

1 The Whole Picture

¹¹ I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. ¹² Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes! ¹³ With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. ¹⁴ In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. ¹⁵ I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. ¹⁶ I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. (Psalm 119:11-16 ESV)

The New Covenant

Many Christians say they follow the ‘new covenant’ instead of the ‘old covenant.’ Yet they don’t know what the new one is or where it is in the Word (let alone what a covenant is). In this book, we’ll talk about it in chapter 5. But you ought to read it and think on it before we get there. It’s in Jeremiah 31:31-34 (see also Exodus 20:6; Deuteronomy 5:10; Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26). The whole of the Law is not so much about rules and regulations as it is about love. Love and the Law are one, just as He is One. As distance from the Law grows, love waxes cold.

¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. (Matthew 24:12 ESV)

As we’ll see, Jesus followed it, Paul followed it, and all the apostles followed it. By nature there are those who do what the Law requires though perhaps unaware (Romans 2:14-16). There are also many more all over the world waking up to the ideas in this book.

What is new about the new covenant is the heart, not the Word. The Word, including the Law, is eternal. Through the sacrifice of the Christ, believers trade in old hearts of stone for new creations. Our new heart is soft and responsive to God’s every thought. As the pagans move further away from the Word, believers need to move closer. We want to be heart to heart with God (1 John 5:1-12).

Some say the new covenant came with huge changes in the unchangeable Word when the Christ died (but see John 10:35). Or that the physical words of the Bible message have (allegedly) merged into spiritual thoughts. So now we can eat a ham sandwich, as long as we think about God while we’re doing it. We can live an alternate lifestyle, as long as we insist on ‘social justice’ at the same time. Adultery is okay as long as we shout out God’s name in the middle of it. It’s clear that these sorts of new covenants aren’t all that new, and they aren’t compatible with a heart of flesh, either.

If we are to make any progress in personal or corporate growth, and harvest the fruit of the Spirit fully, we have to admit our failings. As a group the church has willingly traded the living oracles of God’s new covenant for some feel-good magic beans; a ‘social’ gospel of good works defined by a Christ-rejecting world.

In fables, at least, our beans get us a big tree and maybe a gold-egg laying goose. In reality we’ve got nothing. Well, not exactly nothing. We’ve got rotten philosophy, empty

deception, elementary principles of the world and traditions of men (Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7, 8; Colossians 2). The bad smell from these teachings permeates the church. We've got high divorce and suicide rates the same as the world's rates. Drugs for anxiety are like stand-ins for the bread of communion. Immaturity and unrest are the churchgoing order of the day. God's peace has gone with God's truth. This is not the fruit of the new covenant – more like gas from the beans.

I'm not just talking about peace or blessing, either. I fear we are weakening ourselves, just like Israel did before they went against the Philistines (and others). If we drift away from His Law, His Word, the source of life, the covenant (new or otherwise); we won't just lose battles, we will die. There are many threats in the world right now; among them are Islam and godless governments. These are real threats, with real death for followers of God as their main intention. Modern day Philistines have the upper hand, but it's mostly because we are giving away our trump card.

You may be thinking this book is a little uncomfortable. I can't help it – I rewrote it a bunch of times trying to make things nice and comfy. I know what sells are books that focus on feelings, are soft and sweet, and allow us to do what we want. Prayers by Jabez, finding 'purpose' in a driven life, or helping the church 'emerge' are the way to go for profit. I could write about '10 Rules for Getting Everything You Want out of Life' as long as they aren't God's Ten Rules. This is sad because if God's rules were followed they really would give us what we want.

I would've liked to make this book feel more comfortable, but God wouldn't let me. I can only tell you what He says. He is very clear about the cause and the treatment of corruption. He's not confused, and He doesn't change His mind from one minute to the next. His loving Word can be uncomfortable at first, but if we claim His Name, we get disciplined the same.¹

Yet in spite of the discomfort, those who genuinely desire God and His new covenant will find hope in here. *"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent."* (Revelation 3:19 ESV). If you are an unchurched or barely churched believer, wounded, confused or uncertain where to turn, God has the answer. Abundant life and healing are available. If we really want to reverse the rot, we have to do it right. Deep cuts are sewn together with needle and thread. Bleeding has to be stopped; cauterized if necessary. Infection has to be killed. Failing hearts need a shock to get working again. Friends don't let friends drive drunk, or something like that. The truth is going to hurt a little, but we've got to have it. (Clear!)

In contrast to the popular, profit making books, this one is kind of a stick in the mud. I'm defending the whole of God's Word (and the Law) as absolute truth, applicable to everyone. Not a real fun subject. But our holy and loving God insists on following His ways because they are the only path to life. Living His Words requires humility and trust in Him, which goes against our pride and knowledge. The Law is such a hot button because down deep, in our heart of hearts, in our very natures, we do not want to do what God says. Much of the church has soft-soaped these concepts so much they've scrubbed the life out of what He says. 'Obey' is the original four-letter word.

16 And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, 'As the Lord lives,' even as they taught my people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up in the midst of my people. 17 But if any nation will not listen, then I will utterly pluck it up and destroy it, declares the Lord."
(Jeremiah 12:16-17 ESV)

¹ (1 Corinthians 5:12, 6:2, 3, 11:31-32; Hebrews 12:5, 8, 10, 11; 1 Peter 4:4, 5; Revelation 3:19).

Thy Kingdom Come

One of the parts of the new covenant is that everyone will know God. Linking this with the Law written on a loving heart of flesh means that God's Kingdom is made up of those who lovingly conform to every word out of His mouth.

Love is doing right. Right is defined by God, His Word and His actions. Right is being with God, in attitudes and actions. Wrong is anything short of that. Paul gives us a pretty good definition of love in that famous passage of his first letter to the Corinthians.

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, ESV)

The Bible is filled with examples of God's love for people as He builds His kingdom. In the Garden of Eden God 'birthed' mankind, sharing His love with us in the breath of His lives. We (using the corporate we) spurned this love and chose knowledge with self-will (and rule) instead. Kind of like a self-abortion, if you'll excuse the comparison. That choice continues to be preferred by most people today.

The giving of the Law was a loving act, setting boundaries on people's self-will and preparing Israel as a place for Him to take up residence on earth again, as it was in the Garden. The sacrifice of Jesus is the pinnacle of love, and His message is for people to repent and turn back to the ways of God, listed for us in the Law. The New Testament writers emphasize God's message of love, telling us over and over that repentance contains measures of love and obedience to His Law.

God is love. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." By that statement He identifies Himself as God, because the love, truth and life He shares with God are the Way back to God. Truth is God's Word. God's Word includes the Law. All of the Laws, not just the ones we like or that fit into our feelings.

Thy Will Be Done

The world is going down the tubes because it has rejected God's kingdom and wants to build its own with the deceiver. But Satan has to steal some good things from God's Law in order to shore up his corrupt kingdom. Self-rule, or rule without God, just cannot succeed. A lasting, good, wholesome kingdom cannot be built apart from the Source of those things. As God has said, that's like trying to build a house on sand.

God's will is expressed in His Law. People cannot reject God's will, or sit in judgment on which parts they will follow and which they won't, and expect to build even so small as a house that will last, let alone a whole kingdom. We expect this from pagans. When The Rock is rejected there's nothing solid to build on.

The big surprise is that the church is also trying to build a kingdom without God. Instead of leading the way out, we're falling down the same sinkhole. We've been rejecting God's Laws for decades a little bit at a time. The fruit is in denomination splits over such things as whom to ordain. It's in the difference between what we get from the pulpit and what we plainly read in the Bible. There are the books and opinions that try to get rid of hell, and the rise of many false prophets who get only a shrug and a yawn when they are revealed. It's there in redefining sinful

behavior as “alternate lifestyles.” And now ‘name dropping’ means to drop the Christ from our signs and business cards.

As I said, I don’t have to explain to you the sinkhole modern culture is becoming. You watch the news, you can see it with your own eyes, and you know the world’s a mess. Evil people are getting the upper hand. Fear and frustration are rising. Godless governments promise endless solutions to problems created by their solutions. Everywhere God’s Word, His institutions, His Laws are being attacked.

The more the attacks succeed in replacing His authority with man’s, the more the tide of filth and death rise. We’re getting ready to go down that sinkhole (just waiting for God to flush). All of man’s systems, the culture he has built, are rotten and falling apart, though they are shored up here and there with some of God’s principles. Man has rejected God, and we are getting exactly what we ask for.

Many Christians, of course, mourn the “moral freefall,” and long for “another great awakening” where people return to “faithful prayer, practice, and preaching of the Word of God.”² I can say a big Amen to that. But while Christians may be acutely aware of the culture sinkhole, we may not be as aware of our part in leading into it.

Absolute Truth

In my studied opinion most in the church are falling away from belief in, and practice of, God’s Word as absolute truth. And I’m using the term “falling away” on purpose. Studies done by Christian groups show only 11% of generic Christians, or 25% of those who are ‘born again,’ think the Bible is absolute truth.³ Don’t believe studies? Ask around. It’s clear that most people using His name *almost* believe Him. Is it just me, or is this too weird? If our salt has lost its savor, how will we preserve God’s kingdom on earth?

Why are many of those who wear His name letting go of His Word as absolute truth? In a word - Law. It’s a sticking point for many. People just plain don’t like The Law. It’s not comfortable; even scary. It seems antiquated. It’s too ‘Jewish.’ It’s so last year. It ain’t hip, it ain’t happenin.’ We’re filled with pride; submitting comes hard, and the Law is an objective standard without wiggle room.

And people like to wiggle. Ever since Adam and Eve wiggled into fig leaf garments and wiggled into the bushes at the approach of God, we’ve tried to wiggle away from His holiness. We want what He *has*, but not what He *is*. When He approaches, now in the form of His Word, our first instinct is still to hide. Or try to get Him to just go away and leave us alone. The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree, does it? If we could just reinterpret the Bible enough, maybe chop it into pieces and assign the hard parts to other people, He’ll stop bothering us. If we can get far enough into the bushes, by reducing the Word to fables with only spiritual meanings, we can “feel led” to ignore Him. “If I don’t see it, it’s not really there.” Yet all He wants is our humble obedience to His “living oracles” as Stephen called them in Acts 7:38. He wants us to have life, and that more abundantly. For that we just need to simply do what He says.

² Bishop Harry R. Jackson Jr., in an online article for Townhall.com commenting on Glenn Beck’s ‘Restoring Honor’ rally of August 28th 2010.

http://townhall.com/columnists/HarryRJacksonJr/2010/08/26/becks_rally_what_would_mlk_do/page/full

³ ‘Christians and the DaVinci Code,’ George Barna, The Barna Group of Ventura, CA, January 2006, www.barna.org.

Not every church, and not every Christian, is moving away from His Word.⁴ But overall, in general, church people now are, sadly, not much different than the pagans. A lot of times people can't tell us apart. But unlike pagans, who pretty much ignore His Word, we've cut and pasted and stepped on and stretched and chopped up and soft-soaped His living oracles so much that they're hardly recognizable. So this book is a call to return. Repent. Accept the whole of the Word as absolute truth and live it. *Including the Law*. There. I said it again. This might be freaking you out now, but wait till you get a load of the rest of the book. Hang in there and let God's truth be revealed to you. It'll be exciting, but at the same time shocking too.

The Bible itself is really very simple. It's the opinions from different sects, doctrines and traditions around it that make it seem harder to read and apply than it has to be. There's a lot of confusion from those not-quite-biblical opinions, which, I think, has caused quite a few people to become turned off of God and His Laws. The Satan can't get rid of the Word, but he and his helpers can confuse us or try to get us interested in shiny toys.

Truth makes us uncomfortable. It's not very popular now, and never has been. One of the ways people attack God's truth (or wiggle out of it) is to say it isn't absolute truth, or even better that there is no absolute truth. We ignore the fact that the statement "absolute truth doesn't exist" is itself an absolute! If the Word is not absolute, then we can cherry pick it as we see fit.

The word 'absolute' is defined as "something that is perfect or complete in quality or nature,"⁵ and "independent of some or all relations."⁶ By these measures God's Word is definitely absolute truth. Without getting into extensive logic theory or philosophical thinking, it's also eternal, objective, universal and applicable to everyone, because it is valid in all times and places.⁷ God's Word (including The Law) is both completely and absolutely true or it isn't. It stands perfect and independent or it doesn't. It is a universal standard by which everyone will be judged. His Word has the same character as He does. So what we say (or do) about the Bible is said about Him.

Accepting the Bible as absolute truth is not the same as believing it is the "inspired Word of God." You can think the Bible is inspired (and it is) all you want, but inspired for most people just means the same as a song or a painting that is really emotional. Songs are written with lofty words and melodies. Paintings use evocative tones and shadings. But inspiring songs or paintings don't demand you repent and follow. God's absolute truth on the other hand requires a response. He hasn't just put together a catchy tune or picture with feeling. There is no other option for His Word than complete surrender.

God's Word viewed as absolute truth is also not the same as taking the Bible literally. A person can think the Bible is literal truth, but still interpret that truth as they see fit. He or she can simply redefine the Word into old and new, for instance. Then point out that the 'old' is not relevant anymore, but the 'new' is relevant. Or they can assign 'literal' truths to different people

⁴ At least there are 43% of self-identified Christians that still firmly believe the Bible is accurate in all of the *principles* it teaches. Barna Research 'State of the Church Series 2011' <http://www.barna.org/faith-spirituality/514-barna-study-of-religious-change-since-1991-shows-significant-changes-by-faith-group>.

⁵ Absolute. (n.d.). *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Retrieved January 17, 2009, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/absolute>.

⁶ absolute. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Retrieved January 17, 2009, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/absolute>.

⁷ In logic, a proposition is considered to be universal if it can be conceived as being true in all possible contexts without creating a contradiction. Since God created all contexts, then it would follow that His Word is universal. However, logic does not deal with truth in the absolute sense.

groups, such as part is for Israel and part is for some new entity called ‘the church.’ See how ‘literal’ truths can easily be redefined out of existence?

If His Word is not absolute truth then God is ineffective. If it is not all true then God must be a liar (Numbers 11:23; Romans 3:4). If it isn’t literal, then how do we know for sure what He said? It’s a package with Him in it, and everyone has to adjust to it, sooner or later. There is no in-between. Take it or leave it, but there is no cherry picking. Absolute truth requires absolute obedience.

Absolute truth means we can trust what God says. That’s why He and His Word are described as very solid things (Rock - Deuteronomy 32:4; hammer - Jeremiah 23:29; stone - 1 Peter 2:7-8). It’s not God’s Word that is soft or mushy; He says what He means and means what He says.

Humans want to follow their own way. Absolute truth just gets in the way. It started in the Garden with Adam and Eve, and that scene captures the reason for rot in a nutshell. We didn’t want His authority then, and by nature we still don’t. We want to be “like God” (Genesis 3:5) and we’ll buy any reasoning if it gives us control.

The Empty Ark

In 1 Samuel chapter 4, we read that Israel goes to battle with the Philistines. They get hammered, losing 4,000 soldiers. The elders wonder why their plan failed, and decide they need the Ark of the Testimony. So they send for it and two sons of the high priest Eli for good measure. But instead of victory, as had happened in the past, the Philistines rallied and killed 30,000 more Israeli soldiers. They also captured the Ark and killed Eli’s sons.

Why didn’t the Ark work like it had before? Because their past success wasn’t due to the Box. It was due to God. The simple truth is Israel had a box and a tent, but they lost God. He was far away because *Israel* had moved. They moved away from Him by worshipping other gods and refusing to obey His Word (1 Samuel 7:3). Effectively, the elders were using an empty box to win a war. The power of God was missing because the people had cut Him out of their lives. They didn’t believe God’s Word was absolute truth, so they didn’t live it.

It is a pattern repeated time and again in the history of His people (Psalm 106). Many times Israel used the Ark (and the temple, Jeremiah 7) like other nations use their false gods; as a talisman or a lucky rabbit’s foot. Bring it out when you want to win a battle (except you wouldn’t want to rub this one for luck – 2 Samuel 6) then put it back and go your own way.

It’s happening again. People who wear His name are still treating the Bible the way Israel treated the Ark. The power of God is missing because His Word is being used, in general, like a rabbit’s foot. Take it out when ‘luck’ is needed and conveniently forget it later. Pray to get out of a jam, and then go back to living any old way you want. We have God, but God doesn’t have us. The Bible is on our coffee tables, sometimes in our hands, maybe even on our lips. But it isn’t in our hearts. We’ve wandered so far from His Word it’s no surprise we lose battles. We are lip-synching His Word, not living it.

There are different ways we parade the Bible around like an empty Ark. Leaders redefine His living oracles as ‘old,’ then choose relativism to boost attendance. The picture of Jesus is repainted into a new, wimpy Greek version of God. This new god, in alleged unconditional love and tolerance, allows people to live any old alternate lifestyle they want. Their wimp of a Greek god is supposed to be fond of atheist, Marxist ideas of “social justice” which have infiltrated assemblies and hijacked the real God’s message. It is a false god which teaches we can sin all we want, as long as we go to a multi-media presentation each week, sing a few songs, and toss a few

bucks in the plate. Oh yea, and ask God to clean our sinned-up chalkboard with this new Jesus, presented as The Cosmic Eraser.

This stuff is pretty easy to figure out. Just look around. You and I read the Bible and it doesn't match up with most of what is coming from pulpits or Sunday schools. We hear people claiming to follow it, but their actions don't jibe with their claim. We end up having to get endless explanations from teachers to try and reconcile what they say with what we read. Instinctively you and I know the Bible is absolute truth, but we just can't seem to find people to back us up. Few teachers or preachers or Sunday schools are giving a Bible message outside of a denominational straightjacket. Those teachers that do tend to get fired. Fast.

We read in the Bible about abundant life, complete peace, and blessings pressed down and overflowing. But it seems we only have a sort of tension-filled half-life and few blessings. We read about the fruit of the Spirit, but it is rarely seen. And it's really hard to produce a crop ourselves, though we are surely getting enough fertilizer! We read or sing about 'victory in Jesus' but we're more beat down than ever. There seems to be no help (or very little) in the church, so we've bailed out (or almost bailed out). But we just can't bail out on God.

We're not alone. One estimate is that 20 million believers don't go to church.⁸ Other research shows a ten percent decline in those claiming Christian status.⁹ Well maybe, you say, the polls are faulty. Or some of the pollsters have an agenda to destroy the church. Maybe it's just fair weather fans falling off the band wagon.¹⁰ Some say that bad times are good for the church because it gets rid of all the pretenders. "What's the big deal anyway?" They say. "Isn't the church just a hospital for the sick? Isn't it full of hypocrites and they just got one more when I joined? Shouldn't I be unimpressed with a group who would take me as a member?" Maybe.

If the church was getting healthier, then you might have a point. But we're not. How can you tell if your house is built on the Rock? Because after a storm it's still standing. If you have to wade through wreckage to get in the parking lot, that's a clue. It's not just me and the polls, though. God says it too. Who is He telling to repent in Revelation 2 and 3? Who is He talking to in 2 Chronicles 7:14?

13 "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, 14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:13-14 NASB95)

His "people" are not just 'Israel' or 'the Jews.' It's whoever is "called by My Name." God is not calling for U.S. citizens to go back to church here. He's not preaching to pagans. He is commanding the people already in "the church," or who claim to be in His kingdom, to repent of their ways. One of the doors that He is standing at, knocking, is the door of the church.

⁸ From the book, "Revolution" by George Barna. More recent comments on the condition of Christianity were made by Bruce Feiler in an AP article of September 25, 2009 on foxnews.com titled, 'Where Have All the Christians Gone?' A quarter of people in their 20's profess no organized religion, and 20% of men express no religious affiliation, although most of these still believe in God. They just don't have the same faith in the church.

⁹ "American Religious Identification Survey," The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, Barry A. Kosmin, Egon Mayer, Ariela Keysar which is at: http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research_studies/aris.pdf.

¹⁰ Jerry Fallwell Jr., on Glenn Beck's Fox News show of May 18, 2010 'The Roots of Social Justice,' said that conservative churches over the last 25 years are growing, while "mainstream" (World Council of Churches meaning liberal churches) are shrinking. Beck said that "mixing everybody together = rapid decline."

There are many who are doing the best they can with the teaching, dogma and bureaucracies they've got to work with. And overall, the weakest (real) Christian is still in better shape than even the strongest pagan. But like traffic cops directing people *towards* an accident, we've still got a lot of hard-hearted hypocrisy coming from those saying they follow God's Word as they deny it with actions. Many fight repentance every time the subject comes up, as alcoholics will who won't admit they have a drinking problem.

Which Law?

Some people limit The Law to the first five books (the Pentateuch), or just the so-called 'Mosaic Law' as if Moses was the one that really gave it. At most others will discuss 'moral laws,' conveniently forgetting that everything God says is moral (every word from Him is 'law'). But when God says we live by every word from His mouth (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4), it is plain that The Law is every word that He speaks. All parts, as much as we can do. Including the first five books.

His Words are intimately woven around history and God's dealings with men. There is no avoiding the Word, whether we call it Law or something else. Most of *this* book is about the Law because most of *His* book is about the Law. His Word and His Law is the same thing.

The promise of the Messiah (Genesis 3:15) is also wrapped around everything, including the Law. They go hand in hand. When Jesus (the Promise) showed up as a human, He taught the Law (Matthew 5:17).¹¹

16 So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. 17 If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. 18 The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. 19 Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?" (John 7:16-19 ESV)

Accepting Jesus means accepting all of the Father's Words. What else would 'accepting' mean? God grants forgiveness through the death and resurrection of Jesus, but we still have to live like God wants us to live (Romans 10:3-12; 1 Peter 1:14-16).

I'll bet you've heard explanations that the Law isn't for Christians. That it's been 'fulfilled' by Jesus and therefore eliminated. That we "can't do" the Law. Or maybe just "the Ten" apply (or maybe just 9 or 8 or 2). I cover a bunch of those anti-biblical teachings in chapter 6. But when you read the Word, the whole Law seems to be directed at every believer. Now you're thinking, "What in the world is going on?" because you've been told so much different.

I understand. It happens a lot. But let me assure you – the Word is true. All of His Law really does apply to all believers, all the time, everywhere. It's not scary, or old, or even Jewish. It is all part of His whole absolute truth for all of His kids. Jesus talked a lot about the Law. He gave it, established it, and lived it. He did not abolish it (Matthew 5:17-19). It is part of the gospel (Hebrews 4:2), and it is unequalled as a lifestyle and discipleship method. I don't *have* to follow the Law, I *get* to. The message of the Bible, from the Garden to Jesus to you and me, is do what God says. This is the essence of faith – hearing His Word or Law and doing it.

¹¹ Make note of the fact that Jesus tells the Jewish leaders that they do not keep the Law.

⁴⁶“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me.
⁴⁷“But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (John 5:46-47 NASB95)

The Believer’s Daily Bread

God’s solution to all of mankind’s problems is in opposition to lip-synching or parading around with a gold box. It’s more effective than new churches, dogma, feelings, and chopping His Word into pieces. We need it to reverse the rot and halt the freefall. It is the secret ingredient missing in every losing battle. Here it is; the mystery of the ages, uncomfortable and masked by tradition and dogma. Drum roll and trumpet blast, please.

⁵³Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. ⁵⁸This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. (John 6:53-58 KJV)

Our daily bread is the flesh and blood of the Bread of Life, Jesus the Christ, Son of the Living God. You might think Jesus is talking about a so-called sacrament. But the Protestant crackers and grape juice ceremony hadn’t been created. Neither had the mystical wafer the Catholics favor. It isn’t the feast of Unleavened Bread (1 Corinthians 10:16), and He’s not saying we should nibble His fingers, or tap His main artery like Count Dracula. There is life in His flesh and blood, but He doesn’t mean the tissue and corpuscles (although we could argue that point).

Kingdom Banquet

I know I’m freaking you out, but this really is the key – all those who hunger and thirst after His rightness need to pull up a chair at His banquet. The first thing on the menu is His body and blood. Now I can stop typing, and I don’t need to write the book! Sounds simple, and it is. Sadly, complications from people (Jeremiah 17:9) will keep me typing.

You’re not the first to be freaked out here. Some disciples probably thought things like those and abruptly left off following Him (John 6:66). I’m sure we’ll get that again, too. So in case of freaking out, break the glass of tradition over a quote from Jesus just a few verses later.

⁶³“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. (John 6:63 NASB95)

Jesus means that life is in the words God speaks (John 6:35). Real communion is to hear and follow. Salvation is faith in action - to hear, obey, and exchange our ways of death for God’s Way of Life. Love is a verb, giving our lives in exchange for the life He gave. How do we know

we are saved? Because in love His Words cause us to take action consistent with God's Life. That's how we know we are connected with God.

In the beginning, God spoke words and life sprang forth. The incarnate body of Jesus was made by the Word of God. And the words of Jesus are the same life-generating words that the Father speaks. Those words are like His flesh and blood (John 1:1); you can't tell them apart. Jesus isn't talking about a picnic, or mystical wafers and wine. He is talking about obedience.

Life is in His Word, or body and blood, and we eat and drink when we read and do. This is also called "hear and obey" (Matthew 5:6, 6:33). Literally, we are what we eat. To eat the body and drink the blood of the Christ is to hear everything God says, and do exactly and only what He says. Jesus emphasized the life in His words to the woman at the well in John chapter 4. She received living water (verse 15). A few minutes later, the disciples were told about real food.

31Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." 32But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." 33So the disciples were saying to one another, "No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?" 34Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. (John 4:31-34 NASB95)

Food for Jesus is to do the will of God the Father and accomplish His work. Food (and drink) for His followers is to do the same. The will (and Word) of God and Jesus are identical.

9Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10"Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. (John 14:9-10 NASB95)

The Word on the page is to the Spirit as flesh and blood is to the Messiah. Jesus the Bread of Life (John 6:35) is there in the Words of Life. This absolute true Word of His flesh and blood is the only thing that satisfies our hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6). We can speak of accepting Jesus as a person or even as God, but the proof is in eating and drinking His Word. It makes us as different from the world as the Garden of Eden is from a landfill.

God commands us to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1-3) by confessing Jesus, but this does not mean just to go around saying "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus" or "Jesus is Lord." Anyone can say the name (even demons – Acts 19:15) or call Him Lord (Matthew 7:21, 22; Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11). But to confess Him means to change your life.

This is pure religion – humbly receiving the whole Word; hearing and doing all God says (James 1:22-27). Faith is trust and obedience. It is not a mysterious force for getting what we want. We can't say we trust God if we won't do what He says.

I'm not talking about casual reading, as an atheist would read. I'm not talking about hit-and-miss practice as we feel led. We don't need to study it under a microscope, or take it apart and put it together like a Lego™ project. If you got some water from the Fountain of Youth you wouldn't test it in a lab, you would drink it. And that's what we need to do – drink it. By the bucket. Read large parts of it daily. '*Labor to show yourself approved*' (2 Timothy 2:15) and search the Scriptures like Bereans (Acts 17:10-12). Take in His Word *and do it* as if it is our life.

Members of the one body eat and drink the one faith or truth of the Bible, which is the body and blood of the Messiah Jesus. It is absolute and abundant life for us. We cannot function without it. This explains why as a group we are not functioning. If we have the Son we have life (1 John 5:10, 11), and if we have the Son we have His Words. If we have His Words we do them. His words and God's words are identical. The body and blood of God and the Christ is one faith, and one faith means all of the Word. Believers live by every Word from the mouth of God.

Faith Alone, Not 'Alone Faith'

During the Reformation, one doctrine among many that was brought back was called in Latin '*sola fidei*,' meaning 'faith alone.' Faith alone is how a person is justified (declared righteous enough for salvation) by God.¹² But faith is more than hearing, and it's more than mere belief. It is trusting God followed by action in keeping with His Words (what the Bible calls 'fruit'). One of the big faith sections in the Word is Hebrews 11, and all those people acted on their belief. They didn't just sit around and navel gaze. They obeyed God. The food and drink they consumed moved them to action.

Faith alone is different from 'alone faith,' meaning belief without action.¹³ Where there is faith, there should also be action. If a person believes that a train is coming, yet refuses to get off the tracks, there might be reason to doubt the faith is real. It certainly wouldn't be 'saving' faith. If we believe God, we will also do everything He says. There's no middle ground.

14What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. 18But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." 19You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? (James 2:14-20 NASB95)

Faith must have both trust in God, and obedience to His Word, in order to be genuine and productive. Trust and obedience is why faith can be as small as a mustard seed yet move mountains (Matthew 17:20). If we trust God and are obedient, then the mountain will move. Of course, knowing His will means we would know whether God wanted the mountain to move. Or maybe to get off the train tracks. In a hurry.

Everyone is given a measure of faith (Romans 12:3) though many don't continue or grow in it. The Word is scattered everywhere, and faith grows because trust and obedience to the Word grows. Faith is fed as we keep trusting and obeying His Word. This is what it means to accept the kingdom like a child (Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17). A child trusts mom and dad and responds to them without doubt. The more we trust and obey, the more faith we have.

¹² Leviticus 18:5; Psalm 31:1-2; Habakkuk 2:4; Galatians 3:6-7.

¹³ 'True Confessions,' Reverend Steve Schlissel; Messiah's Covenant Community Church; www.messiahnyc.org; <http://www.messiahnyc.org/ArticlesDetail.asp?id=98>; September 21, 2002.

Faith and belief are sometimes interchangeable words. But godly belief has to respond to God in the same way faith does. Demons believe in God, and tremble (James 2:19) yet they don't do what He says. At the end of this age, every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus is Lord (Philippians 2:9-11) but some are not saved. God is in charge whether anyone admits it or not. So merely stating that "He is Lord" is obviously not saving faith. We have to act like He is Lord if our faith is going to save us.

9For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11 NASB95)

Jesus speaks a great deal about this in the form of hearing and seeing, or eating and drinking His body and blood. But His version of 'hearing' doesn't just mean sound waves striking the eardrum, and His version of 'seeing' doesn't stop with good intentions.

Law AND Grace

If you skipped to this section to see what I had to say about grace after reading about the Law, you might not get a clear picture. You'll need the intervening stuff to make complete sense of this. But if you insist, here's the deal.

I'll talk more about this later, but here I'll tell you – Law and grace go together like peanut butter and jelly. Or pick your metaphor. Grace is in the Law, and Law comes from grace. Law is misused if we take grace out of the picture. Grace is misused if we take Law out of the picture. We are saved by grace through faith, and then we live a life pleasing to God. Including the Law. Just so you know, and can get back to reading things in order.

Whole Bible Christianity

Jesus tells us what we need to solve our problems. He preaches the gospel of His simple solution; so simple in fact that it's very easy to ignore. Reading and doing (hear and see or obey)¹⁴ is the basis of something I am calling whole Bible Christianity. It's a sort of do-it-Himself Christianity which doesn't need an organization or a charismatic leader, a nice building or permission from someone to pursue. All it takes is you and God. You just put one foot in front of the other and follow His footsteps. He gives us the Word and He gives us the Spirit, so what else do we need?

The Law is included in a whole Bible Christian's walk, as much as we are able to follow each command. Some we can't do because we are not in a God-led country. Some apply only to priests in the temple or tabernacle. It doesn't matter. God loved us and gave His Son. We love Him and give every area of our life to Him. There are those who say that since we can't gain salvation with the Law, then we don't have to do it at all. That's like saying because you found a cavity in a tooth you should stop brushing. Everything is a 'salvation issue.' Framing a lack of obedience with 'I don't get paid' is not a loving response to the love given by God.

¹⁴ See for instance Exodus 24:7; Deuteronomy 4:6, 5:27; Jeremiah 5:21, 11:6; Ezekiel 12:2, 33:31, 32; Matthew 13:13; Mark 8:18; Luke 8:21, John 8:43, 12:47.

Whole Bible Christianity is a natural outgrowth of accepting the absolute truth of the whole of the Word and living it completely. It is one body, eating and drinking the one faith given to us by our one God and Savior Jesus the Christ. We are not just shifting furniture around trying to make disobedience more comfortable. We are taking the broken-down imported stuff out to the curb and bringing back the solid pieces that He hand-crafted for us from the start.

I'll bet you're thinking reading and heeding couldn't be 'The Solution,' because many people already read the Bible and try to follow what it says. But when we get right down to it, most reading is sparse or casual, and our practice features a take-it-or-leave-it attitude. If we don't believe His Word is absolute truth, we will have casual attitudes about it. We will pick and choose what we will do and what we won't. This 'shallow root' is prone to destruction by sun, thorns and the cares of the world as Jesus tells us in Matthew 13.

¹²For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12 NASB95)

Man's Kingdoms

Those who wear His name have exerted all sorts of effort to hide God's absolute truth, in the name of building His Kingdom. The hiding is not always on purpose, but generally with a lot of zeal. The problem is that when we sit in judgment on which parts of His Word we will follow and which parts we won't, we end up building a kingdom that looks like us instead of God.

Israel transformed God's kingdom to man's kingdom by holding to a form of religion but denying the power of it (2 Timothy 3:1-9). The church, sadly, has done the same thing. Most churches start off okay, but drift into self-protection and failure to speak the Word, just like Israel. Dogma, tradition, and complicated theologies eventually substitute for the simple straight talk from God. The Word gets split into old and new, and the one body into two – Israel and the church. Even God has been split into last year's model which demanded blood, and the recent model that's all warm and fuzzy.

We're buying the sweet sales pitches from the wolves in sheep's clothing. They hawk everything from rationalism and relativism to evolution and social justice, and have proven irresistible to many. New country clubs or sects (churches or synagogues) are formed to cement the latest and greatest fads instead of a return to Bible principles. Feelings are substituted for objective guidance. Tolerance and unconditional love are mixed together in unbiblical ways.¹⁵ Words have been redefined to ease our discomfort with God's justice. All of these have failed miserably to build houses on rock and produce Spirit-fruit.

Organized Failure

Let me restate a little differently what I said earlier, about the percentage of Christians who do not believe the Bible is absolute truth. Remember Barna discovered that only one out of 10 Christians, and only 1 out of four claiming born again status, believe that the Word is absolute truth. Averaging this out, of every 100 people in a church, only eleven believe God's Word

¹⁵ Yes. All of these are unbiblical teachings. We'll talk more about the unbiblical modern teachings of unconditional love and tolerance in the next chapter.

completely. If the church has 300 people, then about 33 of them really believe God, and 267 do not. If everyone in the group says they are born again, only 75 believe God while 225 do not. No wonder churches are in a tailspin.

Organizations drift like this. They start off with great intentions, but somewhere along the way they become more concerned with self-protection than with God's truth. We all get complacent, and occasionally need to be shaken up a little. Pastors get more concerned about a paycheck than about the truth. The sheep are a pain in the-you-know-where, and it's easier to just give in and tickle the ears. Congregations demand sweet talking and don't want to hear uncomfortable truth. That's why we have events like the flood, Mt. Sinai, the Incarnation, and the Reformation.

Why do I think there is organizational failure? In Leviticus 23:2 God says that the feasts are "my appointed feasts" (or "times"). Do you see any church observing Passover, other than as a novelty? I don't. Instead, we have hijacked a pagan feast called Easter and dressed it up as 'Christian.' And just try to suggest switching Easter for Passover in almost any church group. Film it if you can, because the fireworks will be spectacular.

Do churches teach that believers should avoid pork and shellfish simply because God said? No. We can diet for any reason, as long as it isn't God's. Now the entrée of choice for the pagan feasts we've stolen is pig's flesh (read Isaiah 65:4; 66:17). How about a Sabbath? Is the last day of the week a day of complete rest? Or has that been reinterpreted as "ceremonial" or a "shadow" or "the same as every other day" and therefore not needed?¹⁶

It seems obvious that those who wear His name are ignoring the (alleged) small things while claiming to do 'big' things. But faith is not about size or quantity. It's about doing what God says in all things, whether we think they are big or little or not.

For those who say these things are "minor" or "not salvation issues," how can you claim to be faithful in the big things while sitting in judgment on His Word for (allegedly) small things? Who are you to decide what a "salvation issue" is and what is not? And who are you to split up His living oracles and say some of them are not worthy of our attention? Is salvation the only issue? How can you say you have a loving relationship with God, and at the same time judge what you are willing to do and what you are not? He gave us everything, including the blood of His only begotten Son, in boundless love and grace, and some return that gift with partial effort and picky sentiment? Where's the 'new heart' in that kind of an attitude?

Now that I've brought it up, you can check it yourself. Compare the time your group spends reading and doing the Word against the time spent on other things. How much is action and how much is just talk? Usually the time winner will be preaching (not to be confused with Bible reading and teaching), singing and the bulletin. Or maybe it'll be the time spent on the Christmas cantata or the Purim celebrations.

Jesus didn't come to bring peace, but a sword (Matthew 10:34). This sword is the Word of God, and is intended to divide true believers in God and His Son from unbelievers. If we stick with the Word we should be able to avoid becoming complacent. When introduced again, as I'm trying to do in this book, there will be resistance, like a couch potato who won't get up and change the TV channel. If we don't stick to the Word, over time each club becomes more like the first century synagogue from which we got booted, and less like the God-believers we should be. Seems to happen a lot.

Most organizations will have difficulty agreeing with this book, because they have walked too far away from His Book. Each believer will have to walk it back in their own lives.

¹⁶ The ESV Study Bible shows this attitude in an erroneous interpretation of Romans 14 in the notes.

Don't expect a bunch of bureaucrats whose power is threatened to come along with you. It's no fun telling Pharisees and Sadducees they aren't where they are supposed to be. Remember what happened when Jesus tried it.

Fetch, Dogma

Pay attention and you will also see that most pastors spend a great deal of effort on dogma¹⁷ rather than the Word. I remember a Vineyard pastor speaking at length of his desire to throw theology out of the church. Theology means 'God's Word' so I guess he was very successful.¹⁸ There was the Calvary Chapel guy who tried to get us to 'visualize' the Christ.¹⁹ A Presbyterian told us about his bicycle trip through Ireland of all things.

Mike Adams²⁰ in an online column titled 'Searching for Bonhoeffer'²¹ tells of his trip through 22 states and several mega-churches. He found a watered down gospel message that wasn't satisfying anyone's thirst.

“...the one thing that has started to change in the mega-church is the message. What once was a slightly watered-down seeker-friendly version of the Gospel is now a slightly Gospel-flavored bucket of water. And it's not enough to quench the thirst of the masses.”

He recounts such foolishness as the announcement of a Bible Study class that might not have answers but “just want(s) to start a conversation.” Then there was the church that “doesn't focus on doctrine. We focus on hope.” And the one that said “If Christianity is to survive in the 21st century, everything about it must change.” One of his conclusions:

By watering down their message to be even more seeker-friendly, today's mega-churches are not going to achieve their crass objective: To avoid offending people in order to keep their numbers up (read: Keep the money flowing) and eventually pay their mortgage down.

My friend Shari (who helped edit this book) told me that an Assembly of God magazine for pastors (her husband used to be one) suggested preaching messages with TV themes. She thought this was ridiculous. But three weeks later her pastor preached a message using Friends, The Bachelor, and other shows that don't need an endorsement from the pulpit.

Some use the clock as an excuse (“We don't have the time”). Others are more honest and say Bible reading is boring or irrelevant. Privately, some shepherds say the flock is just too dumb or impatient. Whatever the reason, I think you'll find that teaching the Word comes up short. The other things may be important. But the small amount of time we spend reading the Word out loud, and doing what it says, speaks volumes about how we value it.

Dogma can be hard to detect because it's taught as if it were right from the page, and tickles our ears. There are many examples of dogma in any group. One of the purposes of this

¹⁷ Ideas or beliefs that are unsupported from the Word are dogma. In a way almost anything can be dogma, but my use of the term is to describe what people think is true yet cannot be found by a plain reading of God's Word.

¹⁸ Later this guy had an affair when his wife was in a wheelchair with MS, and a week after he retired he announced a divorce. Obviously the Word was not foremost in his teaching or his living. Nice role model.

¹⁹ Not to be confused with a vision from God. The first step in creating an idol is imagining what it will look like.

²⁰ He's a criminology professor at the University of North Carolina Wilmington and author of 'Feminists Say the Darndest Things: A Politically Incorrect Professor Confronts "Womyn" On Campus.

²¹ URL http://townhall.com/columnists/MikeAdams/2010/09/27/searching_for_bonhoeffer/page/full/. 09/27/10.

book is to teach you how to spot it by encouraging you to read and do the Word. So I won't list a bunch of them here. We'll get to 'em soon though.

We've got wonderful computer programs for searching and studying the Bible. Scholars have done a mountain of work to give us translations that suit every understanding and taste. The Bible is still the best-selling book on the planet. But we still don't read the Word and do it as if it was life. Maybe a little, such as in a synagogue Torah reading schedule, or a Christian devotional series.²² Even then, it is not very well heeded because it is not treated as an absolute whole, with absolute authority. Some view it as a source of nice fables or nifty sayings. For others it's best as a source of material for the sign out in front of the church. If His Word is the most important thing in our lives or our services, why do we spend the least amount of time on it?

Feeling For Truth

Another of man's efforts to preach the Word, but which ends up hiding it, is to substitute feelings for truth. Specifically, we do whatever "feels right or comfortable," or would "produce the most beneficial results" for ourselves.²³ What we feel about the Word has become more important than the absolute truth of the Word itself.

In part, the substitute of feelings for truth is driven by a desire to touch or be touched by God. Sometimes it's a reaction to dry theology and false rejection of gifts of the Spirit. But absolute truth stands apart from the influence of emotion; feelings don't change the truth. Truth causes feelings; feelings have to be built on truth. Or at the very least, have to be cross-checked with truth, and not lead away from the truth (see for instance 2 Corinthians 7:8-11). We are drawn to truth or we are repelled by it. I desire to touch God too, but not at the expense of truth. Truth requires actions that might be uncomfortable at first, but must be pursued to find abundant, long lasting life. Truth leads us to life; unguided sentiment leads us in circles.

1But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. 2For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, 4treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. 6For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, 7always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. (2 Timothy 3:1-7 NASB95, italics added)

Sadly, what is captivating many Christians these days is a form of godliness lacking in power, but appealing to "various impulses." We think strong feelings will motivate people to change. But long term behavior change cannot be sustained by sentiment. It is too transient and unreliable. Affliction and the worry of the world easily choke it. Maybe that's why adult church attendance declined by nine points from 1991 to 2011.²⁴

²² And yes, there are a few who have read and continue to read the Bible front to back, but sadly, it is not common.

²³ 'Americans Are Most Likely to Base Truth on Feelings;' February 2002; The Barna Group of Ventura CA; www.barna.org.

²⁴ <http://www.barna.org/faith-spirituality/504-barna-examines-trends-in-14-religious-factors-over-20-years-1991-to-2011>, Barna Research, July 25, 2011.

²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. (Matthew 13:20-22 ESV)

Feelings are powerful. They can fool us into thinking we are like a dragster in car racing, roaring down the quarter-mile in an awful hurry. Passion is not bad in itself, if it's Spirit motivated. But try taking an emotional dragster on daily driving trips and it's a different story. It'll break down before you get to the next gas station. You'll need a lot of gas stations, too, because over-revved emotions need lots of fuel. The emotional dragster just can't keep going, even if it is fun to drive. For a while.

Feelings are a key factor in "decisions for Christ." Most public appeals for these "decisions" rest heavily on emotion. Ray Comfort says he found an 80% to 90% failure rate for decisions in one study he did. He cited a major denomination which in the early 90's racked up 294,000 "decisions" but later could find only 14,000 in fellowship (95% failure).²⁵

Besides, have you ever tried to teach someone how to feel? We don't pass on the Word of God to the next generation by getting them to 'feel' it. We pass it on by living it, and teaching the truth to our children. When we back up the truth with our lives, then the kids get it. After they learn and do the truth, then feelings come along and help reinforce the living. It wasn't feeling that caused believers to challenge the Roman Empire, getting thrown into the lion's den or burned to death for their efforts. It wasn't feelings that moved any revival, although certainly feelings are a God-given part of life. We just don't lead with feelings, we lead with the truth.

Going to church is not salvation, and decision is not discipleship.²⁶ But it does show something is not working. We have a form of religion but no power. This isn't surprising if we consider that since the beginning God designed us to reproduce after our own kind. Cats give birth to kittens instead of puppies. Parrots hatch other parrots just like themselves. Truth rejecting, anxiety-filled church-goers only produce more of the same.

Jesus prays to the Father for His people that He would, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (John 17:17 NASB95). He also says, "If you continue in my word you are truly disciples of mine, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32).

² Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart,
³ who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways! (Psalm 119:2-3 ESV)

Part-truth means we'll have only part-life. If we deny God's truth (any part of His Word), we lose part of the only effective process of learning, growing, equipping and touching God that really works. Man-made discipleship systems, though plentiful, dilute the truth. They just don't work as well as the complete, absolute truth of His living oracles. In truth, there is freedom.

Sure, we know God's message is still getting out. He can preach it with barnyard animals if He has to. Numbers 22 for instance records a sermon from a donkey. Come to think of it, He must still be using donkeys since I hear a lot of braying. We know His Word will not return void

²⁵ From 'Hell's Best Kept Secret' <http://www.livingwaters.com/learn/hellsbestkeptsecret.htm>.

²⁶ Jesus never told us to 'go forth and make decisions.' He said go forth and make disciples (Matthew 28:19).

(Isaiah 55:11). But in general, it is in spite of the people who claim His name. All too often God has to work around the church instead of through it.

Falling To Pieces

Another of man's efforts to hide truth is to split it and separate Bible teachings that are meant to be together. The Satan pitches in to help but we do a lot on our own too. Some use bastardized concepts such as 'social justice' to steal authority and blunt the impact of the Word.²⁷ We have reduced the riches of the Bible to empty phrases on bumper stickers and church signs. Godless theologies, like vampires, drain His living oracles of life. Sin is excused by making up new definitions for words. Now, for instance, murder doesn't include abortion. Homosexuality is watered down with old and new types. Sex is a presidential joke. When we dilute the absolute truth of the Word, we are judging it – shoving God aside and taking His place. In this 'split parade,' the hits²⁸ just keep coming.

God is split into an old bloody version and a new, Greek hero version – God 2.0 if you will. The church has split into sects for every discriminating taste. Even the Bible text is cracked by chapters and verses into more comfortable chunks. Old parts of truth are declared outdated, or parceled out to other people groups (anyone but us). New parts are declared updated and relevant, and then watered down to make them more appealing for the masses. We pick through the cracked up mush to find what we feel led to do and what we don't. The Christian musician Randy Stonehill said it well.

We are all like foolish puppets, who, desiring to be kings
Now lie pitifully crippled, after cutting our own strings.²⁹

The Word, on the other hand, teaches 'one.' Paul summarizes this in Ephesians.

⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4-6 NASB95)

The word 'one' in this context is the numeral, and means 'singular' or 'there is no other.'

"One body" means all believers are part of a single family whose members are all adopted. We start off being born into the family of man. Then by God's grace, through faith, some of us continue on and adopt God's household. The only real split is between those who are in the Father's house and those who aren't. The Body has been this way since the beginning, and all people have a shot at being part of it.

"One faith" means both a single kind of faith (trusting obedience to God's Word) and a body of beliefs (the Bible). In Ephesians 4 'one faith' is a single group of beliefs (see also Jude 3). The Bible is one complete faith handed down from the beginning. It's always fresh, always alive, vibrant and relevant. It never splits itself into old or new.

"One God" refers to the Father and "one lord" to Jesus, although both share the same nature and have been around, well, forever. The Bible has to say "One God" and "one Lord"

²⁷ 'Social justice' in modern times has nothing to do with the Bible. As Glenn Beck ('The One Thing' show of 4/28/10) said, it is "a collective redemption through the government." Many churches have been co-opted as mouthpieces for this Marxist belief. A key piece of this belief is the forced redistribution of wealth.

²⁸ Not so long ago, a 'hit parade' was a series of very popular songs played on the radio.

²⁹ From the album 'Welcome to Paradise,' song 'Puppet Strings,' copyright 1976, King of Hearts publishing.

because of complexity from people. We blur the lines between God and other powers, and refuse to consider Jesus is God.

The members of His Body are not determined by the church but by response to God's truth. The bottom line is that there is only one body and one God who is a Father to it, one Lord who died for it, and one set of beliefs or faith (The Word) that is the foundation of it. This three-fold outline is used for the next three chapters, because these are three key parts of the whole absolute truth. One of my goals is to heal these splits and return truth to believers.

In contrast to the splitting of truth, the planting of sects, and the many variations in beliefs throughout the church, the Bible teaches that there is only one Body, one faith, one God and one Lord. They've been around since the beginning. One faith means a body of beliefs, but it doesn't mean there are many roads and all lead to God. There is only one road to God which is the absolute truth of the Bible.

Rearranging The Furniture

Although I quote a bit from studies or books by pollsters and pundits who realize that things aren't right, I do not think they always know what to do about the problems. They do good work exposing the falling away, but usually think that we need another program or something to get back. Glenn Beck says, and I agree, that 'Faith, Hope and Charity' are critical. But who defines it? God's Word. Pollsters and pundits are missing the obvious solution from Jesus. For instance, in an article about moral relativism, the writer warns:

“When a majority of Christian adults, including three out of four born again Baby Busters, as well as three out of four born again teens proudly cast their vote for moral relativism, the Church is in trouble. Continuing to preach more sermons, teach more Sunday school classes and enroll more people in Bible study groups won't solve the problem since most of these people don't accept the basis of the principles being taught in those venues. The failure to address this issue at its root, and to do so quickly and persuasively, will undermine the strength of the church for at least another generation, and probably longer.”³⁰

However, when he says that “more sermons” and “more Sunday school classes” are not the answer, he is only partially correct. I agree that a greater quantity of the same subjective, pragmatic, self-centered teaching or study currently offered in the church will not help. We don't need more split-up, generic, feel-good slogans or principles.

What we need is a change in the quantity and *quality* of Bible teaching and practice. As James says (1:25), effectual hearing and doing are the answers. Real fruit comes from effectual doers of the Word, not hearers only (Romans 2:13). People aren't buying the current teaching because we aren't living it.

Most of the solutions men suggest are just style changes. We can make meetings less formal, with more individual expression, and remove pagan practices.³¹ But these don't *solve* problems. We're not going to purify our religion just by changing furniture around. We need to throw out the man-made furniture and buy stuff from the store of God's absolute truth.

³⁰ ‘Americans Are Most Likely to Base Truth on Feelings’ The Barna Group of Ventura CA, www.barna.org, February 12, 2002. He uses a capital ‘C’ for church here when he should've just used the small ‘c.’

³¹ These approaches are advocated in books such as ‘pagan Christianity?’ by Frank Viola and George Barna.

Do You Really Want To Find Him?

Maybe you are one of those people who really want to feel God but just can't seem to reach. Like me, you've looked in a church, maybe even a number of different churches. While there are some good things here and there, God seems to be just a bit out of reach still. Hypocrisy is the standard, and the church mostly a country club.

You've tried a home fellowship or two. You've picked up dozens of books about that guy Jabez, or attended a seminar trying to find some purpose to drive your life. You've tried all the latest church fads, even 'emerged.' And all that stuff is still not working. You can't get over the huge disconnect between what you see around you and what's in the Word. You want to touch God or be touched by Him, and you're wondering where the fruit of the Spirit is.

Many people try to tell me how to get closer to God. The Catholics want you to listen to their liturgy and their priests, confess, and take a mystical wafer. Assembly of God says the best way is to get baptized in the Spirit and speak in tongues. Baptists think you get close by acting like them and getting dunked. Presbyterians are all about government. Methodists think a system of Bible study is the way. Lutherans like liturgy and never really left Catholicism. Calvary Chapel and Vineyard think a lack of formality and endlessly repeating song choruses is best. I've tried them all, and some of the methods have some benefit, but using their methods I just couldn't connect to God as they promised or the Bible describes.

God isn't far away, and He's not deliberately trying to avoid you. We touch Him, and He touches us, when we take in His Word and follow it without question. He's right between the non-biblical, dry theology systems and shallow feelings, masked by teachings of men in traditions and dogma. That stuff does more to confuse and hide the truth than present it faithfully.

It's tough to admit things are not going as well as we'd like in the church, and the way we've chosen is the wrong one. There's not much fun in repentance. But if we hunger and thirst for God's righteousness and the fruit of the Spirit, repentance is the first step to a life of peace.

You're not alone, even if it might be a little lonely at times. Jesus is in the same boat (when He wasn't walking on top the water) and so are the apostles. Paul found himself floating with us. Maybe you'll want to climb on in. Watch the first step though. It's a doozy.

Before you come aboard, close the book and set it aside for a few minutes. Ask yourself how bad you really want to find Him. This is what Jesus calls "counting the cost."

27"Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. 28"For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? (Luke 14:27-28 NASB95)

Do you want to help arrest the moral freefall? Can you ditch all you know if it doesn't measure up to the Word? Are you ready to set the broken legs, sew up the wounds, and defibrillate the hearts? Do you hunger and thirst for God, His kingdom, and His righteousness? Are you willing to trade the unsatisfying food and drink you have stockpiled for the only truly satisfying meal around? Will you give up your pride, humble yourself, and submit to His every command? If so, keep going.