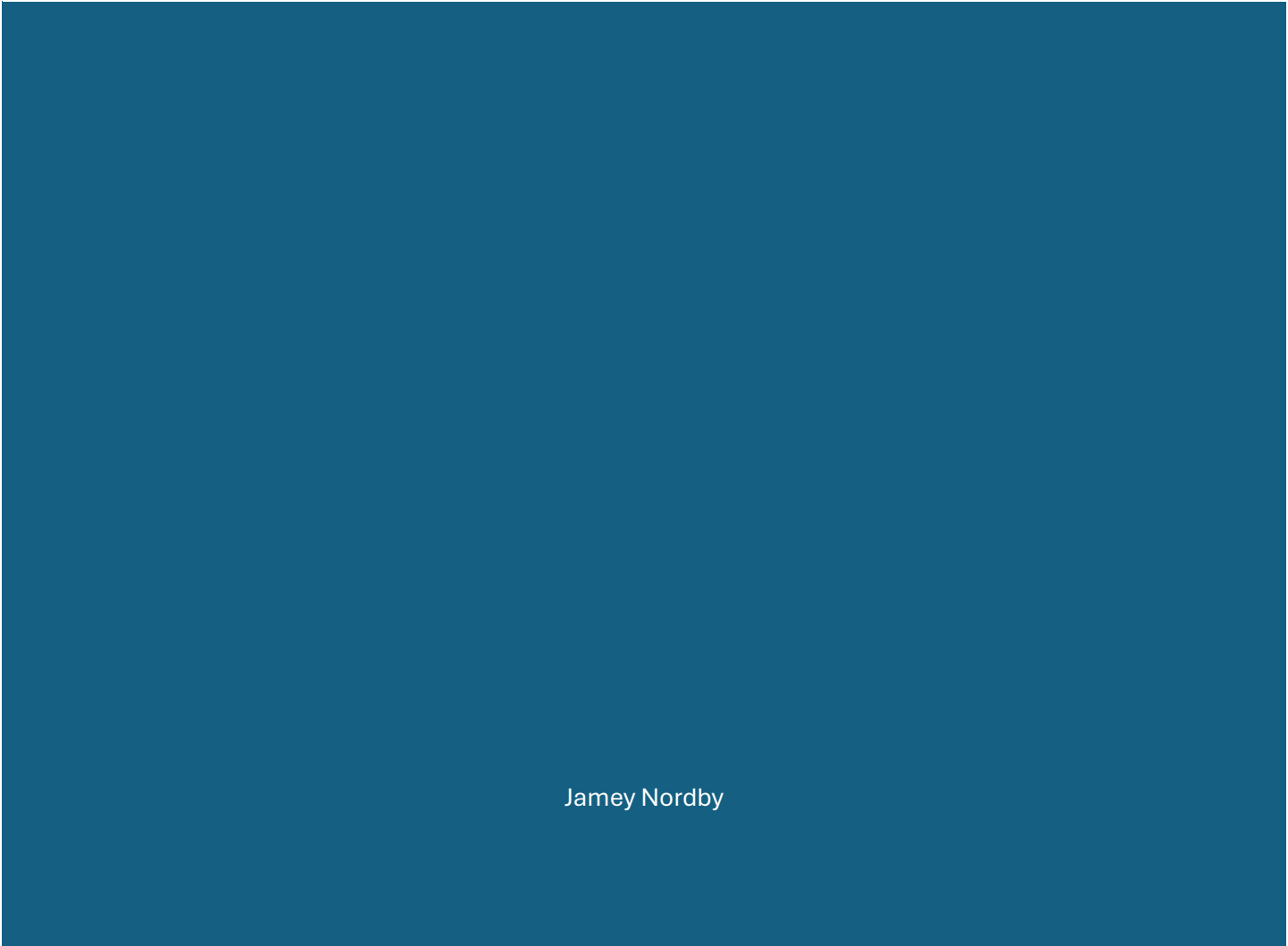




GRAND THEFT JESUS



Jamey Nordby

Grand Theft Jesus

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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’d hunted the mystical “Matrix” relentlessly, and Neo now sits face-to-face with legendary Morpheus, who has the answer. Longing for this moment—risking his job, sleepless nights, and nerve-racking police evasion—Neo’s quest for truth consumes him.

In a secret parlor with storms raging outside, Morpheus offers a quest: take the blue pill from his outstretched hand, wake up in his bed, and remember nothing of the night—or take the red pill to open 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 ignites a life that will never be the same.

Morpheus puts words to Neo’s condition: a festering splinter haunting his mind, but Nothing prepares Neo for a reality stripped of everything he’d ever believed.

I’ve searched for “Morpheus” my whole life. Before I even had the words, I searched for the depths of genuine Truth and Life. Digging deep, one clue at a time, bits and pieces now fit together, and long-trusted pieces have been trashed. Jesus Lives in a brand-new

¹ “The Matrix”, Warner Bros., 1999

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revelation: a real, Live Person infinitely beyond religion's feeble framework, where theology redefines, systematizes, and controls.

Discarding religion, a formerly trusted pillar of my life, is both liberating and terrifying; deprogramming from it challenges my very soul. Consider a lifelong medical treatment that not only doesn't work but also cements disease in our bodies, prevents future cures, and we have convinced our friends and family to try it, too. Then we can begin to realize we never suffered from the problem in the first place, but were deceived by professionals into taking medicine that infected us with the very disease it proclaimed to cure.

My quest often seems like a giant jigsaw puzzle—which I've been doing my whole life. My grandfather! He always kept the last piece in his pocket... and I never remembered until he did it again... and again. In grade school, I'd get bored with the same old puzzle, so I'd do it upside down for fun—solving puzzles is in my blood.

Deprogramming from religion resembles solving a 2,000-piece jigsaw puzzle, where pieces are blank on both sides and reveal Jesus' masterpiece only when correctly placed. Slowly and without a picture to follow, the religious forgery is exposed and crumbles.

Puzzle pieces fall into place as life happens, and my quest for Jesus—hidden by the "Matrix"—intensifies all the more. The splinter in *my* mind screams that something just isn't right with "church." In Neo's "The Matrix," he woke up to a devastating reality; now so have I. My religion—starting in the "church" nursery—isn't just a little off, needing a little reformation, revival, or a more relevant statement of faith. The reality of my religious condition jolted me as badly as Neo upon taking the red pill. We both awoke in a life dominated by imposters that we had trusted.

Learning true ideas that contradict traditional theology has satisfied me for quite a while, but just knowing them is no longer enough. We all have the same choice as Neo:

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take the blue pill, put this book down, and be satisfied with life as we know it, but this is a red pill book: keep reading to see how deep the rabbit hole goes.

Ah ha! You must be curious about the rabbit hole!

First, who is this person writing this book:

1. I love Jesus with my whole heart. He is magnificent, embodied Life and Truth.
2. I trust that scripture 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.
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.

Whatever you think, or however this hits you, my purpose is to point the reader to Jesus. Period. If reading hits you otherwise, take it to Him—that is the only point that matters. This book can be rough. I begin by exposing the impostor, often shocking myself in the process. If you need to balance the shock, skip to Chapter 10 and following to remind yourself of the original while facing the impostor. Then come back.

I’ve known something is ‘wrong’ with the religion I used to practice, but pragmatically, I’ve lived as if something were wrong with me. I’ve been accused (sometimes by myself) of being rebellious, of spending too little time in “the word”, of lacking accountability, of not having enough faith, and of having insufficient theological

² Col 1:27

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training for the questions I pose. Thank God Jesus rejoiced in ‘little children’ instead of the wise and learned.’³ I may not be disqualified after all.

Questioning religion is met with religious solutions:

- If I change my behavior, the questions don’t matter.
- Dismissed as formally uneducated who just doesn’t get it.
- I might not ‘be saved’ if such questions bother me.
- My problem with authority is at the root of my questions.
- and so on

Ironically, putting a stop to religious activity, its theological answers, and rejecting its authority to speak for Him draws me much closer to Jesus, which religion is designed to prevent. Also ironic: the splinter began serious festering decades ago after hearing a sermon passage intended to improve spiritual lives and resolve our woes by ‘spending more time in the word’:

*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

Flaunting my ‘problem with authority,’ I applied the passage to the sermon itself. Unless I assume this scripture means ‘time in the word’ in advance, Paul is praising the Bereans for checking Scripture to see whether Paul and Silas were telling the truth.⁵ If scripture’s purpose is to teach principles, this passage teaches us to question “pastors”

³ Matt 11:25

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.

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and their doctrines deeply. The sermon misrepresented the passage and contradicted Jesus.⁶ Now I look up every passage that a “pastor” quotes! I’m amazed by how often the conclusions are unrelated to the scripture they quote.

A Berean attitude satisfied me—for a while—but the gaps between sermon, book, and guided Bible study quotes and what Jesus actually said are epidemic. I no longer see a bridge over the chasm between original scripture and my former religion. I invite you to join me on my quest to know Jesus *from* Him, rather than *about* Him through religion. Uncovering my history of learning *about* Him reveals an illegitimate system that **uses** His name but cannot speak **in** His name, so it doesn’t know the difference.⁷

Many authors describe the ‘splinter’ in various ways. They agree that “church” does not predictably or even frequently produce disciples (students, apprentices) of Jesus: i.e., Willard, Tozer, Moreland, and Kierkegaard (see appendix 9). Instead, religion produces religious consumers, attenders, and good “church” members who might have discipleship systems. 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.’”⁸

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

⁶ John 5:37-40

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

⁸ Adapted from themes in Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (2006), on the distinction between disciples and mere professing Christians.

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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.⁹

I was formerly committed to doing “church” right, but now see “church” as a question of sanity. Now I understand that being a disciple of Jesus is being someone who learns from Him, taking His call to ‘learn from Him seriously.’¹⁰ Jesus’ students accept no one else as their teacher or instructor, because Jesus is the only teacher.¹¹ Teaching doctrine, theology, or “church” tradition and calling it discipleship violates scripture. As Jesus said, ‘My sheep hear my voice.’

“Church” malaise of the past 200 years is common knowledge, but the assault on Jesus and God’s Kingdom has been a recurring theme since New Testament times and every period in between.¹² “Church” has repeatedly demonstrated corruption, ineffectiveness, and secular behavior for centuries.¹³ Today, we call it the imperfect “church.” Rather than investigating the institution’s roots, we *assume* “church” is True and repeat the cycle, expecting different results, when we should know better after two millennia of constant scandal and failure. I no longer ask, “How do we do ‘church’ correctly?” but whether “church” is something that Jesus even said at all.

Questing down the red pill rabbit hole, I feel downright anger at being fed religion instead of Life in Jesus. I’ve been incredulous to uncover traditions of man masquerading as doctrine that supposedly honor Him. You may experience devastation, too—like discovering a close friend in the act of betraying you.

⁹ Edman, V. Raymond. They Found the Secret: Twenty Lives That Reveal a Touch of Eternity (Clarion Classic) (pp. 53-54). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

¹⁰ Matt 11:29

¹¹ Matt 23:8-10

¹² i.e., Wycliffe, Luther, and Calvin, for example

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

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Sitting obediently in pews for decades—confident that I was rich and needed nothing¹⁴—Jesus called me *out* of religion¹⁵ and into Life.¹⁶ My Berean quest has grown from religious curiosity into desperate hunger for Him, because religion had been cheating me out of my inheritance! Religious beliefs have fallen away, giving way to believing as a way of Life, and my mind is renewing¹⁷ as I accept that I’ve ‘held the wrong end of the stick’ for a very long time.¹⁸

Truth and religion collide into explosive wreckage, but undeniable and irresistible Life in Him rises from the ashes. Regardless of what I am 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. Yes, I have deconstructed—from religion’s impostor and its claim to Jesus’ Name—while enthusiastically embracing Jesus for who He says He is more than ever.

¹⁴ Rev 3:15-16

¹⁵ Rev 18:4

¹⁶ John 5:40

¹⁷ Rom 12:2

¹⁸ Oswald Chambers

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Introduction

Why did I choose a ‘secular’ movie quote to open this book? Because it portrays the reality of our world better than any sermon—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.¹⁹*

When it hit me, Truth crashed into religion like a freight train. The wreckage uncovers an unresolvable chasm between Jesus and “church”—and the religious system it operates—“church” **is** the worldly system pulled over our eyes, blinding us to the truth. Life in Jesus has nothing to do with Constantine’s religion, “Christianity,” or with “church” attendance. One is Life; the other is religion. One is Original; the other is forgery. This single idea unleashes earthquakes in my soul.

Ironically, the “church” itself unleashed my religious deconstruction.

A friend in a high-level “church” position made a bad choice and was exposed in a humiliating way. No question: he had ‘blown it.’ According to the “church’s” commitment

¹⁹ 2 Cor 4:2-5

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to scripture, its statements of faith, and its list of beliefs, the “pastor” and elders should have resolved to gently restore him, which he was more than willing to do.²⁰

That’s not what happened.

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

A few weeks later, the “pastor” preached about being more like Jesus, exercising the kind of compassion He showed the woman that “pastors” of the day ‘caught’ in the act of adultery. Meanwhile, the “pastor” filled the “church” vacancy left open by the termination. Jesus fiercely railed against this kind of religion.²¹ My festering splinter burst open—something is a lot more than imperfect in the “church.”

The Berean mindset kicked in, and I searched scripture with renewed fervency—even dabbling in Greek—while I looked for a “good church” and tentatively settled into a fondly remembered denomination. I still didn’t get it. While I contemplated “church” in general, the new “pastor” preached about the man lowered through the roof to see Jesus. Approaching the sermon’s conclusion, the “pastor” closed: “Who is going to pay for the roof?” The leader of a worldwide denomination turned Jesus’ glory into a “church” fundraiser.

²⁰ Gal 6:1

²¹ Matt 23

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These events, among many others, slowly opened my eyes to the forged hierarchy of one member of Christ's body "churching" it over another, religion-inspired guilt, hypocrisy of the "officers of the church," the forgery of "offices of the church," and institutional focus on money. I cannot imagine Jesus thinking, doing, or saying these kinds of things.

While searching scripture, I stumbled upon a completely unexpected fact. "Church" is fundamentally void of Jesus' Personal leadership because He never conceived the idea, modeled it, or even said the word once. This revelation set off a cascade of religious dominoes in my soul. If "church" is a forgery, then "offices of the church," "church" authority, "church" tradition, and "church" discipline collapse in a pile. Peter's reference to "twisting words" is talking about religion, each denomination with its own version. Some of the falling dominoes include the fact that neither Jesus nor scripture said words such as "pastor," "repent from sin," or "gospel;" these 'translations' come from the agendas of kings of the earth.²² "Church" has He

Stripping away human schemes that create words such as "church," "repent," "gospel," and "pastor" unveils Jesus entirely independent of religious traditions. Many more words have been abused by "church," but these four words are the paint and canvas for religion's forgery of Life in Jesus.

Religion invents endless human traditions—including "church," which Jesus emphatically condemns—because traditions of men nullify God's Word, His *logos*; embracing them destroys the essence of Jesus Himself.²³ "Church" traditions are paintings that illustrate its religion—a blockade to God's kingdom and to Life in Jesus.²⁴

²² 2 Peter 3:16

²³ Mark 7:8

²⁴ Matthew 23:13

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My soul aches for profound transformation in Jesus—Life in Him is my only hope. Sometimes, my desire burns so intensely that it overshadows even food and sleep. The festering splinter launched an all-out quest for firsthand knowledge of Jesus and His *ekklesia*, disposing of religion's narrative for Jesus' own words. You are reading the results.

What if Life in Jesus is entirely independent of religion and “church”? “Church” has never touched my desire for streams of living water.²⁵ I know Chambers' desperation—unsure of exactly what I want—but I know that my religion has frustrated and diverted me from finding it, rather than leading the way to Him.²⁶

If you crave Jesus so intensely that you hungrily embrace the chance to exchange your life for His—risking 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 do understand that religion holds Jesus at arm's length while constantly using His name to claim legitimacy. My goal is to share Jesus as I know Him and compel you into your own quest with Jesus.²⁷ If you're not interested, that's OK—it's not too late to take the blue pill.

First, I dismantle those beliefs that I ***thought*** were absolute, but are only religious traditions that lead away from Jesus. I realized that I cannot say I know Jesus and embrace as doctrine things He did not say. Second, I try to clarify the picture of the Original, founded on words He *did* say or that were inspired in scripture before kings of the earth altered it.

²⁵ John 7:38-39

²⁶ Matthew 23:13

²⁷ Luke 5:11

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Please forgive me in advance; I will slip into intense “teacher” mode from time to time, so grant me one favor and assume that I would be more conversational in person.

Word usage

Human tradition reflects religion’s forgery, and altered scripture is its provenance, so I treat altered words differently. I will discuss more later, but transliterated, mistranslated, or substituted words in this book are denoted in double quotes, such as “church”, “pastor”, “gospel”, and “repentance.” I italicize words in other languages, such as *ekklesia* and *poimén*, which religion has 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.

Scripture reads differently when we use the words Jesus used, in the way that He did.

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PART I

THE SPLINTER

CONFIDENTIAL

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Chapter 1—Mary Magdalene, “*Where Can He Be?*”²⁸

Standing at Jesus’ empty tomb, Mary wept uncontrollably, maybe wringing her hands in despair—drowning in hopelessness.

Being with Jesus has been Life itself, and after all she’d seen, there wasn’t any place else to go—anointing Him with burial spices was all that was left. Some things are just *too* much.

Now, He’s not even in His tomb, cheating Mary down to the depths of her heart. 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 that His Kingdom is invading, and she personally experienced God’s power when Jesus freed her from demons.²⁹ Whatever else we do or don’t know, Jesus wasn’t doctrine or tradition to Mary—He was life itself. He was her Lord, her deliverer, her companion, and her friend. And now He’d been executed while she watched. Where is Life now?

She’d watched Him as he was nailed to the cross and lifted up to hang until He died.³⁰ He had been severely beaten from head to toe—beyond recognition.³¹ Then it was over. What was Mary supposed to do with herself? They hurriedly placed him in a tomb, while she had to go home and try to sleep. I wonder what she did all night and all of the

²⁸ John 20:1-18

²⁹ Luke 8:2

³⁰ John 19:25-27

³¹ John 19, Isaiah 52:14

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next day. She ran back as soon as the Sabbath was over—only to stare in disbelief at an empty tomb.

Even after the others left the tomb, Mary stayed. She could not bring herself to leave. What would she do now? She *knew* where her old life led. *This just **can't** be happening.*

God's messengers told her that He wasn't there—He had been 'awakened.' She could see for herself that He was gone—but their second phrase must have felt beyond cruel—she'd seen him die. She'd seen the spear thrust into his side.

Still weeping, pacing, hand-wringing, and powerless 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.”³² And she collapsed at His feet.

She knew!

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

When I look at religion and realize that Jesus isn't there, either, I, too, wonder, “where have they taken Him?” Like Mary before He called her, will I hear Him call my name, or will I have already gone home or settled for “church”? Will I accept that religion is all there is, only to agonize that I am also looking into an empty tomb?

³² John 20:16

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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 Dürer self-portrait for the purpose of making a copy. The original was painted on a 26" by 19" piece of wood. Kuffner's "copy" began by cutting the wooden canvas in half lengthwise, like slicing bread into two thinner slices.

The back contained dates, conveyances, and stamps that proved the painting's authenticity—its provenance. Then Kuffner painted a copy onto the newly sliced back half, uniting a forgery with the provenance from an original.

Kuffner kept the original painting and returned the forgery to his friend with the original provenance. He was only caught because he sold the original, and its new owner put it on display in Munich, unaware that his forgery was also on display in Nuremberg at the time.³³ Oops.

I admire Kuffner's ingenuity on one level, but I feel like the duped owner of the original; my religion is the forgery. The Way, Truth, and Life in Jesus have been attacked since before the New Testament writers' ink had dried, and the attack continues today, with the original still found exclusively in the Life of Jesus Himself.³⁴

Kuffner painted his forgery in secrecy, but men forged religion in plain sight by ordinary people in positions of power. They just did what humans do; they used their power for their own purposes.

³³ 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.

³⁴ 2 Peter 3:16, Jer 23:36, Matt 22:29, Gal 1:6-7, 2 Cor 2:17, etc

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The Forged Painting

As I pursued my quest to investigate the roots of “church” to figure out what was bugging me, a massive forgery painted by ‘kings of the earth’ emerged, like a huge shipwreck being raised from the ocean floor.

Forging an old masterpiece, I discovered, is an intricate endeavor. For example, the paint that Vermeer used wasn’t the same as the paint used 300 years later. Old canvas can be distinguished from new in seconds; nails used to attach canvas to a frame are unique to their time, and ‘aging’ a new painting is very difficult.

A now-famous forger, Van Meegeren, discovered that infusing Vermeer-style paint with a newly developed plastic causes cracks that mimic aging when baked in an oven. He then painted the cracks with black ink to mimic the dust and dirt that accumulates in old paintings. Finally, Van Meegeren applied the altered paint to existing old paintings that had little value, thereby uniting his forgery to an appropriate canvas and nails for the forgery’s timeframe.

Constantine, the Roman Emperor from 306 to 337 AD, is heralded as the hero who brought Christianity to Rome. Technically, that is true. Perceiving the Christian movement as a religion, he treated it that way (in his words),³⁵ and he granted it (and all other religions) legal status. Naturally, he applied Roman religious, cultural, and imperial practices as well as Roman definitions for scriptural words. Constantine did indeed bring Christianity to Rome in the legal sense, but his new religion had nothing to do with Life in Jesus.^{36 37}

³⁵ See Appendix 3, the edict of Milan

³⁶ John 19:11

³⁷ Matthew 22:15-22

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Two of Constantine's official titles empowered him to legalize Christianity: Emperor and *Pontifex Maximus*—High Priest. Constantine wasn't trying to advance faith in Jesus; he was trying to stabilize his Empire by embracing its diverse religions.³⁸ After centuries of brutal persecution, Constantine probably thought that he was doing Christians a favor.

Other than mimicking its lingo, Roman Christianity has little to do with Jesus. Looking back at the foundations of 'Christianity' and its offspring, the "church," it looks like a massive conspiracy against Jesus. But I don't think that the forgers were trying to derail Jesus or His followers; I don't think that they considered Him at all in terms of the Son of God. Constantine didn't have anything against Jesus. 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. Nevertheless, Constantine's religion became the mother of today's Christianity and its "church."

The Roman religious paradigm applied to the new religion was about 1,000 years old before Christianity joined Rome's approved list. Constantine didn't abandon everything to follow Jesus; he absorbed a movement to serve under him, personally ruling the new religion alongside all Roman religions, including Sol Invictus, his personal preference. The priests who reported to him were called "bishops" [a transliteration of the Greek word for elder], and he built places of worship, as emperors did for all Roman gods.

Instead of gathering to build each other up in Christ who lived in them, followers of the Roman religion gathered in buildings for religious ceremonies conducted by "bishops" for the 'god' of their choice, which now legally included the Christian god.

³⁸ Constantine's stated purpose as written in the Edict of Milan

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The parallel between Kuffner's forgery and the Roman Christian religion opened my eyes. "Priests," "bishops," and "pastors" are all part of a forged painting that operates the different flavors of Constantine's religion today under an umbrella called denominations of Christianity, practiced in "church." Scripture was its provenance [soon to be altered to fit].

Constantine's forged 'painting' features two profound heresies. First, by definition, Christianity is a religion accountable to imperial authority—first to emperors, then the Papal State, then other kings of the earth, and finally "church" authority. Second, Constantine's *ecclesia*, in stark contrast to Jesus' *ekklesia*, appeals to scripture as the provenance of its religion by persistently redefining scripture's words to fit Rome's religious paradigm, reserving scriptural interpretation for the religion's rulers, and altering scripture as needed to support itself. This is how *ecclesia* became synonymous with the religious institution and the buildings where it practiced—today, the word "church".

Jesus' *ekklesia*, on the other hand, lives within the person and presence of Jesus Himself, trusts His words in the form and meaning in which He speaks them, and follows Him as He leads through His presence in those who trust, listen to, and follow Him.³⁹

Rome was not Christianized as the myth goes; the Way in Jesus was Romanized. It turns out that Constantine and then Theodosius are the early "church fathers." Projecting Roman "church" backward onto the Way retroactively projects Rome's new religion on top of Jesus' *ekklesia*, producing a master forgery of religious practice instead of Life in Jesus.

³⁹ John 10:1-4

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Expert Testimony

‘The Forger’s Spell’—the story about Van Meegeren slicing a painting in half—reveals that a really good painting is only part of a forger’s strategy. Great forgers also rely on expert testimony to lend credibility to their forgeries. Museum curators and private collectors are examples of painting experts. Van Meegeren studied these experts and crafted forgeries with their idiosyncrasies in mind, choosing which one would ‘discover’ his paintings.

The greatest asset a forgery can have is an authority’s endorsement.⁴⁰

When a forgery passes a well-known expert examination, future forgeries of similar style are compared to the already endorsed forgery, which is rarely reexamined.

Once Constantine formed what is now known as “church” and Christianity, Theodosius later mandated and enforced it empire-wide. By then, few questioned the Roman institution. Many have tried to reform the institution, reinterpret its provenance through differing theology, and even modify the provenance to match. Once modified, “church” provenance was elevated to “God’s Word, written.”⁴¹ Yet, in all the movements to restructure and redefine “church”, sincere and faithful attenders first assume that “church” is true and, therefore, administer it according to their denominational theologies. Few realize that denominations of “church” are offspring of the Constantinian/Theodosius state religion. The offices of this “church”, filled with graduates of its own educational and apprenticeship prerequisites, are today’s ‘experts’

⁴⁰ 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.

⁴¹ Westminster Confession, Ch 1 & 2, et al.

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who testify to the religion and its “church’s” authenticity. As with Van Meegeren, once the original forgery was enforced over a millennium, future denominations didn’t examine the foundations; they just argued about how the assumed institution should be administered.

“Church’s” first ‘expert’ testimony comes from the Emperor’s endorsement by legalization, followed by creeds written at councils organized and presided over by the same emperors who also held the office of High Priest.⁴² Emperor Theodosius gave a 2nd ‘expert’ testimony by mandating the religion upon all Roman citizens, declaring all other religions heretical (including those who believed in Jesus separate from Imperial control), and enforcing it by Imperial power for centuries, exacting punishment for noncompliance, including execution.⁴³

Rome’s enforced religious paradigm created the expert class within Christianity, “offices” we now call clergy, who dictate and control ‘orthodox’ vs ‘cult’ theology according to their religion’s brand via statements of faith, founding documents, approved seminaries, weekly sermons, and “church” discipline—today’s version of Imperial enforcement.

What is rarely questioned is that the forgery’s centerpiece is the masterful stroke of Christianity’s experts altering provenance to place “church” in Jesus’ mouth.

⁴² The original version of the Nicene Creed.

⁴³ See Appendix 4, the Edict of Thessalonica, the law that mandated the Constantinian religion and Imperial enforcement.

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Religion's Forged Provenance

A skilled forger paints good paintings that play to experts' blind spots, but he doesn't neglect provenance. Kuffner's forgery boasted indisputable testimony: the original provenance on the back of the forged painting.

Christianity uses scripture as its provenance, but few know that the scripture we are given is not the original. Control over the religion flows down from the Emperor/High Priest/Supreme Governor, who controlled scripture translation and interpretation for the same reason the religion was established in the first place: the state's interests and security.⁴⁴ Because government/religion systems render *ecclesia* (Latin) as the building where their religious institution meets, they mimic Jesus' *ekklesia* (Greek) in name only. Emperor and High Priest Theodosius mandated a universal religion for the Roman Empire, updated its creeds, and modified scripture to align with his law, thereby cementing *ecclesia*'s new definition as "church" doctrine.⁴⁵ Punishment for nonconformance was "church" policy from the start.

One example of provenance substitution strikes at the heart of Jesus' mission. Jesus proclaimed God's "gospel, 'God's Kingdom is here; drastically reconsider and believe what I am saying.' Substituting *paenitemini* (Latin) for *metanoëó* (Greek) instead of translating it turned Jesus' message of transformational believing into self-punishment for sin, now a requirement to conform to the state religion.⁴⁶ "Repent," which derives from *paenitemini*, not *metanoëó*, survives to this day as a "church" doctrinal pillar. Punishment in Theodosius' edict now matches "repentance" in "church" provenance. Just before this scripture was altered, Theodosius "updated" the Nicene Creed to include faith

⁴⁴ See the Edict of Milan, Appendix 3

⁴⁵ See the Edict of Thessalonica, Appendix 4

⁴⁶ See Appendix 4

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in his universal, state-sponsored “church,” along with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Westminster Confession upgraded this altered scripture to “the Word of God, written,” and we recite Theodosius’ version of the Nicene Creed regularly across many denominations.⁴⁷

Bible-based, Bible Study, opening the Word, preaching the Word, time in the Word, and being grounded in the Word are examples of forged religious observance based on forged provenance. Ironically, even altered scripture condemns such human tradition as nullifying Jesus—God’s only Word—and juxtaposes Life in Him with scripture-based.⁴⁸

1200 years after the Edict of Thessalonica, King James ‘translated’ “church’s” provenance into English, adding the bold step of dictating in writing which words translators must use.⁴⁹ Referred to as the King James Bible or King James Version, “church’s” provenance now bears the King’s stamp of approval – another expert testimony. Among James’ 15 directives, he dictates that all ecclesiastical (“church”) words be used, including the word “church” itself, overriding several English translations over the previous 85 years. Limiting Bible printing to the King’s presses and exclusive use in the official “church” created an effective monopoly on Bible publication.

Like Roman emperors, King James held an additional title: Supreme Governor of the “Church” of England, officially empowering him to rule over scripture the same way emperors did. Most scripture translations today inherit “church” rather than “congregation,” as King James demanded.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Westminster Confession, Article 6.001

⁴⁸ John 5:37-40

⁴⁹ Appendix 2, King James 15 instructions to translators.

⁵⁰ See appendix 2 for a list of guidelines that James gave to translators.

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Before the KJV (1611), William Tyndale translated *ekklesia* as "congregation" in 1526, based on the original Greek scripture. When Jesus said it—and Tyndale translated it—*ekklesia* referred to the people who together followed Jesus as He called them to Himself, not to the religious class of attenders who sat in pews and followed “pastors” who administered services and policies. “Church” convicted Tyndale of heresy in “church” court and remanded him to the Belgian government, which executed him.⁵¹ The “Church” then confiscated and burned Tyndale’s Bibles. “Church” policy, committed to enforcing provenance from the Edict of Thessalonica and scripture translation of *metanoëó*, proved lethal. King James ensured that the English-speaking world inherited this same version of provenance and “church” tradition.

Coverdale, John Rogers, and others translated scripture using ‘congregation’ like Tyndale. King James overrode all of these translators, instead mirroring the newly published Douay-Rheims official English Catholic Bible from Rome.

With Jerome’s substitution of punishment for *metanoëó* in 382, Constantine’s religion now embraced punishment, imperial interpretation, imperial translation, mistranslation through misuse, and the perpetuation of non-scriptural words such as “church”, “repent”, “pastor”, “gospel”, and others as pillars of its provenance.

Reformation perpetuated the counterfeit by remodeling “church,” an institution founded upon Imperial principles—void of Life in Jesus. Reformation’s offspring are “church” denominations that recite Theodosius’s version of the Nicene Creed, rejoicing that believing in “church” applies to them as well. Many follow some form of the Westminster Confession, which calls Scripture “the rule of faith and life” and “church” the recipient of its revelation.⁵² In reformed “churches,” scripture (and the expert class who

⁵¹ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Tyndale

⁵² Westminster Confession, Chapter 1, Article 6.001

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interpret it) replaces the king as Supreme Governor and High Priest, as the “church's” Supreme Judge.⁵³

Kuffner forged a portrait on the front of actual provenance, deceiving its owners into believing they had the original, just as religion paints a false portrait of Jesus based on scriptural provenance. But unlike Kuffner, religion adds the boldfaced twist of altering scriptural provenance as it paints the forgery.

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⁵³ Westminster Confession, Chapter 1, Article 6.010

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

Suppose the President of the United States issued an executive order dictating which religions were and were not legal and presided over conferences determining which beliefs people are allowed to hold. I can't imagine those trusting in Jesus with every thought converting to such a religion because a president dictated it? However, this is exactly how the “authentic early church” and the foundation of Christianity were established. This may sound bizarre to us today, but the evidence is in Constantine's and Theodosius's own words.⁵⁴

Haunted by evidence that contradicts a lifetime of Christianity, my quest ultimately uncovered three kings and a legislated statement of theology as the fathers of the Christian forgery: Emperor Constantine, Emperor Theodosius, King James, and the Westminster Confession.

These four made decisions about Christianity in relation to the best interests of their state and/or religion, and were not dedicated to proclaiming the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

⁵⁴ See Appendices 3 and 4, The Edicts of Milan and Thessalonica, the laws given by imperial order.

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Step 1: Legalizing The Religion

By formal edict, Constantine legalized Christianity in 313 AD, adding it to the list of approved religions for the purpose of securing favor from the Christian god—along with all other gods—for the sake of the Roman empire. His words.⁵⁵ Contrast his purpose with Jesus’ purpose for gathering believers to Himself: to tear down the gates of Hell.⁵⁶ Constantine certainly brought an *ecclesia* to Rome, but it had nothing to do with Jesus’ ekklesia. Before the Edicts of Milan and Thessalonica, those who trusted in Jesus for Life were called Christians. After the Edicts, Christians were those who practiced imperial religion under the Emperor and High Priest of Rome, in buildings he had built for it, and who embraced faith in Rome’s *ecclesia*.

While He was hanging on the cross, Jesus said to forgive the people who had hammered the nails. After presiding over the council at Nicaea to write the religion’s creed, Constantine wrote this letter to justify celebrating Jesus’ resurrection in relation to the spring equinox:

*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.*⁵⁷

Constantine’s *ecclesia* condemned the people Jesus forgave.

⁵⁵ Appendix 3, the Edict of Milan

⁵⁶ Matt 15:18

⁵⁷ Constantine Augustus to the Ecclesia 9 “Churches”, <https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/primary-texts-from-the-history-of-the-relationship/constantine-i>

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Immediately after legalization, the empire began building structures called *ecclesiae* and invited “bishops” into the empire’s administrative apparatus. *Ecclesia* became known as buildings where the religion was practiced,⁵⁸ establishing “services” and ceremonies. Worshipping Jesus and His Father was legislated by emperors—as if Jesus would appeal to an Emperor for validation, let alone leadership, legal status, and regulation!

Constantine had barely consolidated the Roman Empire under his rule when theological divisions within Roman Christianity threatened to divide the empire again.⁵⁹ Aligned with his stated reason for legalizing Christianity, He wrote to the 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...”⁶⁰

I am taken aback that he wasn’t concerned about the content of the dispute, but about Imperial discord. His concern for the Empire’s unity, rather than for Jesus and His message, exposes the real purpose of the first Council of Nicaea, as does legalizing the religion in the first place. Jesus is concerned about giving His Life to those who believe in Him—Christians; Constantine and his “church” are concerned about people following the empire’s religion.

Absurdly, I failed to apply Berean thinking to the Nicene Creed until just recently. I trusted “church” and its traditions instead until I discovered that Constantine convened

⁵⁸ “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.

⁵⁹ (by defeating, imprisoning, and executing Licinius, co-emperor in the Western Empire and co-author of the Edict of Milan)

⁶⁰ 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.

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the council and personally presided over the official imperial creed.⁶¹ Constantine wasn't trying to articulate what was true regarding Jesus, nor did "church" leaders gather to discuss Life in Him. Instead, he tried to create a uniform, empire-wide definition of Christianity for the Roman Empire to end the infighting disrupting Imperial order—the "church's" first statement of faith. The first of two versions of the Nicene Creed introduced the first references to the "universal" (katholikē) *ecclesia*, referring to the uniform beliefs of an imperial religion, not the spiritually unified Life in Jesus.

Today we recite the **2nd version** of the Nicene Creed, written about 56 years after the first, after Emperor Theodosius mandated universal (within the Roman Empire) observance of the Nicene religion.

However, the first Nicene council didn't settle the Arian-Orthodox controversy that inspired it. It worsened, culminating in confrontations like 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.⁶²

Such is the reality of Constantine's Christianity and its "church." Constantine attempted to resolve the internal theological dispute of the legalized religion by exiling the Arians at Nicaea. Ironically, he brought back Arius, the founder of the heresy he

⁶¹ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine* 3.6–13.

⁶² Ecclesiastical History II:38

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helped condemn, and was baptized by another Arian bishop on his deathbed. Constantine cared little for orthodoxy, let alone Jesus.^{63 64}

This is what Constantine brought to Rome: the precedent that universal, correct theological beliefs are the foundation of Christianity, one of many Roman religions. Faith in “church,” the official Roman religion, comes later with Theodosius.

The splinter in my mind festers now that I know that the issue with “church” isn’t a matter of correctly practicing Christianity *or* attending “church,” because Jesus has nothing to do with either concept and never said those words.

⁶³ Socrates Scholasticus, Ecclesiastical History, Book I, chs. 25–26

⁶⁴ Socrates Scholasticus, Ecclesiastical History, Book I, ch. 39

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Step 2: Mandating The Religion

Now consider a US president selecting one from all legal religions in the US and issuing an executive order dictating it would be the country's sole religion, and adherence enforced by punishment up to and including execution.

Co-Emperors Theodosius, Gratian, and Valentinian issued exactly this order in the Edict of Thessalonica in 380 AD: it legislated Nicene Christianity as the single, official Roman religion. Believers in Jesus, as well as followers of all other religions who refused to follow the state religion, were legally guilty of being deranged, insane heretics, subject to punishment by God and the Empire. Christianity was no longer just a legal Roman religion; it was legally required of every Roman citizen worldwide. Again, Jesus was neither the reason for the law nor its foundation.

Within a year of his edict mandating Christianity, Theodosius convened and presided over the First Council of Constantinople in 381, confirming that the government ruled “Christianity.” Among other items, the Council modified the Nicene Creed, inserting this phrase:

“And [we believe] in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church...”⁶⁵

“Church” is the translation of the Constantine/Theodosius *ecclesia* as used in their edicts, revealing how radically Jesus’ *ekklesia* was redefined through Roman usage. Rome’s *ecclesia* and Jesus’ *ekklesia* are not the same gathering. The Creed’s *ecclesia* refers to a Roman religion that operates as an integrated department of the Roman government. The first Nicene Creed established government-operated Christianity and

⁶⁵ See Appendices 4 & 5

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approved the religion's beliefs. The updated second version is the version we recite in "church" today.⁶⁶

Once legalized and mandated, updates to the religion's creed formed its updated provenance. Later, under Theodosius, the religion's provenance was altered one last time to serve the Roman agenda. In 382, one year after the Nicene Creed was updated, the bishop of Rome, Damasus, commissioned Jerome to retranslate the scriptures.

This is when Jerome substituted the Latin *paenitemini* for the Greek *metanoëó*, second only to *ekklesia* being substituted with "church"—a religious institution that replaced people who followed Jesus. I'll talk more about this later, but *paenitemini* shares roots with punishment, penal, penitentiary, and pain. Scripture, the religion's main provenance, now aligns with the Edict that legislates punishment for non-conformity to the state religion. *Paenitemini* is also the root of the English words "repent" and "repentance," further widening the gap between scripture's original wording/intent and religion's state-sponsored provenance.

⁶⁶ The official creed name is the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, but it is used as the Nicene Creed today.

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Step 3: Enforcing the Religion

We've all heard of toothless laws and unfunded mandates. Such is not the case with Theodosius' religion. First, He mandates that all Romans follow the Nicene religion under the name of Catholic Christianity. Then, in the same legal pronouncement, He criminalized those who don't conform as deranged and insane heretics. So far, it just sounds like name-calling, but read on. Theodosius calls on God (in writing) to condemn these heretics and to inflict Roman imperial punishment upon them. This is the *ecclesia* to be believed in according to the 2nd Nicene Creed as an item of faith that we recite in "church" today. Immediately after the new creed was drafted, Jerome inserted punishment into Jesus' mouth. Scriptural provenance is now synchronized with legal punishment demanded by Christianity's legal mandate, and the religious institution is upgraded to the level of pledging allegiance—putting "church" beyond question.

It is not surprising that the Roman Empire embraced punishment, but I am downright indignant to learn that punishment was "church" policy from the very beginning. Just a few decades earlier, Rome persecuted Christians mercilessly. Under Theodosius, Christianity became the persecutor. [See Appendix 10] In one account of Roman conquest and "church" punishment upon the conquered:

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 500,000.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Krus, D.J., & Webb, J.M. (1993) Quantification of Santayana's cultural schism theory. *Psychological Reports*, 72, 319-325.

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For over a millennium, “church” partnered with government to enforce this policy of punishment for almost 1,000 years before John Wycliffe seriously questioned it. He was condemned by the “church” but escaped execution by dying first. However, the “church” ordered his remains exhumed, burned, and his ashes scattered in posthumous damnation.⁶⁸ It doesn’t take a Berean to know that Jesus never modeled this kind of “church” tradition. He is more likely to call the “church” that did such things a product of hell.⁶⁹

“Church” executions began in 385 AD with Priscillian of Avila and continued until Cayetano Repoll in 1826, with the notorious execution of William Tyndale in 1536. Countless wars were waged ‘in the name of Christ,’ committing genocide along the way.

The state religion also inflicted forced exile, imprisonment, and property confiscation. “Church” held court, and the government performed executions. It’s bad enough that people were executed for not believing what the state religion dictated; that it was “church” policy until the 1800s bears witness against the institution itself. This is how “church” gave expert testimony to the forgery—it punished people for so long that only traitors according to the empire and heretics according to Christianity remembered the Original—Life in Jesus.

⁶⁸ Concilium Constantiense, Session VIII (1415)

⁶⁹ Matt 23:15

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Chapter 4—The Imperial Forgery in English

The world's most influential language, English is used in politics, commerce, technology, education, and social interaction. I'm only fluent in English, but I've communicated in 10 different countries without knowing a single word of the local language before I visited. I also worked for the North American branch of a German software company, collaborating on complex technical issues...in English.

English grew to global dominance with the rapid rise of the British Empire, so the details of Rome's religious forgery are just a history lesson unless the English-speaking "church" shares the same foundation. Unfortunately, I find that the modern "church" is rooted more deeply in forgery than it was under Constantine or Theodosius.

Britain was part of the Roman Empire and/or under the religious control of the Roman "church" from the time of Christ until Henry VIII broke away in 1534. After the break with Rome, the differences in "church" administration were minor, but a few serious challenges to Rome's religious forgery were beginning to surface.

Luther had pinned 95 theses to the Wittenberg door 7 years before Tyndale published the first Greek-based English translation of the New Testament in 1526. Intentional or not, Tyndale attacked the heart of Rome's forgery by translating Jesus' words directly from Greek into English, rendering *ekklesia* as 'congregation.' The "church"/government partnership killed him for it, according to "church" policy

However, the die was cast, prompting Coverdale, John Rogers, and others to build on Tyndale's work and produce several more translations over 85 years. Some of these translations became the official scripture of the "Church" of England. But King James interrupted the movement to translate scripture into English directly from the Greek

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texts, dictating that his translators use “church” instead of “congregation,” reverting to the same religious concept Constantine established for *ecclesia*. In addition to dictating the word “church,” he also instructed translators to treat all ecclesiastical (“church”) words the same way, resulting in substituted or transliterated words such as “pastor,” “deacon,” “bishop,” “repent,” and more.

If the KJV translation were an accurate rendering of Jesus, improving the quality of scripture we use today, we could rejoice. King James, however, did not commission a translation of scripture from Greek into English; he legislated it to align scripture with his official title: ‘The Supreme Governor of the *Church* of England.’ If *ekklesia* were translated as “congregation,” as it had been for the previous 85 years, then his title would have no meaning. “Archbishop” Bancroft, who enforced the 15 KJV rules among the translators, would not have a legitimate title, either.⁷⁰ King James did the same thing as Theodosius before him; he aligned the forgery’s provenance to match the religion that he ruled. King James did not even attempt to preserve scripture and its testimony to Jesus; he violated it—in writing.⁷¹

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

Though Britain’s domain was much smaller than Rome’s at the time, ecclesiastical courts and the enforcement of “church” law mirrored Rome. King James is credited with this vision of “church”:

⁷⁰ See Appendix 2

⁷¹ Rev 22:18-19, Deut 4:2, Proverbs 30:6

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I approve the calling and use of Bishops in the Church, [as well as] it is my aphorism, ‘No Bishop, no King.’⁷²

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

*“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...”*⁷³

Punishment in the Roman tradition hugely impacts the English “church.” King James joined Constantine and Theodosius to form what I call the “church” forgery trilogy. “We Three Kings” will never sound the same. James commissioned the KJV translation within 6 months of the quotes above, organized translation strategies under Archbishop Bancroft, and wrote and/or approved the translation instructions. How eerily this mirrors the edict/creed/translation of the rapid-fire mandates under Theodosius.

Even if we accept King James' authority to craft the forgery, his instructions are filled with self-contradiction that exposes his intent. Instruction #1 from King James stated that the Bishop's Bible, the current official Bible of the “Church” of England, should serve as the translation's foundation, with as little alteration as possible. But the Bishop's Bible uses the word “congregation” in Matthew 16:18, as do the Tyndale, Coverdale, Rogers, and Great Bibles before it—contradiction #1.

⁷² **William Barlow**, *The Summe and Substance of the Conference... at Hampton Court* (London, 1604), often cited around pages 36 or 83–84, depending on the edition.

⁷³ *ibid*

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Instruction #3 in King James' directives 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 have already rendered *ekklesia* as "congregation" in published Bibles since 1526—about 85 years earlier. James contradicts himself by instructing the use of the Bishops Bible while specifically dictating a textually unjustified change, contradicting instruction #1, and overriding a direct translation of *ekklesia*—contradiction #2.

It is important to note that 'congregation' meant the people gathered to Jesus at the time, as opposed to the non-clergy who attended "church"—that is a later clever twisting. The congregation of believers is not a subset or denomination of "church" or an alternative way of doing it; it's the description of the body of Christ without any ties to the institution labeled "church.

Instruction #14 says to use all the above Bibles where they agree best with the [Greek] text. Yet, all the accurate Greek translations for *ekklesia* in these Bibles are overridden by Instruction #3—contradiction #3.

In addition to the dramatic shift to "church" from 'congregation', Instruction #6 prohibits translators from using "margin" notes. This prohibits the most popular feature of the Geneva bible, presumably because it criticized the monarchical hierarchy of "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 by King James' instructions—contradiction #4.

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King James' motto (“No bishops, no king”), combined with his self-contradictory instructions to translators, places his motives outside translation and serves as a smoking gun revealing the forgery of the religion he leads. With his legislated KJV Bible, “church,” “pastor,” “gospel,” and “repent” become foundations of the Anglican “church,” directly aligned with Catholic Imperial tradition. James violates well-known scripture translations to preserve previously forged provenance.⁷⁴ The Douay-Rheims Bible, translated from the Latin Vulgate (rooted in Theodosius and Jerome), is the first Catholic English translation.⁷⁵ The KJV, published shortly after Douay-Rheims, aligns more with the Latin Vulgate and the Douay-Rheims than with Greek manuscripts.

The bottom line is that “church” would not exist today, in word or concept, if King James had not overruled 85 years of direct Greek translation of scripture, leaving us with translations of scripture that scripture prohibits.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ 2 Cor 4:2

⁷⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douay%E2%80%93Rheims_Bible

⁷⁶ 2 Pet 3:16, Rev 22:18-19

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Chapter 5—A Retouched Forgery is Still a Forgery

“Church” forgery--its ‘painters’, the ensuing religion, and the scriptures it changed—cannot be unseen once seen. It has haunted me until I became an ‘author.’ If “church” did not come from Jesus’ mouth—conceptually or linguistically—then “church” leadership, “church” discipline, “church” tradition, “church” doctrine, and all other “church” adjectives are symptoms of deception. “Church” services, “church” plants, and “church” offices are unmasked as network marketing. “Church” member, going to “church”, and joining a “church” are traits of a cult. “Church” budget, “church” offering, and “church” revenue are evidence—follow the money. Let me be clear: I’m not bashing the Catholic “church” because I don’t agree with how it operates; I reject the concept of “church” altogether, starting with its foundation. Because all Christian “churches” are offspring of the Constantinian “church,” finding a good “church” no longer applies.

Many say that the “church” has been reformed from the days of Catholic atrocities. However, reformation begins with the fatal assumption that “church” was instituted by Jesus, and then proceeds to ‘correct’ its flaws. As if that were Jesus’ goal, reformation doesn’t realize that the concept of “church” is the root of the problem, not a flawed version of the solution. Reformed “church,” like the systems it adjusts, fails to develop apprentices of Jesus any more predictably than its predecessors. In fact, reformation has multiplied “church” offspring, spawning 10s of thousands of denominations around the world, failing for predictable reasons:

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

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presence of the kingdom and its King into every corner of human life simply by fully living in the kingdom with Him.⁷⁷

Discovering that “My *ekklesia*” came from Jesus’ mouth only once across all 4 Gospels combined, I concluded that “church” places more emphasis on itself than Jesus did, and that He never gave His name to its systematic religion. “Church” is, at best, unscriptural.⁷⁸ Every other New Testament reference to *ekklesia* either explicitly refers to what Jesus meant, or it contradicts Him.

If Jesus ‘institutes’ anything, it certainly isn’t a religious system or a “church” where it is practiced. Jesus *did* ‘institute’ new Life, Life never before seen or available to mankind.⁷⁹ Jesus’ Life is the Life of God’s only Son, which He offers to literally cohabit within us—as unpredictable as the wind.⁸⁰ It is a life that is literally Him in us and us in Him—not a theology about Him. Jesus did not die to improve our lives, our “church” life, our home life, or our work life. He offers the chance to live His Life instead of ours.

Reforming “church” merely reshuffles theological nuance, service logistics, and nominally tweaks structures invented by kings of the earth. Reforming “church” is like AI – it can only regurgitate assumptions, theology, service logistics, and institutional structure. Reformation of religious systems cannot produce Life from above.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ with Bonus Content (Designed for Influence)*, Location 190. NavPress. Kindle Edition

⁷⁸ Matt 16:18

⁷⁹ 1 Cor 2:9

⁸⁰ John 3:8, James 2:19

⁸¹ John 3:3

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PART III

THE SWITCH

The Forger Redefines Jesus' Words

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Chapter 6—Religious Forgery Hidden in “The Greek”

So Many Degrees of Separation—from Jesus

*You have been weighed, you have been measured, and you have been found wanting.*⁸²

I have searched scripture to determine if what the “church” teaches about “church” was true, and I find it wanting. Scripture demands it that much of me.⁸³

Likewise, I soon tossed “pastor,” “repent,” and the rest of King James’ legislated, ecclesiastically oriented scripture, concluding that “church” doctrine is a product of kings’ agendas rather than Jesus’.⁸⁴ The Westminster Confession codified King-altered scripture as “God’s Word, written,” resulting in scripture preceding Jesus in statements of faith and “church” operation, in stark contrast to what Jesus says about scripture, His *ekklesia*, and Himself.⁸⁵ “Bible church” is not a synonym for Jesus’ *ekklesia*.

Jesus referred to *graphé* as *graphé*, as does all scripture. If faith in scripture can’t bring Life,⁸⁶ how can creeds, “church” statements, or lists of beliefs do any better? I’ve read what Jesus said dozens of times over decades, and finally heard what He 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 life;***

⁸² Heath Ledger, “A Knight’s Tale,” 2001

⁸³ Acts 17:11

⁸⁴ Phil 3:8

⁸⁵ John 5:37-40, Matt 16:16-18

⁸⁶ John 5:37-40

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*and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.*⁸⁷

Jesus condemns scripture-based religion that replaces coming to Him as a Person. Scripture-based religion using altered scripture is doubly tragic. Scripture in our pews is at least four degrees of separation away from what Jesus said about believing in Him:

1. “Church” results from altering *ecclesia*, using it for buildings and religion, rendering it unrelated to Jesus’ *ekklesia*
2. *Paenitemini* is a substitution for *metanoëó*, not a translation, instituting punishment as “church” policy
3. King James substituted “church” lingo to replace valid translations
4. The Westminster Confession elevated altered scripture to God’s Word, written

I need so much deprogramming.

King James didn’t need to substitute every word in scripture to align it with his role as Supreme “Church” Governor, just the ones that validated “church” hierarchy. To accept King James’ version of scripture, we must agree that He had the authority to reinterpret and rewrite scripture to give Him that authority. Accepting his scripture as the lens through which “church” is operated is in direct opposition to what Jesus said of scripture’s purpose: to give testimony to Him.

King James replaced many words from original scripture, but examining just four of them demonstrates “church’s” forged foundation—its false provenance.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

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It's all Greek to Me

One path along my quest has led me out of religious forgery and into “the original Greek,” bypassing seminary degrees, theological doctrines, and “church” traditions—the very thing that scripture calls Bereans to do.

I’ve let “the Greek” intimidate me, content to take a “pastor’s” sermon as true, trusting how difficult they claimed translating it was. I believed the claims that good, direct translations of some Greek words into English were difficult to understand. Then, in a blinding flash of the obvious, I saw it... “pastors” were using English words to describe untranslatable Greek words. Hmmmm. Did Jesus really say that He would be hard to understand without advanced education found in official “church” positions?

Religion’s worst nightmare is the original scripture online with word-by-word translation tools. We can compare how “Christianity” uses words to how Jesus, Socrates, and Homer used them. It surprises me that the Greek words used in the New Testament were up to 800 years old when it was written. I’d always assumed that Jesus used new words that began with Him, but it turns out that He used everyday words arranged in eternally profound ways. Kings and rulers killed Him because they clearly understood what He said. People followed Him because they understood exactly what He said. For example, nobody asked Jesus what *ekklesia* meant when He said it (or inerrant scripture wrote it) because it didn’t need interpretation. Nor did it become clearer by substituting *kuriakos*, the root of the word “church,” a completely unrelated word.

It takes a little work, like any new language, but it doesn’t require us to be ‘wise and learned,’ hold “church” offices, or have advanced degrees to understand Jesus and His message clearly. Knowing Greek isn’t a prerequisite to knowing Jesus at least as well as

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little children, or He would have told us so.⁸⁸ We might, however, need such education to untwist what religion has created to rule its “church.”

Through the KJV lens, hierarchical structure inherited from Rome is set in concrete and replaces Jesus as the in-Person leader of His people through the spiritual gifts He endows. Ruled by state hierarchy, spiritual gifts intended for believers are stripped of their meaning, and monarchs’ position as heads of “church” is codified, betraying Jesus.

In addition to hijacking leadership from Jesus, altered words also change His message from "God's Kingdom has arrived" to ‘do penance so that you can get saved.’ It takes a minute to grasp that “Christianity” appeases its god via repentance of sin in exchange for favor in the form of life after death—the Roman religious model.

Four substituted/transliterated words demonstrate how fundamentally religion opposes Jesus:

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 1. “Church” | Word substitution for <i>ekklesia</i> through government and mandate |
| 2. “Repent” | Word substitution for <i>metanoéo</i> through Roman mistranslation |
| 3. “Gospel” | Transliteration from Old English rather than translation |
| 4. “Pastor” | Transliteration from the Latin Vulgate rather than translation |

If these words are just semantics, this book has no purpose.

⁸⁸ John 14:2

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The “Church” Substitution

“Church” is the English word for the Greek word *kuriakos*, a Greek adjective meaning “the Lord’s,” used twice in scripture for ‘the Lord’s supper’ and ‘the Lord’s day.’ “Church” teaches that “church”—the Lord’s House—is a translation of *ekklesia*, ignoring the fact that it actually has no connection to Jesus’ *ekklesia*. Jesus used a form of the root word *kyrios* 108 times. 51 of those times He referred to God or Himself. 57 of those times, Jesus used the same word to refer to slave masters, landowners, and others in authority. He also used the verb form to label Gentile ‘lording,’ which His disciples were not to do.

Because Romans used *ecclesia* for both buildings and a religion, it came to mean both. The *only* reason that the word “church” exists today in English translations is that King James dictated that “church” be substituted for ‘congregation,’ overruling the first and more accurate English translation from the original Greek that had been in place for over 85 years.⁸⁹

Imperial edicts used the Latin *ecclesia* to describe Rome’s religion and its buildings—now called “Christianity”—in the creeds it established.⁹⁰ In accordance with founding edicts, the religion was enforced upon Germanic/Gothic cultures as they were conquered, who naturally referred to buildings and religion in the same way as their conquerors. Renderings of *kuriakón* emerged—meaning ‘the Lord’s House’—in the 8th and 9th centuries, which later became “church” in English, Kirk in Scottish, Kirche in German, and so on. “Church” comes from the Latin usage of *ecclesia* by the Roman government, followed by the Germanic translations into *kuriakos*, *not* from a translation of the Greek *ekklesia*. *Tyndale and others got it right from the first Greek-to-English*

⁸⁹⁸⁹ See Appendix 2, Instruction #3

⁹⁰ See Appendix 3 and 4

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translations of scripture. Just as Roman edicts defined its religion and modified scripture to fit, King James dictated how scripture would be written to match his own model.

Jerome cemented imperial *ecclesia* usage in the Vulgate, choosing the Constantinian usage, rather than an accurate translation, *congregatio*, as Tyndale did a millennium later. Well-versed in Greek, Jerome knew the definition of *ekklesia*, but by 382, *ecclesia/ecclesiam* had been used consistently for buildings and the new religion for almost 70 years. Scripture's use of *ecclesia* in the manner that later became “church” now mirrored the Edicts of Milan and Thessalonica.

In the 1500s, Tyndale and others translated scripture into English directly from Greek manuscripts for the first time, rendering *ekklesia* as ‘congregation.’ After nearly 100 years of official “church” and cultural use, King James dictated that “church” replace *ekklesia*. King James aligned himself—perhaps unconsciously—with Constantine, Theodosius, Jerome, and the Douay-Rheims Bible. Otherwise, James would have had to change his title to ‘Supreme Governor of the Congregation of England...’ a *non-sequitur*. Jesus alone leads those congregated to Him.

Although familiar with the words *kurios* and *oikos*—Jesus used one or the other about 180 times—He never used them together with the word *kuriakos*. If He wanted continuity in religious buildings, He could have said either My *kuriakos* or My *sunagoge*, and organized at least one building campaign to show the way.

Translators know that *ekklesia* is not a translation for “church” because they translate it differently elsewhere in Scripture. Describing a riot in Ephesus, they (both the King James and the Douay-Rheims translators) render *ekklesia* three times as either ‘assembly’ or ‘congregation,’ but translate it as “church” everywhere else, according to the

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King James rules for translation.⁹¹ The word *ekklesia* has no inherent religious connotation.⁹² *Scripture translators knew that “church” is not a translation of ekklesia!* Translators today know it, too. To continue to accept “church” as something founded in Jesus, we have no choice but to conclude that Jesus (or scripture’s authors) made a mistake and said *ekklesia* when He meant *kuriakos*. Even the sentence doesn’t make sense: “Upon this rock, I will build My *kuriakos*’ means ‘my Lord’s,’ two adjectives in a row that don’t modify anything.

⁹¹ Acts 19:23-41

⁹² Assembly and Congregation are valid translations of *ekklesia*. Neither has inherent institutional meaning. “Congregation” came to mean those who attended “church” after clergy was established.

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The “Pastor” Mistranslation

Because “church” is not a legitimate translation from original Greek text, it is not scriptural. Therefore, offices of the “church” are illegitimate, too, including “pastor.” “Pastor” is not a translation of Greek text, but a transliteration of a Latin ecclesiastical word. The Wycliffe, Tyndale, Coverdale, Matthews, Great, and Bishops Bibles translate *poimén* as shepherd, and two of these bibles were authorized translations for the “Church” of England.

The Catholic Douay-Rheims Bible transliterates, rather than translates, *pastori* from the Latin Vulgate to preserve Roman ecclesiastical tradition in English, and the King James Version likewise preserves ecclesiastical terms rather than translating from Greek. The KJV aligns with Roman scripture, ignoring the fact that the same translators of both bibles render *poimén* as “shepherd” nearly 100 times in the Septuagint and the New Testament and only once as “pastor,” in verses taught as “offices of the church” when they are intended to be spiritual gifts to the saints and believers.⁹³

Even if “church” *was* a legitimate translation, Paul’s 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 Ephesus.⁹⁴ Moreover, five spiritual gifts are listed as gifts to men, not to an institution, its administrators, or even Jesus’ ekklesia.⁹⁵ “Church” hierarchy siphons these gifts into “offices,” robbing people of their inheritance in the saints *to whom the letter was addressed*.

⁹³ Eph 4:11

⁹⁴ Eph 1:1

⁹⁵ Eph 4:8

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Jesus didn't give himself a special title when He described Himself as the good shepherd (*poimén*),⁹⁶ using the term for one of the lowliest human professions. Among the gifts given to Jesus' people, nothing is more devastating than painting the shepherd as a "church" office rather than the gift Jesus gives to manifest Himself in His *ekklesia*. Only if I assume that "church" and its 'offices' are true before reading Ephesians 4:11 can I even imagine these gifts being treated differently from any others.⁹⁷

Like Mary at the tomb, where have they taken Him?

Within the American and worldwide "church", "pastoring" is a career path. There are "pastors", "executive pastors", "senior pastors", "lead pastors", "teaching pastors", "assistant pastors", and more.

Even more disturbing than "church" itself being a forgery is the devastation it brings upon believers when it absorbs gifts belonging to believers, guaranteeing all the disasters those gifts are designed to prevent:

...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes... we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ John 10:11

⁹⁷ 1 Cor 12, 14

⁹⁸ Eph 4:12-16

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“Church” offices don’t prevent deceitful schemes; they *are* the deceitful scheme, and “pastors” (including synonymous titles) deploy them. We cannot fulfill the intent of the Ephesians 4:11 gifts if a gathering focuses on one person leading a service instead of on Jesus and how He manifests in each other. Most of us don’t even know that *we* are the ones who are supposed to be sharing Jesus with each other. The hijacked gift of shepherd *is the mechanism* by which gifts intended for us to share are prevented by “church.”

Peter writes about how shepherding is designed for Jesus’ *ekklesia*:

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.⁹⁹

Peter, an eyewitness to Jesus’ Life, death, and resurrection, calls himself a fellow elder, not “bishop”, “apostle”, “pope”, “father”, “pastor”, or even “one of the 12”, deliberately relating to readers as an equal rather than an officeholder. He encourages fellow elders (not “bishops” or “pastors”) 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 regarding hired hands.¹⁰⁰ “Pastors” hired by “churches” cannot avoid the label of “hired hand”¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ 1 Peter 5:1-4

¹⁰⁰ John 10

¹⁰¹ <https://biblehub.com/greek/2961.htm> , <https://biblehub.com/greek/2962.htm>

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In *utter* irony, Peter warns against “lording it over” those entrusted to them, using the verb *katakuriuo*,¹⁰² built on the root *kyrios*—lord, master, owner. That same root produces *kuriakos*¹⁰³ (“belonging to the lord”), the foundational word for “church.” If translators were consistent, Peter would be warning us against “churching” over those entrusted.

Jesus established the picture of authority within His *ekklesia* before Paul and Peter lived it out—teaching that Gentile kings “churched” themselves over their citizens, but His disciples were not to do so.¹⁰⁴

Constantine created a religion that he and his staff “churched” over Rome’s citizens. Theodosius confirmed the structure with an iron hand of “churching.” “Pastor” is an offspring of this government/religious marriage, not a translation or interpretation of scripture. Roman and Anglican “churches” also “churched” their authority over attenders through “bishops.”

What Jesus forbade is impersonated institutionally; what Peter prohibited in practice is normalized in “church” governance. Jesus protects His people by prohibiting titles like “father”, “rabbi”, and “teacher”.¹⁰⁵ Why would using the name of a Spiritual gift be OK to use for a title, especially considering that Jesus calls himself a shepherd? It’s His shepherding presence within His people that leads us to Life in Him and prevents spiritual disaster. “Pastoring” as a “church office” prevents shepherding among believers.

¹⁰² <https://biblehub.com/greek/2634.htm>

¹⁰³ <https://biblehub.com/greek/2960.htm>

¹⁰⁴ Matthew 20:25-28

¹⁰⁵ Matt 23:9

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The “Repentance” Substitution

Metanoéo, a Greek verb captured in the English noun *metanoia*, means a deep change of heart, mind, perception, or orientation.¹⁰⁶ *Metanoéo* is the act of reconsidering/rethinking that causes such changes after...what? After evidence has been given to justify reconsidering. It took me a while to remember my 9th-grade English and realize that a verb needs a subject and/or an object. In Mark 1:15, the subject is ‘you’, the listeners, and the object is inherent in the word *metanoéo*—mind, heart, perception, and orientation. Nothing in the word *metanoéo* reveals what should change in the heart. What needs to be changed depends on the balance of the sentence—the object of the verb.

The *metanoéo* sentence contains two verbs: first, to reconsider what has been presented; second, to believe what has been presented—to change the mind. Mark 1:15 immediately follows *metanoéo* with what Jesus is persuading them to change—believe what He says instead of whatever else they were believing. Jesus is persuading listeners to reconsider God’s message—the Kingdom of God is here—and to believe it.

Jesus persuaded His future disciples to *metanoéo* as He emerged from the wilderness. After they had witnessed the heavens torn open, watched the Holy Spirit descend upon Him, heard God proclaim Jesus as His Son, and listened to His face-to-face victory over Satan, Jesus encouraged them to rethink whatever they were believing and to believe the message He just delivered instead: God’s Kingdom is invading.

It’s no surprise that religion would sabotage the very thing that Jesus would die for. I’ve been taught my whole life that I needed to hurry up and repent of sin if I wanted to ‘get saved’ so I could go to God’s kingdom, heaven, when I died. Look closely at Mark 1:15—Jesus did not say the word ‘sin,’ let alone demand an action to address it.

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/metanoia>, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metanoia>

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Sorrow, regret, penance, or re-penance due to sin did not have a voice in the most glorious announcement since creation, and Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom message unwaveringly throughout His Life, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Religious forgery, however, substituted *paenitemini* for *metanoéo* in scripture and in practice. Like *metanoéo*, *paenitemini* is a verb placed in Latin scripture that also has the subject ‘you’—the listener—but instructs listeners to do penance (repent) upon themselves, followed by the rest of the original sentence: to believe. Instead of Jesus persuading people to reconsider the most amazing news in history, religion dumps regret and sorrow onto people as a prerequisite to joining God’s kingdom. Jesus hammered Pharisees for this kind of behavior:

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.¹⁰⁷

I’m no longer surprised that “church” and “pastor” aren’t the only pivotal words and concepts that King James inserted into scripture to replace original words and their meanings. Still, I didn’t suspect that the core practice of “repentance” was fabricated, unbiblical, and a religious practice that Jesus never taught. “Repent” is the English rendering of the Latin *paenitemini* that replaces Jesus’ words in Mark 1:15, resulting in bibles that are unscriptural in both word and concept, unless we believe that God inspired King James and Jerome to rewrite scripture.

Martin Luther recognized this in his first thesis that he nailed to the Wittenberg door:

¹⁰⁷ Matt 23:13

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This word [metanoëó] cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance.

While *paenitemini* is not punishment, per se, it is one element of the religion that Rome mandated and explicitly enforced through punishment, including property confiscation, imprisonment, torture, and execution. In both civil and religious governments, *paenitemini* was treated as a mechanism sometimes offered to avoid such punishment, merging the two until the concept was instituted as a sacrament of the “church” and enforced by governments worldwide. In terms of “repent” and other “church” traditions, the King James Church operated under the same paradigm as Theodosius.

In other words, the Roman Government and the kings of the earth who followed in its religious footsteps punished those who would not “repent” from religious beliefs and practices not endorsed by the government’s “church,” including Jesus’ followers who would not accept a state-sponsored religion. “Church” executed ‘heretics’ under the Theodosian model for over 1500 years after his edict.¹⁰⁸

Theodosius didn’t invent the penance concept; *Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and later Augustine had linked paenitemini to the ‘satisfaction’ of sin*. Roman culture had invaded the Way long before Theodosius codified it into law. Theodosius did:

1. Legally define a religion
2. Include its “church” in its statement of faith (Nicene Creed)
3. Oversee the substitution of *paenitemini* for *metanoëó* in scripture
4. Name its observers (Catholic Christian)

¹⁰⁸ See Appendix 4, the last few lines of the Edict of Thessalonica.

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5. Mandate it universally (*katholikē*)
6. Punish dissent

Upon hearing God’s message from Jesus, four fishermen left their boats to follow Jesus when He called them; they didn’t hurry up and “repent,” and He didn’t lead them in a “church” service. Instead, they became Jesus’ first *ekklesia*, the first to follow Him as a group to witness Him cast out demons and heal the sick.¹⁰⁹ Jesus didn’t demand that they pour regret upon themselves first—James, John, Peter, and Andrew reconsidered what they believed and followed Jesus instead. More followed later. Jesus took care of the sin.

This is so important! Unless “repentance of sin,” a direct derivative of Jerome’s substitution into scripture in 381 AD, is assumed in advance, scripture reads as a glorious invasion of God’s Kingdom to set people free. The “repentance from sin gospel” negates Jesus’ unilateral sacrifice “to take away the sins of the world” for all time—before anybody even said they were sorry. We are left with the wreckage of a sin-centered religion operated by “pastors” in “churches” with “repentance from sin” and various related ceremonies required to join. Jesus never said “repent,” let alone “repent from sin,” before believing and following. “Repent,” like “church” and “pastor,” is an unbiblical “church” tradition posing as truth, nullifying God’s word, His *logos*, Jesus Himself.

¹⁰⁹ Mark 1:16-34

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The “Gospel” Mistranslation

Substituting *paenitemini* for *metanoëó* devastates Life in Jesus by placing God’s message—delivered by Jesus—in lockstep with sin-oriented religious dogma. This marriage of “repentance from sin” to the announcement of God’s Kingdom not only poisons Jesus message, but ignores the fact that this is the only time that Jesus refers to a message as God’s “gospel.” “Repentance” is not only illegitimate, but it is also elevated to a central pillar of a fabricated religion, ignoring the fact that Jesus never wavered from proclaiming God’s Kingdom up to the time He ascended to God’s right hand.

The story of God’s “gospel” is not just one transliterated verse quoted out of context; God’s message requires the context of the entire story, from Jesus’ baptism to His calling out four men to join Him to spread the message—God’s Kingdom is here!

After Jesus was “baptized,” the heavens were torn open, the Holy Spirit landed on His shoulder, and God publicly proclaimed Jesus as his son, thereby anointing Him as heir to His Kingdom. Astonishingly, the first step in His mission was to face Satan in the wilderness,¹¹⁰ and 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.”¹¹¹

This is the only time Jesus referred to anything as God’s “gospel,” and I realized that this was, and is, a personal message from God to people, not a theological concept to create dogmatic systems for “church” membership and services. Paul said later that if

¹¹⁰ Mark 1:9-13

¹¹¹ Mark 1:14-15

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anyone preaches another message, he is asking for trouble.¹¹² Therefore, any other time that “God’s royal announcement” is referenced in scripture, it either refers to what Jesus says in this passage or is another “message” altogether. “Repent from sin” is another message altogether.

The Greek word transliterated as “gospel” is *euangelion*,¹¹³ meaning “message”. John Wycliffe first translated the Latin equivalent of *euangelion* into Godspell, Old English for “God’s message,” a partially accurate translation. But instead of translating directly from Greek, the King James Version used Wycliffe’s Old English as a transliteration, tragically missing its essence. Some translations use “good news” today, but that’s also monumentally inadequate. God’s message is not a headline with details at 11; it’s a message from the Lord of Hosts to gather for invasion.

Euangelion was a well-known term when Jesus said it, and it’s far more profound than either “gospel” or “good news.” No question—Jesus was sharing good news. But *euangelion* doesn’t refer to the content of a message; an *euangelion* message is “good” because of its source: royalty. Jesus’ message as He came out of the wilderness is good because it comes from God, the King of kings. The “*eua*” part of *euangelion* indicates that a message, an “*angelion*,” is from royalty. [“angelion” is another transliterated word; “angel,” rather than an accurate translation: “messenger.”]

Messages from Roman emperors were, by definition, *euangelion*. They were sent to towns ahead of an 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.

¹¹² Gal 1:8-9

¹¹³ <https://biblehub.com/greek/2098.htm>

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Jesus proclaimed God's message, which is why scripture says *euangelion*, because Mark revealed in the previous verse that it was God's message. God had already recognized Jesus' coming of Age—at His “baptism”—out of the torn-open heavens. Now, His Kingdom is invading, winning the first battle against Satan, and later tearing down the gates of hell.

Luke's version reinforces the *euangelion* context of a war declaration—God's Kingdom invading —quoting Isaiah about setting captives free.¹¹⁴ This is why Jesus, Paul, and others preach the Kingdom¹¹⁵—because that's what Jesus revealed in God's message. God did not tear open the heavens, empower Jesus to defeat Satan, free captives of sickness, disease, and demons all over Israel, suffer a brutal beating, and die on a cross, so that we might have the opportunity for a lifetime of attending “church” and doing penance for sin. It was “finished” regardless of what we do or do not do. If we abandon the sin-based paradigm, we face the stunning reality that forgiveness of our sin is not the same as believing in Him, which **is** what He asks for. Leading us to repentance instead of trust is diabolical.

When Jesus announced God's Kingdom and its first battle with Satan, He probably saw the blank look on their faces, so He appealed to them to reconsider and believe the message from God that He had just told them. Today, it might sound like “I'm not **kidding**; I've seen it with my own eyes.”

Jesus lived and died for God and His Kingdom. He paid the price for sin with His Life and rose from the dead, giving us the chance to live that resurrected Life in Him. But Jesus never presented forgiveness of sin as God's message; He did it in His unique role in God's Kingdom, just as He calls us to. Even after His resurrection, He didn't say a word

¹¹⁴ Luke 4:18

¹¹⁵ Jesus: 91 references, Acts 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 28:31, and more

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about “repenting” or proclaiming “repentance for sin” to get saved; He spent 40 days proclaiming God’s Kingdom, just as He did after baptism. Getting saved from sin by doing penance is never presented as the “gospel.” God’s message is that His Kingdom is here. Period. Turning the “gospel” into an opportunity for lifetime “repentance” robs us of our inheritance in the unsearchable inheritance of believers,¹¹⁶ such as:

1. An age-old mystery, a perfect message directly from God, Christ in us^{117 118}
2. Joining Him and God’s kingdom to invade this dark world^{119 120}
3. Fellowship in this new life with Jesus, our Father, and each other¹²¹
4. Understanding His parables describing His kingdom¹²²

... and much more. This is what we forfeit when we follow religion’s “gospel” instead of God’s message.

¹¹⁶ Eph 3:8

¹¹⁷ Col 1:26-27

¹¹⁸ Mark 1:14-15

¹¹⁹ Mark 1:17-20

¹²⁰ Eph 6:12

¹²¹ 1 John 1:1-3

¹²² Mark 4:11

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Chapter 7—"Church" Only Mimics 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.¹²³

Although Halverson incorrectly assumes that the pre-Constantinian Way in Jesus is synonymous with post-Constantinian "church," his point is clear: post-*ekklesia* "church," perpetuated and 'reformed' over thousands of years, mimics Jesus' *ekklesia* in lingo and ceremony while actually embracing culture rather than His Person.

American "church" culture is obvious. "Churches" market core values, relevancy, institutional beliefs, meeting needs, a sense of community, and mission statements. "Church" colleges (seminaries) specialize in "church" administration and career paths. Fundraising consultants and industry conferences offer to streamline "church" operations. Specialists train in sales, which we call capital campaigns and giving strategies. These phenomena are sprinkled with "church" language, thinly veiling a religious industry that mirrors popular business books.

Articles of incorporation filed with Secretaries of State, boards of directors, corporate bylaws, tax-exempt certificates, corporate officers, and staff payroll mirror American business. We discuss org charts, attendance trends, budgets, tax returns, and popularity of our program options. "Church" lobbies the government in its own interest, but I can't picture Jesus lobbying Pilate for special tax treatment for the 12.

¹²³ Richard Halverson: Quoted by numerous publications, including CS Lewis Institute – no original publication documented. But I would say the same thing if he didn't.

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Official “Church” Ministry

Homeschooling triggered amazing support networks, organically emerging as like-minded families connected and loosely called themselves ‘homeschool groups.’ We looked up to those with experience, and we just helped each other. People came from “church,” friends of friends, a few from the neighborhood, and others through the grapevine. Occasionally, one parent would teach biology to a neighbor’s kids along with their own, and the other would teach Spanish in return. Everybody shared their insights and experience with others who homeschooled, whether they were ‘in the group’ or not.

People connected with each other all over the county in person, over the phone, through email, and through plain old networking. I didn’t get it then, but now I know that Jesus called His ‘group’ like this His *ekklesia*.

Nobody was elected leader, and nobody suggested meetings to “run the group” ... until “church” got wind of it. Hearing about the ‘group,’ a “pastor” called a meeting to incorporate it as an “official ministry” under the “church” umbrella, specifically “pastoral” oversight. Even the people from his “church” didn’t want this, and those who didn’t attend his church” were amused. His “church” launched its ‘new ministry’ anyway, but the original ‘group’ just kept on helping each other, simply ignoring the “pastor” and his “church.” Some shook their heads and went away.

Spiritual Gifts for the “Church”

Some “churches” focus on spiritual gifts; some never mention them. One “pastor” where I attended held classes on spiritual gifts in what is otherwise a non-charismatic denomination. Intrigued, I later realized the “gifts” they discovered all aligned with the “church’s” volunteer needs. They directed gifts of hospitality toward ushering or kitchen

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duties, etc. The higher gifts that scripture encourages¹²⁴ apparently weren't needed in this "church." 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, perhaps prophecy, from someone in the congregation. Ignoring the spiritual nudge, the "pastor" later admitted he didn't want to disrupt the service. If the "pastor" was gifted with shepherding, rather than the title of "pastor," we might have listened to and considered what Jesus was trying to say.¹²⁵ "Church" order squelched the Holy Spirit, preventing people from hearing what God might have to say from their inheritance in the saints.¹²⁶ We were robbed.

"Church" Intrudes Upon *Ekklesia*

A few from "church," the next-door neighbor, a couple of co-workers, and a high school friend got together weekly at my house. We had dinner, shared our lives, and enjoyed each other's company as we deliberately sought Jesus. It just worked. We were like family—not just once a week, but whenever—helping each other move, sharing cars, and even our houses when fire forced evacuation.

We shared the Lord's supper for years before I attended the subject "church." Upon hearing this, the "pastor" encouraged me to use official elements blessed by "church" clergy rather than to use my own bread and wine. He also encouraged us to focus on next Sunday's scripture reading instead of how we were already following Jesus. I didn't mention any "pastoral" suggestions to our group. A large "church" with a "small group" emphasis is a strange strategy.

¹²⁴ 1 Cor 12 and 14

¹²⁵ 1 Cor 14:29-32

¹²⁶ 1 Thess 5:19-21

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Deadly Symptoms of “Church” Life

In the “Pastor Mistranslation” section, Peter and Paul explicitly reject anyone, including themselves, from “lording/churching” themselves over Jesus’ *ekklesia*.¹²⁷ If “church” is illegitimate, then clergy “church” authority and “church” discipline are also forgeries—unbiblical—and are imposters of His authority to lead.

Jesus didn’t “church” His authority over anybody; He pleaded for us to believe in Him.¹²⁸ This isn’t just semantics; I am uncovering a clear distinction between Life in Jesus and “church” life. “Church” life revolves around...

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Systems of organization | versus | Gifts from above lived dynamically |
| 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 Jesus and Life in Him |
| 5. Guiding theological principles | versus | Listening to Jesus in real time |
| 6. Etc. | | |

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

1. I am the Good shepherd...so that there may be one flock, one shepherd.¹²⁹
2. Don’t let anyone call you rabbi, father, or instructor.¹³⁰
3. Since we have a great high priest...¹³¹
4. Head of the *ekklesia*¹³²

¹²⁷ 1 Peter 5:2-3, 2 Cor 1:24

¹²⁸ John 6:66

¹²⁹ John 10

¹³⁰ Matt 23

¹³¹ Hebrews 4:14

¹³² Ephesians 5:23

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5. Head of His body¹³³

6. There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.¹³⁴

Since Constantine co-opted “Christianity” for the empire, titles such as Pontifex Maximus, Father, “Pastor,” Teacher, Vicar, Supreme Governor, Archbishop, and others rule Christianity. “Pastor” and the others hide the clergy’s use of a title for roles that Jesus reserves for Himself, transliterating a common word to forge the theology of “church offices” and their counterfeit authority to rule. Shepherding is priceless when Jesus manifests Himself in believers for the sake of His *ekklesia*. Using it as a title for a “church office” directly contradicts Him, creating a religious clerical class that “churches” itself over others.

¹³³ Col 1:18

¹³⁴ 1 Tim 2:5

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Impact of False Authority

“Church” forgery and its ‘offices’ strip God’s gifts from intended recipients, rendering attenders unstable and deceived spiritual infants. “Church” spiritually castrates Jesus’ *ekklesia*, misdirecting them from Jesus within each other to imperial/corporate clergy who run services, programs, and ministries. “Church” is the very scheme that God’s gifts in Ephesians 4:11 are designed to prevent. Members who follow staff named for these gifts instead of sharing the genuine gifts remain unequipped to make disciples of Jesus, without unity of faith in Jesus, and unable to grow up into Him—while also being led to believe they are following Jesus as He intended.

Instead of strengthening one another by sharing Jesus within us, we act as consumers of religious goods and services, referring to our leaders as “my pastor” the same way as a barber or dentist. Instead of protection from deception through shared gifting such as shepherding, we depend on “church” staff rather than on the ever-present Jesus. Deception, forgery, and false doctrine flow from those whose titles siphon the gifts into career paths, but are intended to prevent disaster in the gathered.

This damage is neither semantic nor an opinion; it is well documented in scripture, in the same passage that the gifts are revealed.¹³⁵

Without these gifts among Jesus’ people, believers think like unbelievers.¹³⁶ When religious systems mimic shared gifting from above, fellowship with Father and Son isn’t weakened—it is prevented by those ‘leading.’ Jesus called these kinds of people sons of hell who replicate sons of hell.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Eph 4:11-16

¹³⁶ Eph 4:17-19

¹³⁷ Matt 23:15

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No one and nothing other than Jesus has authority in Jesus' *ekklesia*, but everyone placing their faith (all of it, all of the time) in Him enjoys His presence. When gathered, such believers are equipped to share *Him* rather than theology about Him.¹³⁸ Jesus claims one foundation for His *ekklesia* and for one reason—proclaimed faith in the anointed Son of the Living God.¹³⁹ Every time *scripture references ekklesia, metanoéo, poimén, or euangelion*, it either refers to the way Jesus used it or to something else. “Church” is that something else and mistranslates the other words accordingly, leading us away from Jesus.

Jesus' gatherings are not based on statements of faith, founding documents, lists of beliefs, or even scripture *about* Him. It's not based on our interpretation of Jesus' teachings that make us feel 'fed.' Jesus *ekklesia* happens through actively trusting Him for Life, regardless of theological beliefs, “church” tradition, or our efforts to confront sin. Instead, we shepherd one another and preach the same message He preached.

Jesus never said “church” in any language, so going to it cannot be in His Name—under His authority. Jesus' first believers are the “early church” only by “church” tradition, retroactively projecting its traditions, systems, and theology backward as layers on top of scripture that testifies to Jesus—exactly the same way Constantine redirected *ecclesia* by layering Roman religion on top of the Way.

¹³⁸ 1 Cor 12:4-11

¹³⁹ Matt 16:18

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“Church” Must Corrupt Scripture to Justify Itself

Unexpected? It caught me by surprise.

I understand shock—and even fury—with “church” and those who invented it, but recognizing that “church” **must** rewrite scripture to justify its existence, including Jesus’ own words, boggles my mind. If “church” were to embrace Jesus as scripture portrays Him, it would be forced to abandon itself.¹⁴⁰

“Church” inserted itself into creeds, embraces them as “church tradition,” claims that they are bible-based, and monopolizes scripture translation and interpretation for over 1,000 years to support its institution and the hierarchy that runs it. Jesus addressed religion head-on:

And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition...”

...thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.¹⁴¹

Embracing creeds that declare faith in “church” elevates it to provenance of the “church” forgery, while demoting scripture from its purpose—testimony to Jesus. Traditions nullify Jesus, the only Word of God, shifting faith in Him to faith in religious beliefs—theology.

If we were to embrace Jesus as the head of His *ekklesia*, *if* His *ekklesia* is His Father’s temple, *if* He leads it in Person, *if* His presence is literally in His people to share with each other, and the gifts meant to share Jesus with each other are not absorbed into

¹⁴⁰ See “Religion’s Forged Provenance” section above.

¹⁴¹ Mark 7:9,13

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offices of the “church”—then “church” would cease to exist. It does not have the authority to do what it claims.

For “church” to be legitimate...

1. Scripture must read as if “church” is a valid translation for Jesus’ *ekklesia*.
2. Scripture must be interpreted as if “church” is something Jesus and others said.
3. High Priests’ and Emperors’ creeds must be accepted as scripture-based.
4. Gifts to believers must be rendered as offices of His *ekklesia*.
5. Scripture alterations and their authors must be trusted as inspired and inerrant.
6. It must reject Jesus’ purpose for scripture and accept it as “God’s Word, written.”
7. Faith is placed in “church” and scripture instead of the Person, Jesus.

A reminder:

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.¹⁴²

God’s mystery of the ages isn’t “scripture in us” just as it is not “us in church”, but rather Christ in us—His hope of glory.¹⁴³ Hiding God’s *logos* in our hearts is about Jesus’ literal Life *living* in us—not a spiritual supplement, mastered through scripture, or a weekly habit. ‘Grounding ourselves in the “word”, calling ourselves Bible-based, or embracing a ‘biblical worldview’ are Pharisaic practices that failed miserably from Jesus’

¹⁴² John 5:37-40

¹⁴³ Col 1:27

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vantage point.¹⁴⁴ We are to literally ground ourselves in Jesus' Life and His worldview—Him in us and us in Him, abiding—never 'through' something else.¹⁴⁵

Taking Life in Jesus as seriously as we consider oxygen means that we hear His voice—constantly. Jesus' Life cannot be reduced to theologically constructed principles that depend on our understanding and application. Being Bible-based is akin to claiming a deep relationship with your spouse by reading an autobiography and considering it time spent together. The impact of being scripture-based gets worse:

*But I know that you do not have the love of God within you.*¹⁴⁶

Our Bibles, Bible studies, and verse-based services dominate “church” life. Yes—scripture is absolutely inerrant and inspired, *but we don't have **that** scripture in “church.”* We quote verses as principles to manage our lives, thinking that our attempt to apply scriptural principles is the Christian Life. Even if scriptural principles were the way that Jesus prescribed, the scriptures we quote are corrupt and produce corrupt principles.

Placing faith in the versions of scripture we've inherited today practices faith in Constantine, Theodosius, Jerome, King James, and the Westminster Confession—an imperial lens. The Nicene Creed leads us to recite our faith in the “church” that these kings of the earth invented.

Every time Jesus referred to scripture, he called it scripture, explicitly separating logos and graphé, and clearly separating scripture from Life in Himself. Yes, I read

¹⁴⁴ John 5:10,17-18

¹⁴⁵ See Chapter 10

¹⁴⁶ John 5:42

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scripture—a lot—but now I research every “church” word to test translators' allegiance to Jesus rather than King James and the others.

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

‘In Jesus’ Name,’ ‘In His Name,’ and ‘In Your Name,’ are common phrases. 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, most commonly “...In Jesus Name, Amen.” Jesus refers to acting “in His name” many times, yet He doesn’t include the phrase even when He teaches what to pray.¹⁴⁷ Nor is “in Jesus Name” or any variation used to close a prayer in the entire New Testament. So, what does this phrase really mean?

When someone (a grantor) grants power of attorney, the grantee (an agent) is authorized to act on the grantor's behalf, within the boundaries of the grantor's wishes, expressed in a granting document. The agent then negotiates and signs binding legal agreements, executes financial transactions, and makes medical decisions on the grantor's behalf. Without agent authority, such actions are forgery, embezzlement, and fraud—felonies.

After punctuating prayers with the ‘right words’ for decades, I realize that *saying* Jesus' name isn't necessarily the same as being *in* His name—acting upon His expressed desires and His direction to do so. I realized I'd been using His name without His specific instruction, but to shore up prayers for what I want to happen. Saying ‘in Jesus Name’ didn't heal the sick or raise the dead when I closed my prayers that way. The same habit—used in ceremonies and public prayer closings—is epidemic throughout Christendom. “Pastors,” strangers, and friends may sound spiritually sincere, but the results rarely suggest Jesus' authority has been invoked. The 72 didn't return after using Jesus' delegated authority to report that sometimes nothing happened; they rejoiced, exclaiming

¹⁴⁷ Matthew 16

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that even the demons are subject to them in His Name. When people acted based upon Jesus' instruction, Jesus' authority went with them.

Those who used Jesus' name without His authority suffered the penalty—they were signing bad checks, as the sons of Sceva learned the hard way.¹⁴⁸ They copied words from others casting out demons, but without Jesus' delegated authority, thinking they could copy the exorcism process without actually following the one with the power to expel demons.

Jesus is emphatic:

*“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 never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”*¹⁴⁹

In a blinding flash of the obvious, the chasm split open between *saying* “In Jesus’ Name” and *being* in Jesus’ name. What if I am saying “in Jesus Name” while Jesus is simultaneously interceding with a different objective? Am I opposing Jesus? We may be fortunate that nothing happens when we say “in His Name” when He didn’t direct what we just said or did.

Compared to the era before the Constantinian “church,” saying Jesus’ Name when given the authority to do so caused crippled people to walk and demons to flee. Why doesn’t Jesus teach this closing phrase when He teaches prayer? What constitutes a

¹⁴⁸ Acts 19:11-16

¹⁴⁹ Matt 7:21-23

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gathering of two or more to be ‘in His Name’?¹⁵⁰ What do we do with gatherings He didn’t call but use His name? Paul is particularly harsh regarding those who act godly but are powerless:

...having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.¹⁵¹

Getting ‘in His Name’ right is a prerequisite for a gathering to be His—another blinding flash. The 72 were not in His name because they decided to get together and go after some demons, saying Jesus’ name along the way; they were in His Name because He gave them the authority to use it on a mission He gave them. Duplicating one of Jesus’ missions doesn’t make it in His Name. Hearing His voice, gathering with others who hear the same voice, and doing what He says for the unique mission He assigns is nonnegotiable if we are to act under His authority—to be in His Name. Sincerely doing what we think is good and saying His Name as we pursue it is a forgery.

Jesus gathered and led His *ekklesiai* for various missions. For His first *ekklesia*, He called four; then added a fifth; then accumulated a total of 12; and then at least 72.¹⁵² He demonstrated His authority as God’s Son by personally healing the sick and raising the dead as He traveled around Galilee with these *ekklesiai*. Then Jesus commissioned *ekklesiai* to go out on their own and do the same thing *in His Name*. Can you imagine going on a mission to heal the sick and cast out demons, literally carrying a power of attorney from Jesus? ‘Hi, Jesus sent me. I speak for Him.’

¹⁵⁰ Matt 18:20

¹⁵¹ 2 Tim 3:5

¹⁵² Mark 1:16-20, Mark 2:14; Mark 3:14, Luke 10:1-24

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When Jesus said "My *ekklesia*," He was referring to these groups that He had already been sending. There is no legitimate 'institution' today because there was no institution then—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 the principles of its own making onto Jesus' simple groups and purposes, using biblical language, but with different definitions.

Unless I assume a "church" institution before reading scripture, Jesus said the words "build My *ekklesiai*" only once, without a hint of an institution. Jesus' *ekklesiai* look like Old Testament *ekklesiai* in Judges, 1 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Chronicles. "Church" looks like Roman religion.

Since "church" is conceptually and linguistically foreign to Jesus and His *ekklesia*, it cannot be in His Name. "Church" is therefore void of Jesus' authority, cannot be in His name, and 'doing it right' is a *non-sequitur*. "Church" precludes Jesus' *ekklesia* and vice versa.

Gathering together two or more at a time happens in His Name when those gathered hear His voice to do so, in stark contrast to inviting Him to join us as we gather and saying His name over our services. Conversely, going to "church" responds to King James' call and the voices of emperors past.

If Jesus lives in His *ekklesia*, His temple, then *attending* "church" is a forgery of *being* His *ekklesia*—the difference between seeking Him with my whole heart versus doing "church" the way "church" teaches to do "church." When we lose the intimacy of constantly hearing His voice, we cannot be in His Name, and we lose both His *ekklesia* and Jesus Himself, settling for a forgery 'with a form of godliness, but lacking the power thereof.'

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Don't Forsake The Assembly: Hey, Who Said That?

Nowhere is “church’s” forgery clearer than in its teaching about itself, using Hebrews 10:25:

*And let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good works, not neglecting **to meet together**, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another...¹⁵³*

The phrase, ‘to meet together’¹⁵⁴ communicates an action not to be neglected, and makes doctrinal sense when read through “church’s” lens. Through Jesus’ lens, this interpretation is unintelligible, because Jesus’ *ekklesia* is not a system of religious meetings but people who respond to His call in real time. So, what is this passage really talking about? We must be Bereans!

First, the word rendered “to assemble/to gather” in Hebrews 10:25 is not a Greek verb; it is a noun. Reading this as “to attend church” only works if we assume it before reading.

Second, the word in question is *episynagogue*, not *ekklesia*. Even if “church” were a valid translation for *ekklesia*, this verse does not describe the act of gathering, nor does it refer to the word supposedly translated as “church.”

Third, because *episynagogue* is a noun, a nearby verb must support it as the subject of a sentence or as the object of the verb. The verb is *egkataleipó*, meaning to forsake, abandon, or desert, and is modified by the adverb ‘not.’ The instruction is to not forsake the assembly. Why? The answer is in the same sentence: to encourage one another rather

¹⁵³ Hebrews 10:24-25

¹⁵⁴ Also rendered as ‘meeting together’ or ‘gathering together’ in various translations.

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than desert those gathered in Jesus' Name. The word for "encouraged" is the same word Paul uses when teaching how to administer spiritual gifts: so that the gathered may be encouraged. It's the same word used for encouraging in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, and it's the same word in the list of spiritual gifts in Romans 12:8.

The point of the verse and surrounding passage isn't to adhere to the habit of attending. The point is to refrain from forming the habit of forsaking, neglecting, or abandoning those people gathered in Jesus' name—because that is where Jesus manifests Himself in His people, including encouragement. Jesus' encouragement is found in the gathered, *not* in the habit of attending. "Church" replaces attending as the habit to follow, contradicting the words in the verse itself as well as the purpose for gathering—to build each other up.

Hebrews 10:25 cannot be followed—we cannot encourage each other—if we are attending a "church" gathering that faces forward when we should be focused on each other. The same is true for every spiritual gift, including those siphoned from God's intended people into "church" staff.

The incredible Person, Jesus, the incredible things He has done, and the incredible reality that believers may join, inspire Hebrews 10:25 in this context:

Therefore, let us draw near with a true heart

... Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering

... Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works

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*...[let us] not neglect [Jesus' *ekklesia*]¹⁵⁵...*

... but encourage one another...

... But recall the former days

... Therefore, do not throw away your confidence

... let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...

... Consider him who endured from sinners

...Therefore, lift your drooping hands and

... strengthen your weak knees,

... and make straight paths for your feet,

... Strive for peace with everyone

... Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom

... and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship

There are so many actions for Jesus' followers to do for the sake of each other and the relationship to Him that the overemphasized mantra of "do not forsake attending" is insincere, if not heresy.

Along with 1 Cor 14:26—Jesus' *ekklesia* builds each other up in all things—Hebrews 10:25 is encouragement itself, reminding us not to abandon the people whom Jesus has called to assemble. The habit of assembling—attending "church"—and the reminder that

¹⁵⁵ Author interpretation, using a noun instead of a verb to translate the original correctly

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Jesus and his presence, including encouragement, live in His assembled for the sake of each other are unrelated ideas. This is worshiping God in Spirit and in Truth.¹⁵⁶

“Church” teaching about Hebrews 10:25 only validates its own system of services. To gather people according to scripture requires us to dismiss “church” teaching regarding “church”:

1. It’s a conflict of interest because it serves itself.
2. It is taught as a scriptural directive to attend an institution that Jesus did not even mention, let alone model.
3. “Church” invests enormous time, money, and energy in its central function: scheduled gatherings—when there’s no other passage in scripture that supports the idea, but it is vital to the institution.
4. We must treat a noun as a verb.

¹⁵⁶ Romans 12:2, John 4:24

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

This chapter challenges me. Admitting mistakes is bad enough, but knowing how it could strike others gives me pause. Admitting is indeed the first step, but not the only step. Religious forgery still dogs me as I deprogram from trusting in my beliefs to actively trusting in Jesus regardless of how good I think my beliefs about Him are. The seismic shift is like the difference between believing that an object is a chair and sitting down in it.

Now I understand that "*metanoéo* and believe that God's Kingdom is right here, right now" is utterly unrelated to my attendance, theology, or understanding. Hence, Jesus fervently persuades us to radically change our minds and hearts, putting our faith in Him instead. Until I listened to Jesus' actual words outside of the "church" box and experienced *metanoéo*, I couldn't hear God's message as Jesus delivered it. The "church" paradigm prevented me from this kind of transformation because it had programmed me into its brand (denominational) of beliefs. Creeds like the Nicene Creed take Jesus' condemnation in John 5:37-40 to a new level by reducing Life to a list of beliefs rather than trusting in a Person. "Church" adding "church" to a list of its beliefs is the smoking gun.

We change hairstyles, diets, and bad habits with varying degrees of success, but to discard core beliefs is brutal. Building life upon beliefs entirely misses the point, but beware: abandoning the religious paradigm isolates, humbles, frustrates, and confuses the pilgrim's quest. Braving uncharted waters is a journey unrecognizable to "church," because Jesus is a destination that cannot be contained by a statement of "church" faith. Life in Him is mutually exclusive with theology about Him.

My quest usually evokes one of two responses:

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1. Those who don't care about religion anyway find Jesus and "church" irrelevant
2. Those who are so committed to "church" that they vehemently defend it:
 - a. Jesus attended Temple and Synagogue, so we should do the same.
 - b. 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.

Those who fit answer #2 above cannot see a Christian life without Christianity and "church." I no longer see Life in Jesus in either choice.

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Defense #1: Jesus ‘Attended’ Temple And Synagogue, So We Should Follow the Example

I’ve assumed since grade school that Jesus attending something meant that attending “church” is following Him—that’s what Sunday school teaches. Looking back, I can’t recollect a sermon about what attending Temple and synagogue looked like. First, I’m surprised by what I don’t see:

1. Listening to sermons
2. Leading capital campaigns and passing the plate
3. Encouraging followers to attend “services”
4. Developing systems to arrange “worship” for Himself

What *did* happen when Jesus attended the Temple—and shouldn’t we do the same?

1. Synagogue and Temple staff tried to kill Him, trap Him in His words, and called Him demon possessed.¹⁵⁷
 - a. To be Christlike, shouldn’t we speak Truth on “church” grounds in a way that “church” leaders plot to kill us, actually attempt to murder us, try to trick us into saying something worthy of death, and call us demon-possessed?
2. He healed and cast out demons¹⁵⁸
 - a. Shouldn’t we be doing *something* in “church” that demonstrates Jesus’ power as He did rather than talking about theological principles to be applied?
3. He called Temple leaders hypocrites, sons of hell, and whitewashed tombs¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Actual attempts: John 8:20, 48-49, John 10:22-31, John 10:31-39, Mark 11:15-18, Luke 19:45-48, Mark 12:1-12, Luke 20:9-19, Luke 21:1-6. Plots to kill Jesus: Matt 12:14/Mark 3:6, John 5:16-18, John 7:1, 19, 25, John 8: 37,40, John 11:47-57, Mark 11:15-18/Luke 19:45-48, Matthew 26:3-5/Mark 14:1-2/Luke 22:1-6, Trap Him in His words: Matt 22:15, Luke 20:20, Luke 11:54, Called Him demon possessed: John 8:13, 48, 52, John 10:33,

¹⁵⁸ Matt 21:14, Luke 22:50-51, John 8:1-11, John 9:1-7

¹⁵⁹ Matt 23:1-36

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- a. Shouldn't we label "pastors," "bishops," etc. with the same names if "church" is illegitimate?
4. He revealed that Temple leaders were preventing people from entering God's Kingdom¹⁶⁰
 - a. Shouldn't we be exposing "church" leaders for preventing themselves and others from entering the Kingdom of God by practicing "church"?
5. He boldly called out what religion had done to God's truth through Human tradition.¹⁶¹
 - a. Shouldn't we be confronting "church" leaders about how their traditions nullify the word of God?
6. He unveiled His plan to destroy the Temple and rebuild it *in Him* in three days¹⁶²
 - a. Shouldn't we be proclaiming how a "church" attendance will be destroyed as well?¹⁶³

In all attendance accounts, either at the Temple or a synagogue, Jesus has only one positive interaction with leadership.¹⁶⁴ Every other attendance denounces the system and the leaders who ran it. Shouldn't we attend with the same spirit, or are we modeling "churchlikeness" instead of Christlikeness? Jesus is kind, gentle, and loving, but it is not True that a lamb on His shoulders is the complete picture of Jesus. He was not killed because He was nice. He was killed because He repeatedly and fiercely condemned the religion that was stealing God's Kingdom from the people who would otherwise enter. Religion killed Jesus. Shouldn't we also be 'tearing down the modern-day temple, leaving

¹⁶⁰ Matt 23:13, Luke 11:52

¹⁶¹ Matt 15:1-3, Matt 15:4-6, Matt 15:7-9, Mark 7:1-5, Mark 7:6-8, Mark 7:9, Mark 7:10-13, Luke 11:37-41, Luke 11:42, Matt 22:23-24, Matt 23:25-28

¹⁶² Matt 24:1-2, Mark 13:1-2, Luke 21:5-6, Luke 19:41-44, John 2:18-22, Matt 26:60-61, Mark 14:57-59, Matt 27:39-40, Mark 15:29-30

¹⁶³ Rev 18:8-19

¹⁶⁴ Mark 12:28-34

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no stone upon another?’ Perhaps, if we are not making religion so angry that it wants to kill us, we are not being Christlike, but conforming to it instead? I was brought up to be grateful that we live in a country where we can worship as we desire. It took a long time to start wondering why government—kings of the earth—and “church” cohabitated so well. Jesus spoke up. So did Stephen. So did Peter, John, the apostles, and Paul¹⁶⁵. Aren’t these our biblical models rather than “church” tradition and tax-free status? If nothing else, shouldn’t we question everything leadership says, as Paul encouraged?¹⁶⁶

I always knew that the evil Priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes arranged Jesus’ crucifixion. Still, I didn’t know His Temple attendance provoked constant confrontation with these people, resulting in several assassination plots, attempted murder, and theological games designed to trap Him. Jesus’ Temple attendance was marked by calling out “pastors” of the day as sons of hell, hypocrites, vipers, and enemies of God’s Kingdom, but it doesn’t even hint at “church” services.¹⁶⁷ Neither temple nor synagogue was ever linked to His *ekklesia* or any other institution, but rather to spiritual tyranny.

¹⁶⁵ Acts 4:5-22, Acts 5:17-32, Acts 5:33-42, Acts 6:8-Acts 7:21, et al

¹⁶⁶ Acts 17:11

¹⁶⁷ Matt 23, for example

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Following Jesus Tears Down Attendance

In fact, Jesus teaches that His followers will be put out of the assembly (*synagogue*) and even killed by ‘attenders.’¹⁶⁸ The attenders threatened that anybody following Jesus would be put out of the assembly.¹⁶⁹ Others wouldn’t reveal their belief in Jesus for fear of being put out of the assembly.¹⁷⁰ Later, Jesus came across the man born blind, who had, indeed, been kicked out of the assembly. In none of these instances did Jesus even hint at a new system of assembling; He led them to believe in Himself. If there was ever a time for Jesus to talk about His coming institution—the “church”—this was it.

Jesus didn’t just tear down the Temple and rebuild it in Himself through crucifixion and resurrection; He tore down everything about it, starting with attendance, replacing it with spirit and truth.

Only religion could twist His words into establishing a religion practiced in “church,” which literally means the ‘Lord’s House’—a ‘reformed’ Temple. The system no longer applied the moment that Jesus died and was replaced the moment He rose from the dead. This is why Jesus appeared for 40 days over 5 sabbaths, yet didn’t attend the biblically mandated Passover at the Temple or visit a synagogue. Everything these institutions stood for is now found exclusively in the Person of Jesus Himself.

Passover was in full swing in Jerusalem, where 10s of thousands had gathered—talk about a missed opportunity to be relevant to culture! If there was ever a time to anchor Jesus’ new institution to Temple attendance, rising from the dead and attending a feast was it. Instead, Jesus did the same thing that He did when He came out of the

¹⁶⁸ John 16:2

¹⁶⁹ John 9:22

¹⁷⁰ John 12:42

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wilderness—He proclaimed God’s Kingdom—still the point, the whole point and nothing but the point.¹⁷¹ Why? Jesus had already told us:

“I say unto you, that something greater than the temple is here.”¹⁷²

Jesus’ followers knew what He meant:

“...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

There’s more:

“There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.”¹⁷³

... 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

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.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Acts 1:3

¹⁷² Matt 12:6

¹⁷³ Matt 24:2

¹⁷⁴ 1 Cor 3:16-17

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Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,¹⁷⁵

... 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.¹⁷⁶

The Temple's torn curtain was repaired by hands of those who didn't realize they no longer had a job.¹⁷⁷

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¹⁷⁵ 1 Cor 6:19

¹⁷⁶ Eph 2:21-22

¹⁷⁷ Matt 27:51

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Defense #2: But Some Attenders Sincerely Believe in “Jesus” and “church”

Personal sincerity while pursuing “doing church right” does not make “church” True. Paul’s sincerity led him to Damascus, where he planned to put more believers in jail. Apollos was sincere about His teachings—which were incomplete—as were 12 disciples in Ephesus.¹⁷⁸ Peter taught that Jews should not mingle with Gentiles, Thomas refused to believe the resurrection, and Jesus’ brothers sincerely thought that He was crazy.¹⁷⁹ All were very sincere about what they believed, but those beliefs had no bearing on what is True. *Metanoeó* happened to them; they rejected what is false and embraced Jesus. They had been sincerely wrong. “Church” is not legitimate because some sincerely believe in it. It is only legitimate if it is True.

Even when presented with the facts, we hold onto Rome’s creedal religion (protestant and Catholic), unwilling to confront our sincerity of faith in “church.” I sincerely practiced and taught “church” and its religion for decades. My sincerity about “church” was just as wrong as Thomas’ denial of the resurrection.

Embracing sincerity sounds and feels compassionate; however, sincerity establishes intent but cannot establish truth, authority, or legitimacy. Being sincere about “church” doesn’t substitute for being “in Jesus’ Name,” nor does having genuine love for Jesus have anything to do with “church” being True.¹⁸⁰ We have no choice but to place our faith in King James if we choose to embrace “church.” Many will realize too late that sincerely saying Jesus’ Name—including in “church”—will be told to leave His presence.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Acts 18:24-28, Acts 19:1-7,

¹⁷⁹ Acts 10:9-35 Acts 11:1-18, John 20-24-29, John 7:3-5, Acts 1:14, 1 Cor 15:7

¹⁸⁰ John 5:37-40

¹⁸¹ Matt 7:21-23

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Good Things Happen in “Church”

‘But I’ve experienced Jesus, scripture, and prayer in “church,” so it can’t be wrong.’ This logic says that if we judge things to happen in “church,” then “church” is validated. This logic refutes itself because when bad things happen, we don’t invalidate “church.” Instead, we assume “church” is legitimate as if only good things happened and call it imperfect rather than invalid. If the presence of good things validates it, then the presence of bad things should invalidate it as well.

Jesus’ *ekklesia* is not validated by the behavior of institutional members or its staff, but exclusively by Jesus’ Personal call to those who proclaim Him to be the anointed Son of the living God and follow Him like John, James, Andrew, and Peter – the first called to do so.¹⁸² Almost none of the ‘good’ things Jesus did happened in Temple, and most of the bad things that happened to Him did.

¹⁸² Matt 16:16

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

If following Jesus and going to "church" are semantically the same, I have to ask, "Why did you read this far?"

1. Jesus' *ekklesia* refers to people, in Whom their Life resides, and what they do.¹⁸³
2. Jesus' *ekklesia* isn't a building or institution attended, joined, or believed in.¹⁸⁴
3. Proclaiming 'You [Jesus] are the anointed Son of the Living God' is the only foundation for Jesus' *ekklesiai*, those who follow Him when He calls.¹⁸⁵
4. Scripture quoting Jesus says so.¹⁸⁶

Podium signs on the front lawn, websites that advertise attendance hours, and regularly choreographed events highlight the impossibility of "church" and *ekklesia* being just semantically different; they are fundamentally and foundationally unrelated in origin and action. Can you picture Jesus setting up a sign with office hours or having the 12 register with the Roman government?

Compare being married to attending a marriage seminar. One is two people in an intimate relationship; the other focuses on the gathering of married people. A marriage seminar may indeed help a marriage, but treating the principles of a seminar as the root of a good marriage is a forgery.

Imagine the agony of seeing Jesus face-to-face, saying, "Didn't I attend biblical gatherings diligently in your name?" only to realize that He doesn't even recognize me.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ John 14-17

¹⁸⁴ John 4:7-14

¹⁸⁵ John 6:68

¹⁸⁶ Matt 16:16-18

¹⁸⁷ Matt 7:21-23

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Claiming mere semantics between “church” and following Jesus demands that we believe that He didn’t really mean *ekklesia* when He said it, but that He meant *kuriakón*, and that we place faith in King James to have corrected Him. Semantics, indeed!

Jesus didn’t model attendance; He led His *ekklesia* to the “church” of His day to proclaim the arrival of God’s Kingdom, announcing the destruction of what they were attending and introducing the Life from above that was being rebuilt in Him.

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Personal Preferences

The most revealing evidence that unmasks “church” is how **we** treat it. We all have our list of criteria when ‘shopping’ for a good “church:”

1. Where I feel at home
2. A solid kids' program
3. Where I feel like I'm being fed
4. Offers a good small group program
5. Missions' focus
6. If we really like the “pastor”
7. Where my friends go
8. A familiar denomination
9. Activities like men's softball
10. Babysitter prospects

I used #9 and #10 myself once—low expectations. We may pray for “churches” that meet our ‘shopping list,’ and we earnestly seek a “church” that fulfills our needs, and testify how the Lord led us. Roman emperors created the “church” forgery on this premise: to fulfill their political goals—in their own words.¹⁸⁸

The very idea of ‘shopping’ exposes “church.” Jesus didn't demonstrate services, appoint leadership, strategize how to meet people's needs, or call for belief in an institution. He didn't establish programs tailored to all age groups, marital status, personal addictions/issues, or ethnicity. Cultural relevance, website content, and musical style share one “church” objective: attracting attendees. Jesus did the opposite.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ See Appendix 3, The Edict of Milan

¹⁸⁹ John 6:26-66

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PART IV

The ORIGINAL

It Takes Your Breath Away

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

Whether through legislation, misuse, or religious tradition, changing scripture alters God's testimony to Jesus to serve someone else's purposes. Ignore chapter and verse headings, and read Mark 1 from Jesus' immersion until He begins preaching:¹⁹⁰

John, known as the Immerser, preached immersion into a transformative new life and ceremonially immersed them in water. John's preaching moved people so deeply that they publicly acknowledged being sinners. John prophesied that someone far greater than he was coming, who would immerse believers in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus came to John, so John immersed Jesus as well. As He came up out of the water, God tore open the skies, and the Holy Spirit landed on Jesus' shoulder. God speaks from the torn-open sky, "You're my beloved Son; I take great pleasure in you," publicly crowning Jesus as His heir.

The Spirit then drives Jesus into the wilderness to battle Satan. Emerging from the wilderness, Jesus delivers God's message: His kingdom has arrived! He just won the first victory, and Jesus persuades stunned listeners to change their minds and believe God's message.

Jesus then calls a few fishermen out of their boats, and they follow Him throughout Galilee [Jesus first ekklesia], healing the sick, casting out demons, and preaching the same message: God's Kingdom has arrived!

God didn't reveal Jesus and His Kingdom invasion at Temple, "church," or synagogue—but out in the wilderness by a guy who ate locusts and wore camel fur. God conspicuously ignored attendance venues to make His greatest announcement of all time.

¹⁹⁰ Mark 1:9-21

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If institutional attendance was central to God, He missed an incredible opportunity. But God wasn't introducing a better ceremonial and attendance paradigm. In Jesus, religious gatherings at Temple, synagogues, or anywhere else were fulfilled in Him and obsolete in themselves. Every God-ordained ceremonial concept now existed only in the Person of Jesus. God Himself rejects the attendance-and-observance paradigm to reveal the ultimate: Life in Jesus. Gatherings didn't go away, but Human leadership was replaced. They became His gatherings when gathered in response to *His* call—in His Name—and He leads them in Person. As He manifests uniquely in each person—also known as spiritual gifts—the cumulative expression is Jesus' body building each other up in Him.

Instead of going to Temple, when God revealed Jesus, He went immediately to face Satan. He didn't attend services, host Bible studies, or plant new gathering locations. Armed with His Father's authority, Jesus scored the first victory of God's declaration of war and then gathered others to join Him. Only religion could turn the glorious message that 'The Kingdom of God is Here' into an opportunity to 'do penance for sin,' theologically box it into "the gospel," and require attendance.

God's Kingdom? Here? *Now*? Imagine the stunned looks! God has just declared war on His enemy who imprisons His people. It was such an overwhelming message that Jesus followed it with 'believe me, I've just done it... come to your senses and believe what I just told you!' Inserting sin and penance into God's greatest revelation ever is the greatest crime in history and is now a religious pillar. Grand Theft Jesus. Jesus stages a jailbreak, and religion reinforces the prison bars.

It's blasphemy. Religion replaces believing with "repenting."

Embracing what Jesus really says unleashes a deprogramming avalanche; religion's "gospel" collapses on itself, and God's revelation pours in. When we trust Jesus for every

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aspect of Life instead of a lifestyle of “repentance” for our sin, we can also trust that He has really taken away the sin of the world as an obstacle to Himself. He took it off the table, removing every obstacle between us and believing in Him. Sin and penance are religion’s prescription for people to qualify themselves for forgiveness via repentance to get saved—the fabricated idea that Life in Jesus could be attained via a human system. He taught otherwise.¹⁹¹ Jesus forgave and died before anybody even said they were sorry.¹⁹² Profoundly, religion doesn’t even know that unilateral forgiveness, while true, does not constitute believing in Jesus. Consider the woman caught in adultery. Who dragged her in front of Jesus, and who had no condemnation?¹⁹³ What “repentance” did she express?

Opposite of the sin/salvation narrative, Jesus preaches God’s Kingdom:

1. He teaches us to pray “Your [God’s] Kingdom come,”¹⁹⁴ not “our repentance come.”
2. Jesus’ analogies (“parables”) start with “the Kingdom is like...”¹⁹⁵ not “repentance from sin” is like...
3. The arrival of God’s Kingdom is the only idea that Jesus calls “the gospel.”¹⁹⁶
4. Jesus didn’t miss a beat. After His resurrection, He continued to teach God’s Kingdom for 40 days—with no mention of attendance.¹⁹⁷

Jesus preached God’s Kingdom around Galilee and tried to teach Nicodemus. Paul preached, taught, persuaded, and testified about it.¹⁹⁸ Jesus instructed the 12¹⁹⁹ and the

¹⁹¹ John 3:8

¹⁹² Matt 9:2-8, Matt 2:1-12, Luke 5:17-26, Luke 7:36-50, Luke 23:39-43

¹⁹³ John 8:1-11

¹⁹⁴ Matt 6:10

¹⁹⁵ Matt 13 – several examples

¹⁹⁶ Mark 1:15

¹⁹⁷ Acts 1:3

¹⁹⁸ Acts 19, 20, 28

¹⁹⁹ Matt 10:5-7

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72 to preach the Kingdom. He proclaimed, “The Kingdom of God has come upon you.”²⁰⁰ Jesus said He would give the “keys of the Kingdom” to His *ekklesia*. But Jesus never said that he would grant us repentance or a new Temple system. He did not make “repentance” a prerequisite for believing.

Jesus exposed religious leaders and their opposition to God’s Kingdom: “Publicans and harlots enter the Kingdom before you,”²⁰¹ with the ultimate reality: “Not only do you not enter the Kingdom, but you prevent others from entering as well.”²⁰²

Jesus said, ‘Seek God’s Kingdom first’²⁰³ not ‘seek repentance first.’ Freeing prisoners from the religious kingdom tops Jesus’ list, preaching it in the very halls where they gathered.²⁰⁴ Jesus didn’t call people sinners, except to refute religion’s nonsense.²⁰⁵ Jesus has one direct comment: “Stop sinning so that nothing worse happens to you.”²⁰⁶ His concern is for our well-being in His Kingdom, not commitment to “repentance.”

Religion killed Jesus for sharing God’s Kingdom throughout Israel, Galilee, and even Samaria—a Kingdom Pilate could not tolerate, and Jewish leaders rejected. Then Jesus proclaimed God’s Kingdom for 40 more days before ascending into heaven.²⁰⁷ From His very first message until He sat at His Father’s side, Jesus proclaimed God’s Kingdom. That’s the Original. Compared to Life in Him, sin is nothing, so He removed it from consideration.

²⁰⁰ Matt 12:28

²⁰¹ Matt 21:31

²⁰² Matt 23:13

²⁰³ Matt 6:33

²⁰⁴ Matt 23

²⁰⁵ Luke 13:4-5

²⁰⁶ John 5:14

²⁰⁷ Acts 1:3

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Didn't Jesus Come to Call Sinners to Repentance?²⁰⁸

If we assume religion's version of "the gospel," "church," and "repent," then Jesus calls sinners to *paenitemini*—"repentance." Since Jesus never called anybody a sinner, nor did He confront people's sin demanding "repentance" before healing and delivering, Jesus must have a different vantage point.

Picture Levi in his Roman IRS office, collecting taxes on a typical workday. Jesus spots him and says, "Follow me," which Levi does. Hmm?

Levi was excited, so he naturally held a feast for Jesus at his home. Some from Levi's circle, Jesus, and His disciples were the guests. Religious leaders spotted them—were they stalking Jesus? They were not guests eating with the riffraff, but questioned Jesus disciples about why they ate with them (tax collectors and sinners). Jesus overhears.

The religious, repentance-based lens leads to one interpretation of Jesus' response. We may be members in good standing, live "a good Christian life," and strive for "Christlikeness" in that worldview dictated by this same theological lens.

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 through another lens. If we assume that scripture testifies to Jesus as He actually is,²⁰⁹ then we read it as the revelation of a Person, rather than a religious theological pillar.

"Why do you eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Pharisees directed the question to Jesus' students. But Jesus stepped in. The theologians were messing with His people!

²⁰⁸ Luke 7:27-32

²⁰⁹ John 5:37-40

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“The healthy don’t need a physician, just those who are sick,” He says, and continues: “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” If you assume a religious lens, this fits the sin-centered system. Through the repentance lens, Jesus instituted a God-ordained doctrine: Jesus’ mission is to lead sinners to “repentance of sin.” This matches the “repentance gospel,” and the Pharisees should embrace His noble mission. Right?

Aligning this passage with Jesus’ announcement of God’s arrival,²¹⁰ nothing is more clearly debunked than the idea that “repent” means “repent for sin” and that translators have mistranslated *metanoéo*. The illegitimate rendering of “repentant from sin” as a synonym for *metanoéo* must be falsely assumed before reading Levi’s dinner party as the doctrine of “repentance for salvation” to apply.

More subtly, since Jesus had dined with Pharisees several times,²¹¹ what does that say about their own sinful status—does Jesus only dine with sinners? Jesus condemns the Pharisee conversion model, calling them sons of Hell, who reproduced sons of Hell, so He probably wasn’t endorsing their system.²¹² Just as in other confrontations, Jesus likely rocked their worldview rather than endorsed it, leaving them speechless. Since Jesus never called anybody a sinner, He was using the Pharisees’ own accusation to answer them. Can you imagine Jesus being Christlike and calling His fellow dinner guests sinners in front of them?

If this verse stands as a theological foundation directly from Jesus’ mouth, then where is the theology for the righteous who don’t need Him? Wouldn’t they be the ones

²¹⁰ Mark 1:15-16

²¹¹ Luke 7:36-50, Luke 11:37-54, Luke 14:1-24

²¹² Matt 23:15

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for Jesus to build on and give the keys to the Kingdom? If Jesus were stating *the* foundation of Christian doctrine, why does only half of the sentence apply?

Once again, theologians tried to trap Him, but Jesus shut them up, leaving them without a response. What if Jesus actually loved Levi and was celebrating with him and his friends like normal people do when great things happen, like following Him?

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 shunning them as we do?
3. Tax collectors, prostitutes, and fishermen! How can they be made righteous? Impossible? Some things just can't be redeemed! *It would take an act of God...*
4. You can't eat with them; they're unclean. They have to be made clean first. No, we don't want to tell them how. They might attend, too!

If they were genuinely worried about their well-being, why weren't the religious inviting tax collectors and sinners to dinner at their homes? The accusers were left with nothing but their theology, and they had no answer, just like the prodigal son's big brother.²¹³ Jesus had silenced them again. I bet Peter got it. Leaning back and sipping his wine, he hears Jesus say with a straight face, "I haven't come to call the righteous..." This is priceless on so many levels. Can't you see Peter spraying that Mogen David all over Levi's nice white tablecloth?

²¹³ Luke 15:11-32

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Jesus publicly exposed the theologians as vipers, sons of hell, hypocrites, and outsiders to God's kingdom, who also kept others out.²¹⁴ I doubt that He has now reversed Himself to join the Pharisees to call Levi's guests nasty names at dinner.

I don't think they got the joke, but it's now in our statements of faith, our liturgy, and our seminaries. "Church" doesn't get it, either.

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²¹⁴ Matt 23

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The Original Continues

Jesus didn't orchestrate a Temple coup or join its leadership—because there is nothing to attend or operate after He rises from the dead. Jesus didn't visit the Temple or synagogue after His resurrection—He skipped the Sabbath for the rest of His Life, including today. He revealed His desires in prayer with His Father:

*All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them... that they may be one, even as we are one... that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*²¹⁵

Jesus didn't say, "May they 'repent' from sin and attend services together" so that the world may know Him.

Jesus connects this kind of relationship to His Father and His people over 100 times without a single reference to "church", its offices, its authority, or attendance.²¹⁶ His only connection to religion after the Last Supper was to a death sentence. He mentions one sin: the sin of not believing in Him, because Jesus was concerned about one thing—our abiding in Him and Him in us, so that the world may believe that you [God] have sent me [Jesus].

Jesus now lives in His people, the Hope of glory,²¹⁷ His only Temple.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ John 17:10-21 (selected pieces quoted)

²¹⁶ John 14-17

²¹⁷ Col 1:27

²¹⁸ John 2:19-21, 1 Cor 3:16-17, 1 Cor 6:19, 2 Cor 6:16 et al.

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Chapter 11—Jesus’ Original: A Potluck Featuring the Bread of Life

Discovering that religion imitates Life in Jesus is infuriating, but nothing compares to the agony of losing Jesus Himself by attending “church” services and thinking we have Him. Like Mary weeping at the empty tomb, what do we do now? He’s not where we thought He was. It is an enormous and powerful revelation that disarms “offices of the church” for the sake of restoring fellowship in Jesus, but what does Life in Him actually look like? It’s really good news—it’s a Potluck!

Ekklesia: The Believers’ Potluck

There’s nothing like potluck! Everyone brings a favorite dish to share, and all eat to their heart’s content. Visitors who don’t bring anything get seconds. So much glorious food for everybody!

Potluckers cook enough for themselves, their family, and others. Leftovers overflow—for very full people! Big potlucks, two-family potlucks, neighborhood potlucks, and random potlucks. Joe tries a little of everything! Susan loves the bread with butter; many sample their favorites, and some eat things they’ve never tried before—there’s something for everyone. Some only have dessert!

When someone forgets it’s potluck day or is just overwhelmed by life... guess what? They can still come; they are wanted and can bring food to share next time!

So many people attend the potluck that they soon run out of room, and a few break off to start potlucks for those who prefer breakfast. Both potlucks continue to grow and spin off until the town is filled with potlucks every breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Friendship flourishes, and the community thrives.

Except for the local burger franchise, which suffers from anemic traffic, the jealous owner launches his own “potluck,” featuring low-cost, fast, no-cooking food.

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It turns out that there's a market for fast food 'potluck.' He sets aside a section of his restaurant chain during non-peak times, trades free burgers for kitchen volunteers, and passes the hat to his potluckers to cover overhead and tight margins.

Menu items are limited for large meetings; that's the trade-off of an affordable, efficient substitute. The potluck forgery catches on, and the young and hurried professionals bring their kids—who've never attended the real potlucks—while the substitute becomes part of the community's subculture.

Eventually, the meaning of potluck blurs because both potluck and 'potluck' use the same terminology, so non-potluckers on the outside don't know the difference based on terminology for food, organization, fellowship, and purpose. The contrast between them is the difference between home cooking and fast food—a friend's dining room versus a Naugahyde booth. Remodeling the booths still doesn't turn fast food into homemade.

To differentiate itself in the market, the "potluck" runs specials appealing to broader demographics and grows so large that its kitchens can't handle the volume. So it substitutes the limited menu with a single, popular, pre-made snack to meet the needs of busy attenders. Guest speakers add relevant topics that streamline the weekly event, focusing on universally felt needs. Booths and tables are replaced with conference seating, and there is only time for coffee with so many people. Eventually, a larger building was needed, and two sessions a day were needed to service the popular 'potluck.'

Potluck and "potluck" continue to thrive in their respective circles, and the Chamber of Commerce lists the forgery as a community feature. They claim the same heritage—though only one potluck actually is... a potluck. The town is proud of the 'potluck' institution, which is the foundation of its unique culture.

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Jesus' *Ekklesia*: A Spiritual Feast

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

Through the “church” lens, spiritual gifts are religious topics subject to its authority and “pastoral” oversight. Theological debate ignites “church” splits and spawns denominations along the spectrum from extreme focus to complete denial. “Church” leadership, authority, discipline, theological statements of faith, and religious services either manage or ignore Jesus’ mechanism for building His body—they’re the mechanism that prevents it. “Church” likes to call its congregations the body of Christ, but its services prevent His body from interacting with each other by facing the wrong direction.

In Jesus' *ekklesia*, spiritual gifts are more vital among gathered believers than oxygen. Jesus’ Life speaks in these gifts to build up His people. Spiritual gifts are not theoretical sermon topics; they are Jesus’ voice. “Church,” by definition, cannot be Jesus’ potluck.

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

- 1 Thess 5:11

An *ekklesia* that Jesus convenes is His spiritual smorgasbord, a gourmet potluck for those proclaiming, “You are the Son of the living God.” The variety of gifts is limited only

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by Jesus' own glory.²¹⁹ Life in His *ekklesia* happens as believers manifest God's gifts—it's *how* a gathering becomes Jesus' literal body—we are where He Lives. If we gather in response to another call, we get fast food instead of His potluck, empty calories instead of the bread of life.

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²¹⁹ Eph 1:22-23

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Chapter 12—Fellowship Hall Or Fellowship With Him

Jesus' sheep hear His voice *because* they belong to Him. When gathered in His name, He Lives in and through us. Unless gathered in His Name—Him calling, not us using the phrase—the gathering isn't His. Such gatherings may speak about Him, but they cannot speak for Him.²²⁰

When we lose Jesus' *ekklesia* because we think that “church” is what He was talking about, we lose Jesus Himself because “church” cannot be His when He neither modeled nor said the word. The smoking gun is the direction we face while attending. This reality of missing Life in Him 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.²²¹

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

²²⁰ John 10:3, 14-15, 4, Matth 18:20

²²¹ 1 John 1:1-3

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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.²²²

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."²²³

Fellowship with the Father and Son! We are *designed* to share *HIM* with each other when He calls us together. When in His Name and manifesting Him for each other's sake, we can't help but fellowship *with* Him, too! We lose this kind of fellowship when we confuse attending with being.

Imagine an extraordinary, even decadent family meal, celebrating one of life's great events: a nice, juicy steak, a delicious red wine, and something chocolatey for dessert. Even dinners like this pale compared to the laughter and shared memories. Nobody wants to go home; it's so much fun, and people bond more deeply. They can hardly wait for the next dinner.

We love this kind of fellowship so much because it is a whisper of what fellowship is like in Jesus. We settle for quick chats before and after the service because "church" doesn't know the difference between "catching up" and fellowship with Him. Paul called his entire religious background, knowledge, and education garbage compared to the feast at Jesus' table.²²⁴ We skip "church" for football games all the time. Would we skip

²²² Rev 3:20

²²³ John 14:23

²²⁴ Phil 3:8

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Christmas dinner with Jesus... for anything? If “church” really is literally where Christ’s body reveals Himself to each other, why is it so optional?

“Church” Fellowship

I always thought that “fellowship” in “church” was what adults call catching up before and after the service. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with getting together with others just to be together. But don’t mistake human fellowship for Jesus’ *ekklesia* or fellowship *in Him*. The fellowship that John is talking about is with the Father and His Son, Jesus.

Just imagine, for a minute, *expecting* to receive gifts directly from Jesus that are exactly what your heart craves—a word from Him that you desire even more than life itself. What a joy to *expect* to give the same to others. Now *that* would be building me up—the point of Jesus’ *ekklesia*—preparing us to tear down the gates of hell.²²⁵ 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 limited to what people can offer. People outside “church” have this kind of fellowship all the time. Why would we settle for this kind of fellowship?

²²⁵ Matt 16:18

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Religion Satisfies Human Fellowship

Fellowship with the Father and the Son is imitated by brief fellowship among attenders before and after services, unaware that actual fellowship in Jesus is the indispensable foundation of Jesus' *ekklesia*. It is so easy to be fulfilled by human fellowship when we don't expect overflowing streams of living water.²²⁶

Let me drive this home: the entire point of getting together is to build each other up—according to Scripture.²²⁷ Jesus is present when He calls us together—two or more—in His name.²²⁸ The purpose is to interact with one another in His name, building each other up through the gifts He has given.²²⁹ If He has not called us together, if He isn't speaking to us and through us when we are, then it's somebody else's *ekklesia*.²³⁰ We can't be Jesus' *ekklesia* without facing each other.

Religion forsakes fellowship in Jesus and His Father for the fellowship of 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.²³¹

Rather than fellowship in the living Jesus present in each person and sharing God and His Kingdom with each other, the most common topic before “church” is “How is the

²²⁶ John 7:38, John 4:13-14

²²⁷ 1 Cor 14:26

²²⁸ Matt 18:20

²²⁹ 1 Cor 12:7

²³⁰ Matt 7:22-23

²³¹ Eldredge, John. Beautiful Outlaw: Experiencing the Playful, Disruptive, Extravagant Personality of Jesus (p. 9). Hachette Nashville. Kindle Edition

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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 where fellowship in Him does not happen. *Ekklesia* isn’t something that can be attended.

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Fellowship In Jesus: Missing In Action

“Jesus in me,” “Jesus in you,” and discerning what *He’s* doing do not fit in a “church” service.

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.²³²

Plundered of fellowship in Jesus and His Father—the reason John gives for believing in Jesus!²³³ “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”²³⁴ “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”²³⁵ The entire Jerusalem Council agreed with each other *and* with the Holy Spirit.²³⁶ Paul had a direct conversation with Jesus.²³⁷ Jesus—in Person! We are made to be in intimate relationship with Jesus and His Father. Jesus said “*My ekklesia*,” His people, rather than “*kuriakos*,” The Master’s House. Jesus tears down His Father’s House, rebuilding all that it meant in

²³² Beautiful Outlaw, John Eldredge, p. 12

²³³ 1 John 1:1-3

²³⁴ John 10:27

²³⁵ Matt 16:17

²³⁶ Acts 15:1-35

²³⁷ Acts 9:1-19

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Himself, and never 'attended' His Father's House again. There was no reason to. When we lose Jesus in the words of religion, we lose the Life He offers; we lose everything.

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PART V

THE

TESTIMONY

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Chapter 13—Taking Scripture At Its Word

Jesus alone is God’s Word—His *logos*—and He never uses *graphé* (scripture) interchangeably with *logos*. In fact, Jesus explicitly rejects a link between knowing scripture 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 [logos] abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures (graphé) 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... But I know that you do not have the love of God within you.²³⁸

When Jesus refers to scripture, he uses the Greek word *graphé*.²³⁹ Those who search for eternal life through scripture miss the mark with these specific consequences:

1. They have never heard His voice.
2. They have never seen His form
3. They do not have His *logos* [His Word] abiding in them
4. They do not believe the one He has sent
5. They refuse to come to Jesus for Life
6. They do not have God’s love in their heart

Jesus defines *graphé* and *logos*: one testifies to Jesus; the other is Jesus. Altered from the beginning by the emperors who forged a religion using Jesus’ Name, *graphé* has served as the foundation for religion. King James altered it again centuries later, and the Westminster Confession codifies it as “The Supreme Judge... can be no other than the

²³⁸ John 5:37-40,42 [brackets by author]

²³⁹ John 1:1-4

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Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture,’ an idea that neither scripture nor Jesus ever suggested.²⁴⁰

Kings of the earth defined and ruled their religion via “church” and the provenance it authored with modified scripture. By altering provenance to suit its needs, controlling its interpretation, enforcing its observance, and elevating itself as something to believe in, “church” shows that it is void of God’s *logos* according to *graphé*. It is void of Jesus.

The Word was born of a virgin, died on a cross, took away the world’s sin, rose from the dead, and ascended to the Father. The Word healed the sick, raised the dead, and restored sight to the blind. The Word cast out demons and silenced religion. Scripture did none of these things, nor did it ever claim such stature.

The chasm between testifying to Jesus, the Son of the Living God, and “the word of God, written” to scripture isn’t a question of inspiration or the inerrancy of original scripture, but of “church” redefining scripture to fit its own traditions. Treating *ecclesia* as buildings and their meetings, substituting *paenitemini* for *metanoieó*, dictating “church” instead of *ekklesia*, and using God’s gifts to men for “offices of the church” contradict both scripture’s testimony and Jesus Himself. Yet, these altered scriptures are found on the back of the pew in front of us. Few have read God’s inerrant, inspired *graphé*, only religion’s substitute.

The Westminster Confession puts it this way:

*Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments...to be the rule of faith and life.*²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Westminster Confession, Article 6.010

²⁴¹ Westminster Confession Chapter 1, Articles 6.001 and 6.002

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Scripture, being treated as God's word, emerged under Theodosius, became traditional in the Middle Ages, and was codified during the Reformation by Parliamentary legislation in 1643.

The Westminster Confession retains substituted, transliterated, and mistranslated *graphé* and elevates scripture to the level of Supreme Judge, attempting to 'correctly' define Christianity, which contradicts the scripture it exalts.²⁴² Therefore, the Confession not only elevates scripture beyond its own stated purpose, but it also elevates corrupted text. It doesn't even mention scripture's only point: to give testimony to Jesus, because He is exclusively where Life is found. Believing in "church" and the Westminster premise of scriptural foundation launches a religion that has never seen God's face, heard His voice, possessed His Word in the hearts of its attendees, or known His love—*according to Jesus, in inerrant, inspired graphé* that it incorrectly elevates to "God's word, written."

"Church" is founded upon Constantine and Theodosius, and its offspring, the "Church" of England, or its grandchild, the theology of the Westminster Confession. None of them declares that faith in Jesus—"You are the anointed Son of the Living God"—is their foundation. Today, it is common "church" lingo to include phrases like "standing on the word," "preaching the word," and "spending time in the word, and it doesn't mean Jesus.

The point is that we should take Jesus at His Word, take scripture at its word, and embrace scripture's purpose to reveal Him, not to use it to manage King James' "church" and other "church" offspring.

I'm often asked, 'What translation do you use?' I say Greek—yes, an overstatement—I'm not fluent in Greek. I research one word at a time, reading articles

²⁴² John 5:37-40

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from those who are. It is fun to discover that online Greek translation is religion's worst nightmare. I research online what Jesus said in Greek and how it was used as far back as Homer.

We don't need a seminary degree to know from scripture that Jesus is the anointed Son of the living God. But we do need such degrees to untangle what "church" has done.

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PART VI

THE CHOICE

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Chapter 14—What Do I Do For “church”?

‘So, what do *you* do for “church”?’ People understandably ask this all the time. Some will cautiously admit that going to “church” isn’t *required* if I’m truly “saved,” but going to “church” should be the obvious response if I am. If “church” is not attended, the begged question asks for a substitute that somehow qualifies as acceptable “churching,” and the elephant in the room assumes that I may not really be saved.” The begged question and the assumed elephant are ironically and profoundly correct! If I believe in the “church,” say the sinners’ prayer sincerely, follow a “church” denomination’s membership criteria, then I’m officially “saved,” so gathering with the saved at this kind of “church” makes sense. Tragically, believing in and coming to Jesus for Life and the religious system of getting saved and going to “church” have nothing to do with each other.

It’s funny, I can talk to people who agree with everything I say, but then respond, ‘Do you really suggest that I stop going to “church”—that’s concerning.’

I don’t do anything “for church” because Jesus never even said the word, much less institute it—the idea originates from somebody else. There’s nothing in “church” that has anything to do with coming to Jesus for Life, but I do listen to what Jesus says about “church” in scripture: “Come out of her, my people.”²⁴³

Jesus’ *ekklesia* isn’t something you can attend, reform, systematize, or believe in; it’s simply a Greek word for gatherings of many kinds, used for centuries before Jesus referenced His little band of followers. Jesus’ *ekklesiai* are simply those who hear His voice and gather to Him when He calls because they trust their lives to Him. Two or more gathering together like this because they have heard his call and followed Him become

²⁴³Rev 18:4

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one of His *ekklesiai* for the time gathered because they are in His name—He called the gathering. They do not become His body just because *they* decided to get together.

Still, what *do* I do? I do what I know with the intention of coming to Jesus for Life. I capture my thoughts—all of them—and bring them to Jesus, renewing my mind in Him.²⁴⁴ I ask Him what is on His mind—about what He sees that Father doing today that I can be part of. I no longer consider prayer as something that works or doesn't to accomplish what I want, but as an exchange of ideas with a mentor and best friend to get to know Him better in a posture of listening and joining. I'm not saying that I have perfected my relationship with Him, or that I need to—He has perfected His relationship with me. Jesus doesn't seem to be concerned about how well I am questing after Him, but He loves that I am. He connects me with others—two or more at a time—when and how He desires. He reminds me that Him in me is God's mystery of the ages.

Jesus isn't calling me to correct a spiritual apostasy and transform a modern-day Temple system into a good “church” system, but out of my “fishing boat” and out from under my tree.²⁴⁵ I know it's not the path prescribed by “church.” Nicodemus didn't get it, either; now “church” follows his lead:

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

²⁴⁴ 1 Cor 10:4-5

²⁴⁵ Mark 3:14

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*where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*²⁴⁶

Nicodemus had no idea what Jesus meant, or what Kingdom He led. “How can this be?” he responded. Following Jesus is a quest that cannot be captured in a system any more than the wind.²⁴⁷ We try to systematize Him in religion, while claiming it to be a relationship that we practice in “churches.” I have taken myself out of religion, and am not seeking an alternative one:

*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.*²⁴⁸

Some do understand leaving the “church” system, but then search for something to replace it, as if there were a better, correct system to follow, or a “church” that does it right. I strive daily to join Him in the Life He is living right now, with today’s thoughts, and today’s missions.

I now ask a different question: ‘Has going to “church” *ever* had anything to do with following Jesus?’ Now I realize that doing something else like “church” to replace it after leaving her is like asking a prisoner how he plans to replicate cell life in his cell after release.

²⁴⁶ John 3:5-7

²⁴⁷ John 3:8

²⁴⁸ 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

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Therefore, there is no list of the crucial steps to doing Jesus' *ekklesia* right, as if it were a legitimate thing to do. Not only is it not "church," it is not an instituted thing to be administered at all. If I gave you such a list of the critical steps to follow Jesus, it would rob you of your quest. Grand Theft Jesus. If Life in Jesus could be programmed, I might as well just go to "church."

I've shared what happened as I listen to Him in real time, discovering that Life in Him only happens in Person and in real time. To put that into steps (tongue in cheek):

1. Listen to His voice as we apprentice ourselves to Him
2. Join Him in whatever He says to do with Him, especially sharing Him with each other.
3. Repeat. This is becoming apprentices (students, disciples) of Jesus, rather than graduates of a "church" discipleship system.

Becoming His student means learning to hear His voice and follow Him, not mastering a list of theological doctrines about Him and the resulting behavior.

I find that when I seek Him this way with all my heart, I can't help but seek Him all the time. When I seek Him all the time, my whole heart can't help but seek Him.

I now really believe *in* Him minute by minute; I don't just have the correct beliefs about Him. I've learned that the words for faith, believe, and trust come from the same Greek word. My faith no longer means my theological, denominational, or doctrinal positions; it is only my absolute trust in Jesus regardless of how accurate my beliefs (my own understanding) are. I no longer start my day with Jesus to help me through it. Instead, seeking Him continually—moment by moment—throughout the day leads me to trust more deeply that He has already taken care of everything that the two of us will face together. I'm more interested in watching how He works in all things instead of trying to get Him to resolve them according to my requests. I believe: "You, Lord, have already

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taken care of me” when tempted to worry at any given moment. He’s not worried; why should I be? I fully embrace one simple Truth: “This is the work of God, that I believe in Him whom He has sent.”²⁴⁹ I don’t try to understand, but to actively trust in the One who understands all perfectly, regardless.²⁵⁰

I’ve come to crave Jesus like my life depends on Him, because it does, listening for whom, where, and when He wants me to engage in fellowship. I have learned to love Jesus more than I love my own life—every single part of it.

A few books have helped me. Many have not. If you read the ones I have, take every thought in them to Jesus and listen to what He says to you—not me and not the author. Also, a few scriptures are great anchors when read from the perspective of God’s message and His messenger as opposed to a sermon—John 5:37-40, Colossians 1:27, and Ephesians 1:17-18.

I use biblehub.com interlinear and Apostolic Bible Polyglot to learn actual definitions of words—especially the HELPS word studies. I’ve learned to ignore how Christian commentary tries to make original words fit theology instead of revealing Jesus, so I then research how Homer, Socrates, and others used those words for centuries before Jesus said them or any scripture was authored. For example, biblehub shares Strong’s definition for *ekklesia*: “church,” assembly, congregation. But in the HELPS word footnotes: “The English word “church” comes from the Greek word *kyriakos*.”²⁵¹ This one footnote topples the first of many dominoes in Christianity’s assumptions by exposing the true roots of the word “church” itself.

²⁴⁹ John 6:29s

²⁵⁰ Proverbs 3:5-6. This isn’t theology – it is the attitude of every heartbeat.

²⁵¹ <https://biblehub.com/greek/1577.htm>

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“Invitation to Solitude and Silence” by Ruth Haley Barton profoundly helped me to learn to listen to the one true God and Jesus, whom He sent.

John Eldredge’s “Beautiful Outlaw” and “Waking the Dead” resonate with me, especially the idea of being and doing something radically 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 move me deeply. The point is to pursue Jesus and listen to Him. One of Oswald Chambers’ students said this about him:

“He introduced us to Jesus Christ, never to himself . . . he never made it easy, never offered us an alternative.”

My whole point in writing is this one idea: to reintroduce myself to Jesus as I know Him, to show how religion has deceived me for decades, and to share that with you.

It shouldn’t have surprised me that Jesus anticipated the scandal of religion and “church”—it wasn’t a surprise to God. Scripture records His response to man’s religion: “Come out of her, My people.”²⁵² Not that “church” isn’t doing it right, but because “church” is based upon Constantine, Theodosius, James, and the Westminster Confession and has nothing to do with Jesus at all. That some of His people are ensnared inside “church” does not validate or somehow make it OK to continue the scheme as if it somehow evolved under divine guidance. King James would not have dictated that “church” replace existing translations if he didn’t have a reason and agenda as “church’s” Supreme Governor—those assembled under Jesus call and leadership didn’t need a king to run it.

²⁵² Rev 18:4

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The choice is stark, but crystal clear: we remain in religion's institution, its familiar structures, traditions, and belief systems, or we embrace the quest to follow Jesus, the Son of the living God. Life in Him is the only guarantee.

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PART VII

APPENDICES

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Appendix XX1—Regions Historically Operating as Officially Catholic States

(With Approximate Dates of Formal Catholic “Church” Alliance)

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

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

g. Lithuania

- i. 1387 (official Christianization) – 1795 (Partition into the 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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Appendix XX2—King James Translation Instructions²⁵³

- 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.

²⁵³ 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 Thessalonica²⁵⁴

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

²⁵⁴ Codex Theodosianus XVI.1.2

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Appendix XX5—First Version of Nicene Creed²⁵⁵

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.

²⁵⁵ 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 (Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed)

Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)²⁵⁶

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,

²⁵⁶ 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

<u>Tyndale Translation</u>	<u>KJV Translation</u>	KJV impact/result
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 Great²⁵⁷

Roman Emperor who legalized Christianity and began imperial “church” patronage

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:

²⁵⁷ 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:²⁵⁸

- Greek μετάνοεῖτε (metanoeite) → Latin paenitemini / paenitentiam agite
- Greek ἐκκλησία (ekklesia) → Latin ecclesia

²⁵⁸ 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.²⁵⁹

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

²⁵⁹ Adam Nicolson, *God's Secretaries*

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- Maintained ecclesiastical terminology, authorizing Bancroft's rules. (Samples)

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

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Summary Timeline

<u>Date</u>	<u>Figure</u>	<u>Event / Document</u>
313	Constantine	Edict of Milan
		Council of Nicaea
325	Constantine	Nicene Creed
380	Theodosius I	Edict of Thessalonica
		Council of Constantinople
381	Theodosius I	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.’”²⁶⁰

“The greatest issue facing the world today... is whether those who are identified as ‘Christians’ will become disciples...”²⁶¹

“Non-discipleship is the elephant in the church.”²⁶²

J. P. Moreland

“The church has not made disciples but consumers.”²⁶³

“Many Christians are not living a life that is different from the surrounding culture.”²⁶⁴

Søren Kierkegaard

“Christendom... has done away with Christianity.”²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ Commonly attributed; adapted from themes in *The Great Omission* (2006), esp. 1–5.

²⁶¹ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (2006), 1.

²⁶² Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (2006), xiii.

²⁶³ J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind* (1997), 4–5.

²⁶⁴ J. P. Moreland, *Kingdom Triangle* (2007), 17–20.

²⁶⁵ Reference: Søren Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon Christendom* (1855).

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A. W. Tozer

*“We are not making disciples... we are making converts.”²⁶⁶
“The church has accepted the world’s values and methods... and is producing a generation of Christians who are conformed to the world.”²⁶⁷*

Francis Chan

“We’ve created a culture where people show up, sit, and listen... but that’s not what Jesus asked us to do.”²⁶⁸

Neil Cole

“We have made the church into a place where people attend rather than a people who follow Jesus.”²⁶⁹

“We are not called to make church members, but disciples of Jesus.”²⁷⁰

Alan Hirsch

“The church has become a vendor of religious goods and services.”²⁷¹

David Platt

“We have taken the radical commands of Jesus and reduced them to a comfortable cultural Christianity.”²⁷²

²⁶⁶ Reference: A. W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous* (1955).

²⁶⁷ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (1948); *The Root of the Righteous* (1955).

²⁶⁸ Francis Chan, *Letters to the Church* (2018).

²⁶⁹ Reference: Neil Cole, *Organic Church* (2005).

²⁷⁰ Neil Cole, *Organic Church* (2005).

²⁷¹ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (2006).

²⁷² David Platt, *Radical* (2010).

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Appendix X10 Sample of Conflicts Under “Church”/State Authorization²⁷³

<u>Conflict /Conquest</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Connection</u>	<u>Estimated Deaths</u>
Saxon Wars ²⁷⁴	772–804	Forced Conversion	Tens of thousands
Crusades: Holy Land ²⁷⁵	1095–1291	Papally authorized	1–9 million
North/Baltic Crusade ²⁷⁶	1147–15th c.	Conversion wars	Hundreds of thousands
Albigensian Crusade ²⁷⁷	1209–1229	Crusade Cathars	200,000–1,000,000
Fourth Crusade ²⁷⁸	1202–1204	Constantinople	50,000–100,000
Reconquista ²⁷⁹	8th c.–1492	Reconquest of Iberia	Up to millions
Hussite Wars ²⁸⁰	1419–1434	Against reformers	Hundred thousands
Spanish Conquest ²⁸¹	1492–1600s	Imperial expansion	Millions
Fall of Tenochtitlan ²⁸²	1519–1521	Spanish conquest	100,000–240,000
French Religious Wars ²⁸³	1562–1598	Catholic - Protestant	2–4 million
Thirty Years’ War ²⁸⁴	1618–1648	Catholic–Protestant	4.5–8 million
English Civil Wars ²⁸⁵	1639–1651	Religious political	~200,000

²⁷³ Wars waged “in the name of Christ”: Papal Armies or Governments using “Church” Authority

²⁷⁴ General medieval chronicles; estimates vary.

²⁷⁵ Thomas Asbridge; A. Holt, *The Crusades*.

²⁷⁶ Britannica, 'Northern Crusades'

²⁷⁷ Britannica, 'Albigensian Crusade'.

²⁷⁸ Britannica, 'Fourth Crusade'.

²⁷⁹ Britannica, 'Reconquista'.

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

²⁸¹ Demographic studies of Indigenous population collapse - Americas (e.g., DHR VT sources).

²⁸² Fall of Tenochtitlan historical estimates.

²⁸³ French Wars of Religion estimates (various historians).

²⁸⁴ Britannica, 'Thirty Years’ War'.

²⁸⁵ Britannica, 'English Civil Wars'.

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Appendix x11—Bancroft Alters the KJB Translation Before Printing

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 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

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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 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.”

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- “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,
 - 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,

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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.
- 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 manner of the King that shall reign over you, He will take your sons, &c. He was sent for to Lambeth, and there persuaded 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 helps identify a handful of readings that Anglican Bishops influenced, he does not name names except Bilson.

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According to Brother Berg, a 1671 biography of Henry Jessy ascribes the charges of textual tampering to Bancroft. Finding the notes of Dr. Brett, one of the translators, would be a massive find and would go a long way toward clearing up the confusion.

- Suffice it to say that from very early in its printed history. At the same time, 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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Appendix X12—William Tyndale

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.

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.²⁸⁶ The other 17% to 24% is what 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.

²⁸⁶ **John Nielson & Royal Skousen**, *How Much of the King James Bible Is William Tyndale’s?* Reformation 3 (1998)

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Appendix x13: Plots to Kill Jesus When He Attended Temple

1. While in Jerusalem for a Temple feast, 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. [Crowd at a Temple Festival] Is this not He, whom they seek to kill?—John 7:25
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 and scribes sought how they might destroy him.’
7. Jesus teaches in the Temple and:
 - a. ... ‘consulted that they might take Jesus by subtlety 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 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. Temple Priests eventually captured Jesus, turning Him over to the Romans for execution. Herod only tried to kill Him once, and one attempt and one plot were made in a synagogue. Jesus promised the same Temple and synagogue persecution for His followers.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁷ Matt 10:17, Mark 13:9, John 16:2, Luke 21:12, Matt 10:22, John 15:18-20, Matt 24:9,

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Appendix XXX – Parked Ideas

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.

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

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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 than 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:

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.

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. An ancient religious-government institution

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impersonates faith in Jesus, is hung on religion's walls, is practiced in buildings we now call "churches", and has been ruled by Emperors, kings, and even Papal armies. This impersonation modified scripture before elevating it to "God's Word, written."

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 empire, impersonating Him for the explicit purpose of state 'welfare and security'²⁸⁸ as opposed to actively trusting in Him alone for Life.²⁸⁹

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,²⁹⁰ 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.

²⁸⁸ <https://sourcebooks.web.fordham.edu/source/edict-milan.asp>, "Edict of Milan"

²⁸⁹ Mark 13:5-6

²⁹⁰ John 3:3-8

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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 are required, and we must become dependent on His voice, not our religion. 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.

In the chapters that follow, I strive to constantly return to Jesus' words and actions as the basis to compare them with today's religious systems—not to build a better system.

Ironically, religious hierarchy cannot be reconciled with Peter, the religion's supposed founder, according to Theodosius. Peter 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, Pope, or Supreme Governor because Jesus personally told him not to.²⁹¹

²⁹¹ Matthew 23:9

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