

## Losing Scriptural Meaning (or, a short story of hermeneutics)

Open your Bibles to Matthew 12:10

“And a man *was there* whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?’—so that they might accuse Him. And He said to them, ‘What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.’ Then He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand!’ He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.”

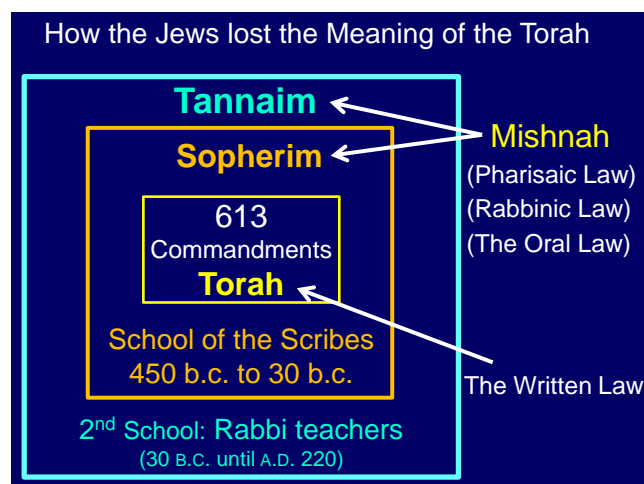
“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

I was intrigued by something I came across that Dr. Fruchtenbaum wrote in his *Messianic Bible Study Collection*. It was called,

### “How the Jews Lost the Meaning of the Torah”

The following are excerpts from that article.

The constant battle between Jesus and the Pharisees is better understood if we look at the historical background as to how **Pharisaic Judaism** developed. When the Jewish people returned from the Babylonian Captivity, the spiritual leaders recognized that the reason for the captivity had been disobedience to the Mosaic Law.



Ezra began a school called the School of the Sopherim (*SAHF uh rim*), or the School of the Scribes (Jewish lawyers). Their plan was to go through each of the 613 commandments God gave to Moses and expound them to the Jewish people. Their thinking was that, by giving them a clear knowledge of what the Law was and how to keep it, they would not bring on another divine discipline like the Babylonian Captivity.

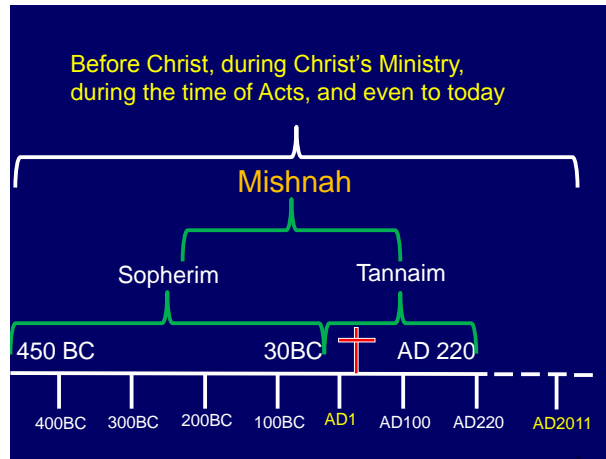
When the first generation of the Sopherim passed away, the second generation took the task more seriously. The second generation said, “It is not enough for us to expound the

Law; **we must build a fence around the Law.**” The fence they would build around the Law would consist of new rules and regulations logically derived from the original 613 commandments. The principle they used was: a sopher (a Scribe ) may disagree with another sopher, but he may not disagree with the Torah, which was sacrosanct (extremely sacred). This process of building a fence around the Law began around 450 B.C. and finally ended in 30 B.C.

Then came a second school of rabbis called the Tannaim, meaning “teachers.” The Tannaim looked upon the work of the Sopherim and declared, “**There are still too many holes in this fence.**” They continued the process for a period of two hundred and fifty years, from 30 B.C. until A.D. 220. The new principle was: a tanna (a teacher from the Tannaim) may disagree with another tanna, but he may not disagree with a sopher. This meant that from 30 B.C. all the thousands of rules and regulations passed down by the Sopherim became sacrosanct and of equal validity with Scripture. In order to validate to the Jewish audience why the laws of the Sopherim were equal to the laws of Moses, they came up with a teaching that all Orthodox Jews believe and teach to this very day. Their teaching was that what really happened on Mount Sinai was that God gave Moses two laws: **the Written Law and the Oral Law.** The first law is called the Written Law because it contains the 613 commandments that Moses actually penned in the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The second law is called the Oral Law because Moses did not write down those commandments; he memorized them all. By memory, they were passed down to Joshua, who then passed them down to the Judges, who then passed them down to the Prophets, who then passed them down to the Sopherim. So the Sopherim did not really innovate all these rules and regulations; they got them from the Prophets who got them from the Judges, who got them from Joshua, who got them from Moses, who got them from God. Indeed, from about 450 B.C. until A.D. 220, these rules were never written down. Key rabbis and scribes had them memorized, and thousands and **thousands of laws were kept strictly on the basis of memory.** That’s about six hundred years! Somewhere around A.D. 220, they finally wrote them all down and thus ended the period of the Tannaim.

The work of the Sopherim and the Tannaim together is now called the **Mishnah**. Any time the terms Mishnaic Law, Pharisaic Law, Rabbinic Law, or Oral Law are used, they refer to the body of material now known as the Mishnah. It is the Mishnah that became the cause of controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees. **The Pharisaic concept of the Messiah was that He would be a Pharisee;** He would be in submission to the laws of the Mishnah; in fact, He would join them in the work of making new laws to plug up the holes in the fence. **A Messiah who was not a Pharisee under the Mishnah’s authority could not possibly be the true Messiah.**

Here’s another way of looking at this phenomenon



Keep in mind that this state of affairs existed before Christ, during Christ's ministry, during the time of Acts, and even to today.

In summary, this is the picture of what took place.....The oral "tradition" of the Mishnah took the place of the Torah. The "words" of the Torah may be read, but the interpretation comes from the commentaries and writings of the Scribes and Rabbis.

And we see Jesus taking aim at this hypocrisy and now it makes more sense.

**In Matthew 15:1-3** "Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 'Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.' And He answered and said to them, 'Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?'"

And again in **Mark 7:6-9**, Mark looks at the same accusation of the disciples eating their bread with impure hands, and Jesus answers, "And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS,  
BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.  
BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME,  
TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'

Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."

He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition."

The **Sabbath** had become a major observance in Pharisaic Judaism, to the point that it was personified as the "Bride of Israel" and as "Jehovah's Queen". When the question was raised, "Why did God create Israel?" the answer was, "God made Israel to honor the Sabbath." Therefore, Israel was made for the Sabbath. While Jesus and the Pharisees debated over the authority of the Mishnah in general, one specific area of debate was on the proper way of observing the Sabbath.

Now we begin to understand something of the absurd, blind, and bizarre attitudes in the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. The fanaticism with which the leaders clung to the traditions of the Mishnah is astounding.

This also helps us understand Paul's comments about his being so zealous in stamping out this new religious thing called the "way" in Acts 22:4. " I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons..." and in Galatians 1:13–14 "For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions." Paul was upholding what he thought was right - the Mishnah rules and regulations!

### Turn to **Luke 13:11-14**

Jesus is about to heal a woman, and once again it is on the Sabbath

"And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, 'Woman, you are freed from your sickness.' And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and *began* glorifying God. But the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, *began* saying to the crowd in response, '**There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day.**'

The Mishnah is in control and now we understand how the Jews lost the meaning of the Torah.

The next thing to look at is:

### **How the early Christians lost the Meaning of Scripture**

As the early church struggled with explanations and definitions of various doctrines, men were already teaching heresy, and the challenging questions asked were the impetus that drove men to the Scriptures for answers and clarification, with much discussion.

In the early stages of trying to define these doctrines, along came a young man named Origen (185-254) to the School of Alexandria who became the most influential and widely traveled scholar in the early church. Origen, with a passion for Greek philosophy, developed an allegorical methodology for interpreting the Bible, wrote numerous commentaries, and became an influence in the intellectual communities of that time and his methodology was soon spreading. Here we begin to see the literal, normal understanding of the Bible being traded for a "deeper" meaning from the mind of man. It is at this point we see that Scripture – the Word of God - the Standard of Truth - is beginning to be set aside.

Augustine is influenced by the allegorical hermeneutic. He also shifted from a premillennial to an amillennial position, which is seen in the change of his interpretation of Matthew 24:13 which says, "*But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.*" In his early years, he interpreted this correctly as "saved" from physical destruction, in the context of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

However, following his shift to amillennialism, Augustine consistently interprets “saved” in Matt 24:13 to be salvation to eternal life. Augustine also believed in the inspiration and canonicity of the apocrypha, and the inspiration of the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament). He quoted from Baruch, Bel and the Dragon, Susana, and the Song of the Three Children as authoritative.

Then, as we look at the Church in the Middle Ages (600-1500), we find a gradual spiritual decline as the Church leaders gradually smother the last flames of Scriptural truth with church imposed “traditions”. Exegetical theology has given over to philosophical theology.

Here’s what the Catholic Encyclopedia says with regard to their traditions:

Roman Catholic Church “Tradition”  
(from The Catholic Encyclopedia)

“At first there was question only of traditions claiming a Divine origin, but subsequently there arose questions of oral as distinct from written tradition, in the sense that a given doctrine or institution is not directly dependent on Holy Scripture as its source but only on the oral teaching of Christ or the Apostles.....  
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“Now in this respect there are several points of controversy between Catholics and every body of Protestants. Is all revealed truth consigned to Holy Scripture? or can it, must it, be admitted that Christ gave to His Apostles to be transmitted to His Church, that the Apostles received either from the very lips of Jesus or from inspiration or Revelation, Divine instructions which they transmitted to the Church and which were not committed to the inspired writings?”  
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Now we see the logical results of allegorical interpretation. Scripture is no longer sufficient – we can imagine special “instructions” (speculations) of what Christ might have spoken to the Apostles to be passed on to the Church to use at its discretion. This is an example of the mystical mind of men at work.

We can watch the progress of some of these traditions:

<b>Tradition Development in Church of Rome</b>	
<u>What</u>	<u>Year</u>
Latin in prayer and worship	600
Prayers directed to Mary, dead saints, and angels	600
Kissing the pope's feet	709
Veneration of the cross, images, and relics	786
College of Cardinals established	927
Canonization of dead people as “saints”	995
Attendance at Mass made mandatory	1000

Year:

- 600 – Latin becomes the official language of the church.
- 600 – Prayers are being directed to Mary, dead saints, and angels.
- 709 – A tradition of kissing the Pope’s feet is started.
- 786 – Veneration of the cross, images, and relics authorized.
- 927 – The College of Cardinals is established (from which popes will be chosen).
- 995 – The tradition of canonization of dead people as “saints”.
- 1000 – Attendance at Mass is made mandatory.

<b>Tradition Development in Church of Rome</b>	
<u>What</u>	<u>Year</u>
Celibacy of priesthood	1079
Rosary, repetitious praying with beads	1090
The sale of indulgences established	1190
Transubstantiation proclaimed	1215
Confession of sins to priests	1215
The doctrine of seven sacraments affirmed	1439
Church Tradition claimed equal in authority with the Bible by the Council of Trent	1545
Apocryphal books declared canon by Trent	1546

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- 1546 – The Apocryphal books declared canon.

At the Council of Trent in AD1545, the Roman Church declared “Church Tradition” to be of equal validity with Scripture, just as the Jewish Rabbis declared all the thousands of rules and regulations passed down by the Sopherim to be sacrosanct and of equal validity with Torah.

### The Council of Trent – on Tradition

“The Council, as is evident, held that there are Divine traditions not contained in Holy Scripture, revelations made to the Apostles either orally by Jesus Christ or by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost and transmitted by the Apostles to the Church. Holy Scripture is therefore not the only theological source of the Revelation made by God to His Church. Side by side with Scripture there is tradition, side by side with the written revelation there is the oral revelation. This granted, it is impossible to be satisfied with the Bible alone for the solution of all dogmatic questions.” (Catholic encyclopedia)

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With Rome as its center, the church eventually became the dominating religious power and proclaimed herself, “Holy Mother Church”. The only way of a sinner’s salvation was through this “the only true church established by Christ Himself”, confirmed by the “succession of popes”.

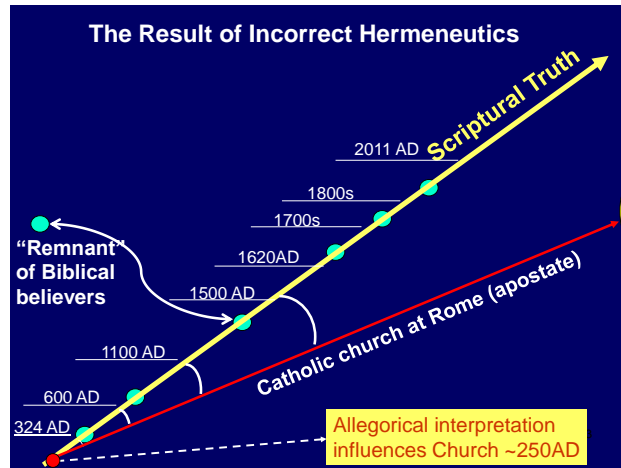
It becomes easier to see how far the church had strayed from a correct hermeneutic of Scripture and molded itself into a governing body of Pharisaical dimensions!

With power and wealth, a more human than spiritual organization emerged – self perpetuating and self sustaining - that would replace Scripture as the true authority - with church traditions; Mariology, an Old Testament-like priesthood, sacraments, and absolute authority – all supported from well chosen “Scriptural words” and taken-out-of-

context phrases that presumably supported these traditions and doctrines that finally made the Catholic Church at Rome - the Roman Catholic Church. The Christians had lost the meaning of Scripture!

Now we consider:

## How Christians Found the Meaning of Scripture



There were always pockets of those who kept the normal, literal interpretation. However, because of the allegorical influence, the church at Rome was mixing truth with mysticism, and it was getting worse. But God began raising up zealous men to reform the church at Rome in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

John Wycliffe (c. 1324-1384), of England was probably the most famous of these. He attacked the Papacy as an office, saying that the pope is neither necessary to the Church nor is he infallible.

He attacked the sale of indulgences.

He attacked the medieval dogma of transubstantiation

He attacked the church for not allowing the common man to read the bible for himself and so translated the Bible into English from the Latin.

This man was so hated that in 1428, 56 years after his death, the Pope ordered his bones to dug up, burned to ashes, and thrown into a river!

John Huss (1369-1415) actively promoted Wycliffe's ideas: that people should be permitted to read the Bible in their own language, and they should oppose the tyranny of the Roman church that threatened anyone possessing a non-Latin Bible with execution. For this, Huss was burned at the stake, with Wycliffe's manuscript Bibles used to build the fire. His ashes were thrown into a river.

Jerome Savonarola (1452-1498) was a Dominican monk who boldly denounced the corruptions and immorality in the churches. For this, he too, was burned at the stake.

Then we come to the Sixteenth Century Reformation with Martin Luther (1483-1546). From 1510 to 1520, Luther lectured on the Psalms, the books of Hebrews, Romans, and Galatians. As he studied these portions of the Bible, he came to view the use of

terms such as *penance* and *righteousness* by the Roman Church in new ways. In reading and studying the Book of Romans, he was captivated by the passage of Romans 1:16-17, especially the words at the end of v 17, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." He began to realize that the verse was not talking about the active righteousness that we must work to attain for God to accept us, but the passive righteousness that God freely gives to those who believe.

Once Luther realized that it was not by Law keeping that we become righteous before God but through faith in Christ; that the alien righteousness of Christ is imputed to us as a gift, he felt that he "was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates...that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise."

Whereas, before there had been only unrest and uncertainty, now his conscience was at rest, now he was certain of his salvation. Now Luther understood the 'Good News'. Now Luther had assurance. And from that time on nothing could turn his mind from Justification by Faith alone in the Cross-work of Christ. John Calvin wrote his Institutes of the Christian Religion, the people had Bibles in their own language and the battle cry of the Reformation began to form: Grace alone, Faith alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone, and the Christians regained to meaning of the Bible.

Now we look at:

### **How Christians lost (again) the Meaning of Scripture**

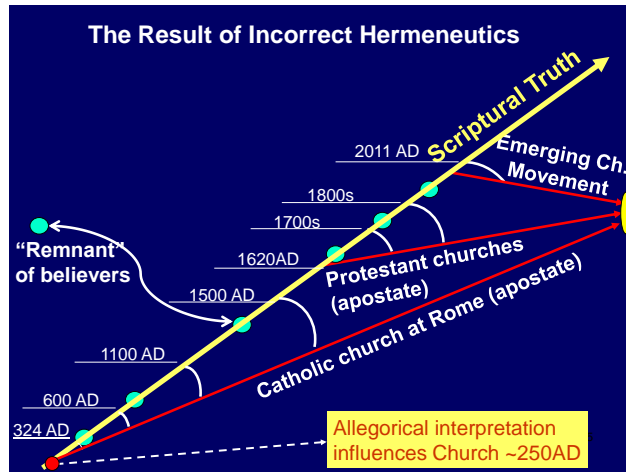
When the Council of Trent convened, everyone understood that the doctrine of Justification was the chief matter to be debated. The Papal Council knew that they must defeat this heresy. They accused Luther of using the "unheard-of-doctrine" of justification by faith alone because he was unable to attack "indulgences" without destroying:

- the efficacy of the sacraments
- the authority of the priest
- purgatory
- the sacrifice of the mass
- all other remedies instituted for the pardon of sin.

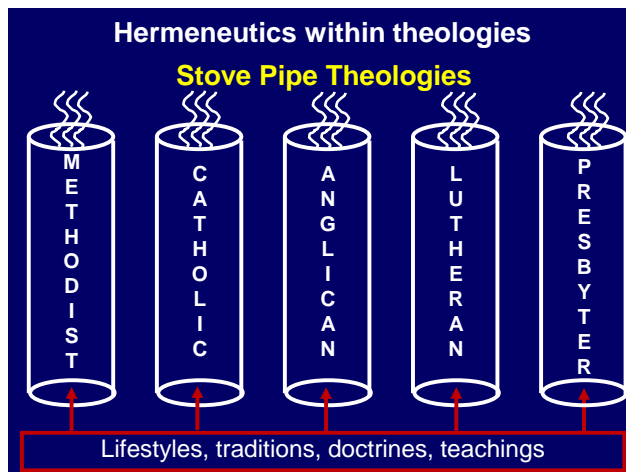
*And that "it was necessary for the establishing of the body of Catholic doctrine to destroy this heresy of justification by faith alone, and to condemn the blasphemies of the enemies of good works."*

The men of the Reformation were courageous, dedicated, and committed to reforming the Roman Church. They had been raised in this tradition, schooled in this tradition, and indoctrinated into this religious system of "Holy Mother, the Church". We can only imagine how difficult it must have been to re-examine so many doctrines and traditions to which they had once dedicated their lives. One the other hand, how freeing it must have been after accepting Scripture's Justification by Faith alone, to clearly see how corrupt this Roman edifice was, and that its foundation was built on the sands of allegorical interpretation and oral tradition.

The Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has a history of over 500 years of “religious movements”; of attempts to define and redefine Christian doctrine through bad hermeneutics.



Speaking of the Church generally, we have become irrational, mystical, sentimental, and self centered in our hymns, our worship, our understanding of what it means to be loyal to Scripture. We’ve allowed ourselves to become complacent. We have been lulled to sleep, thinking that “we’ll always have tomorrow”. We don’t know how to teach and train our children to be the next loyal generation that will understand Divine Viewpoint and desire to “trust and obey” Scripture alone. Some in leadership positions have deliberately mislead their followers to gain fame, power, and money; others, while being “sincere” but having poor interpretational skills (hermeneutics), mislead their followers down another path of unscriptural thinking to the point of where the Gospel of Jesus Christ becomes like a mist over pond water on a cool fall morning. Doctrine has given way to unity; Hermeneutics has given way to experience and feeling.



We have, today, what might be called “stovepipe theologies”, built on calcified creeds of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Content with the knowledge that each has the correct lifestyles, traditions, doctrines, and teachings, Scripture now serves their theology.

Today, we also have the teachings and “traditions” of Kant, Schleiermacher, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Freud thrown into the culture mix, so that people turned into themselves and are concerned more about how you “feel” about a Scriptural passage or doctrine rather than what it is that you “think” about a Scriptural passage or doctrine. The basis of the confusion we see around us today stems from bad hermeneutics. Each passage has one, and only one correct interpretation.

“The Great Commission has stirred no little controversy among laymen, pastors and seminary professors. Much confusion has resulted over typical English translations which begin with the words “Go therefore” (NASB, ESV, NKJV) which, to the untrained eye, appears to be an emphatic command when, in reality, **the only command in verse 19 is “make disciples”** (*matheteusate*)..... A “disciple” (*mathetes*) is a “learner, pupil”. Jesus is commanding them to make “true disciples”. “..... a person must first become a believer in order to qualify to be made into a disciple.” Thus, the passage assumes that in their going out they evangelize the lost. However, the Great Commission is not fulfilled when we do evangelism.....We should not convert them and then go off and leave them.”

Jeremy Thomas

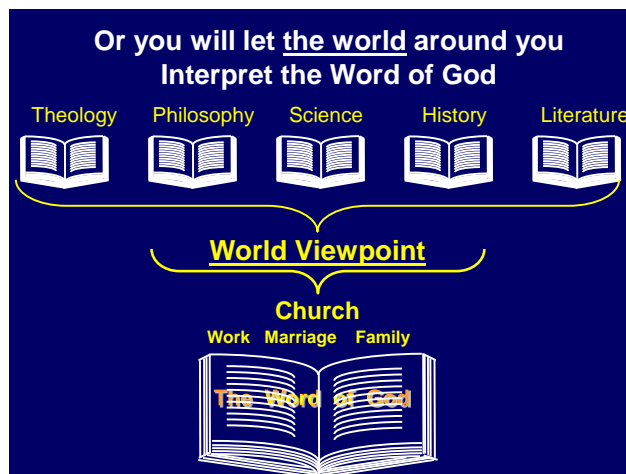
Pastor Jeremy illustrated this in his explanation of something that has been taken for granted in terms of understanding – “The Great Commission”.

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Along the same line, Lordship Salvation leaves people uncertain of their salvation because of a laundry list of “evidences” that they must show to secure their salvation. Others would have people “get right with God” before the presentation of the gospel.



Either you will let the Word of God interpret the world around you...from a Divine Viewpoint. What is meant by divine viewpoint is simply this: the Bible in its entirety from Genesis to revelation expresses one viewpoint of reality, and that is God’s viewpoint of reality. So when we talk about divine viewpoint, we mean that the Scriptures present a viewpoint of every issue of life. It provides the believer with a “framework” for thinking about life.



In contrast to that, Satan has his own system. It’s called it cosmic thinking. The Bible calls it the thinking of the world. That’s what Col 2:8 warns us about, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

We can see the growth of this “philosophy and empty deception” after the Reformation starting in a period called the Enlightenment, starting in the 1600s and lasting until about 1780.

Descartes (1596-1650) is the father of rationalism; John Locke (1632-1704) is the father of modern empiricism (sensory experience), and together they form the thinking of the Enlightenment period. There were good and bad aspects of the Enlightenment, but

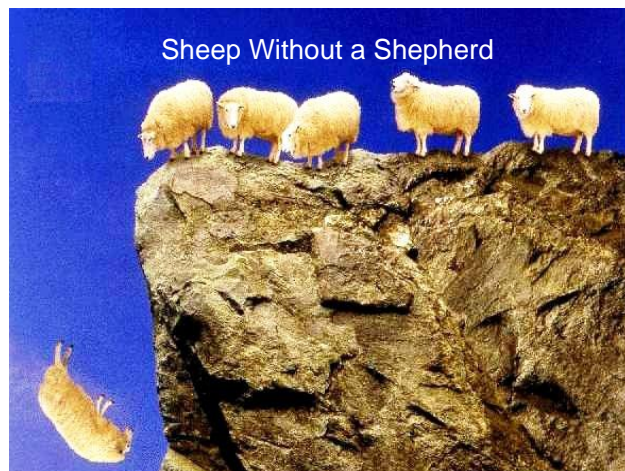
ultimately it is based on the assumption that man, by his human reason and intellect alone, can come to the ultimate answers to solve all of man's problems.

Rationalism and empiricism dominate the scene until a German philosopher by the name of Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) came along and said you can't know things as they "are", you can only know things as you "perceive" them. Well, that destroyed all absolutes and universals; you can only know what you know, you can't know what anybody else knows. So this begins to break down the whole concept of knowledge.

This period is followed by scepticism and existentialism. Existentialism basically says the only way you can find any meaning in life is if we create the meaning for ourselves.

Then we end up in the modern era of what is called postmodernism which has its roots as far back as the 1930s-1950s with intellectual thinkers whose ideas filtered down into the universities and colleges, and continue to destroy all kinds of things in terms of absolutes.

In postmodernism there is no such thing as absolutes. It is different from just relativism in the sense that in the past the relativism that we have had has been primarily individual, now it is shaped a little differently into a social construct. In postmodernism there is the rejection of reason and truth. According to postmodernism truth is "created", not discovered.



Today, mainline Protestant denominational churches now have a "communications executive", a marketing director, and some kind of program-offering for young people, from helping feed the poor to volunteering with youth basketball leagues in low-income neighborhoods. And why are they offering this? Because the average age of their membership is 50-something and their congregational numbers are dropping.

Here what Townhall.com of May 27, 2009 reported:

"The United Methodist Church recently unveiled a \$20 million rebranding effort aimed at attracting younger members to the large but diminishing Protestant group. The new ads will appear over the next four years as part of the denomination's **"Rethink Church"** campaign.

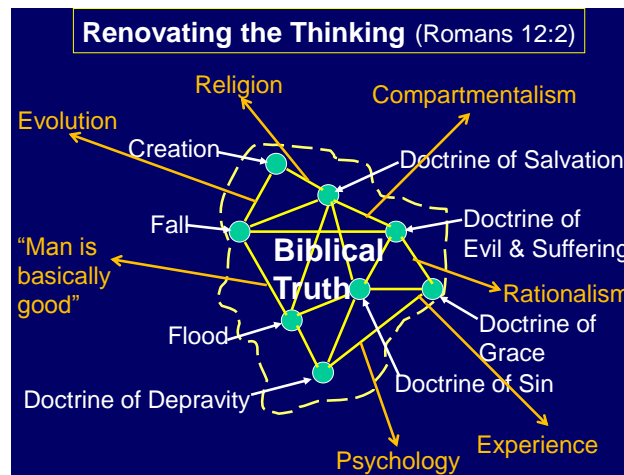
The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has invested nearly \$1.2 million over the past two years launching a similar branding effort based on the theme, "**God's Work, Our Hands.**"

Laura Olson, a Clemson University professor who specializes in religion, said the rebranding efforts likely have their best chance to succeed with young adults who grew up in mainline churches, but who now consider themselves more generally spiritual. But it's not clear how long the denominations can hold onto the young people after they re-enter the church.

"Mainline Protestantism can offer to people who are skeptical of tradition ... something more progressive," Olson said. "By and large, mainline Protestantism is progressive politically and theologically. They have really strong powerful roots in social justice issues. That's their strongest card they have to play."

We live in a time where the Virgin birth, the hypostatic union, the extent of the atonement, the resurrection, scripture, church, the role of men and women, heaven, hell, homosexuality, marriage, family, etc. are being questioned and rejected, or re-interpreted, re-established and promoted as normal, up-to-date, and culturally acceptable.

This is the culture in which we live and we grow up in an educational system where we pick up these cultural values. We watch movies and television that express in their stories the values of that culture, a particular way of thinking. We read books and magazines and they, too, promote the viewpoint of the cultural value system. This is human viewpoint. The Bible calls it "worldliness" and tells us to renovate our thinking in Rom 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...."



That means that we have to learn to identify these human viewpoint ideas that we have absorbed, that have been taught to us, and that we have picked up from living in our culture. We have to identify them in our own thinking so that we can replace them with principles of Biblical doctrine, that is, Divine Viewpoint. That is the whole process of the spiritual life in a nutshell: renovating the thinking. This will only happen because we

make it a priority in our lives to learn how to think as God wants us to think and not to think the way our culture has instructed us to think.

Since the Reformation, there have been multiple breaks from beliefs developed from the interpretation of Scripture, until today we have the establishment of many Protestant churches that are “culturally conformed”. So we find some churches using Scripture plus their tradition, or very little scripture and a lot of ritual, or using Scripture as a morality paddle, or no Scripture and just a pleasant interchange of spiritual experiences and a few songs.

The Roman Catholic Church continues to promote many misguided and scripturally unsound practices (Traditions) – many from a sentimental, oftentimes mystical viewpoint as with Mariology, the study of the traditions and doctrines concerning the Virgin Mary. Feast days are celebrated throughout the year in her honor, along with the dogmas of her Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary bodily into heaven. To repeat the words of the Council of Trent, these are “revelations made to the Apostles either orally by Jesus Christ or by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost and transmitted by the Apostles to the Church”.

The mixture of Holy Scripture, interpreted with bad hermeneutics and the convenient “oral traditions”, stirred by sentimentality and mysticism, have made the Roman Catholic Church a magnet for those desiring a “do it yourself” method of meriting God’s grace for self righteousness. How sad!

The words of Galatians 2:21 come to mind, “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”

You may have heard me say this before, but I think it bears repeating.

The Bible has been the most used, abused, and misused book to prove, or approve the most absurd thinking, grotesque behavior, bizarre cults and religions for centuries.

It is misunderstood, shunned, ignored, belittled, trivialized, and hated.

Yet this book is the most seriously studied, the widely disseminated, critically examined word by word, phrase by phrase, verse by verse of any book ever written - annotated, commented on; given birth to lexicons, dictionaries, concordances, maps, charts, historical backgrounds of related cultures, by the most scholarly of men.

The Council of Elders at this assembly understand the importance of proper hermeneutics, and believe the Bible is, in the fullest sense, the very Word of God, given by inspiration of God, inerrant, infallible, authoritative and sufficient in all matters upon which it touches. The Council will promote generational loyalty, uphold the institutes of marriage and family through Scriptural teaching and will examine traditions in light of Scripture, so that this assembly of believers can be a beacon to the community at large, or be used in whatever manner God wishes to use us.

The saying: “Truth is where you find it” is a human viewpoint cultural adage that misses the mark. What will you do when you’ve gathered as much human “truth” as you can during the course of your life, and suffer the loss of your soul for eternity?

Sometimes, we are more concerned about being politically correct than defending biblical truth. Many have separated the “Bible” from “reality”. “Faith has no business in the real world”, they say. Meanwhile, Satan continues to stir up confusion in the minds of prideful people, and lulls the complacent to sleep. And yet we know the countdown has begun to the end of history with the event of the Ascension and Session of Christ. The Bible tells us that while He sits at the right hand of the Father, waiting to reign, He directs the body of believers (His Church-those of us here and around the world), having provided the Holy Spirit who regenerated us, indwells us, makes us part of the Royal Family, seals us with His Seal for eternal security, Intercedes for us because we don’t always know how to pray, and gives each of us one or more spiritual gifts.

Christ is now calling men and women out of the Dominion of Satan here on earth into His Church in spite of Satan’s attempts at misdirection, temptations, and promises. And how does Christ do this “calling”? He uses His “ambassadors”, you and me, to “plant”, or to “water” the Gospel message. That is why we keep reading, studying, listening to the Word of God, ever learning - in order to be prepared for His use, as unworthy as we are, knowing that neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. (1 Cor. 3:7) Yet, Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God. (Rom 10:17). This is how parents prepare themselves to bring their children to Christ. This is how a man prepares himself before marriage to be a leader. This is how a young woman prepares herself to be a helper in marriage. This is how the husband leads his family, loves his wife, and cares for their spiritual needs. This is how generational loyalty to God is accomplished.

And we are running out of time. Just like the Flood event, people had 120 years of grace before judgment. From the event of the Ascension and Session of Christ till now, it has been almost 2000 years. Soon he will stand up and come take His Bride, the Church, to Himself, before terrible things happen. The judgments that will come are described as nothing the world has ever seen before or will ever see again.

Let us remain faithful in our efforts to interpret Scripture properly as we build precept upon precept to the understanding of the whole counsel of God, so we can truly renovate our thinking with Biblical Truth.

Let’s pray.