

# Grand Theft Jesus

## Preface

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*“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”<sup>1</sup> (emphasis by the author)*

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Having searched for the mystical “Matrix” with everything he had, Neo now sits face-to-face with the legendary Morpheus for a once-in-a-lifetime chance to learn the truth. He’s been longing for this moment—to the point of risking his job, sleepless nights, and dangerous evasion from the police. His quest for the truth would not let him go, regardless of the cost.

This night, in a secret parlor with storms raging outside, Morpheus offers Neo a choice: take the blue pill from his outstretched hand, and he can wake up in his bed in the morning, remembering nothing of the night—or take the red pill. The red pill opens the door to the Matrix, a reality that can only be shown but can never just be told—a reality that is radically more and different than Neo could ever have imagined—and his

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<sup>1</sup> “The Matrix”, Warner Bros., 1999

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life was never the same. Desperation and desire drove Neo to choose the red, and his quest leaped to a spectacular new level.

Before offering the choice to Neo, Morpheus clearly revealed Neo's condition: a splinter in his mind that would not let go of him, driving him relentlessly for an answer. But nothing prepared Neo for the horror of seeing reality as it truly is, stripped of everything that he had ever trusted.

I've searched for such a "Morpheus" my whole life in business and in sports. Even before I had the words, I also searched for someone who would show me Jesus and the Life that He offers. I haven't yet found a single Morpheus, but, digging deep, one clue at a time, bits and pieces of truth began to fit together, while formerly trusted pieces were discarded. Ultimately, Jesus has come into focus for me in a brand-new way, a real, live person whom religion is powerless to define, reveal, systematize, or control.

To discover that something is false is one thing, but it's an altogether different endeavor to deprogram from that thing after living in it for a lifetime. Discovering that a lifelong medical treatment doesn't work would be devastating, but learning that the treatment actually cemented the disease in your body is betrayal, especially if the treatment was enjoyable. Suppose the real thing was never a medical question in the first place—that is unfathomable.

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

Deprogramming from religion is like a 2,000-piece jigsaw puzzle, where each piece of the true picture is blank on both sides, revealing the picture only after being

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placed correctly alongside adjoining pieces. Slowly, without a picture on the box lid to guide me, I hope to see the masterpiece that sidelines the forgery, hidden for all ages until Jesus.

As with most people, life happened, my “Matrix” quest intensified, and puzzle pieces began to fly into place. Until now, the splinter in my mind had been a feeling that something just wasn’t right with “church” and the religion practiced there. Neo woke up to a devastating reality; I also found a reality far more twisted than I could have imagined.

Unexpectedly, the religion I’ve been practicing since my parents dropped me off at the “church” nursery isn’t just off a little bit, in need of reformation, revival, or a more modern statement of faith. No wonder Neo was virtually disabled by the reality he discovered—every single thing that he knew was an imposter.

To my chagrin, I’ve often been satisfied by learning something true that is contrary to the norm. While not nearly as polished and mysterious as Hollywood’s Morpheus, I’m sharing what I have unearthed: serious problems with serious consequences. The choice before you is the same as Neo’s: take the blue pill and put this book down and continue with life as you know it. Or take the red pill, keep reading, and let’s see just how deep the rabbit hole goes.

Ah ha! If you’re reading this, then you must be at least curious about the red pill!

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

1. I love Jesus with my whole heart. He is magnificent, embodied Truth.

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2. I trust scripture that testifies to Him, especially the grounding in “Christ in me, the hope of glory.”<sup>2</sup>
3. I have faithfully participated and served in “church” at several levels for many decades.
4. Cumulatively, I have spent years ‘in the word’, attended and led small groups, read some really great authors, been to retreats and conferences, and implemented many of the prescribed spiritual practices.
5. I don’t have a 501(c) 3 nonprofit to donate to, a new theology (statement of faith) to launch another denomination to join, anything to sell (including this book), or a follow me button.

I know that something is ‘wrong’ in the religion I used to practice. But pragmatically, I’ve lived as if something was wrong with me. I’ve been accused (by myself and others) of being rebellious, of falling short of ‘enough’ time in the word, of lacking accountability, of not having enough faith, and of having insufficient theological training for the questions I ask.

The questions I ask are met with a religious solution: a change in behavior that supposedly eliminates the need to answer. Or my questions are disregarded as if I were not a person whose questions matter. Religious repercussions for such failures inherent in my questions are severe: perhaps I’m not really saved at all, I’m about to lose my salvation for eternity, or I have a mortal problem with “church authority,” depending on the theology of the religious branch I was attending. But I am closer to Jesus now that I’ve stopped all religious activity that I used to do, and I realize that I wasn’t getting answers because nobody had them to give.

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<sup>2</sup> Col 1:27

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A splinter pierced my soul a few decades ago as I took to heart a line from a sermon that was intended to prod listeners to improve their spiritual life and resolve our woes by ‘spending more time in the word.’ The scripture reads like this:

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*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.<sup>3</sup>*

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Blatantly flaunting my ‘problem with authority,’ I applied the passage to the sermon being given. Ironically, unless ‘spending time in the word’ is assumed in advance, this passage praises the Bereans for checking scripture to see if Paul and Silas were telling the truth.<sup>4</sup> The quoted scripture praises people for deeply questioning the preachers! Not only was the passage misrepresented, but it directly contradicted Jesus' words from John 5:37-40. I now look up every scripture passage quoted to see if the “pastor” is telling the truth, and I’m often amazed at the gap between the straightforward meaning found in scripture and the points of the sermon.

Searching like a Berean satisfied me—for a while—but the gaps between sermons, books, and guided bible studies and their quoted scriptures are more obvious and serious than I would have expected. I can no longer bridge the chasm between scripture and my former religion at all.

But personal satisfaction in unearthing the true meaning of scriptures quoted in sermons serves no purpose beyond me. Unexpectedly, I find myself compelled to share the puzzle and its solved pieces.

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 17:11

<sup>4</sup> 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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I offer the same invitation as the one I've received: to examine whether we have learned Jesus **from** Him for ourselves or only learned **about** Him through religion's lens. My history of learning *about* Him, once exposed, reveals a system that **uses** His name but doesn't speak **in** His name and doesn't know the difference.<sup>5</sup>

Many authors have experienced the same 'splinter' and described the problems with religion in various ways. They agree that "church" does not predictably or even frequently produce disciples of Jesus: i.e., Willard, Tozer, Moreland, and Kierkegaard (see appendix 9). Instead, religion produces religious consumers, attenders, and good "church" members. One example from Willard's writings:

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*"The greatest issue facing the world today... is whether those who are identified as 'Christians' will become disciples... or remain just 'church members.'"*<sup>6</sup>

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Oswald Chambers put it this way:

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*The last three months of those years things reached a climax, I was getting very desperate. I knew no one who had what I wanted; in fact I did not know what I did want. But I knew that if what I had was all the Christianity there was, the thing was a fraud.*<sup>7</sup>

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Previously, my response has been to figure out how to do "church" right. Now I see it as a dilemma of sanity.

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 7:21-22, Matthew 24:5, Acts 19:11-20

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from themes in Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (2006), on the distinction between disciples and mere professing Christians.

<sup>7</sup> Edman, V. Raymond. *They Found the Secret: Twenty Lives That Reveal a Touch of Eternity* (Clarion Classic) (pp. 53-54). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

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These esteemed authors reveal that “church” does not predictably produce followers of Jesus, collectively exposing the malaise of the past 200 years. I was more shocked to uncover that this has been a recurring theme dating back to New Testament times<sup>8</sup> and every period in between.<sup>9</sup>

Many have identified “church” as corrupt, ineffective, and secular for centuries, while we continue to *assume* it to be true—if it is done correctly. This, by definition, is a clear example of insanity. Centuries of failing to “do it right” are the evidence. Given the assumption that “church” was ‘instituted’ by Jesus, we continually tweak “church”, expecting different results—*if* we can just figure out how to do it better. The resulting question—and the core of my quest: Is “church” really something that Jesus even said at all?

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

While sitting quietly in my pew for decades—confident that I was rich and needed nothing,<sup>10</sup> —Jesus called me *out* of religion,<sup>11</sup> and into Life, Life in Him.<sup>12</sup> Berean searching grew into desperate hunger for Him. I have been cheated out of my inheritance—and I was part of the problem! Beliefs grounded in human origin began to

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<sup>8</sup> 2 Cor 4:2, 2 Pet 3:16, 2 Cor 2:17, Gal 1:6-7

<sup>9</sup> i.e., Wycliffe, Luther, and Calvin, for example

<sup>10</sup> Rev 3:15-16

<sup>11</sup> Rev 18:4

<sup>12</sup> John 5:40

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fall away, my mind began to renew,<sup>13</sup> and I have accepted that I've been 'holding the wrong end of the stick' all along.<sup>14</sup>

Out of this collision of truth and religion, something undeniable and irresistible survives: whatever it is that 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. In contemporary terms, I **am** deconstructing something: I am deconstructing Jesus' impostor, religion. I am not deconstructing Jesus Himself or Life in Him, but unapologetically religion's claim to Him, while I simultaneously double down on Him.

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<sup>13</sup> Rom 12:2

<sup>14</sup> Oswald Chambers

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## Introduction

You may wonder why I chose a secular movie quote to open. I find that this quote portrays the reality of the world we live in, including the religious one, better than any sermon I've ever heard. But it's not a new idea. Paul said the same thing nearly 2,000 years ago:

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

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

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

Ironically, “church” itself catalyzed my religious deconstruction.

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

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

That’s not what happened.

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

A few weeks later, this “pastor” preached a sermon on the woman caught in adultery—how we should strive to be more like Jesus in situations like hers. Meanwhile, he set out to fill the vacancy created in the church staff. Jesus fiercely railed against this kind of religion in Matthew 23. For me, it was like a flashing neon sign—something certainly is not right with “church”, and it’s not just cosmetic.

As I began searching scripture—even dabbling in Greek to see what Jesus actually said firsthand—I continued to look for a “good church”. I tentatively settled into a denominational branch I remembered fondly from years ago. While still shaky about “church” in general, I was settling in when the pastor gave a sermon about the man who was lowered through the roof to see Jesus. As he approached what seemed like the culmination of his message, he made his closing point: “Who is going to pay for the roof?” It was a fundraising pitch. I couldn’t see a Berean coming up with the same conclusion from that scripture. But I *can* see a money-dependent organization using scripture this way as its provenance.

These examples, among many others, begin to demonstrate to me the false hierarchy of one member of Christ’s body over another, religion-inspired guilt,

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hypocrisy of those in charge, the overreach of “offices of the church,” and dependence on money. I cannot imagine Jesus doing or saying anything like “church” said in these two examples.

What I did not expect in my red pill search is that Jesus never said the word “church” at all, in any language, nor did he model or teach the concept. Therefore, “offices of the church” have no foundation in Him either. After discovering the fallacy of “church,” other scriptural words jumped out as the victims of the twisting that Peter talks about,<sup>15</sup> for the purpose of constructing a religion. Words such as “pastor,” “repent,” and “gospel” are used in ways that neither Jesus nor scripture ever did, but by kings of the earth and their “churches.”

By revealing where these four words originate, the original meanings they replaced, who was involved, and the disastrous impact that results from twisting just them, Jesus emerges in a whole new Light. Many other words have suffered the same fate, but these four serve as a rudder to turn an entire ship.

Within the scheme of this misinterpretation, religion has authored traditions of man that are practiced in “church”. As Jesus pointed out fiercely to the religious leaders of His time, we cannot hold on to God and the traditions of man at the same time.<sup>16</sup> These traditions of the “church” are the chasm that religion creates between people and Life in Jesus, which erects blockades to the kingdom of God.<sup>17</sup>

I long from the depths of my soul for the profound transformation that Jesus offers, knowing without a doubt that Life in Him is the only hope. My desire burns so intensely that sometimes it overshadows even food and sleep. Having lived with a

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<sup>15</sup> 2 Peter 3:16

<sup>16</sup> Mark 7:8

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 23:13

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splinter for decades, the events above triggered an all-out search to see for myself what Jesus' *ekklesia* was supposed to be about, in Jesus' own words as recorded in scripture, as opposed to what "church" says about itself.

What if Life in Jesus is something else entirely? My desire for His Life has intensified to an unquenchable thirst—for the streams of living water<sup>18</sup> that I have never found in "church" or where it directed me. Like Chambers, I have become desperate—unsure of exactly what I want, and a long history of the depths of my soul remaining untouched by "church". I found that not only does religion not have the answer, but it is committed to a framework that frustrates and diverts us from finding it.<sup>19</sup>

If you crave Jesus so intensely that you'd welcome the chance to exchange your life for His—even at the risk of relationships, opinions of others, and every piece of religious baggage—then read on. Whether you agree with anything I say or not, know that religion has a way of holding Jesus at arm's length while speaking fluently using His name. But if you're willing to let go of everything for the chance to know Jesus as He truly is—then join me.<sup>20</sup> That's where I'm headed. If you are not, that's OK—you can still take the blue pill.

My purpose is to share Jesus with you as I have come to know Him, which requires me to dismantle beliefs I only *thought* I knew about Him. These dismantled religious traditions impersonate Him, while "church" words are used instead of Jesus' stated message from God. Jesus speaks plainly about what human tradition does to the

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<sup>18</sup> John 7:38-39

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 23:13

<sup>20</sup> Luke 5:11

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*logos* of God—it nullifies it. It nullifies Him. These few “church” words direct us from His purposes to religious ones, missing the Life in Him that we long for.<sup>21</sup>

## Word usage

Because so much of religion’s forgery of Life in Jesus is reflected in human tradition that is exposed by the way it misuses words in scripture, I treat those key words differently in this book. Words that are transliterated, mistranslated, or replaced, which result in unintended meanings, are enclosed in double quotes, such as “church” and “pastor.” By taking note of such alterations, we begin to remember that what Jesus and scripture actually say are not the same as “church” language traditions.

I denote words in another language in italics, such as *ekklesia* and *poimén*, the words that have been substituted and transliterated into “church” and “pastor”. Using the original Greek or Latin for particular terms is also a reminder of what Jesus actually said rather than religious tradition.

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

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<sup>21</sup> Matt 23:13

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PART I

THE SPLINTER

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## Chapter 1—Mary Magdalene, “*Where Can He Be?*”<sup>22</sup>

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

She just *had* to be with Jesus. After all that had happened, there wasn’t anyplace else to go—anoointing Him with burial spices was the only thing for her to do. Can you imagine? This was just *too* much.

Now, He’s not even in the tomb where He is supposed to be, cheating Mary out of the last thing that she had. Staying at the tomb was hopeless. Wrenching herself away seemed worse.

He was gone.

Mary knew Jesus. She had traveled with the King as He delivered the royal announcement He had received from God, and she personally experienced the power of God’s Kingdom when Jesus delivered her from demons.<sup>23</sup> Whatever else we do or do not know, this much is clear: Jesus was not a doctrine to Mary. He was not tradition. He was not a weekly habit. He was her Lord, her deliverer, her companion, and her friend. And He had just been executed before her eyes. She had found Life in Him. Now what?

She’d watched Him nailed to a cross and then lifted up to hang until dead.<sup>24</sup> Before crucifixion, He was bloodied from head to toe from a brutal whipping, then—the epitome of punishment in the Roman penal system.<sup>25</sup> Then it was over. What was

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<sup>22</sup> John 20:1-18

<sup>23</sup> Luke 8:2

<sup>24</sup> John 19:25-27

<sup>25</sup> John 19

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Mary supposed to do with herself? She'd watched as He was hurriedly placed in a tomb, but 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 could go back to her old life, but she *knew* where that led. *This just **can't** be happening.*

Then 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 sentence was cruel and inconceivable.

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

The “gardener” calls to her: “Mary.”<sup>26</sup> And she collapsed at His feet.

## **She knew!**

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

What will we do when we look at religion and realize that Jesus isn't there, either? What will we do when we realize that religion is what we have been doing? Will we share Mary's despair; will we hear Him call our names in a way we never expected? Or will we accept that what we have is all there is, only slowly and painfully realizing that we're also looking into an empty tomb?

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<sup>26</sup> John 20:16

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I wonder what Mary thought, knowing Jesus as she did, when He later said it would be better if He went away. She had lost Him once. Could Jesus really have meant that we would have a religion of traditions and services that would be even better than Mary's relationship with Jesus? I have yet to see *that* service.

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## PART II

# THE FORGERY

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*Painted by Emperors—Signed by Kings*

*Enforced by Empires*

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## Chapter 2—Anatomy of a Forgery

In 1799, a painter named Abraham Kuffner borrowed a friend's famous Dürer self-portrait for the purpose of making a copy from a 'canvas' that was a piece of wood about 26" by 19". Kuffner's copy was extraordinary indeed: he started by cutting the wood in half lengthwise, as if he were slicing a piece of bread into two thin slices.

The back half of the original painting contained dates, conveyances, and stamps that proved its authenticity. These authenticating markings on the back are called the painting's provenance. In addition to the markings on the back of a painting, other documents may accompany it to attest to its genuine origin. Kuffner painted a copy of the original portrait onto the front of the new sliced half, using the original provenance to validate his forgery, but kept the original painting for himself.

Kuffner was eventually caught because he sold the original, whose new owner promptly put it on public display in a Munich museum while the forgery was simultaneously on display in another museum in Nuremberg.<sup>27</sup> Oops.

In a way, I admired this remarkable ingenuity, but was stunned when I realized it was a reflection of *my* own religious forgery. Many lies attacked the Way, the Truth, and the Life in Jesus, and were attacking even as the New Testament was being written. One of these lies survived as a religion, a forgery intended to look and sound like Life in Jesus, but had the added engine of imperial power to enforce it and create its own provenance.

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<sup>27</sup> 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.

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Even more shocking was the nuance that Kuffner's forgery was produced in secrecy, but religion's was so much worse. It happened in plain sight, forged by the sincere, ordinary actions of humans in positions of power. They just did what humans do with power; they used it to serve their own priorities.

## The Forged Painting

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

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

Many of us have been taught that Constantine brought Christianity to Rome. This is true, in a sense. He viewed the Christian movement as a religion, and granted it (and all other religions) legal status under his authority. He and his staff applied the practices of all Roman religions to this new one, even using their terminology, but with meanings derived from Rome's 1,000-year-old religious system. Constantine legalized a new Roman religion, but the religion failed to recognize that Life in Jesus had been present in the empire for hundreds of years before he was even born. Jesus never sought permission from kings in order to bring new Life. Rome's official recognition was always irrelevant to Him.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Matthew 22:15-22

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In contrast, the number of Jesus' followers had already grown to such an extent that previous emperors had persecuted them, and Constantine now treated them as a religious entity. Constantine did, indeed, bring Christianity to Rome, but this religious system was and is a forgery of the Life that Jesus offers. Constantine had the authority to legalize religion for two reasons. He held two official titles —the Emperor of Rome and Pontifex Maximus, the High Priest over all religions.

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

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

In practice, instead of gathering so that, in everything, believers would build each other up through Christ who lived in them, they gathered in buildings for religious

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ceremonies, performed for the ‘god’ of their choice, which now included the Christians’ god.

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

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

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

## Expert Testimony

As I pursued my quest, I stumbled across “The Forger’s Spell”. I read that creating a really good imitation of a painting was only part of a forger’s strategy. Great forgers also depended on established experts to give credence to a painting. Painting

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experts were sometimes independent, but also museum curators and serious collectors. Van Meegeren studied these experts and crafted his forgeries specifically to those experts' personalities and idiosyncrasies, even choosing which expert he would first allow to 'discover' his latest forgery.

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*The greatest asset a forgery can have is an authority's endorsement.<sup>29</sup>*

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

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

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<sup>29</sup> 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.

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particular religion via statements of faith, founding documents, and weekly sermons. They call it the official “church” position. (This is one of the responses that I have received to questions about “church.”)

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

## Religion’s Provenance

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Scripture moved from being the shared witness to Jesus in an organic movement<sup>30</sup> to being the contested and governed foundation of an imperial, legislated religion.

Just as Kuffner painted a false portrait on the front provenance half of the original wooden canvas, religion painted a false portrait of Life in Christ, complete with an altered provenance. With utter audacity, it didn't just reinterpret and misuse scripture in its religion; it actively altered the provenance to meet state priorities and based its religion on its own version. Again, striving to conform religion and behavior to "church" provenance, religion is basing life on altered scripture and directly opposing Jesus' own words.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> John 5:37-47

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*

# Grand Theft Jesus

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

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

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

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

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

"... together all that concerned the interest and security of the State, we decided ... to grant to Christians and to everybody the free power to follow the religion of their choice, in order that all that is divine in the heavens may be favorable and propitious towards all who are placed under our authority" [See Appendix 3]. This is right out of the Roman religious playbook: appeasing the gods for favor.

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## Step 1: Legalizing The Religion

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

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

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*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.<sup>32</sup>*

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

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<sup>32</sup> Constantine Augustus to the Ecclesia 9”Churches”, <https://www.ccrj.us/dialogika-resources/primary-texts-from-the-history-of-the-relationship/constantine-i>

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in Jesus' name.<sup>33</sup> This is the root of “services,” where religious ceremonies were practiced for the favor Constantine mentioned in his edict. Worshipping Jesus and His Father was legalized—as if Jesus would appeal to an Emperor for validation, let alone leadership and regulation!

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

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*“... I was informed of your controversy... I consider it of little significance... yet because it has produced discord among you, it must be corrected...”<sup>34</sup>*

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

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

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<sup>33</sup> “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.

<sup>34</sup> 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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doctrine.<sup>35</sup> Constantine wasn't trying to articulate what was true regarding Jesus, nor did "church" leaders gather to discuss Life in Him. Instead, he attempted to create a uniform, empire-wide definition of Christianity for the entire Roman Empire to end the infighting that threatened its unity. This version of the Nicene Creed introduces the first official reference to "universal" (*katholikē*) *ecclesia*, referring to the uniform beliefs of a religion throughout the Empire, rather than to a spiritual doctrine.

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

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

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*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.<sup>36</sup>*

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

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<sup>35</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine* 3.6–13.

<sup>36</sup> Ecclesiastical History II:38

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Fausta, and son, Crispus.<sup>37</sup> Within another two years, he brought Arius, the founder of the heresy he helped condemn, out of exile, and was baptized by another Arian bishop on his deathbed.<sup>38 39</sup> Ironically, in a classic demonstration of religion as a political entity rather than faith in Jesus, Nicene bishops were regularly exiled, including Alexander and Athanasius, depending on which faction was in power.

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

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

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<sup>37</sup> Aurelius Victor, *Epitome de Caesaribus* 41.11–12

<sup>38</sup> Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book I, chs. 25–26

<sup>39</sup> Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book I, ch. 39

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## Step 2: Mandating The Religion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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*“And [we believe] in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church...”<sup>40</sup>*

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

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

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

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<sup>40</sup> See Appendices 4 & 5

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

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

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

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

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## Step 3: Enforcing the Religion

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

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

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*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.<sup>41</sup>*

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

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<sup>41</sup> Krus, D.J., & Webb, J.M. (1993) Quantification of Santayana's cultural schism theory. Psychological Reports, 72, 319-325.

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before John Wycliffe publicly opposed “church” policy. He was condemned by the “church,” but escaped execution. However, the “church” ordered his remains exhumed, burned, and ashes scattered in posthumous damnation.<sup>42</sup> The splinter in my mind asks, “Can I really picture Jesus exhuming a heretic for the purpose of burning it in damnation?” He is more likely to call the “church” children of hell.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Concilium Constantiense, Session VIII (1415)

<sup>43</sup> Matt 23:15

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## Chapter 4—The Imperial Forgery in English

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

English grew to global dominance with the rise of the British Empire, a profound revolution. No other language or its source has had as much influence on culture, technology, standardized knowledge, or economics. This is why and how the King James Version of the Bible has so powerfully perpetuated the religion of Constantine, Theodosius, and the Papacy. If the KJV translation were a genuine reflection of Jesus' words and those of the other scripture authors, we could rejoice. Unfortunately, King James did not commission the translation of scripture from Greek into English; instead, he dictated which words and sources could be used, enforcing them through Archbishop Richard Bancroft.<sup>44</sup>

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

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<sup>44</sup> See Appendix 2

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

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

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

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

King James is credited with the saying,

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I approve the calling and use of Bishops in the Church, and it is my aphorism, ‘No Bishop, no King.’<sup>45</sup>

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

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<sup>45</sup> **William Barlow**, *The Summe and Substance of the Conference... at Hampton Court* (London, 1604), often cited around pages 36 or 83–84 depending on edition.

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*“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...”<sup>46</sup>*

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

King James dictated that Archbishop Richard Bancroft oversee the translation of the bible under the constraints of 15 specific instructions.<sup>47</sup> It is important to note that there were 6 existing English translations of the bible at the time: Tyndale, Coverdale, Matthews (John Rogers), Great, Geneva, and the Bishop’s Bibles. There are so many issues between these independent translations and the KJV, so I will focus on just a few words to illustrate James' role in the forgery’s trinity.

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

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<sup>46</sup> ibid

<sup>47</sup> Appendix 2

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

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

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

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

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King James own words (“No bishops, no king”) and his contradictory instructions to translators that specifically preclude accurate translation, expose his bias towards monarchical rule over an empire’s religion. Words like “church”, “pastor”, “gospel”, and “repent” are traditional “church” words that, when originally spoken or written, had straightforward meanings, and the KJV directly violates scripture in its translation.<sup>48</sup>

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

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

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<sup>48</sup> 2 Cor 4:2

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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.<sup>49</sup> It's the other 17% to 24% that King James himself dictated to enforce the ecclesiastical structure he preferred, conceptually aligning with the Douay-Rheims Bible. "Church" is one of the 17% of altered words. "Pastor" and "repent" are two others.

Many scripture translators in history were *influenced* by the government-religious integration of their state, such as Jerome under Theodosius. But King James *explicitly exercised* his authority over the "church" and commissioned the translation of scripture, *and accompanied the commission with his direct instructions on how to do it*. The instructions were not just about the translation strategy; he directed specific words for translators to use, making it a legislated Bible rather than a translated one. (Appendix XX2)

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

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

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<sup>49</sup> **John Nielson & Royal Skousen**, *How Much of the King James Bible Is William Tyndale's?* Reformation 3 (1998)

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directs elders to oversee willingly... not to lord it over the people (2 Peter 5:3). Note that the word for “lord it”, also translated “domineering”, has common roots with the same word that is incorrectly used for “church” (*kyriakón*) instead of Jesus’ word, *ekklesia*. Nor would Peter have accepted the title of Father or Pope because Jesus personally told him not to.<sup>50</sup> I can’t imagine that “Supreme Governor of the Church” would fall into a different category.

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<sup>50</sup> Matthew 23:9

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## Chapter 5—A Retouched Forgery is Still a Forgery

### Additional ideas

The Reformation never reformed the fundamental elements of forgery that were founded with Constantine and enshrined in English by King James. Specifically, reformers assumed “church” to be a true concept and therefore concluded that, if it were done correctly, Christianity would also be correct. By applying Berean concepts, I have discovered that “church” is not a bad translation of *ekklesia*, it is not a valid translation at all. Nor is “church” even conceptually related to Jesus when He said, “*My ekklesia.*”<sup>51</sup> <sup>52</sup> Therefore, the religious system that we call Christianity is a system based on the Imperial religions described so far.

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*This impotence of “systems” is a main reason why Jesus did not send his students out to start governments or even “churches” as we know them today, which always strongly convey some elements of a human system. They were, instead, to establish beachheads of his person, word, and power in the midst of a failing and futile humanity. They were to bring the presence of the kingdom and its King into every corner of human life simply by fully living in the kingdom with Him.*<sup>53</sup>

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The problem is further exacerbated because He said “*My ekklesia*” only once across all 4 Gospels.<sup>54</sup> At best, an institution derived from *ekklesia* is unbiblical, demanding that every other reference to “*ekklesia*” in the New Testament either refers

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<sup>51</sup> Matthew 16:18

<sup>52</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/1577.htm> [HELP Notes: ...The English word "church" comes from the Greek word *kyriakos*, "belonging to the Lord" (*kyrios*)]

<sup>53</sup> Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ with Bonus Content (Designed for Influence)*, Location 190. NavPress. Kindle Edition

<sup>54</sup> Matt 16:18

# Grand Theft Jesus

to what Jesus said or is misinterpreted as well. If Jesus instituted anything while walking the earth, it was not a religious institution; it was Life in Him.

Reforming “church” only reshuffles theological nuance, service logistics, and the nominal structure of a system created under a few kings of the earth. Religion and its theologies are like AI – they can only regurgitate what others have said and rearrange human traditions, but they cannot produce Life from above.<sup>55</sup>

Jesus forming and leading His *ekklesia* in person is a function entirely independent of religion and its tweaks to “church” structure and operations. Reforming “church” is like a forger painting a different version of another forgery. When “church” is reformed, the result is still “church.”

The problem isn't that the Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, or Methodist “churches” need to develop the right model or theology. The problem is that they all assume “church” in the first place, an illegitimate origin. Whether using the Papal model, the King James model, the Westminster model,<sup>56</sup> or any other model, “church” is first assumed, and we bustle around trying to “do it right” when Jesus *ekklesia* is an entirely separate concept.

When Jesus said, “My *ekklesia*”, nobody asked Him what it meant, because it was a well-known 800-year-old word, a simple reference to the groups He had been forming since He called the first four out of their fishing boats. Jesus recognized His followers and the dynamic way they came together when He called them to join Him in what He was doing.

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<sup>55</sup> John 3:3

<sup>56</sup> Note that the Westminster Confession was legislated by Parliament, forming another governmental basis for “church” and religion.

# Grand Theft Jesus

*Ekklesias* formed by Jesus are His people, led by Him in-Person to tear down the gates of hell, which is what He had been doing when He said it, as well as today when two or more as they gather in His name. Jesus *ekklesia* is more like a regular pickup football game than the NFL, or a spiritual potluck where believers share their giftings. There's no advertising, halftime shows, stadiums, concessions, TV coverage, PR, team memorabilia, or season tickets. People who play pickup football get together for love of the game.

## PART III

# THE SWITCH

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*The Forger Claims Jesus' Name*

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# Grand Theft Jesus

## Chapter 6—Forgery Hidden in “The Greek”

“Church”, “bishop”, “pastor”, “repent”, and many other ‘ecclesiastical’ words are not based in scripture; they were dictated by a king, and religion now lays claim to be “bible-based.” Jesus confronts this head-on:

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*... the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word[logos] abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. **You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.***<sup>57</sup>

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

The masterful forgery, played out for sixteen centuries now, is incredibly challenging to believe when you first see it, especially for us lifelong “church” attenders. Once seen, however, the web unravels, and we can’t unsee it. Religion shamefully plunders the word *ekklesia*, first altering Jesus’ words, and then claiming sole authority to translate and interpret them, throwing a veil over Life in Jesus, while it paints its own picture.

A difficult concept to internalize is that there is no “thing” to replace “church,” no way to do it better (reform it), and no other word to label it. Renaming “church” to

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“*ekklesia*” doesn’t work, either, because applying *ekklesia* to “church” would dismantle “church” if successful.

King James didn’t need to change all of the words in scripture, just the ones that kept him as the Church’s Supreme Governor.

I just 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 friends—isn’t here anymore in that same sense—and we know in our souls that we do not have the same or even a better Life that Mary, Paul, or the twelve experienced. The feeling seems important—but like the elusive word on the tip of our tongues or glimpse out of the corner of our eyes that disappears when we turn our

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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:

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*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.<sup>58</sup>*

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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.

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<sup>58</sup> Beautiful Outlaw, John Eldredge Pg 12

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

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

The Roman religious system used terminology similar to Jesus's, modified scripture to conform to imperial rule, and applied definitions from the vantage point of the old Roman institution rather than from the radical new Life in Jesus. The new religion invoked Jesus' name, as scripture foretold, but its authority came from the empire, impersonating Him for the explicit purpose of state 'welfare and security'<sup>59</sup> as opposed to actively trusting in Him alone for Life.<sup>60</sup>

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

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<sup>59</sup> <https://sourcebooks.web.fordham.edu/source/edict-milan.asp>, "Edict of Milan"

<sup>60</sup> Mark 13:5-6

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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,<sup>61</sup> but until now, I had never suspected there was an original outside of our religious forgery, which had already been hanging on “church” walls for many centuries before we joined.

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

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

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

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<sup>61</sup> John 3:3-8

# Grand Theft Jesus

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

It takes a little work, but we don't need to be "wise and learned" or have the "church's" offices explain to understand Jesus and His message. Knowing Greek is not a prerequisite for knowing Jesus; He would have told us.<sup>62</sup> We don't need a degree in Greek to understand Jesus' words at least as well as the little children He spoke to, but sometimes it feels like we need one to figure out what religion has done to Jesus' words.

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

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<sup>62</sup> John 14:2

# Grand Theft Jesus

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

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

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

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

# Grand Theft Jesus

## The “Church” Mistranslation

1. Scripture testifies that Life is found in Jesus and that He is the foundation of His *ekklesia* when we make the bold declaration of faith that He is, “...the anointed Son of the Living God”<sup>63</sup> Religion violently betrays this faith. A religious system lacks both the spiritual fuel and the heavenly authority to sit in Jesus’ seat. Jesus alone is the head of His *ekklesia*, His own body,<sup>64</sup> *Live and in Person*.

Once I examined Jesus’ actual words for myself, according to scripture regarding the Bereans, it became clear that “church” never entered Jesus’ mind as an institutional fixture for a few of His followers to fulfill, and the word never even came out of His mouth, tantamount to Jeremiah 19:5.

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

Congregation didn’t yet mean the people who sat in the pews to listen to leadership; it meant the people who gathered around Jesus as He called them to follow Him and build each other up. As stated before, King James opposed the presbyterian

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<sup>63</sup> Matt16:18

<sup>64</sup> Col 1:18

# Grand Theft Jesus

model he was raised with, because it rejected a king's authority to oversee it. Within the Anglican "church" model, the King ruled and appointed the Bishops who ran the state religion, much like its parent, the Roman Catholic "Church."

Two Bibles translated *ekklesia* as "church" before the King James Version: the Geneva Bible and the Bishops Bible. The Geneva Bible was translated during the Rule of Mary I of England, who briefly returned England to Catholic Rule under Rome. The Geneva Bible was mainly influenced by John Calvin, who was raised Catholic but later created Reformed theology. He embraced, in both Latin and French, the institutional meaning of *ecclesia* along the lines of Constantine and Theodosius. The Geneva Bible, which introduced chapter and verse numbers in an English translation,<sup>65</sup> used the word "church" for *ekklesia*, but included marginal notes rejecting the king as its authority. The Geneva Bible translators accepted the Roman institution of "church," but they disagreed with imperial authority over it and embraced presbyter rule in its stead. Reformed "churches" and Presbyterian "churches" are offspring of Calvin's theology, which is the offspring of the Roman institution without the imperial aspect. The Westminster Confession was influenced by Reformed Theology when Parliament legislated it.

When King James gave his instructions to translators, he included the Geneva Bible as an approved reference point. However, translation rule #6 explicitly prohibited margin notes other than to explain Greek and Hebrew wording. This is how King James consistently removed objections to his authority over the religion and its

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<sup>65</sup> David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (Yale University Press, 2003), 300–301.

# Grand Theft Jesus

“church”. He mandated the word and prohibited criticism of imperial rule. Once the KJV was translated, it was mandated as the exclusive Bible used in “churches,” and Bible printing became illegal except through the King’s printers.

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

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

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

# Grand Theft Jesus

## The “Repentance” Mistranslation

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

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

When Jesus emerged from the wilderness, announcing, “The time is now, God's Kingdom has arrived,”<sup>66</sup> He had been living for the past 40 days as God's publicly ordained heir to His kingdom.<sup>67</sup> The Spirit had driven Him into the wilderness, where He confronted and defeated Satan,<sup>68</sup> unheard of until now. This victory demonstrates that God's kingdom has arrived and that its power rests in Jesus, proving that God's Kingdom is happening NOW!

In light of this stunning victory, He announces in royal language that God's Kingdom has arrived,<sup>69</sup> and then urgently persuades, “Rethink to the depths of your heart and believe the message I just gave you!”<sup>70</sup> After watching the heavens torn open at Jesus' baptism and listening to His story about rebuffing Satan, standing

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<sup>66</sup> Mark 1:15

<sup>67</sup> Mark 1:9-11

<sup>68</sup> Mark 1:12-13

<sup>69</sup> Mark 1:14

<sup>70</sup> Mark 1:15

# Grand Theft Jesus

dumbfounded with open mouths is understandable. Nothing like defeating Satan at the hands of a man had ever even been heard of before. Four fishermen leave their boats to follow Jesus as He demonstrates God’s Kingdom as its King, casting out demons and healing the sick<sup>71</sup>—which starts to unhinge the gates of hell. This is Jesus’ first *ekklesia*—it has no resemblance to a “church” service.

Jerome’s Latin translation, about 350 years later, replaces the words that Jesus used to persuade us to believe. He used the words *paenitentiam agite / paenitemini*,<sup>72</sup> from which we get penance, penitentiary, and punishment.<sup>73</sup> Religion turns Jesus’ excited persuasion about God’s Kingdom into moral regret, reflection, and sorrow about themselves instead. Jerome’s word choice explicitly associates the punishment proclaimed in the Edict of Thessalonica with Jesus’ words in scripture. Jerome’s replacement of *metanoia* with *paenitemini* is the root of religious guilt, not Jesus. Jerome’s version of scripture became known as the Vulgate, which was used throughout the Roman Empire, including in Britain, until the mid-1500s. *Paenitemini* was preached in Britain for about 1,000 years before the King James Translation, cementing “repent” in religion and culture instead of *metanoëó*.

The result is a sharp contrast between the foundation of the “church” and its religion, and that of Life in Jesus. Where Mark’s Greek presents Jesus persuading people to accept the unbelievable reality that God’s Kingdom has arrived in power, Jerome’s wording replaces Jesus’ urgent persuasion to believe the unbelievable with the penitential concepts of the imperial church. If Jerome hadn’t substituted

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<sup>71</sup> Mark 1:16-34

<sup>72</sup> Biblia Sacra Vulgata, Mark 1:15

<sup>73</sup> *paenitentia* — repentance, regret; derived from *paenitet*; historically connected with *poena* (punishment/penalty). P. G. W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), entries *paenitentia* and *poena*.

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*paenitemini* for *metanoia*, and there hadn't been a 1,000-year "church" tradition around it to influence translators, *metanoéo/metanoia* would not have a penance-based translation when directly translating from Greek.

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

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# Grand Theft Jesus

## The “Gospel” Mistranslation

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

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

The full context of the “gospel” is the entire story from Jesus’ baptism to the point when he and four others begin preaching around Galilee. After Jesus was baptized, the heavens were torn open, and God publicly proclaimed Jesus as his son, anointing Him as heir to God’s Kingdom, therefore, a King Himself. Astonishingly, His first order of business was to face Satan in the wilderness.<sup>74</sup> As He emerged victorious:

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

*– Mark 1:14-15*

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This is the only time Jesus referred to anything as God’s “gospel.” Note that it was God’s royal message as opposed to a theological concept called “the gospel.” As Paul said later, if anyone preaches another, he is in trouble.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, any other time that

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<sup>74</sup> Mark 1:9-13

<sup>75</sup> Gal 1:8-9

# Grand Theft Jesus

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

The Greek word transliterated as “gospel” is *euangelion*,<sup>76</sup> a form of the word “message”. John Wycliffe first translated the Latin equivalent of *euangelion* into Godspell, Old English for “God’s message,” which isn’t a horrible translation. But instead of translating directly from Greek, the King James and other transliterations, used Old English. Some modern translations use “good news”, but that’s seriously inadequate as well.

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

For example, messages from Roman emperors were, by definition, *euangelion*, royal messages. They were used to send a message to a town ahead of the emperor’s visit, a message to an enemy of the declaration of war, to announce the birth of the emperor’s son, the coming of age of the son, or the ascension of the son to the throne. The fact that it was God’s message made it an *euangelion*, not the message’s content. This was doubly appropriate, because God had already announced Jesus’ coming of Age—at His “baptism—out of the torn-open heavens; now His Kingdom is invading, as evidenced by the effect on the gates of hell that He later reveals. This isn’t just a news headline.

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<sup>76</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/2098.htm>

# Grand Theft Jesus

God's message is that His Kingdom has arrived. Jesus reveals that the time is right because He just saw it in action in the wilderness. Jesus tells us that God's royal message is that God's Kingdom has come, to set the captives free, as we see in Luke.<sup>77</sup> This is why Jesus, Paul, and others preach the Kingdom<sup>78</sup>—that's what Jesus revealed in God's message, not the opportunity for guilt, remorse, and self-punishment.

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

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

Starting with the hope and glory of a complete and transformative change, grand theft has been committed against Jesus, starting with the words Jesus used in His very first message, which reveal the riches in the unsearchable inheritance of the believers,<sup>79</sup> including this small sampling:

1. An age-old mystery, a perfect message directly from God<sup>80 81</sup>
2. Joining Him and God's kingdom to invade this dark world<sup>82 83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Luke 4:18

<sup>78</sup> Jesus: 91 references, Acts 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 28:31, and more

<sup>79</sup> Eph 3:8

<sup>80</sup> Col 1:26-27

<sup>81</sup> Mark 1:14-15

<sup>82</sup> Mark 1:17-20

<sup>83</sup> Eph 6:12

# Grand Theft Jesus

3. Complete, radical, and seismic transformation from death in religion to life in Jesus<sup>84</sup>
4. Fellowship in this new life with Jesus, our Father, and each other<sup>85</sup>
5. God's inheritance, which lives and is found in other believers<sup>86 87</sup>
6. Understanding His parables describing His kingdom<sup>88</sup>
7. Understanding the purpose and use of His gifts via the Holy Spirit<sup>89</sup>

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

## The “Pastor” Mistranslation

Since Jesus never said “church”, offices of the “church” are a product of religion as opposed to Life in Him. “Pastor” is a direct result of institutional hierarchy that impersonates Life in Jesus. In the English-speaking world, the legitimacy and authority given to “pastors” is in the same league as “church” and “repent” as far as impostors go.

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<sup>84</sup> John 5:24

<sup>85</sup> 1 John 1:1-3

<sup>86</sup> Eph 1:18

<sup>87</sup> 1 Cor 12

<sup>88</sup> Mark 4:11

<sup>89</sup> Eph 4:12-16

# Grand Theft Jesus

The earlier examples highlight the overreach and focus of one member of the body of Jesus, elevated over others.

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

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

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

Even if “church” were a legitimate translation, which it isn’t, the letter to the Ephesians was not addressed to an elder, “pastor,” or any other supposed office of the “church,” or even to the “church” itself. It was addressed to the saints who are in Ephesus.<sup>90</sup> In addition, just before the five spiritual gifts are listed that have been siphoned into “offices”, scripture reveals that these gifts are for people,<sup>91</sup> not positions.

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<sup>90</sup> Eph 1:1

<sup>91</sup> Eph 4:8

# Grand Theft Jesus

If Paul had intended to communicate “offices” of the “church”, certainly he would have addressed his letters either to the institution or the authorities running it.

Even Jesus, when He referred to Himself as the good shepherd,<sup>92</sup> didn’t use a special word. Only if “church” and its ‘offices’ are assumed to be true before reading Ephesians 4:11 can this list of gifts be treated differently from any others, such as those detailed in 1 Corinthians 12 & 14.

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

The imperial “church” fathers did not originate with Jesus; they were instituted by Constantine, Jerome, Theodosius, and King James. In “church”, spiritual gifts are siphoned off, and their names are used for staff positions. Among these gifts for Jesus’ people, nothing is more devastating than shepherding being painted as a “church” office function, except for the forged institution itself.

Within the American and worldwide “church”, “pastoring” is the dominant career path. There are “pastors”, “executive “pastors”, “senior “pastors”, “lead “pastors”, “teaching “pastors”, “assistant “pastors”, “associate “pastors”, “connecting “pastors”, “care “pastors”, “counseling “pastors”, “church” life “pastors”, “family “pastors”,

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<sup>92</sup> John 10:11

# Grand Theft Jesus

“missions “pastors”, “youth “pastors”, “children’s “pastor”, and I even saw a “mega church” with a “parking lot “pastor”.

Neither “pastor” nor “church” is scriptural at all.

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

Peter teaches us how shepherding should happen:

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***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.***<sup>93</sup>

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

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<sup>93</sup> 1 Peter 5:1-4

# Grand Theft Jesus

He encourages fellow elders to “shepherd” the flock, directing them to do so “not under compulsion”, but “willingly” (the same word for voluntarily), not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering, but by example. Jesus had similar insight into hired hands.<sup>94</sup> “Pastors” cannot avoid the label of hired hand.

In utter irony, Peter warns against “lording it over” those entrusted to them, using the verb *katakurieuo*,<sup>95</sup> built on the root *kyrios*<sup>96</sup>—lord, master, owner. That same root produces *kuriakos*<sup>97</sup> (“belonging to the lord”), from which “church” is derived. If translators were consistent and independent of “church” and state influence, the expected translation would conceptually be a warning against “churching” over those entrusted. “Church” and “lording over” derive from the same Greek word.

Paul confirms in 2 Corinthians 1:24 against “churching” authority, but treats the reader as fellow workers. Neither Paul nor Peter invented this self-control. Jesus had already established true authority within His *ekklesia* before Paul and Peter lived it out, teaching that Gentile kings “churched” themselves over the people, but the disciples are not to act this way.<sup>98</sup> This is why a “pastor,” as a church office, lording it over attenders, is a central feature of the “church” forgery, and unbiblical.

That’s exactly what Constantine created, a religion that he and his staff “churched” over. Centuries before and after, Roman emperors were already treated as divine, members of the Imperial Cult, long before Jesus’ earthly ministry—and continued to be so well after Christianity became the Roman state religion. They were formally addressed as *dominus*, “lord” or “master,” the Latin term for a title signaling

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<sup>94</sup> John 10

<sup>95</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/2634.htm>

<sup>96</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/2961.htm> , <https://biblehub.com/greek/2962.htm>

<sup>97</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/2960.htm>

<sup>98</sup> Matthew 20:25-28

# Grand Theft Jesus

absolute lordship, already discussed in Greek, and the same word used for the Lord in scripture. As the official High Priest over all religions in Rome, “churching” over Christians was the institution's DNA, and “pastor” is the mechanism. The Edict of Thessalonica institutes the “church”, lording it over all Roman citizens with this thought. (The same is true for “bishop” as well.)

This isn't a minor mistranslation about authority—it widens the chasm between two opposing authorities: what Jesus forbade in Life is proactively impersonated institutionally; what Peter prohibited in practice is normalized in “church” governance. The *ekklesia* is robbed not by open rebellion, but by a language and subsequent actions that mimic Jesus' while claiming His authority for their own. Jesus protects His people by prohibiting titles like “father”, “rabbi”, and “teacher”.<sup>99</sup> Why would using the name of a Spiritual gift for a title be any different, especially when Jesus calls himself a shepherd? It's His shepherding presence that leads to Life in Him, which “pastoring” cannot deliver from his “office.”

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<sup>99</sup> Matt 23:9

# Grand Theft Jesus

## Chapter 7—"Church" Hijacks Jesus' Authority

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*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.<sup>100</sup>*

~ Richard Halverson

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Taken together, "church" mistranslation, "church" elevation by the creed, and "offices of the church" create a model of authority that directly opposes Jesus as the head of His body. No one other than Jesus has "church" authority in Jesus' *ekklesia*, but everyone in Him has His presence to guide the use of spiritual gifts for sharing with others.<sup>101</sup> Leadership, a product of "church" hierarchy and American business, "lord" the "church" over its members, varying in structure and depth depending on denomination. But if "church" is not a concept from Jesus, then neither is "church" leadership. In His *ekklesia*, direction comes directly from Jesus; in someone else's gathering, direction comes from something else.

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

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<sup>100</sup> Quoted by numerous publications, including CS Lewis institute – no original publication documented. But I would say the same thing if he didn't.

<sup>101</sup> 1 Cor 12:4-11

# Grand Theft Jesus

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

Jesus never mentioned anything else as the foundation for His *ekklesia*, which excludes statements of faith (aka creeds), denominational founding documents, theological beliefs, or even scripture. Jesus' *ekklesia* is founded upon the one thing that He said it was, the proclamation of faith that He is “the anointed Son of the Living God!”<sup>102</sup> Jesus never offers an alternative. “Church” can only resemble Life in Jesus rhetorically because, in practice, it lacks the spiritual resources and authority to share His Life.

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

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

When homeschooling was booming in our extended neighborhood, a support group formed organically, largely made up of parents from my “church”. There was no official name, no agenda beyond helping each other, and nobody was “in charge”. There were also friends of friends, neighborhood friends, and some just heard about us through the grapevine. One parent would teach biology to a neighbor's kids as well as their own, and someone else would teach Spanish in return. Birthday parties and

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<sup>102</sup> Matt 16:16

# Grand Theft Jesus

picnics were also big hits, and everybody shared their insights to help anyone who jumped into the homeschool waters, whether they were ‘in the group’ or not.

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

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

However, one Sunday, during the service singing time, something was just different. Without me trying to explain what was happening, the “pastor” and others expressed the same sense of a spiritual gift in the left side of the congregation that needed to be shared. Later, the “pastor” admitted that he didn’t pursue it properly (1 Cor 14:29-32) in order to keep the service on schedule. Without judging what may have been happening in the congregation, a shepherd would have paused and invited the gift to be shared. But the planned service took priority, and the flock missed a gift from above intended for them. “Church” order squelched the Holy Spirit, and God speaking to His people was squelched.

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

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

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

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

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

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to Him for His purposes as He calls them; this isn't possible within the "church"/"pastor" authority paradigm—by definition.

CONFIDENTIAL

# Grand Theft Jesus

## Chapter 8—We’re Not His *Ekklesia* Without His Name

Jesus gathered and led *ekklesias* for various reasons throughout His time on earth. First, he called four; then a fifth; then 12; then 72.<sup>103</sup> He demonstrated His authority as the Son of God and head of His body. When Jesus said *ekklesia*, He didn’t even mention an institution, nor was there any indication of one later in anything He did. Only religious theology could invent a doctrine of “being called out of the worldly system” into a “spiritual system”, when Jesus was just getting some guys to come with Him as he preached that God’s Kingdom was here.

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

He did not delegate His authority for administrative duties while He brought God’s kingdom to bear on the world; He delegated His authority to others to do what He had shown them to do. First He took four with Him—Andrew, Peter, James, and John—and showed them. Then He added Levi, then the Twelve, and then the Seventy-Two. His strategy didn’t involve building a system, but rather walking through Galilee, proclaiming God’s kingdom and freeing the sick and demonized as He went. His followers watched and learned. Later, Jesus commissioned them to go into all the world, presumably to do the same thing,<sup>104</sup> never mentioning institutional membership or attendance.

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<sup>103</sup> Mark 1:16-20, Mark 2:14; Mark 3:14, Luke 10:1-24

<sup>104</sup> Mark 16:15

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The chasm between saying “in Jesus’ name” in a worship service and the 72 who were sent out in Jesus’ name can’t be overstated. Having done what they had been instructed and taught, they returned, exclaiming, “Even the demons are subject to us in Your name!”<sup>105</sup> Under Jesus’ authority, evil spirits obeyed His ambassadors just like they obeyed Him, and vacated their victims. This is the scriptural picture of *ekklesia*, inseparable from His delegated authority.

How many times have you heard or said, “in His name,” and nothing happened? That didn’t happen to the Twelve or the Seventy-Two. Saying the words “in His name” and actually living within and under specific authority are not the same thing. The sons of Sceva learned what happens when you try.<sup>106</sup> They acted as they had seen others act, without having been sent by Him. We should feel fortunate when nothing happens when we invoke His name for something He has not authorized.

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

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*“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.’”*  
— Matthew 7:21–23

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The issue isn’t that His name is spoken. It’s whether He has actually delegated His authority to somebody to do so. No creed, no tradition, no system, and no

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<sup>105</sup> Luke 10:17

<sup>106</sup> Acts 19:11-16

# Grand Theft Jesus

institution has the authority to delegate Jesus' name or confer His authority. If He hasn't sent someone, they aren't sent—no matter what words they might say.

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

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

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

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

# Grand Theft Jesus

## Chapter 9—Lose *Ekklesia* = Lose Jesus

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

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

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

Religion schedules events to attend; Jesus summons people to be with Him.<sup>107</sup> Christ's body doesn't result from us having a gathering—it's a result of Him doing the gathering. When an institution schedules what He alone has the authority to call, it imitates the form but can't produce the Life, yet attendance is central to religion.

When Hebrews 10:25 is interpreted through an institutional lens, attendance is treated as a scriptural mandate. Scripture interpreted this way serves as the basis for turning the encouragement found in Jesus' *ekklesia* into doctrine within “church.” In “church”, “Do not forsake the habit of assembling” is treated as evidence of submission

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<sup>107</sup> Mark 3:14

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to Christ and proof of an obedient heart. I taught this to my kids, in my Bible study, and as a “church” teacher.

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

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

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

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

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

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of shared encouragement for the sake of “church” attendance, one of those “winds of doctrine.”

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

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

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

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## Chapter 10—Scripture Degraded When It and “Church” are Elevated

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

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

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

# Grand Theft Jesus

interpretation is also included. Because “church” is believed in by creed, it puts scripture translation and interpretation beyond question.

Jesus disagrees:

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

- John 5:37-40

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The mystery of the ages isn't based on “us in church” or “scripture in you”, but it's Christ Himself in us that is God's hope of glory.<sup>108</sup> Initiatives to “ground ourselves” in scripture or promote a “biblical worldview” unintentionally widen the chasm between Life in Jesus and the imperial institution because Jesus never taught such a thing.

In a couple of verses, it gets worse:

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

- John 5:42

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We have inherited words like “church” and “repentance,” as well as transliterations rather than translations for words like “baptize,” “apostle,” and

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<sup>108</sup> Col 1:27

# Grand Theft Jesus

“pastor.” Bypassing direct translation for either substitution or transliteration leaves the definition of those words up to the “church” that manages scripture translation and controls its interpretation. These definitions dominate our Bibles today.

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

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

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

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

# Grand Theft Jesus

## Chapter 11—Sincerity and Good Things Don't Legitimize Forgery

### Parked Ideas

Philippians 1: 15-18 (Christ is preached – doesn't justify or validate the ones who preached it).

2 Peter 2:15- preach for gain

John 10:12-13 – hired hands

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

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

Sincerity is never presented in scripture as evidence that something originates with God. Matthew 7 explicitly dismantles sincerity as a measure of legitimacy when people claim to have served in His name, yet Jesus never knew them.<sup>109</sup> People can be sincere, devout, and emotionally invested—and still be deeply deceived. Sincerity is a beautiful character trait, but it isn't a test for truth.

Scripture consistently places sincerity at the very center of the deepest deceptions. Trusting sincerity isn't the same as trusting Jesus. Paul persecuted

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<sup>109</sup> Matt 7:21-23

# Grand Theft Jesus

believers with a clear conscience and zeal for God,<sup>110</sup> yet he was deeply mistaken. Jesus warned that some would prophesy, cast out demons, and perform mighty works in His name—yet still hear, “I never knew you.”<sup>111</sup> The problem is not hypocrisy; it’s the mistake of sincerely, thoroughly, misplacing trust. Believing in an institution called “church” is one example.

The overwhelming majority of Jesus’ allegories, healings, teachings, and deliverances occurred outside the Temple and synagogue systems, calling the religious sons of hell and hypocrites<sup>112</sup> when He did go there.

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

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

Sincerity does not dismantle a forgery.

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<sup>110</sup> Gal 1:13

<sup>111</sup> Matt 7:21-23

<sup>112</sup> Matt 23

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

The measure of Truth isn't sincerity; its anchor is in its origin. The question is not what I may be sincere about, but what Jesus actually said about His people and where He promised to be present. The Original exposes the forgery. Sincerity cannot.

## PART IV

# THE ORIGINAL

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*It Steals Your Breath Away*

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# Grand Theft Jesus

## Chapter 12—Jesus Is The Original

We degrade scripture when we read it in snippets. ‘I’ve got a verse for that!’ is a common phrase, and sermons preached ‘in context’ rarely are. Scripture was not written as theological bullet points, but as integrated and inspired testimony to Jesus. The Bible that introduced headings and numbers was translated and published on the basis of Reformed theology. Ignore chapter and verse headings for a minute and read Mark 1 from Jesus’ immersion (transliterated as “baptism”) until He begins preaching.<sup>113</sup> It’s one integrated story, not a basis for a theological sermon series. Nobody has a favorite novel, children’s book, or autobiography with a number for every sentence.

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

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

*When John immersed Jesus, something nobody had ever seen before happened—the skies were torn open, and the Holy Spirit landed on Jesus’ shoulder. Then, God speaks out of the torn-open heavens, declaring, “You’re my beloved Son, I take great pleasure in you.” God had just publicly announced His Son as His heir and anointed Him as heir to God’s kingdom with the Holy Spirit instead of water. Apart from the crucifixion and resurrection itself, nothing in human or cosmic*

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<sup>113</sup> Mark 1:9-21

# Grand Theft Jesus

*history comes close to this moment. A man has been inaugurated as King over all of God's creation.*

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Like most of Jesus' teachings and miracles, God didn't "show up" when beckoned to a Temple service, a synagogue meeting, or any other religious event. The entire essence of Jesus' Life is God Himself, His *logos*.<sup>114</sup> Systems, theologies, and traditions of worship were introduced later by Constantine's forgery. Jesus and His Father did 'show up' unexpectedly when John immersed Him—they tore open the heavens. Instead of at a temple, "church", or synagogue service, Jesus and God both 'showed up' in the wilderness, where John (the immerser) declared Jesus "the Lamb of God, the One who would take away the sins of the world."<sup>115</sup> This is where God anointed Jesus as His heir, the future King of God's Kingdom.

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

Jesus defeated Satan's barrage of temptations, emerging from the wilderness with a message from God Himself: "God's Kingdom is here!" God didn't send Jesus to introduce a new theological doctrine and put it in a theological box called "the gospel."

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<sup>114</sup> John 1:1-3

<sup>115</sup> John 1:29

# Grand Theft Jesus

God sent Jesus as the King to lead an invasion, the same invitation that He offers us to join today.

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

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

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

This is why Jesus teaches us to pray, "Your Kingdom come,"<sup>116</sup> as opposed to, "Give us true repentance." "Forgive as we have been forgiven," is not the same as "forgive us according to our repentance." This is why Jesus' analogies ("parables") start with, "the Kingdom is like..."<sup>117</sup> and the Kingdom is in the "beatitudes". Can you imagine a "parable" that starts with, "And true repentance is like...?" Yet we talk about repenting as if we have a scriptural model for how to do it.

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<sup>116</sup> Matt 6:10

<sup>117</sup> Matt 13 – several examples

# Grand Theft Jesus

This is why Jesus went around Galilee preaching the Kingdom,<sup>118</sup> attempted to teach Nicodemus about seeing the Kingdom,<sup>119</sup> and Paul preached, taught, persuaded, and testified to the Kingdom.<sup>120</sup> This is why Jesus instructed the 12<sup>121</sup> and the 72 to preach the Kingdom. He also said, “The Kingdom of God has come upon you”<sup>122</sup> when the religious condemned Him, and why Jesus said He would give the “keys to the Kingdom” rather than the “keys to *paenitemini*.” In fact, Jesus never said the phrase “repent from sin” ever, let alone in relation to “getting saved”, as a prerequisite to entering His Kingdom, or associating “repent” with “the gospel” in any way.

This is why Jesus said, “Publicans and harlots enter the Kingdom before you<sup>123</sup> (the religious).” This is why the condemnation for the religious is framed, “Not only do you not enter the Kingdom, but you prevent others from entering as well.”<sup>124</sup>

This is why Jesus said to “seek the Kingdom first”<sup>125</sup> rather than repentance or salvation: it’s God’s pleasure to give it to us, it’s already among us, and it’s worth leaving everything on this earth to seek.

This is why Jesus—after preaching the Kingdom throughout Israel, Galilee, and even Samaria—was killed. He preached a Kingdom that Caesar could not tolerate, and that the Jewish leaders rejected. And this is why Jesus, after Life, death, and resurrection, spoke about God’s Kingdom for 40 days before ascending into heaven.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Luke 4:42-43

<sup>119</sup> John 3:3

<sup>120</sup> Acts 19, 20, 28

<sup>121</sup> Matt 10:5-7

<sup>122</sup> Matt 12:28

<sup>123</sup> Matt 21:31

<sup>124</sup> Matt 23:13

<sup>125</sup> Matt 6:33

<sup>126</sup> Acts 1:3

# Grand Theft Jesus

From His very first message until He ascended to the Father's side, Jesus preached the Kingdom of God.

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

## Didn't Jesus Come to Call Sinners to Repentance?<sup>127</sup>

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

He must have been so excited and beside himself that, naturally, he held a feast for Jesus. What else would he do? Some people from Levi’s circle of friends joined them, along with Jesus and His disciples. Some religious leader spotted them.

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

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

Suppose we see “the gospel,” and therefore Jesus, as the foundation for a religion of penance, the opportunity to change our minds about sin, feel remorse about it, and

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<sup>127</sup>127 Luke 7:27-32

# Grand Theft Jesus

establish accountability for it, so that we qualify for salvation from eternity in hell—we would see what follows through that lens. We may be members in good standing and live a good Christian life. We may even be approaching our religion’s definition of “Christlikeness”. Our theology would dictate our response. We have a lot of faith in it. In this case, we would not yet have discovered that theology about Jesus isn’t the same as faith in Him.

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

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

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

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

The only way to read this from a *paenitemini* perspective is to assume it in advance. Jesus condemns the religious conversion perspective so thoroughly that He calls its practitioners “sons of Hell”, who “create twice the sons of Hell that they are.” More profoundly, if this verse theoretically stands as the concrete foundation of a

# Grand Theft Jesus

theology for Jesus' "gospel" to save sinners, then where is the theology for those of us who don't need a physician? Just who are the righteous, the spiritually healthy people that Jesus was talking about that don't need Him? Wouldn't they be the ones for Jesus to build on and give the keys to the Kingdom? If Jesus was making a statement as *the* foundation of Christian doctrine, why does only half of the sentence apply? If people can be righteous before they come to Jesus, why do we need Jesus at all? If we try to finagle this theologically, it proves my point.

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

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

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

What are the theologians going to say?

1. Oh, huh, we're sinners, too! Why aren't you having dinner with us?
2. We don't need any more righteous converts. There's not enough room in the synagogue anyway! Why aren't you with us?
3. Tax collectors, prostitutes, and fishermen! How can they be made righteous?

Impossible? Some things just can't be redeemed! *It would take an act of God...*

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4. You can't eat with them; they're unclean. They have to be made clean first. No, we don't want to tell them. They might start coming to synagogue!

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

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

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

Jesus had been publicly exposing the theologians as vipers, sons of hell, hypocrites, outsiders of God's kingdom, and gatekeepers preventing others from entering.<sup>128</sup> I doubt that He agreed with them now, as they called his fellow guests nasty names. Maybe he wasn't being literal about the Pharisees being righteous, or that the reason He was having dinner with them was to change their minds and get religion. I don't think they got the joke. That joke is now in our statements of faith and our liturgy.

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

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<sup>128</sup> Matt 23

# Grand Theft Jesus

## The Original Continues

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

In Mark's scripture, Jesus mentions sin for the first time in 'chapter 2' while leading his first *ekklesia* and healing a paralytic.<sup>129</sup> In stark contrast to the future Roman religion, there is no price, emotional or otherwise, that is required before Jesus forgives sin for this man—or for any of us. When Jesus persuades us to *metanoéo* about what He is saying, He is calling us to believe in Him, no matter how unbelievable God's message appears, and to follow Him. This is a picture of the Original.

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

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

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<sup>129</sup> Mark 2:5

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own life, Jesus took away the sins of the world—unilaterally, stripping Satan of His only leverage.

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

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# Grand Theft Jesus

## Chapter 13—Jesus' Original: A Spiritual Potluck

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

### *Ekklesia: Jesus' Potluck for Believers*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Grand Theft Jesus

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

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## Jesus' *Ekklesia*: A Spiritual Feast for Gathered Believers

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*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

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

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

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

# Grand Theft Jesus

- 1 Thess 5:11

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

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

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

# Grand Theft Jesus

## Chapter 14—Fellowship Hall Or Fellowship With Him

Jesus said *His* sheep hear His voice<sup>130</sup> *because* they belong to Him.<sup>131</sup> When they gather in His name, He Lives in and through them.<sup>132</sup> Where He isn't Living, the gathering isn't His—no matter what a gathering claims or what words it uses. A gathering formed under institutional authority may speak about Him, but it cannot speak for Him—in His name—unless we first accept that Jesus' presence Lives in an institution.<sup>133</sup>

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

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

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*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.*<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> John 10:3

<sup>131</sup> John 10:14-15

<sup>132</sup> John 10:4, Matt 18:20

<sup>133</sup> Acts 17:25

<sup>134</sup> 1 John 1:1-3

# Grand Theft Jesus

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

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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.<sup>135</sup>*

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And again:

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*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.”<sup>136</sup>*

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

Imagine an extraordinary, even decadent meal with family and friends at one of life’s great events: a nice, juicy steak, a delicious red wine, and something chocolatey for dessert. But even dinner like this pales in comparison to the laughter and shared memories. Nobody wants to go home; it’s so much fun, and people grow more deeply into each other. They can hardly wait for the next get-together.

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<sup>135</sup> Rev 3:20

<sup>136</sup> John 14:23

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

## "Church" Fellowship

To me, "fellowship" in "church" always meant what adults do to catch up before and after the service. I never saw or heard it described as anything else. There's absolutely nothing wrong with getting together with others just to be together. But don't make the mistake of thinking it has anything to do with Jesus' *ekklesia* or fellowship *in Him*. By believing, the fellowship that John is talking about is with the Father and His Son, Jesus. Jesus even talks about His wedding feast at the end of history.<sup>137</sup>

Just imagine, for a minute, *expecting* to receive gifts directly from Jesus that are precisely what your heart craves—a fellowship that you desire even more than life itself. What a joy it would be to give the same to others while receiving the same from them. Now *that* would be building each other up—this is the entire point of Jesus' *ekklesia*—and it prepares us to tear down the gates of hell.<sup>138</sup> Fellowship in Him is better than the Super Bowl.

If our fellowship "in church" is essentially the same as the local bar, season tickets with friends, coffee shop buddies, or a book club, then we're settling for human

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<sup>137</sup> Rev 19:6-9

<sup>138</sup> Matt 16:18

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fellowship. People outside “church” have this kind of fellowship all the time. In fact, adding a service to a “church” dramatically reduces the time spent together.

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

## Religion Satisfies Human Fellowship

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

Fellowship with the Father and the Son is the central and indispensable core of Jesus’ *ekklesia*. “Church” without **this** fellowship is just human preferences, enjoyment, common traditions, or even friendship—human events, religiously practiced. Why are we satisfied with human fulfillment in place of the overflowing streams of living water in the Holy Spirit?

Let me drive this home: the entire point of getting together is to build each other up, according to Scripture.<sup>139</sup> Jesus is present when He calls us together—two or more—in His name.<sup>140</sup> The purpose is to interact with one another in His name, building each other up through the gifts He has given.<sup>141</sup> If He has not called us together, if He isn’t

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<sup>139</sup> 1 Cor 14:26

<sup>140</sup> Matt 18:20

<sup>141</sup> 1 Cor 12:7

# Grand Theft Jesus

speaking to us and through us when we are, then it's somebody else's *ekklesia*.<sup>142</sup> We can't do Jesus' *ekklesia* facing the front.

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

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*... 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.*<sup>143</sup>

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As opposed to the living Jesus present in each person, sharing God and His Kingdom with each other, the most common comment before “church” is “How is the family?” and afterward is, “What did you think about the sermon?” The phrases “before church” and “after church” refer to the scheduled service and/or Sunday School, a stark contrast to Jesus' *ekklesia*.

## Fellowship In Jesus, Missing In Action

Fellowship composed of “Jesus in me”, “Jesus in others”, and what's on **His** mind rarely happens. “Leaders” encouraging the congregated to share Jesus' gifts in them when they come to “church” is not “church's” purpose.

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

Plundered of what? *Fellowship in Jesus.*

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<sup>142</sup> Matt 7:22-23

<sup>143</sup> Eldredge, John. Beautiful Outlaw: Experiencing the Playful, Disruptive, Extravagant Personality of Jesus (p. 9). Hachette Nashville. Kindle Edition

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Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”<sup>144</sup> John 10 refers to hearing Jesus’ voice as the way that Life is for His sheep. Jesus tells Peter that he had just spoken a revelation directly from His Father.<sup>145</sup> The entire Jerusalem Council agreed with the Holy Spirit.<sup>146</sup> Paul definitely had a conversation with Jesus.<sup>147</sup> When Jesus said that He would be with His followers always, how literal is that?<sup>148</sup> When we lose *ekklesia*, we lose Jesus. When we lose Jesus, we lose Life in Him; we lose everything.

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<sup>144</sup> John 10:27

<sup>145</sup> Matt 16:17

<sup>146</sup> Acts 15:1-35

<sup>147</sup> Acts 9:1-19

<sup>148</sup> Matt 28:20

Grand Theft Jesus  
PART V  
THE  
TESTIMONY

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# Grand Theft Jesus

## Chapter 17—Let's Take Scripture At Its Word

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

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

If we’re to take scripture at its word, we need to start where we place our faith: Jesus. That’s what scripture says.<sup>149</sup>

Jesus never refers to scripture as anything but *graphé*, the Greek word for scripture. Calling scripture the word, placing it first (or at all) as an article of faith, and using it for the authority of all faith, belief, and behavior is a tradition of man, and it nullifies the *logos* of God.<sup>150</sup>

Scripture, as originally inspired and written, is inerrant and therefore trustworthy. It can be trusted for what it says it is, as well as for what Jesus says it is. When kings, emperors, their staffs, or others modify it with meanings different than

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<sup>149</sup> John 5:40

<sup>150</sup> Mark 7:13

# Grand Theft Jesus

the original, the result is no longer inerrant unless we make the jump that God inspired King James and Jerome to rewrite scripture because it wasn't quite right in its original form.

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

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

*– John 5:37-40*

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

The scripture versions produced under both regimes were written to do just that, and the words they used to do so remain in our scriptures today. These scriptures, along with the creeds, confessions, and other “church” documents, combined with the elevation of these updated scriptures, which “church” controlled exclusively for over

# Grand Theft Jesus

1000 years, still keep “church” in authority today. Scripture still uses the word “church,” which still employs “pastors”, and which still preaches “repentance.”

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

Jesus teaches that we have Life in Him —the Word, God’s *logos*. Scripture bears witness to Him, but it’s neither Life itself nor is it the source for it. Jesus in you, and in me, is God’s Hope of Glory. <sup>151</sup>

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

1. The supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried
2. The only rule and norm of all doctrine and life.
3. The ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged.

Jesus never said anything like this about scripture. Neither did scripture. Jesus defines scripture—which exists solely to give testimony about Him; scripture doesn’t define Jesus, nor does our theology based on it. Not only are these examples unbiblical,

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<sup>151</sup> Col 1:27

# Grand Theft Jesus

but they're also listed first in their statements of faith. Jesus is mentioned later. The ordering itself of such statements in relation to Jesus should give us pause.

According to scripture:

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus led His *ekklesia* through witness, mutually shared gifting of discernment, and the Spirit's real-time leading, and confirmed by scripture. Shepherding was modeled after Peter in 1 Peter 5:20. The Spirit led the *ekklesia* into Truth, and scripture continued to bear witness to Jesus, now and always. The conclusion was not, "It seemed good to our interpretation of scripture." It was, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us (Jesus' entire body who had gathered)." Jesus, manifesting via the Holy Spirit, acted as the foundation of the gathering. The letter to the Gentiles in Antioch that communicated their decision didn't refer to Bible verses; it didn't mention scripture at all.

The point is that we should take Jesus at His word, take scripture at its word, and embrace the meaning that both give. Many Greek words are transliterated in our English translations. I'd always been taught that this happens when there's no

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adequate word in the English language, so a new word must be created. Examples are “apostle”, “bishop”, “deacon”, “pastor”, and more. In some cases, words were even substituted for the original, like “church” and “repent.”

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

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

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

Grand Theft Jesus

PART VI

THE CHOICE

CONFIDENTIAL

# Grand Theft Jesus

## Chapter 18—What To Do For “church”?

When I talk about Jesus’ *ekklesia*, people ask, “Is that what you do for “church”?” What follows is blunt: I don’t do anything “for church”, there’s no reason to do anything “for church”, and “doing something for church” would harm me spiritually as well as those around me. Jesus did not institute “church” in word or concept so if I were to follow Him, it couldn’t be into “church.” “Church” was not in Jesus’ vocabulary, and He didn’t establish a religion to systematize Life in Him. Jesus’ *ekklesia* isn’t something that can be attended, an institution that could reform another one, or a different kind of institution to replace “church.” Though “church” claims “church” to be a translation of His *ekklesia*, it bears no structural or spiritual resemblance to what Jesus said or Lived. I don’t do anything “for “church” anymore. I have come out of her, according to scripture.<sup>152</sup>

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

What do I do? I continually capture every thought and bring it to Jesus,<sup>153</sup> asking what is on His mind more as well as telling Him what’s on mine. In prayer, I try to listen more than I speak. I go straight to the Father—Jesus died so that I can—and I look for whom He wants me to have fellowship with. I’m not saying that I have perfected my relationship with Him, or that I even need to, because His relationship

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<sup>152</sup><sup>152</sup> Rev 18:4

<sup>153</sup> 1 Cor 10:4-5

# Grand Theft Jesus

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

Jesus' *ekklesia* isn't "church"; *ekklesia* is simply a term for what happens together with Jesus, in-Person, when we declare that "Yes! You're the anointed Son of the Living God", and He calls us together. His calling isn't a huge spiritual mystery out of a bad system into a "good" system, but a calling to Him out of our "fishing boats" and up from under a tree to be with Him.<sup>154</sup> *Ekklesia* is not an institution at all; it has no systems to keep it running well or to adhere to a published schedule. Even if Jesus' calling was to come out of a worldly system, the "church"/religion is the worldly system being talked about.<sup>155</sup> Jesus demonstrated His *ekklesia* many times in scripture, but said the term just once, with joy, as Peter declared faith in Him.<sup>156</sup> *Ekklesia* is Jesus alive in His people, forming His body as they believe in Him, and He brings them together.

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

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

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<sup>154</sup> Mark 3:14

<sup>155</sup> Rev 18:2-8

<sup>156</sup> Mat 16:16

# Grand Theft Jesus

Nicodemus had no idea what Jesus was talking about. “How can this be?” was his response. Following Jesus is a quest that cannot and should not be canned into a religion or a system—Life in Jesus is no more a system than the wind.<sup>157</sup>

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

– Ruth Haley Barton<sup>158</sup>

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

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

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

Of course, we’d be more comfortable with an organized, predictable, doctrinally pure, and scheduled system to follow Jesus. But Jesus didn’t leave following Him up to

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<sup>157</sup> John 3:8

<sup>158</sup> Barton, Ruth Haley; R. Ruth Barton; Willard, Dallas. Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence (Transforming Resources) (pp. 16-17). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition

# Grand Theft Jesus

human capacity; He left it up to Himself. We can't follow Jesus using any human ability or system; we must abide in Him as He leads us, breath by breath.

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

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

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

What I can tell you is what happened as I began to listen to Him in real time, thought by thought. It can't be systematized or copied. Life in Him only works if He is leading in Person. What are the critical steps to following Jesus? Ok, now this is totally tongue-in-cheek, and none of these are to be reduced to principles any more than breathing. Instead, I will share this part of my life with you. There are two things you can do: listen and trust. That means to stop talking and stop everything else, and to trust him for every heartbeat, not just correct beliefs. The big tip is that all other tips result from listening and trusting. What I can offer is: start the quest by listening and trusting, but you have to decide on the direction. We can't get started on one quest while still pursuing another.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It shouldn’t have surprised me, but the scandal of religion and “church” is anticipated in scripture—it wasn’t a surprise to God. A system intertwined with the kings of the earth, namely Constantine, Theodosius, James, and even the IRS ties that we have today, demands a very clear response: “Come out of her, My people.”<sup>159</sup>

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

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<sup>159</sup> Rev 18:4

Grand Theft Jesus

**PART VII**

**APPENDICES**

CONFIDENTIAL

# Grand Theft Jesus

## Appendix XX1—Regions Historically Operating as Officially Catholic States

(With Approximate Dates of Formal Catholic Affiliation)

### A. European Kingdoms and States

#### a. France

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

Restored under various regimes until 1905 (formal separation law)

#### b. Spain

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

#### c. Portugal

- i. 12th century – 1910 (Republic; monarchy ended)

#### d. Austria

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

#### e. Hungary

- i. 1000 (Coronation of Stephen I) – 1946 (monarchy abolished)

#### f. Poland

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

#### g. Lithuania

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

# Grand Theft Jesus

## 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

# Grand Theft Jesus

- 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

# Grand Theft Jesus

## aAppendix XX2—King James Translation Instructions<sup>160</sup>

- 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.

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<sup>160</sup> Rules most likely drafted by Archbishop Richard Bancroft—who also presided over the translation and had final editorial decisions—and probably submitted them to King James as Supreme Governor over the Church for approval.

# Grand Theft Jesus

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

# Grand Theft Jesus

## Appendix XX3—The Edict of Milan

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

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# Grand Theft Jesus

Appendix XX4—The Edict of Thessalonica<sup>161</sup>

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

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<sup>161</sup> Codex Theodosianus XVI.1.2

# Grand Theft Jesus

Appendix XX5—First Version of Nicene Creed<sup>162</sup>

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.

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<sup>162</sup> Philip Schaff, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 14 (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1900), 3–5.

# Grand Theft Jesus

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

But those who say:

“There was when he was not,” and

“Before being born he was not,” and

“He came into existence out of nothing,”

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

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

Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)<sup>163</sup>

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,

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<sup>163</sup> Philip Schaff, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 14 (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1900), 3–4.

# Grand Theft Jesus

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.

# Grand Theft Jesus

## Appendix XX7—Institutional Words Altered in KJV Translation

### Ecclesiastical / Clerical Terminology: Tyndale vs KJV

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

# Grand Theft Jesus

## Appendix XX8—Timeline from Emperor Constantine to King James

### 306–337 — Constantine the Great<sup>164</sup>

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

Key events and documents:

- **313 — Edict of Milan**

Legalized Christianity and restored confiscated Christian property.

- 325 — First Council of Nicaea

Produced the Nicene Creed (original version).

Included the anathema clause stating that the “catholic and apostolic church anathematizes” certain doctrines.

- **Imperial church-building program**

Constantine commissioned major basilicas described by contemporaries as

**ἐκκλησίαι (“churches”):**

- “Church” of the Holy Sepulchre (Jerusalem)
- “Church” of the Nativity (Bethlehem)
- Early cathedral of Constantinople (later known as *Megale Ekklesia*, “Great Church”).

### 379–395 — Theodosius I

Emperor who made Nicene Christianity the official religion of the empire

Key events and documents:

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<sup>164</sup> Life of Constantine, by Eusebius of Caesarea

# Grand Theft Jesus

- **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.

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## 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:<sup>165</sup>

- Greek μετανοείτε (metanoείτε) → Latin paenitemini / paenitentiam agite
  - Greek ἐκκλησία (ekklesia) → Latin ecclesia
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<sup>165</sup> Biblia Sacra Vulgata, This became the standard Bible of Western Christianity for over 1,000 years.

# Grand Theft Jesus

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.<sup>166</sup>

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

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<sup>166</sup> Adam Nicolson, *God’s Secretaries*

# Grand Theft Jesus

- Maintained ecclesiastical terminology, authorizing Bancroft's rules.

Example:

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

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## Summary Timeline

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

# Grand Theft Jesus

## Appendix XX9—Authors Who Have Identified Church Failing

Dallas Willard

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*“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.’”<sup>167</sup>*

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*“The greatest issue facing the world today... is whether those who are identified as ‘Christians’ will become disciples...”<sup>168</sup>*

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*“Non-discipleship is the elephant in the church.”<sup>169</sup>*

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J. P. Moreland

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*“The church has not made disciples but consumers.”<sup>170</sup>*

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<sup>167</sup> Commonly attributed; adapted from themes in *The Great Omission* (2006), esp. 1–5.

<sup>168</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (2006), 1.

<sup>169</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (2006), xiii.

<sup>170</sup> J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind* (1997), 4–5.

# Grand Theft Jesus

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*“Many Christians are not living a life that is different from the surrounding culture.”<sup>171</sup>*

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Søren Kierkegaard

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*“Christendom... has done away with Christianity.”<sup>172</sup>*

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A. W. Tozer

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*“We are not making disciples... we are making converts.”<sup>173</sup>*

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*“The church has accepted the world’s values and methods... and is producing a generation of Christians who are conformed to the world.”<sup>174</sup>*

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<sup>171</sup> J. P. Moreland, Kingdom Triangle (2007), 17–20.

<sup>172</sup> Reference: Søren Kierkegaard, Attack Upon Christendom (1855).

<sup>173</sup> Reference: A. W. Tozer, The Root of the Righteous (1955).

<sup>174</sup> A. W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God (1948); The Root of the Righteous (1955).

# Grand Theft Jesus

Francis Chan

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*“We’ve created a culture where people show up, sit, and listen...  
but that’s not what Jesus asked us to do.”<sup>175</sup>*

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Neil Cole

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*“We have made the church into a place where people attend rather  
than a people who follow Jesus.”<sup>176</sup>*

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*“We are not called to make members of the church, but disciples of  
Jesus.”<sup>177</sup>*

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Alan Hirsch

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*“The church has become a vendor of religious goods and  
services.”<sup>178</sup>*

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<sup>175</sup> Francis Chan, Letters to the Church (2018).

<sup>176</sup> Reference: Neil Cole, Organic Church (2005).

<sup>177</sup> Neil Cole, Organic Church (2005).

<sup>178</sup> Alan Hirsch, The Forgotten Ways (2006).

# Grand Theft Jesus

David Platt

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*“We have taken the radical commands of Jesus and reduced them to a comfortable cultural Christianity.”<sup>179</sup>*

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<sup>179</sup> David Platt, *Radical* (2010).

# Grand Theft Jesus

## Appendix X10 Conflicts Under “Church” Authorization<sup>180</sup>

<u>Conflict / Conquest</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Connection</u>	<u>Estimated Deaths</u>
Saxon Wars <sup>181</sup>	772–804	Forced Conversion	Tens of thousands
Crusades: Holy Land <sup>182</sup>	1095–1291	Papally authorized	1–9 million
Northern/Baltic Crusade <sup>183</sup>	1147–15th c.	Conversion wars	Hundreds of thousands
Albigensian Crusade <sup>184</sup>	1209–1229	Crusade Cathars	200,000–1,000,000
Fourth Crusade <sup>185</sup>	1202–1204	Constantinople	50,000–100,000
Reconquista <sup>186</sup>	8th c.–1492	Reconquest of Iberia	Up to millions
Hussite Wars <sup>187</sup>	1419–1434	Against reformers	Hundred thousands
Spanish Conquest <sup>188</sup>	1492–1600s	Imperial expansion	Millions
Fall of Tenochtitlan <sup>189</sup>	1519–1521	Spanish conquest	100,000–240,000
French Religious Wars <sup>190</sup>	1562–1598	Catholic - Protestant	2–4 million
Thirty Years' War <sup>191</sup>	1618–1648	Catholic-Protestant	4.5–8 million
English Civil Wars <sup>192</sup>	1639–1651	Religious political	~200,000

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<sup>180</sup> Wars waged “in the name of Christ”: Papal Armies or Governments using “Church” Authority

<sup>181</sup> General medieval chronicles; estimates vary.

<sup>182</sup> Thomas Asbridge; A. Holt, \*The Crusades\*.

<sup>183</sup> Britannica, 'Northern Crusades'.

<sup>184</sup> Britannica, 'Albigensian Crusade'.

<sup>185</sup> Britannica, 'Fourth Crusade'.

<sup>186</sup> Britannica, 'Reconquista'.

<sup>187</sup> 7. Wikipedia / general historical syntheses on Hussite Wars.

<sup>188</sup> Demographic studies of Indigenous population collapse - Americas (e.g., DHR VT sources).

<sup>189</sup> Fall of Tenochtitlan historical estimates.

<sup>190</sup> French Wars of Religion estimates (various historians).

<sup>191</sup> Britannica, 'Thirty Years' War'.

<sup>192</sup> Britannica, 'English Civil Wars'.

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## Appendix x11—Bancroft Changes to KJV Translations

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

### Introduction

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

### Bancroft's 14 Changes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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