

## Understanding the New Testament

Written July of 2009

Dear friends and patriots,

I finished reading the Bible recently. Some of you know that I have studied closely the four gospels of Jesus Christ, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and transcribed each of them in detail. There are those who would find fault with the notion that I undertook this endeavor without the guidance of people who have studied these works before me (priests, historians, theologians, etc.) and without the benefit of provided historical context. Others would quibble with the notion that I focused solely on Jesus' words and teaching without having a firm understanding of many other parts of the Bible other than from third hand accounts heard in church or in discussions. I write this paragraph simply to provide a point of perspective rather than a justification. But in retrospect there really may not be a better way to understand Jesus than to just read his words for yourself and attempt to separate what he said from what was said of him.

When I studied the gospels, having started with a firm understanding of the Ten Commandments given through Moses and a general understanding of God's will for us, I anticipated finding blasphemies and contradictions. My expectation should be of no great surprise. Most of us have heard so-called Christians talk of some version of piety where drunkenness is among the greatest of sins and homosexuality is a curse that humanity has brought upon itself through immorality. They've told us that it is God's will that the weak should serve the powerful because each was born so by the will of God, that it is not a sin for a people to murder the weak and helpless of other peoples, as in time of war, and that it is the place of women to serve their husbands and to remain silent in the church. The Calvinists preach predestination, that God knows our fate at the time we were born, and that there is nothing we can do through our free will to change it. Most distressing is the idea, almost universal in Christian churches, that if you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, simply as a heartfelt declaration, that you will be rewarded with an eternal heaven, regardless of the way you live your life or otherwise treat one another, and if you do not profess this acceptance, you are damned to an eternity of suffering. To many of these so-called teachers, you only need acknowledge that Jesus is God, and nothing else is necessary. Though skeptical, it seemed intuitive to me that these ideas must have sprung from Jesus Christ himself. It is called Christianity after all.

But if you go back and read the New Testament with an open mind and an open heart, you may discover that Jesus Christ believed and taught none of these things. If you have been skeptical, you may come to believe that you find no fault with Jesus at all, and that in fact you admire him deeply. You may even find yourself wanting to be more like him and discover that it is possible

to be more so. Even if you've never had faith in God, or if instead you've blindly been seeking the rapture your entire life, you may end up wanting to take it upon yourself to help other people better understand what he taught so that they might share in the understanding you have. It is good to have hope in better possibilities for yourself and for others, and if you find such hope you can share it. It is our place to help each other along, and I tell you truly that you can find wisdom in this from the teachings of Jesus. If you are one who believes there is fault in Jesus, as I expected to find, when you read the New Testament you may instead discover that the fault you believed, the preaching that made you unwilling to hear, came not from Jesus, but from men who followed him, or to put more accurately simply came after him in time, teaching their own very flawed understanding of God in his name.

The next few pages are a very brief synopsis of the New Testament of the Bible.

The Gospels of Jesus Christ are four books that detail his life mainly from the time he was about 30 years old. In these books Jesus more or less appears on the scene of Israel during the Roman occupation around what is now called the year zero CE (Common Era, also called AD). There are many other books written in the same general period that describe Jesus' life and purport to be gospels, but these were never canonized by the Roman Catholic Church nor included in the Bible, so for simplicity's sake we will consider only these four.

In the beginning of these four books is a man called John the Baptist, generally accepted by Christians to be a cousin of Jesus, who lives in the desert and comes out to preach the gospel of repentance for the remission of sin, which simply put is that people need to repent their sins before God, openly admitting their wrongdoings and asking God's forgiveness, and thenceforth living better lives acknowledging God and his will. This is symbolically performed by a follower of God ducking the person in the water beneath the river. Jesus comes to John to be baptized, and John immediately recognizes Jesus as spiritually superior to himself and from there tells people that Jesus is the one of God that John has foretold. During Jesus' baptism, the sky opens, and a light descends upon him like a dove, and a loud voice declares from heaven, "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Both before and after his baptism, Jesus finds certain men whom he recruits and later names as apostles who follow him loyally, generally leaving behind their previous lives and occupations. In addition to the apostles are many other disciples who follow and teach Jesus' doctrine and thousands of others who follow him to hear his teaching and to be healed. From beginning to end Jesus exhibits a great understanding in general and particularly the ability to perceive the thoughts and intentions of others.

Throughout these travels Jesus performs many miracles which are mainly manifested in his ability to heal, which ranges from healing infirmities such as blindness and being crippled to raising the recently dead, or nearly dead, and his ability to cast out devils. Generally the only prerequisite to being healed is that the person who requests the healing believes that he can do it, and most praise God for his help and go on to preach his greatness. As to casting out devils, it is noteworthy that the evil spirits recognize him on sight and beg for his mercy. Those from whom devils were cast also praise him and seek to follow him. Jesus performs a number of other miracles and prognostications. Among the most remarkable of these are two episodes where thousands follow him into the wilderness to hear his teaching, and his disciples tell him that they

should be sent back as there cannot possibly be enough food to feed them all. Jesus breaks the few loaves and fish that the apostles have brought, commanding them to do likewise, and thousands are fed. There are also two episodes where the apostles' boat is about to capsize in a storm. In one instance the apostles fearfully wake Jesus, who calms the winds and water with a gesture, and in another he walks out from the shore upon the water to help them, both times to show them that their faith in him is incomplete when they are amazed that he can do these things. Jesus makes a number of speeches concerning the will of God, particularly at the beginning of his journeys, exhorting those who hear him mainly to seek God, to forgive and seek God's forgiveness, to love peace and to love one another. The "Sermon on the Mount" is the best known of these. He says a great deal about spirituality and being meek before God. He talks about the kingdom of God and how God's rewards are there for them who seek them above the riches of the Earth. He preaches that God will do good for those that truly seek him, and that those who bear good fruit for God will have his eternal reward, and those who do evil will be cast away.

There are three main themes that develop in the gospels. The theme which most concerns the teaching of Jesus is man's relationship to God. In some ways it continues with the Gospel of Repentance for the Remission of Sin that starts with John the Baptist. Jesus always refers to God as his Father, he instructs others to see God as their heavenly Father, and he preaches that they should always seek God in prayer and that they should ask God's forgiveness and ask of him what they desire. He stresses that they should have an open relationship with God, not for a show to other men, but as a form of divine communication. As a point of comparison, he asks people what father would give his child seeking bread instead a stone, and if earthly fathers, being evil, would do as their children ask, how much more will their heavenly Father do for them? He teaches of loving one another as God loves us. As people seek God's forgiveness, he instructs them that they should also forgive one another and seek one another's forgiveness. Jesus gives the example that if a man approaches God's altar and asks that God correct his brother, but the man himself has acted against his brother and seeks not his brother's forgiveness, that his prayer is for nothing. When Peter asks him how much a man should keep forgiving his brother who seeks his forgiveness, "until seven times?" Jesus tells him "until seventy times seven," which comes just short of saying as many times as you can imagine. Jesus also teaches of living a good life and following God's commandments, doing so openly not for a show, but as a good example. He teaches that everyone should serve God always, because they will not know when God will come for them and to therefore always be prepared. When asked what is the greatest of God's commandments, Jesus says there are two: There is one God, and you should love him with your whole heart, and love thy neighbor as thyself. Jesus also preaches often about not loving the riches of this Earth, and that we should instead lay our riches in heaven. Jesus talks in many parables about the kingdom of heaven and its greatness, and he makes it clear that those who are not with God, or who do evil and harm others, will be cast out from heaven and endure much suffering.

The second theme, which ties the other two themes together, is the antagonism between Jesus' teaching and the conflicting teaching of the Old Testament as interpreted by the religious leaders of Israel. Jesus is at odds with the Pharisees almost from the beginning of his journeys. He teaches that it is good to do good work on the sabbath day, which by Jewish law and the Fourth Commandment is Saturday, and the Pharisees see it as Jesus flaunting the law. When he heals a man on the sabbath day, he tells the man that his sins are forgiven, saying that God has also

given him the ability to forgive sins, which further enrages the Pharisees, as they believe that he makes himself as God. When they ridicule Jesus for eating and drinking with sinners, prostitutes and tax collectors and the like, or for letting his disciples eat with unwashed hands, he berates them for putting their own laws, man's laws, over the laws of God, and that in so doing they lead people away from God and toward destruction. And he tells them in parables that their anger with him is as with God's prophets before him, whom they killed, and that their seeking to harm him is not Godly, but ungodly, going as far as to call them not sons of Abraham, but of Satan. They test him repeatedly with riddles, and Jesus consistently demonstrates wisdom beyond their preparation. The Pharisees seek to kill him throughout the gospels, making it clear that Jesus is boldly risking his life with his words.

A particularly good story in this vein is the well known Good Samaritan, where Jesus demonstrates that any man can be your neighbor. Jesus tells a lawyer of the Pharisees of a man who is beaten by robbers and left for dead. A priest happens by, and, seeing the man, he moves to the other side of the street and goes on. Later a higher priest passes by and does likewise. Finally a Samaritan, hated by Israelites, comes along and takes compassion on the man, binding up his wounds and taking him to an inn, going as far as to leave money for the man's stay with the innkeeper and telling the innkeeper that if more is required to put it on his tab. Jesus asks the lawyer which of these was the man's neighbor, and he responds the man who showed mercy on him, and Jesus tells him to go and do likewise, demonstrating both that anyone can be your neighbor and that being a priest or holding a certain belief does not make one so.

The third theme is Jesus' role as the Messiah, the foretold savior of Israel, and the Son of God, which is most dogmatic of the three. At the beginning of his teaching, Jesus is tempted by Satan after fasting forty days in the desert. Satan tells Jesus that if he is the Son of God to simply command the stones to be made of bread, and Jesus responds that man is not fed by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Satan then tells Jesus to throw himself from a high mountain, as it is written that God will send his angels to bear him up, to which Jesus answers, it is also written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Finally Satan tells Jesus that if he will only serve him, that he will give Jesus dominion over all the kingdoms of the Earth, and Jesus orders him away as it is written, "thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

Throughout the majority of the Gospels Jesus refers to himself as the Son of man, but he makes it clear that he is serving God, and he always addresses God as "Father." His role as Messiah is regularly supported by contextual references provided by the gospel writers to Old Testament prophet predictions of his coming. He makes it clear that his teaching is the will of God, and that those who hear his sayings and do them will find salvation, and those who hear them and do them not will find destruction. He cautions people not to find offense in him, as he preaches the will of God, but in three of the four Jesus does not say that he is God or that believing he is so is the one condition to finding God's kingdom. Of the four Gospels, only the Gospel of John refers to Jesus as God, or the Word that is before the world was. Given that each of the Gospels are written by men, rather than just accepting each as the truth from a different kind of Jesus, we should instead determine why men wrote such blatantly conflicting interpretations of Jesus in John compared to the other three.

Well into his ministry he reveals to his apostles that his teaching will lead them to Jerusalem

where he will eventually be taken by evil men and put to death and that he will rise again on the third day and ascend to heaven to sit at the right hand of God. One of his apostles, Judas, betrays him to the priests of Israel, as Jesus knew he would do. His condemnation and subsequent crucifixion happen consistently in all four gospels. The Jews demand his crucifixion and the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, claims to find no wrongdoing in him, but he acclimates to the will of the Jews and has Jesus crucified. It is noteworthy that while the Gospel writers portray Pontius Pilate as mostly innocent, the Romans harshly belittle Jesus, with Roman soldiers beating and torturing him before crucifying him in an especially torturous way, putting a crown of thorns on his head and nailing him to the cross rather than simply hanging him up with ropes. The stories of his resurrection are much more varied, but they all end with Jesus rising after three days, appearing to Mary Magdalene and then the disciples, and then rising to heaven after remaining with them and instructing them for some time.

One final element of the gospels are Jesus' predictions of the end times. He tells of Jerusalem's enemies encompassing it round about, and that it will be terrible for all, especially for the weak and for women with children. He teaches of family members turning on one another for his sake, turning each other over to the authorities to be put to death. He instructs those who can flee to do so without looking back and warns that they will be scattered through many lands, that one person will be taken and another like person spared, and that the temple of Israel will be destroyed to its very foundation. He tells them that these things will happen within their lifetimes, and in fact, Israel, along with its temple, was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, just as Jesus predicted. It is noteworthy that the Gospels of Matthew and Mark were written around 50 CE, making this one of the few historically verifiable predictions of Jesus. It happened as he said it would. He also warned against false prophets and antichrists who would come in the lifetimes of many who were following him, and who would preach false doctrines in his name, misleading people and leading them away from God, much as the Pharisees were doing in Jesus' lifetime.

That about sums it up concerning Jesus' teaching in the gospels. I have likely omitted, unintentionally, some important or better instructive passages, but what is presented here is a fairly concise report of what is contained therein. So I look back on this and ask what fault should I find in Jesus? Christians have murdered and stolen and coveted the rights and possessions of others in Jesus' name nearly from the time he was crucified. Millions have been killed simply for belief, and generally the justification given is not that they didn't believe in God, but that they believed differently than those committing the murders. But Jesus in no way instructed them to do these things at all. Jesus taught us to be peaceful and to love our neighbors. Jesus taught us to love one another. Jesus resisted bad authority and served God only. Jesus may have been wrong about some things. The gospels clearly record one instance of it, where Jesus believes one thing and a short conversation with a woman teaches him to believe another. But upon reading the Gospels, I found in Matthew, Mark and Luke that Jesus' teaching is good, and he teaches that God is good, and that God loves us as children, and that we should likewise love one another and serve God, showing deference to God's greater understanding.

I believed that I had found fault with Jesus, but I came to realize that it wasn't Jesus who was at fault, but the men and women who claimed to represent or to follow him. It would be easy to conclude that human nature is simply deeply flawed and that many people are simply evil-spirited, and that is more or less the conclusion that I reached, but the dogmatic preachings of the

church that contradict Jesus' teaching suggest a more pointed conclusion. How could so many good people so completely miss Jesus' message?

So after a couple of years of writing and teaching people about God, using the Judeo-Christian perspective as a point of reference, I found it proper in time to study the entirety of the Bible from beginning to end. While the Old Testament is not insignificant in terms of perspective, as it provides great insight into our understanding of God and how it shaped a very persistent people, I would for the purposes of this letter consider specifically the post-Gospel books of the New Testament written mainly by Paul and beginning with the Acts of the Apostles.

The Acts of the Apostles had been described to me as a history of the apostles following the crucifixion of Jesus as well as the history of the early church. There are about fifteen pages at the beginning in this vein, focusing mainly on Peter's leadership and the persecution of the early Christians. Near the middle of this initial segment is a story of a disciple, Stephen, who bravely stands before a hostile crowd and preaches of Jesus before being stoned to death. Among those who sanction the stoning is Saul, a Jewish servant of the Romans. Sometime after the murder of Stephen, Saul is on the Road to Damascus, where they will persecute more Christians, and a light appears to him and he is blinded, and a voice says to him that it is Jesus whom he persecutes. At that point Jesus gives him instructions, and another disciple meets him and heals him of his blindness at Jesus' command, and Saul subsequently changes his name to Paul, declares himself to be one of the apostles, and proceeds to travel mainly the Greek areas of the Roman Empire preaching in Jesus' name until his execution by the Romans in 68 CE.

The Acts provides a close look at the travails of the early Christian church growing in Jerusalem, illustrating how the teaching began in Jerusalem, under the leadership of Peter, and how it continued to grow inward and outward, with the persecution of Christians only creating more and more followers. There are a number of stories of Peter's divinely assisted escapes from Roman and Jewish authorities with Peter healing others among the faithful as he goes. It has a very communistic character, where the Christians are expected to sell all they have and give it to the church, and God will, and does in the Acts, provide for them. One story in this vein that diverges from Jesus' teaching of forgiveness in the Gospels is where a couple sells their property and deceptively gives only half to the church, keeping half for themselves. When Peter questions each of the couple in turn, perceiving their dishonesty, the man and woman in turn both die on the spot, illustrating a very different slant generally in the remainder of the New Testament as no one dies for their sins in Jesus' presence. Another common theme in Acts, and throughout much of the rest of the New Testament, is reconciling Jewish law, such as circumcision, with teaching of faith in Jesus.

While the book is called the Acts of the Apostles, some might be surprised, as I was, to see that about one-third of the way through it, it becomes almost entirely about the travels and teaching of Paul. But it was written by Luke, a follower of Paul, who is believed to have written the Gospel of Luke, so it shouldn't be so surprising to be mostly about Paul's teaching, declared himself to be an apostle. The next fourteen books are also written by Paul. This one man who bore witness of everything he did and taught wrote almost the entirety of the New Testament that was written after the teaching of Jesus. Half, arguably much more than half, of the teaching of the Christian church comes from the teaching of this man.

What is equally striking, and unknown to many Christians, is that the Gospel of John, which appears in the Bible before the letters of Paul, is widely believed to have been written around 94 CE, more than 60 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, 40 or so years after the Gospel of Matthew was written, and 25-or-so years after Paul's death in Rome. Not surprising, the first theme of the other three gospels, teaching people to obey God's law, including God's commandments, is mostly omitted or significantly changed by the Gospel of John, and instead it focuses almost entirely on Jesus' divinity. Unlike the other three gospels, Jesus says in no uncertain terms in John that his healing is done to justify that he is of God, that he is like God, and that no man may see the Father but the Son, and those who seek the Son. To paraphrase, Jesus says in John, "You question me about God's law? I AM the law, and I have been so since before the world was created!" But according to the testimony of those who followed him during the times that he was teaching, he said no such thing, but he said instead to love God and to serve and obey God as Jesus himself did. Again, with the exception of the Gospel of John, Jesus says to follow his teaching and to do as he does, and that if peoples' faith is good and pure, God will likewise do for them who ask him, and he will lay up their treasures in heaven, not because they claim faith in the name of Jesus, but because they serve God.

If you have doubt of the truthfulness of what I've written so far, especially to those reading this who are non-believers, I boldly implore you to study the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke and, so doing, ask yourself what fault you find in Jesus. You have likely in the past heard Christian witness telling you what you should or must believe. Perhaps you've hardened your heart against so-called Christian statements that seem to you blasphemous, even though you may claim to believe in no God, and on some level you think Jesus must have been wrong, or insane, or simply lying for his own personal fame. But these things that you've heard from so-called witnesses may not be the teaching of Jesus. The things taught by Jesus were good examples. The example Jesus taught with his life was a good example. If you look for yourself you may see it, and if you see it, what bad will you have done to yourself? At worst will you find some greater purpose to do the good things you've always believed and to continue to help and defend and protect those who need protection the way you always have, though you might find some purpose in God for doing so?

Returning to the text of the New Testament, Paul wrote fifteen books, or letters, which form one of the two backbones of the Christian church. Beginning with the Acts, the stories are a mingling of Paul's journeys in the vicinity of the Eastern Mediterranean, between Israel and Rome, and particularly in the lands that are now Greece and Turkey. While the Acts and his second book, Romans, tell much of his journeys, each of Paul's letters is primarily a letter to followers or leaders of his followers instructing them in their teaching and imparting his wisdom upon them. He refers to his teaching as "my gospel," and he repeatedly justifies that he speaks for God, stating at the beginning of the majority of the letters that God has declared him an apostle of Jesus Christ.

His teaching is very consistent and not linear in the sense of progressing from one place or idea to another, so it is generally not instructive to make contextual book references to where he was or his differentiated purpose at the time that the quote is made. Here are a few examples of Paul's validation: From Romans Chapter 2 Verse 16: "God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." First Corinthians 3:10-11, "According to the grace of God which is given to me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth

thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” First Corinthians 11:1-2 “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.” Second Corinthians 11:5, “For I suppose I was not a whit behind the chiefest apostles.” (He goes on here to say that those preaching righteousness, as Jesus did, are false apostles.) Second Corinthians 12:11, “. . . for in nothing am I behind the chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.” First Timothy 1:11, “According to the glorious gospel of the

blessed God, which was committed to my trust.” Again, his first line in most of his letters is to tell people that God has declared him an apostle.

A primary theme of Paul is that all men are inherently evil by nature, and because of this, the commandments of God have been made moot by Jesus, and the only salvation from God is by believing in the name of Jesus, as articulated by Paul. Some examples: Romans 3:11-12, “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become unprofitable; There is none that doeth good, no, not one.” (Contrast with Matthew 5:6 and 5:8 “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”) Paul says in Galatians 5:4, “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.” (Contrast with Luke 1:5-6, “There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” They go on to bear John the Baptist.) This is particularly relevant as the primary argument of most Christians, and fundamentalist Christian churches, is, “You are all evil and consumed by sin. Repent and believe as we teach, or you are condemned by God to eternal damnation.”

A second theme of Paul is explaining why God’s law is nullified, but still exists, as explained by Paul, but that it is entirely based in Jesus’ Resurrection. Romans 7:14-17, “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would that I do not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.” Romans 7:25, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.” (Paul is saying here that he isn’t morally responsible for what his body does because his mind has believed in the holy Resurrection of Jesus.) Philippians 2:5-6, “Let this mind also be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:” (Here Paul says if you accept the grace of Jesus, you are, in some way, equal to God, as he proclaims Jesus to be.) Peter teaches of spiritual milk. First Peter 2:1-3, “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be, ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” But Paul says, Hebrews 6:1, “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.” After writing much about how faith in God had been a great bounty for God’s faithful, he concludes, Hebrews 11:39-40, “And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the



promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” What Paul says here, central to the fundamental Christian church, is that faith toward God may get you on God’s good side, but it will ultimately get you nowhere, as it ultimately got Abraham and Joseph and Moses nowhere, and you will only find heaven through the grace of Jesus Christ.

While he declares that the grace of Jesus has nullified man’s understanding of God’s law, Paul declares his own commandments for men. First Corinthians 5:11, “But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one do not to eat.” (Jesus intentionally drank and dined with such people. While many Americans would find fictional Sherif Andy Griffith to be a truly Christian example, Paul would have had Andy Griffith run Otis the drunk out of town.) Galatians 5:18-21, “But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance (meaning disagreement, dissension or nonconformity), emulations (meaning contentions), wrath, strife, seditions (encouraging disloyalty to rulers), heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in the time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” (The commandment against revelling explains why some Christians consider dancing to be a sin.) First Thessalonians 4:2-3, “For ye know by what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.” In First Timothy 4:1-4 Paul teaches that vegetarianism is of the devil. Jesus gives only hope to those who love God and love one another. Paul, with his teaching, creates a kind of hopelessness, a kind of slave mentality, that saps all of the pleasure out of physical existence, that leaves no hope but for blind faith in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Paul’s version of God’s differing laws for men and women merits its own paragraph. First Corinthians 11:3-7, “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of every woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.” First Timothy 2:11-14, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” First Corinthians 15:4-5, “And that he (Christ) was buried, and that he rose again on the third day according to the scriptures; And that he was seen of Cephas (Peter), then of the twelve:” The risen Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene first in three of the four Gospel accounts, with an angel of the Lord appearing first to her in Luke. But Paul’s version simply cuts her out of the story. He believes himself to have the authority to just tell it how it best suits him, and to Paul, clearly, a woman could not merit such great respect from Christ.

Throughout Paul's teaching are pearls of wisdom, hinted at in some of the earlier verses provided, exhorting mankind to obedience to the men set above us. Romans 13:1, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." Romans 13:3, "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil." Romans 13:7, "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." Those last passages sound like a defense of slavery, where God compels the weak to obey the strong. Philippians 4:22, "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household." First Timothy 5:19, "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses." (Kind of makes it easy for priests to molest altar boys.) Titus 3:1, "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work." While Jesus sidesteps the subject of consecrating leaders, saying to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God that which is God's, Paul instead says, "obey your rulers because God put them over you."

Also worthy of its own paragraph is what could be, and arguably has been, a provocation for Christians to act against those who believe otherwise. Second Corinthians 10:6, "And having in readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled." Second Thessalonians 3:6, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." While Paul doesn't specifically command Christians to do violence, his doctrine is the source of Christian violence toward the Saracen, toward the savage, the heathen, and every other people that Christian churches have helped to direct violence against, including other differently-believing Christians.

And throughout the teaching of Paul he presents various declarations that faith in Jesus is the only salvation, or even that Jesus is God, often subsequently affirming that he, Paul, is next in line after Jesus. First Corinthians 16:22, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha (which is interpreted, "God's vengeance be upon him.")" Colossians 2:9, "For in him (Jesus) dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." (A foundation of the Catholic Church is the idea of the Trinity, that Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three equal parts of a triune Godhead, and thus Jesus is equal to God.) The Gospel of John (written well after Paul's letters) continues boldly with this idea. When I have been confronted by Pauline Christians, who universally contend that belief in the grace of Jesus is the only salvation, they largely avoid "blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," and the first three Gospels entirely, making their defense instead the Gospel of John and the letters of Paul.

To conclude this consideration of Paul's doctrine, Second Thessalonians 2:3-4, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." Second Corinthians 11:13-14, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light."

When Jesus prophesied the destruction of Israel and the razing of the temple, he spoke of antichrists and false prophets, men who would mislead and speak evil in his name, to turn people against God, who would deceive the very elect. He said that these would be in the lifetimes of

those who followed him and were hearing him. People say that Judas was the antichrist, but Judas deceived no one in the long run. Jesus knew, as related in every gospel, that Judas would betray him, and woe unto Judas, for he made an evil choice, but it was as it had to be. The Gospels record him showing great remorse at the end, at the very least. Perhaps instead of casting away the silver and killing himself he should have simply begged God's forgiveness and gone back to face justice. Jesus was clear that men would set themselves in the place of God in the lifetimes of those who followed him, much as he also said Israel would be destroyed in their lifetimes.

Israel was destroyed, as Jesus said it would be, and yet there is no antichrist identified. But Paul followed with a new doctrine which people have eaten up. "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God." Paul made up his own doctrines, and those who seek to shun others, to separate others, to cast others as sinners for simply living, love his teaching. The ultimate order seekers love his teaching. It is the gospel of the hurt man, the vengeful man, and Paul records often how he was hurt by the Jews he was trying to teach. Paul's gospel appeals to our baser natures, not that of our desire to fornicate, but to punish the fornicator, and the drunkard, and the homosexual, and everything that we are not. Jesus taught faith in God, forgiveness and prayer. Paul teaches faith in God only through belief in Jesus, that you can die following God's law or you can live through Jesus, with no middle ground.

But Paul's doctrine has no place in Jesus or spirituality or simply seeking God's forgiveness and faith toward God. Jesus did what he did and taught what he taught, bravely giving his life for God, and it was nothing but good, and he let others bear witness of it, as God chose for him. Paul named himself an apostle, bore witness of himself and his deeds, and dictated the law according to his own mind. Reveling, celebrating, loving life in an exultant way, is a sin. Sex between a man and a woman, or any other kind of sex, simply pleasuring oneself, are all sins but for the purpose of procreation which God has allowed out of necessity. Homosexuality is a sin. Being intoxicated is a sin. Paul declares variance, simple disagreement with the established authority, to be a sin. Does loving your neighbor as yourself mean forcing your neighbor to cease in certain behaviors, not because they cause harm, but simply because you, or Paul, find them distasteful?

There is one statement that perfectly explains the diversities between the teaching of Jesus and that of Paul, between the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke and the Gospel of John. Paul is the antichrist. Paul's doctrine has led directly to the murder of millions. Tens of millions. How many millions more to come? It lends itself to being a political doctrine, the strong over the weak. Be not only meek before the Lord, but meekly accept the laws and ordinances of your rulers as your God-given destiny, even if they amount to theft, rape and murder. The worst people in the world are those who use the power entrusted to them to harm and subjugate the weak for their own personal gain. Jesus teaches civil disobedience and obedience toward God only, and the simple laws he has given. Paul teaches blind obedience. All of those who don't accept Christ are infidels, so serve your wealthy masters and destroy those infidels. Paul teaches people to reject the doctrines of Jesus and instead to follow his own doctrines, telling us that his doctrines are from God. Jesus taught us to love and forgive, seeking forgiveness always. Paul taught us not to follow Jesus, but simply to believe in Jesus' divinity as the key to salvation, and

to follow Paul's doctrine on the matter. Paul's teaching is evil wrapped in a cloak of good intentions. He and his like are the wolves in sheep's clothing.

And it certainly appears that Paul believed his intentions to be good. No doubt his commandments are against murder and theft as well, but when everything is a sin, and people are taught to believe that harmless decisions, actions or beliefs keep one from heaven, things that are truly sinful begin to lose meaning. Jesus rails against the priests for making the ordinances of Israel as the law of God, the pharisees seeking to punish others for minor transgressions, often having them beaten to death, while allowing the very commandments of God to be of no effect. Jesus goes as far as to tell them that they're the children of Satan, making men twice the sinners they were and misleading people down the path to hell with them. Paul does the very same thing, with the only difference being that Paul says God has given him this authority directly. "Put aside the teaching of Christ and other dead doctrines and follow me, your wise masterbuilder." And he says this because, as much as Jesus is the Christ, Paul is the antichrist. He didn't simply follow Jesus' teaching, but instead made a new law unto himself. If the antichrist simply declared that people should do evil, what power would he have? His power is inciting evil, ultimate intolerance of the existence of man, and all of man's weaknesses, in the name of God. The strong dominate the weak, and the weak lash out at the weaker, all in the name of God.

When the Romans adopted Paul's version of Christianity, dark ages followed that lasted a thousand years, where the people of that era moved backward. Innovation and invention lost, enlightenment stifled. Plagues and open murder in the name of God, dark ages. Only after the people of Europe began to believe in their own God given rights and abilities did things begin to change significantly for the better. Today's ministers of Paul say that America's founding fathers were all Christians, and there's an argument that they were, but they were certainly not the kind of Christians that these ministers say that they were. Franklin and Jefferson were both spiritual men who believed in God and a greater purpose for mankind, but they didn't believe in the divinity of Christ. Even Washington and John Adams, though both devout Christians, didn't write or say that it was necessary for people to believe in God as they did, and their consensus was that men should be free to believe as they choose, if at all. They didn't take God out of lawmaking, and they acknowledged the burden of God's good. They simply took religion out of it. "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." That's Creator with a capital C. And the pursuit of happiness for most includes things that Paul declares to be sinful. The very idea of resistance to tyranny was an American idea at some point, sparking a chain of revolutions against imperialism, and Paul declares even that to be a sin.

And the history of the United States of America has been at its best when we take religion out of government and allow it to remain private, between God and men by their own consciences. Many Americans didn't want the burden of fighting World War II, but wanted instead to isolate America from the world's problems, but we had a man like Franklin D. Roosevelt to lead us. He looked beyond our desire to remain apart and saw the need for the United States to help protect the world, and ultimately America, by fighting fascism, murder and totalitarian governments. Roosevelt was a well-known drunkard and an adulterer. Winston Churchill was well-known to

be a drunkard. By Paul's reckoning we should keep men such as these out of our community, or separated from Christians. Hitler, on the other hand, drank beer sparingly and was believed to uphold high morals, other than the hatred and the murders and secret drug addictions and such. His people had to follow him unquestioningly or face harsh consequences, theft, rape and murder. Hitler was cast much more in the image of Paul than the other two men, and he made himself the savior of his people, protecting them from the evil of Jewry and the laziness of lesser races. And like so many Christians with Paul, many of the German people loved him for it. We want someone to tell us that differently believing peoples are evil. Our baser instincts often aren't about drinking and sex, but vengeance and murder. Millions have been killed in the name of Christ, but it was in no part at the behest of Jesus.

The obvious question here is why would God allow this to happen? The simplest answer is that he gave us free will. We chose for it to happen. God gave us Jesus for an ultimate example, and we turned around and mostly nullified it not twenty years later. For too many of us it's easier to follow the antichrist. The rebellion continues, and sometimes those opposing God hold sway. We want to do what we want, to be angry and find faults with our neighbors. Some of us only have enough love for ourselves. Some of us have enough love for our family, or for our community, or even for our country. Love everyone as ourselves? That's a tall order, but that is, in fact, the order. It's well beyond the capacity of many, but if some will just stand up and show them, there are others who will follow. Epidemics can start with the smallest triggers, but this one can result in a tidal wave of goodwill. God is never going to simply tell us what to do, and while the Bible is a good book, a book of God, it is a book of our understanding of God. The fact that men put books into the Bible doesn't make everything written therein the will of God. The Christian church generally has repudiated much of Paul's doctrine, but Paul's influence continues because we choose to follow it. I've always encouraged those who read my letters to read the Bible and to decide for themselves. It will always be God's will that we choose. If you are already on good footing, then you should be thankful and let your example shine before men. If your life is a good light for others, you certainly don't have to justify your beliefs by my reckoning. But if you are lost and aren't sure where to start, you can always look to Jesus and go from there.

And don't get me wrong and read into this that I'm saying all of those who choose to follow Paul and Paul's doctrines, opposed to those of Jesus, are evil. Certainly some of them are. Paul's teaching has been greatly profitable for many, and they would keep it so even if their neighbors continue to be harmed, even if it results in theft, rape and murder. Most people are simply as innocent sheep, going where the powerful tell them to go. There is a great divide between true faith and blind faith, and blind faith is easier for many. They choose to go with the flow, to punish themselves for wanting differently, and to punish others for what they perceive as their own weaknesses, but this doesn't make them evil, or opposed to God. They truly want to serve God. They are the very elect that has been deceived by the antichrist, which blinds them to the simple faith and obedience to God's will that Jesus taught. It doesn't make them either evil or stupid. Many of them only need others to show them that they can have better, that they can believe better, that people can be as Jesus taught them to be. They would probably be better off not following the antichrist, but serving God with a good life is the bigger issue. Most of us have been confused by others in our lifetimes into making bad choices, sometimes choices that harm ourselves and others. But it is never too late to change our minds and to live and believe

differently. Jesus said many times, many who are last will be first. So it is.

A faithful woman asked me recently what is my purpose in teaching these things. It was a difficult question to answer. I cannot see the future as Jesus did. I can only see potential outcomes. It will never be entirely good or entirely evil. In a world where men have the freedom to choose, some will always choose evil, and it is our duty to protect others from them when we have the understanding and power to do so. Our good faith has brought us relative peace, and yet we now sit on the precipice of war and scarcity. The future can be one of tyranny or commonwealth, slavery or freedom. If I can make the choice, my children will grow up in a world where they are free to do what their own consciences dictate, so long as they are not harming others, and that they can not be enslaved by those who would put their desire for power and profit over the rights of others to do as they will and to be as they choose. God has shown me a few things, but I have written many things. I pray that I have understood well and communicated it well enough. The world is complicated but the truths of God are simple. Love one another. Forgive and be forgiven. God has given us simple laws to help us understand, and we can choose to follow them. God and truth are all the purpose I have. Paul stands as a direct obstacle to God's truth, and, that being the case, it must be said.

Perhaps the right question for a person reading this is what can you do right now? The world is complicated and the difference between right and wrong is not always clear, but taking from others out of greed or subjugating others to our will out of a lust for power is clearly wrong. You can stand against these things when you have the power to do so, and you can just communicate your understanding to others if your power is lacking. We can love one another as we love ourselves, as Jesus taught us. That certainly doesn't mean letting others walk all over us. Loving one another means someone has to stand up to the bullies, and the bullies include Paul and his followers putting man's laws in the place of God's, as well as the Osama Bin Ladens of the world. You can ask God's forgiveness and live a better life, knowing that you would make the wrong things right if you could. You can follow God's simple commandments, the dead doctrines as Paul would say, or you can simply live your life the best you can, putting yourself in your neighbors' shoes and acting accordingly knowing that there is a greater purpose for it even if you don't acknowledge that purpose to be God's will. You can forgive those you can, or have not forgiven, and you can seek forgiveness. Do good, not as Paul taught, but as Jesus did. You can do that. And you can teach these things to others.

So it is.

Bob Young.

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