

Grand Theft Jesus

Table of Contents

Preface	4
Introduction.....	9
Word usage	11
Part I The Splinter.....	12
Chapter 1—Mary Magdalene, “Where Can He Be?”	13
PART II THE FORGERY	16
Chapter 2—The Forgery.....	17
Chapter 3—Imperial Forgery Launched.....	21
Chapter 4—Legalizing: Forgery’s First Step	24
Chapter 5—Forgery Becomes The Official State Religion.....	29
Chapter 6—Kings Translate Forgery Into English.....	33
Chapter 7—A Reformed Forgery is Still a Forgery	36
Part III The Switch.....	40
Chapter 8—Forgery Hidden in “The Greek”	41
The “Church” Mistranslation.....	43
The “Repentance” Mistranslation.....	46
The “Gospel” Mistranslation	49
The “Pastor” Mistranslation	53
Chapter 9—“Church” Hijacks Jesus’ Authority	59
Chapter 10—We’re Not His <i>Ekklesia</i> Without His Name.....	64

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 11—Lose <i>Ekklesia</i> = Lose Jesus.....	68
Chapter 12—Scripture Degraded When “Church” Elevates.....	71
Chapter 13—Sincerity Doesn’t Make Forgery Legitimate	75
Part IV The Original	78
Chapter 14—Jesus Is The Original.....	79
Didn’t Jesus Come to Call Sinners to Repentance?	83
The Original Continues	87
Chapter 15—Jesus’ Original: A Spiritual Potluck.....	90
<i>Ekklesia</i> : Jesus’ Potluck for Believers.....	90
Jesus’ <i>Ekklesia</i> : A Spiritual Feast for Gathered Believers.....	92
Chapter 16—Fellowship Hall Or Fellowship With Him.....	94
“Church” Fellowship	96
Religion Satisfies Human Fellowship	97
Fellowship In Jesus, Missing In Action.....	99
Part V The Testimony	101
Chapter 17—Let’s Take Scripture At Its Word.....	102
Part VI The Choice	109
Chapter 18—What To Do For “church”?	110
Appendices	119
Appendix XX1—Regions Historically Operating as Officially Catholic States	120

Grand Theft Jesus

Appendix XX2—King James Translation Instructions	126
Appendix XX3—The Edict of Milan	128
Appendix XX4—The Edict of Thessalonica.....	129
Appendix XXX5—First Version of Nicene Creed.....	130
Nicene Creed (AD 325).....	130
Appendix XXX6—Second Version of Nicene Creed (aka: Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed)	132
Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381).....	132
Appendix XXX7—Institutional Words Altered in KJV Translation.....	134
Ecclesiastical / Clerical Terminology: Tyndale vs KJV	134
Appendix XXX8—Timeline from Emperor Constantine to King James	135
306–337 — Constantine the Great	135
379–395 — Theodosius I	135
382–405 — Jerome.....	136
1604–1611 — Richard Bancroft.....	136
1604–1611 — James VI and I	137
Summary Timeline	137

Grand Theft Jesus

Preface

“What you know, you can’t explain, but you feel it—like a splinter in your mind.”¹

We love Jesus, trust scripture that testifies to Him, and faithfully participate in “church”. Yet, every once in a while, we get the feeling that something just isn’t quite right. You’re not alone—and you’re not crazy, rebellious, or in danger of “losing your salvation. We speak fluent “churchianity,” attend faithfully, believe sincerely, and we *still* sense a growing chasm between the Life in Jesus that we see in scripture and the life we actually experience. Our unease isn’t due to a lack of devotion, failure of discipline, or the ‘ultimate sin’—a problem with authority. It’s an invitation worth paying attention to.

The point of writing this book is so that we might embrace Jesus with our whole hearts²—abandoning hope in all others, and entrusting ourselves to Him for every breath. I’ve spent decades inside religion and seen first-hand what happens when ritual and tradition try to impersonate Him, and now I deeply question what I’ve been taught. Don’t doubt for a minute that I’m arguing *for* Jesus, extending an invitation to examine whether or not we have learned Him *from* Him—or whether we have only learned *about* Him through systems that use His name, but don’t speak *in* His name, and don’t know the difference.

¹ “The Matrix”, Warner Bros., 1999

² Jer 29:13

Grand Theft Jesus

What you know, you can't explain, but you feel it...like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad...

*The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us, even now in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work... when you go to “church” ... when you pay your taxes. It is the **world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.***

- Morpheus, “The Matrix”³ (emphasis by the author)

Morpheus describes a counterfeit that blinds people from reality. Paul describes the same dilemma—but his story isn't fiction. He describes a blindness that has eternal consequences.

*... we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word [logos], but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our message is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, **the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the message of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.** For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.*

³ “The Matrix”, Warner Bros., 1999

Grand Theft Jesus

2 Cor 4:2-5 (emphasis, brackets by the author)

I now realize that this blindness isn't just around me. It has been inside me. I'd always assumed that "church" and Jesus were indivisible, but I have discovered they're not. If forced to choose between the two, I would have wholeheartedly answered, "Both" with that theologically confident raised eyebrow look. The chasm between Jesus and "church", however, is unbridgeable. It turns out that my assumptions were based on pivotal words hijacked from scripture by a religious system with its own agenda.

After decades within that system, I realize in shocking clarity that entrusting Life to Jesus is entirely unrelated to practicing "Christianity." One is Life. The other is religion.

I'm not planting an updated "church" denomination; if you have a copy of this book, you should not have paid for it; I'm definitely not presenting a new theology, you can't follow me online, and I don't have a "donate" button.

If you're able to read this to the end, you'll experience a number of emotions. Downright anger at what you've been taught. Incredulity at what has become doctrine. And if you let yourself, you will experience devastation as if your closest friend betrayed you. Hold on tight—because we must break through this wall before we can see Him on the other side—Life in Jesus beyond what we have

Grand Theft Jesus

ever imagined.⁴ We can't find Life in Him while holding onto another life at the same time, no matter how painful and shocking it may be.⁵

Statements of theology and religious tradition don't point to Jesus; they impersonate Him and use His name as if lists of belief could author Life,⁶ while believers in Him receive an inheritance so vast that *windfall* barely describes it—the same inheritance as God's Firstborn Son—*Life in Him!*⁷

While we sit content in our pews—confident that we are rich and need nothing⁸—Jesus calls His people *out* of religion,⁹ offering Life in Him.¹⁰ To the extent that we embrace a religious impostor, we cheat ourselves out of our inheritance.

Scripture testifies that Life is found in Jesus and that He is the foundation of His *ekklesia* when we make the bold declaration of faith that He is, "...the anointed Son of the Living God"¹¹ Religion violently betrays this faith. A religious system lacks both the spiritual fuel and the heavenly authority to sit in Jesus' seat. Jesus alone is the head of His *ekklesia*, His own body,¹² *Live and in Person*.

The splinter in *my* mind—nagging me since grade school—has always insisted: "This isn't IT. This cannot be Life in Jesus." Over time, every assumption about faith, doctrine, and "church" came under fire in my heart and mind. One by

⁴ Eph 3:20

⁵ Mark 8:34-35

⁶ James 2:19

⁷ Eph 1:18

⁸ Rev 3:15-16

⁹ Rev 18:4

¹⁰ John 5:40

¹¹ Matt 16:18

¹² Col 1:18

Grand Theft Jesus

one, indoctrinated ideas fell away, and I had to reset my entire being, realizing I'd been “holding the wrong end of the stick all along.”¹³

Yet in the wreckage, something undeniable and irresistible rises from the ashes: whatever I am losing, it's not Jesus. *I cling to Him now more fiercely than ever*: Jesus only, Jesus ever, never settling for an alternative—or an impostor.

CONFIDENTIAL

¹³ Oswald Chambers

Grand Theft Jesus

Introduction

I long for deep transformation in the depths of my soul, knowing without a doubt that Life in Jesus is the only answer. My desire for Him burns so intensely that sometimes it overshadows even my food and sleep.

I've spent decades fully bought into "church" life, only to realize that the Life I see in the eyewitness accounts in scripture remains elusive, and I can't help but question what I've been doing all these years. What if Life is something else entirely? My desire for Life has intensified into an unquenchable thirst—for the streams of living water¹⁴ that I have never found in the places I was told.

Finding himself in the same quest, Oswald Chambers put his struggle in writing—a struggle that began as a thirst after spending years in what he understood to be the normal Christian life:

"I determined to have all that was going, and went to my room and asked God simply and definitely for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, whatever that meant. From that day on for four years, nothing but the overruling grace of God and kindness of friends kept me out of an asylum."¹⁵

At the point of desperation, Chambers lamented:

The last three months of those years things reached a climax, I was getting very desperate. I knew no one who had what I

¹⁴ John 7:38-39

¹⁵ Edman, V. Raymond. They Found the Secret: Twenty Lives That Reveal a Touch of Eternity (Clarion Classic) (p. 53). Zondervan. Kindle Edition

Grand Theft Jesus

*wanted; in fact I did not know what I did want. But I knew that if what I had was all the Christianity there was, the thing was a fraud.*¹⁶

Like Chambers, I have been desperate—unsure of exactly what I want, yet the depths of my soul remained untouched. If this resonates, if desire for Jesus is reaching a boiling point, pause and contemplate:

- Deep down, what do you really desire that religion has never reached?
- In what ways has longing for Life been frustrated instead of fulfilled?

If you crave Jesus so intensely that you'd welcome the chance to exchange your life for His—even at the risk of relationships, opinions of others, and every piece of religious baggage—then read on. Whether you agree with anything I say or not, know that religion has a way of holding Jesus at arm's length while speaking fluently using His name. But if you're willing to let go of everything for the chance to know Jesus as He truly is—then join me.¹⁷ That's where I'm headed.

My purpose is to share how I know Jesus, which requires me to dismantle many things that I thought I knew about Him, how religion impersonates Him by substituting its own words and definitions for His stated message from God, redirecting us away from His purposes to its own, and impeding Life in Him that we long for.¹⁸ My heart's desire is to *know* the Life He has always offered—and nothing else.

¹⁶ Edman, V. Raymond. *They Found the Secret: Twenty Lives That Reveal a Touch of Eternity* (Clarion Classic) (pp. 53-54). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

¹⁷ Luke 5:11

¹⁸ Matt 23:13

Grand Theft Jesus

Word usage

Because so much of religion's forgery of Life in Jesus is reflected in the misuse of words in scripture, I treat them differently in this book. Words that are transliterated, mistranslated, or replaced are enclosed in double quotes, such as "church" and "pastor", reminding us to remember what Jesus and scripture actually say rather than tradition. I also refer to words in another language in italics, such as *ekklesia* and *poimén*, the words that have been substituted and transliterated into "church" and "pastor". Using the original Greek or Latin is a reminder of what they actually meant when spoken, rather than religious usage.

I also capitalize some words, like Life, when they refer to Jesus' Life, as opposed to life before or without Him.

Grand Theft Jesus

Part I

The Splinter

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 1—Mary Magdalene, “Where Can He Be?”¹⁹

Mary Magdalene stood at the entrance of Jesus’ tomb, weeping uncontrollably, maybe wringing her hands in despair—utter hopelessness.

She just *had* to be with Jesus. After what had happened, there was no other place to go, and anointing Him with burial spices was the only thing to do. Can you imagine? This was just *too* much.

And now, He’s not even in the tomb where He is supposed to be, and Mary has been cheated out of the last thing she had. Staying at the tomb was hopeless. Wrenching herself away was no better.

He was gone.

Mary knew Jesus. She had traveled with the King, so she knew God’s royal announcement and personally experienced the power of God’s Kingdom because Jesus had delivered her from seven demons.²⁰ Whatever else we do or do not know, this much is clear: Jesus was not doctrine to her. He was not tradition. He was not a weekly habit. He was her Lord, her deliverer, her companion, and her friend. And He was dead. She had found Life in Him. Now what?

She’d watched Him be nailed to a cross and then lifted up to hang until death.²¹ Already severely beaten, He was bloodied from head to toe from a brutal whipping, then—the epitome of punishment in the Roman penal system, crucifixion.²² And then it was finished. What was Mary supposed to do with

¹⁹ John 20:1-18

²⁰ Luke 8:2

²¹ John 19:25-27

²² John 19

Grand Theft Jesus

herself? She'd watched as He was hurriedly placed in a tomb before the Sabbath, but she ran back as soon as she could—and now the tomb is empty. His body was missing.

She'd come prepared with burial spices, but even that was taken from her. In less than a week, Jesus had gone from a King's welcome to crucified, buried, and gone—right in front of her. Even after the others left the tomb, Mary stayed. She could not bring herself to leave. What would she do, now? She could go back to her old life, but she *knew* where it would lead. *This can't be happening.*

Then God's messengers told her that He was not there—He had been awakened. She could see for herself that He was gone—their second sentence was cruelly inconceivable.

Still weeping, pacing, hand-wringing, and unable to process an empty tomb, Mary catches the gardener out of the corner of her tear-filled eyes. She pleads with Him for Jesus' body.

The "gardener" calls to her: "Mary."²³ And she collapsed at His feet.

She knew!

Hope collided with despair—and stole her breath away. Devastation was not the last word.

What will we do when we look at religion and realize that Jesus isn't there, either? Will we share her despair; will we hear Him call our names in a way we

²³ John 20:16

Grand Theft Jesus

never expected? Or will we just accept that this is all there is, not realizing that we're looking into an empty tomb?

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

PART II

THE FORGERY

Painted by Emperors—Signed by Kings

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 2—The Forgery

The greatest crime stories aren't about stealing fortunes through brute force. They're about sleight of hand, misdirection, intrigue, and forgeries.

Sometimes the tale is so intricate and clever that nobody sees it coming. Forgeries sometimes hang in place of the original for years, assumed to be the real thing. Sometimes a diversion steals the guards' attention for just a second. Sometimes the forgery hangs undisturbed for centuries, and nobody even knows there is an original. Then, everybody thinks they have the real thing—and wouldn't recognize the original if they saw it. If anyone questions the substitute, they're in more danger than the thieves are.

Religion is this kind of a forgery.

Jesus' name is everywhere. It's in liturgy. It's in songs. It's in Christmas pageants. It's even in culture's curse words, for heaven's sake. Yet Jesus Himself, who walked around Galilee with His friends, isn't here anymore in that sense—but we know, at some level, that what we have inherited isn't what Mary, the twelve, or Pentecost experienced. The feeling seems vital—but like that elusive word on the tip of our tongues or that glimpse out of the corner of our eyes that disappears when we turn our heads—it's hard to put our finger on it. But we know that if we find the word or turn our heads at the right time, nothing will be the same again.

The religious forgery is old. Jesus confronted it boldly within the Jewish context for what it had done to His father's intent. In parallel, Roman was a pagan, imperial, and religious culture that was centuries old when Jesus was born. Jesus, Judaism, and Roman religious culture were about to collide.

Grand Theft Jesus

Jesus collided with Judaism until it colluded with Rome to execute Him. From the time of Jesus' crucifixion onward, Rome persecuted believers for centuries. At one point, Roman imperial persecution was so brutal that any easing felt like deliverance. What few recognized in the moment of easing was that Life in Jesus was not being embraced; Rome was co-opting His words into the Roman religious model, and faith in Him was being impersonated within an ancient religious-government institution.

This new religious system, created explicitly for state purposes, used terminology similar to Jesus's, but applied definitions from the vantage point of the Roman institution rather than the perspective of a new Life in Jesus. The new religion invoked Jesus' name, as scripture foretold, but its authority came from the empire, which impersonated Him rather than believing in Him.²⁴

Whether born into it or entering later, we all inherit a fully formed system derived from this model—complete with language, roles, and rituals solidified over many centuries. We're taught to see Jesus through this lens rather than seeing Him through His eyes.

Jesus explicitly refuted that Life from above could be systematized,²⁵ and we never suspected there was an original outside our religious framework—the impostor had already been set in cement for centuries before we became part of it.

These forgeries have been hanging on the wall for a long time, so that what Jesus established as Life in Him is now impersonated as attending museums where

²⁴ Mark 13:5-6

²⁵ John 3:3-8

Grand Theft Jesus

the forgeries live. The system has been in place for so long that we can't even visualize Life without it.

It's not a question of whether religion's attenders are sincere and devoted; they clearly are. The question is whether we will settle for a museum of forgeries or go all in for Life in Jesus once we see it. These are not compatible lives—they are mutually exclusive.

If something is a forgery, comparing it with the original is necessary to determine authenticity. The comparison process is simple, but it's not easy, especially when we're invested in one or the other. Patient thought, and honest conversation with our Father is required, and we are more dependent on listening to His voice²⁶ than we may have known in the past. Even more challenging is the willingness to hold long-standing assumptions loosely and challenge their basis. It also requires resisting the urge to defend what we're familiar with before listening to Jesus' opinion.

The chapters that follow constantly return to Jesus' words and actions to provide the basis for the forgery/Original comparison—not to build a better system, but to determine whether systems have anything to do with Life in Him at all.

For me, some discoveries have been clarifying. Others are unsettling. Some are shocking; others are devastating. I wasn't looking for any of this. If true, each level of revelation must be discovered before we can move past it and into Life in Jesus, away from human tradition. We all know that human tradition nullifies the

²⁶ Psalm 46:10

Grand Theft Jesus

logos of God.²⁷ The response to troubling discoveries isn't the point; listening to Jesus and trusting Him with the responses is vital. The difference between the forgery and the Original is Life and death.

CONFIDENTIAL

²⁷ Mark 7:13

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 3—Imperial Forgery Launched

The Secret Service understands that detecting forgeries requires studying the original—its appearance, feel, printing methods, paper composition, security features, and production tolerances. When they know the original intimately, forgeries are obvious. Clever forgers claim that the forgery is original, copying specific style, color, and material details to reinforce the deception and control the narrative. After we've trusted a forgery for a long time, replacing the original in our minds is easier said than done.

The religious forgery has several overlapping players and parts. Although it can feel like a conspiracy in retrospect, it was actually painted by sincere artists doing what they thought was best, given their priorities and vantage point. Kings and emperors of this earth made decisions about religion as it related to their empires in the best interests of the state, their own power, and the prevailing culture.

Regardless of how sincere the royalty might have been, it was an emperor who also held the office of High Priest over all religions in his empire who founded the religion called "Christianity". People called Christians, not members of a religion called Christianity. The Roman state began describing the movement as the Christian religion (*religio Christiana*) in the late fourth century, particularly after the Edict of Thessalonica in 380 under Theodosius I. In the Edict of Milan, Emperor Constantine legalized the Christian religion along with all other religions

Grand Theft Jesus

for the same reason: the security and interests of the empire.²⁸ ²⁹ Not only did this shock me—it shocked my wife! Existing religious practices and the culture’s religious paradigm were applied to Jesus’ words in scripture to form the structure of the new institution.

The past two paragraphs may need to be read again; there’s a lot there. Two key dynamics are:

1. Kings and emperors acted in sincerity when they ruled over the religions within their realms. Whether addressing their legal status, overseeing scripture translation, or crafting policy for a religion to govern them, the state treated them as a political entity within their integrated culture/religion/government.
2. Within this governmental religious structure, Jesus’ words were retranslated, substituted, and redefined to serve its stated purpose.

Rome legalized a spiritual movement within its Empire, codified it as the official religion, regulated it by creed, and enforced it with imperial power—completely independent from Life in Jesus. Whereas authority and Life in Jesus’ *ekklesia* flow from His Life within His people, authority in the imperial religion flows from its emperor.

Rome’s imperial religion isn’t an evolution or maturation of Jesus’ *ekklesia*. In spite of institutional religion, Jesus’ *ekklesia* continues from the day He called Andrew, Peter, James, and John out of their boats³⁰ until today. The imperial

²⁸ The Edict of Milan granted Christians freedom of worship and restored confiscated property. See Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum* 48; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 10.5.

²⁹ From the Edict of Milan: “...considered together all that concerned the interest and security of the State.”

³⁰ Mark 1:16-20

Grand Theft Jesus

process uses redefined, retranslated, and substituted Christian terms in scripture that create and operate what we know today as “church”.

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 4—Legalizing: Forgery’s First Step

Suppose the President of the United States decided which religions were and were not legal and exercised his authority to regulate them. Imagine the President deciding what people could and could not believe. Can you imagine someone who entrusts his life to Jesus for Life, changing his faith because the President decriminalized it? Yet this is the exact foundation of “Christianity” and “church”.

Emperor Constantine decriminalized the practice for all religions via the Edict of Milan, “to grant to Christians and to everybody the free power to follow the religion of their choice” in 313, in order to address, “all that concerned the interest and security of the State...in order that all that is divine in the heavens may be favorable and propitious towards all who are placed under our authority.”³¹ He did NOT say, “For the sake of Jesus Christ, my Lord, and God’s message that He delivered.” Constantine himself practiced the religion of Sol Invictus, the Sun God, and aligned Christianity traditions around the same holidays as Sol Invictus—Christmas and Easter, for example.

We’ve been taught that Constantine is a hero of Christianity—and in one specific sense, he is. He legalized it, allowed it to operate under his authority, and built temples for it, using the word *ecclesia* for both the buildings and the religion practiced in them.³² *Ekklesia/ecclesia* didn’t mean Jesus’ people in the Roman model. He is the first of a team of painters who forged a human institution using Jesus’ name. While a hero for the establishment of Christianity, Constantine’s

³¹ Direct quotes from the Edict of Milan, 13 February, 313 AD.

³² “The emperor... commanded that a house of prayer worthy of the Savior should be built... a most magnificent **church** (ἐκκλησία).”— *Eusebius, Life of Constantine* 3.30–32.

Grand Theft Jesus

religion had little to do with what Jesus actually said or did. He practiced Sol Invictus, another one of Rome's religions.

Before Constantine, Jesus' *ekklesia* was a group of people that He called to Himself and sent out to proclaim God's kingdom. Constantine's *ekklesia* used Jesus' name to establish a legal religion whose end was gathering in buildings for Roman-style worship. Jesus' *ekklesia* and Constantine's *ekklesia* have different foundations.

It would be easy to see this as an anti-Jesus conspiracy theory, but Constantine had nothing personal against Jesus; he didn't understand Him at all and didn't seem to care. He inherited a Roman religious paradigm that had been seamlessly integrated with government and culture for nearly a thousand years. From a Roman perspective, granting official status to Jesus' followers was an honor. From the perspective of those who belonged to Jesus, it was heresy.

The Roman state already had priests, pontiffs, and officials who oversaw rituals, temple maintenance, festivals, and legal compliance. Christianity and "church" were regulated alongside all other legal religions.

Constantine's "conversion" is attributed to a vision of a cross in the sky before battle. Aware of Christians in his realm, he interpreted it as a sign from the Christian God, much as he might have credited Mars, the god of war. He fought "in that name" and won. This made Constantine the sole emperor of the Western Roman Empire. He and Licinius, the emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, then decriminalized Christianity and all other religions. In 324, Constantine defeated Licinius and later had him executed, giving himself sole dominion over the entire Roman Empire, including all of its religions.

Grand Theft Jesus

Because of intense theological differences within Christianity across the unified empire, Constantine convened the Nicene Council in 325 AD to establish a single set of beliefs for the Christian religion throughout the empire. Constantine personally presided over the council and added wording to the Nicene Creed, the official document that became the governing doctrine of the religion.³³ Following the legalization of Christianity, the Roman government now supervised the beliefs allowed within it; conflicting doctrines were banned, and their supporters were exiled. Ironically, Constantine supported the opposing view to the official creed before the council, and soon restored the banned people and doctrine after the council. He was baptized just before his death by one of its bishops.

As emperor, Constantine simultaneously held the title Pontifex Maximus—High Priest—placing Christianity under the same authority that oversaw all other Roman religions. By legalizing “Christianity”, it became part of the religious department within Rome’s religious system. It gave Constantine the authority to call and to preside over the Council of Nicaea, which produced the first version of the Nicene Creed. For the first time, a credal statement became the defining foundation of Christianity and its “church.”

In addition to overseeing religious practices and beliefs, scriptural terms were redefined so that buildings came to be known by the same names that had previously defined the people who gathered. Both the religion and its buildings began to be called *ecclesia* in Latin and *ekklesia* in Greek. This new conceptual foundation became the basis for the English word “church” centuries later. For the first time, a state-sponsored religious institution layered Roman religious roles and

³³ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine* 3.6–13.

Grand Theft Jesus

practices onto Christian scriptural words, while maintaining religious-governmental definitions.

The idea of “universal” was tied as an adjective to *ekklesia*—*katholikē ekklesia*—for the first time at the council of Nicaea. Unlike the spiritualized meaning we’re taught today, the original usage meant that the Creed defined the common beliefs of the Christian religion to be practiced throughout the empire. “Universal” referred to an imperial scope, not to the common spiritual bond among believers.

In practical terms, Constantine used Jesus’ *ecclesia* only in word to support the Roman religious model, rather than embracing Jesus and the people who had declared faith in Him. The chasm between Rome’s religion and Life in Jesus was now embedded in law, culture, and government—where it remained largely unquestioned for centuries.

In Jesus’ *ekklesia*, believing in Him is more like breathing than religion:

... for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

– Acts 4:20

In the Roman religion, people are told what to practice. Once you see Jesus as He is, you can’t help but believe and speak about what you’ve seen and you’ve heard.

For decades, I have heard that Constantine Christianized Rome. The truth is that Constantine Romanized Jesus’ assembly into a legally recognized religion

Grand Theft Jesus

built on central power, practice, and control modeled on the Roman Imperial system, an impostor of Life in Jesus.

But legalizing and incorporating a new religion into the Roman system was just the beginning.

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 5—Forgery Becomes The Official State Religion

Skipping forward a few decades, emperors Theodosius I, Galatin, and Valentinian II together 1) mandated the Nicene religion to be the sole official religion; 2) within a year, Theodosius I convened a council to update the Nicene Creed which elevated the official state/”church” religion to a doctrine of faith in the same sentence—on the same level—as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; 3) within a year after that, Jerome was commissioned to retranslate scripture, resulting in what we know today as the Vulgate. These critical steps took place in 380 AD, 381 AD, and 382 AD, respectively.

The implications of this sweeping consolidation of one religion across the entire empire are seismic and have reverberated throughout history. Constantine’s integration of Christianity into the Roman government/religious system set profound precedents for the empire, but under Theodosius, new precedents were set that profoundly impacted world history.

Constantine established that the Roman Emperor and High Priest could legally permit and oversee Christianity; Theodosius established that Christianity was the only religion allowed in the Roman Empire. Constantine codified permitted beliefs within Christianity; Theodosius cemented the institution of the “church” as a pillar of the new religion. Constantine eliminated persecution of Christians by coopting its ideas into a Roman religion; Theodosius turned that religion into a partner that persecuted all people who believed otherwise (including Christians who wouldn’t embrace the state religion). Constantine didn’t worry about scripture but treated the religion according to Rome’s religious paradigm; under Theodosius, scripture was retranslated to reflect the state religion. Finally,

Grand Theft Jesus

Theodosius proclaimed divine condemnation and the empire's power to punish those “heretics” who wouldn’t comply. The persecuted became the persecutors. Constantine and Theodosius both used the term universal (*katholikē*) to denote their definition of the religion to be used throughout the Roman Empire.

The festering splinter in my mind prepared me to uncover foundational issues with “Christianity,” but I was still shocked to discover that the creed we recite in “church” was not produced at the Council of Nicaea in 325, but at the Council of Constantinople in 380. Constantine called the Nicene Council, but Theodosius called the one in Constantinople. While the “church” claims that this was a refining update, primarily regarding the Holy Spirit, the tectonic change was the addition of “... and the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church,” which incorporated the religion itself into the list of institutional beliefs. The other beliefs were the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Putting the pieces together, the forged religion is now mandated throughout the empire, and its governing creed is updated to include itself in its central list of beliefs.

To control the religion, its documents must support it; religion must control scripture. The new religion understandably retranslated scripture through the 1,000-year-old lens of Roman state-religion integration, then enforced it through imperial authority, including canonization, translation, and interpretation within the empire and its successor institutions.

Grand Theft Jesus

One powerful example involves *metanoéo*, a verb meaning “to change one’s mind,”³⁴ which can extend to profound inner transformation. Under Theodosius as Pontifex Maximus and Damasus as the Bishop of Rome, Jerome replaced *metanoéo* with a word linked to the root *poena*, a Latin word that is the root of penance, penalty, punishment, penitentiary, and “repent”. “Repent” is now a doctrine ingrained in the religion. This aligns scripture with the Edict of Thessalonica regarding the treatment of “heretics”, those who wouldn’t submit to the Roman religion.

Before Constantine, Christians were persecuted because they declared faith in God alone. After Theodosius, those same believers were declared “madmen and heretics”, subject to divine vengeance and punishment by the state. The “church”, a religious institution integrated with the Roman state, became the persecutor.

Over the centuries that followed, “church” courts condemned and civil authorities punished, meting out penalties including exile, imprisonment, and execution. This was not an isolated excess or the violence of a few rulers. It was “church” policy within an imperial religious system in which religious conformity was enforceable by law. “Church”-ordained executions began shortly after the Edict of Thessalonica and endured into the 1800s.

From the moment orthodoxy was defined by civil law, those who wouldn’t submit to it were branded heretics—including believers whose allegiance was to Christ alone. The imperial religion didn’t replace the original or modify it; it

³⁴ <https://biblehub.com/greek/3340.htm>

Grand Theft Jesus

criminalized the original while embracing a forgery bearing His name: the original became the target.

A final blow to my understanding of “church” was that “universal” Christians were defined by Theodosius for the “universal” Roman empire and had nothing to do with spiritual unity. The Creed we recite affirms belief in the universal religion within the Roman Empire. All others are specifically forbidden from calling their gatherings *ecclesia*—forbidden from using Jesus’ words for His own gatherings.

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 6—Kings Translate Forgery Into English

The Roman religion spread to over 40 countries and colonies under the integrated religion-state structure, including Great Britain, from the 6th century for nearly 1,000 years. What is called the “Reformation” in England was actually a new set of doctrines administered under the same hierarchical structure as the Roman religion. The King was the Supreme Governor of the “Church” of England, like the Pope was the head of the Catholic Church. Services in Britain were similarly liturgical; the King appointed the bishops, and King James ruled over religion in a manner similar to that of Theodosius and Constantine, the High Priests over the *katholikē ecclesia*. While Britain’s domain was much smaller, ecclesiastical courts and the enforcement of “church” law also mirrored Rome. “Church” was reorganized and relabeled, but the ruling hierarchy over it remained the same.

King James I of England was also King James VI of Scotland, where he had ruled since he was 13 months old. While raised in a rebellious Presbyterian culture, he often lamented being bridled by the Kirk (Scottish for “church”). He assumed the role of Supreme Governor of the Church of England upon ascending the throne, embracing the episcopal model and being known for proclaiming, “no bishops, no king.” He made multiple attempts to force the episcopal model onto Scotland over several years.

By ruling from a perspective parallel to Catholicism and rejecting the less hierarchical Presbyterian models of the Scots and the English Puritans, King James set the stage for the retranslation of the Bible into English, which he commissioned in 1604.

Grand Theft Jesus

The king had reason to retranslate because, according to him, if the king appointed no bishops to the foundation of the “church” structure, then there was no King over the “church” at all. At the time of commissioning the KJV Bible, three Bibles had already translated *episkopos* (“bishop”) as “overseer,” four had translated *ekklesia* (“church”) as “congregation,” and all had translated “poimén” as “shepherd.” The list of Bibles that preceded the King James Bible included the Tyndale, Coverdale, Matthews, Great, Geneva, and Bishops' Bibles. Even the Wycliffe Bible, translated by a Catholic from the Latin Vulgate in the late 1300s, used “shepherd” for “*poimén*”.

The first English translation based on the *Textus Receptus*—a widely accepted Greek manuscript—was by William Tyndale in 1526. Because England remained religiously Roman until 1534, the “church” bishops refused him permission to translate scripture into English. He therefore translated from Worms, Germany, and smuggled copies into England. A staunch critic of Henry VIII, Tyndale stayed in Europe even after England broke ties with the Roman Church. However, the “church” caught up with him in Belgium, convicted him of heresy, and turned him over to government authorities for execution in 1536.

Ironically, about 83% of the KJV New Testament and about 76% of the KJV Old Testament portions are derived from Tyndale’s work.³⁵ It’s the other 17% to 24% that King James himself designed to enforce the ecclesiastical structure he preferred.³⁶ Today’s Bible translations continue to hold on to a large portion of the KJV institutional wordings. He approved the 15 instructions to the translators

³⁵ John Nielson & Royal Skousen, *How Much of the King James Bible Is William Tyndale’s?* Reformation 3 (1998)

³⁶ See Appendix XX7—Institutional words changed by King James translators/editors.

Grand Theft Jesus

through archbishop Bancroft, rule #3 stating, “The old ecclesiastical words to be kept, as the word church, not to be translated congregation,” which specifically retained Rome’s hierarchical structure. “Church” is one of those in the 17% altered words. Both King James and Archbishop Bancroft had a severe conflict of interest.

Many scripture translators were *influenced* by the government-religious integration of their state, such as Jerome under Theodosius. But King James *explicitly exercised* his authority over the “church” by commissioning the translation of scripture *under his direct instructions*. The King James Bible was not translated; it was legislated. (Appendix XX2)

By issuing these rules, he appeared to accept these previous translations; his other instructions specifically prohibited the vital words that made the earlier translations genuine, most notably “pastor”, “church”, and “bishop”. Many words were translated under imperial authority, further widening the chasm between Jesus and religion. The parallels between the Constantine/Theodosius model of religion and the King James model are striking. The Anglican ‘reformation’ had no material effect on church structure, maintaining the central stroke of the forgery and imposture of Jesus’ direct, in-person authority over His people.

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 7—A Reformed Forgery is Still a Forgery

This impotence of “systems” is a main reason why Jesus did not send his students out to start governments or even “churches” as we know them today, which always strongly convey some elements of a human system. They were, instead, to establish beachheads of his person, word, and power in the midst of a failing and futile humanity. They were to bring the presence of the kingdom and its King into every corner of human life simply by fully living in the kingdom with him.³⁷

In scripture, Jesus never said the word “church” in any language, nor did he conceptually teach “church” or model anything that looks like it. There’s no linguistic or conceptual link between the word “*ekklesia*” and the word “church”.³⁸ The problem is further exacerbated because He said “My *ekklesia*” only once across all 4 Gospels.³⁹ At best, an institution derived from *ekklesia* is unbiblical. Every other reference to “the *ekklesia*” in the New Testament must refer to that one time that Jesus said it, or those references are not scriptural either. If Jesus instituted anything while walking the earth, it was not a religious system; it was Life in Him.

³⁷ Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ with Bonus Content (Designed for Influence)*, Location 190. NavPress. Kindle Edition

³⁸ <https://biblehub.com/greek/1577.htm> [HELP Notes: ...The English word “church” comes from the Greek word *kyriakos*, “belonging to the Lord” (*kyrios*)]

³⁹ Matt 16:18

Grand Theft Jesus

The only thing that reforming “church” does is to reshuffle the emphasis, theology, logistics, and structure of a system that doesn’t originate with Jesus, but with kings of the earth.

Jesus still leads His *ekklesia* in person while religion tweaks its “church” structure and operations based on arguments about who should actually be in charge and what traditions to follow. Reforming “church” is like a forger painting a better painting from another forgery. When “church” is reformed, the result is still “church.”

The problem isn’t that the Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, or Methodist “churches” need to develop the right model. The problem is that they all assume “church”, an illegitimate starting point. Whether using the Papal model, the King James model, the Westminster model,⁴⁰ or any other model, “church” is assumed, and we bustle around trying to “do it right.”

When Jesus said, “My *ekklesia*” for the one and only time, nobody asked Him what it meant, because He was frequently forming groups to do something—what He was doing. Jesus recognized His followers and the dynamic way they came together when He called them to join Him in what He was doing. This is how He led His people in-Person to tear down the gates of hell, and it’s in His presence in two or more as they gather in His name that He leads today. Jesus *ekklesia* is more like a pickup football game than the NFL, or a spiritual potluck where believers share their giftings. There’s no advertising, halftime shows, stadiums,

⁴⁰ Note that the Westminster Confession was legislated by Parliament, forming another governmental basis for “church” and religion.

Grand Theft Jesus

concessions, TV coverage, PR, team memorabilia, or season tickets. People who play pickup football get together for love of the game.

While “churches” maneuver for power and theological correctness, they remain mired in Constantine’s “church” forgery. This is why “church” reformation perpetuates its own problem; it never understands that Jesus is leading his *ekklesia* out to tear down the gates of hell—and religion is calling people in to its services.

Since “church”, “bishop”, “pastor,” and many other ecclesiastical words are not scriptural, but dictated by a king of the earth, it’s a double forgery to declare a “church” to be “bible-based.” Jesus confronts this head-on:

*... the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word[logos] abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. **You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.***⁴¹

Jesus said that trusting scripture is the opposite of the basis for Life in Him. His followers find Life in Him alone, not the scriptures about Him. Jesus said, “*My ekklesia*”, not “*Scripture’s ekklesia*” and not a “Bible church.”

The masterful forgery, played out for sixteen centuries now, is incredibly challenging to believe when you first see it, especially for us lifelong “church” attenders. Once seen, however, the web unravels, and we can’t unsee it. Religion

⁴¹ John 5:37-47

Grand Theft Jesus

shamefully plunders the word *ekklesia*, first altering Jesus' words, and then claiming sole authority to translate and interpret them, throwing a veil over Life in Jesus, while it paints its own picture.

The bottom line is that there is no “thing” to replace “church”, a way to do it better (reform it), or another word to label it. Renaming “church” to “*ekklesia*” doesn't work, either, because applying *ekklesia* to “church” would dismantle “church”.

The same corruption has affected many words in “church”-translated and interpreted scripture, but there are just a few, like *ekklesia*, on which the whole religious scheme pivots. King James didn't need to change all of them, just the ones that allowed him to remain the Church's Supreme Governor.

Part III

The Switch

The Forger Claims Jesus' Name

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 8—Forgery Hidden in “The Greek”

Don't let “the Greek” intimidate you. I let it intimidate me for decades, content to understand a word or two here and there, taking the sermon's word for it. I believed religion when it told me that there's no direct translation from Greek to English. It took me a while for the blinding flash of the obvious to hit me... “pastors” were using English to describe Greek that wasn't supposed to translate to English. Today, Greek translation is online, and we can compare “Christianity's” definition to Jesus', Socrates', and Homer's common use for centuries before Jesus said it. It's no more complicated than looking up words in Spanish on Google when we need to communicate with somebody.

It takes a little work, but we don't need to be “wise and learned” or have the “church's” offices explain in order to understand Jesus and His message. Knowing Greek is not a prerequisite for knowing Jesus; He would have told us.⁴² We don't need a degree in Greek to understand Jesus' words at least as well as the little children He spoke to, but sometimes it feels like we need one to figure out what religion has done to Jesus' words.

We've seen how King James explicitly legislated the translation of scripture. From a religious perspective, he executed a brilliant strategy. He didn't rewrite the entire scripture, but transliterated or substituted those pivotal words that, once reframed, are the lens through which the balance of scripture is read. The scripture that's translated for doctrine is left largely intact, such as “love your neighbor as

⁴² John 14:2

Grand Theft Jesus

yourself.” The words that secured hierarchical definition and control over an institution are the ones he focused on.

As mentioned earlier, Tyndale’s work accounts for the vast majority of the KJV translation; the mistranslated words are those which King James demanded in the 3rd of 15 instructions that he gave to his translators. These words strip Jesus’ message of the spiritual gifts intended for believers, set in concrete the hierarchical structure inherited from Rome, and solidify the monarch’s position as the head of a religious institution. The altered words also change God’s royal message: from "God's Kingdom has arrived" to a sin-centered message that demands penance as a prerequisite for membership in the institution and entry into God’s kingdom.

Just a few critical words that King James demanded demonstrate the devastation to our understanding of new Life in Jesus:

1. “Church” A word substitution for *ekklesia* from institutional usage
2. “Repent” A word substitution for *metanoëó* from Roman updates to scripture
3. “Gospel” A transliteration from Old English
4. “Pastor” A transliteration from the Latin Vulgate

If these words were just semantics, this book would have no purpose. However, these words are the colors used to paint the religious forgery that mimics Life in Jesus, painted by the kings of the earth.

Grand Theft Jesus

The “Church” Mistranslation

Ekklesia, which Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, has no linguistic or conceptual connection to the Greek word *kuriakos*; “church” is derived from the word *kuriakos*, which renders “church” unbiblical. No word in the bible translates correctly to the word “church.” The word exists in English Bibles today because King James instructed translators in writing to use it instead of “congregation”, even though 4 different translations between 1526 and 1604 correctly translated *ekklesia* as “congregation.” Jesus didn’t institute something that He called *kuriakos*; in fact, scripture doesn’t record Him saying the word at all.

Congregation didn’t yet mean the people who sat in the pews to listen to leadership; it meant the people who gathered around Jesus as He called them to follow Him and build each other up. As stated before, King James opposed the presbyterian model he was raised with, because it rejected a king’s authority to oversee it. Within the Anglican “church” model, the King ruled and appointed the Bishops who ran the state religion, much like its parent, the Roman Catholic “Church.”

Two Bibles translated *ekklesia* as “church” before the King James Version: the Geneva Bible and the Bishops Bible. The Geneva Bible was translated during the Rule of Mary I of England, who briefly returned England to Catholic Rule under Rome. The Geneva Bible was mainly influenced by John Calvin, who was raised Catholic but later created Reformed theology. He embraced, in both Latin and French, the institutional meaning of *ecclesia* along the lines of Constantine and Theodosius. The Geneva Bible, which introduced chapter and verse numbers for

Grand Theft Jesus

the first time in an English translation,⁴³ used the word “church” for *ekklesia*, but included marginal notes rejecting the king as its authority. The Geneva Bible translators accepted the Roman institution of “church,” but they disagreed with imperial authority over it and embraced presbyter rule in its stead. Reformed “churches” and Presbyterian “churches” are offspring of Calvin's theology, which is the offspring of the Roman institution without the imperial aspect. The Westminster Confession was influenced by Reformed Theology when Parliament legislated it.

When King James gave his instructions to translators, he included the Geneva Bible as an approved reference point. However, translation rule #6 explicitly prohibited margin notes other than to explain Greek and Hebrew wording. This is how King James consistently removed objections to his authority over the religion and its “church”. He mandated the word and prohibited criticism of imperial rule. Once the KJV was translated, it was mandated as the exclusive Bible used in “churches,” and Bible printing became illegal except through the King’s printers.

The Bishops Bible was written under Queen Elizabeth I in response to the popular Geneva Bible, removing “political” marginal notes that questioned the monarchical authority over the “church.” Bishops within the “church” of England performed the translation with an obvious vested interest. In the Geneva Bible, there was no room for Bishops to be appointed by a king if there were no king with

⁴³ David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (Yale University Press, 2003), 300–301.

Grand Theft Jesus

such authority. Bishops had a vested interest in deriving their authority from the king of England.

King James explicitly named the Bishops' Bible as the most important reference authority for his translation, for obvious reasons. (see #1 in the list of instructions to translators.) He instructed that the existing translation be maintained as much as possible without alteration, in stark contrast to the goal of creating the most accurate translation from Greek transcripts, which Tyndale and others had already achieved nearly 100 years earlier.

Kuriakos is also the root for *Kirk* in Scottish and *Kirche* in German. As an aside, Luther used the word *gemeinde* to translate *ekklesia* in Matthew 16:18, but the Catholic “church” used the word *Kirche* when it released its official German translation of Scripture. This is where Lutherans get the word “Church” today, and why it aligns with the Catholic and Anglican translations.

Grand Theft Jesus

The “Repentance” Mistranslation

King James wasn't the first to alter scripture in devastating ways; Jerome did the same, at the commission of Damasus, the Bishop of Rome, in 382 AD. The new religion had just been legislated by imperial edict under Theodosius, Galatian, and Valentinus II, and the Nicene Creed had been updated to elevate the Roman “church” as an institution to be believed in. The final thought in the Edict of Thessalonica, which instituted what we call “church” today, was that anyone who didn't practice the new religion was to be condemned and punished.

Jerome substituted a Latin word associated with penance, punishment, and moral wrongdoing into Jesus' mouth when he translated scripture, thereby aligning scripture with the new religion.

When Jesus emerged from the wilderness, announcing, “The time is now, God's Kingdom has arrived,”⁴⁴ He had been Living for the past 40 days as God's publicly ordained heir to His kingdom.⁴⁵ The Spirit had driven Him into the wilderness, where He confronted and defeated Satan,⁴⁶ unheard of until now. This victory demonstrates that God's kingdom has arrived and that its power rests in Jesus, proving that God's Kingdom is happening NOW!

In light of this stunning victory, He announces in royal language that God's Kingdom has arrived,⁴⁷ and then urgently persuades, “Rethink to the depths of your heart and believe the message I just gave you!”⁴⁸ After watching the heavens torn

⁴⁴ Mark 1:15

⁴⁵ Mark 1:9-11

⁴⁶ Mark 1:12-13

⁴⁷ Mark 1:14

⁴⁸ Mark 1:15

Grand Theft Jesus

open at Jesus' baptism and listening to His story about rebuffing Satan, standing dumbfounded with open mouths is understandable. Nothing like defeating Satan at the hands of a man had ever even been heard of before. Four fishermen leave their boats to follow Jesus as He demonstrates God's Kingdom as its King, casting out demons and healing the sick⁴⁹—which starts to unhinge the gates of hell. This is Jesus' first *ekklesia*—it has no resemblance to a “church” service.

Jerome's Latin translation, about 350 years later, replaces the words that Jesus used to persuade us to believe. He used the words *paenitentiam agite / paenitemini*,⁵⁰ from which we get penance, penitentiary, and punishment.⁵¹ Religion turns Jesus' excited persuasion about God's Kingdom into moral regret, reflection, and sorrow about themselves instead. Jerome's word choice explicitly associates the punishment proclaimed in the Edict of Thessalonica with Jesus' words in scripture. Jerome's version of scripture became known as the Vulgate, which was used throughout the Roman Empire, including in Britain, until the mid-1500s. *Paenitemini* was preached in Britain for about 1,000 years before the King James Translation, cementing “repent” in religion and culture instead of *metanoëó*.

The result is a sharp contrast between the foundation of the “church” and its religion, and that of Life in Jesus. Where Mark's Greek presents Jesus persuading people to accept the unbelievable reality that God's Kingdom has arrived in power, Jerome's wording replaces Jesus' urgent persuasion to believe the unbelievable

⁴⁹ Mark 1:16-34

⁵⁰ Biblia Sacra Vulgata, Mark 1:15

⁵¹ *paenitentia* — repentance, regret; derived from *paenitet*; historically connected with *poena* (punishment/penalty). P. G. W. Glare, ed., Oxford Latin Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), entries *paenitentia* and *poena*.

Grand Theft Jesus

with the penitential concepts of the imperial church. If Jerome hadn't substituted *paenitemini* for *metanoia*, and there hadn't been a 1,000-year "church" tradition around it to influence translators, *metanoéō/metanoia* would not have a penance-based translation when directly translating from Greek.

This is so important! To be eminently clear, unless repentance, a derivative of Jerome's wording, is assumed in advance, scripture can't be read as having a moral prerequisite to Life in Jesus. Doing so turns Christianity into a sin-centered religion, constantly focusing on repentance.

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

The “Gospel” Mistranslation

Substituting *paenitemini* for *metanoeo* devastates Life in Jesus in two ways:

1. As discussed, it replaces joyful revelation about God’s Kingdom with sorrow, guilt, and self-centered remorse.
2. It permanently associates these false claims with God’s news that He delivers through Jesus. The “gospel” is not only transliterated rather than translated, but it’s also tied to the false command to do penance upon ourselves, falsely placing it in Jesus’ mouth.

The full context of the “gospel” is the entire story from Jesus’ baptism to the point when he and four others begin preaching around Galilee. After Jesus was baptized, the heavens were torn open, and God publicly proclaimed Jesus as his son, anointing Him as heir to God’s Kingdom, therefore, a King Himself. Astonishingly, His first order of business was to face Satan in the wilderness.⁵² As He emerged victorious:

Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming God’s “gospel,” saying, “The time is fulfilled, and God’s kingdom is here; “repent” and believe in the “gospel.”

– Mark 1:14-15

This is the only time Jesus referred to anything as God’s “gospel.” Note that it was God’s royal message as opposed to a theological concept called “the

⁵² Mark 1:9-13

Grand Theft Jesus

gospel.” As Paul said later, if anyone preaches another, he is in trouble.⁵³

Therefore, any other time that “the gospel” is referenced in the rest of scripture, it refers to the meaning that Jesus gave it, or another “gospel” is being preached.

The Greek word transliterated as “gospel” is *euangelion*,⁵⁴ a form of the word “message”. John Wycliffe first translated the Latin equivalent of *euangelion* into Godspell, Old English for God’s message, which isn’t a horrible translation. But instead of translating directly from Greek, the King James and other transliterations, used Old English. Some modern translations use “good news”, but that’s seriously inadequate as well.

As with all words used in the New Testament, *euangelion* was well known when Jesus said it (or when Mark wrote it that way), and it’s far more profound than either “gospel” or “good news.” There’s no question that Jesus was sharing good news, but the “goodness” wasn’t in the content of the message; its nature came from who sent it. The “*eua*” part of the word indicated that the message, the “*angelion*,” was from royalty.

For example, messages from Roman emperors were, by definition, *euangelion*, royal messages. They were used to send a message to a town ahead of the emperor’s visit, a message to an enemy of the declaration of war, to announce the birth of the emperor’s son, the coming of age of the son, or the ascension of the son to the throne. The fact that it was God’s message made it an *euangelion*, not the message’s content. This was doubly appropriate, because God had already announced Jesus’ coming of Age—at His “baptism—out of the torn-open heavens;

⁵³ Gal 1:8-9

⁵⁴ <https://biblehub.com/greek/2098.htm>

Grand Theft Jesus

now His Kingdom is invading, as evidenced by the effect on the gates of hell that He later reveals. This isn't just a news headline.

God's message is that His Kingdom has arrived. Jesus reveals that the time is right because He just saw it in action in the wilderness. Jesus tells us that God's royal message is that God's Kingdom has come, to set the captives free, as we see in Luke.⁵⁵ This is why Jesus, Paul, and others preach the Kingdom⁵⁶—that's what Jesus revealed in God's message, not the opportunity for guilt, remorse, and self-punishment.

This news is so stunning that Jesus probably saw the look of unbelief on people's faces, so He appeals to them to reconsider and believe God's royal message. Today, it would sound something like "I'm not kidding, I've seen it with my own eyes."

Not only is the "gospel", "good news", or "message" inadequate to convey the power and importance of the message, but combined with the horror of tying it to *paenitemini*, "the gospel" has become a theological subject, at best. When I ask people what Jesus said the "gospel" was, a blank stare is the most common response, whereas the invasion of Normandy on D-Day is a more accurate description.

Starting with the hope and glory of a complete and transformative change, grand theft has been committed against Jesus, starting with the words Jesus used in

⁵⁵ Luke 4:18

⁵⁶ Jesus: 91 references, Acts 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 28:31, and more

Grand Theft Jesus

His very first message, which reveal the riches in the unsearchable inheritance of the believers,⁵⁷ including this small sampling:

1. An age-old mystery, a perfect message directly from God^{58 59}
2. Joining Him and God's kingdom to invade this dark world^{60 61}
3. Complete, radical, and seismic transformation from death in religion to life in Jesus⁶²
4. Fellowship in this new life with Jesus, our Father, and each other⁶³
5. God's inheritance, which lives and is found in other believers^{64 65}
6. Understanding His parables describing His kingdom⁶⁶
7. Understanding the purpose and use of His gifts via the Holy Spirit⁶⁷

Perhaps the most radical crime of substitution in New Testament translation is religion putting “do penance” (implying from sin) in Jesus’ mouth as He announces God’s Kingdom. The result is a sin-based religion, founded on *penance* for salvation, and the translation of “repent” into what should be an incredible belief. “Sin” is not part of God’s message that Jesus delivered, nor was it implied until the Roman philosophy of *paenitemini* was integrated into its official religion when scripture was altered.

⁵⁷ Eph 3:8

⁵⁸ Col 1:26-27

⁵⁹ Mark 1:14-15

⁶⁰ Mark 1:17-20

⁶¹ Eph 6:12

⁶² John 5:24

⁶³ 1 John 1:1-3

⁶⁴ Eph 1:18

⁶⁵ 1 Cor 12

⁶⁶ Mark 4:11

⁶⁷ Eph 4:12-16

Grand Theft Jesus

The “Pastor” Mistranslation

“Pastor” is a direct result of institutional hierarchy that impersonates Life in Jesus, using *ekklesia* as if it were its root, for example. In the English-speaking world, the legitimacy and authority given to “pastors” is in the same league as “church” and “repent” as far as impostors go.

“Pastor” is a transliteration of the Latin translation of the Greek word *poimén*, which was rendered as “shepherd” in all major English translations from John Wycliffe in the late 1300s until the King James version in 1611. Two reasons make the *poimén* transliteration unique:

1. Across the Septuagint and New Testament the word *poimén* occurs roughly a hundred times and is almost universally translated “shepherd,” except Ephesians 4:11, where it’s rendered “pastor”.
2. It is the cornerstone of the theology that claims “offices of the church”/“five-fold ministry” as scriptural.

In Ephesians 4:11, the Douay-Rheims (the first official Catholic English Bible) and the King James versions translate this as “pastor,” a term that had become a position within the Catholic hierarchy. This must have been one of King James’ ecclesiastical words that he instructed to be retained, since there was no other scriptural precedent.

Even if “church” were a legitimate translation, which it isn’t, the letter to the Ephesians was not addressed to an elder, “pastor,” or any other supposed office of the “church,” or even to the “church” itself. It was addressed to the saints who are

Grand Theft Jesus

in Ephesus.⁶⁸ In addition, just before the five spiritual gifts are listed that have been siphoned into “offices”, scripture reveals that these gifts are for people,⁶⁹ not positions. If Paul had intended to communicate “offices” of the “church”, certainly he would have addressed his letters either to the institution or the authorities running it.

Even Jesus, when He referred to Himself as the good shepherd,⁷⁰ didn’t use a special word. Only if “church” and its ‘offices’ are assumed to be true before reading Ephesians 4:11 can this list of gifts be treated differently from any others, such as those detailed in 1 Corinthians 12 & 14.

When I reached this point in my quest, realizing how a hierarchical man-made institution uses Jesus’ words to paint a forgery of Life in Him, I felt like I’d been hit by a truck. I have felt, at times like Mary at the tomb—where have they taken Him? In one sense, I’m relieved that I’m not crazy, but I have to warn you, the devastating impact of the “church” forgery is just beginning. If “church” isn’t Jesus’ institution, then “offices of the 'church', “church” doctrine, “church” leadership, “church” tradition, “church” authority, and “church” discipline are also imitations.

The imperial “church” fathers did not originate with Jesus; they were instituted by Constantine, Jerome, Theodosius, and King James. In “church”, spiritual gifts are siphoned off, and their names are used for staff positions. Among

⁶⁸ Eph 1:1

⁶⁹ Eph 4:8

⁷⁰ John 10:11

Grand Theft Jesus

these gifts for Jesus' people, nothing is more devastating than shepherding being painted as a "church" office function, except for the forged institution itself.

Within the American and worldwide "church", "pastoring" is the dominant career path. There are "pastors", "executive "pastors", "senior "pastors", "lead "pastors", "teaching "pastors", "assistant "pastors", "associate "pastors", "connecting "pastors", "care "pastors", "counseling "pastors", "church" life "pastors", "family "pastors", "missions "pastors", "youth "pastors", "children's "pastor", and I even saw a "mega church" with a "parking lot "pastor".

Neither "pastor" nor "church" is scriptural at all.

This is merely academic until we realize that the clergy has siphoned gifts intended for the gathered, and people are subject to the deceit resulting from their absence. More horrifying is the realization that we spend most of our time "in church" facing a weekly presentation by one person and his staff, rather than building each other up in Jesus. Hijacking shepherding is the mechanism by which all gifts intended for the people are kept from being shared among the congregation, cementing us in spiritual infancy.

Peter teaches us how shepherding should happen:

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being

Grand Theft Jesus

*examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*⁷¹

Peter, an eyewitness to Jesus' Life, death, and resurrection, calls himself a fellow elder, not “bishop”, “apostle”, “pope”, “father”, “pastor”, or “one of the 12”.

He encourages fellow elders to “shepherd” the flock, directing them to do so “not under compulsion”, but “willingly” (the same word for voluntarily), not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering, but by example. Jesus had similar insight into hired hands.⁷² “Pastors” cannot avoid the label of hired hand.

In utter irony, Peter warns against “lording it over” those entrusted to them, using the verb *katakurieuo*,⁷³ built on the root *kyrios*⁷⁴—lord, master, owner. That same root produces *kuriakos*⁷⁵ (“belonging to the lord”), from which “church” is derived. If translators were consistent and independent of “church” and state influence, the expected translation would conceptually be a warning against “churching” over those entrusted. “Church” and “lording over” derive from the same Greek word.

Paul confirms in 2 Corinthians 1:24 against “churching” authority, but treats the reader as fellow workers. Neither Paul nor Peter invented this self-control. Jesus had already established true authority within His *ekklesia* before Paul and

⁷¹ 1 Peter 5:1-4

⁷² John 10

⁷³ <https://biblehub.com/greek/2634.htm>

⁷⁴ <https://biblehub.com/greek/2961.htm> , <https://biblehub.com/greek/2962.htm>

⁷⁵ <https://biblehub.com/greek/2960.htm>

Grand Theft Jesus

Peter lived it out, teaching that Gentile kings “churched” themselves over the people, but the disciples are not to act this way.⁷⁶ This is why a “pastor,” as a church office, lording it over attenders, is a central feature of the “church” forgery, and unbiblical.

That’s exactly what Constantine created, a religion that he and his staff “churched” over. Centuries before and after, Roman emperors were already treated as divine, members of the Imperial Cult, long before Jesus’ earthly ministry—and continued to be so well after Christianity became the Roman state religion. They were formally addressed as *dominus*, “lord” or “master,” the Latin term for a title signaling absolute lordship, already discussed in Greek, and the same word used for the Lord in scripture. As the official High Priest over all religions in Rome, “churching” over Christians was the institution's DNA, and “pastor” is the mechanism. The Edict of Thessalonica institutes the “church”, lording it over all Roman citizens with this thought. (The same is true for “bishop” as well.)

This isn’t a minor mistranslation about authority—it widens the chasm between two opposing authorities: what Jesus forbade in Life is proactively impersonated institutionally; what Peter prohibited in practice is normalized in “church” governance. The *ekklesia* is robbed not by open rebellion, but by a language and subsequent actions that mimic Jesus’ while claiming His authority for their own. Jesus protects His people by prohibiting titles like “father”, “rabbi”, and “teacher”.⁷⁷ Why would using the name of a Spiritual gift for a title be any different, especially when Jesus calls himself a shepherd? It’s His shepherding

⁷⁶ Matthew 20:25-28

⁷⁷ Matt 23:9

Grand Theft Jesus

presence that leads to Life in Him, which “pastoring” cannot deliver from his “office.”

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 9—"Church" Hijacks Jesus' Authority

In the beginning the "church" was a fellowship of men and women centering on the living Christ. Then the "church" moved to Greece where it became a philosophy. Then it moved to Rome where it became an institution. Next, it moved to Europe, where it became a culture. And, finally, it moved to America where it became an enterprise.⁷⁸

~ Richard Halverson

Taken together, "church" mistranslation, "church" elevation by the creed, and "offices of the church" create a model of authority that directly opposes Jesus as the head of His body. No one other than Jesus has "church" authority in Jesus' *ekklesia*, but everyone in Him has His presence to guide the use of spiritual gifts for sharing with others.⁷⁹ Leadership, a product of "church" hierarchy and American business, "lord" the "church" over its members, varying in structure and depth depending on denomination. But if "church" is not a concept from Jesus, then neither is "church" leadership. In His *ekklesia*, direction comes directly from Jesus; in someone else's gathering, direction comes from something else.

Uncovering "church" forgery exposes "church" discipline, "church" authority, "church" tradition, "church" membership, "church" budget, "church" governance, "church" doctrine, "church" accountability, and "church" leadership. In contrast, Jesus revealed the foundation of His *ekklesia* only once. Therefore, like

⁷⁸ Quoted by numerous publications, including CS Lewis institute – no original publication documented. But I would say the same thing if he didn't.

⁷⁹ 1 Cor 12:4-11

Grand Theft Jesus

God's royal message, every other time *ekklesia* is referenced in scripture, it refers to Jesus' description unless it specifically describes somebody else's *ekklesia*, as in Acts 19.

Jesus never mentioned anything else as the foundation for His *ekklesia*, which excludes statements of faith (aka creeds), denominational founding documents, theological beliefs, or even scripture. Jesus' *ekklesia* is founded upon the one thing that He said it was, the proclamation of faith that He is "the anointed Son of the Living God!"⁸⁰ Jesus never offers an alternative. "Church" can only resemble Life in Jesus rhetorically because, in practice, it lacks the spiritual resources and authority to share His Life.

We've all been taught to take imperfect "church" in stride, but if we stop and really look at what happens in our midst, we begin to see how institutional authority speaks in Jesus' name while functioning in its own, in effect, usurping Jesus' authority for its own purposes. Just to be clear, Jesus' authority still reigns in His people, but "church" can't be His *ekklesia* where that happens—it is a different concept altogether.

Philosophically, the gap between Jesus' *ekklesia* and the "church" institution is a huge chasm; the impact of forged authority instead of Life in Him devastates people in real life.

When homeschooling was booming in our extended neighborhood, a support group formed organically, largely made up of parents from my "church". There was no official name, no agenda beyond helping each other, and nobody was "in

⁸⁰ Matt 16:16

Grand Theft Jesus

charge”. There were also friends of friends, neighborhood friends, and some just heard about us through the grapevine. One parent would teach biology to a neighbor’s kids as well as their own, and someone else would teach Spanish in return. Birthday parties and picnics were also big hits, and everybody shared their insights to help anyone who jumped into the homeschool waters, whether they were ‘in the group’ or not.

My “pastor” heard about it and held a meeting to integrate this movement into an “official “church” ministry, complete with “pastoral” oversight. Not only did “church” members not want this, but those who were not members of the “church” were not interested at all. After the dust settled, the “church” started up its new ministry, but the unnamed support group went underground. They still connected with each other like they always did, but they never let anyone make them “official.” Looking back, I realize that this living group reflected Jesus’ *ekklesia* far more than what “church” ever stood for. Self-appointed authority is irrelevant to real life.

Consider another example. Some “churches” are all about spiritual gifts, and some never mention them. One “pastor” I knew held classes on spiritual gifts in what was otherwise a mainstream denomination. The “gifts” that mattered seemed aligned with the volunteer needs of running the “church” itself: gifts of hospitality were directed toward ushering or kitchen duties, etc. There wasn’t any talk about gifts according to scripture, like 1 Corinthians 12 and 14.

However, one Sunday, during the service singing time, something was just different. Without me trying to explain what was happening, the “pastor” and others expressed the same sense of a spiritual gift in the left side of the

Grand Theft Jesus

congregation that needed to be shared. Later, the “pastor” admitted that he didn’t pursue it properly (1 Cor 14:29-32) in order to keep the service on schedule. Without judging what may have been happening in the congregation, a shepherd would have paused and invited the gift to be shared. But the planned service took priority, and the flock missed a gift from above intended for them. “Church” order squelched the Holy Spirit, and God speaking to His people was squelched.

Going forward, Bible study hosted in my home included a few people from “church”, the next-door neighbor, a couple of co-workers, and an old high school friend. We had dinner every week and brought something spiritual to share – a favorite psalm, a spiritual question, something great that had happened, or a trial. It just worked.

We were like family—not just once a week, but in the lives we shared. We helped each other move, shared cars, and even our houses when a fire forced evacuation. We shared the Lord’s supper weekly for years. Even though the bible study predated the “church” I attended, when my “pastor” heard about it, he suggested that he and the staff bless some of the official elements used at “church” and then send them home with me, rather than use my own bread and wine. He also suggested that our focus be the same readings that were the basis of next Sunday’s sermon. “Church” authority and tradition felt the need to manage people’s spiritual lives in their own homes. I never mentioned this “pastoral” suggestion to my friends.

Finally, “church” exposed itself and its priorities in one ‘imperfect’ debacle.

A friend with a high-level “church” position was recently exposed in a humiliating way. No question: he had blown it. The “pastor” and the elders should

Grand Theft Jesus

have read their own statements of faith for the “church” and resolved to restore him gently, scripturally guiding him back to his official and relational position within the “church”. *That’s not what happened.* Instead, the “pastor” fired him on the spot and kicked him out of the “church” building. A few weeks later, they preached a sermon on the woman caught in adultery and how we should be more like Jesus in situations like hers. Matthew 23 speaks of such religion.

Until this last episode, I considered all of these things messy, but routine. Imperfect but routine.

Unlike the TV-deserving “church” scandals, these have been just a few of the endless examples of the side-effects of “church” structure and the resulting culture: systems over gifts from above, “church” over community in Him, “office” authority over shepherding, and people as “church” resources. “Church” vs. *ekklesia* and “pastor” vs. shepherd aren’t just semantics; they’re the difference between Jesus leading His people and religion leading its people. Jesus’ *ekklesia* happens when His people are gathered to Him for His purposes as He calls them; this isn’t possible within the “church”/“pastor” authority paradigm—by definition.

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 10—We’re Not His *Ekklesia* Without His Name

Jesus gathered and led *ekklesias* for a variety of reasons throughout His time on earth. First, he called four; then a fifth; then 12; then 72.⁸¹ He demonstrated His authority as the Son of God and head of His body. When Jesus said *ekklesia*, He didn’t even mention an institution, nor was there any indication of one later in anything He did. Only religious theology could invent a doctrine of “being called out of the worldly system” into a “spiritual system”, when Jesus was just getting some guys to come with Him as he preached that God’s Kingdom was here.

When Jesus sent out the Twelve and then the Seventy-Two, they were “in His name” because He authorized them to act on His behalf—similar to a power of attorney. They were not “in His name” because they said ‘magic words’ as they prayed, healed, held services, or cast out demons. They were in His name because they had been sent by Jesus with explicit permission and instruction to act on His behalf.

He did not delegate His authority for administrative duties while He brought God’s kingdom to bear on the world; He delegated His authority to others to do what He had shown them to do. First He took four with Him—Andrew, Peter, James, and John—and showed them. Then He added Levi, then the Twelve, and then the Seventy-Two. His strategy didn’t involve building a system, but rather walking through Galilee, proclaiming God’s kingdom and freeing the sick and demonized as He went. His followers watched and learned. Later, Jesus

⁸¹ Mark 1:16-20, Mark 2:14; Mark 3:14, Luke 10:1-24

Grand Theft Jesus

commissioned them to go into all the world, presumably to do the same thing,⁸² never mentioning institutional membership or attendance.

The chasm between saying “in Jesus’ name” in a worship service and the 72 who were sent out in Jesus’ name can’t be overstated. Having done what they had been instructed and taught, they returned, exclaiming, “Even the demons are subject to us in Your name!”⁸³ Under Jesus’ authority, evil spirits obeyed His ambassadors just like they obeyed Him, and vacated their victims. This is the scriptural picture of *ekklesia*, inseparable from His delegated authority.

How many times have you heard or said, “in His name,” and nothing happened? That didn’t happen to the Twelve or the Seventy-Two. Saying the words “in His name” and actually living within and under specific authority are not the same thing. The sons of Sceva learned what happens when you try.⁸⁴ They acted as they had seen others act, without having been sent by Him. We should feel fortunate when nothing happens when we invoke His name for something He has not authorized.

Similarly, Jesus is serious about knowing Him before using His name, as opposed to treating it like magic words tacked on to ceremonies and prayers:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to

⁸² Mark 16:15

⁸³ Luke 10:17

⁸⁴ Acts 19:11-16

Grand Theft Jesus

them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"
— *Matthew 7:21–23*

The issue isn't that His name is spoken. It's whether He has actually delegated His authority to somebody do so. No creed, no tradition, no system, and no institution has the authority to delegate Jesus' name or confer His authority. If He hasn't sent someone, they aren't sent—no matter what words they might say.

The same is true of any system that claims to act in His name. If He has not delegated His authority to it, it doesn't possess it. A system may use language, organize gatherings, and maintain tradition, but it cannot confer what only Jesus Himself can delegate.

As we have already seen, when the heavens were torn open at His baptism, the Father publicly declared that Jesus is His Son. Jesus' authority did not originate with Himself but was vested in Him by God Himself. He immediately demonstrated His authority over Satan in the wilderness and then exercised it openly in Galilee—ultimately delegating that authority to others.

In order to receive Jesus' authority, we must hear His voice. To say, "In Jesus' name" without hearing His voice means to act based on our own authority or in response to someone else's voice. His sheep know His voice; Jesus' people hear their Good Shepherd. Jesus did not send the Twelve out to operate under religious values, institutional training, or carefully constructed principles. He sent them under His authority to do what He instructed, not to apply a system, but to carry out His will.

Grand Theft Jesus

This is the core of Jesus' *ekklesia*—His people hearing His voice and gathering together to share Him with each other as He directs and follow Him as He sets the captives free. Neither “church” nor religion can offer a Life like this.

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 11—Lose *Ekklesia* = Lose Jesus

Without Jesus' name—given under His specific authority—to people who hear it when it's given, the raw material for His *ekklesia* doesn't exist—it's somebody else's gathering. This is bad enough, but what is lost if we lose His *ekklesia* altogether?

If the religious institution is just a forgery, then the Original Lives on exactly where He has always been—in His people. Religion's forgery seriously harms people in terms of illegitimate authority, the control over scripture, a monopoly over scriptural interpretation, and the practice of attendance instead of Jesus' presence. Scripture is ultimately translated and interpreted to support the institution that controls it. Using Jesus name in an institution outside of His *ekklesia* is example.

An institution may use Jesus' name and borrow the titles of His gifts, but it cannot relocate, contain, or generate His Life. The manifesting of Jesus' body can't be scheduled, because it forms where and when He calls His people to Himself.

Religion schedules events to attend; Jesus summons people to be with Him.⁸⁵ Christ's body doesn't result from us having a gathering—it's a result of Him doing the gathering. When an institution schedules what He alone has the authority to call, it imitates the form but can't produce the Life, yet attendance is central to religion.

⁸⁵ Mark 3:14

Grand Theft Jesus

When Hebrews 10:25 is interpreted through an institutional lens, attendance is treated as a scriptural mandate. Scripture interpreted this way serves as the basis for turning the encouragement found in Jesus' *ekklesia* into doctrine within "church." In "church", "Do not forsake the habit of assembling" is treated as evidence of submission to Christ and proof of an obedient heart. I taught this to my kids, in my Bible study, and as a "church" teacher.

But when asked whether "church" attendance is required, the "church" answer is rarely direct. "You don't *have* to attend..." we're told—but the unspoken question lingers: are you really saved if you don't? "Assembling," of course, is treated synonymously with attending "church".

I was surprised to learn that the word interpreted as the action of assembling isn't a verb at all, but a noun referring to Jesus' assembly. Remember that the "gifts to men" reside in Jesus' *ekklesia*, in the people gathered in His name, which is impossible for an institution.

A straightforward interpretation reveals that it's the gift of encouragement within Jesus' body that is to be remembered, not the act of attending. In general, spiritual gifts, and in particular exhortation/encouragement, use the same word in Hebrews and 1 Corinthians.

Hebrews 10:25 has long been the verse interpreted as a command to attend. Yet the text does not command attendance; it warns against abandoning one another in suffering, consistent with building each other up through all spiritual gifts, including encouragement. Combined with the timing—"church" wasn't even a concept, yet—the passage ties assembly in His name directly to mutual encouragement, collapsing the attendance doctrine at the heart of "church".

Grand Theft Jesus

Read in harmony with Ephesians 4:11 and following, spiritual gifts—including encouragement—are for protection from false doctrine and building each other up to prevent His body from perpetual infancy, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine and by the cunning and schemes of men. In this case, misinterpretation steals the gifts of shared encouragement for the sake of “church” attendance, one of those “winds of doctrine.”

When an institution uses the names of those gifts for its offices, the forgery adopts the words but can’t produce the protection those gifts provide. When the gifts Christ gave for protection are not present, cultivated, and shared among His people, the very instability Ephesians warns against, dominates—winds of doctrine reign, and human schemes deceive.

I can’t stress enough how deep and unbridgeable the chasm is between Life in God’s Kingdom, aka Life in Christ, and life in religion. It’s not just semantic, as if the same reality were being described with different vocabulary; they arise from entirely different sources of authority with entirely different objectives.

The Spirit didn’t drive Jesus to revive a broken institution; The Spirit compelled him into the wilderness to defeat Satan. Nicodemus couldn’t understand what life from above was like—the mystery like the wind—a direct challenge to the assumption on which the religion is built: the belief that Jesus’ presence can be reliably accessed through a scheduled, structured assembly. When we accept an institution’s assembly instead of Jesus’ *ekklesia*, we lose His actual presence and the resources to share with each other.

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 12—Scripture Degraded When “Church” Elevates

Jerome and King James were utterly sincere about how scripture should be translated when they did it. From a king’s perspective, scripture should support a monarch's rule; from Jerome’s, it should align with the newly legislated religion. We may not agree that King James had the divine right to rule or that Constantine and Theodosius were themselves considered divinity, but their impact on scripture is horrific.

Through them, “offices of the church” were invented, assuming themselves to rule over them as Supreme Governor and High Priest. The result of this hierarchy and “offices” was to strip spiritual gifts from those they were intended recipients, rendering them spiritual infants and doctrinally deceived. Scripture translation and “church” interpretation remove the very mechanism that empowers Jesus’ *ekklesia*, granting imperial power over Jesus’ authority within its institution. Members are no longer taught to call upon the resources from above to build each other up. Instead of growing up into Him, we orbit a system that ensures spiritual infancy. Instead of strengthening one another, we face the stage as consumers. Instead of being guarded from deception through shared gifting like shepherding, we become dependent upon the “church” titles that assume names like “pastor.” The deception comes from those with the titles that should be the protectors.

The loss is not semantic. It is catastrophic. When shared gifting is replaced by managed traditions, fellowship with Father and Son doesn’t weaken — it vanishes. “Church” elevates itself through government-integrated creeds, controls scripture interpretation and translation, and then, in the final blow, elevates scripture to “God’s word”, a stature that scripture never claims for itself. Not only

Grand Theft Jesus

is “church” elevated to the level of a creedal belief, but its authority over scripture translation and interpretation is also included. Because “church” is believed in by creed, it puts scripture translation and interpretation beyond question.

Jesus disagrees:

And the Father who sent Me has himself borne witness about Me. His voice you have never heard, His form you have never seen, and you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe the One whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me that you may have life.

- John 5:37-40

The mystery of the ages isn't based on “us in church” or “scripture in you”, but it's Christ Himself in us that is God's hope of glory.⁸⁶ Initiatives to “ground ourselves” in scripture or promote a “biblical worldview” unintentionally widen the chasm between Life in Jesus and the imperial institution because Jesus never taught such a thing.

In a couple of verses, it gets worse:

But I know that you do not have the love of God within you.

⁸⁶ Col 1:27

Grand Theft Jesus

– John 5:42

We have inherited words like “church” and “repentance” as well as transliterations in lieu of translations for words like “baptize”, “apostle”, and “pastor.” Bypassing direct translation for either substitution or transliteration leaves the definition of those words up to the “church” that manages scripture translation and controls its interpretation. These definitions dominate our Bibles today.

Not only is “church” illegitimate in word and concept, but we have been given scripture translated through the imperial lens that dictated the term “church” in the first place.

Jesus called scripture by its name (*graphé*) when He referred to it. Neither Jesus nor any other New Testament writer referred to scripture by another name. Scripture is the testimony to Him, according to Jesus. In John 5:37-40, quoted above, Jesus includes both *logos* and *graphé* in the same conceptual section of scripture, and He explicitly juxtaposes scripture with Himself—He didn’t elevate it beyond their purpose.

One subtle, but diabolical consequence of elevating scripture is that, by granting it the power of “the word,” we encourage dependence on the text rather than on Him. That’s like getting to know your spouse through an autobiography without actually having live conversations. Spending more time in “the word” doesn’t engage a living person. Imagine suddenly being without scripture for the rest of your life. Compare that to being without Jesus for the rest of your life. Which option makes us more anxious?

Grand Theft Jesus

Scripture is testimony to Him, it is not Him. It does not lead His *ekklesia*—He does. Disciples are made by following a living Lord, not by mastering a text, as evidenced by how far and wide the gospel spread for years before New Testament writings even existed. Jesus Himself must have been present in His people. Scripture finds its fulfillment in Him, not the other way around.

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 13—Sincerity Doesn't Make Forgery Legitimate

One of the most deceiving defenses of “church” is sincerity. Understandably so. I was one of those imperfect, sincere “churchgoers” myself. While the claim that there are sincere believers in Jesus who attend “church” is common, the confusing emotional response is to think that sincerity also implies institutional legitimacy.

Embracing sincerity sounds and feels compassionate; however, it only establishes intent, and it can't establish truth, authority, or legitimacy. Sincerity is not a test for being “in Jesus' name.”

Sincerity is never presented in scripture as evidence that something originates with God. Matthew 7 explicitly dismantles sincerity as a measure of legitimacy when people claim to have served in His name, yet Jesus never knew them.⁸⁷ People can be sincere, devout, and emotionally invested—and still be deeply deceived. Sincerity is a beautiful character trait, but it isn't a test for truth.

Scripture consistently places sincerity at the very center of the deepest deceptions. Trusting sincerity isn't the same as trusting Jesus. Paul persecuted believers with a clear conscience and zeal for God,⁸⁸ yet he was deeply mistaken. Jesus warned that some would prophesy, cast out demons, and perform mighty works in His name—yet still hear, “I never knew you.”⁸⁹ The problem is not hypocrisy; it's the mistake of sincerely, thoroughly, misplacing trust. Believing in an institution called “church” is one example.

⁸⁷ Matt 7:21-23

⁸⁸ Gal 1:13

⁸⁹ Matt 7:21-23

Grand Theft Jesus

The overwhelming majority of Jesus' allegories, healings, teachings, and deliverances occurred outside the Temple and synagogue systems, calling the religious sons of hell and hypocrites⁹⁰ when He did go there.

A person may encounter Jesus anywhere—even within institutions He didn't establish. That encounter doesn't make the institution itself legitimate. In other words, encountering Jesus at “church” doesn't redefine religion's origin or purpose, including the religion originating from Rome's emperors. Otherwise, any place where someone first met Christ would have to be treated as something God established.

Sincerity can't supply what only Jesus Himself provides: His living presence. Jesus' *ekklesia* isn't defined by good intentions, correct language, or emotional devotion, but by His living presence shared among His people when they gather in His name—under His authority. A system that operates via the principles of attendance, offices, programs, or managed participation is not legitimized by the sincerity of its participants.

Sincerity does not dismantle a forgery.

The real question, therefore, is not, “Do we sincerely believe that 'church' originates with Jesus?” The question is this: “Did Jesus actually establish the institution, and is He present in its gatherings?” Being sincerely mistaken is still mistaken. Sincerity may explain why people remain in forged systems, but it does not make the forgeries His.

⁹⁰ Matt 23

Grand Theft Jesus

The measure of Truth isn't sincerity; its anchor is in its origin.

The question is not what I may be sincere about, but what Jesus actually said about His people and where He promised to be present. The Original exposes the forgery. Sincerity cannot.

CONFIDENTIAL

Part IV

The Original

It Steals Your Breath Away

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 14—Jesus Is The Original

We degrade scripture when we read it in snippets. ‘I’ve got a verse for that!’ is a common phrase, and sermons preached ‘in context’ rarely are. Scripture was not written as theological bullet points, but as integrated and inspired testimony to Jesus. The Bible that introduced headings and numbers was translated and published on the basis of Reformed theology. Ignore chapter and verse headings for a minute and read Mark 1 from Jesus’ immersion (transliterated as “baptism”) until He begins preaching.⁹¹ It’s one integrated story, not a basis for a theological sermon series. Nobody has a favorite novel, children’s book, or autobiography with a number for every sentence.

As it was inspired and originally written—without headers and numbering—the story reads something like this:

Jesus comes to his cousin, John, known as the immerser, who ceremonially initiated people into a life of *metanoieó* by immersing them in water. John’s preaching so moved people that they even openly admitted they were sinners. John also prophesied that someone else was coming who was far greater than he, and who would immerse people in the Holy Spirit.

When John immersed Jesus, something nobody had ever seen before happened—the skies were torn open, and the Holy Spirit landed on Jesus’ shoulder. Then, God speaks out of the torn-open heavens, declaring, “You’re my beloved Son, I take great pleasure in you.” God had just publicly announced His Son as His heir and anointed Him as heir to God’s kingdom with the Holy Spirit instead of water. Apart from the crucifixion and resurrection

⁹¹ Mark 1:9-21

Grand Theft Jesus

itself, nothing in human or cosmic history comes close to this moment. A man has been inaugurated as King over all of God's creation.

Like most of Jesus' teachings and miracles, God didn't "show up" when beckoned to a Temple service, a synagogue meeting, or any other religious event. The entire essence of Jesus' Life is God Himself, His *logos*.⁹² Systems, theologies, and traditions of worship were introduced later by Constantine's forgery. Jesus and His Father did 'show up' unexpectedly when John immersed Him—they tore open the heavens. Instead of at a temple, "church", or synagogue service, Jesus and God both 'showed up' in the wilderness, where John (the immerser) declared Jesus "the Lamb of God, the One who would take away the sins of the world."⁹³ This is where God anointed Jesus as His heir, the future King of God's Kingdom.

Upon His coronation, we'd expect Jesus to be ushered to Jerusalem and installed on its traditional throne, but tradition isn't the foundation of His mission. The Spirit immediately drove Him into a war with Satan, who was armed with temptation, his most powerful anti-human weapon. With it, he convinces people to believe in him rather than God, as Eve did. Jesus came armed with the authority of God Himself—He had been anointed to wield it in His Father's name. He knew what God said and what He meant. Jesus knew God's *logos* because He is God's *logos* incarnate. It degrades scripture to assign the authority vested in Jesus to writings that He inspired.

⁹² John 1:1-3

⁹³ John 1:29

Grand Theft Jesus

Jesus defeated Satan's barrage of temptations, emerging from the wilderness with a message from God Himself: "God's Kingdom is here!" God didn't send Jesus to introduce a new theological doctrine and put it in a theological box called "the gospel." God sent Jesus as the King to lead an invasion, the same invitation that He offers us to join today.

By defeating Satan face-to-face, Jesus unveils God's presence in a man for the first time. The mystery of the ages had just been revealed in Jesus: God's hope of glory (victory over the kingdom of darkness) is now vested in mankind.

The idea is incredulous. God's Kingdom? Here? Now? Jesus must have seen the look on their faces, so he persuaded them, "Believe me, I've just seen it and done it in the wilderness; completely change what you're thinking, reconsider, think again, come to your senses—and believe God's message that I just told you—His Kingdom is here—now!

If we embrace God's message—the "gospel"—in Jesus' own words, "God's Kingdom has come," we hear Him and read the rest of scripture through this lens rather than through one shaped by religion's message. If we start with Jesus' words, we now understand that it's Life in God's Kingdom that's the point, a very different concept from getting saved by repenting of sins. One is Life in Jesus—the Original; the other is life in religion—a forgery.

This is why Jesus teaches us to pray, "Your Kingdom come,"⁹⁴ as opposed to, "Give us true repentance." "Forgive as we have been forgiven," is not the same as "forgive us according to our repentance." This is why Jesus' analogies ("parables")

⁹⁴ Matt 6:10

Grand Theft Jesus

start with, “the Kingdom is like...”⁹⁵ and the Kingdom is in the “beatitudes”. Can you imagine a “parable” that starts with, “And true repentance is like...?” Yet we talk about repenting as if we have a scriptural model for how to do it.

This is why Jesus went around Galilee preaching the Kingdom,⁹⁶ attempted to teach Nicodemus about seeing the Kingdom,⁹⁷ and Paul preached, taught, persuaded, and testified to the Kingdom.⁹⁸ This is why Jesus instructed the 12⁹⁹ and the 72 to preach the Kingdom. He also said, “The Kingdom of God has come upon you”¹⁰⁰ when the religious condemned Him, and why Jesus said He would give the “keys to the Kingdom” rather than the “keys to *paenitemini*.” In fact, Jesus never said the phrase “repent from sin” ever, let alone in relation to “getting saved”, as a prerequisite to entering His Kingdom, or associating “repent” with “the gospel” in any way.

This is why Jesus said, “Publicans and harlots enter the Kingdom before you¹⁰¹ (the religious).” This is why the condemnation for the religious is framed, “Not only do you not enter the Kingdom, but you prevent others from entering as well.”¹⁰²

⁹⁵ Matt 13 – several examples

⁹⁶ Luke 4:42-43

⁹⁷ John 3:3

⁹⁸ Acts 19, 20, 28

⁹⁹ Matt 10:5-7

¹⁰⁰ Matt 12:28

¹⁰¹ Matt 21:31

¹⁰² Matt 23:13

Grand Theft Jesus

This is why Jesus said to “seek the Kingdom first”¹⁰³ rather than repentance or salvation: it’s God’s pleasure to give it to us, it’s already among us, and it’s worth leaving everything on this earth to seek.

This is why Jesus—after preaching the Kingdom throughout Israel, Galilee, and even Samaria—was killed. He preached a Kingdom that Caesar could not tolerate, and that the Jewish leaders rejected. And this is why Jesus, after Life, death, and resurrection, spoke about God’s Kingdom for 40 days before ascending into heaven.¹⁰⁴ From His very first message until He ascended to the Father’s side, Jesus preached the Kingdom of God.

If we are to believe that “the gospel”, God’s message that His Kingdom is here, is about an opportunity to do penance in order to get saved, we have no choice but to embrace Jerome’s substitution of *paenitemini* as a valid translation of *metanoeó* and that doing penance for sin is “the gospel.” And we also have to believe that Jesus came to author theology rather than to institute Life in Himself, directly contradicting scripture. Jesus really was and is a real Person.

Didn’t Jesus Come to Call Sinners to Repentance?¹⁰⁵

So, Levi is in the Roman IRS office, collecting taxes on a typical workday. Jesus spots him and says, “Follow me,” which Levi does.

He must have been so excited and beside himself that, naturally, he held a feast for Jesus. What else would he do? Some people from Levi’s circle of friends

¹⁰³ Matt 6:33

¹⁰⁴ Acts 1:3

¹⁰⁵ Luke 7:27-32

Grand Theft Jesus

joined them, along with Jesus and His disciples. Some religious leader spotted them.

Were they stalking Jesus? How did they happen to be at Levi's house at dinnertime? They must have been keeping an eye on him after that healing on the sabbath sacrilege. That must be it.

Levi's friends (whom the religious called sinners and tax collectors) were seen eating dinner with Jesus, prompting them to ask Jesus' disciples why they were eating with the riffraff. Jesus overhears the question.

Suppose we see "the gospel," and therefore Jesus, as the foundation for a religion of penance, the opportunity to change our minds about sin, feel remorse about it, and establish accountability for it, so that we qualify for salvation from eternity in hell—we would see what follows through that lens. We may be members in good standing and live a good Christian life. We may even be approaching our religion's definition of "Christlikeness". Our theology would dictate our response. We have a lot of faith in it. In this case, we would not yet have discovered that theology about Jesus isn't the same as faith in Him.

Jesus, on the other hand, has been consistently turning theological challenges upside down. This vantage point reveals the chasm between Him and a forgery. If we give Jesus the courtesy of being human, including a sense of irony, humor, and wit, we might slap our thighs in laughter in just a moment rather than sharpen our theology.

Back to the dinner party. "Why do you eat with tax collectors and sinners?" The question was directed at Jesus' protégés, but Jesus stepped in and answered. The theologians just messed with His people!

Grand Theft Jesus

Jesus answers their pointed question with, “The healthy don’t need a physician, just those who are sick. Sounds reasonable, right? Jesus continues: “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

With this one sentence, Jesus founded a God-ordained doctrine: that an institution staffed by the righteous and the healthy should preach that anyone who is a sinner must practice penance—and that this is the purpose and reason for Jesus’ incarnation. The Pharisees confronting Jesus should embrace this noble effort to make converts. Right?

The only way to read this from a *paenitemini* perspective is to assume it in advance. Jesus condemns the religious conversion perspective so thoroughly that He calls its practitioners “sons of Hell”, who “create twice the sons of Hell that they are.” More profoundly, if this verse theoretically stands as the concrete foundation of a theology for Jesus’ “gospel” to save sinners, then where is the theology for those of us who don’t need a physician? Just who are the righteous, the spiritually healthy people that Jesus was talking about that don’t need Him? Wouldn’t they be the ones for Jesus to build on and give the keys to the Kingdom? If Jesus was making a statement as the foundation of Christian doctrine, why does only half of the sentence apply? If people can be righteous before they come to Jesus, why do we need Jesus at all? If we try to finagle this theologically, it proves my point.

Since Jesus never called anybody a sinner even when caught in the act (did you know that?), why did He say it now, rudely insulting Levi and his dinner guests? Was Jesus' purpose really to establish the “church” penance doctrine? No, Levi and his guests were the object of religious name-calling.

Grand Theft Jesus

As with every other time the theologians tried to trap Him, Jesus shut them right up, leaving them without a response to Jesus' explanation for attending dinner. What if Jesus actually loved Levi and was celebrating with him and his friends?

Right to their face, Jesus tells them that he wasn't having dinner with the non-religious sinners because, unlike the "sinners" he hangs out with, He has hope that they can become just like *them, the righteous ones who don't need Him*. I speculate that, just like when the woman was caught in adultery, none of the accusers dared to cast a stone. Nobody said a thing.

What are the theologians going to say?

1. Oh, huh, we're sinners, too! Why aren't you having dinner with us?
2. We don't need any more righteous converts. There's not enough room in the synagogue anyway! Why aren't you with us?
3. Tax collectors, prostitutes, and fishermen! How can they be made righteous? Impossible? Some things just can't be redeemed! *It would take an act of God...*
4. You can't eat with them; they're unclean. They have to be made clean first. No, we don't want to tell them. They might start coming to synagogue!

If these scripture-masters were genuinely concerned with Jesus' spiritual well-being, why didn't *they* invite *Him* to dinner? If they were genuinely worried about the well-being of the tax collectors and sinners, why weren't *they* having dinner with them?

Grand Theft Jesus

The accusers were left standing with nothing but their theology and no answer. Just like the elder son, did he go in and celebrate with his father and brother, or did he walk away in a huff, in the iron grip of religion?

I bet that Peter got it. He's sitting back, sipping his wine, when he hears Jesus say with a straight face, "I haven't come to call the righteous (*like YOU*)..." This is priceless on so many levels. Can't you see Peter spraying that Mogen David all over Levi's nice white tablecloth?

Jesus had been publicly exposing the theologians as vipers, sons of hell, hypocrites, outsiders of God's kingdom, and gatekeepers preventing others from entering.¹⁰⁶ I doubt that He agreed with them now, as they called his fellow guests nasty names. Maybe he wasn't being literal about the Pharisees being righteous, or that the reason He was having dinner with them was to change their minds and get religion. I don't think they got the joke. That joke is now in our statements of faith and our liturgy.

The heresy of doing penance, a prerequisite for being counted as a believer in Jesus, obliterates God's good message sent through His Son. "The gospel" is missing in action in the forgery.

The Original Continues

Even after defeating Satan, Jesus doesn't ascend to a human throne—because a radical new Life is here. Instead of a human coronation, Jesus recruits—*he calls out*—four men out of their fishing boats to come with Him as He preaches God's invasion throughout Galilee. These four are Jesus' first 'called out ones.' The

¹⁰⁶ Matt 23

Grand Theft Jesus

four follow Jesus as He expels demons and heals people's ailments. He sets captives free.

In Mark's scripture, Jesus mentions sin for the first time in 'chapter 2' while leading his first *ekklesia* and healing a paralytic.'¹⁰⁷ In stark contrast to the future Roman religion, there is no price, emotional or otherwise, that is required before Jesus forgives sin for this man—or for any of us. When Jesus persuades us to *metanoëó* about what He is saying, He is calling us to believe in Him, no matter how unbelievable God's message appears, and to follow Him. This is a picture of the Original.

Before the religious forgery, the Original looks something like this:

1. God sneaks behind enemy lines in the ultimate Trojan Horse, a baby born of a virgin.
2. Anointing this boy as His king when He is a grown man, heir to His Kingdom, and directing Him to defeat Satan, disarming him by this anointed authority, living in a man for the first time.
3. Empowering Him to lead the invasion, while teaching other men how to do it, and to delegate that power and authority to these other men.
4. Jesus giving up His own Life so that all of mankind can receive His Life by virtue of believing in Him, just like this first message in Mark. By giving up His own life, Jesus took away the sins of the world—unilaterally, stripping Satan of His only leverage.

¹⁰⁷ Mark 2:5

Grand Theft Jesus

Religion changes this unbelievable story into one about penance for sin, attending “church”, and blindly accepting “church’s” version of scripture without question.

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 15—Jesus’ Original: A Spiritual Potluck

Religion may imitate Life in Jesus, but no analogy reaches the depth of loss when Jesus’ *ekklesia* is missing. Like Mary weeping before Jesus’ empty tomb, we cannot deny the question: what do we do now? He’s not where I thought He was. When the “offices of the church” framework is disarmed and spiritual gifts restored to their rightful place—in Jesus’ believers—what does Life in Him actually look like?

Ekklesia: Jesus’ Potluck for Believers

There’s nothing like potluck! Everyone brings a favorite dish and eats to their heart’s content. Unexpected visitors get seconds. So much food—so many choices!

Potluckers prepare food for themselves, their family, and then some. Leftovers overflow—even for very full people! Big potlucks, two-family potlucks, neighborhood potlucks, and random potlucks. Joe tries a little of everything! Susan loves the bread, many sample their favorites, and some eat things they’ve never tried before—there’s something for everyone.

When someone forgets it’s potluck day until the last minute, or is overwhelmed by life... guess what? They come anyway! There is so much food!

Soon, so many people attend the potluck that they run out of room, and a few break off and start their own. Both continue to grow and spin off, and soon, the town is filled with potlucks every night of the week, plus a few breakfasts and lunches. Friendship flourishes, and the community thrives.

Grand Theft Jesus

Potlucks work because everyone brings what the others desire, and everyone leaves full.

Except for the local burger chain. Potlucks are so popular that business suffers at the one-minute hamburger stand, so the jealous owner launches his own “potluck,” featuring low-cost, no-cooking, and convenient “fellowship.”

It turns out that there’s a market for the “potluck” for the one-minute scenario. He sets aside a section of his restaurant during non-peak times and even trades burgers with attendees who volunteer in the kitchen, but he passes the hat to everyone else to cover overhead.

True, only a few menu items are suitable for mass feeding, but that’s the price of an affordable substitute, both in terms of money and time. The “potluck” catches on, and over time, the young and hurried professionals bring their kids—who never attended the real potlucks—until the substitute itself becomes the community’s subculture.

Eventually, the meaning of potluck is blurred altogether, even though both potluck and “potluck” use the same terms for food, organization, fellowship, and purpose, when in reality the difference between them is a vast chasm.

To differentiate itself, the “potluck” grows so large that its kitchens can’t handle the volume, so it reverts to a single easy-to-produce snack and brings in speakers to offset the change. The information sounds useful, so it attracts even more people. Tables are replaced with conference seating, and coffee is all there’s time and money for, and they had to tent a larger building next door. “Food” became the intellectual content, and fellowship was reduced to a few minutes before and after the speaker.

Grand Theft Jesus

Both potluck and “potluck” continue to thrive in their separate worlds, yet outwardly use the same terminology and claim the same heritage—though only one of them actually possesses it.

But the community still calls itself a “potluck” community for as long as anyone can remember.

Jesus’ *Ekklesia*: A Spiritual Feast for Gathered Believers

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...

- 1 Cor 12:4-11

Somehow, the constant potluck of spiritual gifts has been detached from the normal daily Life in Jesus and treated as a denominational choice. Some “churches” don’t even mention spiritual gifts, while others talk about nothing else. It’s very rare to find a shepherd who not only mentions spiritual gifts in sermons but also guides others to share them with one another.

Spiritual gifts are neither the point nor are they incidental; they’re the mechanism by which Jesus lives in His people and enables them to give Him to each other. They’re not an optional spiritual upgrade. They come with Jesus. Spiritual gifting in Jesus is His native language, spoken among His believers, so that we can build one another up.

Grand Theft Jesus

When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up...

- 1 Thess 5:11

Jesus' *ekklesia*—His assembly—is a spiritual smorgasbord, a gourmet potluck for those who proclaim, “You are the Son of the living God.” Jesus is the only limit to the kind and number of gifts to be shared; everybody leaves full in the way Jesus has just for them. Jesus comes to Life in His *ekklesia* as believers share their gifts from God—it's the way a gathering is Jesus' literal body.

Believers who gather together as they hear Jesus' voice calling them are also the means through which Jesus builds up His people. When all believers work together, Christ's body becomes present within His people, sharing that Life with one another. Gathered people become His body as they share His gifts with each other, like a finger sharing life with a hand. That's hard to do when we're all sitting down listening to a speaker, especially if that's the only thing we've been taught.

It's both captivating and terrifying. Thank God that He gives us the means to lead us into the fullness of His Son!

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 16—Fellowship Hall Or Fellowship With Him

Jesus said *His* sheep hear His voice¹⁰⁸ *because* they belong to Him.¹⁰⁹ When they gather in His name, He Lives in and through them.¹¹⁰ Where He isn't Living, the gathering isn't His—no matter what a gathering claims or what words it uses. A gathering formed under institutional authority may speak about Him, but it cannot speak for Him—in His name—unless we first accept that Jesus' presence Lives in an institution.¹¹¹

When shepherding is converted into “church” offices and gifts are absorbed into systems, the loss is devastating.

When we lose Jesus' *ekklesia* because we think that “church” is what He was talking about, we lose Jesus Living in His people, evidenced by the direction we face when we attend; the reality of what that means in real Life—together in Jesus—takes a minute to sink in.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us;

¹⁰⁸ John 10:3

¹⁰⁹ John 10:14-15

¹¹⁰ John 10:4, Matt 18:20

¹¹¹ Acts 17:25

Grand Theft Jesus

and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.¹¹²

This is why Jesus died for us—so that He could be in fellowship with us—and His Father, our God! This is Life in Him—by His design. He says it again:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.¹¹³

And again:

Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.¹¹⁴

This is fellowship with the Father and Son, and we are designed to get together to share **HIM** with each other. We get to fellowship *with* Him as we fellowship with each other! This is why the devastation of His gifts siphoned off by an institution is so heinous. Because in “church”, we then fall so far short of the fellowship that He desires with us and for us.

Imagine an extraordinary, even decadent meal with family and friends at one of life’s great events: a nice, juicy steak, a delicious red wine, and something chocolatey for dessert. But even dinner like this pales in comparison to the laughter

¹¹² 1 John 1:1-3

¹¹³ Rev 3:20

¹¹⁴ John 14:23

Grand Theft Jesus

and shared memories. Nobody wants to go home; it's so much fun, and people grow more deeply into each other. They can hardly wait for the next get-together.

This is just a whisper compared to the fellowship that Jesus offers. If we knew the difference, we'd give even this kind of family/friend gathering away for a moment at His feast at His table. We skip "church" for football games all the time. Would we skip Christmas dinner with Jesus for a game—any game? If "church" were literally Christ's body revealing Him to each other, why would we be so ready to give it up for football, birthdays, vacations, or just not feeling like it.

"Church" Fellowship

To me, "fellowship" in "church" always meant what adults do to catch up before and after the service. I never saw or heard it described as anything else. There's absolutely nothing wrong with getting together with others just to be together. But don't make the mistake of thinking it has anything to do with Jesus' *ekklesia* or fellowship *in Him*. By believing, the fellowship that John is talking about is with the Father and His Son, Jesus. Jesus even talks about His wedding feast at the end of history.¹¹⁵

Just imagine, for a minute, *expecting* to receive gifts directly from Jesus that are precisely what your heart craves—a fellowship that you desire even more than life itself. What a joy it would be to give the same to others while receiving the same from them. Now *that* would be building each other up—this is the entire

¹¹⁵ Rev 19:6-9

Grand Theft Jesus

point of Jesus' *ekklesia*—and it prepares us to tear down the gates of hell.¹¹⁶

Fellowship in Him is better than the Super Bowl.

If our fellowship “in church” is essentially the same as the local bar, season tickets with friends, coffee shop buddies, or a book club, then we’re settling for human fellowship. People outside “church” have this kind of fellowship all the time. In fact, adding a service to a “church” dramatically reduces the time spent together.

Having a common religious denomination, “church” style, similar stories about repenting from sin, or age-appropriate Sunday school is not fellowship in Him. This is just “church” attendance aligned with personal preference. This kind of fellowship can happen in a homeless shelter. Sometimes more, and sometimes deeper.

Religion Satisfies Human Fellowship

Religion impersonates fellowship in the Father and the Son with fellowship among attenders. Our requirements when choosing “a good church” include a “community” feeling, and being “like a family” is even better. “Getting fed” with “sermons from the word”, and a strong missions program are also high on the list for a “church”. We don’t need Jesus for this kind of fellowship. Did Jesus really give up his life so we could have a smorgasbord of “church” preferences?

Fellowship with the Father and the Son is the central and indispensable core of Jesus' *ekklesia*. “Church” without *this* fellowship is just human preferences, enjoyment, common traditions, or even friendship—human events, religiously

¹¹⁶ Matt 16:18

Grand Theft Jesus

practiced. Why are we satisfied with human fulfillment in place of the overflowing streams of living water in the Holy Spirit?

Let me drive this home: the entire point of getting together is to build each other up, according to Scripture.¹¹⁷ Jesus is present when He calls us together—two or more—in His name.¹¹⁸ The purpose is to interact with one another in His name, building each other up through the gifts He has given.¹¹⁹ If He has not called us together, if He isn't speaking to us and through us when we are, then it's somebody else's *ekklesia*.¹²⁰ We can't do Jesus' *ekklesia* facing the front.

Religion forsakes fellowship in Jesus and His Father for fellowship in repenting of sin, Bible study, and “church” activities, yet still uses the term “fellowship.” We're deceived into thinking they're the same thing as fellowship in Him:

*... because religion gives the impression of having Christ, while it inoculates you from experiencing the real thing. **Most wicked.** If you want to destroy an economy, flood the market with counterfeit bills.¹²¹*

As opposed to the living Jesus present in each person, sharing God and His Kingdom with each other, the most common comment before “church” is “How is

¹¹⁷ 1 Cor 14:26

¹¹⁸ Matt 18:20

¹¹⁹ 1 Cor 12:7

¹²⁰ Matt 7:22-23

¹²¹ Eldredge, John. Beautiful Outlaw: Experiencing the Playful, Disruptive, Extravagant Personality of Jesus (p. 9). Hachette Nashville. Kindle Edition

Grand Theft Jesus

the family?” and afterwards is, “What did you think about the sermon?” The phrases “before church” and “after church” refer to the scheduled service and/or Sunday School, a stark contrast to Jesus’ *ekklesia*.

Fellowship In Jesus, Missing In Action

Fellowship composed of “Jesus in me”, “Jesus in others”, and what’s on *His* mind almost never happens. “Leaders” encouraging the congregated to share Jesus’ gifts in them when they come to “church” is not “church’s” purpose.

I would have loved to have written this, but I’m so glad that somebody did:

The records of Christ are written so you can experience him as they [Jesus’ disciples] did, this intimate connection with the Father and the Son. John says that you can enjoy the same friendship with Jesus that he knew, for this Jesus came. So, if you do not know Jesus as a person, know his remarkable personality — playful, cunning, fierce, impatient with all that is religious, kind, creative, irreverent, and funny — you have been cheated. If you do not experience Jesus intimately, daily, in these very ways, if you do not know the comfort of His actual presence, do not hear His voice speaking to you personally—you have been robbed. If you do not know the power of his indwelling life in you, shaping your personality, healing your brokenness, enabling you to live as he did, you have been plundered.¹²²

Plundered of what? *Fellowship in Jesus*.

Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”¹²³ John 10 refers to hearing Jesus’ voice as the way that Life is for His sheep.

¹²² Beautiful Outlaw, John Eldredge Pg 12

¹²³ John 10:27

Grand Theft Jesus

Jesus tells Peter that he had just spoken a revelation directly from His Father.¹²⁴ The entire Jerusalem Council agreed with the Holy Spirit.¹²⁵ Paul definitely had a conversation with Jesus.¹²⁶ When Jesus said that He would be with His followers always, how literal is that?¹²⁷ When we lose *ekklesia*, we lose Jesus. When we lose Jesus, we lose Life in Him; we lose everything.

CONFIDENTIAL

¹²⁴ Matt 16:17

¹²⁵ Acts 15:1-35

¹²⁶ Acts 9:1-19

¹²⁷ Matt 28:20

Grand Theft Jesus

Part V

The Testimony

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 17—Let’s Take Scripture At Its Word

Neither Jesus nor scripture—Old Testament or New—refer to scripture as “the word.” Neither did believers before or after Constantine and Theodosius institutionalized “church.” There were a few phrases that started to mention scripture in connection with God’s word starting in the 1500s, but it wasn’t until the Westminster Confession was legislated by Parliament in 1646 that a linguistic link was made between scripture and the word of God.

Even then, it wasn’t until the full development of Reformed theology that the term was embraced, and “standing on the word”, “preaching the word”, and “spending time in the word” became universally understood as the Bible rather than Jesus, God’s *logos*. The concept didn’t even get hinted at until the 1500s, was written into theology (as a statement of faith) in 1646, and then popularized in the 1700s, starting with the Puritans.

If we’re to take scripture at its word, we need to start where we place our faith: Jesus. That’s what scripture says.¹²⁸

Jesus never refers to scripture as anything but *graphé*, the Greek word for scripture. Calling scripture the word, placing it first (or at all) as an article of faith, and using it for the authority of all faith, belief, and behavior is a tradition of man, and it nullifies the *logos* of God.¹²⁹

Scripture, as originally inspired and written, is inerrant and therefore trustworthy. It can be trusted for what it says it is, as well as for what Jesus says it

¹²⁸ John 5:40

¹²⁹ Mark 7:13

Grand Theft Jesus

is. When kings, emperors, their staffs, or others modify it with meanings different than the original, the result is no longer inerrant unless we make the jump that God inspired King James and Jerome to rewrite scripture because it wasn't quite right in its original form.e

Mistranslation, misinterpretation, and transliteration create the gap between inspired scripture and corrupt scripture. Jesus is plainly and repeatedly referred to as the Word in John 1, but neither Jesus nor scripture ever associates *graphé* with *logos*. In fact, Jesus places those who are the scripture authorities on the other side of the chasm between themselves and Life in Him:

And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

– John 5:37-40

Jesus clearly states the purpose of scripture, to point to Himself for Life. Treating it otherwise misquotes scripture and, as Jesus points out, cannot produce eternal Life. Both the King James/Archbishop Bancroft and the Theodosius/Damasus/Jerome regimes understood this quite clearly. If they were to maintain their authority over religion, they not only had to be its ultimate authority but also control the scripture that justified their power over a religious institution.

Grand Theft Jesus

The scripture versions produced under both regimes were written to do just that, and the words they used to do so remain in our scriptures today. These scriptures, along with the creeds, confessions, and other “church” documents, combined with the elevation of these updated scriptures which “church” controlled exclusively for over 1000 years, still keep “church” in authority today. Scripture still uses the word, “church”, which still employs “pastors”, and which still preaches “repentance.”

“Church” has trained us to treat scripture as a system that authorizes the “church” and manages behavior within it. John 5:37-40 turns that doctrine on its head in the same way Jesus silenced every ‘scriptural’ challenge the theologians posed to Him.

Jesus teaches that we have Life in Him —the Word, God’s *logos*. Scripture bears witness to Him, but it’s neither Life itself nor is it the source for it. Jesus in you, and in me, is God’s Hope of Glory.¹³⁰

Viewing scripture through the lens of John 5:37-40 is drastically different than reading it through the lens of denominational statements of faith that place the Bible as its foundation. The first lens leads to an eternal Life change, the other is the framework for an earthly religion. Here are a few ‘statement of faith’ examples from “churches” today:

1. The supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried
2. The only rule and norm of all doctrine and life.

¹³⁰ Col 1:27

Grand Theft Jesus

3. The ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged.

Jesus never said anything like this about scripture. Neither did scripture. Jesus defines scripture—which exists solely to give testimony about Him; scripture doesn't define Jesus, nor does our theology based on it. Not only are these examples unbiblical, but they're also listed first in their statements of faith. Jesus is mentioned later. The ordering itself of such statements in relation to Jesus should give us pause.

According to scripture:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the ekklesia. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. – Col 1:15-20

Even if “church” were an accurate translation for His *ekklesia*, Jesus builds His *ekklesia* on the revelation of Himself in His people. The foundation for Life in Jesus isn't a book that “church” or *ekklesia* embraces or has elevated in creeds to His level. Neither scripture nor Jesus equates scripture with God's *logos*. In both the Old and New Testaments, both scripture and Jesus refer to scripture as graphé.

Grand Theft Jesus

But “church” isn’t just a mistranslation of *ekklesia*; it’s historically rooted in Roman government/religion. Scripture as we have it today and tradition born from this religion are the foundation for what we have inherited in religion. Its translation can’t be trusted because it isn’t founded on Jesus but are originals adjusted to suit the Edicts of Milan and Thessalonica, King James’ instructions, and the governments that enforced them. Even then, nobody referred to scripture as “the word” until the 16th and 17th centuries.

When controversy over Gentile believers surfaced in Acts 15 1:35, the apostles and elders met *with the whole ekklesia*. The apostles and elders didn’t unilaterally decide the matter for either the Jerusalem gathering or for Antioch’s. Testimony was given to what God Himself had done. Peter confirmed the Spirit falling upon the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas recounted the signs and wonders God had performed. James then agreed and made the same argument, quoting scripture to confirm as another witness of what had been revealed. This wasn’t one man’s opinion, and it wasn’t a religious decree or official “church” position. Jesus led His gathered people, and scripture continued to confirm that He was speaking in and among them, bearing witness to what He was doing.

This is why *ekklesia* can’t be lived as an audience facing a stage receiving theology; the point is that Jesus is present and active *in His people—all of them*—not in delivered information about Him in presentations developed weekly for that purpose.

Jesus led His *ekklesia* through witness, mutually shared gifting of discernment, and the Spirit’s real-time leading, and confirmed by scripture. Shepherding was modeled after Peter in 1 Peter 5:20. The Spirit led the *ekklesia*

Grand Theft Jesus

into Truth, and scripture continued to bear witness to Jesus, now and always. The conclusion was not, “It seemed good to our interpretation of scripture.” It was, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us (Jesus’ entire body who had gathered).” Jesus, manifesting via the Holy Spirit, acted as the foundation of the gathering. The letter to the Gentiles in Antioch that communicated their decision didn’t refer them to Bible verses, it didn’t mention scripture at all.

The point is that we should take Jesus at His word, take scripture at its word, and embrace the meaning that both give. Many Greek words are transliterated in our English translations. I’d always been taught that this happens when there’s no adequate word in the English language, so a new word must be created. Examples are “apostle”, “bishop”, “deacon”, “pastor”, and more. In some cases, words were even substituted for the original, like “church” and “repent.”

The explanation doesn’t hold up; “ambassador”, “overseer,” “servant,” and “shepherd” were readily available in English, which sermons in English reveal. There aren’t many words that are treated like this, but the ones that are treated this way are pivotal—they’re the ones that “church” uses to place itself through its ‘offices’ in ‘leadership.’ No wonder the “church” elevates scripture to “the word,” it’s a conflict of interest to reinforce itself.

So when asked about my preferred Bible translation, I say Greek. That’s an overstatement—I’m not fluent in Greek and don’t plan to be. I started by researching one word, which led to another, and so on. Then I found people who were fluent in Greek who had come to the same conclusions. The availability of Greek translation, both present and historic, is religion’s worst enemy. Now, we

Grand Theft Jesus

can research online what Jesus said in Greek and see how it was used as far back as Homer.

We don't need a seminary degree to know that Jesus is the anointed Son of the living God, but we might need a degree to untangle what "church" and its first language, theology, have done to the treasure that is scripture. The words found in scripture had been in use for centuries before they were written, and even the Septuagint had been translated into Greek for over 200 years before Jesus was born. Not a single new definition was used to write it.

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Part VI

The Choice

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 18—What To Do For “church”?

When I talk about Jesus’ *ekklesia*, people ask, “Is that what you do for “church”? What follows is blunt: I don’t do anything “for church”, there’s no reason to do anything “for church”, and “doing something for church” would harm me spiritually as well as those around me. Jesus did not institute “church” in word or concept so if I were to follow Him, it couldn’t be into “church.” “Church” was not in Jesus’ vocabulary, and He didn’t establish a religion to systematize Life in Him. Jesus’ *ekklesia* isn’t something that can be attended, an institution that could reform another one, or a different kind of institution to replace “church.” Though “church” claims “church” to be a translation of His *ekklesia*, it bears no structural or spiritual resemblance to what Jesus said or Lived. I don’t do anything “for “church” anymore. I have come out of her, according to scripture.¹³¹

If this book is treated as a set of principles for improving “church,” it has already failed. Either nothing will change and “church” will continue as it always has, or it will actually lead us to take Jesus at His word — and dissolve “church.” If “church” interpreted scripture through the lens of John 5:37–40 instead of through its own statements of faith and traditions, it wouldn’t survive.

What do I do? I continually capture every thought and bring it to Jesus,¹³² asking what is on His mind more as well as telling Him what’s on mine. In prayer, I try to listen more than I speak. I go straight to the Father—Jesus died so that I can—and I look for whom He wants me to have fellowship with. I’m not saying that I have perfected my relationship with Him, or that I even need to, because His

¹³¹131 Rev 18:4

¹³² 1 Cor 10:4-5

Grand Theft Jesus

relationship with me is perfect. This is the direction I'm going, and He isn't worried about how well I do it as I go towards Him.

Jesus' *ekklesia* isn't "church"; *ekklesia* is simply a term for what happens together with Jesus, in-Person, when we declare that "Yes! You're the anointed Son of the Living God", and He calls us together. His calling isn't a huge spiritual mystery out of a bad system into a "good" system, but a calling to Him out of our "fishing boats" and up from under a tree to be with Him.¹³³ *Ekklesia* is not an institution at all; it has no systems to keep it running well or to adhere to a published schedule. Even if Jesus' calling was to come out of a worldly system, the "church"/religion is the worldly system being talked about.¹³⁴ Jesus demonstrated His *ekklesia* many times in scripture, but said the term just once, with joy, as Peter declared faith in Him.¹³⁵ *Ekklesia* is Jesus alive in His people, forming His body as they believe in Him, and He brings them together.

Knowing what to do is baffling if "church" is taken out of the picture. As Jesus said to Nicodemus:

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born from above/again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." – John 3:5-8

¹³³ Mark 3:14

¹³⁴ Rev 18:2-8

¹³⁵ Mat 16:16

Grand Theft Jesus

Nicodemus had no idea what Jesus was talking about. “How can this be?” was his response. Following Jesus is a quest that cannot and should not be canned into a religion or a system—Life in Jesus is no more a system than the wind.¹³⁶

Unlike a trip designed to get us somewhere as efficiently as possible, a quest requires us to leave familiar dwelling places for strange lands we cannot yet envision, without knowing when we will return. This journey requires a willingness to say goodbye to life as we know it because our hearts long for something more.

– Ruth Haley Barton¹³⁷

The drive to replace “church,” when we decide to come out of her, is so strong because of habit and what we’ve been taught. It’s a paradigm shift that can’t be grasped by tweaking operations.

Jesus’ sheep hear His voice, and they follow Him. Listening to Him and Him alone and trusting Him to lead us into fellowship with Himself and others who declare the same faith as Peter—*that is Ekklesia*. This fellowship, as described earlier, is focused on Jesus in each other, the opposite focus of a “church” service. In my quest, I have found astounding fellowship in unexpected places. I long for more.

¹³⁶ John 3:8

¹³⁷ Barton, Ruth Haley; R. Ruth Barton; Willard, Dallas. Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence (Transforming Resources) (pp. 16-17). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition

Grand Theft Jesus

People wonder whether what I do counts toward the mandate to “go to church”. The question should be, ‘Does going to “church” count as following Jesus?’

Of course, we’d be more comfortable with an organized, predictable, doctrinally pure, and scheduled system to follow Jesus. But Jesus didn’t leave following Him up to human capacity; He left it up to Himself. We can’t follow Jesus using any human ability or system; we must abide in Him as He leads us, breath by breath.

Asking the question, “What do I do for church” if I leave her, is like a prisoner trying to figure out how to replicate his cell life on the outside. Replacing the guards, schedule, food, and the sheer intolerability of prison life is insane, but living in freedom can seem foreign to lifetime prisoners.

Life in Jesus, constant conversation with Him, sharing that with others, and receiving the same from them, as He leads, is modeling the 4, 5, 12, and 72 (Jesus’ first *ekklesias*).

If I could, and it was the way that Jesus instituted, I’d give you five steps to follow Him. But if I did, it would rob you of your adventure in Him because you’d be following mine. It’s not that I wouldn’t love to walk with you, but the walk is not on a beaten path. There is no system for following Him. If we thought so, we’d turn it into another denomination.

What I can tell you is what happened as I began to listen to Him in real time, thought by thought. It can’t be systematized or copied. Life in Him only works if He is leading in Person. What are the critical steps to following Jesus? Ok, now this is totally tongue-in-cheek, and none of these are to be reduced to

Grand Theft Jesus

principles any more than breathing. Instead, I will share this part of my life with you. There are two things you can do: listen and trust. That means to stop talking and stop everything else, and to trust him for every heartbeat, not just correct beliefs. The big tip is that all other tips result from listening and trusting. What I can offer is: start the quest by listening and trusting, but you have to decide on the direction. We can't get started on one quest while still pursuing another.

I learned that I can't follow Jesus unless I listen to Him in real time, thought by thought, heartbeat by heartbeat. I pursued listening until I experienced a conversational relationship with Him.

I learned to really believe in Him, not just about Him. I learned to stop beginning my day with Jesus and then going on with my day, thankful that He had taken care of me. I replaced this idea with asking Him all day long what is on His mind, what He has planned minute by minute, and how I can join Him, rather than asking Him to help me. I learned to believe that "You, Lord, have already taken care of me" when tempted to worry. He really does care about every single hair on my head, and more. I fully embrace the simple Truth: "This is the work of God, that we believe in Him whom He has sent." I take this to mean that I actively believe in Him moment by moment, not in a theologically correct way. Don't trust your relationship with Jesus to anybody else, their principles, traditions, or schedules.

I have come to crave Jesus like my life depends on Him, because it does. I listen for who He wants me to engage with in fellowship, where, and when. I have learned to love Jesus more than I love my own life—every single part of it. The quest is quite the adventure.

Grand Theft Jesus

A few books fell into my lap that helped me learn to listen. They're not formulas. If you read them, take every thought to Jesus and resist turning it into a principle.

I read scripture through the lens of scripture, specifically John 5:37-40 and Col 1:27, and Ephesians 1:17-18. Not through a "church" lens, but through the lens as if I'd never heard of "church" before. "Church" can only be seen in scripture if assumed before reading.

Learning what *ekklesia* really means in Greek and how "church" came from another word, source, and concept, pierced my traditional shell.

I learned to listen to Jesus from Him through a book titled "Invitation to Solitude and Silence" by Ruth Haley Barton, quoted above. I'd say that this is one of the top 2 or 3 things that helped me to listen to Jesus constantly and in Person. The goal isn't to become good at solitude and silence; the goal is to stop everything else in solitude and silence so that there's room to learn how to listen to Jesus.

Similarly, John Eldredge's "Beautiful Outlaw" and "Waking the Dead" resonated with me, especially the idea of being and doing something different from what I've been taught. Oswald Chambers's "My Utmost for His Highest" (July 12th) and "They Found the Secret" (Chapter 5) by V. Raymond Edman moved me deeply. None of these are formulas; they're the books I read on my quest for Jesus as He is. The point is to pursue Jesus and listen to Him. These books helped me. Ask Jesus if they might help you.

It shouldn't have surprised me, but the scandal of religion and "church" is anticipated in scripture—it wasn't a surprise to God. A system intertwined with the kings of the earth, namely Constantine, Theodosius, James, and even the IRS ties

Grand Theft Jesus

that we have today, demands a very clear response: “Come out of her, My people.”¹³⁸

The choice is stark, but it’s crystal clear: we either remain in the institution of “church,” with its familiar structures, traditions, and belief systems, or we embrace the unpredictable adventure of following Jesus, the Son of the living God—no systems, no guarantees, just Him.

CONFIDENTIAL

¹³⁸ Rev 18:4

Grand Theft Jesus

Part VII Appendices

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

CONFIDENTIAL

Appendices

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Appendix XX1—Regions Historically Operating as Officially Catholic States

(With Approximate Dates of Formal Catholic Affiliation)

I. European Kingdoms and States

France

c. 496 (Clovis' baptism) – 1789 (French Revolution)

Restored under various regimes until 1905 (formal separation law)

Spain

589 (Visigothic conversion) – 1978 (new constitution removed state religion)

Portugal

12th century – 1910 (Republic; monarchy ended)

Austria

c. 8th century – 1918 (end of Habsburg monarchy)

Hungary

1000 (Coronation of Stephen I) – 1946 (monarchy abolished)

Poland

966 (Baptism of Poland) – 1795 (Partitions); restored Catholic monarchy
1918–1939

Lithuania

Grand Theft Jesus

1387 (official Christianization) – 1795 (Partition into Russian Empire)

Ireland

5th-century Christian kingdom; under a Catholic monarchy until the English Reformation (1534).

Post-independence constitutional preference 1937–1972.

Italy

Various Catholic states from late antiquity; unified Italy recognized Catholicism 1929–1984 (Lateran Treaty)

Malta

1530 (Knights Hospitaller) – present (constitutionally Catholic)

Monaco

1297 – present (Catholic state religion)

Andorra

1278 – present (co-prince is Catholic bishop of Urgell)

Belgium

1830 – 20th century (constitutionally Catholic monarchy)

Luxembourg

1815 – 20th century (Catholic constitutional monarchy)

Croatia

925 (King Tomislav) – 1918 (end of the kingdom)

Grand Theft Jesus

Slovakia

Within the Hungarian Crown (1000–1918), a Catholic state, 1939–1945

Czech Republic (Kingdom of Bohemia)

10th century – 1620 (Battle of White Mountain; enforced Catholic restoration)

II. British Isles (Pre-Reformation Catholic Monarchies)

United Kingdom

(England) c. 597 – 1534; restored 1553–1558

(Scotland) 6th century – 1560

(Wales) as part of England during the same period

III. Papal Territorial Rule

Vatican City

1929 – present

Papal States (central Italy):

754 (Donation of Pepin) – 1870

IV. Spanish Colonial Catholic States

Catholicism was legally established under the Spanish Crown:

Grand Theft Jesus

Mexico

1521 – 1857 (liberal reforms)

Guatemala

1524 – 1871

Honduras

1520s – 19th century secular reforms

El Salvador

1520s – 19th century secular reforms

Nicaragua

1520s – 1893 reforms

Costa Rica

1520s – present (official state religion)

Panama

1519 – early 20th century secularization

Colombia

1538 – 1991 (constitutional reform)

Venezuela

1522 – 1864

Ecuador

Grand Theft Jesus

1534 – 1906 (separation)

Peru

1532 – 1979 (formal secular constitution)

Bolivia

1538 – 2009 (constitution ended official religion)

Paraguay

1537 – 1992 (new constitution)

Chile

1541 – 1925 (separation)

Argentina

1580 – present (state support; no longer official religion)

Uruguay

1680 – 1917 (strong secular reform)

V. Portuguese Colonial Catholic States

Brazil

1500 – 1891 (Republic Constitution)

Angola

1575 – 1975 (independence)

Grand Theft Jesus

Mozambique

16th century – 1975

East Timor

16th century – 1975 (Portuguese rule)

VI. Spanish Asia

Philippines

1565 – 1898 (Spanish rule; Catholic state religion)

VII. African Catholic Kingdom

Kingdom of Kongo

1491 (royal conversion) – 17th-century decline

Grand Theft Jesus

Appendix XX2—King James Translation Instructions¹³⁹

1. The ordinary Bible read in the “church”, commonly called the Bishops' Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the original will permit.
2. The names of the prophets and the holy writers, with the other names in the text, to be retained, as near as may be, accordingly as they are vulgarly used.
3. The old ecclesiastical words to be kept, as the word "*church*", not to be translated *congregation*.
4. When any word hath divers significations, that to be kept which hath been most commonly used by the most eminent fathers, being agreeable to the propriety of the place and the analogies of faith.
5. The division of chapters to be altered either not at all, or as little as may be, if necessity so require.
6. No marginal notes at all to be affixed, but only for the explanation of the Hebrew or Greek words, which cannot, without some circumlocution, so briefly and fitly be expressed, in the text.
7. Such quotations of places to be marginally set down as shall serve for the fit reference of one Scripture to another.
8. Every particular man of each company to take the same chapter or chapters; and, having translated or amended them severally by himself where he thinks good, all to meet together to confirm what they have done, and agree for their part what shall stand.

¹³⁹ Rules most likely drafted by Archbishop Richard Bancroft—who also presided over the translation and had final editorial decisions—and probably submitted them to King James as Supreme Governor over the Church for approval.

Grand Theft Jesus

9. As any one company hath dispatched any one book in this manner, they shall send it to the rest, to be considered of seriously and judiciously; for his Majesty is very careful on this point.
10. If any company, upon the review of the book so sent, shall doubt or differ upon any places, to send them word thereof, to note the places, and therewithal to send their reasons; to which if they consent not, the difference to be compounded at the general meeting, which is to be of the chief persons of each company, at the end of the work.
11. When any place of special obscurity is doubted of, letters to be directed by authority to send to any learned man in the land for his judgment of such a place.
12. Letters to be sent from every bishop to the rest of his clergy, admonishing them of this translation in hand, and to move and charge as many as, being skillful in the tongues, have taken pains in that kind, to send their particular observations to the company, either at Westminster, Cambridge, or Oxford, according as it was directed before in the king's letter to the archbishop.
13. The directors in each company to be the Deans of Westminster and Chester, for Westminster, and the king's professors in Hebrew and Greek in the two universities.
14. These translations to be used, when they agree better with the text than the Bishops' Bible: Tyndale's, Coverdale's, Matthew's [Rogers'], Whitchurch's [Cranmer's], Geneva.
- 15.** By a later rule, three or four of the most ancient and grave divines, in either of the universities, not employed in translating, to be assigned to be overseers of the translation, for the better observation of the fourth rule.

Grand Theft Jesus

Appendix XX3—The Edict of Milan

When we, Constantine Augustus and Licinius Augustus, met so happily at Milan, and considered together all that concerned the interest and security of the State, we decided ... to grant to Christians and to everybody the free power to follow the religion of their choice, in order that all that is divine in the heavens may be favorable and propitious towards all who are placed under our authority.

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Appendix XX4—The Edict of Thessalonica¹⁴⁰

EMPERORS GRATIAN, VALENTINIAN AND
THEODOSIUS [AUGUSTI](#). EDICT TO THE PEOPLE
OF [CONSTANTINOPE](#).

It is our desire that all the various nations which are subject to our Clemency and Moderation, should continue to profess that religion which was delivered to the Romans by the divine [Apostle Peter](#), as it has been preserved by faithful tradition, and which is now professed by the [Pontiff Damasus](#) and by [Peter, Bishop of Alexandria](#), a man of [apostolic](#) holiness. According to the [apostolic teaching](#) and the doctrine of the [Gospel](#), let us believe in the one deity of the [Father](#) and of the [Son](#) and of the [Holy Spirit](#), in equal majesty and in a holy [Trinity](#). ... We order the followers of this law to embrace the name of [Catholic Christians](#); but as for the others, since, in our judgment they are foolish madmen, we decree that they shall be branded with the ignominious name of [heretics](#), and shall not presume to give to their conventicles the name of churches. They will suffer in the first place the chastisement of the divine condemnation and in the second the punishment of our authority which in accordance with the will of [Heaven](#) we shall decide to inflict.

GIVEN IN THESSALONICA ON THE THIRD DAY FROM
THE [CALENDS](#) OF MARCH, DURING THE FIFTH [CONSULATE](#) OF
GRATIAN AUGUSTUS AND FIRST OF THEODOSIUS AUGUSTUS⁸

¹⁴⁰ Codex Theodosianus XVI.1.2

Grand Theft Jesus

Appendix XXX5—First Version of Nicene Creed¹⁴¹

Nicene Creed (AD 325)

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty,
maker of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Son of God, begotten of the Father,
only-begotten, that is, from the substance (*ousia*) of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father,
through whom all things came to be,
things in heaven and things on earth;

who for us men and for our salvation
came down and was incarnate
and became man;

he suffered,
and the third day he rose again,
ascended into heaven;

and he will come again to judge
the living and the dead.

And in the Holy Spirit. [NOTE: usual stopping point if this version is recited]

But those who say:

“There was when he was not,” and
“Before being born he was not,” and
“He came into existence out of nothing,”

¹⁴¹ Philip Schaff, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 14 (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1900), 3–5.

Grand Theft Jesus

or who assert that the Son of God is
of a different hypostasis or substance,
or created,
or subject to alteration or change—these the catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes.

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Appendix XXX6—Second Version of Nicene Creed (aka: Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed)

Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)¹⁴²

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
Light from Light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one substance with the Father,
through whom all things came to be.

For us humans and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,
and became human.

He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate,
and suffered and was buried.

And he rose again on the third day
according to the Scriptures,

and ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

And he will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead,
whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord and giver of life,

¹⁴² Philip Schaff, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 14 (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1900), 3–4.

Grand Theft Jesus

who proceeds from the Father,
who with the Father and the Son
is worshiped and glorified,
who spoke through the prophets.

And in one holy catholic and apostolic church.

We confess one baptism
for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the age to come. Amen.

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Appendix XXX7—Institutional Words Altered in KJV Translation

Ecclesiastical / Clerical Terminology: Tyndale vs KJV

Tyndale Translation	KJV Translation	Category / Class of Word
congregation	church	institutional religious body
senior / elder	elder	leadership role (clerical governance)
overseer	bishop	hierarchical clerical office
shepherd	pastor (Eph 4:11)	clergy office / pastoral role
congregation of elders	presbytery	clerical governing body
minister / servant	minister	clerical function (church service role)
elder (context of leadership)	elder (institutionalized usage)	clergy leadership role
messenger	angel (when referring to church leadership in Rev 2–3)	ecclesiastical authority figure
congregation leader (contextual)	bishop / overseer (interpretive rendering)	hierarchical church authority
shepherd the flock	feed the flock	pastoral duty (clerical oversight language)

Grand Theft Jesus

Appendix XXX8—Timeline from Emperor Constantine to King James

306–337 — Constantine the Great¹⁴³

Roman Emperor who legalized Christianity and began imperial patronage of the church

Key events and documents:

- **313 — Edict of Milan**
Legalized Christianity and restored confiscated Christian property.
- **325 — First Council of Nicaea**
Produced the **Nicene Creed (original version)**.
Included the anathema clause stating that the “**catholic and apostolic church anathematizes**” certain doctrines.
- **Imperial church-building program**
Constantine commissioned major basilicas described by contemporaries as **ἐκκλησίαι (churches)**:
 - Church of the Holy Sepulchre (Jerusalem)
 - Church of the Nativity (Bethlehem)
 - Early cathedral of Constantinople (later known as **Megale Ekklesia**, “Great Church”).

379–395 — Theodosius I

Emperor who made Nicene Christianity the official religion of the empire

Key events and documents:

- **380 — Edict of Thessalonica**
Declared that all Roman subjects should follow the faith held by the bishops of Rome and Alexandria.

It defined the legitimate Christian body as the **catholic church**.
- **381 — First Council of Constantinople**
Revised the Nicene Creed and added the confession:

“We believe in **one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church**.”

¹⁴³ Life of Constantine, by Eusebius of Caesarea

Grand Theft Jesus

This became the standard creedal formulation for the imperial church.

382–405 — Jerome

Commissioned to produce the standard Latin Bible

Key developments:

- **382 — Commission by Pope Damasus**
Jerome begins revising Latin biblical texts.
- **c. 390–405 — Translation of the Latin Vulgate**

Key translation choices:¹⁴⁴

- Greek μετανοείτε (metanoείτε) → Latin **paenitemini / paenitentiam agite**
- Greek ἐκκλησία (ekklesia) → Latin **ecclesia**

1604–1611 — Richard Bancroft

Oversaw the rules governing the King James translation

Key development:

- **1604 — Bancroft's Translation Rules**

One rule was particularly influential:

“The old ecclesiastical words to be kept; as the word **church** not to be translated congregation.”

This rule preserved traditional church institutional and clerical terminology and function over direct translation from Greek.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Biblia Sacra Vulgata, This became the standard Bible of Western Christianity for over 1,000 years.

¹⁴⁵ Adam Nicolson, God's Secretaries

Grand Theft Jesus

1604–1611 — James VI and I

Commissioned the King James Bible

Key events:

- **1604 — Hampton Court Conference**
Authorized a new English translation.
- **1611 — Publication of the King James Bible**

Key features:

- Built on the earlier English tradition:
 - Tyndale Bible
 - Geneva Bible
 - Bishops' Bible
- Maintained ecclesiastical terminology, authorizing Bancroft's rules.

Example:

Greek	Earlier translation	KJV
<i>ekklesia</i>	congregation (Tyndale)	church
<i>poimēn</i>	shepherd	pastor (Eph 4:11)

Summary Timeline

Date	Figure	Event / Document
313	Constantine	Edict of Milan
325	Constantine	Council of Nicaea / Nicene Creed
380	Theodosius I	Edict of Thessalonica
381	Theodosius I	Council of Constantinople / revised Nicene Creed
382–405	Jerome	Latin Vulgate translation
1604	Bancroft	Rules for KJV translation
1611	King James	King James Bible published