

Grand Theft Jesus

Preface

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

*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”¹ (emphasis by the author)

He hunted for the mystical “Matrix” with everything he had, and Neo now sits face-to-face with legendary Morpheus with the priceless chance to find it. Longing for this moment—to the point of risking his job, sleepless nights, and nerve-racking police evasion, Neo’s quest for truth consumed him.

In a secret parlor with storms raging outside, Morpheus offers Neo the chance: take the blue pill from his outstretched hand, and wake up in his bed, remembering nothing of the night—or take the red pill. The red pill opens the Matrix door, a truth to be shown but never told—a reality more radical than Neo could have imagined. Driven by desperation and desire, Neo chooses red, and his quest becomes a life that will never be the same.

¹ “The Matrix”, Warner Bros., 1999

Grand Theft Jesus

It was before Neo's choice that Morpheus put words to Neo's condition: a splinter in his mind that would not let go. But nothing prepared Neo for the utter shock of seeing reality stripped of everything he trusted.

I've searched for such a "Morpheus" my whole life. Before I had the words, I also searched for someone who would show me the depths of Life. Digging deep, one clue at a time, bits and pieces of truth begin to fit together, and formerly trusted pieces are discarded with gusto. Jesus is emerging in a brand-new way: a real, live Person infinitely beyond religion's mission to define, systematize, and control.

Discovering that a trusted pillar of my life is false destabilizes me to the core, and deprogramming from it severely challenges my soul. Consider discovering that a lifelong medical treatment not only doesn't work, but it actually cements the disease in your body, preventing future cures—and you have convinced your friends to try it. Consider that you never had a medical question in the first place, but now you have the feared disease, anyway.

My quest is a giant jigsaw puzzle. I've done puzzles my whole life, a gift from my grandfather—he always kept the last piece in his pocket so *he* could place the finishing touch. I never remembered his trick, until he did it again... and again. In grade school, I'd get bored with the same old puzzle, so I'd do them upside down for fun. Solving puzzles seems to be in my blood.

Deprogramming from religion is like a 2,000-piece jigsaw puzzle, where each piece of the true picture is blank on both sides, revealing the picture only after being placed correctly alongside adjoining pieces. Slowly, without a picture on the box lid to guide me, I start to see the masterpiece that sidelines the forgery, replaced by the true picture, hidden for all the ages until Jesus.

Grand Theft Jesus

Life happened of course, and puzzle pieces began to fall into place as my personal “Matrix” quest intensified. The splinter in my mind had been a feeling that something just wasn’t right with “church” and its religion. Neo woke up to a devastating reality in his Matrix, and I also discovered a reality more twisted than I could have imagined. I discovered that my religion—since my parents dropped me off at the “church” nursery—isn’t just off a little bit, in need of reformation, revival, or a better statement of faith. My religion was as disabling to me as Neo’s discovery that every single thing that he knew about life was an imposter.

To my chagrin, I’ve been content with satisfaction to learn something true that is contrary to the norm, but I’m now sharing what I have unearthed. Our choice is the same as Neo’s: take the blue pill, put this book down, and continue with life as we know it; or take the red pill, keep reading, and discover just how deep the rabbit hole goes.

Ah ha! You must be curious about the red pill!

Before we go further, I must tell you a little about me:

1. I love Jesus with my whole heart. He is magnificent, embodied Truth.
2. I trust scripture that testifies to Him: “The mystery of the ages Christ in me, the hope of glory.”²
3. I have participated/ served in “church” at several levels for many decades.
4. Cumulatively, I have spent years ‘in the word’, attended and led small groups, read many really great authors, and been to retreats and conferences.

² Col 1:27

Grand Theft Jesus

5. I don't have a 501(c) 3 nonprofit to donate to, a new theology/creed (statement of faith) to launch another denomination, anything to sell (including this book), or a button to follow me.

Even though I have known something was 'wrong' in the religion I used to practice, pragmatically, I've lived as if something was wrong with me. I've been accused (by myself and others) of being rebellious, of too little time spent in "the word", of lacking accountability, of not having enough faith, and of having insufficient theological training for the questions I ask. Thank God that Jesus rejoiced in 'little children instead of the wise and learned.'³ I've not been disqualified after all.

My questions are met with religious solutions:

- Changes in behavior that eliminate the need to answer.
- Disregarded as if I were not a person whose questions matter.
- Failures inherent in my questioning threaten my salvation; I embody a problem with authority; and so on.

Today, I'm closer to Jesus because I've stopped religious activity and wholeheartedly reject religion's authority to speak for Him, because it doesn't have the answers. And it is structurally designed to prevent them.

The splinter began serious festering decades ago in response to a scripture passage that was intended to prod the attenders to improve our spiritual lives and resolve our woes by 'spending more time in the word':

³ Matt 11:25

Grand Theft Jesus

Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.⁴

Blatantly flaunting my ‘problem with authority,’ I applied the passage to the sermon itself. Ironically, unless one assumes a conclusion about ‘time in the word’ in advance, Paul praises the Bereans for checking scripture to see whether Paul and Silas were telling the truth.⁵ The quoted scripture praises people for deeply questioning preachers and their doctrine about improving our lives. Not only was the passage misrepresented, but it also contradicts Jesus’ words from John 5:37-40. Now I look up every scripture passage a “pastor” quotes! I’m often amazed by the gap between the sermon’s conclusions and the actual meaning of the quoted scripture.

Searching like a Berean satisfied me—for a while—but the gaps between sermons, books, and guided bible studies and their quoted scriptures have become more obvious and serious than I ever expected. In fact, I can no longer see a way to span the chasm between scripture and my former religion at all.

Join me to examine whether we have learned Jesus *from* Him for ourselves, or learned *about* Him from religion. My history of learning *about* Him, once exposed, reveals a system that **uses** His name but doesn’t speak **in** His name and doesn’t know the difference.⁶

Many have experienced a similar ‘splinter’ and described the problems in various ways. They agree that “church” does not predictably or even frequently produce

⁴ Acts 17:11

⁵ Acts 17:11 - Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

⁶ Matthew 7:21-22, Matthew 24:5, Acts 19:11-20

Grand Theft Jesus

disciples of Jesus: i.e., Willard, Tozer, Moreland, and Kierkegaard (see appendix 9). Instead, religion produces religious consumers, attenders, and good “church” members. From Willard’s writings:

“The greatest issue facing the world today... is whether those who are identified as ‘Christians’ will become disciples... or remain just ‘church members.’”⁷

Oswald Chambers put it this way:

The last three months of those years things reached a climax, I was getting very desperate. I knew no one who had what I 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.⁸

I used to be concerned with doing “church” right, which I now see as a question of sanity.

These authors reveal that “church” does not predictably produce followers of Jesus, collectively exposing the malaise of at least the past 200 years. I now know this has been a recurring theme since New Testament times⁹ and every period in between.¹⁰

Many have identified “church” as corrupt, ineffective, and secular for centuries, but we continue to *assume* “church” to be Jesus’ institution, and constantly repeat the cycle to try to do it right. This, by definition, is insanity. Centuries of failing to “do it

⁷ Adapted from themes in Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (2006), on the distinction between disciples and mere professing Christians.

⁸ Edman, V. Raymond. *They Found the Secret: Twenty Lives That Reveal a Touch of Eternity* (Clarion Classic) (pp. 53-54). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

⁹ 2 Cor 4:2, 2 Pet 3:16, 2 Cor 2:17, Gal 1:6-7

¹⁰ i.e., Wycliffe, Luther, and Calvin, for example

Grand Theft Jesus

right” are the evidence. Given the “church” assumption, we constantly tweak “church”, expecting different results. I ask the question: Is “church” something that Jesus said at all?

Traveling down the red pill rabbit hole, I experienced downright anger at being fed religion instead of Life in Jesus. I have been incredulous to find traditions of man masquerading as religious doctrine that supposedly honor Him. You may even experience my devastation—as if a close friend has betrayed you.

After sitting quietly in a pew for decades—confident that I was rich and needed nothing,¹¹—Jesus called me *out* of religion,¹² and into Life in Him.¹³ Berean searching grew into desperate hunger for Him, because I have been cheated out of my inheritance—and I was the problem! My beliefs grounded in religion began to mercifully fall away, my mind began to renew,¹⁴ and I have accepted that I’ve been ‘holding the wrong end of the stick’ all along.¹⁵

Out of this wreckage of truth colliding with religion, undeniable and irresistible Life in Him survives: whatever I’m leaving behind, 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. Jesus in me, Jesus in you, and Jesus in our fellowship together in Him. I **am** deconstructing something: Jesus’ impostor, and its claim to His Name.

¹¹ Rev 3:15-16

¹² Rev 18:4

¹³ John 5:40

¹⁴ Rom 12:2

¹⁵ Oswald Chambers

Grand Theft Jesus

Introduction

Why did I choose a secular movie quote? It portrays the reality of the world we live in better than any sermon I've ever heard, and Paul said the same thing nearly 2,000 years ago:

*... 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.*

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

When it finally hit me, it was like a collision with a freight train. I recognized a chasm between Jesus and “church”: the religious system operated by “church” **is the worldly system** pulled over my eyes, blinding me to the truth. I realized that Life in Jesus is not linked to the religion, “Christianity,” or attending its “churches.” One is Life; the other is religion. One is The Original; the other is a forgery. This one idea sets off an earthquake in my soul.

Ironically, “church” itself catalyzed my religious deconstruction.

A friend with a high-level “church” position made a choice and was exposed in a humiliating way. No question: he had ‘blown it.’ According to scripture and the “church” statements of faith, the “pastor” and elders should have resolved to gently

Grand Theft Jesus

restore him, guiding him back to his official and relational position within the “church,” which he was more than willing to do.¹⁶

That’s not what happened.

Instead, the “pastor” fired him on the spot, immediately kicking him out of the “church” building, prelude to a religious comedy—if it weren’t a tragedy. Within minutes, the entire “church” staff knew the scandal, and within hours, the congregation was spreading the ‘news.’ My friend was immediately stripped of his professional and church positions, and lifelong friends shunned him because of their official “church” jobs (their words).

Just a few weeks later, the “pastor” preached a sermon on the woman who religious leaders somehow caught in adultery—encouraging us to strive to be more like Jesus in such situations—while he set out to fill the vacancy. Jesus fiercely railed against this kind of religion.¹⁷ My splinter burst into full festering mode—something certainly is not right with “church”, and it’s not just cosmetic.

The Berean mindset kicked in. As I began to search scripture—even dabbling in Greek—I looked for a “good church” and tentatively settled into a fondly remembered denomination. Still shaky about “church” in general, the new pastor gave a sermon about the man who was lowered through the roof to see Jesus. Approaching the sermon’s ultimate point, he closed: “Who is going to pay for the roof?” I couldn’t see a Berean coming up with that conclusion about Jesus, but I could see it about a money-dependent organization.

¹⁶ Gal 6:1

¹⁷ Matt 23

Grand Theft Jesus

These examples, among many others, began to open my eyes to the forged hierarchy of one member of Christ's body over another, religion-inspired guilt, hypocrisy of those in charge, the overreach of "offices of the church," and dependence on money. I cannot imagine Jesus doing or saying what "church" just did.

One day, I discovered that not only is "church" fundamentally void of things that Jesus said or did, but He never even said the word "church" at all, either—linguistically or conceptually. This landmine set off a cascade of religious dominoes. If "church" is a forgery, then "offices of the church," "church" authority, "church" tradition, and "church" discipline fall one after the other. Peter's reference to "twisting words" takes on a whole new depth. I found that neither Jesus nor scripture said words such as "pastor," "repent from sin," and "gospel"; these 'translations' are from kings of the earth.

Exploring the origins of the words "church," "repent," "gospel," and "pastor"—along with the original meanings they replaced, the people involved, and the negative consequences of their distortion—unveils an entirely new and different understanding of Jesus. Many words suffer similar abuse, but these four are pivotal to understanding Life in Jesus.

Religion invents myriad human traditions used in "church". Jesus emphatically exposed the religious leaders who claim to embrace God, that they cannot simultaneously hold traditions of man.¹⁸ These traditions of the "church" illustrate the chasm between religion—a blockade to God's kingdom—and Life in Jesus.¹⁹

¹⁸ Mark 7:8

¹⁹ Matthew 23:13

Grand Theft Jesus

From the depths of my soul, I ache for the profound transformation that Jesus offers, knowing without a doubt that Life in Him is my only hope. My desire burns so intensely that it overshadows even food and sleep. My splinter that has festered for decades is now triggered by these insights into an all-out quest for firsthand knowledge of Jesus and His *ekklesia*, rather than religion's—in Jesus' own words.

What if Life in Jesus is something else entirely? I now know that my desire for Life like streams of living water²⁰ is independent of “church.” Like Chambers, I know desperation—unsure of exactly what I want—with a long history of “church” impotence to even touch my soul. Rather, it is committed to a framework that frustrates and diverts me from finding it.²¹

If you crave Jesus so intensely that you welcome the chance to exchange your life for His—even at the risk of life as you know it: relationships, opinions of others, and every piece of religious baggage—then read on. You may not agree with anything I say, but know that religion holds Jesus at arm's length while fluently using His name. My goal is to share Jesus as I think He truly is, as imperfectly as I may say it, and invite you to join me.²² That's where I'm headed. If you are not, that's OK—its not too late to take the blue pill.

To right my misdirected rudder, my mission is to first dismantle the direction paved with beliefs that I *thought* were absolute, but are religious traditions and diversions that Jesus. “Church” words substitute for Jesus' stated message from God, ignoring Jesus' declaration that human tradition nullifies God's *logos*. It nullifies Jesus.

²⁰ John 7:38-39

²¹ Matthew 23:13

²² Luke 5:11

Grand Theft Jesus

Word usage

Human tradition is a reflection of religion's forgery, and altered scripture is its provenance, so I treat altered words differently. Words that I found to be transliterated, mistranslated, or replaced are enclosed in double quotes, such as "church" and "pastor." I denote words in another language in italics, such as the original Greek words *ekklesia* and *poimén*, which have been substituted and transliterated as "church" and "pastor". I also capitalize some words, like Life, when they refer to Jesus' Life, as opposed to life before or without Him.

My quest is not to become a linguistic expert, but to uncover what Jesus and scripture meant when He said it, not what kings of the earth decided they should be.

Grand Theft Jesus

PART I

THE SPLINTER

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 1—Mary Magdalene, “*Where Can He Be?*”²³

At the mouth of Jesus’ tomb, Mary wept uncontrollably, maybe wringing her hands in despair—drowning in hopelessness.

Being with Jesus is Life itself. After all she had seen, there wasn’t anyplace else to go—but anointing Him with burial spices was all that was left. Can you imagine? Some things are just *too* much.

Now, He’s not even in the tomb either, cheating Mary’s heart to its core. Staying at the tomb was hopeless. Wrenching away from it seemed worse.

He was gone.

Mary knew Jesus. She’d traveled with the King as He delivered God’s announcement, and she personally experienced God’s Kingdom when Jesus freed her from demons.²⁴ Whatever else we do or don’t know, Jesus wasn’t doctrine to Mary—or weekly tradition. He was her Lord, her deliverer, her companion, and her friend. And He’d just been executed before her eyes. Where is Life now?

She’d watched Him as he was nailed to the cross and lifted up to hang until dead.²⁵ He had been severely beaten from head to toe—beyond recognition.²⁶ Then it was over. What was Mary supposed to do with herself? He was hurriedly placed in a tomb, while she had to go home and try to sleep. I wonder what she did all night and all of the next day. She ran back as soon as the Sabbath was over—only to stare in disbelief at an empty tomb.

²³ John 20:1-18

²⁴ Luke 8:2

²⁵ John 19:25-27

²⁶ John 19, Isaiah 52:14

Grand Theft Jesus

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 that led. *This just **can't** be happening.*

Then God's messengers at the tomb told her that He wasn't there—He had been 'awakened.' She could see for herself that He was gone—but their second sentence must have been beyond cruel.

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."²⁷ And she collapsed at His feet.

She knew!

Hope collided with despair—and stole her breath away; death does not get the last word.

When we look at religion and realize that Jesus isn't there, either, what will we do? Will we despair like Mary before He found her; will we hear Him call our name, or will we have already gone home? Will we accept that religion is all there is, only to slowly and painfully realize that we, too, are looking into an empty tomb?

Later, when Jesus said it would be better for Him to go away, I wonder what Mary thought then. I cannot believe Jesus really meant that "church" as we know it describes a relationship with Him that is better than Mary's. I have yet to see *that* service.

²⁷ John 20:16

Grand Theft Jesus

PART II

THE FORGERY

Painted by Emperors—Signed by Kings

Enforced by Empires

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Chapter 2—Anatomy of Forgery

In 1799, Abraham Kuffner borrowed a friend's famous Dürer self-portrait to make a copy of the original that was on a piece of wood about 26" by 19". He started by cutting the wood in half lengthwise, as if he were slicing a piece of bread into two thin slices.

The back half contained dates, conveyances, and stamps that proved its authenticity. These markings are called the painting's provenance. Other documents may accompany the painting to complete its provenance. Kuffner then painted a forgery onto the newly sliced back half, thereby unifying it with the original provenance, while keeping the original for himself.

Kuffner was caught when he sold the original, whose new owner promptly put it on display in a Munich museum, unaware that the forgery was simultaneously on display in Nuremberg.²⁸ Oops.

I admire Kuffner's ingenuity, but feel like the duped owner when I realize that I have been believing in a forgery. The Way, the Truth, and the Life in Jesus were under attack even as the New Testament was being written. I bought into one of these lies, a forgery painted to look and sound like Life in Jesus, **but** had the added engine of imperial power to enforce it and create its own provenance.

Even more shocking was the nuance that Kuffner's forgery was produced in secrecy, but religion's was so much worse. It happened in plain sight, forged by the

²⁸ Dolnick, Edward. *The Forger's Spell: A True Story of Vermeer, Nazis, and the Greatest Art Hoax of the Twentieth Century* (P.S.) (pp. 153-154). HarperCollins e-books. Kindle Edition.

Grand Theft Jesus

sincere, ordinary actions of humans in positions of power. They just did what humans do with power; they used it to serve their own priorities.

The Forged Painting

Though I'd never even thought about it before, producing a forgery of an old masterpiece is quite the endeavor. For example, the paint Vermeer used was not made from the same compounds as the paint used 300 years later. Old canvas can be distinguished from the new in seconds; the nails used to attach canvas to a frame are unique, and the aging of a new painting is downright monumental to fake.

Van Meegeren discovered that Vermeer-style paint could be infused with a newly developed plastic that would harden and crack when baked, mimicking 300-year-old paint. Black ink inserted into the cracks mimicked the dust and dirt that would settle there over centuries.

Many of us have been taught that Constantine brought Christianity to Rome. This is true, in a sense. He viewed the Christian movement as a religion, and granted it (and all other religions) legal status under his authority. He and his staff applied the practices of all Roman religions to this new one, even using their terminology, but with meanings derived from Rome's 1,000-year-old religious system. Constantine legalized a new Roman religion, but the religion failed to recognize that Life in Jesus had been present in the empire for hundreds of years before he was even born. Jesus never sought permission from kings in order to bring new Life. Rome's official recognition was always irrelevant to Him.²⁹

In contrast, the number of Jesus' followers had already grown to such an extent that previous emperors had persecuted them, and Constantine now treated them as a

²⁹ Matthew 22:15-22

Grand Theft Jesus

religious entity. Constantine did, indeed, bring Christianity to Rome, but this religious system was and is a forgery of the Life that Jesus offers. Constantine had the authority to legalize religion for two reasons. He held two official titles —the Emperor of Rome and Pontifex Maximus, the High Priest over all religions.

In retrospect, Christianity vs Christian looks like a massive conspiracy, but the forgers responsible weren't trying to derail Jesus or those who followed Him; they didn't think about Him much at all. Constantine didn't have anything against Jesus. He didn't understand Him, didn't seem to care, and treated Him just like he would treat any Roman deity, himself included. It was perfectly natural for him to integrate a popular new religion (in his view) into the Roman religious system. From his perspective, granting official status was an honor and an upgrade. From the perspective of those who actually belonged to Jesus, what Rome thought about them or Jesus was irrelevant, just as it was to Jesus.

The Roman religious paradigm had existed and matured for over 1,000 years before Christians were recognized as legitimate within the Roman religions. I think Constantine believed he was being a gracious ruler by allowing Christians to be included in his empire's religious system. But Constantine did not abandon all to follow Jesus; he absorbed a movement to serve under *him*. He was the religion's ruler; the priests who reported to him were allowed to be called "bishops," and he built places of worship, just as the other Roman gods had their temples. Constantine himself followed the Sun god, Sol Invictus.

In practice, instead of gathering so that, in everything, believers would build each other up through Christ who lived in them, they gathered in buildings for religious ceremonies, performed for the 'god' of their choice, which now included the Christians' god.

Grand Theft Jesus

With a shock that stopped me in my tracks, I realized that the Kuffner forgery reflects the Roman religion called "Christianity," which was 'painted' on the new half of the wood that had the genuine 'provenance' on the back. "Priests," "bishops," and "pastors" operate flavors of that same religion today under an umbrella called Christianity, which is practiced at "Church."

The forged 'painting' commissioned by Constantine established two main characteristics. First, members of Christianity became accountable to imperial authority—emperors, then the Papal state, and subsequently other kings of the earth. Second, Constantine's *ecclesia*, in stark contrast to Jesus' *ekklesia*, altered religion's provenance through persistent usage of Rome's religious terminology, reserving scriptural interpretation for itself. *Ecclesia* became synonymous with the religion itself and its buildings. Jesus' *ekklesia*, on the other hand, still refers to the people gathered to Him as He calls them together for Him to lead in Person. Third, "offices of the church" assumed the names of spiritual gifts intended for the gathered rather than the clergy.

This is the 'painting' called Christianity. Most of us never considered that Rome wasn't Christianized because the truth is that Christians were Romanized. The Way was used as the basis for a new, Roman religion, which signed Jesus' name to its forgery. Constantine is its "church" father.

Expert Testimony

As I pursued my quest, I stumbled across "The Forger's Spell". I read that creating a really good imitation of a painting was only part of a forger's strategy. Great forgers also depended on established experts to give credence to a painting. Painting experts were sometimes independent, but also museum curators and serious collectors. Van Meegeren studied these experts and crafted his forgeries specifically to those

Grand Theft Jesus

experts' personalities and idiosyncrasies, even choosing which expert he would first allow to 'discover' his latest forgery.

The greatest asset a forgery can have is an authority's endorsement.³⁰

Once an expert buys into one forgery, it is much easier to produce additional forgeries with the same look and feel. The first forgery is forever assumed to be true and is never subject again to reexamination for authenticity. Likewise, once the "church" forgery is accepted as a baseline, it is always assumed to be true, and the Berean mindset is not reapplied to that teaching. All energy and effort naturally center on doing the assumed "church" correctly. The institution is always measured against the assumption, never on whether 'institution' is a legitimate concept in the first place. This is why it takes serious deprogramming from what we have always thought to be unquestionably true. Rome's religion had the advantage of imperial punishment and persecution—official "church/state" policy—to ensure legitimacy within the Empire.

By forcefully controlling religious interpretation, Rome's religious paradigm created an expert class within Christianity, namely, religious "offices" that we now call the clergy. Today, those who lead Christian denominations are qualified by theological and educational criteria that align with their denomination's philosophy, a system with no precedence in scripture. Such experts dictate what is and is not believed in their particular religion via statements of faith, founding documents, and weekly sermons.

³⁰ Dolnick, Edward. *The Forger's Spell: A True Story of Vermeer, Nazis, and the Greatest Art Hoax of the Twentieth Century* (P.S.) (p. 157). HarperCollins e-books. Kindle Edition.

Grand Theft Jesus

They call it the official “church” position. (This is one of the responses that I have received to questions about “church.”)

“Church” is legitimized by usage today just as the Roman religion legitimized the *ecclesia*’s new meaning. The Roman narrative was unopposed for over 1,000 years before Luther launched the first serious challenge to the forgery. Virtually every scripture translation since still uses “church” for *ekklesia*.

Religion’s Provenance

In addition to playing to experts' weaknesses and painting a believable forgery, a skilled forger also establishes a provenance that attests to a fake’s authenticity. In the Kuffner example, the back of the original painting gave testimony to what turned out to be the forged painting applied to the new ‘front.’

Visualize scripture as the provenance on the back of the new Roman ‘painting.’ By limiting the interpretation of scripture to the expert class, Roman religion changed the meaning of its provenance with respect to *ecclesia*. The new provenance now refers to Roman religion itself and the buildings where it is observed, rather than to testimony to Jesus. At this point, being biblical inherited the reality of conforming to false provenance, one that cannot be derived from Jesus’ words.

By substituting just one more word, *paenitemini* for *metanoéo*—punishment for transformation—the provenance of the new religion now matched the official license to punish as established in the edict of Thessalonica. Hence, the license to persecute and execute, and the root for the English word “repent,” was established. It was practically a gasp when I realized that Jesus never said the words, “repent from sin.” Nor did any scripture, let alone for the purpose of “getting saved.”

Grand Theft Jesus

While Constantine provided the ‘painting’, Theodosius and those following provided the forged provenance to accompany the forged painting, as well as Imperial enforcement.

Executions started in 385 AD with Priscillian of Avial, five years after the declaration of the official religion, and continued until Cayetano Repoll in 1826, including the notorious execution of William Tyndale in 1536. Countless wars were fought “in the name of Christ” by the countries aligned with the Roman “Church,” and its offspring.

Forced exile, imprisonment, and property confiscation were other tools of the state-religion. The “church” held court, and the government performed the executions. It is bad enough that people were executed for not believing the same way that the state religion demanded, but that such activity was the official “church” policy, enforced for over 1400 years. While the “church” no longer executes those who dissent, excommunication is still held over people’s heads. This is how “the early church” enforced its religion and its provenance.

I was still thinking that I was being a good Berean when I discovered that over 1200 years after the Edict of Thessalonica, King James continued to protect the forged provenance by dictating the official terms he would allow for the translation of English scripture. I’m sure that he was just as sincere as Constantine in his motives. Many fewer were executed or exiled under the “Church” of England than under the Catholic “church”, but the KJV version of the Bible was used exclusively in “church”; Bibles could not be printed without a license, and only by the king’s printers. Virtually no other English versions of the bible were printed after the KJV for about 250 years, until the Revised Standard Version, which assumed “church” and translated accordingly. I

Grand Theft Jesus

am humiliated by the number of times that I taught how “church” was supposed to work.

From the time of Jerome in 382, the forged provenance of Constantine’s religion was enforced through force, Imperial translation, and usage, perpetuating the misuse of “church”, “repent”, “pastor”, “gospel, and several other words.

Reformation perpetuated the problem, using these forged words and ideas as pillars of every branch (denomination) of religion. At the same time, denominations continue to follow Theodosius’s elevation of the “church” by reciting his creed, and finally, religion has elevated scripture to the status of “the word”.

One exception was William Tyndale, who published his unauthorized translation in 1526, which correctly translated ekklesia as “congregation,” and was convicted of heresy by the “church” courts and executed by the Catholic government of Belgium. (Note that “congregation” in Tyndale’s vernacular did not mean those who attended “church,” it meant those who gathered in His name to be His body.) The Catholic “Church” then confiscated and burned every copy of Tyndale’s Bible that it could find. As many as 18,000 were printed, but only two remain. This is the commitment of the “church” to enforce the provenance that it had created.

The Reformation sought to better align religious practice with the same provenance — the scripture that had been altered in content and usage to authenticate the religion that used it. The goal of Christendom has since become to conform to forged provenance—to be more and more biblical, not realizing that we have been attempting to conform to forged provenance instead.

Grand Theft Jesus

Scripture moved from being the shared witness to Jesus in an organic movement³¹ to being the contested and governed foundation of an imperial, legislated religion.

Just as Kuffner painted a false portrait on the front provenance half of the original wooden canvas, religion painted a false portrait of Life in Christ, complete with an altered provenance. With utter audacity, it didn't just reinterpret and misuse scripture in its religion; it actively altered the provenance to meet state priorities and based its religion on its own version. Again, striving to conform religion and behavior to "church" provenance, religion is basing life on altered scripture and directly opposing Jesus' own words.³²

³¹ John 5:37-47

³² *ibid*

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 3—Imperial Forgery: We Three Kings...

Regardless of your political preferences, suppose any President of the United States from any party made the unilateral decision by executive order to legalize which religions were and were not permitted. Imagine the President deciding which beliefs people were allowed to hold, deporting those who disagreed. Can you imagine someone who has placed all confidence, all faith, in Jesus for Life, changing to such a religion because the President endorsed and defined it? I hope that you are as shocked as I am to find that this is exactly how Christianity was founded, and we recite the emperor's theology today in our "churches."

As I explored further, now haunted by disillusionment, the bottom line is that three kings of the earth 'painted' the forgery: Emperor Constantine, Emperor Theodosius, and King James.

These three rulers made decisions about religion as it related to their empires in the sincere best interests of the state as they saw them, driven by a natural desire to strengthen their own power. Their subjects followed their lead, by force, if necessary.

Constantine clearly states His rationale for legalizing the religion in the Edict of Milan:

"... 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" [See Appendix 3]. This is right out of the Roman religious playbook: appeasing the gods for favor.

Grand Theft Jesus

Step 1: Legalizing The Religion

Constantine did not legalize Christianity for any motive other than to enlist the favor of all the gods of heaven to benefit the Empire under his rule. I found that what is not said in the edict is more interesting: not even a hint of placing faith in Jesus, the anointed Son of the Living God. Before the Edict of Milan, those who placed all of their faith in Jesus were called Christians. After the Edict, Christians were those who practiced the Imperial religion under the Emperor of Rome, its High Priest.

What a revelation: to realize that legalizing “the Christian religion” placed it legally under the Emperor, along with all other Roman religions. Constantine himself didn’t practice the new religion; he followed the Sol Invictus religion, which is why Jesus’ birth is celebrated on the same day as Sol Invictus’ birthday, Sun day was declared the day of rest for all Roman citizens of all religions, and Easter is celebrated according to lunar events, rather than Passover. Again, in his own words:

And first of all, it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul... Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd.³³

Immediately after legalization, the empire began building buildings called *ecclesias* and brought “bishops” into the state's operating circle. *Ecclesia* became buildings where the religion was practiced, rather than the people being called together

³³ Constantine Augustus to the Ecclesia 9”Churches”, <https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/primary-texts-from-the-history-of-the-relationship/constantine-i>

Grand Theft Jesus

in Jesus' name.³⁴ This is the root of “services,” where religious ceremonies were practiced for the favor Constantine mentioned in his edict. Worshipping Jesus and His Father was legalized—as if Jesus would appeal to an Emperor for validation, let alone leadership and regulation!

Constantine had barely consolidated the Roman Empire under himself (by defeating, imprisoning, and executing Licinius, co-emperor in the Western Empire and co-author of the Edict of Milan), when theological divisions within the Christian religion threatened to divide the empire again. In alignment with his reason for legalizing Christianity under himself, He wrote to the two leaders of opposing doctrines:

“... I was informed of your controversy... I consider it of little significance... yet because it has produced discord among you, it must be corrected...”³⁵

Given my previous understanding of “Constantine brought Christianity to Rome,” I am surprised that he wasn’t even concerned about the content of the dispute, but about the Imperial discord. The threat to the unity of the Empire, rather than concern for Jesus’ message, is the basis for the first Council of Nicaea.

To my everlasting shame, I didn’t apply the Berean mindset to the Nicene Creed itself until just recently (40+ years after I should have known better). I trusted “church” and its traditions, instead. However, the council was convened by Constantine himself, who presided over it and personally crafted portions of the official government

³⁴ “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.

³⁵ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Book II, chs. 64–72, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace.

Grand Theft Jesus

doctrine.³⁶ Constantine wasn't trying to articulate what was true regarding Jesus, nor did "church" leaders gather to discuss Life in Him. Instead, he attempted to create a uniform, empire-wide definition of Christianity for the entire Roman Empire to end the infighting that threatened its unity. This version of the Nicene Creed introduces the first official reference to "universal" (*katholikē*) *ecclesia*, referring to the uniform beliefs of a religion throughout the Empire, rather than to a spiritual doctrine.

I couldn't believe it, but this isn't even the same creed we recite today; that one was actually written about 56 years later. This Council condemned Arian theology and exiled its followers (including Arius). Presumably, the Council thought this would settle the doctrinal problem threatening the unity of the empire.

This did not settle the Arian-Orthodox controversy. It actually got worse, culminating in confrontations like one set of riots between the factions in Constantinople:

The result was horrifying. It's related here by the historian Socrates Scholasticus:

[They] attacked one another with great fury, and great loss of life was occasioned. The churchyard was filled with gore, and the well in the yard overflowed with blood, which ran into the adjacent portico, and from there into the very street.³⁷

Another emperor had to settle the ongoing dispute decades later. Meanwhile, in addition to Constantine's religious creed, his status as the hero of Christianity in Rome is suspect in my mind because, within a year of the Nicene Creed, he murdered his wife,

³⁶ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine* 3.6–13.

³⁷ Ecclesiastical History II:38

Grand Theft Jesus

Fausta, and son, Crispus.³⁸ Within another two years, he brought Arius, the founder of the heresy he helped condemn, out of exile, and was baptized by another Arian bishop on his deathbed.³⁹ ⁴⁰ Ironically, in a classic demonstration of religion as a political entity rather than faith in Jesus, Nicene bishops were regularly exiled, including Alexander and Athanasius, depending on which faction was in power.

Constantine's most devastating contribution was setting the precedent that formulating correct theological beliefs was central, even foundational, to "church" and Christianity. The tenant and practice continue to dominate "church" practice today. A few years ago, I stopped reciting the Nicene Creed before the line that declared faith in the Catholic "church". The practice of using a small 'c' or 'Christian' instead of 'Catholic' doesn't alter the underlying forgery. After reciting this creed for over 1700 years, this, too, has become part of the forgery's provenance.

As the splinter in my mind continues to fester, I suddenly know that the problem isn't a matter of correctly practicing Christianity or "church," both are corrupt in their very foundations—and there's more.

³⁸ Aurelius Victor, *Epitome de Caesaribus* 41.11–12

³⁹ Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book I, chs. 25–26

⁴⁰ Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book I, ch. 39

Grand Theft Jesus

Step 2: Mandating The Religion

Recall the story from above, but with a subsequent President selecting one religion from among all religions and legislating it as the country's sole official religion.

Co-Emperors Theodosius, Gratian, and Valentinian issued the Edict of Thessalonica in 380 AD, establishing Nicene Christianity as the single state religion of the Roman Empire. Not only did emperors mandate a single state religion, but they also declared that all other religions, including Jesus' believers who refused to submit to a state religion, were legally labeled deranged, insane, and heretics.

Legally, this put an end to disputes between the Arian and Nicene divisions, as well as all other questions about how the Romans would worship.

Assuming the same motives as Constantine for legalizing religions in the first place, combined with the language of the Edict itself, this one religion, Christianity, and its organization, the "church", would be better for the security and interests of the state. As Pontifex Maximus, ruling one religion was certainly simpler than running a collection of them.

As with Constantine and the Edict of Milan, the Edict of Thessalonica advanced Christianity and its "church" as a political strategy. Nowhere in either edict was faith in Jesus declared as the reason and foundation for *ekklesia*.

The major difference between an artist's forgery, which required a painting that experts and authorities would accept, and the religious forgery was that the latter was enforced from the top down by military and political power.

Within a year, Theodosius convened the First Council of Constantinople in 381, confirming that the Imperial government would continue to govern Christianity, as it

Grand Theft Jesus

had since its legalization under Constantine. Among other items, the Council modified the Nicene Creed, adding the phrase:

“And [we believe] in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church...”⁴¹

Note that the word “church” is actually *ekklesia* in the original language, which testifies to the radical change in usage from the one time that Jesus said the words, “My *ekklesia*.” Most notably, this first Council of the newly established state religion updates its provenance. The updated Creed now matches the Edict of Thessalonica, which reserves the word “church” for meetings of the official religion only. This is the version of the Nicene Creed (actually the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed) that is recited in “church” today, not the original from the Council of Nicaea.

Once the state religion was established and its core statement of faith was crafted, the next step was to cement its provenance to match. In 382, just one year after the Nicene Creed was updated to include “church” in its list of beliefs, the same pontiff mentioned in the Edict of Thessalonica, Damasus, commissioned Jerome to retranslate scripture.

There are endless theological topics that could be discussed regarding Jerome's translation. However, there is one word that he substituted rather than translated, which has had more impact on the Roman state religion and its offspring than any other, except the redefinition by usage of *ecclesia* as a religion and its building.

⁴¹ See Appendices 4 & 5

Grand Theft Jesus

Jerome substituted the Latin *paenitemini* for the Greek *metanoéo*. I'll talk more about this later, but *paenitemini* share roots with punishment, penal, penitentiary, and pain. This is also the root of the English words repent, repentance, etc.

The Greek word *metanoéo* is captured by only one English word, metanoia, meaning a deep change of mind, perception, or orientation. *Metanoéo* is the verb form that persuades to change mind, perception, or orientation... after. After what? After what was just presented. In other words, change your mind after what I just told you.

However, Jerome translated every occurrence of *metanoéo* in Greek scripture to a form of *paenitemini* in the Latin Vulgate. Combined with the state-mandated observance of the state's "church," the "provenance" of the new religion now has words in its doctrine, teaching, and practice that are not from Jesus or the scripture that testify to Him. Much more on this in a minute.

Contrary to all my learning in "church," Rome's imperial religion wasn't an evolution or maturation of Jesus' *ekklesia*; it was a government-legislated religion with a 'provenance' supplied to support its forgery. Reformation never caught either fallacy: "church" and "repent," and religion revolves around those two ideas today.

Grand Theft Jesus

Step 3: Enforcing the Religion

We've all heard of rules and laws that 'have no teeth.' Speed limits in certain places seem to be 'toothless.' This was not the case in Theodosius' Rome. As I mentioned before, those not conforming to the state religion were legally labeled deranged, insane, heretics. This would sound like silly name-calling except for one thing: the law included this penalty for non-compliance: divine condemnation, and such punishment that the Empire itself would inflict in accordance with heaven.

Punishment became "church" policy within, and 'convert or die' was applied to conquered nations. Just a few decades earlier, Christians were persecuted mercilessly. Under Theodosius, Christianity became the persecutor. [See Appendix 10] In one account:

The intensity of that conflict surpassed that of other types of armed confrontations. In Bohemia, for instance, there were whole sections of the country in which nobody was left to bury the dead. The total population of Bohemia decreased in the 17th century from about 3 million to 500,000.⁴²

The shocking bottom line is not the incredible number of people killed, but the unbelievable realization that this was "church" policy. The same policy, from the same source, is the justification for the execution of "heretics" mentioned earlier. This is the heritage, rationale, and practice of the forger we call "church" today. As a Berean, I cannot see Jesus doing or saying the things we see in Constantine and Theodosius. Yet this "church" went unopposed, or punished those who did, for exactly 1,000 years

⁴² Krus, D.J., & Webb, J.M. (1993) Quantification of Santayana's cultural schism theory. Psychological Reports, 72, 319-325.

Grand Theft Jesus

before John Wycliffe publicly opposed “church” policy. He was condemned by the “church,” but escaped execution. However, the “church” ordered his remains exhumed, burned, and ashes scattered in posthumous damnation.⁴³ The splinter in my mind asks, “Can I really picture Jesus exhuming a heretic for the purpose of burning it in damnation?” He is more likely to call the “church” children of hell.⁴⁴

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⁴³ Concilium Constantiense, Session VIII (1415)

⁴⁴ Matt 23:15

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 4—The Imperial Forgery in English

English is the most influential language in the history of the world. It's used worldwide in politics, commerce, technology, education, and common social interaction. Even though I am fluent only in English, I've been able to communicate in English in about 10 different countries, and didn't know a single word in the local language in half of them. I also worked for the North American branch of a German software company, collaborating regularly on complex technical issues with foreign engineers...in English. The only real hitch was a couple of days of confusion, thinking that the "D" on the black-and-white car stickers meant diesel instead of Deutschland.

English grew to global dominance with the rise of the British Empire, a profound revolution. No other language or its source has had as much influence on culture, technology, standardized knowledge, or economics. This is why and how the King James Version of the Bible has so powerfully perpetuated the religion of Constantine, Theodosius, and the Papacy. If the KJV translation were a genuine reflection of Jesus' words and those of the other scripture authors, we could rejoice. Unfortunately, King James did not commission the translation of scripture from Greek into English; instead, he dictated which words and sources could be used, enforcing them through Archbishop Richard Bancroft.⁴⁵

King James' authority to translate scripture derives from his role as King and the "Supreme Governor of the Church of England," much like Emperors Constantine and Theodosius, who held a second title as well, "*Pontifex Maximus*," or High Priest. I am

⁴⁵ See Appendix 2

Grand Theft Jesus

truly amazed that the religious paradigm created by Constantine has endured for so long and through so many political upheavals.

Britain was a Catholic country for over a millennium, and the only substantial change in 1534 was that a King assumed authority over the “Church of England,” replacing the Pope. Superficial changes occurred over time, but one thing that did not change was the hierarchy of the Roman Imperial cult that Constantine painted over the picture of Life in Jesus.

“Services” in Britain were similar to the Catholic liturgy they were used to; the King appointed the “church’s” bishops, and James ruled England’s religion in the same manner as Theodosius and Constantine ruled over the *katholikē ecclesia* in Rome.

Though Britain’s domain was much smaller than Rome’s, ecclesiastical courts and the enforcement of “church” law also mirrored Rome. “Church” was reorganized and relabeled, but the ruling hierarchy within and over it remained the same.

King James is credited with the saying,

I approve the calling and use of Bishops in the Church, and it is my aphorism, ‘No Bishop, no King.’⁴⁶

James was reacting to Puritan and Presbyterian proposals at the Hampton Court council in 1604 and had this to say to their proponents:

⁴⁶ **William Barlow**, *The Summe and Substance of the Conference... at Hampton Court* (London, 1604), often cited around pages 36 or 83–84 depending on edition.

Grand Theft Jesus

*“If this be all your party hath to say, I will make them conform themselves, or else I will harry them out of the land...”*⁴⁷

Like Constantine and Theodosius before him, the stage is set for King James to join them as the third king in the Christianity/“church” trilogy. He commissioned what is now known as the King James Version of the Bible within 6 months after the quotes above, organized translation strategies under Archbishop Bancroft, wrote and/or approved of the 15 translation instructions, and then began translating. I shake my head at how eerily this mirrors the edict/creed/translation of the rapid-fire religious nationalism in Theodosius’ time. If we look at this with more than a ‘history book’ mindset, how would we react to a president acting like these three rulers today?

King James dictated that Archbishop Richard Bancroft oversee the translation of the bible under the constraints of 15 specific instructions.⁴⁸ It is important to note that there were 6 existing English translations of the bible at the time: Tyndale, Coverdale, Matthews (John Rogers), Great, Geneva, and the Bishop’s Bibles. There are so many issues between these independent translations and the KJV, so I will focus on just a few words to illustrate James’ role in the forgery’s trinity.

Instruction #1 from King James stated that the Bishop’s Bible was to be used as the foundation, with as little alteration as was possible. The Bishop’s Bible was the current Bible authorized by the King for reading in “church.” One example demonstrating the Imperial forgery was the Bishop’s Bible’s use of the word “congregation” in Matthew 16:18.

⁴⁷ ibid

⁴⁸ Appendix 2

Grand Theft Jesus

Instruction #3 in King James' list instructs translators to use “the old ecclesiastical words, the *ecclesia* words inherited from the Roman religion. James traps himself in two ways.

1. He specifically directs translators to use the Bishops' Bible wherever possible, but to use different words when they apply to “church”—the ecclesiastical words.
2. The Bishops' Bible and all but one of the Bibles listed above already rendered *ekklesia* as “congregation” in published Bibles since 1526. James contradicts himself by instructing the use of the Bishop's Bible while specifically dictating a textually unjustified change.

Five of the six Bibles translated from Greek into English used “congregation” instead of “church” for nearly 100 years before the KJV publication. Remember that, in this time, ‘congregation’ meant the people gathered to Jesus, building each other up according to scripture, as opposed to “church” running a religion. The use of ‘congregation’ eliminates the role of a king ruling a religion. This is just one of many examples in which James dictated traditional religious terms rather than accurately translating, severely damaging its credibility in my mind.

The contradictions continue. Instruction #14 says to use all of the above Bibles where they agree best with the [Greek] text. However, in addition to the dramatic shift between “church” and ‘congregation’, instruction #6 prohibits translators from using “margin” notes. This prevents the most popular feature of the Geneva bible, presumably because they criticized the monarchical hierarchy of the “church”. This may have been the first of what we call a ‘study’ bible. While the Geneva Bible, as an example, is “included”, its features are specifically excluded.

Grand Theft Jesus

King James own words (“No bishops, no king”) and his contradictory instructions to translators that specifically preclude accurate translation, expose his bias towards monarchical rule over an empire’s religion. Words like “church”, “pastor”, “gospel”, and “repent” are traditional “church” words that, when originally spoken or written, had straightforward meanings, and the KJV directly violates scripture in its translation.⁴⁹

Once the KJV was published, all Bible printing was restricted to the King’s own printing, effectively shutting off all other English-language Bibles for about 250 years. In terms of hierarchy, the KJV relates most closely to the Catholic Church’s first significant English translation, the Douay-Rheims Bible, which was published shortly before the KJV. I don’t believe it was a coincidence that, in terms of “church” name, structure, and administration, the KJV relates more closely to the Catholic Bible than to the six preexisting English Bibles or to the best Greek manuscript of the time, the *Textus Receptus*.

In contrast, William Tyndale published the first English translation of scripture based on the *Textus Receptus* in 1526. He was forced to do his work in Worms, Germany, because the Catholic Bishops in England refused to permit him to translate scripture into English. He smuggled English Bibles into England. A staunch critic of Henry VIII, Tyndale stayed in Europe even after England broke ties with the Roman Church in 1534. However, the Roman “church” caught up with him in Belgium, convicted him of heresy, and turned him over to government authorities for execution in 1536. Much of the work on the other 5 pre-KJV Bibles is largely based on Tyndale’s work.

⁴⁹ 2 Cor 4:2

Grand Theft Jesus

Ironically, so is the King James Version. About 83% of the KJV New Testament and about 76% of the KJV Old Testament portions are derived from Tyndale's work.⁵⁰ It's the other 17% to 24% that King James himself dictated to enforce the ecclesiastical structure he preferred, conceptually aligning with the Douay-Rheims Bible. "Church" is one of the 17% of altered words. "Pastor" and "repent" are two others.

Many scripture translators in history 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" and commissioned the translation of scripture, *and accompanied the commission with his direct instructions on how to do it*. The instructions were not just about the translation strategy; he directed specific words for translators to use, making it a legislated Bible rather than a translated one. (Appendix XX2)

One specific example of James' instructions having a profound impact on the final Bible is the changes that Archbishop Bancroft personally made after the translation and before publication. In Acts 1:20 and up to 13 other places, Bancroft replaced the translation from Greek with a form of "bishop". Whether he enforced James' instructions or had a serious conflict of interest given his "church" title, the transliterated term "bishop" became illegitimately cemented in English scripture. [Appendix 11]

The "Church" of England's 'reformation' produced some doctrinal and practical alterations, but it had no material effect on church structure, maintaining Constantine's first strokes of the forgery. Ironically, religious hierarchy cannot be reconciled with Peter, the religion's supposed founder, according to Theodosius. Peter

⁵⁰ **John Nielson & Royal Skousen**, *How Much of the King James Bible Is William Tyndale's?* Reformation 3 (1998)

Grand Theft Jesus

directs elders to oversee willingly... not to lord it over the people (2 Peter 5:3). Note that the word for “lord it”, also translated “domineering”, has common roots with the same word that is incorrectly used for “church” (*kyriakón*) instead of Jesus’ word, *ekklesia*. Nor would Peter have accepted the title of Father or Pope because Jesus personally told him not to.⁵¹ I can’t imagine that “Supreme Governor of the Church” would fall into a different category.

The bottom line is that “church” might not even exist today, and certainly not be mainstream, in word or concept, if King James had not legislated it to overrule correct translations that had been published and widely accepted for nearly 100 years before the KJV was published.

⁵¹ Matthew 23:9

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 5—A Retouched Forgery is Still a Forgery

Now that I see the “church” forgery for what it is, who ‘painted’ it, the resulting religion of its traditions translated into attended ceremonies, and the scriptures it changed, I cannot unsee it. The ramifications are profound. If “church” is not valid, conceptually or linguistically, then I can no longer swallow ideas like “church” leadership, “church” discipline, “church” tradition, and “church” doctrine. The impact on the very idea of “church” services, “church” employees, and “church” offices sounds to me like network marketing. “Church” member, go to “church”, and join a “church” start to sound a little bit cultish, and “church” budget, “church” offering, “church” campus, and “church” payroll remind me of a Ponzi scheme. I no longer see the need to find a good “church.” For me, “church” is a *non-sequitur*.

The word “Christianity” can be substituted into many of these phrases, and “Christian” no longer makes sense to me as an adjective. But, most profoundly, “church” reformation, revival, and denomination really speak of the offspring of Constantine’s religion, not Life in Jesus.

I now see “church” reformation as a refinement of the fundamental elements of Roman forgery that King James enshrined. “Church” reformers started by assuming “church” to be a true concept and proceeded to do it ‘correctly’ in their own minds, when the entire idea of “church” should be discarded. ‘The Reformation’ didn’t result in predictably producing disciples of Jesus as He intended; it multiplied “church” offspring instead, now numbering in the 10s of thousands of denominations, each with its own brand of the system.

By applying a Berean mentality, I have discovered that “church” is not a bad translation of *ekklesia*; it is not a valid translation at all. Nor is “church” even

Grand Theft Jesus

conceptually related to Jesus when he said, “*My ekklesia.*”⁵² ⁵³ Therefore, the religious system we call Christianity, and “church” where it operates, is based on imperial religions, not on scripture and not on Jesus.

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.⁵⁴

Did you know that Jesus said “My ekklesia” only once across all 4 Gospels combined, leaving no room for man to impose a systematic religion on Him.⁵⁵ At best, an institution derived from *ekklesia* is unbiblical. Still, because He mentioned it only once, every other reference to *ekklesia* in the New Testament either explicitly refers to what Jesus said, or it is misinterpreted as well. If Jesus ‘instituted’ anything, it was not the system, “Christianity,” to be run by “churches”; it was Life in Him, a Life as unpredictable as the wind.⁵⁶

Reforming “church” reshuffles theological nuance, service logistics, and the nominal structure of a system created by a few kings of the earth. Reforming “church” is like AI – it only regurgitates assumptions based on what others have said about

⁵² Matthew 16:18

⁵³ <https://biblehub.com/greek/1577.htm> [HELP Notes: ...The English word "church" comes from the Greek word *kyriakos*, "belonging to the Lord" (*kyrios*)]

⁵⁴ Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ with Bonus Content (Designed for Influence)*, Location 190. NavPress. Kindle Edition

⁵⁵ Matt 16:18

⁵⁶ John 3:8

Grand Theft Jesus

theology, and rearranges human traditions, but it cannot produce Life from above.⁵⁷ I see reforming “church” as mostly about who gets to be in charge at a particular point in history.

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⁵⁷ John 3:3

Grand Theft Jesus

PART III

THE SWITCH

The Forger Redefines Jesus' Words

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 6—Religious Forgery Hidden in “The Greek”

Degrees of Separation—from Jesus

An unbelievable event in “church” (mentioned in the Introduction) launched me on a quest out of what had just been a Berean hobby. For the first time, it occurred to me to dig into primary sources and learn for myself what Jesus said about “church.” I am incredulous to realize that Jesus never said “church” at all—in any language. Ever. Then I set off to understand who put that word in His mouth.

I searched the scripture to determine whether what I’d been taught in “church” about “church” was true and found it patently false.

In quick succession, I threw “pastor,” “repent,” and other dictated ‘ecclesiastical’ words into the trash heap based on the same original sources,⁵⁸ and now see that central “church” doctrines are products of kings’ pursuits of power and control. It is this same altered scripture that has been elevated to “the word,” resulting in “Bible churches” and the pervasive practice of listing the Bible first in “church’s” list of beliefs, mission statements, or statements of ‘faith.’ Neither Jesus nor any scripture associates scripture with *logos*; Jesus is clearly called God’s *logos*, and scripture is always referred to as scripture. If faith in scripture can’t bring Life, how can creeds or “church” statements do any better? Then, a scripture passage that I had read dozens of times over the years jumped out at me. I finally heard what Jesus was saying:

*... 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***

⁵⁸ Phil 3:8

Grand Theft Jesus

*life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.*⁵⁹

Jesus Himself reveals the chasm between having faith in beliefs or scripture versus trusting in Him.

Not only is being Bible-based explicitly rejected by Jesus, but today's scriptures do not even use the same words that He did (in any language). As this passage reveals, being scripture-based misses Life in Jesus, but it is even more egregious when the scripture used has been altered by Jerome, the King James translators, and many others in between. Not only is the result condemned, but even if it were valid, it is also four religious degrees of separation from believing in the Person, Jesus, for Life in His name: alteration by usage of *ecclesia* starting with Constantine, the substitution of *paenitemini* for *metanoéo* by Jerome, dictated translation by King James, and the elevation of altered scripture to the level of 'the word.'

Even if "church" was a legitimate translation for *ekklesia*, Jesus said, "**My** *ekklesia*", not "**Scripture's** *ekklesia*." Virtually every "church" is named to some other allegiance than Jesus'.⁶⁰

A religious forgery, played out for sixteen centuries so far, has altered many forged brushstrokes in addition to *ekklesia*. Once seen, the web of religion unravels, and I am unable to unsee the forgery, and I begin to sense the desperate need to deprogram.

⁶⁰ I.e., the Lutheran "Church", Bible "Church", Hope "Church", Baptist "Church", St. John "Church", Presbyterian "Church", etc.

Grand Theft Jesus

King James didn't need to redefine every word in scripture to solidify his role as Supreme "Church" Governor, just the ones that related to "church" authority, which reframes the lens through which the balance of scripture is read. There are many words that He prevented from being translated accurately, but examining just four of them demonstrates "church's" forged foundation, giving false provenance to support it.

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

It was all Greek to Me

I discovered that part of the path out of the forgery was to look at “the Greek” firsthand, bypassing others’ degrees, interpretations, and traditions. That’s what Bereans do.

I let it intimidate me for decades, content to understand a word or two here and there, taking a “pastor’s” word for it. I believed religion when it claimed that there are no good, direct translations of some Greek words into English. But a blinding flash of the obvious to hit me... “pastors” were using English to describe these Greek words all the time. Today, Greek translation is online, and we can compare “Christianity’s” definitions with Jesus’, Socrates’, and Homer’s use of the same words for centuries before Christianity was invented. It’s no more complicated than looking up Spanish words on Google.

It takes a little work, but we don’t need to be “wise and learned” or “church” offices with advanced degrees to explain Jesus and His message. Knowing Greek is not a prerequisite for knowing Jesus, or He would have told us so.⁶¹ We don’t need a degree in Greek to understand Jesus’ words at least as well as the little children He spoke to (but I have learned that sometimes we need such degrees to figure out what religion has done).

Through the KJV lens, Jesus’ message about the spiritual gifts intended for believers is stripped of its meaning, sets the hierarchical structure inherited from Rome in concrete, and solidifies 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 religion that demands penance as a prerequisite for membership in

⁶¹ John 14:2

Grand Theft Jesus

the official institution. Imagine discovering that “Christianity” was established as the practice of appeasement to a god via repentance for the favor of life after death—in the official edicts that legalized and dictated the religion.

The following four examples of mistranslation and substitution demonstrate how fundamentally opposite Jesus’ words are compared to “church’s” words.

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

If these words are just semantics, then my book has no purpose. I think that these mistranslations and substitutions launched an entirely new religion, utterly separate from Life in Jesus.

Grand Theft Jesus

The “Church” Substitution

The English word “church” derives from the Greek word *kuriakos*, an adjective meaning “the Lord’s,” used twice in scripture to refer to ‘the Lord’s supper’ and ‘the Lord’s day.’ The post-Constantine use of the Latin transliteration *ecclesia* was integral to the Christianity introduced to and enforced upon Germanic/Gothic cultures, which naturally referred to buildings and their religion in the same manner as the Romans. *Kuriakón* emerged as the term for their ecclesiastical buildings, ‘the Lord’s House’, in the 8th and 9th centuries, and later became the English “church,” Kirk in Scottish, Kirche in German, Kerk in Dutch, and so on. In the case of *ekklesia*, scripture is altered by usage rather than maintained by simple translation.

Spanish, Italian, French, and Portuguese still use their language’s transliteration of Latin’s *ecclesia* as the name for their “churches.”⁶² Jerome cemented the Imperial usage of *ecclesia* for its religion and buildings when he chose the common usage, rather than perhaps *congregatio* for the Vulgate. He was well-versed in Greek and certainly knew the meaning of *ekklesia*, the word Jesus used, but by 382, *ecclesia/ecclesiam* had been used for buildings and religion practiced there for almost 70 years. He mirrored its usage as found in the Edicts of Milan and Thessalonica rather than scripture.

In the 1500s, Tyndale and others translated scripture directly from Greek manuscripts, rendering *ekklesia* as “congregation.” Nearly 100 years later, King James dictated that “church” be substituted for *ekklesia*, instead. Perhaps without realizing it, but from the same motivation, he aligned himself with Constantine, Theodosius, Jerome, and the newly released Catholic Douay-Rheims English translation from the Vulgate.

⁶² Iglesia, Chiesa, Église, and Igreja, respectively

Grand Theft Jesus

Jesus is not recorded as saying *kuriakos* in scripture, nor did He demonstrate it in action; He said another word, *ekklesia*, which has no common roots in usage or translation. If He wanted continuity of buildings and religion, He could have said either *kuriakos* or *sunagoge*. The smoking gun that “church” is an illegitimate translation is revealed in Acts 19. In describing the events surrounding a riot in Ephesus, *ekklesia* is rendered three times as ‘assembly’⁶³ by both the King James and the Douay-Rheims translators. The translators knew that “church” is not what Jesus said. Before Constantine, and long before King James, *ekklesia* was explicitly separate from the building where it gathered.⁶⁴ Notably, nobody ever asked Him what *ekklesia* meant, either, and nobody was appointed “pastor,” “bishop,” or “deacon,” let alone Supreme Governor or High Priest.

If we strip all of the ecclesiology and “church” tradition from *ekklesia*, we are left with Jesus calling a few fishermen, a tax collector, a guy under a tree, and a few others to be with Him.’⁶⁵ To do what? To tear down the gates of hell, which is what He and those following were already doing when Jesus mentioned *ekklesia* in passing to celebrate what they were doing out of God’s kingdom, as opposed to another religious institution.

The very heart of Christianity, the “church”—one of four things to place faith in according to the Nicene Creed—isn’t just from semantic mistranslation. It is unbiblical, as demonstrated by the first several translations from Greek. The pragmatic difference between *ekklesia* and “church” is that “church” gathers in religion’s name and is

⁶³ Assembly and Congregation are valid translations of *ekklesia*, neither have institutional meanings at the time. Only after clergy is established did “congregation” come to mean those who attended “church”.

⁶⁴ Rom 16:5, 1 Cor 16:19

⁶⁵ Mark 3:14

Grand Theft Jesus

founded by kings of the earth, whereas Jesus' *ekklesia* gathers in His name for His purposes, and the chasm between the two is infinite.

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Grand Theft Jesus

The “Pastor” Mistranslation

Since Jesus never said “church”, offices of the “church” are irrelevant to Jesus and the scripture that testifies to Him, and “pastor” is the poster child—a direct product of institutional hierarchy that tries to impersonate Life in Jesus. 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*, 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 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 a scriptural concept.

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 to do so.

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 in

Grand Theft Jesus

Ephesus.⁶⁶ In addition, just before the five spiritual gifts are listed that have been siphoned into “offices”, scripture reveals that these gifts are for people,⁶⁷ 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,⁶⁸ 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.

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 impostors.

The imperial “church” fathers did not originate with Jesus or His apostles; 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 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”,

⁶⁶ Eph 1:1

⁶⁷ Eph 4:8

⁶⁸ John 10:11

Grand Theft Jesus

“teaching pastors”, “assistant pastors”, and a dozen more. I even saw a “mega church” with a “parking lot pastor.”

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.⁶⁹ 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. We are no longer aware that we are the ones who are supposed to be ‘ministering.’ 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.⁷⁰

Peter teaches us how shepherding is designed:

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

⁶⁹ Eph 4:11 and following

⁷⁰ *ibid*

⁷¹ 1 Peter 5:1-4

Grand Theft Jesus

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”, deliberately relating as an equal member, rather than an officeholder.

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” in “churches” cannot avoid the position of hired hand.

In utter irony, Peter warns against “lording it over” those entrusted to them, using the verb *katakuriuo*,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.

Jesus had already established true authority within His *ekklesia* before Paul and Peter lived it out, teaching that Gentile kings “churched” themselves over the people, but the disciples are not to act this way.⁷⁶

That’s exactly what Constantine created, a religion that he and his staff “churched” over. Theodosius confirmed the structure with an iron hand. 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

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>

⁷⁶ Matthew 20:25-28

Grand Theft Jesus

scripture. As the official High Priest over all religions in Rome, “churching” over Christians was built into the institution's DNA, and “pastor” is the mechanism.

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

⁷⁷ Matt 23:9

Grand Theft Jesus

The “Repentance” Substitution

“Church” isn’t the only pivotal word that King James substituted into scripture. “Repent” is also a product of a Roman-legislated religion and its “church” policy to enforce it through punishment.⁷⁸ King James did have an excuse with “repent” if following “church” tradition determines scripture’s wording rather than translation. *Paenitemini* was substituted for *metanoéo* over 1,000 years earlier to align with the newly legislated religion, and the Nicene Creed was updated to elevate the Roman “church” to an object of faith.

The only remaining piece of the forgery was to synchronize the provenance. The final thought in the Edict of Thessalonica subjected anyone who didn’t practice the official religion to be condemned and punished by God and the Empire. Personally, I can’t reconcile the idea of Jesus proclaiming the “gospel” that the Kingdom of God is near, and then demanding self-punishment as a prerequisite to believing what He just said.

We don’t have a record of instructions to Jerome, as King James issued to his translators, but we know that he aligned scripture with the last line of the Edict. He used a Latin word associated with penance, punishment, regret, and moral wrongdoing instead of a translation of the word Jesus did say. The substitution has lasted for almost 1700 years, including its English derivation, “repent,” and serves as the foundation for “church” guilt. Just this one phrase, institutionally embraced and imperially enforced, turns Jesus’ glorious message of Life in God’s Kingdom into a sin-based religion demanding punishment. I don’t think that King James and his translators knew any better: Britain had practiced *paenitemini* as Catholics for over a

⁷⁸ See Appendix 4, the last few lines of the Edict of Thessalonica.

Grand Theft Jesus

millennium, and nothing changed in this regard by breaking from Rome. Jerome, an educated linguist, could have used *resipiscere* or *mentem mutare* for straightforward translation of *metanoéo*, but chose *paenitemini* instead, for unknown reasons, the root for penal, penitentiary, and punishment.⁷⁹ Religion turns Jesus' excited persuasion to believe in Him about God's Kingdom into moral regret, self-condemnation, and punishment instead. Jerome's word choice explicitly associates the punishment proclaimed in the Edict of Thessalonica with Jesus' words in scripture.

When Jesus emerged from the wilderness, announcing, "The time is now, God's Kingdom has arrived,"⁸⁰ He had been Living for the past 40 days as God's publicly ordained heir to His kingdom.⁸¹ The Spirit had driven Him into the wilderness, where He confronted and defeated Satan,⁸² unheard of in human history. God's personal anointing and this victory demonstrate that God's kingdom has arrived and that its power rests in Jesus, evidence that the time is fulfilled. NOW!

In light of this stunning victory, He announces in royal language [see "Gospel" section] that God's Kingdom has arrived,⁸³ and then urgently persuades, "Rethink to the depths of your heart and believe the message I just gave you after the victory I just won!"⁸⁴ After watching the heavens torn open at Jesus' baptism and listening to His story about rebuffing Satan, standing dumbfounded with open mouths is understandable. Four fishermen leave their boats to follow Jesus as He demonstrates

⁷⁹ *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*.

⁸⁰ Mark 1:15

⁸¹ Mark 1:9-11

⁸² Mark 1:12-13

⁸³ Mark 1:14

⁸⁴ Mark 1:15

Grand Theft Jesus

God's Kingdom as its King, casting out demons and healing the sick⁸⁵—which starts to unhinge the gates of hell. This is Jesus' first *ekklesia*—and has no resemblance to any “church” service I have ever seen. James, John, Peter, and Andrew transformed their thinking (metanoéo) after hearing Jesus and followed Him.

The result is a drastic contrast between the foundation of the “church” and Life in Jesus. Mark's account presents Jesus persuading people to accept the glorious reality that God's Kingdom has arrived in power. Jerome's wording replaces Jesus' urgent persuasion to believe the unbelievable to ‘do penance for sin’ as a prerequisite to believing and joining the imperial “church.”

This is so important! Unless “repentance”, a direct derivative of Jerome's wording, is assumed in advance, scripture reads as a glorious invasion of God's Kingdom. The false “repentance”-based “gospel” negates His unilateral payment for all sin for all time—before anybody even said they were sorry—and results in a sin-centered religion that constantly focuses on repentance from sin (or working on our issues), a phrase never found in scripture. “Repent”, like “church”, is unbiblical.

⁸⁵ Mark 1:16-34

Grand Theft Jesus

The “Gospel” Mistranslation

Substituting *paenitemini* for *metanoéo* 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. God’s “gospel” is not only transliterated rather than translated, but it’s also tied to the false command to do penance upon ourselves, and falsely placed in Jesus’ mouth.

The full story of God’s “gospel” is not one verse quoted out of context; it encompasses the entire story from Jesus’ baptism to His invitation to four others to join Him. After Jesus was “baptized,” the heavens were torn open, and God publicly proclaimed Jesus as his son, thereby anointing Him as heir to His Kingdom. Astonishingly, the first step in King’s training was to face Satan in the wilderness.⁸⁶ 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.” As I dug in, I also realized that this was, and is, a personal message from God to people, not just a theological concept called “the gospel.” As Paul said later, if anyone preaches another

⁸⁶ Mark 1:9-13

Grand Theft Jesus

message, he is asking for trouble.⁸⁷ Therefore, any other time that “God’s royal announcement” is referenced in the rest of scripture, it refers to the meaning that Jesus gave it in this passage, or another “message” is being preached.

The Greek word transliterated as “gospel” is *euangelion*,⁸⁸ a form of the word “message”. John Wycliffe first translated the Latin equivalent of *euangelion* into Godspell, Old English for “God’s message,” which is a decent translation. But instead of translating directly from Greek, the King James used an Old English transliteration. Some modern translations use “good news”, but that’s monumentally inadequate.

As with every word 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” isn’t derived from the content of the message. *Euangelion* is a form of message that originates from royalty. The message is important, superior, and infallible because it came from God. The “*eua*” part of *euangelion* indicates that the message, the “*angelion*,” was from royalty.

For example, messages from Roman emperors were, by definition, *euangelion*. They were sent to towns 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. God had already announced Jesus' coming of Age—at His “baptism—out of the torn-open heavens; now His Kingdom is invading,

⁸⁷ Gal 1:8-9

⁸⁸ <https://biblehub.com/greek/2098.htm>

Grand Theft Jesus

as evidenced by Satan’s defeat and the effect on the gates of hell that He reveals later. This isn’t just a news teaser, and details at 9.

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.⁸⁹ This is why Jesus, Paul, and others preach the Kingdom⁹⁰—that’s what Jesus revealed in God’s message, not the opportunity for guilt, remorse, and self-punishment to qualify for the religion.

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” completely inadequate to convey the power and importance of God’s message, but combined with the horror of tying it to *paenitemini*, “the gospel” has become a theological proposition demanding penance for sin. Substituting this amazing spiritual ‘D-day’ with doing penance to get saved destroys God’s message and deceives the listener.

There is no question that Jesus paid the price for sin with His own Life, but He never presented His role in God’s kingdom as God’s message, the “gospel.” Jesus’ role as a man in God’s kingdom is to live in unison with His Father, reveal the Kingdom publicly, give up his royal Life to eliminate all barriers for all people to share this Life in God’s Kingdom, to reveal that death cannot harm this Life, and to make this Life

⁸⁹ Luke 4:18

⁹⁰ Jesus: 91 references, Acts 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 28:31, and more

Grand Theft Jesus

available to all by ascending to heaven with our Father. Jesus gives these gifts to build up His body, just as we are to build each other up with the gifts He has given each of us.

Starting with the hope and glory of a complete and transformative change, grand theft has been committed against Jesus, misusing words Jesus said in His very first message. Those words reveal the riches in the unsearchable inheritance of the believers,⁹¹ including this small sampling:

1. An age-old mystery, a perfect message directly from God^{92 93}
2. Joining Him and God's kingdom to invade this dark world^{94 95}
3. Complete, radical, and seismic transformation from death in religion to life in Jesus⁹⁶
4. Fellowship in this new life with Jesus, our Father, and each other⁹⁷
5. God's inheritance, which lives and is found in other believers^{98 99}
6. Understanding His parables describing His kingdom¹⁰⁰
7. Understanding the purpose and use of His gifts via the Holy Spirit¹⁰¹

This is what we risk when we follow religion's "gospel" instead of God's royal message.

⁹¹ Eph 3:8

⁹² Col 1:26-27

⁹³ Mark 1:14-15

⁹⁴ Mark 1:17-20

⁹⁵ Eph 6:12

⁹⁶ John 5:24

⁹⁷ 1 John 1:1-3

⁹⁸ Eph 1:18

⁹⁹ 1 Cor 12

¹⁰⁰ Mark 4:11

¹⁰¹ Eph 4:12-16

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 7—The "Church" Forgery 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.¹⁰²

The word "church" is a misnomer, but Halverson's point is clear: "church" today is not Jesus' *ekklesia* at all. The latter three phases Halverson identifies above share one anchor: they mirror local culture, not Jesus. Looking back, I'm humbled not to have discerned "church's" misplaced authority staring me in the face.

The American "church" enterprise culture is unmistakable. Their websites speak of core values, relevant marketing, lists of "church" beliefs, and mission statements. Few recognize that these are all concepts introduced by business books.

Articles of incorporation with the Secretary of State, boards of directors, corporate bylaws, corporate officers, and payroll underlie the "church" structure. I've been in many "church" meetings to discuss felt needs, organizational charts, and facility-use policies, not to mention budgets, tax returns, and music style. "Church" lobbies the government in its own interests, succeeding in areas such as tax treatment and corporate oversight. In this light, it makes sense that "church" hierarchy exerts its brand of power over its members, but I just can't picture Jesus lobbying Pilate for special tax treatment for the women supporting Him so that God's royal message was unhindered. Jesus Himself is the resource to support God's message.

¹⁰² Quoted by numerous publications, including CS Lewis Institute – no original publication documented. But I would say the same thing if he didn't.

Grand Theft Jesus

“Church” Overreach

When homeschooling emerged, a unique phenomenon emerged where people started helping each other whenever they crossed paths. When a few families became connected,” we loosely called it a support group. Nobody was elected leader, even though we looked up to others due to their experience. Meetings about running “the group” never materialized; we just helped each other. Several were from my “church,” some were friends of friends, a few were from the neighborhood, and others heard through the grapevine. Occasionally, one parent would teach biology to a neighbor’s kids as well as their own, and the neighbor would teach Spanish in return. Everybody was ready to share their insights and experience to help others who jumped into the homeschool waters, whether they were ‘in the group’ or not.

People came together all over the county in person, over the phone, through email, and through plain old networking. I didn’t get it then, but Jesus formed and named this kind of relationship as His *ekklesia*. I didn’t yet know that “church” is something else entirely.

The “pastor,” having heard about the ‘group,’ organized a meeting to incorporate it as an “official church ministry” under the “church” umbrella. Those in the group who went to this “church” didn’t want this, and those who didn’t attend this “church” couldn’t understand. After the dust settled, the “church” launched its ‘new ministry’ anyway, but the original ‘group’ simply kept helping each other, ignoring both the “church’s” intrusion.

Consider another example. Some “churches” focus on spiritual gifts; some never mention them. I attended one “church” where the “pastor” held classes on spiritual gifts in what was otherwise a non-charismatic denomination. Intrigued, I embraced the class—until I realized that the ‘important gifts’ all aligned with the “church”

Grand Theft Jesus

organization's volunteer needs. Gifts of hospitality were directed toward ushering or kitchen duties, etc. The higher gifts that scripture encourages¹⁰³ weren't needed in the system. Clergy had those covered.

One Sunday, during the service's singing time, something was different. The "pastor" and others later expressed the sense of a spiritual gift from someone in the congregation to be shared. Ignoring the spiritual nudge, "pastor" later admitted he didn't pursue it to keep the service on schedule. Someone with the gift of shepherding would have guided the gathering, and we could have listened to and considered the spiritual gift.¹⁰⁴ "Church" order squelched the Holy Spirit, preventing people from hearing what God might have to say.¹⁰⁵

Another example: a few people from "church", the next-door neighbor, a couple of co-workers, and an old high school friend got together weekly. We had dinner and shared our lives with each other, purposefully seeking Jesus. It just worked. We were like family—not just once a week, but whenever. We helped each other move, shared cars, and even our houses when a fire forced evacuation.

We shared the Lord's supper for years. Even though our group existed before the "church" I attended, my "pastor" proposed that he bless 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 shift to the next sermon's scripture reading. I didn't mention these "pastoral" suggestions to our group, but the splinter in my mind continued to fester.

¹⁰³ 1 Cor 12 and 14

¹⁰⁴ 1 Cor 14:29-32

¹⁰⁵ 1 Thess 5:19-21

Grand Theft Jesus

Symptoms of “Church” Overreach

Peter and Paul explicitly reject anyone, including themselves, from “lording” their position over Jesus’ *ekklesia*.¹⁰⁶ Instead, they consider and portray themselves as co-workers rather than “church” leaders.¹⁰⁷ Jesus said the same thing.¹⁰⁸ Ironically, all three use the same Greek word that prohibits ‘lording’ from the same Greek root word as “church.” If translators were consistent, Paul, Peter, and Jesus would prohibit elders and overseers from “churching” their position over believers. Let that sink in for a minute. Not only is “church” an invalid concept, but the time-honored practices of “church” authority and “church” discipline are also directly opposed to Jesus own words—they are unbiblical.

The tradition of “church” leadership as we know it is nullified when Jesus demonstrated *ekklesia* leadership by washing His disciples’ feet. Following Him was always an option, never a demand to conform to “church” authority.¹⁰⁹ This isn’t just semantics; it is a clear distinction between Life in Jesus and “church” life. “church” life revolves around:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Systems of organization | versus | gifts from above |
| 2. “Church” fellowship | versus | fellowship with the Father and Son |
| 3. “Church office” authority | versus | the gift of shepherding |
| 4. For the sake of the “church” | versus | the sake of each person’s Life |

Life in Jesus does not coincide with “church” authority/discipline, and He emphatically prohibits authoritarian “titles” within His body of believers:

¹⁰⁶ 1 Peter 5:2-3, 2 Cor 1:24

¹⁰⁷ 2 Cor 1:24

¹⁰⁸ Matth 20:25-26

¹⁰⁹ John 6:66

Grand Theft Jesus

1. I am the Good shepherd...so that there may be one flock, one shepherd.¹¹⁰
2. Don't let anyone call you rabbi, father, or instructor.¹¹¹
3. Since we have a great high priest...¹¹²
4. Head of the ekklesia¹¹³
5. Head of His body¹¹⁴
6. There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.¹¹⁵

Yet, from the moment that Constantine first coopted “Christianity” under his authority, there have been titles such as Pontifex Maximus, Father, Teacher, Vicar, President, Supreme Governor, Archbishop, Most Holy Reverend, and more. “Pastor” is the most egregious “church” title because it uses a transliterated Latin word that hides the clergy’s use of a title reserved for Jesus alone, and is the core position used to justify the concept of “church” offices and the “church” authority they rule. Shepherding is a priceless gift when Jesus manifests it in a believer for the sake of His *ekklesia*, but it is in direct conflict with Him when used as the title of a “church office.”

¹¹⁰ John 10

¹¹¹ Matt 23

¹¹² Hebrews 4:14

¹¹³ Ephesians 5:23

¹¹⁴ Col 1:18

¹¹⁵ 1 Tim 2:5

Grand Theft Jesus

Impact of False Authority

The forgery featuring ordained “church” hierarchy and its “offices” strips spiritual gifts from their intended recipients, rendering people unstable, spiritual infants, and doctrinally deceived. Scripture mistranslation and incorrect interpretation remove the very mechanism that empowers Jesus’ *ekklesia*, subscribing to imperial/corporate power as a forgery of Jesus’ leadership using “church” authority. Members are no longer equipped to build each other up, lack unity of faith in Jesus, and the ability to grow up into Him.

Instead of strengthening one another, we face the stage as consumers of religious goods. Instead of being guarded from deception through shared gifting like shepherding, we become functionally dependent upon the “church” titles that assume names like “pastor.” Deception and forgery come from those with invented titles using the same names as the spiritual gifts that should be protecting the gathered from within.

The damage just described is neither semantic nor an opinion and is well documented in scripture, just after the gifts are revealed¹¹⁶. Without these gifts among Jesus’ people, believers operate in the Gentile mindset.¹¹⁷ When shared gifting is replaced by managed religious systems, fellowship with Father and Son doesn’t weaken — it fails to exist at all. “Church” elevates itself through government-integrated creeds, controls scripture interpretation and translation, and then, in the final blow, elevates its altered scripture to “God’s word”, a stature that neither Jesus (the only Word) nor scripture ever claims, even for unaltered scripture. No one and nothing other than

¹¹⁶ Eph 4:11-16

¹¹⁷ Eph 4:17-19

Grand Theft Jesus

Jesus has authority in Jesus' *ekklesia*, but everyone in Him has His presence to guide the use of His gifts for the purpose of sharing with others.¹¹⁸

In contrast, Jesus revealed the foundation of His *ekklesias* (plural!) only once and for one reason—proclaimed faith in the anointed Son of the Living God. Therefore, as with Jesus' singular reference to God's royal message ("the gospel"), every other time *ekklesia* is referenced in scripture, it either refers to Jesus' single mention or explicitly describes someone else's meeting. Acts 19 uses *ekklesia* too, where it refers to a group in near riot. Jesus' gatherings are not based on statements of faith, founding "church" documents, lists of beliefs, and scripture. It's not even based on our interpretation of Jesus' teachings; it is faith in a Living Person who has the power and authority to grant that same Life to those who believe in Him, not about Him. "Church" can only look like its own organizations and traditions when projected backward onto teachings and events that are redefined to fit. "Church" lacks the power to embody 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. Just to be clear, Jesus' authority still reigns in His people, but "church" can't be His *ekklesia* because its authority derives from itself, a different concept altogether.

¹¹⁸ 1 Cor 12:4-11

Grand Theft Jesus

Scripture Weaponized When “Church” Misuses It

Unexpected, huh? So far, we can be pretty upset with “church,” how it came into existence, and its diabolical foundational sources. But realizing that “church” turns scripture *against* Jesus stops me in my tracks, and I can no longer see past a forged institution using scripture as its provenance to secure its own position.

1. Imperial councils invented “Christianity,” a religion based on theological statements approved by an emperor. Creeds become part of the religion’s provenance. It’s not that the statements are wrong, but that they are the basis for a religion of beliefs that mimics Life in Jesus, and that religion is the only permitted religion by law—dictated beliefs as opposed to faith in Him.
2. The same foundational statements of the religion elevate “church” as an article of faith in the same sentence—on the same level—as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a statement of heresy rather than believing.
3. Scripture is then rewritten in alignment to align with the legal religion, and “church” language is imposed over words’ actual meaning.
4. In usage, “church” lingo, and in enforced practice, altered scripture is elevated to “the word” or “the written word”, which religion under governments dominates for 1700 years, supporting provenance for a “church” forgery.

Jesus emphatically 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.

Grand Theft Jesus

- *John 5:37-40*

God's mystery of the ages isn't "us in church" or "scripture in you", but Christ Himself indwelling that is His hope of glory.¹¹⁹ Memorizing scripture in human minds is not Jesus living in a human heart by faith. Initiatives to "ground ourselves" in scripture or promote a "biblical worldview" widen the chasm between Life in Jesus and "church" membership. Jesus never mentioned imperial institutions, other than "kings of the earth," and when he did, it was not good.¹²⁰ But it gets worse:

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

- *John 5:42*

"Church" narrative and its words dominate our Bibles, Bible studies, and "church" services today. Yes, scripture is absolutely inerrant and inspired, but it is unconscionable that the verses that we quote in "church" are not the scripture that was written. Following them as if they were God's "written word" is a commitment to Jerome, King James, and others rather than to Jesus and His own words above. Not only is "church" illegitimate in word and concept, but we have been fed scripture through the imperial lens that Revelation condemns.

Jesus called scripture by its name (*graphé*) when He referred to it, as did all other New Testament writers. In John 5:37-40, quoted above, Jesus explicitly separates *logos* and *graphé*, juxtaposing scripture with Himself. He didn't elevate it beyond its purpose. Not only did religion change scripture's purpose, but it also elevated it as

¹¹⁹ Col 1:27

¹²⁰ Rev 18:9-19

Grand Theft Jesus

closely as it could to Jesus himself, differentiating it only by using a small ‘W’, and not always that. We mistake following “the word” for following Him, fueling a multi-billion-dollar Bible study industry. I read a lot of scripture, but I always double-check the “church” words in Greek and ask, “How does this passage reveal Jesus?” rather than “What does this mean to me and my behavior?”

Being bible-based is like claiming to know your spouse through an autobiography while considering it spending time together. Christians often claim that they would take the Bible if stranded on a desert island and could only bring one thing with them. I’ll take Jesus, instead.

Scripture is testimony to Jesus; it is not Him. It is not the head of His *ekklesia* or believers individually. Following scripture does not produce disciples; it produces theological adherents, when we need to know the Person that scripture is talking about. Believers were found throughout the Mediterranean world decades before scripture was even written. How could this happen if spreading faith in Jesus was dependent on scripture?

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 8—Lose His Name—Lose *Ekklesia*—Lose Jesus

We say things like, ‘In Jesus’ Name,’ ‘In His Name,’ and ‘In Your Name,’ as a matter of habit. The “church” service version might be, ‘In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.’ I’ve said some variation of these closing phrases countless times over the years.

Only recently did I face the fact that while I had been saying the ‘right thing’ for decades, nothing happened when I did, I didn’t know why, and I didn’t really know what it meant to say it. The same empty habit—used mainly for ceremonial purposes and as closings for public prayer—is epidemic in books, sermons, and ceremonies. It can be spoken by “pastors,” strangers, or friends and sound spiritually sincere, but it rarely has a discernible impact. Compared to the “pre-church” era, saying such things caused crippled people to walk and demons to flee. Jesus’ disciples had a one-time failure during their training years, even after having previously cast out demons when Jesus had directed them to do so, but today this verse is used mostly to explain why nothing tangible happens today when we say the right thing. I’m left with questions like:

1. Why doesn’t Jesus teach this closing phrase in the Lord’s prayer?¹²¹
2. If Jesus is interceding for us at the right hand of God, am I praying the same thing, and how do I know? How can I know that my prayer is ‘in His Name’?
3. If saying, “In Jesus’ Name” before, after, and during everything I do, is that the same as being in His Name?¹²²
4. What makes a gathering of two or more something being done ‘in His Name’?

¹²¹ Matthew 16

¹²² Col 1:17

Grand Theft Jesus

Jesus gathered and led *ekklesiai* for various reasons. For His first *ekklesia*, he called four; added a fifth; then accumulated a total of 12; and then at least 72.¹²³ He demonstrated His authority as God's Son by healing the sick and raising the dead in person as He traveled around Galilee with these *ekklesias*. Then Jesus commissioned separate *ekklesias* to go out on their own and do the same thing in His Name. Can you imagine being sent out on a mission explicitly authorized—in Person—to use Jesus Name to heal the sick and cast out demons?

When Jesus said *ekklesia*, He was referring to these groups He had already been forming. He never mentioned any institution, because He was in the process of tearing one down. Jesus called His *ekklesia* out of fishing boats, tax offices, and out from under trees to come with Him as He announced God's arriving Kingdom. That's it. Religion later overlaid principles of its own institutional systems on top of Jesus simple groups and their purpose.

Unless I assume a “church” institution before reading the only time that Jesus mentioned building these *ekklesias*, I cannot find even a hint of it in Jesus' words or actions. I come away with something more like “that's what I'm talking about” as the 72 came back in victory. Jesus *ekklesiai* sound more like the Old Testament *ekklesiai* in Judges, 1 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Chronicles. It turns out that “in His Name” means to accept His assignment and carry it out under the power of His authority. The institutional “church” has no relationship to Jesus' *ekklesia* and is not a valid translation in scripture. *Embracing “church” directly contradicts Life in His Name.* ‘In His Name’ isn't a theological concept to be applied; it's an action on Jesus' behalf as He directs us.

¹²³ Mark 1:16-20, Mark 2:14; Mark 3:14, Luke 10:1-24

Grand Theft Jesus

After initial training, Jesus sent out Twelve and then Seventy-Two to heal the sick, cast out demons, and announce God's kingdom in His stead. They were 'in His Name' because He explicitly authorized them to do this on His behalf—like a power of attorney. As I was pondering this, revelation #2 jumped out at me: Jesus never required anyone to “repent from sin” to join His *ekklesia*. I have no reference for things that Jesus did not say.

I cannot overstate the chasm separating 'in Jesus' name' in “church” ceremonies and delegated authority to those actually sent out by Him. Having done what they had been instructed, the 72 returned, exclaiming, “Even the demons are subject to us in Your name!”¹²⁴ Under Jesus' authority, evil spirits obeyed His ambassadors just as if Jesus had Personally ordered them to leave, demonstrating that the scriptural picture of *ekklesia* is inseparable from His delegated authority. “Church” calls its own meetings.

The sons of Sceva learned the hard way about using Jesus' name without His direction.¹²⁵ They copied words from others who were casting out demons, but without Jesus' direction to do so. We are fortunate when nothing happens when we say 'In His Name' before Jesus says to:

“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 them, ‘I

¹²⁴ Luke 10:17

¹²⁵ Acts 19:11-16

Grand Theft Jesus

never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”
— Matthew 7:21–23

No creed, tradition, system, or institution possesses the right or the power to delegate Jesus’ authority. A system may use language, organize gatherings, and maintain tradition, but only Jesus confers His Name upon others. This leads us to revelation #3: once I recognize that truly *being* in His name is indispensable, then hearing His voice becomes likewise nonnegotiable, which leads straight to revelation #4: every person who gathers two or more at a time must have heard His voice to do so if the gathering is Jesus’ *ekklesia*. Otherwise, it is King James’ voice that is being followed, calling us to “church” instead.

The heavens were torn open at His baptism, and the Father publicly revealed Jesus as His Son. Jesus’ authority did not originate within Himself, but God personally and publicly vested Jesus as His son, as He came of age. He immediately demonstrated this delegated authority by thwarting Satan in the wilderness and then exercised it openly in Galilee—ultimately delegating that same authority to others. Since He only did what He saw the Father doing, it is God’s voice that gave Jesus authority to act in His Father’s Name.¹²⁶ Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him, not that they would form “churches” and attend religious services.¹²⁷

Ponder the impact for a minute: what happens if we lose Jesus’ *ekklesia* to a forged religious institution?

¹²⁶ John 8:28, 14:10

¹²⁷ John 10

Grand Theft Jesus

If the religious institution is a forgery, then where is the Original? The Original Lives on exactly where He said He would—in His people. If we attend an *ekklesia* that Jesus has not called, then we lose Jesus Himself, while thinking we have Him.

Jesus is explicitly in His *ekklesia*—within His people—and His indwelling is the mechanism that He designed to build us up in Himself. There is no other mechanism by which we are protected from deception. When we lose *ekklesia*, we lose Jesus' presence in each other. Facing forward in services cements the forgery and substitutes fellowship together in Him with “church” attendance.

Religion schedules events to attend; in stark contrast, Jesus summons people to be with Him.¹²⁸ Christ's body doesn't result from religion having a gathering—His body is a result of Him doing the gathering.

¹²⁸ Mark 3:14

Grand Theft Jesus

Don't Forsake The Assembly

Nowhere is “church” vs *ekklesia* highlighted more clearly than by applying an institutional “church” lens to Hebrews 10:25. Given “church’s” motives, history, and foundations, its teaching on this verse exposes a massive conflict of interest.

The entire point of the verse and surrounding passages is to emphasize the opportunity to find encouragement in Jesus’ *ekklesia*, those that He calls together. The gift of encouragement is found within those whom God selects within the gathered. When teaching “church” attendance from this verse, focus on Jesus Living in each other is replaced by clergy at the front of a sanctuary. We don’t even know that we are supposed to be encouraging the person next to us instead.

In technical terms, the word used in Hebrews is a noun, not a verb. It is the *ekklesia* itself—Jesus’ body that He has called together—that is not to be forgotten, because that is where Jesus resides and how the encouragement mentioned in the verse is shared. The act of assembling isn’t original scripture; it is legislated scripture. I am chagrined that I taught assembling to my kids, my Bible study, and as a “church” teacher instead of seeking to give and receive Jesus with others as He directs. I’m truly sorry.

The original text is not a warning about failing to attend; it warns against abandoning others to suffer alone because the gifts from Jesus reside within the *ekklesia*, the people, rather than in the sermon or in who delivers it. This is why “church” and *ekklesia* are mutually exclusive: one is focused forward, the other is focused on each other. Never mind that “church” wasn’t even invented, legislated, and enforced for over two centuries after Hebrews was written.

In Ephesians 4:11 and following, spiritual gifts—including encouragement—are for protection from false doctrine, building each other up to prevent His body from

Grand Theft Jesus

perpetual infancy, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine and by the cunning and schemes of men. Turning these gifts into “church” offices perpetuates the demise of the people attending, forsaking encouragement from each other for the sake of “church” attendance, one of the “winds of doctrine” that gifts in Jesus’ *ekklesia* would have prevented.

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 Life were being described from a different vantage point. The differences arise because they come from entirely different sources of authority with entirely different objectives.

The Spirit didn’t drive the anointed 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: that Jesus’ intentions can be reliably accessed through a scheduled, structured assembly run theologically by clergy. When we accept an institution’s assembly instead of Jesus’ *ekklesia*, we lose Him—His actual presence in us—the very resource that He gives for Life in Him.

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 9—Sincerity, Good Things, and Temple Attendance Don't Legitimize Forgery

This chapter challenges me. Admitting my errors is bad enough, but knowing how hard it will hit others gives me pause. Admitting mistakes is indeed the first step, but not the only step. Humiliation by religious forgery doggedly persists as I deprogram and transform who I persistently believe in to replace beliefs that I have possessed. "Metanoéo and believe" that God's Kingdom is Living right now in their midst was so far outside of disciples' religious habits that radical change in mind and heart is nonnegotiable if Jesus is to be known.

Paul, for example, did not buy it. He so deeply believed in the religious order that He persecuted The Way. He was very sincere about what He believed. *Metanoéo* happened to him on the road to Damascus.

Hairstyles, diets, and even *some* bad habits can change. Discarding lifelong beliefs because they are false is a lonely, humbling, frustrating, and confusing quest along a path with no map in uncharted waters to an unknown destination.

Talking to people about my quest usually receives one of two responses:

1. Those who don't care much about "church," so what I say doesn't matter
2. Those who are so committed to "church" that they justify it with gusto:
 - a. Jesus attended Temple and Synagogue, so we should do the same
 - b. Some attenders sincerely believe in Jesus and "His church"
 - c. Good things happen in "church," so it can't be totally wrong
 - d. Going to "church" versus believing in Jesus is just semantics

I have used these arguments myself, and my logic now stands in shreds.

Grand Theft Jesus

Jesus Attended Temple And Synagogue, So We Should Do The Same

“Well, Jesus went to Temple and synagogue.” We have been taught and assume that since Jesus attended religious institutions, attending “church” today follows His example. When I looked closely at God’s Temple, unavoidable questions emerged: ‘Why would Jesus destroy the Temple, His own Father’s House, and then launch another institution with essentially the same name?’¹²⁹

Jesus’ personal interactions with the Temple and synagogue are even more illuminating—I had been too busy systematizing scripture into principles to notice that every visit to the Temple after He was 12 resulted in confrontation, assassination plots, and attempted murder. Following His example, being Christlike looks more like calling “pastors” sons of hell, hypocrites, and vipers than a picture of a Caucasian carrying a lamb on His shoulders. But this is what Jesus said to His “pastors” during Temple attendance.

Temple ‘attendance’ was more like festival observation and was required just three times a year.¹³⁰ Jesus observed these festivals, along with some traditional Temple festivals. There was nothing in festival observance that maps to today’s “church” services. There weren’t services, sermons, communal singing, or liturgy. The informal teaching He participated in took place in the outer courts during the festivities.

Outside of the duty to fulfill Jewish law, Jesus didn’t mention Temple attendance in any context, let alone associate it with His *ekklesia*. “Church,” however, still uses

¹²⁹ Review: “church” is a translation/transliteration of kuriakos/kuriakon, “The Lord’s House”

¹³⁰ Exodus 23:14-17, 34:23, Deut 16:16

Grand Theft Jesus

some version of tithes, gifts, and offerings to raise funds for itself, and uses persistent repentance of sin—a phrase Jesus didn't say—for regular sacrifice instead of animals.

I find it difficult to embrace Jesus' destruction of the Temple, rebuilding it entirely in the form of His resurrected body, only to assign the laws of Temple funding to yet another institution.

So, why *did* Jesus attend Temple and Synagogue? As an infant and as a youth, Jesus went to the Temple with His parents to observe Jewish law. As an adult, Jesus observed the prescribed Jewish feasts and spoke about His Father and His Kingdom, just as He did when He was 12. At one of these festivals, Jesus "... stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"¹³¹ This message was doubly profound since the current festival featured a water-related ceremony, indicating God's Living Temple of the near future. I imagine that Jesus timed this proclamation to the priests carrying water through the courts.

Most of us are unprepared for the reality that Jesus risked His life to attend Temple. Several references demonstrate how every visit after childhood was met with an attempt on His Life, or a plot to kill Him.

1. While in Jerusalem for one of the Jewish feasts, Jesus healed a man lame from birth, and:
 - a. 'Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him'—John 5:18
2. [Jesus] Why do you seek to kill me—John 7:19
3. [The crowd at a Temple Festival] Is this not He, whom they seek to kill?—John 7:25

¹³¹ John 7:37-38

Grand Theft Jesus

4. Jesus taught in the Temple Treasury [inside the Temple]
 - a. They took up stones to throw at Him—John 8:59 [to kill by stoning]
5. Jesus taught in Solomon's Colonnade [inside the Temple]
 - a. Again, the Jews picked up stones to stone Him—John 10:31
6. Jesus drives the merchants out of the Temple
 - a. 'The chief priests [the top Temple leadership] and scribes sought how they might destroy him.'
7. Jesus teaches in the Temple and:
 - a. [the Chief Priests] 'consulted that they might take Jesus by subilty and kill him'—Matt 26:3-4
8. Judas Joins the Plot
 - a. 'sought how they might kill him'—Luke 2:6
9. Arrest attempts presumably with the same goal that His ultimate arrest accomplished:
 - a. 'they sought to take him'—John 7:30
 - b. Officers sent to arrest—John 7:39
10. The Temple Priests eventually captured Jesus and turned Him over to the Roman government for execution.

Herod only tried to kill Him once. Another attempt and plot were made in synagogues. Instead of encouraging attendance, Jesus promised the same Temple and synagogue persecution of His followers.¹³²

If there was ever a time to anchor Temple and synagogue attendance, rising from the dead was the perfect time: Jesus had everybody's attention. He had conquered

¹³² Matt 10 :17, Mark 13 :9, John 16 :2, Luke 21 :12, Matt 10:22, John 15:18-20, Matt 24:9,

Grand Theft Jesus

death, rebuilt everything that the Temple stood for in Himself, and there were still 5 days remaining in the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world could see the resurrected Son of God and hear about attending His new institution. Instead, Jesus chose to reveal Himself to His disciples a few at a time, with one account of up to 500. He didn't do things the way people do.

There is no indication that Jesus attended a new institution or the old ones on any of the 5 sabbaths between His resurrection and His ascension. No, He did the same thing that He did when He came out of the wilderness—He proclaimed God's kingdom with His *ekklesia*. There was nothing left for Jesus, or anybody else, to do at the Temple. He now embodied everything that it had represented forever. Nothing in God's kingdom is accomplished by attendance to anything other than Jesus Himself, and choosing the word *ekklesia* over synagogue, Temple, or *kuriakón* explicitly distinguishes His gathering from all religious attendance.

As He discipled His students, Jesus had many things to say about the Temple:

*"I say unto you, that something greater than the temple is here."*¹³³

Jesus, without apology, places Himself above the Temple. Those totally committed to the Temple structure were offended to the core. For those seeking God and His messiah, Jesus unleashed unlimited hope:

"...Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up... he was speaking of the temple of his body" —John 2:19,21

¹³³ Matt 12:6

Grand Theft Jesus

God, starting with Moses, the journey to the promised land, the building of His Temple, and finally, and completely, the manifestation in Jesus of resurrected Life, is the most stunning event in all History. Every single nuance of God's Life is encapsulated in Him, who destroys the shadow Temple that was built solely for the purpose of revealing Him. There is no longer any place to attend for those who follow Him. The chasm between gathering together in Him and attending an institution couldn't be wider.

"There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down."¹³⁴

Jesus, at the very beginning of His public Life:

... the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father...But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." -John 4:21,23-24

When the Temple curtain was torn in two, and Jesus walked out of that tomb, everything symbolized by the Temple ceased to have meaning because everything that it stood for became embodied in Him. Jesus is the offering, the Passover, the High Priest, and the only Good Shepherd. As Jesus became God's temple to be passed on to His believers, the Father's old house was rendered obsolete. Jesus knew what He was destroying:

¹³⁴ Matt 24:2

Grand Theft Jesus

1. After Jesus drove the merchants out of the Temple:
 - i. Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade—John 2:16
 - b. It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer—Matt 21:13
 - c. "...but you have made it a den of robbers—Matt 21:13 (direct correlation to John 10 and the hired hands).
2. Even at age 12, when visiting the Temple with His parents:
 - a. Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?—Luke 2:49

The argument that Jesus' Temple attendance justifies "Church" attendance is nullified by the word "church" itself. We've looked at this earlier: "church" comes from the word "*kuriakón*", the 'Lord's house,' the thing that Jesus destroyed and a word He never said.

Paul knew where God's Temple resides:

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.¹³⁵

He says it again:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,¹³⁶

¹³⁵ 1 Cor 3:16-17

¹³⁶ 1 Cor 6:19

Grand Theft Jesus

And again:

... being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you are also being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.¹³⁷

Yet “church” still collects tithes, gifts, and offerings, explicitly modeled on Temple systems. It calls its staff priests, fathers, pastors, and other names that are null and void in Jesus. John drives this home in his revelation of our eventual home in heaven:

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.¹³⁸

This is not a new idea. According to scripture, a house not built of human hands was spoken of often in the Old Testament:

Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?’¹³⁹

The torn curtain in the Temple was repaired by the hands that didn’t realize that they no longer had a job.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Eph 2:21-22

¹³⁸ Rev 21:22

¹³⁹ Acts 7:48-49, Stephen quoting Isaiah

¹⁴⁰ Matt 27:51

Grand Theft Jesus

Some Attenders Sincerely Believe in Jesus and “His church”

Besides believing in the institutional “church” according to Roman creeds, one of the most deceptive beliefs among “church” attenders is that sincerity somehow validates it. Whether sincere about Jesus instituting “church” or the beliefs it recites, Truth and validation are not discernible through sincerity. I understand. I was one of those attenders at imperfect, sincere “churches”.

Embracing sincerity sounds and feels compassionate; however, sincerity can only establish intent. It is not a foundation of truth, authority, or legitimacy, nor does it substitute for being “in Jesus’ name”. Having beliefs (even ‘correct’ ones) about Jesus stands explicitly opposite to placing every ounce of trust *in* Him alone.¹⁴¹ I placed my trust in my beliefs *about* “church” and Jesus for so long...

Jesus clearly reveals the difference between using His name and being in His name.¹⁴² *Knowing* Him is eternal life itself.¹⁴³ *Knowing about* Him is religion and theology. Believing *about* Jesus and attending “church” in sincere obedience does not change the fact that He never said the word “church.” People can be sincere, devout, and emotionally invested—and still be deeply deceived. Paul persecuted believers with a clear conscience and zeal for God,¹⁴⁴ until He experienced Jesus in Person.

Jesus’ allegories, healings, teachings, and deliverances occurred almost exclusively outside His Temple and synagogue attendance. When He did do these things while attending, Temple leadership tried to kill Him. Jesus plainly exposed Temple hierarchy as sons of hell, vipers, whitewashed tombs, and hypocrites¹⁴⁵ right in

¹⁴¹ John 5:37-40

¹⁴² Matt 7:21-23

¹⁴³ John 17:3

¹⁴⁴ Gal 1:13

¹⁴⁵ Matt 23

Grand Theft Jesus

the Temple courts. Jesus did not endorse attendance at all, and *ekklesia* was never a thing that could be attended.

The question we must answer is not, ‘Do we sincerely believe that Jesus instituted “church”’—I don’t believe He did—but, ‘Does attendance to anything have any relationship to Jesus at all?’ Sincerity of the wrong answer does not help—being sincerely mistaken about a forgery is still being mistaken about the Original, too.

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Good Things Happen in “Church”

‘But I experienced Jesus, scripture, and prayer in “church”, so it can’t be all bad.’ The implication is that if good things related to Jesus happen, the place where they happen is therefore validated for what it says it is.

If this were true, then the road to Damascus, the chariot where Nathanael met the Egyptian, the well where Jesus met the Samaritan woman, and Lazarus’ tomb are all places where Jesus met people in profound ways and should be considered ordained. But Jesus said no more about ordaining these places than He did about “church.”

In fact, the opposite is true; virtually everything good that Jesus did at the Temple and synagogue resulted in attempted and plotted murder—the vast majority of the good things Jesus said and did occurred outside religious institutions.

What if bad things happened at “church”? Kids learn cuss words in Sunday school, and “church” politics is a well-known malady. Does that invalidate “church”? No. Neither our opinion of good works nor of bad has any relevance as to whether “church” has anything to do with Jesus or not. Since He never said the word (in any language), or indicated “church” in any way, it is an irrelevant topic in relation to Life in Jesus. If we are concerned with a Roman, sin-based religion, then “church” is the perfect institution to be concerned with.

Good things happen in schools, grocery stores, coffee shops, and at dinner with friends. It is hard to overstate that these institutions have no more validation in Jesus than does “church,” and things happening that we approve of do not change that.

It is those who hear Jesus’ call and gather to carry out the purpose He has in mind who become Jesus’ ekklesia. Being called by the term “Jesus’ ekklesia” was never His point in calling people together.

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Isn't Going to "Church" and Following Jesus Just Semantics

If I thought following Jesus was encapsulated in going to "church," there would be no need for this book. But summing up all the ideas so far, Jesus' *ekklesia* is something we are, not something we are even able to attend. Compare being actively married to someone with attending a marriage seminar. Jesus' *ekklesia* is a term to refer to who we are, the people gathered together at His call. "Church" schedules its gathering of people with common religious beliefs, interests, and ways of observing them. One is a response to Jesus' call, His purpose, requiring each member to bring Jesus' unique manifestation to share with the others. The other is focused on the gathering itself—its desires, its needs, and its traditions—convinced that its form of gathering is correctly following gathering rules. I know, I've done it.

I can't help but feel the agony of seeing Jesus, only to say, "Didn't I attend biblical gatherings diligently in your name?"

Claiming it's mere semantics is to say that Jesus didn't really mean *ekklesia* as defined when He said it, but He meant *kuriakón*, and King James corrected it when he dictated that "church" be used in His Bible project. Jesus' *ekklesia* and King James' "church" are mutually exclusive words and concepts, not semantically overlapping.

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Personal Preferences

If we are honest, the most blatant condemnation of “church” is declared in the way that we treat it. Over the years, I’ve heard endless reasons that people give for attending a particular “church,” and the process more closely resembles car shopping than listening to Jesus. These are some of the things that we place in our cart:

1. I feel at home here
2. They have a great kids' program
3. It's a place where I get fed
4. A good small group ministry
5. A good missions' focus
6. The pastor really divides the word well
7. That's where my friends go
8. I was raised that way
9. It has a men's softball team
10. It has a lot of kids who are babysitter age
11. It does or does not subscribe to health and wealth teaching

You get the idea. I used #9 and #10 at one point of severely low “church” expectations. I rarely hear of anyone listening for Jesus’ call to Himself, or for others listening for the same call, resulting in His *ekklesia*. Instead, “church” shopping looks like a list of personal preferences, like bucket seats and good gas mileage.

This one mindset—all by itself—reveals that not only is “church” not the dynamic assembly of people responding to Jesus call out of fishing boats and from under trees, but a man-made system to address man-felt needs and desires. In hindsight, the softball team became a tight-knit softball *ekklesia*. At least we knew our purpose of getting together: the sake of playing softball.

Grand Theft Jesus

For those who have ever been close to “church” leadership, we’ve all been in meetings that discuss how to meet these kinds of needs and to be relevant so we attract more people to attend based on our intent to fulfill them. I’ve never heard the question, “For what purpose has Jesus called you to Himself, and who do you know who has the same call to Him, forming a basis of an *ekklesia* in Him, formed to fulfill His purpose?”

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Grand Theft Jesus

PART IV

THE ORIGINAL

It Steals Your Breath Away

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 10—Jesus Is The Original, Genuine Son of the Living God

We degrade scripture when we alter its words through legislation, misuse, religious tradition, and 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 to highlight future “church” traditions, but as an integrated and inspired testimony to Jesus.¹⁴⁶ Ignore the inserted chapter and verse headings (which are not inspired or inerrant) for a minute and read Mark 1 from Jesus’ immersion (transliterated as “baptism”) until He begins preaching.¹⁴⁷

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 transformative life by immersing them in water. John’s preaching so moved people that they even openly admitted they were sinners in public. John prophesied that someone else was coming who was far greater than he, and who would immerse them in the Holy Spirit for real, rather than in water as a symbol.

John immersed Jesus, and as He came out of the water, something nobody had ever seen before happened—the skies were torn open, and the Holy Spirit emerged, landing on Jesus’ shoulder. Then, God speaks out of the torn-open skies, declaring, “You’re my beloved Son, I take great pleasure in you.” God had just publicly coronated His Son as His heir to His kingdom, anointing Him with the Holy Spirit. Apart from Jesus’ death by crucifixion and subsequent return from the dead, nothing in human or cosmic history comes close to this moment. God installed a man as King over His creation.

¹⁴⁶ John 5:37-40

¹⁴⁷ Mark 1:9-21

Grand Theft Jesus

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. Jesus spends His Life manifesting God Himself, His *logos*.¹⁴⁸ Service systems, theologies, and traditions of worship were introduced later through the Constantinian religion.

Jesus' Father did 'show up' unexpectedly when John immersed Him and tore open the heavens. Instead of at a temple, "church", or synagogue service, our Father set this ceremony in the wilderness, where John (the immerser) declared that Jesus is "the Lamb of God, the One who would take away the sins of the world."¹⁴⁹ He conspicuously did not choose the temple/synagogue systems, which Jesus later destroyed by crucifixion and rebuilt in resurrection¹⁵⁰

Upon His coronation, human logic would usher Jesus into Jerusalem and place Him on the throne. The Spirit immediately drove Him into a face-to-face war with Satan instead, who was armed with temptation, his most powerful anti-human weapon. With it, he convinces people to believe in him rather than God. Just ask Eve. Jesus came armed with the authority of God Himself—He had been anointed to wield it in His Father's name. Jesus knew God's *logos* because He was God's *logos*.

Jesus defeated Satan's barrage of temptations and emerged from the wilderness to deliver 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, and God's army is at the gates, the same invitation that He offers us to join today.

¹⁴⁸ John 1:1-3

¹⁴⁹ John 1:29

¹⁵⁰ John 2:19-21

Grand Theft Jesus

By defeating Satan face-to-face, Jesus unveils God’s power in a man for the first time. The mystery of the ages had just been revealed in Jesus: God’s hope of glory is now vested in mankind.¹⁵¹

The idea is incredible. 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 went to battle on its behalf in the wilderness; completely change what you’re thinking right now, 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 the actual message that Jesus delivered—the “gospel”—that is none other than “God’s Kingdom has come,” we hear Him and read the rest of scripture through His lens rather than the one that religion uses. Starting with Jesus’ words, we can understand that God’s Kingdom is the point, a very different message than getting saved if we sincerely repent of our sins. One is Life in Jesus—the Original; the other is life in religion—a forgery—appeasing the Christian God with repentance to appease Him in exchange for favor in this life and the next.

Through the lens of God’s Kingdom, it makes sense that Jesus teaches us to pray, “Your Kingdom come,¹⁵² as opposed to, “True repentance come.” “Forgive as we have been forgiven” rather than “forgive us according to our repentance.” This is why Jesus’ analogies (“parables”) start with, “the Kingdom is like...”¹⁵³

Jesus preached the Kingdom all around Galilee,¹⁵⁴ attempted to teach Nicodemus about seeing the Kingdom,¹⁵⁵ and Paul preached, taught, persuaded, and testified to the

¹⁵¹ Col 1:27

¹⁵² Matt 6:10

¹⁵³ Matt 13 – several examples

¹⁵⁴ Luke 4:42-43

¹⁵⁵ John 3:3

Grand Theft Jesus

Kingdom.¹⁵⁶ Jesus instructed the 12¹⁵⁷ and the 72 to preach the Kingdom and proclaimed, “The Kingdom of God has come upon you”¹⁵⁸ when the religious condemned Him. Jesus revealed that He would give the “keys to the Kingdom” to His ekklesia, not the “keys to genuine repentance.” 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. Jesus came to usher in the Kingdom of God and rescue sin’s captives as He went.

Therefore, Jesus said, “Publicans and harlots enter the Kingdom before you¹⁵⁹ (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.”¹⁶⁰

This is why Jesus said to “seek the Kingdom first”¹⁶¹ rather than do penance for sin.

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.¹⁶² From His very first message until He ascended to the Father’s side, Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God. He perfectly launched God’s invasion, and He Lives in those who have believed in Him to accomplish eternal life with Him in that Kingdom.

¹⁵⁶ Acts 19, 20, 28

¹⁵⁷ Matt 10:5-7

¹⁵⁸ Matt 12:28

¹⁵⁹ Matt 21:31

¹⁶⁰ Matt 23:13

¹⁶¹ Matt 6:33

¹⁶² Acts 1:3

Grand Theft Jesus

If we are to believe that “the gospel”, God’s message that His Kingdom is here, is about an opportunity to do penance to secure salvation, we are sentenced to embrace Jerome’s substitution of *paenitemini* as a valid translation of *metanoeo* 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 about Him.

Jesus, the original, leads God’s Kingdom against the gates of Hell that are fiercely guarded by the one enemy that Jesus confronted without hesitation: religion.

But Didn’t Jesus Come to Call Sinners to Repentance?¹⁶³

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 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

¹⁶³ Luke 7:27-32

Grand Theft Jesus

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!

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

Grand Theft Jesus

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.

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...*

Grand Theft Jesus

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?

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.¹⁶⁴ 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 religion's forgery.

¹⁶⁴ Matt 23

Grand Theft Jesus

The Original Continues

Even after defeating Satan (or rising from the dead for that matter), Jesus doesn't ascend to a human throne or appeal to the religious system—because a radical new Life is here outside of human institutions. 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 four follow Jesus as He expels demons and heals people. He sets captives free before He even mentions religion's handcuffs: sin.

In Mark's scripture, Jesus mentions sin for the first time in 'chapter 2' while leading his first *ekklesia* and healing a paralytic.¹⁶⁵ In stark contrast to the future Roman religion, there is no price required before Jesus declares the man's sins forgiven. He never demands repentance from sin from anybody before He helps them. 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 Jesus, the Original, who looks something like this:

1. God sneaks a secret weapon behind enemy lines in the ultimate Trojan Horse, a baby in a virgin.
2. God anoints this boy as His king when He becomes a man, heir to His Kingdom. He directs Jesus into battle with Satan, disarming him by God's anointed authority, which is vested in a man for the first time.
3. God empowers Him to lead the invasion, to teach other men how to do it, and to delegate that power and authority to them, spreading the Kingdom everywhere He goes.

¹⁶⁵ Mark 2:5

Grand Theft Jesus

4. Jesus gives up His own Life in brutal fashion so that all of mankind can receive His Life by virtue of believing in Him, just like His very 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 before anybody even said they were sorry.

Religion changes this unbelievable story into a religious burden about penance for sin, attending “church”, and blindly accepting “church’s” self-translated version of scripture without question. The Original continues to this day to unmask the forger.

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Chapter 11—Jesus’ Original: A Spiritual Potluck

Religion may imitate Life in Jesus, but nothing approaches the agony we experience when we realize that we lose Jesus when we lose His ekklesia to “church.” Like Mary weeping before Jesus’ empty tomb, we cannot escape the dismay: 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.

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

Grand Theft Jesus

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.

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.

Grand Theft Jesus

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.

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...

Grand Theft Jesus

- 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! God help us when we get caught up in something else.

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 12—Fellowship Hall Or Fellowship With Him

Jesus said *His* sheep hear His voice¹⁶⁶ *because* they belong to Him.¹⁶⁷ When they gather in His name, He Lives in and through them.¹⁶⁸ 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.¹⁶⁹

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; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.*¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ John 10:3

¹⁶⁷ John 10:14-15

¹⁶⁸ John 10:4, Matt 18:20

¹⁶⁹ Acts 17:25

¹⁷⁰ 1 John 1:1-3

Grand Theft Jesus

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.¹⁷¹

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.¹⁷²

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 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.

¹⁷¹ Rev 3:20

¹⁷² John 14:23

Grand Theft Jesus

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.¹⁷³

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 point of Jesus' *ekklesia*—and it prepares us to tear down the gates of hell.¹⁷⁴ 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

¹⁷³ Rev 19:6-9

¹⁷⁴ Matt 16:18

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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 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.¹⁷⁵ Jesus is present when He calls us together—two or more—in His name.¹⁷⁶ The purpose is to interact with one another in His name, building each other up through the gifts He has given.¹⁷⁷ If He has not called us together, if He isn’t

¹⁷⁵ 1 Cor 14:26

¹⁷⁶ Matt 18:20

¹⁷⁷ 1 Cor 12:7

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speaking to us and through us when we are, then it's somebody else's *ekklesia*.¹⁷⁸ 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.*¹⁷⁹

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 the family?” and afterward 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 rarely 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:

Plundered of what? *Fellowship in Jesus*.

¹⁷⁸ Matt 7:22-23

¹⁷⁹ Eldredge, John. Beautiful Outlaw: Experiencing the Playful, Disruptive, Extravagant Personality of Jesus (p. 9). Hachette Nashville. Kindle Edition

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Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”¹⁸⁰ John 10 refers to hearing Jesus’ voice as the way that Life is for His sheep. Jesus tells Peter that he had just spoken a revelation directly from His Father.¹⁸¹ The entire Jerusalem Council agreed with the Holy Spirit.¹⁸² Paul definitely had a conversation with Jesus.¹⁸³ When Jesus said that He would be with His followers always, how literal is that?¹⁸⁴ When we lose *ekklesia*, we lose Jesus. When we lose Jesus, we lose Life in Him; we lose everything.

CONFIDENTIAL

¹⁸⁰ John 10:27

¹⁸¹ Matt 16:17

¹⁸² Acts 15:1-35

¹⁸³ Acts 9:1-19

¹⁸⁴ Matt 28:20

Grand Theft Jesus
PART V
THE
TESTIMONY

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 13—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 to do because trusting in Him alone is the only way.¹⁸⁵ Jesus did not say to know Him ‘through anything’, not scripture, not “church”, but by trusting in Him only. That is Who He is, the one and only Person that can be trusted.

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.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ John 5:40

¹⁸⁶ Mark 7:13

Grand Theft Jesus

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 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.

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, just as 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. ¹⁸⁷

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

¹⁸⁷ Col 1:27

Grand Theft Jesus

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 it 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. 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*.

But “church” isn't just a mistranslation of *ekklesia* that means and operates identically. “Church is rooted in Roman government/religion. Scripture as we have it today and tradition born from religion are the foundation for what we have inherited in Christianity and its “church.” Its translation can't be trusted because it's founded on

Grand Theft Jesus

the Edicts of Milan and Thessalonica, King James' instructions to translators, 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. Neither Peter nor Paul 'lorded' themselves in that meeting or later in their letters.

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, presented weekly for that purpose. Jesus is a Life, not a philosophy.

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

Grand Theft Jesus

that communicated their decision didn't refer 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 Bibles. I'd been taught that this happens when there's no adequate word in the English language, so a new word must be used. 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 explaining them 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." Doing so shores up the institution. Today, we would call that a conflict of interest.

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 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.

Grand Theft Jesus

PART VI

THE CHOICE

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Chapter 14—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.¹⁸⁸

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,¹⁸⁹ 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 relationship

¹⁸⁸188 Rev 18:4

¹⁸⁹1 Cor 10:4-5

Grand Theft Jesus

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.¹⁹⁰ *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.¹⁹¹ Jesus demonstrated His *ekklesia* many times in scripture, but said the term just once, with joy, as Peter declared faith in Him.¹⁹² *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

¹⁹⁰ Mark 3:14

¹⁹¹ Rev 18:2-8

¹⁹² 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.¹⁹³

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 Barton¹⁹⁴

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.

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

¹⁹³ John 3:8

¹⁹⁴ 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

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 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.

Grand Theft Jesus

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.

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.

If 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.

Grand Theft Jesus

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 that we have today, demands a very clear response: “Come out of her, My people.”¹⁹⁵

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 outside of Life in Him—just Him.

¹⁹⁵ Rev 18:4

Grand Theft Jesus
PART VII
APPENDICES

CONFIDENTIAL

Grand Theft Jesus

Appendix XXX – Possible Ideas for possible future inclusion

If “church” were eliminated, what would be missing

While I was discovering that “church” was both a concept and an organization entirely separate from Jesus’ words and actions, I also found it difficult to internalize that nothing based on Jesus is missing once “church” is eliminated. “Church” is an invalid term, a forgery of Life in Jesus, not a potential way of living Life in Him. By definition, there is no way to do “church” better (reform it), and no other word to label it. In fact, renaming “church” to “*ekklesia*,” or even “assembly,” can’t work because it would either just be a label change, or, by applying *ekklesia*’s principles, every aspect of “church” as we know it would crumble and disappear.

Personal view on the foundations of a forgery.

I love a great “who-done-it” story. The most intriguing crime stories aren’t about stealing ultra-secure fortunes through brute force. We are captured by clever sleight of hand, misdirection, intrigue, and forgeries.

Sometimes the tale is so intricate and ingenious that nobody sees it coming. Forgeries sometimes hang in place of the original for centuries, where everyone assumes they are authentic. Sometimes a diversion steals the guards’ attention for just a second. Sometimes the forgery hangs undisturbed for so long that it never occurs to anybody that they are not looking at the original. Everybody treats these forgeries as originals—sincerely believing they have a real treasure—but they wouldn’t recognize the original if they saw it. If anyone questions the substitute, they risk more than the thieves.

Based on what I have discovered, I now see religion as a forgery.

Grand Theft Jesus

Jesus' name is everywhere: liturgy, songs, and Christmas pageants. It's in culture's curse words, for heaven's sake. Jesus Himself—who walked around Galilee with His friends—isn't here anymore in that same sense—and we know in our souls that we do not have the same or even a better Life that Mary, Paul, or the twelve experienced. The feeling seems important—but like the elusive word on the tip of our tongues or glimpse out of the corner of our eyes that disappears when we turn our heads—I find it hard to put my finger on it. But we know that if we find the word or turn our heads at the right moment, Life will never be the same again.

A religious forgery robs me of the glory of that word I have been grasping for, that glory just beyond the corner of my eyes:

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.¹⁹⁶

This is not just a choice about finding the “right church family” that fulfills our needs as we define them; it is a choice between Life in Jesus and our religious preferences.

¹⁹⁶ Beautiful Outlaw, John Eldredge Pg 12

Grand Theft Jesus

The religious forgery I now see is centuries older than a millennium. Scripture records Jesus boldly confronting the Jewish religion for the lies that it had perpetrated on His father's people. The forgery of Life in Jesus is a similar religion that first hung in the halls of Roman pagan, imperial, and religious culture—a culture that existed centuries before Jesus was born. Jesus, Judaism, and the Roman religious culture smashed together with aftershocks that we feel deeply today.

When Jesus invaded our world, He confronted Judaism until it colluded with Rome to execute Him. From the time of Jesus' crucifixion onward, Rome persecuted believers for several centuries. At one point, Roman imperial persecution was so brutal that Constantine's easing in 313 AD felt like God's deliverance.

Few recognized, in that moment of easing, that Rome was not embracing Life in Jesus, the son of the living God; Rome was absorbing the movement of Life in Jesus into its government-integrated religious empire. In Rome, religion was enforced, like all other state departments, by the empire's military. Faith in Jesus was impersonated by an ancient religious-government institution, hung on religion's walls, practiced in things we now call "churches", and ruled by Emperors, kings, and even Papal armies. Modified scripture became the provenance of forgery through translation and usage.

The Roman religious system used terminology similar to Jesus's, modified scripture to conform to imperial rule, and applied definitions from the vantage point of the old Roman institution rather than from the radical new Life in Jesus. The new religion invoked Jesus' name, as scripture foretold, but its authority came from the

Grand Theft Jesus

empire, impersonating Him for the explicit purpose of state ‘welfare and security’¹⁹⁷ as opposed to actively trusting in Him alone for Life.¹⁹⁸

Whether we were born into religion, like I was, or entered it later, we have inherited a fully formed system straight from the Roman model—complete with lingo, roles, and rituals we call traditions. We receive Jesus through this lens. When I finally decided to ignore everything that religion teaches about itself and start from scratch with the straightforward scriptural accounts, I came to a different conclusion.

Jesus explicitly refuted that Life from above was a thing to be systematized,¹⁹⁹ but until now, I had never suspected there was an original outside of our religious forgery, which had already been hanging on “church” walls for many centuries before we joined.

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—they originate from different places.

To uncover a forgery, we must compare it with the original to determine authenticity. The comparison process is simple, but it’s not easy, especially when we’re invested. Patient thought, and an honest conversation with our Father is required, and I became much more dependent on His voice than I have been in the past. Even more challenging has been the willingness to hold long-standing assumptions loosely while challenging their basis. I also have had to resist the urge to defend the familiar before listening to Jesus’ own opinion.

¹⁹⁷ <https://sourcebooks.web.fordham.edu/source/edict-milan.asp>, “Edict of Milan”

¹⁹⁸ Mark 13:5-6

¹⁹⁹ John 3:3-8

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I strive in the chapters that follow to constantly return to Jesus' words and actions as 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 Jesus at all.

Appendix XX1—Regions Historically Operating as Officially Catholic States

(With Approximate Dates of Formal Catholic Affiliation)

- A. European Kingdoms and States
 - a. France
 - i. c. 496 (Clovis' baptism) – 1789 (French Revolution)
Restored under various regimes until 1905 (formal separation law)
 - b. Spain
 - i. 589 (Visigothic conversion) – 1978 (new constitution removed state religion)
 - c. Portugal
 - i. 12th century – 1910 (Republic; monarchy ended)
 - d. Austria
 - i. c. 8th century – 1918 (end of Habsburg monarchy)
 - e. Hungary
 - i. 1000 (Coronation of Stephen I) – 1946 (monarchy abolished)
 - f. Poland

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

g. Lithuania

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

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h. Ireland

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

Post-independence constitutional preference 1937–1972.

i. Italy

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

j. Malta

- i. 1530 (Knights Hospitaller) – present (constitutionally Catholic)

k. Monaco

- i. 1297 – present (Catholic state religion)

l. Andorra

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

m. Belgium

- i. 1830 – 20th century (constitutionally Catholic monarchy)

n. Luxembourg

- i. 1815 – 20th century (Catholic constitutional monarchy)

o. Croatia

- i. 925 (King Tomislav) – 1918 (end of the kingdom)

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- p. Slovakia
 - i. Within the Hungarian Crown (1000–1918), a Catholic state, 1939–1945
- q. Czech Republic (Kingdom of Bohemia)
 - i. 10th century – 1620 (Battle of White Mountain; enforced Catholic restoration)
- B. British Isles (Pre-Reformation Catholic Monarchies)
 - a. England
 - i. c. 597 – 1534; restored 1553–1558
 - b. Scotland
 - i. 6th century – 1560
 - c. Wales
 - i. As part of England during the same period
- C. Papal Territorial Rule
 - a. Vatican City
 - i. 1929 – present
 - b. Papal States (central Italy)
 - i. 754 (Donation of Pepin) – 1870
- D. Spanish Colonial Catholic States (Legally Established)
 - a. Mexico
 - i. 1521 – 1857 (liberal reforms)
 - b. Guatemala
 - i. 1524 – 1871
 - c. Honduras
 - i. 1520s – 19th century secular reforms
 - d. El Salvador

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- i. 1520s – 19th century secular reforms
- e. Nicaragua
 - i. 1520s – 1893 reforms
- f. Costa Rica
 - i. 1520s – present (official state religion)
- g. Panama
 - i. 1519 – early 20th century secularization
- h. Colombia
 - i. 1538 – 1991 (constitutional reform)
- i. Venezuela
 - i. 1522 – 1864
- j. Ecuador
 - i. 1534 – 1906 (separation)
- k. Peru
 - i. 1532 – 1979 (formal secular constitution)
- l. Bolivia
 - i. 1538 – 2009 (constitution ended official religion)
- m. Paraguay
 - i. 1537 – 1992 (new constitution)
- n. Chile
 - i. 1541 – 1925 (separation)
- o. Argentina
 - i. 1580 – present (state support; no longer official religion)
- p. Uruguay
 - i. 1680 – 1917 (strong secular reform)
- E. Portuguese Colonial Catholic States

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- a. Brazil
 - i. 1500 – 1891 (Republic Constitution)
- b. Angola
 - i. 1575 – 1975 (independence)
- c. Mozambique
 - i. 16th century – 1975
- d. East Timor
 - i. 16th century – 1975 (Portuguese rule)
- F. Spanish Asia
 - a. Philippines
 - i. 1565 – 1898 (Spanish rule; Catholic state religion)
- G. African Catholic Kingdom
 - a. Kingdom of Kongo
 - i. 1491 (royal conversion) – 17th-century decline

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aAppendix XX2—King James Translation Instructions²⁰⁰

- 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.

²⁰⁰ 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.

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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.

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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.

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Appendix XX4—The Edict of Thessalonica²⁰¹

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

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 AUGUSTUS

²⁰¹ Codex Theodosianus XVI.1.2

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Appendix XX5—First Version of Nicene Creed²⁰²

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.

²⁰² Philip Schaff, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 14 (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1900), 3–5.

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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,”

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.

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Appendix XX6—Second Version of Nicene Creed (aka: Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed)

Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)²⁰³

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,

²⁰³ Philip Schaff, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 14 (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1900), 3–4.

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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,
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.

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Appendix XX7—Institutional Words Altered in KJV Translation

Ecclesiastical / Clerical Terminology: Tyndale vs KJV

Tyndale Translation	KJV Translation	KJV Category/Class
congregation	church	Institutional/religious
overseer	bishop	Clerical hierarchy
shepherd	pastor (Eph 4:11)	clergy office
gathering of elders	presbytery	clerical governing body
servant	minister	clerical function
messenger	angel	ecclesiastical authority
shepherd the flock	feed the flock	pastoral duty

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Appendix XX8—Timeline from Emperor Constantine to King James

306–337 — Constantine the Great²⁰⁴

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:

²⁰⁴ Life of Constantine, by Eusebius of Caesarea

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- **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.”

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:²⁰⁵

- Greek μετανοεῖτε (metanoete) → Latin paenitemini / paenitentiam agite
 - Greek ἐκκλησία (ekklesia) → Latin ecclesia
-

²⁰⁵ Biblia Sacra Vulgata, This became the standard Bible of Western Christianity for over 1,000 years.

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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.²⁰⁶

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

²⁰⁶ Adam Nicolson, *God’s Secretaries*

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- Maintained ecclesiastical terminology, authorizing Bancroft's rules.

Example:

Greek	Earlier translation	KJV
ekklesia	congregation (Tyndale)	church
poimén	shepherd	pastor (Eph 4:11)

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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

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Appendix XX9—Authors Who Have Identified Church Failing

Dallas Willard

“The greatest issue facing the world today... is whether those who are identified as ‘Christians’ will become disciples—students, apprentices, practitioners of Jesus Christ—or remain just ‘church members.’”²⁰⁷

“The greatest issue facing the world today... is whether those who are identified as ‘Christians’ will become disciples...”²⁰⁸

“Non-discipleship is the elephant in the church.”²⁰⁹

J. P. Moreland

“The church has not made disciples but consumers.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Commonly attributed; adapted from themes in *The Great Omission* (2006), esp. 1–5.

²⁰⁸ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (2006), 1.

²⁰⁹ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (2006), xiii.

²¹⁰ J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind* (1997), 4–5.

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“Many Christians are not living a life that is different from the surrounding culture.”²¹¹

Søren Kierkegaard

“Christendom... has done away with Christianity.”²¹²

A. W. Tozer

“We are not making disciples... we are making converts.”²¹³

“The church has accepted the world’s values and methods... and is producing a generation of Christians who are conformed to the world.”²¹⁴

²¹¹ J. P. Moreland, Kingdom Triangle (2007), 17–20.

²¹² Reference: Søren Kierkegaard, Attack Upon Christendom (1855).

²¹³ Reference: A. W. Tozer, The Root of the Righteous (1955).

²¹⁴ A. W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God (1948); The Root of the Righteous (1955).

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Francis Chan

*“We’ve created a culture where people show up, sit, and listen...
but that’s not what Jesus asked us to do.”²¹⁵*

Neil Cole

*“We have made the church into a place where people attend rather
than a people who follow Jesus.”²¹⁶*

*“We are not called to make members of the church, but disciples of
Jesus.”²¹⁷*

Alan Hirsch

*“The church has become a vendor of religious goods and
services.”²¹⁸*

²¹⁵ Francis Chan, Letters to the Church (2018).

²¹⁶ Reference: Neil Cole, Organic Church (2005).

²¹⁷ Neil Cole, Organic Church (2005).

²¹⁸ Alan Hirsch, The Forgotten Ways (2006).

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David Platt

“We have taken the radical commands of Jesus and reduced them to a comfortable cultural Christianity.”²¹⁹

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²¹⁹ David Platt, *Radical* (2010).

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Appendix X10 Conflicts Under “Church” Authorization²²⁰

<u>Conflict / Conquest</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Connection</u>	<u>Estimated Deaths</u>
Saxon Wars ²²¹	772–804	Forced Conversion	Tens of thousands
Crusades: Holy Land ²²²	1095–1291	Papally authorized	1–9 million
Northern/Baltic Crusade ²²³	1147–15th c.	Conversion wars	Hundreds of thousands
Albigensian Crusade ²²⁴	1209–1229	Crusade Cathars	200,000–1,000,000
Fourth Crusade ²²⁵	1202–1204	Constantinople	50,000–100,000
Reconquista ²²⁶	8th c.–1492	Reconquest of Iberia	Up to millions
Hussite Wars ²²⁷	1419–1434	Against reformers	Hundred thousands
Spanish Conquest ²²⁸	1492–1600s	Imperial expansion	Millions
Fall of Tenochtitlan ²²⁹	1519–1521	Spanish conquest	100,000–240,000
French Religious Wars ²³⁰	1562–1598	Catholic - Protestant	2–4 million
Thirty Years' War ²³¹	1618–1648	Catholic-Protestant	4.5–8 million
English Civil Wars ²³²	1639–1651	Religious political	~200,000

²²⁰ Wars waged “in the name of Christ”: Papal Armies or Governments using “Church” Authority

²²¹ General medieval chronicles; estimates vary.

²²² Thomas Asbridge; A. Holt, *The Crusades*.

²²³ Britannica, 'Northern Crusades'.

²²⁴ Britannica, 'Albigensian Crusade'.

²²⁵ Britannica, 'Fourth Crusade'.

²²⁶ Britannica, 'Reconquista'.

²²⁷ 7. Wikipedia / general historical syntheses on Hussite Wars.

²²⁸ Demographic studies of Indigenous population collapse - Americas (e.g., DHR VT sources).

²²⁹ Fall of Tenochtitlan historical estimates.

²³⁰ French Wars of Religion estimates (various historians).

²³¹ Britannica, 'Thirty Years' War'.

²³² Britannica, 'English Civil Wars'.

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Appendix x11—Bancroft Changes to KJV Translations

Sunday, November 20, 2022— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever* Lesson 186 The AV 1611: Bancroft's 14 Changes & The Question of Authorization

Introduction

- The last time we met, in [Lesson 185](#), we considered the following points:
 - Bancroft, Bilson, Smith & The Finishing Touches
 - Publisher: Robert Barker, The King's Printer
- In this Lesson, I would like to cover the following points regarding the publication of the King James Bible.
 - Bancroft's 14 Changes
 - The Question of Authorization

Bancroft's 14 Changes

- One of topics discussed in Lesson 185 was the long-standing rumor regarding Archbishop Richard Bancroft having altered fourteen readings before the text went to print. My friend and fellow research partner Christopher Yetzer commented on last week's video on YouTube and directed me to look at *King James His Bible And Its Translators* by Laurence M. Vance. Vance references a document held by Lambeth Palace Library

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that extends the charge of textual tampering on the part of high church Bishops beyond Bancroft.

- “A manuscript about the translators in the Lambeth Palace Library, apparently written about 1650, record that Richard Brett (1567-1637), a translator on the Oxford Old Testament company, reported that “the Bps. altered very many places that the translators had agreed upon: He had a note of the places. Bishop Bancroft, the “chief overseer,” is said to have made fourteen changes. He died on November 2, 1610, never seeing the translation published that he had overseen.” (Vance, 52)
- Dr. B.F. Westcott reproduces this Lambeth Palace MS in Appendix XII (see pages 343-350) of his book *A General View of the History of the English Bible*. The name of the MS is *Gibson Papers, Vol. 5, No. 41*. Moreover, Charles C. Butterworth mentions this in his 1941 book *The Literary Lineage of the King James Bible, 1340-1611*:
 - “It remains to add that a series of memoranda concerning the translators, set down about 1640, in speaking of Richard Brett, who worked with the first Oxford companies, contains this comment: “Dr. Bret reported that the Bps. [Bishops] altered very many places that the translators had agreed upon: He had a note of the places. According to another report, Archbishop Bancroft himself insisted upon certain changes being made in a few places.” (Butterworth, 213)
- Thanks to the fine work of Timothy Berg, I have been able to view an image of the MS in the Lambeth Palace library that mentions Dr. Brett and his

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report regarding the bishops altering “many places”. Due to copyright limitations, I am not at liberty to share the image publicly at this time. Internal evidence suggests that the MS was written in about 1651, as it mentions the late wife of translator John Harding, who died in 1650. Friend and fellow researcher Christopher Yetzer has also pointed out that this document testifies to the fact that, as early as 1650, several people were already trying to gather histories on the translators.

- In a sermon dated [April 3, 1648](#), Dr. Thomas Hill, Master of Trinity College in Cambridge delivered a sermon in which he mentions fourteen changes to the translation that had been made by “prelates” of the “Church of England.”
 - “I have it from certain hands, such as lived in those times, that when the Bible had been Translated by the Translators appointed, the New Testament was looked over by some of the great Prelates, (men I could name some of their persons) to bring it to speak Prelatical Language, and they did alter (as I am informed by the means of one that was a great observer in those times, and lived them) fourteen places in the New Testament, to make them speak the Language of the Church of England, that was so cryed up: and I'll tell you some of them.” (Hill)
- Hill then goes on to identify half a dozen or so of the changes made by Anglican Bishops to the text after the translation work had been completed.
 - “First,* In the first of the Acts, speaking of Judas, Let another man take his Bishoprick; it is forc'd, it signifies Charge or Inspection: but that you may believe that the Bishops are the Apostles Successors, let another man take his Bishoprick.
 - Again, In the second of the Acts, it is Not suffer my Soul to lie in Hell; this is clear,

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- Former Translations have it, not suffer my Soul to lie in the Grave; But it was learned Bilsons Opinion, and thrust into the Thirty nine Articles, that Christ did Locally descend into hell; and to make that Translation agree with the Articles, they must change Grave into Hell.
- Also the Fourteenth of the Acts,*They ordained them Elders, they loved to cry up
- Consecration of Churches, and Dedication, and such kinde of things, and Episcopal Ordination too (for these all advanced the power of the Priests and the Bishops, which brought in Transubstantiation amongst Papists) and therefore in the Geneva Translation,* that was render'd, chosen by suffrages, by lifting up of hands, the word Primarily imports that, it may be in some of the Fathers it includes both, they will tell you, because afterwards having chosen Elders by Suffrages or Voyces, they did Ordain them.
- Next, I come to the first of the Corinthians, 12.28. An abominable violence offered to the Original, God hath set in the Church, Apostles, Teachers, Helps, Governments, and you shall finde here a great imposture, it may be now altered, appearing so gross, but I have seen it, and read it in some Translations, Helps in Government;* which is a most horrible prodigious violence to the Greek words, for they are both the Accusative case, Helps; there are Elders, Government, there are Deacons; now to obscure these, you must put it, helps in Government.

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- I had it related since the delivery of this plain Sermon, by one who most confidently affirmed it,* That the learned man to whom it belonged to Translate the first Book of Samuel, having rendered that which Samuel from God spake concerning Saul, 1 Sam. 8.
- 11. This shall be the maner of the King that shall reign over you, He will take your sons, &c. He was sent for to Lambeth, and there perswaded to make the words Will take your sons, &c. Shall take; which he conscienciously refused, well knowing it was not spoken by Samuel to Saul, by way of direction for duty what he should do, but Prophetically and Eventually what he would do.” (Hill)
- Hill’s sermon also contains discussion of the word “Easter” in the late translation. These comments are nebulous, and no specific scripture reference is cited. While Hill’s list is helpful for identifying a handful of readings that were influenced by Anglican Bishops, he does not name names with the exception of Bilson. According to Brother Berg, it is in a 1671 biography of Henry Jessy that the charges of textual tampering are ascribed to Bancroft. Finding the notes of Dr. Brett, one of the translators, would prove to be a massive find and go a long way toward clearing up the confusion.
- Suffice it to say that from very early in its printed history, while many of the translators were still alive, complaints had arisen among the translators themselves that Bishops of the Anglican Church, up to and including Archbishop Richard Bancroft had altered the text without the consent of the other translators. For the time being, this must remain one of the unsolved mysteries related to the publication of the King James Bible.

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