

Preface

This book has been written in order to help people understand the very pagan origins of Christmas.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When we were very little, we believed everything our parents, our friends' parents, our teachers, our uncles and aunts – and even our peers – told us. As we became older, we started to be a little more skeptical about things. School taught us to question much of the conventional wisdom we had been given. By the time we were adults, many of us believed little of what we heard and only half of what we saw.

In my case, I did not become a believer until I was well into my twenties. Unlike many within the Church subculture, I did not really grow up in the bosom of “The Faith”.¹

Before I finally became a believer, I asked a lot of questions and required a lot of proof, in order to be convinced of something. The first time someone in the Church ever heard me ask questions, like why I should believe in a God who let me be abused as a kid, I was told that I should not question, but simply believe. I didn't stop asking questions, though.

When I finally *did* become a believer, I did so, not because someone told me I should “just believe”, necessarily, but because the evidence for the existence of God in the Person of Jesus Christ was overwhelming, as were the many other correlative proofs that I found. Given the reality that these things were true, I felt compelled to act on them. Jesus became the Lord (the One in Charge) of my life because Bible was the Truth; I had decided that it was going to be the Book that governed my life in matters of faith, behaviour and lifestyle.

¹ My parents *did* take us to church when we were little, but they saw this as an obligation to God that we had to fulfil, not a joy and a time of fellowship. We had no concept of the true meaning of Christianity.

Just Call Me Thomas

“I won’t believe it until I see it!!!” These words are often met with disdain in the Church today. “Just believe” we are told. When dealing with belief that the Lord is who He says He is, people point to this passage as “proof” that we should not question:

The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."²

Personally, I think that Thomas got a “bad rap”; he was doing what every person who is serious about worshipping the Lord in Truth should do – he was making sure that which was being said was really the case. Earlier, the disciples were actually warned by Jesus Himself not to believe it when people said that He was in the desert, or He was in the upper room. As far as I can ascertain, the guy was doing what he was told to do by the Master Himself. It is because of these things that Jesus patiently **showed** Thomas the proof that he needed.

People focus on the fact that Jesus goes on to say that those who have not seen Him and believe in Him would be blessed. However, many people miss the little blurb at the end of the chapter, placed right after this little pericope.³ It tells the readers that the many signs in the book of John were written down “***that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.***”⁴

This begs the question: should we ask questions and demand to have

² John 20:25-29

³ A pericope is a self-contained story found within a larger body of text.

⁴ John 20:31. All Scriptures in this book are from the New King James Version of the Bible, unless otherwise stated. Additionally, unless otherwise noted, all emphases are mine throughout this book.

proof before we choose to believe/act upon something, or should we “just believe” without proof? I don’t know about you, but I would rather be like Thomas than someone who “just believes”. Let me show you why....

The Word of the Lord – Truth

The Word of the Lord is replete with allusions to testing the things that occur to ensure that they are from the Lord. Here are just a couple of examples:

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, **and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.** - Acts 17:10, 11

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. **Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.** Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.⁵

One of the basic things we are taught in the Word is that we are to be careful about the things we receive as “Truth”. In fact, we are told that **our faith is contingent on the Word.** It is what informs us through the mediation of the Holy Spirit.

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.⁶

Jesus, in praying to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane about His disciples, asked this of the Father:

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.⁷

⁵ I Corinthians 5:16 – 24

⁶ Romans 10:17

⁷ John 17:17

Also, when speaking to Satan about the temptation of food, Jesus said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”⁸

I would like to ask each member in the Body of Christ to be careful to check out the message that is portrayed in these pages, not with pre-suppositions that have been placed in our minds so early in life that we “assume” them to be true, but to take the information and strain it through the words of God in context; ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the fullness of His truth in context.

Our Subjective Feelings

I would also like to remind people that the message of the Scriptures is unified; the Scripture in its entirety conveys truth; we cannot take verses out of the context in order to justify that which we condone. Neither can we simply excise others because they are uncomfortable. The word of God needs to stand *before* our feelings, no matter how compelling our feelings may be.

Often, our feelings are in opposition to the Truth. Take, for instance, the fact that telling the truth is very uncomfortable. In order to alleviate this, we often resort to platitudes or we simply refrain from speaking. Telling the truth is often not a fun thing to do. It is something that we would often rather NOT do in many circumstances. Regardless, we are supposed to be children of truth, since Jesus is the Way the Truth and the Life.

The Truth and Our Traditions

Tradition is not a bad thing, in and of itself. There are some wonderful traditions that have come from the Apostles that have enriched and informed our faith throughout the millennia.

Some of our family traditions, such as baking cookies together on a rainy day, bring continuity and a bond of togetherness throughout our

⁸ As an aside, one need remember that the Word He was talking about was not only the Incarnate Word, Himself, but also the entire Old Testament. That which we believe in the New Covenant cannot directly contravene that which has already been revealed. If we just ignore the entire Old Testament, we have done a disservice to Jesus and all of His followers, since that WAS the Bible that Jesus read.

generations, too. However, traditions, like our feelings, need to be in subjection to the Word of God.

Listen to what Jesus had to say about some traditions He came across:

Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God'- 'then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

*'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'*⁹

This verse is also appropriately applied to some of our choices within God's Church. For example, in the 1800's (and 1900's for that matter), we somehow thought that unless people conformed to the European model of what "Christianity" was, they could not be saved. Thus, many hundreds of thousands of children, men and women were forced to give up everything that was a part of their culture, in order to be "Christianized". We literally turned away thousands of souls from the One who could save them because we bought into the lie that we ("European" English Christians) were the epitome of Christendom and made that our tradition....

Some traditions that we hold may crumble when we truly check them out by comparing them with the plain meaning of the Word of God.

A Note on Legalism

Recently, as I have asked some of the opponents of this book to read and critique the contents, I have been accused of "gross legalism". This word is often thrown around in Evangelical circles, but few, if any, have bothered to take a look at the Biblical definition of legalism.

⁹ Matthew 15:1 – 9

What is Legalism?

As soon as the Old Testament is brought up, the Christian's obligation to obey the moral requirements of the Law¹⁰ – that is, the commandments, or other such things are mentioned – the cry of legalism is tabled. What really is legalism, though? We may have a variety of our own definitions about the word, based on teachings we have heard others give or based on whatever is the popular consensus of the day, but what is the Biblical definition of the word?

There are a few instances where the idea of legalism is dealt with in Scripture. The first comes from Galatians/Acts.

Legalism is Trying to be Saved through the Keeping of the Law

To keep the Law *without* the understanding and believing that God alone saves you (as long as I do the right things, the right practices, I will be able to stand before God as a righteous person) and *without* a desire to do the will of God, is legalism. He knows whether we believe in Jesus or not. I can never keep the Law in order to “be good enough” to get to heaven on my own merit through the adherence to the Law.

Our motivation for keeping the Law *cannot be our desire to “make ourselves acceptable to God”, as He has already done that.* This mistake of Legalism can be found in the book of Galatians, where the people *began* as believers, knowing that they were justified by faith. Later, though, they began to teach that one **MUST** keep the Law in order to be Christians; these men tried to teach that unless a person kept the works of the Law, they could not be **saved**.

But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ

¹⁰ We are no longer required to keep the ceremonial or the sacrificial aspects of the commandments; however, even though we do not incur the penalty of the commandments (i.e. death), since Jesus freed us from that, we are still compelled to choose not to do that which the Lord has identified as sin; we were bought at a price.

Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; **for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified**¹¹. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.¹²

This issue kept on coming up; the book of Acts gives a clear, concise take on the central issue:

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, **you cannot be saved.**"¹³

Basically, when the Jewish Christians (often called "Judaizers") came in among the church of Galatia, some began to act as if the Gentile Christians were not really Christians because they did not follow the Laws of Moses. In essence, they were trying to teach that we could

¹¹ Justification (also known as Positional or Objective Sanctification – this occurs at the moment of Salvation; we are seen by God through the blood of Christ as justified or “just as if I have not sinned”). We are declared as righteous by God at the moment of our salvation (I Corinthians 6:11; Romans 4:6; Ephesians 1:4). It is because of this objective sanctification that we can all be called “saints of God”. God has set us apart. (I Corinthians 1:2)

Progressive (Subjective) Sanctification – this is the process that begins from the moment one becomes a believer, wherein the person begins to exhibit more and more of the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23) and the very fragrance of our Lord, Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 2:15-16). This (Progressive/Subjective) aspect of sanctification is guided not only by the promptings of the Holy Spirit, but also by daily lifestyle choices guided by obedience to the Word of God in context. * This Progressive sanctification is what the entire body of this book is dealing with.

Glorification - Finally, the culmination of all of this is the glorification of the believer. This will occur when the believer is finally brought into the presence of God and every bit of the “Old man” that remains will be removed. This, like the initial act of justification, is a work entirely of God.

¹² Galatians 2:14

¹³ Acts 15:1

merit God's favour by our actions, *thus securing our salvation*. We were, are and always will be saved by grace, not works.

This issue was finally dealt with in Acts 15, where the bare minimum required for being considered a Christian was finally "fleshed out". According to Luke, the Jerusalem Council declared that these following things were necessary¹⁴:

For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

I am NOT teaching anything like those Jewish Christians did in the book of Galatians; I am not saying that you must choose not to celebrate Christmas or you will no longer be a believer. **I affirm** the fact that we are **saved by grace, not works**.

Legalism is Adding More to the Word of God or Taking Away from the Word

Jesus told us that the adding or subtracting of that which is already written in the Old and New Testaments, is also legalism. Choosing to conform to human rules and traditions, as well as novel interpretations of Scripture, rather than the plain word of God in context with the rest of the Word (we cannot have teachings that contradict the larger reading of the Bible, even if it "seems" to be what it is teaching in a given passage) would be a good working definition of the word.

I have already talked about Jesus' views regarding traditions of people that go against the Word of God earlier in the section called, "The Truth and Our Traditions" found on page 8.

Essentially, it comes down to this, while we may not have a "black book of do's and don'ts" in the sense of say issues like gambling, et cetera, the overreaching issue is this; even though a specific act like gambling is not expressly denounced, we know the Bible teaches basic truth, such as relying only on God for what we need; if we do not, we are sinning against Him. This is why gambling *may* be sin; if some-

¹⁴ These are the words of the people who presided over the Jerusalem Council, as found in Acts 15, not mine. I am only reporting what they said.

one is choosing to gamble to get the “big one”, he or she is relying on self and ingenuity to do that which God should be doing. Gambling and self-sufficiency become idols to that person and the First commandment is broken in that person’s life.

As a believer who loves the Lord and wants to be more fully conformed to the image of the invisible God, I can read that Scripture clearly says **flee immorality**. If I choose not to listen and go ahead and do it anyway, God may (and often does) send others to help me to see that what I am doing is harmful to me as a believer and to the Body in general. It is not “Me and Jesus”, but believers in community.

Scripture teaches that we are no longer what we once were and therefore need no longer behave as we once did.¹⁵

The New Testament Church and the World

I am not going to discuss too much how the World deals with things, but how we, as Christians, need to respond to the pure, unadulterated Word of God in its entirety. As unbelievers, the people in the world are slaves to sin. In contrast, according to Romans 6:14-23, believers are to be **slaves of righteousness**. It is our job to present our lives to Christ through the keeping of the Law of Grace.¹⁶

¹⁵ See Romans 6:6; II Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10

¹⁶ The keeping of this Law of Grace can only be accomplished through the Spirit, according to Romans 8:1-2. This passage does not mean that we do not still have a moral obligation to the Law; it is still that which identifies sin in our lives. The difference, according to Paul, is that we are no longer subject to the Law of sin and death; we are no longer under a death sentence, if we do not keep the Law. We keep the Law, not to merit salvation or to even participate in our salvation because God has done that work completely. Instead, we listen to the Word of God and follow His righteous decrees with the aid of the Holy Spirit out of thankfulness to Him. We respond to the Father in a sense as we did to our earthly fathers. If we disobeyed our earthly fathers, we knew they would still love us. That did not mean, though, that our fathers would not be upset with us because of our disobedience to the things they said. Similarly, the Law is right and just and good. The Lord set forth the Law as His standard to convict us of sin so we would come to Him through Jesus. It is also still His standard of righteousness. I will explain more later in this book.

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? **But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.** I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. **For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.** What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. **But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.** For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹⁷

Our information about what we are free to do or not cannot come from our feelings, what the world thinks is okay, what other Christians allow, or from the argument of silence¹⁸.... Instead, we need to strain our traditions through the Word of God and allow His Word to renew our minds.

Remember, it was Paul who told us:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. **And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.** – Romans 12:1-2

With this entire preamble in our thoughts, please listen to what I be-

¹⁷ Romans 6:14-23

¹⁸ There are some within the Church who would say that because something is not expressly denounced, it is all right to do.

lieve the Word of God is saying to us, the New Testament Church in the 21st century.