacking the Church itself or its doctrines, and had no enmity toward churchmen. In my estimation he, above
all other church reformers, embodied the Spirit of Christ in the effort to reform matters. Additionally, he retained his intellectual integrity amidst it all because he did NOT seek to build a following unto himself. We know this is true because the letters he wrote were written in academic language (Greek and Latin), the language of scholars - something the masses were not, so they could not tap into him or his views to honor and obey. I mention all of these things to help validate Erasmus' oppositional positions which are often lost in the popularity of those who appealed to revolution rather than reconciliation. Enter Martin Luther.

Erasmus couldn't help but notice Luther's criticism of the Catholic Church. At the onset he described Luther as "a mighty trumpet of gospel truth," agreeing with his criticisms and saying, "It is clear that many of the reforms for which Luther calls are urgently needed."

In turn Luther spoke with admiration of Erasmus' superior learning. But like any person seeking to overthrow an empire, Luther wanted more from Erasmus than intellect – he wanted his allegiance. In their early correspondence, Luther expressed boundless admiration for all Erasmus had done in the cause of a sound and reasonable Christianity but urged him to join the "Lutheran party."

Why?

 Couldn’t one person out of all who agreed with Luther have been allowed to remain behind? Did Luther have to have complete allegiance to his vision from all parties involved? Couldn’t he see the value of Erasmus as an allied force behind the scenes?

Naturally, Erasmus declined to commit himself, arguing that to do so would endanger his position as a leader in the movement for pure scholarship, which he regarded as his purpose in life. But when Erasmus hesitated to support him, the straightforward Luther got angered.
and claimed Erasmus was avoiding his responsibility – suggesting it was either due to “cowardice or a lack of purpose.” This was the first division between Luther and Erasmus and it was founded on the fact that Erasmus refused to join “team Luther.” It is a fact that, in retrospect, accentuates our purpose and point today – we do not need to divide. The Spirit of Christ that abides in all who are His plainly suggests that we can remain accepting of each other while differing greatly in opinion, praxis and thought.

Any hesitancy on the part of Erasmus to join Luther came not from lack of courage or conviction but rather from a concern over the mounting disorder and violence the reformed movement was creating – remember – among people who sought to love and serve God in Jesus' name. In a letter to Protestant Reformer Philip Melanchthon, Erasmus wrote in 1524:

“I know nothing of your church; at the very least it contains people who will, I fear, overturn the whole system and drive the princes into using force to restrain good men and bad alike. The gospel, the word of God, faith, Christ, and Holy Spirit – these words are always on their lips; look at their lives and they speak quite another language.”

Now remember, Erasmus was an expert in his day on the contents of the Bible and the teachings of Jesus, the Apostles and the Early Church Fathers. He was a first-hand witness of the reformers and their followers and the Spirit they embodied, and He was ardently faithful to God and His purposes. With that background, we have to take his assessment of the reformers and those who followed them quite seriously – as seriously as we would take the assessment of a first-hand witness of Joseph Smith and his followers back in the day – it’s only fair.

Are you willing to do this, or will you toss Erasmus away simply because he did not have a huge following, or because he remained Catholic, or because he might
have even been a homosexual? I’m not suggesting that Erasmus and his assessment of all things was completely correct, but I am saying that all points of view play a role and what he observed in the Reformation was not all goodness, holiness and purity.

In 1529, Erasmus wrote something called, “An epistle against those who falsely boast they are Evangelicals.” Here he begins to complain of the doctrines and morals of the reformers, saying:

“You declaim bitterly against the luxury of priests, the ambition of bishops, the tyranny of the Roman Pontiff, and the babbling of the sophists; against our prayers, fasts, and Masses; and you are not content to retrench the abuses that may be in these things, but must needs abolish them entirely... Look around on this ‘Evangelical’ generation, and observe whether amongst them less indulgence is given to luxury, lust, or avarice, than amongst those whom you so detest. Show me any one person who by “that Gospel” has been reclaimed from drunkenness to sobriety, from fury and passion to meekness, from avarice to liberality, from reviling to well-speaking, from wantonness to modesty. I will show you a great many who have become worse through following it....The solemn prayers of the Church are abolished, but now there are very many who never pray at all.... I have never entered their conventicles, but I have sometimes seen them returning from their sermons, the countenances of all of them displaying rage, and wonderful ferocity, as though they were animated by the evil spirit.... Whoever beheld in their meetings any one of them shedding tears, smiting his breast, or grieving for his sins ?... Confession to the priest is abolished, but very few now confess to God.... They have fled from Judaism that they may become Epicureans.”

Did Erasmus have a valid point? When the pendulum swings it certainly swings wide, does it not? In many ways what was happening between Catholicism and the Protestants, between Erasmus and Luther, pictured what
Hegel created and called “the dialectic.” For more than a millennia philosophers, like the Christians who would flow in behind them, would spout their philosophy as “the only true philosophy.” From Parmenides and Heraclitus, to Socrates and Aristotle, to Descartes and Kant, everyone wanted to author and bottle and sell their special brand of philosophy as the best or correct philosophy. Along came Hegel and he said that "truth," "the best philosophy," is a historical process whereby everything sort of grows by feeding and fighting off each other, and in this process we are able to arrive at better models of thought. Hegel proposed that instead of one form being right or absolute, it would serve as an element that would produce future truths.

Using religion, Hegel’s system or approach might look something like this:

Church A says, “Jesus was all Man.”

This is what Hegel called a Thesis statement.

Church B, in an affront to church A’s thesis that "Jesus was all Man" provides an antithesis claim and says, “Jesus was all God.”

From these two perspectives colliding, conflicting and challenging each other, we arrive at a SYNTHESIS of the TWO,

“Jesus was all man and all God.”

According to Hegel this synthesis, in time, would become the New Thesis – which of course will be at some time or another challenged by a new Antithesis – and on and on and on, with thoughts and positions climbing higher and higher as a result.

Catholicism (a historical Thesis) was confronted by Luther (Antithesis) and the end result of this conflict (dialectic) was the Protestant Reformation (Synthesis) - here we have an actual working example of Hegel’s dialectic in play. The Reformation then becomes the
New Thesis . . . and from there we have grown to tens and tens of thousands of Synthesis Religions around the world – all claiming Jesus and His ways in some form or another.

In the face of where we are today, with over 30,000 Christian denominations, there is truly only one way to manage this vast sea of divergence and difference in the body – subjectively.

So let’s preach, teach and share Jesus.

Let’s do our best to teach the Bible admitting we may be wrong on things. Let’s live by the Spirit whose fruit is love. And let’s let every division go.

Interestingly enough, in philosophical circles, Hegel and his dialectic was not the end. A number of subsequent theories of philosophy have been presented but the one that continues to thrive – both in reality, and therefore functionally and with purpose – is existentialism, founded by Christian believer, Soren Kierkegaard.

I find it utterly amazing (and absolutely the work of God) that Kierkegaard’s existentialist views (especially related to the church and love) provide us with what I believe is the only viable solution left for the church today – which, admittedly, those views were not authored by Kierkegaard but only echoed the Spirit of Christ. Applying Kierkegaard’s model of existentialism to the faith we may indeed become free to love – which is not only the end of the Law but the very nature of God.

In addition to what he perceived as the moral failings of the Reformers, Erasmus also dreaded any change in doctrine, citing the long history of the Church as a bulwark against innovation. In book I of his "Hyperaspistes" he puts the matter bluntly to Luther himself and says:

“We are dealing with this: Would a stable mind depart from the opinion handed down by so many men famous for holiness
and miracles, depart from the decisions of the Church, and commit our souls to the faith of someone like you who has sprung up just now with a few followers, although the leading men of your flock do not agree either with you or among themselves — indeed though you do not even agree with yourself, since in this same Assertion you say one thing in the beginning and something else later on, recanting what you said before.”

Continuing his chastisement of Luther — while tossing in sarcastic witticisms (like, “there is no pure interpretation of Scripture anywhere but in Wittenberg”) - Erasmus touched upon another important point of the controversy saying to Luther:

“You stipulate that we should not ask for or accept anything but Holy Scripture, but you do it in such a way as to require that we permit you to be its sole interpreter, renouncing all others. Thus the victory will be yours if we allow you to be not the steward but the lord of Holy Scripture.”

Erasmus was on to something here. His point to Luther was, “You claim sola scriptura, sola scriptura, but demand people adhere to your interpretation of scripture alone.” Erasmus saw through the fail in the Reformational stance. Unfortunately this has always been the standard of Protestantism — “unless you see and interpret scripture as we interpret scripture, you are in the wrong.” And this stance became the license for thousands of denominations to set themselves up as representatives of the one true way.

Unlike Luther, Erasmus was not in support of division and said:

"I detest dissension because it goes both against the teachings of Christ and against a secret inclination of nature. I doubt that either side in the dispute can be suppressed without grave loss."

In his catechism of 1533 titled, "Explanation of the Apostles' Creed," Erasmus took a stand against Luther's
teaching by asserting that the unwritten "Sacred Traditions" of the Church were just as valid a source of revelation as the Bible. He did this by enumerating the Deuterocanonical books in the canon of the Bible and by acknowledging seven sacraments. However he simultaneously and radically supported a lay access to the Bible.

In the end, Erasmus and his ways were too much for Luther and he, as with most people bent on people doing things their way, resorted to the rhetorical tools found in the mouths of many Evangelicals today when they are disagreed with and began assigning pejoratives to the person of Erasmus, calling him a "viper," "liar," and "the very mouth and organ of Satan."

Like anyone seeking for peace and unity Erasmus was also criticized by the monks of his own faith who said that he had "prepared the way and was responsible for Martin Luther. Erasmus," they said, "had laid the egg, and Luther had hatched it." In response Erasmus, ever witty, dismissed the charge, and claimed that “Luther had hatched a different bird entirely.”

Finally, while attempting to avoid most theological debates, Erasmus did, in fact, stridently argue for two points - first, that human beings had “freedom of choice.” Drawing on his astute knowledge of scripture and a large array of notable authorities - like Origen, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, in addition to Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus - Erasmus argued that human beings absolutely have free will. Luther aggressively disagreed. This division lives on today. Secondly, Erasmus was also a big proponent of religious toleration saying, even in the face of his own Roman Catholicism, that “outward signs were not important; what mattered was the believer's direct relationship with God,” which he added, "as the [Catholic] church believes."
Erasmus died suddenly from dysentery and according to his friend, his last words were, “Dear God.” He, like Kierkegaard after him, set an example of Christianity that Luther could have more seriously considered. It would have saved millions of lives – a number somewhere in the tens of millions – and helped eliminate the divisions present in the Church today. It’s not that Luther was all wrong. His criticisms against the machine were, in my estimation, legitimate. But doctrine, world views, and even views on the Word of God are, as Erasmus and Kierkegaard pointed out, entirely subjective. Luther didn’t offer true subjective religion – only the promise of it. What was delivered was really just more of the same.
TWENTY TWO- Thank you, Sola Scriptura

The failing idea of "Sola Scriptura" is built right into the title – "Scripture Alone." Our view is that scripture alone leads to division-a-plenty – as evidenced by the 30,000 plus Christian denominations throughout the world. As a final quick review, let me put it to you this way:

1. When Jesus sent the apostles out He did not tell them to write but to “preach” the Word.

2. Many years later these men were led to write – gospels and letters to believers.

3. These written epistles were sent to specific believers in specific areas.

4. They helped lead the early post-apostolic church but were by no means unified or agreed upon, nor were they ubiquitously shared or copied.

5. Additionally there were plenty of pseudo accounts that were considered apostolic by believers.

6. The genuine articles were a blessing to believers and were shared and copied – so much so that many of them were translated into numerous languages.

7. Unfortunately, by 400 AD all the translations were boiled down to one language – Latin - and for 1000 years this Bible was unavailable to the majority of believers due to cost and an inability to read Latin, or read at all for that matter.
To claim "Sola Scriptura" for the Body of Christ in the mid 1500’s is like an automotive group standing up today and saying, “The only viable source of travel today is the automobile – refusing to accept that prior to Ford people rode horses and carriages and bicycles and today ride trains, plains, skateboards etc.”

We need to wake up.

The stance against "Sola Scriptura" is NOT against the scripture – ever – it’s against man's use, interpretation, and boxed up views of the scripture, which has led to division. All we need to do is observe how Luther, the Father of the Reformation was opposed to Erasmus’ views on things like church, traditions, and “free will” and we see that from the beginning "Sola Scriptura" could not even solve their differences! It didn’t because it couldn’t – we are human beings with differing views! In the end "Sola Scriptura" appeals to a methodology that is all together untenable. Admittedly, it sounds like it would work because at face value it presents us with what we want to believe is the written authority from God, but even in the midst of two great minds – one a genius in original languages and the other a devout believer - scripture divided them!

In 1522 Luther produced, from Erasmus’ work, the German New Testament. In response Erasmus wrote "Freedom of the Will" in 1524. In response to that Luther wrote, “On the Bondage of the Will” a year later. Let’s see where this spirit of "Sola Scriptura" has led us to today:

- In 1525 the Anabaptist movement began.
- In 1528 Lutheranism is officially adopted with Luther confirming, by and through his views, that the actual presence of Christ's body and blood are present in Christ’s Supper.
• In 1537 Myles Coverdale published his version of the Bible.

• Nine years later this Bible (which included the "apocrypha") was banned by Henry VIII.

• In 1535 Thomas More refuses to accept King Henry VIII's claim to be the supreme head of the Church in England. What did they do? Execute him.

• In 1536 Tyndale was put to death and English ecclesiastical authorities ordered his Bible burned because it was thought to be part of "Luther's reform."

• In 1536 Calvin writes "Institutes of the Christian Religion" (look what that has created today!)

• 1536 Jacob Hutter, founds the Hutterites. The Hutterites for Goodness' sake! Where are the Christians, the followers of Jesus? Lutherans? Hutterites? Millerites?

• 1537-1551 "The Matthew Bible," by John Rogers was published. This Bible was NOT authorized for use in public worship. The 1551 edition contained some very offensive notes.

• 1539-1569 "The Great Bible," by Thomas Cromwell, defective in many ways, was the 1st English Bible to be authorized for public use in English churches.

• In the 1540's Parliament of England bans Tyndale's translation as a "crafty, false and untrue translation."

• In 1545-1563 a Catholic Council of Trent offers up a Counter-Reformation against Protestantism.
• 1552 Joachim Westphal starts controversy against Calvinists, and defends the Lutheran doctrine of “Real Presence” in communion.

• In 1553 Michael Servetus, founder of Unitarianism, is burned at the stake in Geneva (in a true act of Christian love). BURNED AT THE STAKE! Over opinion!

• In 1553-1558 Queen Mary I of England persecutes reformers John Rogers, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, and Thomas Cranmer; 238 are then also burned at the stake!

• 1555 the "Peace of Augsburg Act" (listen to this) gives religious freedom in Germany (but only to Lutheran Protestants).

• 1560 "Geneva Bible," first Bible with chapter and verse numbers.

• 1572 John Knox founds the Scottish Presbyterian Church. Why? Due to disagreement with Lutherans over sacraments and church government.

• 1585 Jesuit scholar Francisco Ribera publishes the first "futurist interpretation," naturally appealing to his interpretation of the Biblical books of Daniel and Revelation.

• 1609 The Baptist Church (founded by John Smyth) Why? Objections over infant baptism and demands for a church-state separation.

• 1611 the "King James Version" (AKA the "Authorized Version") is published, based primarily on Tyndale's work and "Bishop's Bible" of 1572. The first printings also included the Apocrypha.
• 1635 Roger Williams was banished from Massachusetts Bay Colony for advocating separation of church and state. (Good on ya, Roger.)
• In 1636 Harvard University was founded as a training school for ministers.
• In 1638 Anne Hutchinson was “banished” as a heretic from Massachusetts. At her trial (she had views that differed with the Puritan Clergy for goodness' sake) she said,

“You have no power over my body, neither can you do me any harm – for I am in the hands of the eternal Jehovah, my Savior, I am at his appointment, the bounds of my habitation are cast in heaven, no further do I esteem of any mortal man than creatures in his hand, I fear none but the great Jehovah, which hath foretold me of these things, and I do verily believe that he will deliver me out of your hands. Therefore take heed how you proceed against me – for I know that, for this you go about to do to me, God will ruin you and your posterity and this whole state.”

• Oh, and then in 1650, Bishop James Ussher calculated the date of creation as October 23, 4004 BC. (Thanks for that, Bishop. Now "Sola Scriptura" was providing the world actual dates including days and months of things.)
• 1692 Salem witch trials were held in Colonial America (Witch trials! "Sola Scriptura?").
• 1693 Jacob Amman founds the Amish sect.
• 1730-1749 and the United States experienced its First Great Awakening.
• 1738 John Wesley and his hymn writing brother Charles founded the Methodist movement.


• 1779 Virginia, the "Statute for Religious Freedom" which says (in part): "Jesus never coerced anyone to follow him, and the imposition of a religion by government officials is impious."

• 1791 First Amendment to the United States Constitution said: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

A country's Congress is wise enough to make such a stance but "Sola Scriptura" and those who enforce it as believers aren’t?

As we enter into the 19th century the battle over converts, division over doctrine and practice, and debates over “which church is correct” begin to mount.

• 1809 the Disciples of Christ (AKA the Campbell Movement) begins seeking to restore the true church back to earth.

• 1819 Thomas Jefferson produces the "Jefferson Bible."

• 1828 Plymouth Brethren were founded; they promote a tradition known as "Dispensationalism."

• 1830 Charles Finney's revivals lead Americans into the Second Great Awakening.
• 1830 Joseph Smith, Jr. starts the Church of Christ as a result of reported heavenly visitations, buried gold plates, and revelations from God.

Why not? Looking around the guy could see that people wanted certainty, they wanted leadership, and they wanted promises of absolute truth. "Sola Scriptura" wasn’t giving it to anyone. All they got from it was division – so being who he was, Smith decided to give the people what they wanted. We cannot EVER say that any of these men, women or their interpretation of scripture were correct. None of them. All we can say is that men and women were able to preach and teach things that a certain number of people (large or small) accepted as truth. Why would God allow this to occur and exist? Because the importance has NEVER EVER been in perfect doctrine and practice – we are all far too different in far too many ways for it to be that. God has simply wanted those who look upon His Son to love each other. And those who are His – the MORE they are His – the less they make doctrinal divisions important. The divisions didn’t stop with Smith and his dreamy imaginations. The train of Christian division kept a rollin’.

• 1831 William Miller begins the "Advent Movement" by preaching his first sermon on the Biblical books of Daniel and Revelation.

• 1832 The Stone Movement and the Disciples of Christ merged to form the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement.
1844 the Millerites experienced what is called "The Great Disappointment" – Jesus didn’t return.

1844 Ellen G. White, co-founder and prophetess of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, has her first vision.

See, suspect visions became the key to overrunning the "Sola Scriptura" fail. If a person could have an actual vision from God, whatever they saw would give certainty to the divisions between those who were fighting over scriptural interpretation. Religious visionaries are nothing new, even in the early 1800’s. But in the face of "Sola Scriptura," religious visionaries seemed more reliable than the multitudinous opinions from others on what this passage or that passage means.

1845 the Southern Baptist Convention formed in Augusta, Georgia.

1846 Bernadette Soubirous receives the first of 18 apparitions of "Our Lady of Lourdes" in Lourdes, France. Six million people a year visit this Lourdes Shrine today.

1847 Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod founded in Chicago, Illinois.

1848 “Perfectionist movement” in western New York state kicked into gear (I think some of them are still around today).

1855 Søren Kierkegaard, a man who had great disdain for the abuses he saw in religion presented another way to see Christ and Christianity. We call it
"Christian Existentialism." It is the forerunner to "Subjective Christianity" today.

- 1863 Seventh-day Adventist Church officially formed, 19 years after the Millerite "Great Disappointment."

- 1865 Methodist preacher William Booth founds the Salvation Army, vowing to "bring the gospel into the streets to the most desperate and needy."

- 1879 Mary Baker Eddie starts her Christian Scientist movement.

- 1881-1894 "Revised Version," called for by the Church of England, uses Greek based on "Septuagint (B) and (S)," "Hebrew Masoretic Text" used in OT; follows Greek order of words, greater accuracy than AV, includes "Apocrypha," scholarship never disputed.

- 1884 Charles Taze Russell founds the Bible Student movement. It becomes the Jehovah’s Witnesses in time.

- 1894, another contributor to the "Subjective Christian" movement steps forward in the person of Leo Tolstoy who wrote a book called, "The Kingdom of God is Within You," which speaks to "ChristiAnarchy" and "Christian Subjectivity." Between 1906-1909 what is called the "Azusa Street Revival" in Los Angeles, CA begins the modern Pentecostal movement.

- 1907 The Church of God in Christ is formed.

- 1908 Church of the Nazarene founded in Pilot Point, Texas.

- 1909 "Scofield Reference Bible" published which promotes futurism.
• 1909-1911 The Rosicrucian Fellowship, an international association of Esoteric Christian mystics, founded at Mount Ecclesia.

• 1910-1915 The Fundamentals, a 12-volume collection of essays by 64 British and American scholars and preachers, forms the foundation of what is called Christian Fundamentalism.

• 1919 Karl Barth's "Commentary on Romans" is published, critiquing Liberal Christianity and beginning the neo-orthodox movement.

• 1923 Aimee Semple McPherson builds Angelus Temple.

• 1942 National Association of Evangelicals founded.

• 1946-1952 "Revised Standard Version."

• 1947 Carl F. H. Henry, produces a landmark work pairing Evangelicalism versus Fundamentalism in the United States.

First, 330 years without an agreed upon Bible. Then 1000 years with a Bible that could not be accessed or read or afforded or trusted. Then 515 years (from 1500 to 2015) where "Sola Scriptura" divided everyone in the body of Christ from each other. Isn’t it time for a waving of the white theological flag and for people who love Jesus to simply look to others who love Jesus and smile?

Jesus saved the world – not the Bible. It is a gift to help seekers understand God’s means of redeeming humankind from a historical foundation of God speaking through inspired individuals. The only way to understand its contents is by the Spirit – not the flesh. Our knowledge does not save us. In other words, how
we think of things or about things is not what saves us – He saves us – by His grace through our faith. And our faith is not static but a dynamic force that, like the ocean, is constantly on the move, never still, and forever changing.

Interpretations over the Bible, over matters of faith, over doctrine and practice cannot take precedence over love – for all. There is no theology exam at the gates of heaven. God does not make most things in the Bible clear. He allows paradox and differences. The result of this are opportunities to die to self and self-importance and to love as He loved. Maybe we could think about it this way – if we find ourselves angry, indignant, calling names, dividing, pointing fingers or judging others by the Bible, it is our flesh that is reigning not the Spirit of Christ. The Word of God is truly sharper than any two-edged sword, but compared to the persuasive power of His love it’s like showing up with a knife to a gun fight.
The focus of this ministry has evolved over time as I have evolved (or as some would say, as I have de-evolved). In any case, we started out hitting the LDS hard. Next we saw what was going on in the Evangelical world and hit it hard. Then we realized that hitting things hard is not the best approach. So we started looking at the "Heart of the Matter" which we believe is faith in God through Jesus Christ, and loving God and Man. Included in this is dying to division and differences, viewing the Bible contextually, and kindly challenging objective orthodoxies.

In the end we now promote what we are calling "Subjective Christianity" or the idea that true Christianity is subjectively believed, embraced and lived, and that every individual is responsible before God for both what they accept and reject and how they choose to love. We have stepped back from allowing dogma to reign over our conversations and have tried to let the Spirit of Love reign in truth.

In an effort to support "Subjective Christianity" we have culled the best passages from the New Testament for your consideration. We chose from Romans to Revelation, leaving the Gospels and Acts out of the mix simply because they are books that primarily deal with elements of Objective religion as established among the Children of Israel.

Romans

Paul says in Romans 8:33-34 -

"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ
that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

Romans 12:3-10 "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another."

Romans 14:1-23 "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we
die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

The gist of these passages are one in the same – let God through His Spirit lead and guide those who are His. I mean, let’s admit it here and now – we all believe what we believe anyway, no matter what.
And we are all going to die alone and go to God alone and give our report alone – so let’s celebrate the fact that God so loved the World that He sent His only begotten Son, and those who believe on Him believe on Him by a very personal faith they received from Him.

1st Corinthians

Maybe we could define "Subjective Christianity" as -

“An approach to faith in Jesus Christ that refuses to divide over doctrine or dogma by accepting all professions of faith and allowing all people the right to openly pursue Him according to the leading of the Holy Spirit in their lives.”

Where I personally reject eternal punishment, and futurism, and "Sola Scriptura," and Trinity, and Calvinism, as a Subjective Christian, I fully embrace others as my brothers and sisters in Christ who claim Him in addition to being “Trinitarian Calvinists that push 'Sola Scriptura,' the eminent Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and eternal punishment of hell fire.” Does that make sense? Do you at least understand?

So let me hit on the passages from 1st Corinthians that support "Subjective Christianity" -

1st Corinthians 1:10-13  "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"
1st Corinthians 2:1-2  "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

What were the signs of Milk-drinkers in the church? Paul said,

1st Corinthians 3:1-3 "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envyng, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?"

1st Corinthians 3:18-22 "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours."

1st Corinthians 4:5 "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God."

Paul touched on the fact that everyone tends to think they are instructors in the things of Christ, saying,

1st Corinthians 4:15 "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."

For you doctrinalists out there, Paul plainly said,
1\textsuperscript{st} Corinthians 4:20 "For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power."

1\textsuperscript{st} Corinthians 6:12 "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."

1\textsuperscript{st} Corinthians 6:17 "But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." (Suggesting strongly that love ought to reign between us).

1\textsuperscript{st} Corinthians 8:2-3 "And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of him."

1\textsuperscript{st} Corinthians 9:19-23 "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you."

Then there’s chapter 13 – how do you get around it?

1\textsuperscript{st} Corinthians 13:2-3 "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

And what about verse 7?
“Love . . . beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

1st Corinthians 14:33 "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints."

1st Corinthians 15:56 "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law."


2nd Corinthians

In 2nd Corinthians 1:24 Paul refers to his apostolic position and says plainly,

“Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.”

That word dominion has its root in lordship and Paul’s meaning is that even as an apostle he did NOT exercise lordship over anyone's faith, because (he said) it is BY FAITH that they stand. Radical.

2nd Corinthians 3 is amazing. Read the whole thing but let me hit on a few key passages. Verse 1 - 8,

"Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able
ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: how shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?"

Now jumping down to verse 17 he adds,

“Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

In chapter four beginning at verse one listen to what Paul writes,

"Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

That's subjective faith folks.

The last verse of chapter four reminds us of the spiritual nature of all things Christian, saying,

2\textsuperscript{nd} Corinthians 4:18 "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

I would commend all of chapter five to you – it is amazing but consider these highlights -
2nd Corinthians 5:1-5 "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit."

Then listen to his message in verse 12,

"For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart."

And in 16,

"Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more."

How seriously do we take verse 16 of chapter six which says,

2nd Corinthians 6:16 "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

If I and YOU and THEY are the temple of the living God, and God dwells in me, and walks in me, and is MY God who the hell has the right to try and get me to obey and listen and follow them, ESPECIALLY in terms of doctrine. I get submitting to people and such but there
is no doctrine outside of us that trumps the doctrine we possess internally.

We note the free and open subjectivity of 2nd Corinthians 9:7 where, speaking of giving it says,

“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

From 2nd Corinthians chapter 10 verse 7 unto the end, take the time to reflect upon Paul’s words there. It would take too long to properly exegete them but you can – you have the Spirit.

Paul adds a fear in chapter 11 saying,

“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”

Modern translation? Take all your BS mandatory doctrinal demands and smoke ‘em. The Simplicity is in CHRIST. ALL CHRIST.

2nd Corinthians is concluded at chapter 13:11-13 with these words,

"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you. Greet one another with an holy kiss. All the saints salute you."

Note the emphasis on unity, peace and love.

Galatians

Galatians 1:10-12 "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the
gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Oh, and let’s see what Paul did when he was called into ministry -

Galatians 1:15-19 "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother."

Sounds like Paul cared about the leadership and the council of apostles' input and ideas? Not to me. He did what he was called to do.

One of the biggest complaints against me over the years by the local pastors is I haven’t sought “their council.” I mean they have literally told me to my face that I needed to be accountable to them. Ha!

This is a familiar verse but consider it,

Galatians 2:16 “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

Now think about this, if a man is justified before God by faith and NOT by works then there is absolutely NO obligation to have to answer any person because they cannot know our faith – only God. If works were
necessary to salvation I would understand a hierarchy of authority but since it is individually based on faith, the visible church is over.

At verse 20-21 Paul adds emphasis to this subjective personal faith, saying,

Galatians 2:20 "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

Nine times Paul refers to himself as I or Me – five times he speaks of Jesus – in one of those times he says, “Christ lives in me.”

SUBJECTIVE. PERSONAL. NO MAN.

NO VISIBLE AUTHORITY. CHRIST. YOU. I.

When it comes to playing religion, playing worthiness, playing outward conformity, Paul plainly says in chapter 3,

Galatians 3:1-3 "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"

The flesh of human beings, folks – every human being – is depraved. Live by it in any effort, including efforts to perfect it – and your flesh will be in control. As Christians we ALL began in the Spirit, and as Christians that is where we are hoping to abide and grow. The
flesh, the material, the world, men, buildings, projects, tithes, blah, blah, blah are of the flesh.

The import of faith is reiterated in verse 14 of the same chapter where we read,

Galatians 3:14 "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

Through faith, faith, faith. No man can quantify or qualify our faith. They try and make us prove our faith to them but only God can truly measure it.

Ever attend a church where women are treated differently in Christ than men?

Check this out -

Galatians 3:26-28 "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

The "woman game" is all tied to a misappropriation of the Word and culture of the day. It has nothing to do with what is right – we are all one in Christ.

Let me ask you this – In 2nd Corinthians we read where Paul said that the apostles did not want to dominate over anyone but only increase people’s joy, right?

And then we know Jesus came to give life more abundantly, right?

So listen to Galatians 4:6 which says -

“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”
So if we have the Spirit of His Son in us and neither He nor His apostles oppressed but only liberated, shouldn’t this be the call on all of our lives too?

Think!

Go on and read all that Paul goes on to say in chapter 4 about Hagar the Bondwoman and Sarah the free, then turn to chapter five verse one -

Galatians 5:1 “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

The liberty wherewith Christ has made us FREE? Anything, anyone who strips away our liberty and freedom as believers in any way is imposing their religion on us. Don’t accept it. Don’t believe it. You are free in Him, by Him, and for Him to use – not men and not religion.

Are we under any commands from Him? Just two (verse 6),

“For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.”

Faith and love – two commandments which can only be judged by God and not men. Stay with me and jump down to verse 13 -

Galatians 5:13-16 “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”
What does this love in the Spirit look like? Verse 22-23 -

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

In the last chapter of Galatians we read:

Galatians 6:3-5 “For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden.”

Ephesians

Ephesians 1:4 “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”

Ephesians 1:17-18 “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.”

Ephesians 2:16 “And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.”

Ephesians 2:18 “For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.”

Ephesians 2:19-22 “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together
growth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

Ephesians 3:6 “That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:”

Ephesians 3:16-19 “That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”

Ephesians 4:1-7 “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.”

Ephesians 4:11-32 “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in
love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, 
even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together 
and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according 
to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh 
increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. This I 
say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk 
not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having 
the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of 
God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the 
blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given 
themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness 
with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be 
that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the 
truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former 
conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the 
deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and 
that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in 
righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore putting away 
lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are 
members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the 
sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil. 
Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, 
working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may 
have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt 
communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is 
good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the 
hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are 
sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and 
wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put 
away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, 
tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's 
sake hath forgiven you.”

Ephesians 5:2 “And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved 
us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to 
God for a sweet-smelling savour.”
Ephesians 5:9 “For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.”

Ephesians 6:6 “Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.”

Ephesians 6:12 “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

Ephesians 6:13-18 “Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”

Philippians
Philippians 1:6 “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

Philippians 1:27-29 “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you it is given in the
behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.”

Philippians 2:1-11 “If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Philippians 2:14-15 “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.”

Philippians 3:18-19 “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.”

Philippians 4:2 “I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.”

Colossians
Colossians 1:27 “To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Colossians 2:1-2 “For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.”

Colossians 2:4-10 “And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ. As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.”

Colossians 2:16-23 “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with
the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh.”

Colossians 3:1-3 “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”

Colossians 3:12 “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

Colossians 3:23 “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.”

1st Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 1:2 “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.”

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1 Thessalonians 2:13  “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 “And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.”

1 Thessalonians 4:8-9 “He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit. But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

1 Thessalonians 4:11 “And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.”

2 Thessalonians

2 Thessalonians 1:3 “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.”

2 Thessalonians 3:5 “And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.”

1st Timothy

1st Timothy 2:1 “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto
the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one
mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who
gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”

1st Timothy 2:9 “In like manner also, that women adorn
themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and
sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly
array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with
good works. Let the woman learn in silence with all
subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp
authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was
first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the
woman being deceived was in the transgression.
Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they
continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.”

2nd Timothy

2nd Timothy 1:13-14 “Hold fast the form of sound words,
which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in
Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee
keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.”

2nd Timothy 2:14-26 “Of these things put them in
remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive
not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the
hearers. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman
that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of
truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will
increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as
doeth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who
concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection
is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless
the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The
Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that
nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a
great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but
also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”

2nd Timothy 3:14-17 “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

Titus

Titus 1:3 “But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior.”

Titus 3:9-11 “But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.”

Philemon
Philemon 1:4 “I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints.”

Hebrews

Hebrews 1:1 “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.”

Hebrews 2:11 “For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.”

Hebrews 3:12 “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.”

Hebrews 6:1-3 “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit.”

Hebrews 6:10 “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”

Hebrews 8:8-13 “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For
this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.”

Hebrews 9:11 “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building.”

Hebrews 9:13-14 “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

Hebrews 9:26 “For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

Hebrews 10:16 “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.”

Hebrew 11:6 “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a reworder of them that diligently seek him.”

Hebrews 12:18-29 “For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,
And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.”

Hebrews 13:9 “Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.”

James

James 2:13 “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”
James 2:14-25 “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?”

James 4:11-12 “Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?”

James 4:17 “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

1st Peter 1:22 “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.”
1st Peter 2:4-5  “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”

1st Peter 3:8-11  “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.”

1st Peter 3:22  “Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.”

1st Peter 4:1-2  “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.”

1st John

1st John 2:5-6  “But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.”

1st John 2:9-10  “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.”

1st John 2:26-27  “These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye
have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any
man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all
things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught
you, ye shall abide in him.”

1st John 3:10-11 “In this the children of God are manifest, and
the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is
not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is
the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should
love one another.”

1st John 3:14 “We know that we have passed from death unto
life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his
brother abideth in death.”

1st John 3:23-24 “And this is his commandment, That we
should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love
one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth
his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And
hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he
hath given us.”

1st John 4:1-6 “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the
spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets
are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God:
Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the
flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus
Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit
of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and
even now already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little
children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is
in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world:
therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.
We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not
of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and
the spirit of error.”

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1st John 4:7-12 “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.”

1st John 4:13-21 “Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”

1st John 5:1-5 “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is
he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

1st John 5:9-10 “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.”

1st John 5:13 “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

2nd John

2nd John 1:3 “Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.”

Jude

Jude 1:17-21 “But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”
and a Summary Explanation

Seven Steps
(from the Material to the Spiritual)

Biblical supports on why our focus on brick and mortar religion ought to become a thing of the past.

FIRST . . . the Material

The Nation or House of Israel (Material)

- Laws and Commands written in stone\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{20} Deuteronomy 9:10 And the LORD delivered unto me two tables of stone written with the finger of God; and on them was written according to all the words, which the LORD spake with you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly.
- Temples were “made with hands”\(^\text{21}\)
- Priesthood was held by flesh and blood\(^\text{22}\)
- Sacrifices were actual animals\(^\text{23}\)
- An economy of “Obedience/Blessing or Disobedience/Curse”\(^\text{24}\)
- A literal material Nation culled out from all others\(^\text{25}\)
- Even their cities were prescribed by God\(^\text{26}\)

\(^{21}\) Exodus 25:9 According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.

\(^{22}\) Exodus 19:6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

\(^{23}\) Leviticus 5:9 And he shall sprinkle of the blood of the sin offering upon the side of the altar; and the rest of the blood shall be wrung out at the bottom of the altar: it is a sin offering.

\(^{24}\) Deuteronomy 11:26 Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known.

\(^{25}\) Leviticus 26:12 And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.

\(^{26}\) Numbers 35:4 And the suburbs of the cities, which ye shall give unto the Levites, shall reach from the wall of the city and outward a thousand cubits round about.
- Literal manna from heaven\textsuperscript{27}
- Literal water from rock\textsuperscript{28}
- A literal day of rest\textsuperscript{29}
- Literal Prophets prophesying of literal events\textsuperscript{30}
- Ten percent of increase of fruits and harvest given to temple priests\textsuperscript{31}
- What to eat and drink was prescribed\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{27} Exodus 16:15 And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.

\textsuperscript{28} Exodus 17:6 Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.

\textsuperscript{29} Exodus 16:29 See, for that the LORD hath given you the sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.

\textsuperscript{30} Numbers 12:6 And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.

\textsuperscript{31} Leviticus 27:30 And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S: it is holy unto the LORD.

\textsuperscript{32} Exodus 22:31 And ye shall be holy men unto me: neither shall ye eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; ye shall cast it to the dogs.
- What to wear was prescribed\textsuperscript{33}
- How to worship was prescribed\textsuperscript{34}
- Sanitary laws were demanded\textsuperscript{35}\textsuperscript{36}\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{33} Exodus 39:1 And of the blue, and purple, and scarlet, they made cloths of service, to do service in the holy place, and made the holy garments for Aaron; as the LORD commanded Moses.

\textsuperscript{34} Ezekiel 46:3 Likewise the people of the land shall worship at the door of this gate before the LORD in the sabbaths and in the new moons.

\textsuperscript{35} Exodus 30:21 So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever to them, even to him and to his seed throughout their generations.

\textsuperscript{36} Leviticus 11:40 And he that eateth of the carcase of it shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: he also that beareth the carcase of it shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even.

\textsuperscript{37} Leviticus 14:8 And he that is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he may be clean: and after that he shall come into the camp, and shall tarry abroad out of his tent seven days.
- Even physical deformity was forbidden 38
- All of it pointing to the Coming of a material Messiah 39 40 41

38 Leviticus 21:18-21 For whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach: a blind man, or a lame, or he that hath a flat nose, or any thing superfluous, or a man that is brokenfooted, or brokenhanded, or crookbackt, or a dwarf, or that hath a blemish in his eye, or be scurvy, or scabbed, or hath his stones broken; no man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the LORD made by fire: he hath a blemish; he shall not come nigh to offer the bread of his God.

39 2nd Samuel 7:16 And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.

40 Deuteronomy 18:15-18 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

41 Isaiah 35:4-6; 40:1-5,9; 50:6; 53:1-3; 53:4-6; 53:7; 53:9; 53:12; Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 9:9; 12:10; Psalm 41:9
The Promise Messiah (Material)

- Came to House of Israel first, specifically, materially and literally\(^{42}\)
- He materially fulfilled the Law and the Prophets by obedience\(^{43}\)

\(^{42}\) Matthew 15:24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

\(^{43}\) Matthew 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.
He is the “bread of life,” “the living water,” “the way, truth and life,” “rest.”

Altered dietary laws.

Became the day of rest fulfilling the Sabbath

Our literal and final sacrifice for sin and death

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44 John 6:35 And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

45 John 7:37 In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

46 John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

47 Matthew 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

48 Matthew 15:17-18 Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.

49 Matthew 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

50 Hebrews 10:9-10 Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.
- Our new, final and only High Priest

- Said the temple would be destroyed within a generation

- The Material Messiah was put to death for the sins of the world

- The Temple veil ripped in two top to bottom

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51 Hebrew 3:1 Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.

52 Hebrews 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

53 Hebrews 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

54 Hebrews 8:1 Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens;

55 Hebrews 9:11 But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building.

56 Matthew 24:34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

57 1st John 2:2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

58 Mark 15:38 And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.
- He died physically\textsuperscript{59}
- He was buried physically\textsuperscript{60}
- He resurrected physically from the grave\textsuperscript{61}
- And He promised to return to save them physically from coming judgement\textsuperscript{62}
- He ascended physically into the heavens\textsuperscript{63}
- He was the last to be sent by God\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{59} John 19:30 When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

\textsuperscript{60} Matthew 27:59-60 And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.

\textsuperscript{61} Matthew 28:5-6 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

\textsuperscript{62} Revelation 3:11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

\textsuperscript{63} Acts 1:9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

\textsuperscript{64} Matthew 21:37 But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.
THIRD . . . His witnesses usher in the spiritual and warn of the coming end of the material.

12 APOSTLES

“Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen the Lord Jesus Christ?”

- Holy Spirit fell on them on Day of Pentecost – initiation a new administration/economy/dispensational (of the Spiritual)

- The eleven (plus Matthias and Paul) were the last material witnesses of Him

65 Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

66 1st Corinthians 15:8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

67 1st Corinthians 4:9 For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.
- They were commanded to go and preach the Gospel to the “vicinity or area” containing His people\textsuperscript{68}

- In time these witness also wrote (according to the Holy Spirit)\textsuperscript{69}

- What they wrote was to the believers in that day and age. \textsuperscript{70}

- They gave instructions on how to survive the end of all things which was headed their way - destruction.

- When they referred to scripture it was almost always to the Old Testament.

- There was no New Testament to guide people – just some letters.

- All compositions occurred before 70 AD – including Revelation.\textsuperscript{71}

- The Holy Spirit did the converting and guiding of believers far and wide in the early church.

\textsuperscript{68} Matthew 28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations (ethnos in Greek, tribes)

\textsuperscript{69} Namely Matthew, John, Paul, James, and Peter

\textsuperscript{70} There is not a passage in scripture where any of the New Testament writers intimate that their written epistles were for the benefit of future generations of believers.

\textsuperscript{71} See chapter on Revelations in “Knife to a Gun Fight”
- The Apostles gave their lives for their witness of His material life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and promise of His eminent return.

FOURTH . . . Material Destruction Arrives

“And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.” Jerusalem – 70 AD

- End of all things (of the former Covenant/Economy/Administration).72

- End of “the world” (which refers to their world, the Nation of Israel)73

72 1st Peter 4:7 But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

73 Matthew 13:49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just. (World here is not the typical Kosmos but Aion, which means age – “the end of the age.”

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- Material Temple utterly leveled\textsuperscript{74}
- Matthew twenty-four describes all the signs of the end of that age
- This was the beginning of a New Heaven and New Earth (spiritual)\textsuperscript{75}
- A New Jerusalem (spiritual)\textsuperscript{76}
- The Church was raptured by Christ at His coming\textsuperscript{77}
- Judgment fell on the rest for rejecting Him\textsuperscript{78}
- Everything related to the material religion was obliterated

\textsuperscript{74} See Josephus History of the Jews for a detailed description of this destruction.

\textsuperscript{75} Revelation 21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.  (Apocryphal language – no sea describes no brazen sea that was part of the temple).

\textsuperscript{76} Revelation 21:2 “. . .and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God” (meaning it is heavenly and spiritual not physical by any means).

\textsuperscript{77} Revelation 21:2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (God has always longed to be the husband of a worthy bride of believers).

\textsuperscript{78} (see note 55)
(The temple, priesthood, Genealogy, Law, Nation and City of David)

FIFTH . . . His Spiritual Kingdom now reigns forever.

“Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.”

The Body of Christ (Spiritual)
- God writes His laws upon individuals hearts and minds\textsuperscript{79} \textsuperscript{80}
- Believers are the epistles today\textsuperscript{81}
- No man need teach His neighbor for all will know Him\textsuperscript{82} \textsuperscript{83} \textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{79} Hebrews 8:10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

\textsuperscript{80} Hebrews 10:16 This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.

\textsuperscript{81} 2\textsuperscript{nd} Corinthians 3:3 Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

\textsuperscript{82} Hebrews 8:11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

\textsuperscript{83} 1\textsuperscript{st} John 2:27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

\textsuperscript{84} 1\textsuperscript{st} John 2:20 But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. (note that this was written before the end of the age and before the New Testament was gathered, agreed upon, compiled or printed).
- All things that can be shaken have been destroyed.  
- Only “unshakeable things” remain (things of the Spirit).
  - No vestiges of the material remains
  - No brick and mortar edifices
  - No institutional hierarchies
  - No priesthodds but the priesthood of believers
  - No rules, policies or regulations (as all who are part of the Body have the Spirit in them and are responsible before God for how they respond)
  - No discipline (as the Spirit disciplines each individual)

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85 Hebrews 12:27 This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what is shaken, as of what has been made, in order that what cannot be shaken may remain.

86 (see note reference # 66 above) Ask yourself, “What in my Christian walk can be shaken (upset, changed, moved, destroyed, altered). Then realize whatever such things are they are superfluous to your walk.

87 Romans 14:22 Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

88 Romans 14:10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.
• No tithes, building funds, collections – all free will offerings

- All the commandments are summarized in “faith and love.”

- Doctrinal knowledge and education often antithetical to humility.

Summary

Brick and mortar religion ought to become a thing of the past meaning the focus on material build-up in the churches has got to end. Downsizing, deconstruction, and using excess capital to share Jesus is the call on today’s bloated religious institutions. All believers are responsible to Christ alone for what they believe, embrace, and do. Individuals ought to choose to feed the poor, serve the weak and to move as lead of the Holy Spirit. Inquiry and divergence from religious tradition is often a sign of spiritual maturity rather than rebelliousness and since Christ reigns over all things all things are in His control.

UNFORTUNATELY . . . SIXTH

89 2nd Corinthians 9:7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

90 1st John 3:23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.
Man has taken the Body of Christ and has tried to re-materialize His Kingdom by building-up “shakable” institutions and uses the contents of the Bible as a Sword with which to kill each other.

- Accepted men now known as “early-church Fathers”\textsuperscript{91}
- Tried to gather the Apostolic letters and form new code for governing instructions of brick and mortar institutions.
- The compilation not agreed upon until after 250 years of Jesus ascension
- Constantine (and the Creedal Age) formalized beliefs and doctrine
- A thousand years of horrors were then done in Jesus name

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Matthew 23:9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.}
- Bible unavailable to masses due to poverty, education, and inability to understand it.  

- 1450 - Guttenberg Printing Press finally makes the New Testament available

- In the 1500’s we have the (so-called) Reformation – Erasmus, Luther, Calvin – but the contents and translation of the Bible is still not entirely agreed upon!

- The utter failure of “Sola Scriptura”

- The Bible used to divide the Body, create schisms, forge denominationalism

- Today more than 35,000 Christian denominations

- Countless “translations” (and therefore differences) in “the manual” most Christians rhetorically say is perfect and all we need. Materialism reigns.

SEVEN . . . Is there a possible solution?

First, a total DECONSTRUCTION

1. It might begin with all people everywhere (who claim Christ as Lord and Savior) being given the freedom to openly believe any tenet of doctrine they choose without being persecuted or ostracized by other

92 But the Holy Spirit – without the Churches influence or an available New Testament – continued to save.

93 (see contents of this book)
believers for their particular point of view no matter how errant or wild the view may seem.

2. It might continue with all believers freely attending any “Salvation by grace through faith in Christ” religious gathering of their choosing while being openly accepted and allowed to worship how, where, or what they may while in attendance of that group.

3. It might thrive when believers everywhere agree to:
   a. Love all people all the time in Jesus name.
   b. Never allow doctrinal differences of others to disrupt the faith and love we are commanded to possess.
   c. Teach and preach the Word of God as teachers see fit but allow all people the right to “vote with their feet” over what is acceptable to them by the Spirit and what is not.
   d. Refuse to get involved in solving or fighting against any social evil but to instead be known simply for their faith in God through Christ and their love.
   e. Cease resisting or fighting secular advances in science and psychology (or from other avenues) and to teach the Word of God lovingly and patiently to all interested in hearing it.
   f. Be known more for who we love, follow and adore rather than for what we are against or what we reject.
4. It might take over the world when believers simply gather each week to pray, worship, hear the Word of God taught and then go out and be Christians according to the leading of the Spirit. This might continue when any and all focus on money, tithes, donations, tax-exempt status, and building budgets are dropped and people are left to volunteer, give or support as lead of the Spirit . . . (or not).

5. It will have legs when there is a material deconstruction around the world of all things Christian and when this spiritual reconstruction is allowed to take place.

Any and all changes (like those mentioned) above can and will happen ONLY when Pastors allow themselves to turn from the things of this material world and to stop playing church, when believers refuse to have any part of playing church, and when the presence of the Holy Spirit is allowed to reign in the lives and hearts of all who are His.
other writings and books from Shawn McCraney

“I Was a Born-Again Mormon”
“Where Mormonism Meets Biblical Christianity Face to Face”
“If My Kingdom were of this World then my Servants would Fight”
“It’s Not the End of the World”
“The End of Material Religion” (workbook)

Films

by Cassidy McCrane

Girl
Boy

the Word of God Set to Original Music

by Mallory McCrane

Volumes I through V

Online bookstore, podcasts and program archives at www.hotm.tv

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Every Sunday Mountain Time
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“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

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