

**Repentance is the Whole Life of the Christian:  
Some Points On the Ongoing Need for Church Reform**

**Submitted to the Church by  
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*Introduction: The Ongoing Need for Reform*

Around five hundred years ago God moved among many believers and congregations of the Church in western Europe to correct certain abuses and superstitions that had arisen in the faith and practice of Christians. These false practices had taken root in the early middle ages through cultural syncretism, when Europe's illiterate masses were still in their early generations of being Christianized and pagan customs still gripped much of their imagination; falsehood and syncretism came eventually to flourish in the hierarchies of the Catholic Church until many such practices and beliefs were dogmatized. The corrective movement is called the Protestant or Magisterial Reformation. Among its outcomes is the splintering of Western Christianity into numerous Christian communities that have no relationship with the Roman Catholic episcopacy.

The Protestant Reformation has itself been fraught with misunderstandings and abuses, so that many of its adherents supposed they were doing the work of God by inciting violence against those of other faiths and practices. However the Reformation recovered the scriptures as the rule for faith and the plan of salvation contained therein for the hope of the sinner, and motivated the publication of the Bible into innumerable languages, so that the Bible is the most widely published and available book in the world. Over time the Protestant traditions curtailed many errors regarding clerical offices, the veneration of saints, and the state of the soul after death. It is right and proper to thank God and celebrate that the Reformation occurred.

Over the course of time Protestant scholars and academics used their freedoms of conscience and thought to raise new doctrines touching the nature of God, the use of the scriptures, and the basis of salvation, until it became standard in many divinity schools throughout the Atlantic World to teach the following: that the belief in God's personal involvement in history and in the lives of individuals was a superstition and that God was remote; that the doctrine of a Triune God worshiped as One God in three persons, was all nonsense; that the Bible was a self-contradicting assemblage of diverse documents redacted several times and fraught with factual errors; that miracle accounts are fables; that Jesus of Nazareth was merely a human being whose main achievement was to show the world the practice of the virtues God desires of us; that virtues are exercised by our will, and that it is according to our practice of virtue that we will be judged and rewarded for eternal life.

These new doctrines provoked others to seek to preserve the integrity of their received faith. They clung to a high view of the scriptures as divine self-revelation both inspired and superintended by God, and the only perfect standard for faith. By early in the twentieth century, with advances in scientific knowledge and the construction of new models of history and reality, the fault-lines in Protestant/Evangelical thought were described as Modernism versus Fundamentalism. Then an approach was pioneered called Neo-orthodoxy, which shored up the traditional doctrines of the Protestant/Evangelical Church while accounting for advances in other spheres of knowledge.

Yet strict traditionalists who have rejected Neo-orthodoxy have erected extra-Biblical schemes of both the past and the future that are based on faulty hermeneutics, and have spoken in doctrinaire terms on issues entirely unaddressed by the scriptures themselves, as though God must be defended and is somehow less than sovereign over all truth. Meanwhile the tendency

among theological liberals has remained to place greater faith in fashionable theories emerging from the physical and social sciences, and greater skepticism on the scriptures as the standard of God's self-revelation. Liberal Christians have in general been puffed up by their knowledge of worldly models and philosophies; conservative Christians have in general been puffed up by their doctrinal precision; those who have claimed a "middle way" have been just as puffed up by their own sense of superiority towards what they consider the philosophical, theological and exegetical shortcomings of the others on either side. In all cases where knowledge has puffed up, love has been diminished. The lack of Christ-like, agape love marked by meekness and service first across Protestantism's confessional boundaries, and for the last century across its theological poles, has harmed the overall witness of the Church to the world.

Modernism, Fundamentalism, and the middle ways that emerged through Neo-Orthodoxy, post-criticism and other emergent hermeneutics, were variously impacted and reinterpreted by the Modern Missionary Movement of the nineteenth century, and in the twentieth century by two world wars, the modern formation of a reconstituted Israel, the Cold War, and the advance of material prosperity in western Europe, the British Commonwealth, Canada, and the United States. With the end of the Cold War the United States emerged as the only hegemonic global power in the world. From the end of the Cold War the world has entered a new chapter of global conflict defined by radical jihadism.

With the withdrawal of imperialist governments indigenous leaders from mission churches around the globe have been finding their own voice. In many cases these 2/3's-World Christians have expressed a prophetic critique of the overall theological milieu of prosperous Western Protestantism with its significant blind-spots to the conditions of the persecuted Church and to the widening gaps between the world's rich and poor.

In the traditional bastions of Protestant heritage most of the heirs of the confessions and theological orientations have absorbed the materialistic values and concerns of the prosperous Western societies in which they live. As a result the laity have shifted their priorities to accommodate and syncretize materialistic ambitions and concerns, in most cases without theological reflection. As western societies have increasingly abandoned the Church the liberal, conservative and middle-way Protestants and Evangelicals have argued among themselves about ways to maintain their relevance to their world, their legal privileges and immunities, and so forth. Protestant and Evangelical communities from all three theological orientations have been spiritually compromised by the prosperity of their society; with the neglect of discipleship and catechesis, these communities have seen the values in their communicants decisively shaped by the worldly distractions and deceptions that come with wealth and the cares of the flesh.

Liberal, Conservative and Middle Way churches all alike have had trained pastors, leaders and self-declared spokespersons who have approached their neighbors, their perceived opponents, and their governments not as prophets of God's will and character but as pundits of special interest. In order to preserve the comforts and conveniences of a materialistic Church, in order to avoid the witness of suffering by establishing and then maintaining a legal environment friendly to their own favorite Biblical values, and in order to secure the pleasures that are the benefits of financial opulence, the Protestant leaders across the spectrum have departed from their witness to the gospel in the following errors of practice:

First, they have promoted political alliances and instructed their adherents to compromise with godless political hacks and to trust the godless to implement promises that have only ever amounted to the most negligible short-term legal gains. This has come at the cost of alienating an electorate that is increasingly cynical of government and embittered toward the Church.

Second, they have spoken from a position of hubris rather than from the humble fear of God. Arrogating to themselves the authority that springs from out of their own wisdom, virtue, and rhetorical flair, they have sought to convey among the worldly the impression that the Protestant faith is authentic and relevant to worldly concerns, and have done so by adopting the world's own values so that those values and distractions have come to steer the worship and service culture of the local congregation. As was true in the Middle Ages, syncretism at the popular level has subsumed the Church and is now flourishing, unreflected and unrepented, in its hierarchies and schools.

Third, the Protestant faiths, their pastors and adherents across the spectrum, have failed to engage the world as repentant people bearing the fruits that are fitting of repentance; rather we have presumed to call ourselves "Children of Abraham" – that is, the elect of God – as though we were somehow exempt from the very spiritual fruits that we in our punditry and hubris have demanded from a lost and godless world. The overall result is that we are being "tuned out," and the impact of Protestant churches in the prosperous west is shrinking.

Our increasing irrelevance to worldly people is not in and of itself a cause for finding fault within ourselves. This is to be expected, indeed, when Christians set an authentic witness to the true Gospel of God. We are at fault, however, where our marginalization and irrelevance are the result of our own hypocrisies, lack of grace, unrepentant spirits, fear of Truth, and worldly conformity. Where repentance is lacking, what remains is a fearsome prospect of judgment. At the time of writing such a season may be in the early stages of being visited on the churches of prosperous western societies.

To offer hope and perspective so that the current season proves redemptive rather than destructive to the soul of the western Protestant movement, I submit the following statements to

recall the full spectrum of the Protestant Church to its identity and orientation as the People of God, the People of the Word, a Repentant People.

*I. God, Christ, and Reconciliation*

1. Jesus Christ is the supreme self-revelation of God, very God of very God, the perfect image of the invisible God.
2. Jesus Christ has once and for all time effected the salvation of humankind from sin, the curse on sin, and eternal death which has been divinely decreed as punishment for sin, through his own sinless life upon Earth, his atoning death, his resurrection from the dead, and his exaltation to heaven to judge the living and the dead.
3. The salvation of the sinner is that we are rescued from God's wrath on sin which is the curse of death, and share, each one individually, in the resurrection into eternal life in the company of Jesus Christ.
4. Because of God's love for each person, God in grace alone calls each person to receive this great salvation by means of faith: in grace alone God issues the call and orchestrates the summons to faith, and the completion of faith is God's gift of the Spirit of Christ, our seal of salvation, who is given to us also by grace alone.
5. Therefore it is God's grace alone by which the person is declared justified by God's fiat, and it is by faith alone that this great salvation is received.
6. When the gift of our justification in Christ is received in faith, it is then that God's Spirit begins to be a living, active agent within the person:
  - awakening the mind, heart, soul and conscience to godliness and instructing the person in righteous living and the ethics of Christ;

- bearing fruits that are the harvest of righteousness sown in the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control;
- bestowing Spiritual gifts (in addition to the grace and seal of salvation) that advance one's testimony of a personal relationship with Christ and builds the Church as a whole in its mission to the world of lost sinners.

(An Illustration: God's grace of justification, the salvation of the soul for eternal life, is received as one receives a wrapped gift. Rather than putting the gift unopened on a shelf to admire for its own sake, one unwraps the gift and puts the gift to use as the gift is intended.)

7. This faith is empowered by God's grace to make the person an active, ethical agent, a representative and ambassador of God's salvation in the way the person lives, in the temptations one overcomes, in the trials that are patiently borne, in the words and deeds that testify not to oneself and one's accomplishments in the flesh, but testify wholly and solely to the grace of God for the promotion of God's glory.
8. Faith is a function of one's relationship with the living Lord and Savior, it is not a perfection of the person nor does it bring a static state to the soul.
9. The failure of the believer to obey God in every matter and empower the Spirit in all things is a daily occurrence.
10. We fail because sin still functions within us as we live in these bodies of sin-tainted, sin-oriented flesh.
11. We fail according to the first, or old, nature of sin; the failures and sins of the justified believer in Jesus are both conscious to the believer and beneath the consciousness, and they take the form both of doing what is wrong and failing to do what is right, of

- being complacent and indifferent to righteousness and eager and ambitious for sating one's appetites and/or achieving vainglory.
12. Therefore conscious, regular repentance is a function of godly faith in the justified, awakened and instructed soul.

*II. Repentance is the Whole Life of the Christian*

13. Jesus the Christ, the Word of God, has spoken through the scriptures, whose authors he infallibly inspired through his own Spirit, and in this self-revelation began his gospel with the message, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." This command of Jesus was the premise of the first argument made by Martin Luther on the document that sparked the Reformation: "Repentance is the whole life of the Christian." (As stated by the Reformer Martin Luther in the first of his *95 Theses*.)
14. Repentance includes but is not limited to sorrow for immoral and unchaste deeds in thought, motive and action, with intent to avoid such sins going forward.
15. Repentance also encompasses the recognition of one's own insufficiency to effect one's will for righteousness and goodness, and the recognition of the need for an active, saving power and agency from beyond oneself.
16. Repentance is supremely the act of acknowledging that one is unholy in the human nature received at one's conception and birth, that God's holy nature is alien to oneself, and that these natures are incompatible and thus alienated from each other; one cannot stand before God apart from the mercy of God.

17. The seal of the Holy Spirit upon oneself, given as God's gift in grace, is alone of all things in heaven and on earth that can make one capable of both enduring and of joyfully participating in God's presence and glory for eternity.
18. The promise of repentance is that God draws near to the humble, for "a humble and contrite heart God will not despise."
19. The warning to repent is that God remains distant from the proud, that is, the unrepentant. The unrepentant are those who believe themselves to be innocent of any great sins and see their transgressions as insignificant matters compared to their motives with which they justify in themselves. The proud see themselves sufficient in their own goodness, and believe themselves powerful in and of themselves to avoid judgment on sin and to obtain merits and rewards in eternal life.
20. Repentance is clearly taught and urged by preachers and teachers committed to rightly testifying to the truth, for the reason that repentance is clearly commanded in the scriptures which God has formed and bestowed upon the world as a gift.

### *III. The Scriptures are God's Word*

21. The scriptures (the short Protestant canon) are the divine self-revelation of God's will, character, and purpose for Creation and humankind.
22. The scriptures testify that there is one true God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth and of all life, who made covenant faith with Israel; this same God is self-revealed as God the Spirit sowing and sealing eternal life in the souls of the converted and infallibly inspiring the human authors of scripture; this same God is the Christ of Heaven and

of Israel, who is called the Divine Word and Son of the Father, incarnate in Jesus Christ.

23. The self-revealing story of God described in the scriptures points supremely to the expectation of salvation from a promised Christ, and the fulfillment of this promise in the incarnation of God the Divine Son into human flesh as Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus' distinctive ministry, death and resurrection, and his roles as our savior from our sins, sender of the Holy Spirit, and judge over the living and the dead, are described in the gospels, explained in the New Testament's other writings, and are given faithful doctrinal formulation in the ancient ecumenical creeds.
24. The scriptures, weighted with this testimony, are provided for the edification of believers for public proclamation, private discussion, and personal devotion, that we may be transformed by faith through the renewing of our minds.
25. Unless read in faith the scriptures can only be negligibly understood.

#### *IV. Reading the Scriptures to Understand Them*

26. Even though a discerning view of history and our present age can hardly allow an optimistic view of humankind, the scriptures present a stumbling block to many who assume humankind is good by nature and deserving of merits. Such persons are confused that God in the scriptures has testified against us of our rebellion, sin, and corruption.
27. The scriptures in all of their forms, genres, and diversity of authors and times and contexts, are most completely comprehended when one accepts on faith the premise

- that the soul that sins deserves to die and shall indeed perish except and unless God in mercy intervenes.
28. That all human beings sin, are conceived in sin and born sinful, and fall short of the glory of God, is an uncompromised and absolute tenet of scripture –this is God’s word and warning to us, and the urge to repent in light of God’s desire to reconcile and save us is a universal Word from God to all people in all times and places.
  29. No one is able to justify themselves based on their attributes at birth, predilections, heritage, upbringing, or the moral hierarchies that human beings so proudly and so often construct among ourselves based on cultural definitions of virtue.
  30. Unless it is understood that the soul that sins deserves to die, and that all have sinned and all deserve to die, the Bible’s offer and promise of grace is poorly understood, poorly preached, and poorly modeled, doing great disservice to Christ and the gospel.

V. *Conspectus on the Western Protestant Church*

A. *Liberal Christianity*

31. Five hundred years after the dawn of the Magisterial Reformation, confusions abound among Protestants who have, for various self-justifying reasons, abandoned the First Principle of the Reformation, which is that *God’s grace is on the sinner who repents*.
32. Among the confusions that now abound is the notion that, depending on one’s own efforts and merits, a person may reach the place of God’s favor on their own.
33. A pernicious belief has entered in among liberal Christians that the Bible cannot be trusted on what God has decreed to be sinful. This leads to rejecting the notion that

- the Holy Spirit convicts of the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and also leads to the further erroneous supposition that God's convictions change because the Mind of God changes.
34. Many of the liberal Christian ilk make a grave mistake in supposing that God changes and evolves. Some speak of God growing up to become more mature than in the past, a point that is negotiated among some in the Middle Way of neo-orthodoxy. The upshot of this error is that what God in ignorance and bigotry punished as sin thousands of years ago (i.e. praying to idols, self-defining sexual morality, etc.) is just fine to do today because God has evolved, changed, become more mature, etc.
  35. Liberals reject much of the Bible as the revelation of God's will for our lives and behaviors today, its ethical force being deconstructed and severely circumscribed.
  36. For many liberals the Bible is mainly useful as a testimony for a God whose consciousness evolves from an Old Testament relationship of wrath to a New Testament story of a pacifist philosopher named Jesus who was martyred, but whose stirring memory lives on, much like the memories of the twentieth-century martyrs Ghandi, Martin Luther King and John Lennon.
  37. To uphold this, for many liberals, means editing the New Testament. Words of Jesus that sound too much like the warnings of a wrathful Old Testament God are rejected as not coming from him but being put into his mouth by other, less-inspired authors. The contents of each epistle must also be separated out according to what was really a word from an evolving God versus the bigoted consciousness of the writer getting in the way.

38. Erroneous, unbiblical philosophies of humanist optimism serve to make Christ's atoning sacrifice for the sinner a mere act of martyrdom and to smear the Christian's testimony with confusion.
39. Among the heterodox customs and teachings to which liberal Christians are succumbing, is an ecumenicity that promotes and celebrates the worship of false gods and false spirits as legitimate pilgrim journeys for the human spirit.
40. In many liberals this ecumenical priority is the product of a growing belief in Universalism, which is the doctrine that all humankind will eventually appropriate the grace of God and so be saved.

*B. Neo-Orthodox or "Middle Way" or "Classical" Christians*

41. Vigor, rigor, meekness and humility describe the Middle Way Christians at their best. Whether these are mainline conservatives still oriented to the piety and grace manifest in their confessions, or mainstream evangelicals looking to a sounder foundation on which the Church is established as a global, community endeavor, it seems that the most productive work in the task of doing theology is accomplished in this milieu.
42. However, confusion plagues this Middle Way. This confusion is caused in part by a reluctance to make any doctrine or issue a matter either of dogmatism or of discipline.
43. Although exuding much conceitedness concerning their theological culture's exegetical precision and hermeneutical depth, adherents to the Middle Way lack self-confidence in their own affirmations and are rather more self-defensive when it comes to their doctrinal and denominational peculiarities.

44. A call to clarity is a call for justice, so that people may know for themselves where they stand in relation to a Church's doctrine and discipline; neither clarity nor justice are tantamount to legalism.
45. As a result, while community is given such priority in the Middle Way, the boundaries of that community are uncertain. Flexibility is well and good, until there are clear transgressions even of such minimal rules as do exist. Then there is much wringing of hands, and all of those involved begin to think of themselves as having been injured, and since the process for arriving at a judgment on a matter seems to be steered more by intuition than by a constitution, rarely are such judgments hailed by all as the doing of justice.
46. Middle Way Churches are not distinguished from other the rest of the Protestants in the matter of Biblical illiteracy among laity and clergy alike. This illiteracy is the result of an unconcerned and unaccountable discipleship which leaves the Bible unread, unheard and untaught.
47. With Biblical illiteracy comes the error that God's grace excuses us from all things concerning our discipleship, including, our stewardship to the church, our efforts at personal evangelism, and our redemptive service in the world.
48. Particularly in cultures and societies that enjoy material plenty, there is a confusion in Middle Way churches whereby envy, ambition and avarice have become virtues held alongside a gospel of a cheap and fruitless grace.
49. A misappropriated doctrine of the life and function of the Holy Spirit has too many self-described born-again believers keeping their Bibles closed while they blindly

presume their own personal alignment with God's Will on the terms of their own opinions, good intentions, and politics.

*C. Biblicist and Fundamentalist Christians*

50. Further confusion among theological conservatives, sown by the Magisterial Reformers themselves, has reduced the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, which urges the distinctive testimonies of meekness, humility, and love for one's enemies, as being inapplicable to followers of Jesus at certain times and in certain dispensations, and are applicable only at other times and in other dispensations.
51. A fetishism has consumed and splintered Biblicists into a fractured community of innumerable and oppositional sects and factions, so that a fixed belief in a secondary matter becomes in many a litmus test for ordination, membership, and in some cases even assurance of salvation. These fetishes arise out of over-emphasizing a particular doctrine to the exclusion of other truths. Six such fetishes are: Decisional conversion, Double-predestination, Sanctification, Eschatology, the over-definition of Biblical Inspiration, and Israel.
52. *Decisional conversion*: The new birth is an essential dimension of the Christian pilgrimage. It becomes a fetish when the priority for the individual's conscious choice for believing in Jesus Christ becomes the basis for a one-time only sinner's prayer, rather than the basis for an ongoing, fruitful life of discipleship in repentant faith. This fetish is sometimes caricatured or satirized as "fire insurance."

53. *A TULIP<sup>1</sup> fetish, especially of “Double-predestination.”* The theological positions of Calvinism organized as the acronym TULIP are major themes in many evangelical circles of Calvinist orientation. TULIP becomes a fetish when the doctrine of the sovereign election of God *becomes an excuse to be complacent* about one’s own discipleship, repentant living, and whole-life testimony. This is really the same error as the decisional fetish, in that a doctrinal abstraction takes the place of a living relationship of daily obedience with the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no Biblical warrant whatsoever to take TULIP theology and turn it into a reason to be fruitless in our lives and smug concerning our destinies.

54. *Sanctification:* The process of being made holy through the growing presence of the Holy Spirit in one’s life is that process by which sin is put in remission and the fruits of the Spirit are fostered. This logical and straight-forward Biblical description of the believer’s spiritual journey is based on scripture’s premise that the believer’s life and will are now inhabited by the living presence of God, who transforms the mind and disposes our bodies to become “living sacrifices” that glorify God before the world. Yet there are arguments over when sanctification occurs and what the impact of the living Holy Spirit in the life of the believer ought to be. Some have turned sanctification into the theological fetish of perfectionism and all of its associated absurdity and legalism; some have associated sanctification with a fetish for giddiness and enthusiasm independent of any anchor in redemptive living; some have

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<sup>1</sup>TULIP is an acronym that summarizes the findings of the Calvinist theologians at the Synod of Dort. T=Total Depravity; U=Unconditional Election; L=Limited Atonement; I=Irresistible Grace; P=Perseverance of the Saints. It is not the purpose of this document to either defend or deconstruct major Protestant theological orientations. Only in the sense that doctrinal pieces become overly-dogmatized to the exclusion of other valid apostolic, scriptural views does any doctrine become a “fetish.”

abstracted sanctification completely and declared in a new Antinomianism that the ethical actualization of the Living Presence of God is neither necessary nor pertinent. These fetishes and confusions have led to unfortunate polarizations within conservative, evangelical, Biblically-oriented traditions, so that some groups on the one hand have lost all sense of community discipline while others are imposing legalisms, and still others associate becoming “holy” with ecstatic displays in a worship service rather than ethical conduct the rest of the week. I would pose that if the word “sanctification” is no inspiration to a godly life but rather a distraction to provoke only abstract theological arguments, then speak of it no more: rather, speak of “discipleship,” “commitment,” and “testimony.”

#### 55. Eschatology:

The Christian hope is an essential dimension of the Christian life. The conviction that we will actually be raised from the dead in new, eternal bodies is a liberating doctrine that brings courage to the believer. Any system or doctrine from eschatology can become a fetish when, as with all other abuses of doctrine, it becomes an excuse for the believer to abandon redemptive, ethical living. Stewardship, evangelism, compassion, the hunger and thirst for righteous justice, meekness and humility, are to set apart the believer in Jesus from the world, in every generation, without exception. There is no Biblical warrant for wasting natural resources, for abandoning sound and self-sustaining economic and financial principles, for withholding compassion, for refusing to evangelize based on some dogma about the manner of the Kingdom’s inauguration, or for being biased, partisan, or unconcerned about justice. Many Bible readers and teachers have peered into texts of prophecy and apocalypse as a dabbler

peers into a crystal ball, hoping to find a time-line of the future as a means of securing power over it, and tying apocalyptic images to the political entities and technology of their own time . But only the Christ is worthy to break the seals on the scroll of the future. We are called to live into the future as faithful witnesses of our redemption and salvation, we are not called to treat the scriptures as though they give us magical insights or power over the future.

56. Over-definition of scripture's perfection and function:

A fifth fetish is the tendency of evangelicals to over-define the Bible's perfection and function. It is essential to teach the authority, inspiration, and reliability of the scriptures. However it is a fetish to attempt to distil a high view of scripture into a framework that makes the Bible more akin to a book of magic than to a testament of the Will of God.

- a) Some believe they have answered every objection by creating the "original autographs" hypothesis, by which it is said that all so-called errors and contradictions are resolved in the documents as first written by the authors, and that the errors were introduced later by copyists. Consider the logical outcomes of such a fetish:
  - i.) This belief that only the original autographs are correct makes the Bible in your hands untrustworthy, as indeed are any of the extant documents we have to make our modern translations, all for the sake of a doctrine of a "perfect autograph" that is no longer extant for any of the Bible's writings.
  - ii.) Most of the Bible is oral in origin. Jesus Christ taught his Hebrew followers in Aramaic and occasionally in Hebrew, yet his words were first written in Greek. No language transfers exact concepts word for word. So to posit that the four gospels are without error in their original autograph, is to posit that

they are as equally perfect as the words actually spoken by Jesus in his flesh. In the fetish of scriptural inerrancy in its autographs we no longer need Jesus as God's Living Word, for our relationship is no longer with a person, but with words; The Bible becomes Magic. This may seem to be an absurd critique to many, however, consider how many read and use the Bible: They lift out half a verse with no regard to its story, setting, authorship, and function, in order to "claim" something that will make their lives more comfortable and convenient. That is magic thinking, and it besets evangelicals who suppose that this is a high view of the scriptures.

- iii.) The original autographs hypothesis undoes the miracle of Pentecost, in Acts 2. Whereas the Spirit empowered people to hear the gospel in their own language, the original autographs hypothesis requires that the purest message from God can only be distilled in the Koine dialect of Greek and in various evolutions of the Hebrew language.
- iv.) But now you will call me a liberal because I implore you, evangelicals, to read the Bible MORE than you do, and to read it for DISCIPLESHIP rather than MAGIC. In the genealogy of Matthew One Matthew declares fourteen generations between Abraham and David, fourteen between David and Jeconiah, and fourteen between Jeconiah and Joseph "the husband of Mary." Any one may turn to the genealogies of the kings in the Old Testament and find that there are seventeen between David and Jeconiah. To call this a discrepancy, and then to claim that this has to have been "fixed" in an original

autograph, is to completely ignore the spiritual force of what Matthew is doing. Neither will I tell you. Go, be a disciple, and study the scriptures.

b. Inerrancy, Infallibility, Questions of Faith and Science: So concerned are the fetishists at making sure the Bible is perfect in their own minds that they ignore such devices known to our languages as hyperbole, metaphor, poetry and lyric, to force the Bible to affirm things of no value to the salvation of the soul or to one's relationship to God. So a conviction about the start date of Creation, the mechanical devices of God in forming life, and the breadth of Noah's flood, all become litmus tests by which someone is said to be a true believer or not. Energies that should be poured into evangelism and compassion than become redirected into efforts at getting elected to school-boards in order to dictate science and history curriculum in the public schools.

The Bible is a testament of God's will to form us in faith and teach us the way to live. No matter how highly we esteem the Bible, any approach we take to the scriptures that give us excuses to deny their ethical force in our lives is a fetish. Sometimes we can learn from the discrepancy, but we miss that opportunity if we chalk up all discrepancies to the errors of human copyists. And so in the four gospels we find women are the first to whom the Risen Lord appears, but oh dear, there is a discrepancy as to which women and how many. Except, of course, that it is ALWAYS women to whom he appears first, and in every single gospel, one of those women is Mary Magdalene. Maybe we learn MORE *from what four different authors hold in common*, than we do from fretting over so-called discrepancies.

In Second Kings David is said to pay 50 pieces of silver for the plot of land which would eventually become the location of the temple. In First Chronicles he is said to pay

600 pieces of gold, a value which for illustration we will say is 1,000 times the one first stated (it would be inflated by AT LEAST that amount). Rather than fretting over “which original autograph” would supposedly “fix” this contradiction, perhaps it is more productive for your soul to explore the purposes of the Chronicler in elaborating such a lavish expense.

c. These fetishists would have the Bible function as a modern newspaper, a modern secondary text of history, and a modern lab report. God did not wait until these genres were invented to disclose the written Word. If we truly agree that the Bible is perfect in disclosing God’s will for our faith, doctrine, and conduct, than we believe this perfection is revealed in Bible’s own genres as they function by their own rules. That means we must be humble; to read the Bible for faith is to cross cultural, language, and generation barriers in order that we might sit ourselves at the feet of the apostles (Acts 2:42). Biblical faith puts us under the authority of ancient minds. Our anachronisms and over-definitions do nothing to contribute to the inspiration and authority of their testimony.

6.) Israel: Concern for Israel is a justified Biblical priority as shown in Romans 9-11.

The theological dilemmas posed by the Apostle Paul are also resolved in the same series of chapters, and this resolution is confirmed in the Book of Hebrews. These resolutions are not relativized by any further revelation, not even the Book of Revelation. Yet the concern over Israel has taken a number of fetishes.

a. Some move in the direction of Anti-Semitism, as egregious a misreading of the scriptures as can be found.

- b. Some move in the direction of supersessionism, the belief (as though ignorant of Romans 11:11-21) that the Gentile Church supersedes Israel as heirs of the promises as signaled by the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.
- c. Some move to a view that adherents to Judaism can be saved apart from faith in Jesus Christ.
- d. And some evangelicals exert political pressure on world governments to absolve the modern nation-state of Israel from any ethical responsibility.

The following facts must be stated to dispel the fetishes at all political and theological poles:

- Paul is clear that Gentiles are grafted onto a Jewish tree of salvation. Israel encompasses the Church in one community of salvation; the Church neither encompasses Israel nor rejects Israel.
- Salvation into eternal life is sealed by the blood of Jesus Christ, whom God raised from the dead to become judge of the world. There is no other name or covenant by which we must be saved.
- No country is above ethical accountability and prophetic remonstrance. If Biblical Israel, whose kings were anointed by promise, was accountable to God and judged, how much more modern Israel, a secular nation state which funds free abortions and recognizes same-sex unions performed in other countries?
- The modern state of Israel is a functioning western-style democracy, and its right to exist in modern times is as equally legitimate as is Kuwait's, Pakistan's, and several post-colonial African countries. This is the reason

that support for Israel is both ethical and strategic from a geo-political perspective; support for the modern state of Israel as it is now constituted should have nothing whatsoever to do with evangelical fetishes.

*D. The Whole Protestant Church and the Political Chasm*

57. Churches and Christians both liberal and conservative are in the forefront of concocting political deals and compromises with godless powers, and they often excoriate their perceived political opponents and bring them to rhetorical or real violence rather than loving our enemies as Christ commanded.
58. Self-serving alliances with godless political powers and factions have enabled Christians both liberal and evangelical to engage in bombastic vitriol towards those with whom they disagree. This has rightly exposed all Protestants to charges of hypocrisy, since the Beatitudes and fruits of the Spirit and other Biblical injunctions to meekness, kindness and humility, have been so plainly abandoned that even the world can tell the difference between what Jesus said and what his followers do.
59. Hypocrisy and graceless partisanship among Protestant Liberals and Evangelicals negate the impact of the Church as a whole in our service to the world, and grievously and to God's great sorrow hinder the salvation of the lost.

*VI. Conclusion: Repentance is the Whole Life of the Christian*

60. Christians are called to repentance; for it is our whole life, as Christians, to acknowledge our need for forgiveness on the merits of Christ's blood alone, and our need for God's Spirit which has sealed us for eternal life so to fruitfully beatify our

lives now, and to instruct us in God's Word, that we might become light to the world, salt to the earth, and the fragrance of Christ to cultures and societies that are desperately lost.

61. The truly repentant life will be driven by the Spirit to the Word, Sacraments, and the fellowship of other believers; that is, their hearts will compel them into the Church.

62. It behooves the Church, therefore, to be about the discipleship of the repentant, and, by the disciplines inherent in instruction and absolution, to elicit the fruits fitting of repentance, in order to empower the Spirit's gifts accorded to each believer, and to strengthen each believer's conscience.

Respectfully Submitted,

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