

BACKSTAGE

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1. Man's Apologetics vs. God's Apologetics

Man's Apologetics:

"The Allure of Gentleness: Defending the Faith in the Manner of Jesus" (Dallas Willard)

God's Apologetics:

Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, "Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!" (John 2:15-16)

Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. (Mark 3:4-5)

* * *

Defending the faith "in the manner of Jesus"? Which Jesus? The "allure" is in conforming to the world's standard of polite conversation. The "allure" is in inventing a different Jesus, a Jesus that you prefer, and then tell people to follow that one. Our apologetics must defend against this kind of apologetics. If we want to be "gentle" in the defense of the faith, then go heal the sick with miracles. That's defending the faith "in the manner of Jesus."

2. Man's Gospel vs. God's Gospel

Man's Gospel:

"Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart" (J. D. Greear)

God's Gospel:

I pray...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. (Ephesians 3:16-17)

* * *

I get the point that people are trying to make. Much of modern preaching is misleading. But the people who keep saying "Stop asking Jesus into your heart" or "The gospel never teaches us to ask Jesus into our hearts" are often just additional examples of the problem. They accuse people of turning the gospel into misleading slogans, but they do the same thing themselves. Even their corrections are misleading slogans.

The criminal on the cross was saved when he said to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Apparently there was enough implied understanding behind the statement. There is nothing wrong for someone to pray, "Jesus, come into my heart." The Bible explicitly uses this language in the context of prayer and in the context of doctrine. And there is nothing wrong with expecting to receive salvation at a certain point in time with a prayer. The real issue is whether someone who says this has enough implied understanding behind the statement.

Of course we should ask Jesus into our hearts. There is a right context to it and a wrong context to it. But to say don't do it or that the Bible does not teach it is to preach a different gospel. No matter what correction you need to make about somebody, you should never say something like, "Stop confessing Jesus as Lord" or "Stop saying Jesus is the Son of God." When you do that, you become a worse heretic.

3. Man's Christianity vs. God's Christianity

Man's Christianity:

"Don't Waste Your Cancer" (John Piper)

God's Christianity:

He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. (Psalm 103:3)

According to your faith be it unto you. (Matthew 9:29)

And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. (James 5:15)

* * *

Don't waste your cancer? Are you kidding me? Don't waste your redemption! Don't waste the blood of Christ! Jesus took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses (Matthew 8:16-17).

Every point in this small book is either misleading or the opposite of what the Bible teaches. If you do not want to "waste" your sickness, then get healed from it and testify about the miracle.

Don't crucify Christ afresh so you can make yourself look like a religious hero. Don't urinate on the face of Christ just so you can make yourself feel better in your unbelief and defeat.

Don't waste your life romanticizing unnecessary suffering. Don't waste the sacrifice of Christ with your stupid fake piety.

4. Reformed Social Media

Reformed:

"The Bible never teaches that we should ask Jesus into our hearts!"

Paul:

"I pray...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." (Ephesians 3:16-17)

* * *

Of course, you people are going to use that "straw man" defense again. But you are often the ones making up straw men to attack others.

If you keep preaching in memes, how does it make you any better than the people you criticize? Do you really think that if you post enough stupid square pictures with quotes about politics, you will change the world?

If the apostles knew it was that easy, they wouldn't have had to preach the word in season and out of season, with healing miracles and all kinds of signs and wonders. Know where the real power is.

5. "God-Centered" Social Media

"God-centered" Christians:

Politics. Science. Sports.

Bible-Reading Christians:

Jesus. Jesus. Jesus.

* * *

You don't need to be so "God-centered" if there is not much else in your life except Jesus Christ to begin with.

6. Dogs: The Cure for Sores

If you use the story of Lazarus to support a doctrine of poverty, you might as well say that the proper cure for sores is to have dogs lick them (Luke 16:21).

Hermeneutics 101. What is an incidental detail to hold the story together, and what is the real point that Jesus tries to make? A parable or a story is not a hundred unrelated details for you to use as you please. It has one or only several main points, and then some details to hold it together. Of course the details could be significant, but locate the main point first, and this main point controls what you can infer from the details. Why is this so hard for you to understand?

Idiots. Stop exploiting Jesus to justify your pathetic lives — your lack of faith, your lack of success, and yes, your love of money. You are so much more obsessed with money than the rich, only you have nothing to show for it.

7. Did You Really Get Jesus?

"When you come to Jesus, you don't come to get health, wealth and prosperity. You come to Jesus to get Jesus." (David Platt)

OK...but if you come to Jesus and refuse to receive what Jesus brought with him, then you either have not come to Jesus, or you have accepted a different gospel. Your faith is a sham. You did not really get Jesus.

Satan uses these religious messengers to steal from you the benefits that Jesus bled and died to give you. He wants you to "get Jesus" as a concept only, but give up all the benefits that he purchased for you.

In effect, he wants you to trample on the blood of Christ as if it is some worthless thing, and all the while thumb your nose at those who come to him to receive all of him.

The Bible says: Don't forget his benefits — he forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases. The Bible says: Don't worry about food and clothing and money — seek first the kingdom, and ALL these things will be added to you.

I come to THIS Jesus, and no other. If your Jesus is not like this, you have the wrong Jesus.

You know, when I came to the Christian community, I did not come to hear garbage preachers like this, but I got them anyway, because this is the way the church has been. It's all one package.

Indeed, when I came to Jesus, I came to get Jesus, but when I got him, I got a whole bunch of good things anyway, because they came with Jesus. It's all one package.

I am so glad Jesus is not like the church. But I also know that the church can be more like Jesus, if they will throw off pretentious garbage like this.

In the Bible, many people came to Jesus exactly to get things from him, like healing and health. And they received healing and health. Then many of them had faith in him and received all of him.

Why did they come to Christ for health? Because he had it to give. Because he was God's prophet, and God himself. And now you speak as if it dishonors him to come to him for health.

When someone comes to God, why shouldn't he ask for these things from him? And when someone wants these things, why shouldn't he ask for them from God? If he is God, then he is exactly the one we should ask.

See, if you come to him at all, you come to him as a religious expert or some super spiritual seeker that is "above it all," and not as a little child like Jesus wanted. You do not treat him as God. It is like you think you are too good for these things, too good for the promises of God. You are the one with the problem.

Get off that religious high horse. Your theology is bull dung. If you are more "Christ-centered" than Christ himself, then the truth is that you have been totally self-centered all along, totally in awe with yourself for being so Christ-centered.

8. What About the Reformed Solas?

What do you think about the Reformed Solas?

Let me tell you something about eggplants.

The local supermarket has been my exclusive source of groceries. When I want an eggplant, this market ALONE is where I would buy one. They have the best looking eggplants I have ever seen. This has been going on for years.

Guess how many eggplants I have purchased from there? Zero. This is because I have never wanted to buy an eggplant in my life. In fact, I have never bought any prune juice from there. Or grape soda. Or microwave popcorn. Or a hundred other things.

There are more things in that market that I have never purchased than things that I have purchased. But this market ALONE, is where I get my groceries.

You see, alone is not a lot. In fact, alone can be nothing. Exclusive does not mean exhaustive.

The Solas are not wrong, but they are not enough. Nevertheless, in connection with the Reformed, the Solas are just...so lame.

First, the Reformed are liars when it comes to the Solas. "Scripture alone"? Yeah, right. They have made up so many doctrines and traditions, and they impose these on people as if they carry the same force as Scripture. Even if they refrain from this in principle, they do it in practice. Think through the other four. You will see that they do not in fact keep the Solas. But they like to talk about them and rub them in people's faces.

Second, whereas the Solas were supposed to be convenient slogans for faithful religion, they in fact represent the lowest level of acceptable religion. If you make them into pillars, then it just means that you are proud of a big fat zero.

If your faith is not from Scripture alone, then it is not even acceptable. But Scripture alone is the starting point, not the apex of anything. What is in Scripture? What about Scripture do you believe?

If you worship both Christ and Satan, then you are not saved at all. You are not a Christian, and your religion is unacceptable. So you go "Christ alone," but that is just the starting point. What about Christ do you believe? What do you do with this Christ?

You need to stress the "alone" thing when you are leaving Catholicism. (We need to affirm justification by faith **alone**, but faith can receive **a lot** more than justification.) Some circles have been stuck at the starting point for five hundred years. I say this charitably, since as I

mentioned, they have not even rid themselves of other things — there is really no "alone" on anything with them.

You cry, "Scripture alone!" Good, but to believe the Bible alone does not mean to believe the Bible a lot, or any of it. I can say that I believe the Bible alone and have never read any of it. If I believe only John 3:16, I would believe in the Bible alone, but that is not enough.

You say, "Christ alone!" The Reformed are fond of talking about "preaching Christ from all of Scripture." This is so basic that it is pathetic that it is even an issue. But I say that we should be "preaching ALL of Christ from Scripture."

Regardless of what passage of Scripture they choose, they always end up talking about only the few aspects about Christ that they allow in their theology. Either they avoid passages that talk about other aspects of Christ, or they make these passages into allegories for the few aspects of Christ that they allow. See? So what good is it, if they cry "Christ alone"?

Christ alone indeed! But I want all of Christ. The Bible teaches me about the Christ who heals the sick and casts out demons, the Christ who brings boatloads of fishes with a word, the Christ who multiplies bread for thousands, the Christ who teaches that all things are possible to faith, the Christ who baptizes his people with the Spirit, so that they can do the same things, and even greater things.

Do your preachers mention these aspects of Christ? When they mention them, do they affirm that you can receive these aspects of Christ, or do they make them into allegories for the one, two, or three aspects of Christ that their tradition allows? What good is it if they say "Christ alone," if they won't let you have him?

In refusing to preach almost every aspect about Christ, and in twisting almost all aspects about Christ into the few aspects that they accept, in effect they have rejected and even preached against most aspects of Christ. Thus they are anti-Christ.

What do I think about the Reformed Solas? I agree with them. (I also think the Reformed never truly agreed with them.) Now if only the Reformed would actually keep them, then they can START learning and preaching all of Scripture, believing and loving all of Christ, receiving and dispensing all of grace (all that grace gives us, including the gifts of the Spirit, prophecies, and all kinds of signs and wonders), taking and working all of faith (all that is promised to faith, including healing, prosperity, and all kinds of blessings we inherited from Abraham through Christ), and finally render to God **alone** the glory — **all** the glory — that he deserves.

9. Christian First

There is one who uses Scripture to account for what he assumes to be knowledge, but there is one who uses Scripture to deduce what God reveals to us as knowledge.

The first is a philosopher who tries to contend as a Christian. The second is a Christian who rises to contend with a philosopher.

10. Science and Sexuality

Science is not an objective authority or body of knowledge. Science is not God. What is science? Science is people. A very small group of people. These people use theories that they developed, categories that they thought up, instruments that they manufactured, and they claim that there are things such as molecules, germs, genes, etc., and they claim that they are this and that, and that they determine this and that. Science is just a pretty name to sum up all this, well, to hide all this, because the truth is that it is as weak as it sounds once you expand on what it is. So I cannot accept this as an authority to tell me about the nature of reality or as a basis of ethics.

If we cannot agree on the above, then the issue changes first to the nature and reliability of science, and AIS (Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome) becomes meaningless until we settle this. But if we can agree on the above, then science becomes irrelevant to the spiritual and ethical aspects of AIS. That is, even if there are indeed such things as chromosomes, and even if it is true that men and women have different genetic makeup, there is no way to jump from this to the conclusion that chromosomes determine rather than merely correlate with gender. It is logically impossible to jump from one to the other. It has to be accepted by an act of decision without reason. But if I do not accept it, since there is no reason to accept it, then the relevance disappears. Thus on this point I might agree with the person who said that before genetics, the person might have been regarded as an infertile female, because physically, this person would be able to become "one flesh" with a male. The person might marry someone and never discover the condition.

Whatever the reason for the infertility, this is a physical defect. As with the case of homosexuality, which some scientists regard as genetically determined (Is homosexuality even physical? We are assuming many things that science claims for now without agreeing or disagreeing, but just so we can have this discussion), it is a consequence of sin (not necessarily particular sins, but the fall of man). Jesus came to save us from sin, and to destroy the works of the devil. He has come to save the whole man. There are some benefits that are explicitly delayed until after this life, such as our resurrection body. However, there are other benefits that are explicitly established for this life, such as healing, both spiritual and physical. Healing is meaningless after this life, because then we will receive a resurrection body, and that is transformation, not healing. If you are getting any healing at all, you are getting it now. Whatever the reason for the defect, God can heal it. If there are indeed such things as chromosomes, and if they indeed determine gender, and if they indeed determine that one is male genetically even if the person is female in other aspects, God can change the genes to match. Likewise, if there are indeed such things as genes, and if genes indeed determine sexual orientation, God can change the genes. Even if the science is true, and if God does not heal, the person can remain single for life. But science does not know what is true, and God indeed heals.[1]

This is no different than if someone comes into God's kingdom crippled, or blind, or sick with cancer. "Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses" (Matthew 8:17), just

like he bore our sins. Healing is part of redemption, just as much as forgiveness, because the basis is the same. To deny this is to preach a different gospel, and to trample on the blood of Jesus as a common and ineffectual thing. In fact, there is so much healing for the church, for "the children," that Christians can dispense it to the outsiders ("the dogs") as the "crumbs" that fall from the children's table (Matthew 15:27). As Jesus said, "They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:18).[2] Since cessationists reject the atonement in this sense, they cannot offer biblical counseling on this matter (imagine counseling against sin when one's theology rejects atonement for sin). They cannot offer any proposal that solves the problem. They will probably resort to nonsense about the sovereignty of God (who in his sovereignty sent Jesus to bear away our sicknesses), suffering as a blessing (a blessing that Jesus spent much of his time to eliminate, Acts 10:38), suffering with or for Christ (when he suffered some things so we would not have to), that this is still a fallen world (when Christ has overcome the world), and then hand this person over to almighty "science" (which means that small group of people, mostly unbelievers and evolutionists, who are scientists). None of this is of the gospel, but of unbelief, that is, of the devil.

As long as there is confusion, and as long as there is no change, and if there is unbelief when it comes to healing, why not just put gender and sex out of the picture, become a "eunuch," and dedicate one's life to the gospel (Matthew 19:12)? Jesus said that some are born eunuchs, some are made eunuchs by men, and some renounce marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. If one does it with joy and faith (though apparently lacking faith for healing), and not grudgingly, he can still have a wonderful and productive life through Jesus Christ.

Again, I would insist that the biblical solution is miracle healing, and that biblical counseling should not begin by making backup plans against the biblical solution. But if there is so much unbelief, then the first backup plan is celibacy, if not for life, then at least while destroying the unbelief. If the unbelief is simply regarded as acceptable, then I would have no more counsel because I do not think any course of action would make a difference any longer. The person does not care what God says, and might as well do whatever he/she/it wants.

* * *

[1] God almost always heals the condition and the symptom, as if one corresponds to the other. But he does not have to, and sometimes he does not. I heard about someone who fell from an oil rig. He almost died, and by some accounts, he did die. Christians prayed for him, and he recovered. Among other things, the bones in one of his arms were shattered. As he returned to work, the x-rays still showed that the bones were shattered, but he could use the arm and the doctors cleared him. The insurance company insisted on paying him anyway because they followed the medical report, even though the man went to their office and showed that he could use his arm. My point is that even if everything science says about genes is correct, God can change the effect or the symptom without changing the genes, although he usually changes everything to correspond.

[2] There should be too much healing among Christians, so that we should be looking for non-Christians to dump it on. Once I took leadership of some Christians and introduced healing to them. People were getting healed and it was good to have demonstrations. But after two weeks, everybody was healed. I continued to teach about it, since there is so much to say on this subject that I could talk about it endlessly, but for a while there were no more demonstrations. No more sick people. So we had to work harder to invite the sick to come, and someone started to drive me around town to visit the sick. This was the beginning of the period when I distributed the work such that I prayed only for incurable cases (not always terminal), and the other Christians prayed for the rest. The children should have too much healing. Healing should be falling off the table. They should be stuffed with healing, and still have enough leftovers to feed the dogs.

From: email

11. Mark the Mocker

Mark the one who makes sarcastic and mocking comments when you refer to the promises of God. This is very common among those who claim to be Christians, and among preachers.

Suppose you mention that Jesus said that when we pray in faith, we will receive what we want. You wish to encourage the man and have him rejoice with you, that God has decreed a way for us to obtain assistance and blessing.

But then this person makes a joke about it. Perhaps he makes a sarcastic remark about his hard life, or mockingly utters a request that he regards as unrealistic — I say "he regards" as unrealistic, because if he has faith, he could get it.

But the Spirit of God does not speak against himself. The Spirit of God does not make fun of Jesus (1 Corinthians 12:3). This man speaks by the spirit of Satan. The devil is the one who casts doubt on God's word, and he has been doing it since the beginning.

If he reacts this way to what you say, this is his attitude toward God. As Jesus said, the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart. There is a bitterness and hatred toward God in this man that he does not admit to himself, because he assumes that he is holy and humble by his negative and self-abasing attitude.

The Bible says that the righteous delights in the word of God and thinks about it day and night. He is happy with the word of God, and the word of God makes him happy. He is happy to believe it and to do it. So he builds his whole life upon it. And the Bible says, "Whatever he does prospers" (Psalm 1:3). But it also says, "Blessed is the man who does not...sit in the seat of mockers" (v. 1).

The place of the mocker is the place of the reprobate. Do not tolerate a mocker, but kick him out of your life, so that he does not take you down with him.

12. Healing and Moderation

Divine health comes wholly from God, not from our effort and care. The worst thing you can do is to become a "health nut." A paranoid attitude is poison. Some of the sickest and regularly sick people I come across are health nuts — they are experts on every nutrient, supplement, and exercise. They watch what they eat and what they do, but their thinking poisons them from within.

You might know someone like this. He has all kinds of equipment. He bikes every day and continuously blocks traffic for half a mile. Then he gets hit by a car during one of his morning routines and it takes him out for six months, and he never fully recovers. It is futile. The same thing happens when a severe sickness surprises him. He falls flat on his face because his faith is not ready. His life has been established on human wisdom and effort, and not the word of God (Matthew 7:24-27).

Just follow what you think is right for your health, and do things in moderation. This does not have to be precise, or you would be back to trusting in yourself again. You can make all kinds of mistakes and still have healing. I only mean that we should not abuse ourselves.

The reason we care for our bodies is to avoid "testing" God. He can preserve you even if you fall from a cliff, but if you throw yourself off just to make a point, then you are testing him (Matthew 4:5-7). When you more or less maintain habits that honor the body he has given you, then you can believe him for healing and immunity with full confidence and a clear conscience.

From: email

13. Study for Faith

I do not deliberately decide how long I study, but if I study whenever I want or whenever I have some time, I end up doing a lot of it. I had done up to 12 hours of reading a day, but that happened during vacations when I was in high school and college. Now I do not read 12 hours a day.

My personal library filled a commercial storage, not on shelves, but in boxes stacked in columns. It took two construction trucks several turns to move them. Several times it took me more than a week to find a book I wanted. It would take this long because the columns filled the storage area solid, with only four to twenty inches between each column. So even if I remembered the exact location of a book, it would take a long time to move the other boxes out of the way to get to the one I needed. It was such a big deal looking for a book that at times I had to bring food and water, and called my wife occasionally to report that I was safe.

So I have owned many books and done a lot of reading, and I will offer you an honest opinion. Most theology books are so bad, so tedious, so pretentious, and so full of errors and unbelief that, if I could do it again, I would spend a lot of that time sleeping instead or reading more "devotional" works and Pentecostal books. Of course, these also contain errors, but they are much less annoying. On average, I would say that I find 4 errors in theology or reasoning on every page in a Reformed theology book. Sometimes I would find as many as 20 errors on a page. I suppose that's as many as they could fit on a page. I would write down all of these errors for reference, with comments. It was very painful and boring.

Reading was my favorite habit since a kid, but reading Reformed theology almost destroyed my interest in reading. It almost made me hate books, because many of the books that I read were by these people. In reality, I hated their errors, unbelief, and pretentious way of writing. However, that time indeed helped me build a good foundation and become familiar with the theological situation throughout church history. But I received a good foundation not because I accepted what they said passively, but because I engaged them with an active mind.

When I first started serious studies, at times I had to stop to give my mind some rest. But instead of watching TV or doing something like that, I would rest my mind by reading computer programming books. Reading computer code was relaxing to me, because reading theology was a battle, since the arguments and reasoning of the theologians were usually very poor. At times their arguments were very stupid even when their doctrines were right. I had to fill in the blanks or correct them in my mind. But a computer does not forgive errors and does not fill in logical holes, and so programming code has to be precise and complete, and all assumptions must be declared. After a while, I no longer need to take breaks, and so I stopped reading computer codes for relaxation.

As a side point, despite reading thousands of pages of book on programming, I never programmed anything. I didn't do the exercises in the books. I just read the code like I would read a novel. I would imagine the code and the results in my mind. And I became good enough that I received several basic certifications for programming. I did not need them, but I took the tests just to amuse myself. You do not need experience or practice to learn many things. This is my point. But you need to think.

Anyway, I am telling you this so you would not feel guilty if you think that the theology books you have to study seem very boring, very wrong, very useless, and the prose seems very poor, very convoluted, very pretentious. They are. In fact, if you do not get this impression, then you are not understanding them. However, since you are in seminary, you will need to read them anyway, so you will be forced to study them. That's good, so you don't have to force yourself to get what little benefit you can from them. And it is good to become familiar with some of the literature. It is not necessary to become familiar with all of them.

Study is good, very good. But make sure your study increases your faith. Many books tend to hinder faith, plant doubt, and destroy zeal, so you will have to wrestle with them and overcome them. Overcome the theologians. When you win against them by superior arguments, you might have increased in faith, because you will have refuted their unbelief. Also, read the literature from other theological perspectives. I do not mean you should read Mormon books or Buddhist books, but just Christian books that are beyond your narrow denomination or circle. For example, if you are already convinced about the doctrine of election, total depravity, and so on, it would not hurt to read some Arminian books and Pentecostal books. Their errors will not affect you, but they will say some things that the Reformed missed — the Reformed are wrong on a lot of things. Don't fall in love with a human tradition. If you are in love with a human tradition, your spiritual zeal is an illusion. It would feel like a love for Christ, but it is fake.

This suggestion applies to those who are relatively established. Some people are influenced by the most recent position that they are exposed to. They get tossed back and forth by every wind of doctrine. So they change from week to week. Sometimes they are Calvinist, sometimes Arminian. Sometimes they are charismatic, sometimes cessationist. Sometimes they believe in a hell, sometimes not. They slide from dispensationalism to full preterism, and then back again depending on which web site they are reading that week. To someone like that, I would recommend staying with one reliable theologian or at the most several teachers for a while until he is established in the basics. But start with a teacher who has some faith.

Length of time spent in study is not the most important factor. Do not read for pride. Read for faith, love, and knowledge. I see many people who spend a lot of time reading, but they are very bad at theology. Spiritual intelligence is more important. And even more important than that is faith. Even good theology will be useless to you if you don't believe any of it. Most theologians do not believe the Bible. They believe themselves, and they appear to believe the Bible only because part of the Bible agrees with them. There is a big difference.

It is a very good idea that you study English. In Christian studies, I think it is overall more useful than Greek, Hebrew, Latin, German, etc. Make sure you become very good at it. It will help you with your studies, and also increase your ministry audience in the future. Make sure you become very good at English. Reading will be easier, but try to become good at writing and speaking too. Writing and speaking are harder because there is not much room for error. It is not enough to be generally correct, but you need to be precise. Writing is probably easier, since you can read over what you have written and correct mistakes before sending it to someone. So at least become good at reading and writing in English.

Between serious studies, read things that are less pretentious, read things that are full of faith. I cannot emphasize this enough. Read things that are full of faith. Faith does not only mean having a good attitude in defeat. Faith overcomes. Faith wins.

From: email

14. How To Talk Like the Bible

The Bible writers are unlike the Christians who fancy themselves skillful in theology. Christians get obsessed with several doctrines and then they expect every sermon, every book, every conversation, and even every biblical passage to talk exactly like how they think using the exact narrow expressions they use.

You see this a lot in Calvinists. No one teaches a more extreme doctrine of divine sovereignty than I do, because I affirm that it is absolute. So someone can only teach it equally as strong, but not stronger. That said, I would talk freely about man's decisions and responsibilities just like the Bible writers, with God's sovereignty always assumed, but not always mentioned. I find no problem in telling people to "choose" Christ. The Bible says, "Choose you this day whom you will serve." But God's sovereignty is the explanation for why people choose what they choose. So when this is the topic of discussion, Christ said, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you."

I find no problem in preaching to people, "Believe in Jesus Christ, and save yourselves from hell." Peter said, "Save yourselves from this evil generation." I find no problem in saying that sickness comes from the devil, even saying that it is "not from God." The Bible says that Jesus went about healing all who were oppressed by the devil. And God said to Israel, "They will surely gather against you, but not by me." God's sovereignty is always assumed, but there is freedom in expression when we are not talking about metaphysics, but about our regular interaction with creation.

Christians are very amateurish in theology when they become obsessed with the few ideas and terms that their traditions emphasize, to the point that even the Bible is not biblical enough for them. The Bible finds no need to obey our technical jargon. I don't either. Once I used the word "condition" in a discussion about faith, and some Calvinists immediately seized on that and said, "Vincent Cheung says faith is a condition for salvation!" False Calvinism! Arminian impostor! With them, the word can only mean prerequisite. But I am not a Calvinist, and I am not Reformed. I am not a moron either. I don't need to follow their stupid rules. No, I meant condition as in a "state of affair." So the word almost carries the meaning of "anything." Thus I was saying, "Anything that is found in the Christian came from God in the first place." But they could not even understand something simple like this. Once people become zealots for a tradition or a pet doctrine, they become theologically and religiously stupid. Intellectually broken. It is a psychological dysfunction, a mental stronghold.

The same applies to other doctrines, such as the fate of unbelievers. Terms like "destruction" and "death" are just the way the Bible refers to the punishment God will apply to reprobates. You cannot use these terms to prove annihilationism, just like you cannot prove Arminianism with biblical passages that tell us to choose and to save ourselves. There is no excuse for missing this. Even in our ordinary speech, "destruction" does not often mean "total disintegration of every part" or "remove from existence" in the

metaphysical and ontological sense. Annihilation is a separate issue. It needs to be established by other considerations, such as what the Bible reveals about the immortality of the soul and the nature of the judgment. When God says, "I never knew you!" he does not mean, "Hey where did you come from! I never knew you existed!"

From: email

15. Don't Beg for Healing

Don't beg for healing. Just take it, because it belongs to you. It is yours to receive. If you have sinned, you don't beg God to forgive you. Begging is useless. Christ has paid for your forgiveness with his own blood. You confess your sin, and you ask for forgiveness, but then you receive it by faith. You don't beg and beg and beg until you feel better. The same is true for healing and anything else that belongs to us in Christ.

Don't try to ask as many people as you can to pray. Talk about it only with people who have faith for healing.

Avoid teachings that encourage acceptance rather than resistance and dominance over sickness. People pretend to honor God's sovereignty and accept whatever happens, but that is not what they want, is it? They are dishonest with God and with themselves. Their teachings are really attempts at convincing themselves that it is OK to lay down and let life roll over them. They really want healing, and there is healing in Christ. But when they pray, they tell God what they think they ought to say, and then they sneak off to the doctors to get what they want in the first place.

You want healing, not something else, so insist on it by faith, and don't let pious teachings talk you out of it.

From: email

16. Science is People

Science commands so much respect in our society that most Christians seem to think that even God must answer to it in order for him to retain any credibility. When they preach to Buddhists, they do not argue that the Christian faith is just a stronger form of Buddhism. When they confront the cults, they never attempt to portray Christ as the chief cult leader, or the supreme Satanist. Yet when they address those who trust in science, they are driven by a degrading eagerness to offer the Christian faith as more scientific than the alternatives. Without argument, Christians accept that science discovers truth and exposes error, and so the gospel itself must pass its test in order to secure a place in this world.

This is very strange, because Scripture tells us that the spiritual man judges all things, but he himself is judged by no one, and certainly not by the natural man. I am waiting for the scientists to plead with me, and to convince me that their conclusions are Christian! Science is not God. Science is not truth. It is not a thing in itself. It is not some eternal standard of truth by which all things are judged. What is it? Science is people. People guess, choose, make mistakes, scheme for funding, revise their theories, invent explanations, and spiral into utter absurdity. But Jesus Christ is God and Truth. He is rationality incarnate, and he answers to no one. Science must answer to him.

From: book endorsement for another author

17. Healing: Succeed First, Then Improve

Some people teach healing, but before they finish, they give you five, seven, or twenty reasons on why you might not get it. Well, the biggest reason why you might not get it is because you have persuaded yourself with those twenty reasons. If you keep listing reasons, more and more of them will seem to apply. Only those who are experiencing success at receiving and ministering healing should ask why some are not healed, not so that they will start, but so that they will get more healed than the many they are already getting healed. Walk in the way of faith. Get a lot of success first, before you start thinking about why you sometimes fail. Even that could be recast as, "How can I get more success?" After you begin to see results, find five, seven, or twenty ways to obtain more results. Meanwhile, fix your attention on Jesus Christ. He is the only reason you need for healing to come with ease and force. He is the author and finisher of faith. Begin with him, and he will destroy those twenty reasons for failure as you continue.

From: email

18. The Gospel of Poverty

Some of those who preach a gospel of poverty are in fact quite well off, while their people endure their doctrines without even the hope of any improvement. A number of these ministers operate from mega churches or almost mega churches (while preaching against mega churches).

The gospel of poverty does not come from Scripture, but from human tradition, and many preachers make a decent living from it. In fact, it is Catholic tradition. A priest can even take a vow of poverty, but he can live like a king as long as he does not claim to own any of the properties, mansions, and automobiles that he enjoys.

The Protestant gospel of poverty is not far from this, but it is more devious in that it is less obvious, and it is almost certainly more self-righteous. All of it is satanic. It degrades humanity, especially believers, and makes them suffer without hope, for no reason.

This is the anti-health and anti-wealth gospel. It does not preach suffering for Christ, but suffering for the sake of suffering. The people worship suffering itself. This gospel makes people throw out the blood of Christ like it is sewage water. It pervades Protestantism. The only people who fight it are labeled as heretics.

19. Mega is Good

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (Acts 2:41)

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:47)

But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand. (Acts 4:4)

Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. (Acts 5:14)

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7)

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. (Acts 9:31)

The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord....He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. (Acts 11:24)

God cares about numbers, even if it is not the most important thing. There are those who make a show of stressing essential issues like doctrine, and in the process put down the very idea of a mega church. The irony is that in doing so, these people show that they themselves are contemptuous of the Bible, and care more about legitimizing themselves than what the word of God says.

There is nothing wrong with a mega church, except that it is not a super mega church. If there is anything wrong, it is not because it is big. It often seems wrong to care too much about numbers only because the churches, whether they are big or small, are deficient in even the most basic matters. They should be ashamed that they are running the congregations so poorly that they cannot afford to care too much about numbers.

A bad small church is not really better than a bad mega church. The difference is that the bigger church is also the bigger target. The bad small church attacks the big one to justify itself. Meanwhile, the mega church is so big that it doesn't even notice the small church in order to attack it. If we attack the small church, we might find that it is just as corrupt as the big one.

The big bad charismatic preacher embezzled church funds, and it makes headline news. But have you heard about that Reformed pastor who was caught in adultery with one of his

church members? Have you heard about the Baptist preacher who was arrested for child molestation? They probably preached against that big bad charismatic just last Sunday. These are not reported, because they make so little impact in the world that the news don't know about them. I don't fault them for being small. I just mean that they are not necessarily better.

20. Total Healing in God's Word

My child, pay attention to my words; listen closely to what I say. Don't ever forget my words; keep them always in mind. They are the key to life for those who find them; they bring health to the whole body. (Proverbs 4:20-22)

God's word brings healing to every part of the body. Many people have been healed just by listening to the words of the Bible, sometimes without any prayer or ministry to them.

In the past, there were several who built their whole healing ministries on this method — by visiting or hosting the sick and reading the Bible to them daily, especially passages on God's forgiveness and healing. It might take longer and therefore produce fewer results than other biblical methods (such as commanding the sickness to leave), but healing still happens, because God's word heals the whole body.

Nowadays we have electronic recordings, so each person can listen to these words of healing all day and all night without effort or expense. And people have been healed while listening.

Let us sow seeds of faith into our own hearts, and into the hearts of others.

21. Holy Water and Magic Crackers

The most alarming issue on the topic is that the Reformed assign a mystical efficacy to baptism and a mystical presence to the Lord's Supper that the Bible does not teach. It is mysticism, and Catholicism. If we are strict about it, I do not think that Reformed churches practice ANY legitimate baptism or communion for this reason alone. Other Evangelicals, even if they do not have a mystical view of baptism and communion, fail to implement the Lord's Supper, because they serve only crackers — a tiny wafer for each person. There is no supper, and no fellowship among Christians as it occurs.

Yet they claim to be faithful to the practice as portrayed in Scripture. For putting up with the clown show, each Christian should be offered at least a full-sized cookie and a glass of milk. If in the same service the Reformed guru is shameless enough to criticize Catholics or Pentecostals for their mysticism, then add a serving of ice cream. It makes the hypocritical drivel go down a little easier.

From: email

22. The Bible on Speaking in Tongues

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were **filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues** as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4)

Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them **declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!**" (Acts 2:7-11)

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that **the gift of the Holy Spirit** had been poured out even on the Gentiles. **For they heard them speaking in tongues** and praising God. (Acts 10:44-46)

When Paul placed his hands on them, **the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues** and prophesied. (Acts 19:6)

For **anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God**. Indeed, no one understands him; [it is an ability from the Holy Spirit by which] he utters mysteries with his spirit [directly to God]. (1 Corinthians 14:2)

He who **speaks in a tongue edifies himself** [he strengthens and builds up himself, infuses and charges himself with power, comfort, and encouragement]... (1 Corinthians 14:4)

I would like every one of you to speak in tongues [so you can strengthen yourself like I just said], but I would rather have you prophesy [when you are in a public gathering]. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets [in which case the two would have equal standing], so that the church may be edified. (1 Corinthians 14:5)

For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue [especially in a public gathering] should pray that he may interpret what he says [because the solution to an inappropriate use of gifts is always more gifts, more power, not less]. (1 Corinthians 14:13)

For **if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays**, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? **I will pray with my spirit**, but I will also pray with my mind; **I will sing with my spirit**, but I will also sing with my mind. (1 Corinthians 14:14-15)

If you are **praising God with your spirit**, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say "Amen" to **your thanksgiving**, since he does not know what you are saying? You may be **giving thanks well** enough, but the other man is not edified [but still, you are praising God, giving thanks, and doing it well, and there would be no problem if there is interpretation]. (1 Corinthians 14:16-17)

I thank God that **I speak in tongues more than all** of you [since it is good to do it more]. But in the church [or a public gathering] I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue [that is, unless I interpret, in which case the tongues would be just as good]. (1 Corinthians 14:18-19)

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, **everyone has** a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, **a tongue** [even in a public gathering] or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two — or at the most three — should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret [so not only is it acceptable to speak in tongues in a public gathering, but it can be done multiple times by different people, if there is interpretation]. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God. (1 Corinthians 14:26-28)

Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and **do not forbid speaking in tongues** [even in a public gathering, if there is interpretation]. (1 Corinthians 14:39)

Bonus:

And in the church God has appointed...prophets [as a ministry, even though any believer may prophesy, Acts 2:17-18; Acts 19:6; 1 Corinthians 14:31]...teachers [as a ministry, even though any believer may teach]...those having gifts of healing [as a ministry, even though any believer may pray for the sick]...those able to help others [as a ministry, even though any believer may help others]...those with gifts of administration [as a ministry, even though any believer may perform administration]...those speaking in different kinds of tongues [it must follow in this context: as a ministry, even though any believer may speak in tongues]...Do all have gifts of healing [as a ministry, even though any believer may pray for the sick]? Do all speak in tongues [it must follow in this context: as a ministry, even though any believer may speak in tongues]? Do all interpret [as a ministry, and if one doesn't, he can just ask for it, 1 Corinthians 14:13]? (1 Corinthians 12:27-30)

- Paul is talking only about ministries, and not suggesting that only those with special gifts can do these things. The point is that God appoints believers in different ministries, so that you must respect one another, even though as individuals believers could do all the things represented by these ministries. For example, one who does not have a ministry or a special gift of teaching is still able to teach others what he knows from the word of God. One who does not have the ministry of an evangelist could — must! — still perform evangelism. And just because there is a

gift of faith does not mean that only someone with this gift has any faith. The same is true with healing, prophecy, tongues, and others.

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying [although any believer can prophesy], let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving [although any believer can serve], let him serve; if it is teaching [although any believer can teach], let him teach; if it is encouraging [although any believer can encourage], let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others [although any believer can give], let him give generously; if it is leadership [although any believer can lead], let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy [although any believer can show mercy], let him do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:4-8)

- The gifts represent only one mode by which things are accomplished. The Bible almost never refers to the abilities or the effects in the language of "gifts" — only in several places in the entire Bible. The gifts were never meant to refer to exclusive abilities. This applies to both gifts that appear to be more supernatural and those that appear to be less supernatural. Paul talks about prophecy and teaching in the same list and in the same way. And he talks about healing and administration in the same list and in the same way. The fact that there is a gift of teaching does not mean that only the one with the gift can teach, and likewise, the fact that there are gifts of healing, and prophecy, and tongues does not mean that only those with the gifts can do these things. It appears most theologians and believers in church history have been entirely incompetent and lacking in elementary reading skill when it comes to this, and miss such an obvious point. Do not be ignorant about something so basic (1 Corinthians 12:1).

23. Don't Make Excuses: Choose!

Jesus went into the synagogue again and noticed a man with a deformed hand. Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus' enemies watched him closely. If he healed the man's hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath.

Jesus said to the man with the deformed hand, "Come and stand in front of everyone." Then he turned to his critics and asked, "Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?" But they wouldn't answer him.

He looked around at them angrily and was deeply saddened by their hard hearts. Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." So the man held out his hand, and it was restored! At once the Pharisees went away and met with the supporters of Herod to plot how to kill Jesus. (Mark 3:1-6, NLT)

What does your pastor do at church?

Does he put his faith into action and lay hands on the sick, and see God heal them by an evident show of miracle power? Or does he swindle and exploit God's people by attacking those who follow Jesus in preaching God's grace and healing the sick? Does he criticize others for preaching a positive message, while he is preaching sickness, guilt, and defeat? But that is not the gospel. A shepherd ought to feed the people with the spiritual food of faith and life. Cynicism and heresy hunting is not spiritual food, especially when he is the one preaching the heresy of unbelief. Why would you continue to support him, unless you are also in unbelief? Don't make excuses. Choose.

What does your idol theologian do?

Is he more like the Pharisees, or more like Jesus? Does he put on a big show of preaching repentance, humility, and such things, but then tear down people's faith in God's promises of healing, victory, and many other good things, so that he may build up his reputation on unbelief? Is he always looking to catch a "charismatic" in saying or doing something wrong? He builds his career on putting down faith. He is like one who plots with unbelievers to murder Jesus Christ. He wants to destroy anyone who does not obey his tradition. Why do you still worship your theologian, unless you also want to kill the Son of God? Don't make excuses. Choose.

And what do you do?

What kind of person do you want to be? Which path will you choose? Do you want to feed on death like a maggot, thinking that it is bread from heaven, deluding yourself that it is the true gospel, or do you want to feed on faith, and life, and power, and joy unspeakable

and full of glory? That's what Jesus came to bring you. Will you love him for it? Or will you kill him for it? Don't make excuses. Choose.

24. I Never Knew You!

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:21-23)

If this is what happens to these people, what will happen to those who do even less? What will happen to those who are even worse?

What will happen to those who disobey God's commands, and refuse to prophesy, refuse to cast out demons, and refuse to perform miracles in the name of Jesus? What will happen to those who refuse to heal the sick? What will happen to those who teach against these doctrines of Christ?

If the passage refers to counterfeit believers, then what will happen to those who are so much worse than they cannot even imitate counterfeit believers? What will happen to those who refuse to obey Christ and perform these works, and who even attack the people who do them?

What will happen to those who oppose atheists, heretics, murderers, prostitutes, homosexuals, abortionists, drug dealers, child rapists, and all kinds of sinners, but who refuse to condemn cessationists? And what will happen to those who honor cessationist theologians and preachers?

Why do you call yourself a Christian, but pretend that the Bible teaches the opposite of what is written? Why do you call him Lord, but refuse to do what he says?

25. Satanic Exploitation of God's Sovereignty

When Christians from certain traditions are confronted with an undeniable promise from God of something pleasant, like healing, or answers to prayer, or the gifts of the Spirit, they say, "Yes, but remember God is sovereign." All of God's promises are meaningless to them, because whatever God's word says, God can always do something different, even something directly opposite.

However, these people never apply this to the promise of salvation. They do not say, "Yes, God promised to save all those who have faith in Christ, but remember now, God is sovereign. So someone might have full faith in Christ, more faith than Paul, Peter, and John combined, and still burn in hell." They never say this. They would condemn this as "hyper" this or that. But they are hyper-hypocrites.

Then, these people never apply this to the promise of judgment. They never say, "Yes, God promised to judge all those who reject the gospel, but remember now, God is sovereign. So someone might definitely and repeatedly reject Jesus Christ, and still be exalted to the highest place in heaven. In fact, he could even replace Jesus Christ, because you know, God is sovereign."

No, they would say that if God promised to save all those who have faith in Christ, then all those who have faith in Christ will be saved. They would say that God promised to damn all those who do not have faith in Christ, and he will surely damn them just like he said. But when it comes to something pleasant other than salvation, suddenly "God is sovereign" and we never know what will happen regardless of what he has promised and regardless of whether we have faith.

They exploit the doctrine of divine sovereignty to neutralize biblical promises that expose their lack of faith, their lack of intelligence, and their inferior spiritual condition. But once they do this, they cannot stop it from being done with everything in God's word, including promises that they wish to keep, threats that they wish to enforce, and doctrines that they wish to affirm.

If "God is sovereign" can do away with something good that God said, then it can also do away with something bad that God said. It can do away with everything that God said. We must believe in Christ? Fine! But God is sovereign. There is a hell to punish sinners? Great! But God is sovereign. Abortion is wrong? OK! But God is sovereign. Everything would be decided on a case-by-case basis, and we can no longer tell anyone what is true or false, right or wrong. Because God is sovereign.

All doctrinal controversies have become meaningless. Why argue about water baptism, when "God is sovereign"? So you believe in infant baptism? Good for you, but John Smith is exempt, because God is sovereign. You don't believe in infant baptism? Mary Jane is doing it anyway, because God is sovereign. You believe that a homosexual female penguin

cannot be a church elder? We don't care, because God is sovereign. That penguin is getting "lawfully ordained" and serving your magic crackers next Sunday.

There is no other kind of theology more satanic than this.

26. Um...Abraham Was There

Christians come up with funniest interpretations for Scripture. I laughed pretty hard when I found out that some of them use the story of Lazarus and the rich man to preach a gospel of poverty, and to excuse themselves from the biblical promises on prosperity. Before then, it never occurred to me the story could be used that way, since Jesus tells us outright the point he tries to make, which is not really about money. Let me change the story a little, then perhaps you can see what I see.

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Solomon's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Solomon far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "King Solomon, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire."

King Solomon mumbled something, but the rich man could not hear him. Solomon knew what the problem was, because this happened often. So he took out his shovel, and after two hours he was finally able to dig himself out of the mountain of gold that was on top of him.

He crawled out of the hole, and after catching his breath, he said, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us."

He answered, "Then I beg you, king, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment." Solomon was choking on gold dust and his face turned bright red. Diamonds were dripping out of his nose and ears. He was struggling, but he managed to say, "**They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.** They can do what I did. Allocate their loose change to hire five hundred scribes to read the Scripture to them, up and down, day and night. Easy."

"No, King Solomon," he said, "but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent." Solomon tripped on a huge gold bar and fell into a swamp of precious stones. Lazarus tried to pull him out, but they both started to sink. Before he was completely submerged, he shouted, **"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."**

Get it now? The IDIOTS' interpretation does not fit. The Christian poverty scam would appear ridiculous if the story was written this way, but it is not very different when Abraham is in it. How can this passage promote a doctrine of poverty, or devalue prosperity in any way, when Abraham was likely even more wealthy in his time than the rich man in the story?

27. By Their Fruit You Will Know Them

God spoke to two people who called themselves Christians. He said, "Study the word of God. Believe the message. Do what it says."

The first person was a charismatic. He was unwilling, because he did not think that serious study was very spiritual. Perhaps he was a little careless. Perhaps he was a little imprecise. Perhaps he was a little unrefined. But then he read the Bible and believed what he read. And so he made it his mission to preach the word, heal the sick, and bring to people the power and victory that they could receive through Jesus Christ. The other person complained that he was not "God-centered," but "self-centered." He declared that this man's message was too personal and positive. Indeed, he kept taking and taking and taking from God. "Give me what you promised," he insisted. But then he kept giving and giving and giving to people out of what he received.

The second person was a cessationist. He was eager for serious study, because it was what he enjoyed. The more he studied, the more he became impressed with himself, but when he read the Bible he rejected much of what he read. And so he made it his mission to humiliate and undermine the one who had faith in God's word to save, to heal, and to work all kinds of signs and wonders. For the rest of his life, he tried to enslave everyone to his own religious system. He kept denying and recasting and allegorizing the blessings of God and the benefits of redemption. "For the glory of God!" he boasted. And he kept attacking and harassing and mocking those who had faith to receive from God the things that Jesus shed his blood to obtain for them.

What do you think? Which of them did what the Father wanted? (Matthew 21:28-32)

* * *

When Jesus said, "By their fruit you will recognize them" (Matthew 7:16, 20), do you think he was warning us about the first person or the second person? The historical context tells us what Jesus had in mind. He was not facing opposition from anyone like the first man. Almost all his enemies were like the second one. Almost all his enemies to this day have been like the second one. The biblical context is also unmistakable. He said this in the Sermon on the Mount. From the start to the finish of the discourse, he was speaking against the Pharisees and the scribes (Matthew 5:20, 7:29), the religious establishment of his day.

John the Baptist was also speaking to the Pharisees and Sadducees when he said, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8, 10). He told them to stop saying, "We have Abraham as our father." Now people say they have Augustine, or Calvin, or this or that theologian as their father in the faith. So what? God can raise up ten thousand of them from a bunch of rocks. But was Calvin correct about everything? And what does that have to do with you, when you are wrong about everything? Why should I care about your

Reformation heritage, or Methodist heritage, or some other heritage? Why would I be impressed, when it produced someone like you?

Jesus was speaking against those who criticized him. They attacked his ministry of healing and miracles (Matthew 12:24), and he replied, "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:33-34). He said, "A tree is recognized by its fruit." The teaching that we must judge the "fruit" is often used to attack charismatics, televangelists, and prosperity preachers, but Jesus directed it against the traditionalists and the religious establishment. It mainly applies to the cessationists, the theologians, and the heresy hunters — the self-appointed defenders of the faith.

Part of judging the fruit has to do with evaluating what they say (Matthew 12:33-34). What is their fruit? What do they say? They speak against the benefits of Christ, against the ministry of healing and miracles, at times blaspheming the Holy Spirit, and they persecute those who have the faith and desire to receive from God. This is their fruit. This is their legacy. Now you recognize them. What will you do about it? My guess is that you will not do anything about it. And this is why Christians remain in bondage.

28. The Theological Pervert

It is perverse when God's promise to help you and to bless you becomes a problem for your theology, so much so that you are obligated to even call the promise a heresy. Don't blame other people. It is all your fault, and only your fault. Get a better theology. But first, examine yourself, to see if you are really in the faith to begin with.

29. Progress by Faith and Prayer

You move forward in life by faith, by praying to God and receiving from God. This is one of the main ways by which God influences the world, by delivering his riches, powers, and blessings to his people. He blessed Abraham, and by him, he blessed all nations and all generations. A true servant of Christ unleashes the faith of God's people to receive all that belongs to them through faith — without false humility, without meaningless sacrifice, without unnecessary suffering.

Phony self-denial will only hold you back from advancing the gospel and building a better world. This is exactly what Satan wants. If he can keep you from making progress in life but make you believe that you are being spiritual, you will never become a threat to him, and he will not have to exert any effort to oppose you, because you will remain in place by your own volition. You become Satan's obedient house dog.

You become his servant, his evangelist, by spreading his gospel of sickness, poverty, and defeat to make more losers like you. Most Christian preachers and theologians serve Satan in this manner, spreading his message and restraining God's people. This is the spirit that murdered Jesus Christ. You will know them by their fruit. They are false prophets. They are wolves in sheep's clothing.

30. A Religious Boast Backfires

"I would rather have the crumbs off the Master's table than all the riches promised by the false prosperity gospel."

The reference to crumbs from the Master's table comes from Matthew 15:27. You should read the passage before you use it. The context is a miracle of healing, and it backfires against you at least three ways.

[1] It means you at least preach a gospel of health and healing. This is a gospel of health so strong that someone could receive complete healing even as a matter of "accident" or surplus. And it is available to anyone who has faith, even in the face of apparent rejection from Christ himself. You didn't realize?

[2] Then, it means you declare that you are nothing more than a non-Christian heathen dog, without a covenant. By your own admission you are only good enough to lick the shoes of any prosperity preacher who is a Christian. Who are you to say anything about the Christian life? Or did you miss this part as well?

Don't like a gospel of health and wealth, do we? Just by making that reference you are already half way there, moron. You are just a stupid fake self-righteous fraud.

[3] In fact, you are more than half way there. If the "crumbs" of God's healing are so powerful that they would remove diseases and demons from a woman by a miracle and at a distance, the "crumbs" of God's prosperity could at least wipe out financial deficits and hardships in your life. The crumbs could prosper even a heathen dog without a covenant.

By making that reference to crumbs, either you blaspheme God, as if crumbs from his table represent very little, or you already preach a prosperity gospel, since even the crumbs are more than enough to represent miracle deliverance and blessing.

It is because you wish to impress people that you say you would settle for the crumbs, but the woman who made the original reference to crumbs did it to confess the overwhelming, overabundant, overflowing, OVERKILL level of healing power that flowed from Jesus Christ.

Now you wish to apply the term to prosperity, and in order to oppose a prosperity gospel? It totally backfires against you. If applied to prosperity, the crumbs would wipe out poverty and shortage even for the heathens. As for the bread on the table, it belongs to the Christians by covenant right, and it would be an overwhelming, overabundant, overflowing, overkill amount of wealth.

Although you think that statement would make you look spiritual, you have accomplished the opposite of what you intended. You have preached the strongest gospel of health and

wealth. You have declared that an absurdly excessive amount of healing and prosperity belong to Christians on the basis of the covenant, such that God's children have the right to expect and demand the highest level of health and wealth.

Read the Bible you pretend to defend. Read it before you try to correct people. Read it before you say something to make yourself look better than someone else, when it just exposes you as someone so much worse.

Me? I'm seated at the table. I'm having the bread. If you will shut your mouth and wait on the floor, I will throw you some crumbs when I'm done.

You stupid phony high-minded religious piece of heathen garbage.

31. Baptism, Circumcision, and Covenant

This is not intended to be a definitive statement on water baptism, but it raises some questions that must be addressed. Whether or not I agree with a doctrine, I dislike bad arguments.

* * *

Have you ever come across the observation (and a response to it) that circumcision did not end on the basis that it was supposedly replaced by water baptism, but on the basis that it has been fulfilled by Christ? It seems that this observation is definitely true. Paul himself argued that circumcision ended because of Christ, not because of water baptism. So if there were no Christian baptism, circumcision would still have ended, because it ended on another basis. Then, the question is how infant baptism can be maintained on the basis that circumcision has been replaced by water baptism, since whether or not God covenants with families has become irrelevant to the topic.

* * *

One of the key passages is Colossians 2:11-12. The interpretation that practically identifies baptism with circumcision (so that baptism replaces circumcision) would read it like this:

In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ
= having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

However, what is the refutation, if an opponent complains that the verses are read this way only because the desired conclusion has been brought to the text by force?

Suppose the opponent claims that it is more natural to read the passage this way:

(1) In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature
(not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ),

(2) having been buried with him in baptism and

(3) raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

What if the opponent claims that, instead of talking about one thing (circumcision = baptism), the passage is talking about three things (circumcision, baptism, resurrection/faith)? Or at least spiritual circumcision and physical baptism as two different things, two entirely distinct operations?

Now, (a) if the circumstantial evidence (such as those passages in Acts) are inconclusive, neither proving nor disproving the doctrine, (b) if the interpretation on Colossians 2 is discredited or at least rendered inconclusive so quickly, (c) and if circumcision did not end because it has been replaced by water baptism, but because of the coming of Christ, as Paul argued in Galatians and other places, then the arguments from the usual biblical passages lose their force. Moreover, all arguments based on the covenant would become irrelevant, because these points would mean that whether or not God covenants with families, he does not have to associate any physical sign with it.

* * *

Of course the continuity of the OT and NT should not be in dispute. However, if water baptism is a sign of the covenant, and if the sign of the covenant must be applied to all members of the family, and if it is a moral obligation (so that it would be sin to neglect or refuse it), then the burden on the Reformed would be to establish beyond doubt (1) that there should still be a physical sign to the covenant, (2) that Paul's reasoning behind Galatians and other places does not nullify a physical sign, (3) but only cancels circumcision as a physical sign, (4) while the same reasoning somehow allows, even imposes, another physical sign, (5) but at the same time removes the significance that the Jews have placed upon a sign, (6) and establishes beyond doubt that this physical sign has become water baptism. It would be an amazing feat.

Are we convinced that the Reformed arguments have done this? Even if the Reformed arguments on baptism are strong enough to permit their doctrine, are they strong enough to be enforced? To impose an obligation upon the conscience of all believers? To declare that it is a sin to refuse? The Reformed wish to place their doctrine on this level, but if the arguments are circumstantial and inconclusive, and if the essential principles and assumptions are rendered irrelevant, then they are insufficient to produce this effect. This is the difficulty that they must overcome in order for their doctrine to define sin and command the conscience, as they want it to do.

* * *

The premise is that God covenants with families, and baptism is a sign of the covenant that applies to members of the families. Let us consider the sign first. (1) Has it been established that there is a physical sign of the covenant under Christ? (2) Has it been established that water baptism is a physical sign of the covenant? Now, if baptism is a sign of the covenant, and if it replaces circumcision so that baptism stays and circumcision goes, then why was Israel "baptized" in water under Moses when they had the sign of circumcision (1 Corinthians 10:2)?

As for the covenant itself, God never covenanted with families in the way some people assumed. Paul's argument in Romans 9 is that God never promised to save families as such, but he only promised to save "faith" — the faith of individuals. And these individuals could be way outside of those who had the sign of circumcision. So more Gentiles than Jews were receiving salvation through Jesus Christ. He actually said that those in the "family" were "not all" Abraham's children. Suppose I receive Jesus, and God says that his covenant now belongs to me and my children. According to Paul's reasoning, although God promises to save my children, he might consider only two out of ten of them truly my children, because only two would have faith. This makes the concept of covenanting with families, in the context of this topic, totally meaningless.

So did circumcision ever mean anything like the Reformed think? If not, then even if baptism replaces circumcision, which they must establish, baptism still would not mean what the Reformed think.

* * *

The most important thing is the circumcision of the heart. This has been God's emphasis since the beginning (Leviticus 26:41, Deuteronomy 36:10, Jeremiah 4:4, Jeremiah 9:25-26, Acts 7:51, Romans 2:28-29). Although it was important to obey God's command on circumcision, the Jews used their emphasis on physical circumcision to excuse themselves from spiritual circumcision. Many who anathematize people on water baptism are in the same condition. Their entire religion is about getting wet the right way and at the right age. They have never been baptized or circumcised in their hearts, and they don't want anyone to know it.

The Sabbath was important, but Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. He said to find out what God meant when he said that he wanted mercy, not sacrifice. God is not making Christians just so he would have more people to baptize. If we are not receiving mercy and showing mercy by doing what he commands, like preaching about victory in all of life, praying with faith, healing the sick, casting out demons, and prophesying for insight and comfort, then what good is it, if we are baptized the right way? We would not be doing what God wants anyway.

This is why I have mostly contempt and suspicion toward those who are insanely zealous for physical signs and rituals. They seem to be driven by a strange spirit. There is something wrong with them that they want to hide, and they are trying to distract people, even themselves, from the real issue. And they wouldn't even offer better arguments while doing it, which shows us even more about their spiritual and intellectual corruption.

From: email

32. Healing: A Christian Reality

Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. (Acts 14:19-20)

When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!"...The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted. (Acts 20:9-12)

Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand....But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. (Acts 28:3-5)

Living in the healing power of God should be as natural to us as eating and sleeping. There should be no struggle and no need to work up to it. Jesus took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses. He suffered the curse of sin and its effects. Although we can receive healing through prayer, it is not even necessary to pray for it. One who has faith can assume it and enforce it. He never has to beg for it and wonder if he will obtain it. Healing is not a hit-or-miss or case-by-case matter. It is an accomplished reality, and we live in it by faith.

33. Confessionalism and Denominationalism

1. Are you against confessionalism and denominationalism?

No, I am totally in favor of both as long as you submit your faith and conscience to a confession that I have written, and as long as you bring all your congregations under a denomination that I have founded.

Don't worry, I will follow the standard practice of claiming that my confession only represents what is in Scripture, and is never equal to it in authority. But in reality I will place it even above Scripture, and use it to interpret Scripture and judge all other groups and traditions. If you ever deviate from my confession, I will call you a heretic and chase you down. You will feel right at home.

2. Are you being sarcastic?

Why would you think so, when I have described your way of life so literally?

3. How can you compare yourself with the framers of the historic confessions? The historic confessions were formulated by wise and holy men, not someone like you.

Right, by men.

4. That's it?

You want more? I thought you answered your own question when you called them men. For a moment I forgot you are an idolater. After all these years, I still overestimate people sometimes. I developed the habit from the time when I read the Bible as a child and assumed that Christians actually believed it.

Right...well, how can you respect these men any more than you respect me, when I have refuted essential sections in their confessions? If you cannot even get pass me, then how can you validate these men? What kind of sadist are you, to make me submit to them, when I have refuted them? To you, is tradition more important than truth? Do you force me to receive what I know to be false?

Or do you mean that it is acceptable only if I submit to men that YOU approve? So in reality YOU are the judge of these men, the historic confessions, and the judge of my faith. Is that what creedalism means? If not, then why don't you submit to me?

If we are not permitted to reason and dissent, then it is the implicit faith of Catholicism. If we are permitted to reason and dissent, then what use is your confession? At the most, it would be a template from which we reconstruct our own theology. Either way, it would not be what you say it is.

5. So you are against confessionalism and denominationalism?

I already answered you. Why is it hard to understand? I am sincerely in favor of both confessionalism and denominationalism as long as I am the writer of the confession and the head of the denomination.

I don't think you can win this if what you want is for me to come under your confession and denomination, because I have already refuted yours, and I have written out elaborate formulations, making my confession superior. If you were so confessional and denominational, you would place your conscience under my authority and let me tell you what to believe and how to behave.

Again, are you telling me that you are for confessionalism and denominationalism only if I submit under YOUR confession and denomination? Or at least one on your approved list? Why don't you just admit it? And if this is your attitude, why am I wrong to demand the same from you? Am I supposed to submit under your people, as if they are somehow more qualified than I am, even though I have refuted them?

Does truth matter to you at all? Does Jesus Christ mean anything to you?

6. Do you agree with the so-called confessional imperative?

Yes! That's what I have been trying to tell you. It is imperative that you agree with me. I don't think you want to turn that around. If you try to make it imperative for me to agree with your confessions, I will decimate them and leave you with nothing. You will be stuck with whole stacks of confessions that you know are false.

My guess is that you will keep living the same way as if nothing has happened, but this will multiply your guilt before God, because you will be choosing the lie while knowing the truth.

If you want to force me to submit to a false creed no matter what, and if you continue to submit to a false creed no matter what, then I doubt that you are a Christian. How dare you question me? I should be the one interrogating you.

7. Are you one of those "No creed but Christ" people?

Obviously not. Which brand of idiot are you? Pay attention. You wish to think of me this way not because I don't have a "creed," since my theology is more complete and precise than yours, but because I do not submit to your creed or because I do not hold an attitude toward it that you like. You are so deep in religious idolatry that you cannot process this and this is your reflexive response.

I have written theological formulations on most doctrines, and in more elaborate detail than your confessions. You can extract sections out of my writings and arrange them into a creed in a matter of hours. Feel free to bind your conscience to it and bring all your denominations under it. Feel free to say that you commit sin whenever you disagree with me or transgress anything that I have written. Since you are so stupid, I am not sure I want you in my denomination, but if you are so zealous to bind your conscience to some man, then I would rather it be me than someone else. At least I have no interest in exploiting you. With me, you are always a free man in Christ...if you are indeed in Christ.

How can I be "no creed but Christ," when I am the one who keeps insisting that we have to know Christ by his doctrines? You might be able to get away with it if you are bullying some other Christian, but when you are talking to me, since I have already written out such elaborate formulations and refuted essential sections in the historic confessions as well as the accepted formulations of many standard theologians, I don't think you can impose a standard on me that I cannot turn around and impose on the whole bunch of you with greater force and warrant. So don't think you can act all superior and put something like this on me. It won't work. It will backfire against you.

Indeed, Christ is my creed — I am not ashamed to admit this — and what an intellectually extensive and satisfying confession! The creed of Jesus Christ is a comprehensive revelation. He reveals himself to me by his creed — his complete system of doctrines.

But I am concerned that you have a creed, a defective one, but no Christ.

8. But don't you think that God ordains creeds, denominations, and their leaders by his providence? So they are in authority even though they might be flawed.

Of course I agree. Why do you think you are talking to me now? Providence. Now leave your tradition, and follow me, as I follow Christ.

Ready to sign up? If you join my denomination, I promise to SLAP that hypocrisy right off your face very quickly. But boy, it is going to hurt.

34. Catholic Wannabe

I chuckled at the irony when I saw one of the world's most well-known **Reformed** theologians, **in a robe** hardly distinguishable from those used by Catholic priests, preaching at **Saint Petersburg**, Florida. He didn't have the funny tall hat though, so I suppose that's the "reformed" part of it. Go Reformation!

35. Two Mindsets: Political vs. Spiritual

John the Baptist: Go ask Jesus, "I have been unjustly thrown into prison. Are you the political champion we wanted, or should we expect someone else?"

Jesus: Go back and tell John what you hear and see: Jesus is healing the sick, healing the sick, healing the sick, healing the sick — yes, I want to say this five times in different ways — and preaching the gospel. This is the spiritual ministry I am supposed to be doing. You better not be upset about that.

See: Matthew 11:2-6

* * *

Jesus: Don't begin your ministry — don't even leave town — until you receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Disciples: OK...but when will God restore our political power?

Jesus: Don't think about that. It is none of your business. You will receive spiritual power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. This is the power to preach the gospel, power to heal, power to see, hear, and know prophetically, and power to receive and perform all kinds of signs and wonders. Then you are ready to be my witnesses to the whole world by continuing my spiritual ministry.

See: Acts 1:4-8

* * *

Authorities: Don't speak about this Jesus anymore!

Apostles: Really? Should we obey you rather than God?

Back at the church...

Apostles: Guess what? They don't want us to talk about Jesus anymore.

Christians: Lord, look at their political threats. But we finally understand. Infuse us with spiritual power to preach, to heal, and to work miracles in the name of Jesus.

See: Acts 4:18-31

* * *

After two thousand years...

Christians: Lord, look at their political threats. Now grant us with even more political power to organize, campaign, educate, and influence policy in the name of our denomination.

And kill the charismatics. They remind us of somebody we really hate, but we can't remember his name. They're always talking about healing the sick, healing the sick, healing the sick, and preaching the gospel. That's just sooo unbiblical, right?

In the name of our bestselling theologian, Th.D., Ph.D, STD, copyright, patent pending, etc.

Amen.

See: Your mirror

36. Get Wise, or Get Out

Several places in the Book of Proverbs say that the wise man will listen to advice and rebuke, but the fool refuses counsel. Christians have abused this so much that it has become a truism, an adage or tradition, or Christian cultural common sense, instead of a divine precept. We must allow the Bible to define its own terms and ideas. The Book of Proverbs is all about wisdom. And it says that the fear of the Lord is the foundation of wisdom. So when it tells us to heed advice, it is only talking about wise and godly advice.

In most cases, this would wipe out a hundred percent of the advice and counsel our stupid neighbors are so eager to force upon us. They want to dictate our doctrines. They want to direct our decisions. They want to correct our attitudes. They have an opinion on every little thing about us. Most of the time, we are dealing with busybodies, not counselors. When we refuse to listen because they are so stupid, here comes the verses from Proverbs again. They have God's word, but they do not know how to use it.

Wise counsel, however, is worth more than fine gold. It can save a soul. It can save a family. It can save a nation (Proverbs 11:14). God always gives wisdom to anyone who asks in faith (James 1:5-8). But when you are dealing with people, unless they are Christians who have knowledge of God's word and strong faith in what it says, you will continue to receive bad advice, and that is worse than no advice.

37. A Greeting with a Point

Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. (3 John 2, KJV)

The faith teachers (WOF) often use this verse to teach a gospel of health and wealth. Critics counter that their application fails to respect the genre or literary form of 3 John. The verse appears in the introductory portion of a letter. Thus it is a greeting, intended as a wish and not a promise. The observation might be correct, but to use this as a rebuttal is deceptive. Whether the misdirection stems from a lack of reverence, a lack of honesty, or a lack of intelligence, we will not take time to investigate. The theologians of unbelief usually display all three characteristics in their attempts to destroy their enemies.

Faith teachers do not always refer to the verse as a promise in the first place. In fact, I cannot immediately recall an example of this. But let us assume that some of them do, so that we will not become stuck on this point. Still, the truth is that they mainly use the verse to teach that it is "God's will" for his people to live in health and prosperity. In our terms, this would be in the preceptive sense.

If the critics then insist that the apostolic greeting cannot represent God's preceptive will on the matter because the verse appears in the greeting portion of a letter, they would have to apply this to all the apostolic letters. All the greetings in the inspired epistles would be reduced to mere human wishes and friendly gestures. This offers an alarming view into what the critics really think about Scripture, and God himself.

What are some of the apostolic greetings? Paul writes, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:3). A mere greeting? I can get someone saved with this! And Paul himself extended this with theological content: "...who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (v. 4-5). Verse 4 affirms the atonement, but it depends on verse 3, the greeting. So the greeting is not just a greeting.

Peter writes, "Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (2 Peter 1:2). Is this a mere wish? But there is a teaching in there: "...through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." We can receive grace and peace in abundance through the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ. The greeting is not just a greeting, but also a teaching.

Even if a greeting amounts to a mere wish, we know that grace and peace are promised to us through Christ. So just because something appears in a greeting as a wish does not mean that it is not promised in many other places in Scripture. This is mainly how the faith teachers use the 3 John 2. The verse teaches us that God's will is for his people to possess healing and prosperity, and he has promised these things in a number of places in the Bible. The observation that the verse is a greeting does not overturn the WOF doctrine.

Look at the greeting in Revelation: "John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father — to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. " (Revelation 1:4-6). The high christology is so integrated with the greeting that it is inseparable from it. As I copied the passage to make this point, I became captivated by the content and read it several times to appreciate it. I could taste the richness in it. The elevated description of Christ was enough to move me to tears, but I restrained myself so I could continue. This is the Jesus I love. But of course, it is just a greeting, right?

When I write a greeting card to my wife, I follow the custom where one closes with a word or phrase, accompanied by a signature. The difference is that there is a special phrase that I use only for her. I might throw other people a "sincerely," if even that. Although it is a customary portion of a card, when I write to her it is not a mere greeting or polite gesture, but it is always the most meaningful part of it. I always write it with the greatest amount of feeling and purpose. The words represent what she means to me. The phrase is both a statement of fact and a solemn promise.

Who was God to John? What did Jesus mean to him? "Him who is, and who was, and who is to come...the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth...who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood." If this is just a greeting to you, then Jesus does not mean the same to you. But if Jesus means the same to you, then this is not just a greeting.

This same John greets his friend Gaius with all sincerity: "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well" (3 John 2). Just a wish? What a wish! He does not say, "Friend, I wish that the sovereign will of God be done in your life, whether it is sickness or health, whether it is prosperity or calamity." No, he only wants his friend to be well. Unless the scholars accuse John of going rogue, in which case they would condemn themselves, the least we can say about the verse is that it represents the preceptive will of God. And this is exactly how the faith teachers use it most of the time. Then, the promises of God that could fulfill John's wish are found in other places in Scripture.

The first issue with this verse is not health and wealth, but whether we take God's word seriously. Even if the faith teachers make more out of the verse than it intends, the critics are the worse offenders. With all the right intellectual tools, it is remarkable that they end up with such an inferior application, while the unsophisticated "heretics" arrive at a better interpretation just by taking the verse more seriously — to the critics, too seriously. The truth is that these critics are prejudiced against the Bible itself, and against the benefits that come from faith in Christ, and the WOF Christians just happen to get caught in the crossfire. The faith teachers are indeed mistaken on some points, but you could not tell what they are, if you are prejudiced against what the Bible teaches.

When have you seen the critics put 3 John 2 to good use? Probably the only time that they bring it up is for controversy and refutation, not for teaching and encouragement. So which group honors the word of God more? What good is it, if the critics call themselves doctors this and that, when they cannot even use a greeting correctly? And what good is it, if they do not use God's word to build up people's faith? Wouldn't they contribute more to the world, if they would become land mine testers instead?

38. Accept Jesus Into Your Heart

Accept Jesus Christ...

Whoever accepts you also accepts me, and whoever accepts me also accepts the One who sent me. (Matthew 10:40, NCV)

But to all who did accept him and believe in him he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12, NCV)

And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. (Colossians 2:6, NLT)

Confess him as Lord...

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9, NIV)

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Acts 2:21, NIV)

Ask him into your heart...

On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. (John 14:20, NIV)

I pray...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. (Ephesians 3:16-17, NIV)

"Accept Jesus Christ, confess him as Lord, and ask him into your heart."

Some pretentious and ignorant religionists complain that this is not the gospel, but this is exactly the gospel. The message is correct both as an introduction to the Christian life and as an continuation of the Christian life. The shallow evangelism that they claim to oppose, where it is wrong, is not wrong on this point.

Their incompetent diagnosis disqualifies them as those who could lead the church back to biblical evangelism. They themselves don't know what it is. They just know they want to correct people who are getting more converts than they are.

They seize on the false converts and declare that the whole thing is worthless! But they are getting almost no converts, real or false. They want to preach "the gospel according to the

apostles," but the apostles wrote the above verses, didn't they? The apostles also wanted us to accept Jesus Christ and ask him into our hearts.

They want biblical evangelism, but biblical evangelism often came with signs following and resulted in instant conversions. They deny evangelism with healing, prophecy, and miracles, and they either deny instant conversions or they rarely get them.

For all their talk about wanting everything to be "biblical," it seems that they don't read the Bible, don't know the Bible, and definitely don't believe the Bible. Yet they think they are the gold standard of biblical orthodoxy and biblical evangelism.

39. Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Forgiveness in the Bible is mainly volitional, and judicial or forensic. It is a voluntary cancellation of an objective debt. The debt is incurred toward God when a person violates God's commands, and also when one inherits guilt — both a guilty verdict and a guilty nature — from mankind's federal head, Adam. Between men, the debt is incurred when one person thinks or behaves in a way about or toward another person such that he violates God's commands regarding how one must treat another.

Forgiveness in human relationships is also mainly volitional and objective, not emotional. Jesus said that if someone has wronged you, even multiple times on the same day, but returns and says "I repent," you are to forgive him. This seems to imply that forgiveness is possible or required only when the other person repents. But elsewhere, Jesus also says that when someone wrongs you, you are supposed to confront him, to rebuke him and show him his fault. Then, if he admits to wrongdoing and repents, you are to forgive him. Both sides have the responsibility to resolve the issue. The one who has sinned ought to know that he has sinned and ask for forgiveness. And the one who is wronged ought to confront the offender, and make a case for the charge based on Scripture, and the offender is then supposed to repent. When that happens, the one who is wronged must forgive.

God demands reconciliation, especially among brothers and sisters in Christ. The biblical approach is to fix it, not just to forget it. If the offender refuses to repent, then the one who is wronged can bring the matter before the elders and the church. The unrepentant offender is finally excommunicated.

Some people take this further to say that forgiveness must mean a total removal of the debt such that the relationship must become the same as before, as if the transgression has never occurred. They claim that true forgiveness in human relationships means instant and total restoration. This is often what should happen, but when they teach it as an obligation, it is not only unbiblical, but foolish and dangerous. It is irresponsible to impose a false principle like this on believers such that they think they are morally compelled to always proceed as if nothing has happened.

When some Pharisees and Sadducees came to John the Baptist, he said, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:7-8). Why did John say this? Why didn't he welcome them? Because he was not stupid. He knew that people can say they are interested in your message, and people can say that they repent, but few people actually change. John would not accept an empty gesture, but insisted, "Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God" (NLT). In human relationships, we can extend formal forgiveness to someone who repents, but it is often dangerous and destructive to continue as if nothing has happened. Consider cases like murder, rape, fraud, and so on. Would you allow a known child molester to babysit for you just because he claims he repents? You would be a criminal parent.

Suppose someone worked for you and committed a costly error so that you fired him. Now he returns and says, "I was careless and did not take the work seriously. I repent." You forgive him, but it would be unreasonable to insist that you must hire him back. You might no longer be angry with him, but his error probably showed that he was not right for the job in the first place. If he receives additional training and if his work ethic obviously improves, then give him another chance if you wish. But don't rehire him if he has not changed. What if he is a bus driver? What if he was drunk while operating dangerous factory machinery? How many opportunities will you give him before he kills somebody? Let him produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

This is true even with milder situations. Suppose a friend wronged you and damaged the relationship. Now he returns and repents. By all means, forgive him, but it does not necessarily mean that you have to be friends again, or that the relationship must return to the way it was before. Perhaps the two of you have conflicting priorities in life. There is no reason to force both of you to keep wasting time. It does not mean you are angry with him. You might even help him when he gets into trouble. But not everyone has to be your friend. The same is true with ministry. You do not have to offer personal attention to everyone who asks for it. When some people do not listen to me, after a while I stop making the effort and cut them off. It does not mean I resent them. I am not the only preacher in the world, and we should not keep wasting time. They might listen to other people.

The procedure is not possible with non-Christians. They operate by a different standard of right and wrong. It is impossible to bring an unbeliever to the church elders or a church court. There is no excommunication since he has never been in fellowship with the congregation. However, the Christian can still take the first step toward reconciliation by confronting the non-Christian offender about his wrongdoing. The non-Christian's repentance must first entail conversion to the Christian faith. If this does not happen, then the Christian cannot offer forgiveness in the objective sense. We can pray to God, "Father, forgive him." This is answered only when God turns him into a Christian. If he does not become a Christian, God will throw him into hell for his sins anyway, including the sin that he committed against you. There is no forgiveness of sins other than by the blood of Christ.

A person transforms from an enemy to a friend only when he becomes a Christian. Any other friendship is superficial. Suppose a non-Christian owes you ten dollars and refuses to pay it. You can "forgive" that in an objective sense by not pursuing the matter, but there is no way to forgive the objective moral wrong that he has done. If you confront him about the moral wrong, you do so on the basis of God's commands about stealing, telling the truth, and so on, but whether he happens to agree or not, he does not affirm the same standard for the same reason; therefore, it is impossible for him to repent in the right sense ("I have wronged you by violating God's commands in my behavior toward you"). He must become a Christian, and then repent on the basis of God's commands, or there can be no true reconciliation. As for the emotions, a Christian is not supposed to harbor resentment toward another person, but to let that go is a private matter of self-control and the fruit of the Spirit, and is not forgiveness in the objective sense.

Let us summarize. If we use the word "forgive" in a very loose sense, then it is possible for a Christian to forgive a non-Christian, or for a non-Christian to forgive another non-Christian. However, the Bible uses the word and the idea in a more specific sense. Forgiveness in the Bible entails true reconciliation with God and men instead of putting the matter aside without resolving it. This is why for a non-Christian to receive forgiveness in a biblical sense, he must become a Christian. There is no true love, forgiveness, humility, or any other moral virtue in non-Christians, because these are the fruit of the Spirit, and non-Christians cannot have the Spirit. What they seem to have or think they have is an imitation. Any "forgiveness" toward the non-Christian or an unrepentant person can at the most mean releasing emotional resentment toward him or releasing him from any material debt (such as money borrowed). But this is not forgiveness in the specifically biblical sense.

Then there are those who declare that it is unbiblical to apologize, but one must always ask for forgiveness. This is from the same group of people who claim that true forgiveness must always mean instant and total restoration even in human relationships. They are from a theological tradition that tends to strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. Here I think it depends on what we are talking about. If someone accidentally bumps into you on the train and says, "I am sorry" or "I apologize," I don't think you should seize him by the collar and demand, "NO!!! You must repent and ask me to forgive you!" Sometimes a polite gesture like "I am sorry" or "Excuse me" is more than sufficient, and we should not be so easily offended. However, if a person does something that God's word defines as a sin, and it is something that is concrete and significant, so that we can investigate it and discuss it, then the proper procedure for forgiveness is necessary. And often when someone realizes the seriousness of the situation and says, "I apologize," he indeed means, "I was wrong, please forgive me." In those case, it is usually more important to achieve reconciliation first, and then settle the proper terminologies later.

40. Healing Cloths

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. (Acts 19:11-12)

Many charismatic groups send out cloths for healing. What do you think about it? Is it biblical? Could a church do it or is it unnecessary?

God heals through various methods. I am not drawn to this one because I avoid using objects and substances in ministry as much as possible. Considered in itself, of course it is biblical, and there might be practical reasons for it even when one does not prefer it. The problem is usually not the method, but whether it is used as a gimmick and whether it is used to raise money. Presumably, Paul used this method to deliver God's healing power to people that he was unable to reach. When God's power is in tangible manifestation, it could conduct through the body as well as fabric. There was enough power stored in Elisha's bones that a dead man was revived when his corpse touched them. Jesus could feel power going out of him to heal the woman who had a bleeding condition when she touched his clothes. If something similar is happening here, it indicates that this power is also stored in fabric.

There are several modes by which God's power can work through men. The "gifts of the Spirit" is only one of them. Although Christians often use the "gifts" language to teach and debate the entire subject, the Bible almost never refers to God's power working through men as "gifts" — only a few times out of hundreds of instances. The "tangible anointing," as the charismatics sometimes call it, is actually a different mode. The Bible represents this with a number of phrases, but we will use the charismatic term for the sake of convenience. The two sometimes overlap, but they are distinguishable. Even within the gifts of the Spirit, there are the gift of healing and the gift of faith, but the gift of faith can also heal. Thus even when we are talking about the gifts of the Spirit, there are different ways of doing the same things. Then there is the faith of the Christian that is not the gift of faith. It is a "gift" in the sense that it comes from God, and not manufactured by the man, but it is not the gift of faith that comes under "the manifestations of the Spirit." This is the Christian's ordinary and permanent faith. This kind of faith is the mode that operates most closely with the word of God, since that is the only thing it looks at. This is the mode of operation that is the most independent from feeling and environment.

Faith also enhances how one works with the gifts of the Spirit and the tangible anointing. Elisha was a strong prophet, but when the three kings consulted him about their battle with Moab, he was annoyed due to the presence of ungodly men. So he asked a musician to play, and while he played, the hand of the Lord came upon him, and he prophesied. Some Christians need to produce a pleasant environment whenever they operate in healing and prophecy. They use music, lighting, isolation before the meeting, and audience support

during the meeting, in order to strengthen the manifestation of God's power or to cooperate better with it. Those who are ignorant of spiritual things often think that this is mysticism, or part of a scam. But it is biblical, and dismissing something like this when it is clearly biblical is tantamount to dismissing the Spirit due to prejudice. If our theology cannot accommodate all of Scripture, then we must revise our theology. That said, if we operate by faith, it is almost never necessary to adjust the surrounding elements. Jesus healed the sick in hot, noisy, and uncomfortable environments, among hostile people. He did not need music to heal the sick. He did not need air-conditioning to prophesy. When we realize that he was also the most extreme faith teacher, the matter becomes clear. Faith enhances all the operations of God.

When the gifts of the Spirit come into play, I usually let them do what they want while I do my own thing by faith, unless they happen to demand my involvement. This is more likely with prophetic gifts, such as when I need to point someone out from the audience or say something specific to the person in front of me. When other gifts come into operation while I minister to the sick, like the gift of healing or the working of miracles, I would proceed as normal if possible. They would strengthen what I am already doing, and the people often can't tell the difference, because what the gifts of the Spirit do, I have been doing by faith alone, so that they witness the same results either way. Sometimes the gifts disrupt the normal process, and I would adapt accordingly. When the tangible anointing is present, I almost never mention it to the people. I could be talking about healing and the power begins to burn my hands, but I would just ignore it. I would lay hands on the sick either way. Sometimes the power is especially strong. Even though Jesus was always ready to heal, in one place the Gospel makes a point of saying, "And the power of the Lord was present to heal them." It would just be something added on top of what I am doing. I would operate by faith with or without it.

Some people suggest that we should always talk about the tangible presence of God's power to honor his work and to increase expectation. I understand this perspective, and it is fine to talk about it. Indeed, when it comes to things like these, whatever you talk about tends to become stronger. However, I would always prefer to draw people's attention to the word of God. If we fail to focus on faith, then the people might become increasingly impressed with the tangible manifestations such that they would keep waiting for them when they can just take God at his word at any moment. They might also think that the more spectacular works are done only when these manifestations are present, but this is not true. God answers faith, and he performs the most spectacular works; therefore, faith performs the most spectacular works. If it is something that God is doing, then it is not wrong to acknowledge it, but we must focus on his word.

The tangible power indeed affects what I do when it moves in a way that demands my attention. Jesus felt the power go out of him when the woman touched his clothes, and so he stopped to ask about it. If I am preaching and I sense this power reaching out to a certain person, I might pause and point it out. It depends on several factors as to whether or not I say anything. Sometimes God is doing his own thing and I will hear about it later. Or, if I am talking to a person on stage and I sense the power entering a certain area of his body, I would realize that he has a sickness in that area that God is healing. I can say, "You are

healed. What was wrong with you?" or "God is healing your back right now. What was wrong with it?" Again, this could coincide with the gifts of the Spirit, but it is not the same thing. Knowing something this way is not the same as prophecy. There is usually no specific information with the tangible anointing. Jesus did not know who touched his clothes or what condition was healed. Prophecy can potentially locate the person, name the condition, describe the circumstances surrounding the sickness or injury, and a combination of various items.

The tangible anointing could direct the timing of ministry. I am always ready to move by faith, because the word of God is always the same, but if I sense that I am supposed to wait, then I might keep talking to the person or the audience, going on and on, and not praying for the person or laying hands on him. Then suddenly the power moves, and I move with it. Sometimes you see a preacher doing this during healing and prophetic ministry. He seems to talk more than he needs to before he lays hands on each person. This could be the reason, but I suspect many of them do not realize why they are doing this. They are doing it instinctively. Then sometimes the power runs down the line so fast you have to run to keep up.

The power can also come when a minister is preaching or teaching. The Bible often mentions how the hand of the Lord comes upon a person as he speaks. How it affects this kind of ministry is another subject. But it does not fall exactly under the gifts of the Spirit. To relate this to healing, when Jesus was teaching, demons were sometimes forced to cry out, so that they exposed themselves and were cast out. Sometimes people stationed close to me are healed as I preach, or when they come close after I preached, but this does not happen while we are, say, just eating or shopping. The power comes with the exercise of a gift or ministry. The same effect, like healing, can be delivered by different ministries. Sometimes we find that a person has little success when he lays hands on the sick, but he obtains consistent results when he delivers healing in the form of prophecies. Someone like this probably has a strong gift of prophecy, and covers all kinds of topics, and healing is only one of them. He might not even have a gift of healing. One may have a strong healing ministry, but people receive healing only when he prays for them, not when he is preaching to them. In fact, he might make a mess of teaching on healing. This is probably because he has no ministry for doctrine or for teaching. Someone like this should not be the head of a ministry, but he should submit under a pastor or teacher. Many defective ministries have been formed because they are founded by people who think they can lead a major work just because they have certain gifts like healing and prophecy. Sometimes they confuse the ministry of exhortation with the ministry of preaching or teaching. Any believer should be competent in teaching simple truths, so gift or no gift, there is no excuse, but you do need a doctrinal gift or ministry to lead a Christian work. Use your strengths to deliver Christ to people, while continue to develop other areas.

You can see how important it is to understand that there are different modes of operation, and how ignorant it is to focus only on the gifts of the Spirit when discussing whether God still performs miracles through men. When it comes to the ministry of healing, there is a reason that makes this understanding essential. Some Christians assume that the only way God performs miracles is by the gifts of the Spirit, and some of them also realize that there

is such a thing as God's tangible power. And so they wait for these things. They think they are helpless until these things come. Some people wait even with the ministry of preaching or teaching. They pray and wait, pray and wait. You don't need to pray for something that is already here, just like you don't need to pray that Jesus would come down from heaven or that he would rise from the dead. He already did. The word of God is always here, and it is always the same. What does faith say? "The word of God is near you: it is in your mouth and in your heart" (see Romans 10:6-8). If you have faith, you can always do what the word of God says you can do. If you have faith, you can always receive what the word of God promises. There is no need to wait for some gift or power to arrive. It is also unnecessary to wait for some special minister.

I mention the above for two reasons, other than the fact that this is an opportunity to discuss some of these things. First, it is important to note that the cloths Paul sent out likely carried this tangible healing power. Second, I want to point out that these things are biblical, and not strange. They are not mystical or anti-intellectual. They can be intelligently studied from the Bible, then discussed and practiced. The reason they might feel wrong to people is because the "Christian" worldview in mainstream evangelical theology is not really biblical. It predetermines what is allowed from the Bible, and then it arranges the filtered data into doctrines. After that some things in the Bible can no longer fit into this belief system or this view of reality. And those things are then considered unbiblical. Thus although the effort supposedly honors Christ, in reality it constructs an intellectual stronghold that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. There it stands stubbornly against the parts of the Bible that it has discarded.

Returning to Paul, it is certainly biblical to send out cloths for healing, but there are other considerations I would like to discuss.

Due to improved technology for travel and communication, as well as the wider spread of the gospel throughout these centuries, we are now in a better position than the one the apostle lived in. I do not mean that we are better than Paul, but that Paul has made things better for us. Now Christians all over the world can pray for the sick, and the sick can also pray for themselves and receive healing that way. Many Christians no longer have to send for help to someone far away, but if he lacks knowledge on the subject, or if his faith is weak, he might find Christians around him who can teach him and pray for him. Even when someone who is far away asks for help, our first response does not have to be healing cloths. It is now easy to send instructions, even entire books and recordings, in an instant. We can teach the person to pray for himself, and to expel the sickness from his own body by the authority that God has given to every believer. The instances where healing cloths seem necessary have been drastically reduced.

The method is too often used as a gimmick. By this, I mean that many ministries send out cloths when they are unnecessary and when they are ineffective. If the healing can be achieved by teaching the people, either the sick or those around them, then this is the first route to take. Teach the people the promises of God, the atonement of Christ, and the rights and powers that they can exercise by faith. The main reason to send out cloths is when there are people unfamiliar with healing who are struck with urgent cases, and there is no

way to quickly teach them to receive for themselves. If it is still somehow necessary to send out cloths, they need to be effective — the people must actually receive healing. If a ministry has not been receiving definite reports of success, it should stop using a scattershot approach in sending out cloths, where it just blasts the things all over the place not knowing whether anyone ever receives healing because of them. Even if it continues to send out cloths, it should reserve them for people that it cannot reach locally, and switch to a more deliberate and monitored approach. Record the names, addresses, and conditions of the people receiving the cloths, then follow up. Obtain detailed testimonies, medical reports, x-rays, and so on.

One way to improve the success rate is to ensure that the fabric has been in contact with the tangible power of God. I have the impression that many ministries cut up tiny squares of thin fabric and send them right out without even praying over them. This is dishonest, but dishonest or not, it is useless either way when no one is receiving healing from them. This is a different operation from healing by faith alone. You need the power to enter the cloths before sending them out. And use bigger and thicker cloths, not tiny squares of paper-thin fabric. Have the cloths ready at church meetings so that when the tangible power is in manifestation, lay hands on them and pray over them. Or, the minister can carry the cloths on him for a while during services where this power is in manifestation. This most likely means that a ministry would be unable to send out tens of thousands of them. Good! Of course, the cloths should never be used to raise money. Healing is one ministry about which Jesus explicitly said, "Freely you have received, freely give." If a group discovers that it does not really have this kind of ministry, then stop sending out cloths. Focus on teaching the word of God and laying hands on the sick. Help those who are far away with intercessions and instructions, especially teachings on what belongs to them in Christ and what they can do by faith in his name.

41. The Father Himself Loves You

In that day you will ask in my name. **I am not saying that I will ask the Father** on your behalf. **No, the Father himself loves you** because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. (John 16:26-27)

Just highlighting some of these neglected words of the Bible is more profitable than a hundred sermons that spread unbelief.

42. The Water-Walking Controversy

Peter: Lord, if it is really you, tell me to walk to you on the water.

Jesus: Come!

Thus Jesus gave his word, his promise that Peter could exercise this power and experience this miracle. Peter started walking toward Jesus. He was walking on the water as if it was solid ground. It was happening. It was indeed the word of God. It was indeed the will of God. Otherwise, he could not have taken even the first step. But as Peter saw the wind and the waves, he became fearful, and started to sink. As always, the false teachers were watching, and scheming.

Peter: Lord, save me!

Theologian #1: It must be the will of God for you to suffer!

Theologian #2: This is a gift from God! Embrace it! Learn from it!

Theologian #3: The mystery of suffering. Oh, the theology of the cross!

Theologian #4: Don't waste your drowning!

Theologian #5: People are watching. Quick! Strike a pose as you sink. Try to look like a suffering saint. You can get a book deal out of this! "Where is God When I Sink?" "The Water-Walking Heresy." "Christ-Centered Drowning." "Sinking and the Sovereignty of God." "Drowning for the Glory of God." "The Redemptive-Historical Excuse for Sinking in Life." There is a large market of idiots with itching ears for this kind of stuff.

Jesus: Peter, I gave you my word, but it takes faith to experience what I said. Why do you have so little faith? Why did you doubt? What did the wind and the waves have to do with it? Do you think it is easier to walk on calm water? What have I been teaching you about miracles? Walk by faith, not by sight! If you have faith, THEN you will see the glory of God. If you failed to experience a miracle, it is not because I did not give you my promise, but because you did not have faith.

Theologian #1: I knew it. You're a Pentecostal Arminian.

Theologian #2: You insensitive faith heretic! Why don't you shut up?

Theologian #3: Let him talk now. After we kill him, our followers will have hundreds of years to preach a different gospel and to destroy everyone that spreads his doctrine of faith. We will crucify him again and again until he is just a smudge on a piece of wood.

Theologian #4: I hate this guy so much. Just to rub it in his face, we will make our religion the Christian orthodoxy. We will say we are preaching his gospel.

Theologian #5: LOL

43. Take Out the Trash

When you are a preacher, some people will support you as long as you are a mouthpiece for their pet doctrines, but they will turn against you when you say something that challenges them. Even if you are right, they just don't want to hear it. They don't want to change. They don't want to think that they are wrong, especially when it concerns an area of life that they are proud of, like religion. You are challenging a part of their identity, something that makes them who they are. You are killing them. This is why they become angry, and they will try to kill you first. But Jesus said, if you try to save your life, you will lose it, but if you will lose your life for his sake, then you will find it.

As long as you do not offend them, they will support you, because they consider you their champion. You clear the way for them to believe what they want to believe and to be who they want to be in this world. As a preacher, perhaps your only interest is to speak the truth for Jesus, but these people do not want you to speak for him, but for them. The two might appear to overlap, because some of what they wish you would say will coincide with what you should say anyway. At least on paper, some of the truth of the gospel agrees with what they affirm as their personal philosophy. So they support you, not because you speak for Jesus, but because they feel like you are speaking for them. Their faith is fake. Their approval is an illusion. And they become a drag. It is better to take out the trash early and clean up your audience. This is why it is important to offend them. As you continue to speak for Jesus, eventually you will say things that they cannot accept, because they have never really accepted him in the first place.

Jesus would cut off the dead weight. Once he told the crowd, "Eat my flesh, drink my blood!" The people were confused and offended. Speak the truth bluntly, so that they will hear you. Give them a chance to be offended, or else they would never snap out of the illusion that they agree with you and the truth. Jesus would speak the truth in outrageous ways. If the followers had truly respected him enough to pay attention, they would have heard, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life." Their loyalty was a pretense. It was never really about Christ, but themselves. So the Bible says, "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (John 6:66). Good riddance.

Then Jesus asked those who remained, "Aren't you going to leave too?" It is pointless to keep disciples and supporters, if they are only using you to pursue their own agendas — not your mission from God, and not the gospel of Christ. But those who stayed said, "Lord, where would we go? You have the words of life." True followers of Christ will know that you are a man, not God. They will not worship you, but they will recognize the voice of the Great Shepherd in you, that you care about God, that you speak the truth, and that you labor for them to know God intimately and accurately.

Preach the word. Preach Jesus Christ as he is in the Bible. Don't be an echo of the people and their traditions or opinions. Don't let them use you as their mouthpiece. Resist the

pressure to keep them around just so you will have a bigger crowd. They will become a liability. If they are going to be offended eventually, then offend them early, and offend them deeply. Your work will be better and cleaner for it.

44. Just Hold It, Don't Read It

Pastor: The Bible is complete! Isn't it wonderful? We have the whole revelation of God in this book. Let us celebrate the whole counsel of God!

Christian: Great! It says Jesus took my infirmities and bore my sicknesses. It says that if I pray in faith, the Lord will heal me. If the Bible is complete, then this must be God's final word on the subject. Do you mean I can experience healing by faith like anything else that Jesus did for me?

Pastor: Well...God is sovereign. It might or might not happen.

Christian: What is there to be "sovereign" about, when the book says this already happened? Wasn't he sovereign when he did it? What if I believe in Jesus like the Bible tells me, and God still sends me to hell?

Pastor: No, that's different. If you have faith in Jesus, you will surely be saved.

Christian: But...I might not get healed, even though this same Jesus bore my sicknesses, and even though this is based on the same Isaiah 53 that talks about his atonement for sin.

Pastor: Right, because God is sovereign.

Christian: Whew. This is crazy. But I can cast out demons and speak in tongues, right? And I can prophesy like the Bible says? You said we have the complete Bible, so that can't have changed, right?

Pastor: Oh, no, no, no! Hold it right there. All that ended almost as soon as it started. Don't let our people hear you talk like that or I would have to kick you out.

Christian: All right, then. I suppose I can still seek first the kingdom of God, and then all these things that the pagans seek will still be added to me like Jesus said.

Pastor: Well, you know...

Christian: OK! What now?! I can't have this either?

Pastor: Look, I didn't mean you can believe or experience everything that the book promises. The Bible...well, it's just...you just need to HAVE it. Just hold it. It's all that God wants to tell you.

Christian: But only several things that it says still apply. Even the atonement does not apply much of the time because God is sovereign. So he tells me things that he doesn't want me to believe.

Pastor: Right. You see, if you take the redemptive-historical approach...

Christian: Wait, so I don't have to seek God's kingdom? Because God is sovereign?

Pastor: Oh, no. God is not THAT sovereign. You still need to do that.

Christian: So I MUST do the first part, because God said it, but I might not get the second part, even though God said it, because God is sovereign. And if I believe in his atonement for sin, I will be saved, but if I believe in his atonement for healing, I might not be healed. This is just brilliant. I never would have come up with this on my own.

Pastor: If you have been to seminary, you would understand.

Christian: I am sure, reverend, then I would be smart like you.

45. Evangelism: Decisions vs. Indecisions

Bible Reader: Praise God! I have been healing the sick, healing the sick, healing the sick, healing the sick, healing the sick, and preaching the gospel (Matthew 11:5) ever since I accepted Jesus (Colossians 2:6) and asked him into my heart (Ephesians 3:17).

Christian Otaku: Heretic! You are preaching a counterfeit gospel like Jesus! Your gospel of healing is what's wrong with the church today. And you just can't "accept" Jesus and ask him into your heart. I don't care what Paul said. Even if you are ready, you are supposed to seek, seek, seek, agonize, doubt, seek, pray, seek, get depressed like the Puritans, agonize, doubt, seek, get assurance, then lose it, then seek, seek, pray, get depressed...well, like Jesus said, seek and you might find if you're lucky.

Bible Reader: I did seek. Then I found. And I discovered that it was Christ who found me. Praise God!

Christian Otaku : Shut up! False convert!!! You just made a "decision"!

Bible Reader: Yes, I did. When I heard the gospel, it was as if God called me to choose between life and death. I counted the cost and made the decision to follow Christ, over thirty years ago, and I never looked back. Then I discovered that I was not the one who chose him, but he was the one who chose me and died for me! An instant decision is not necessarily false, and extensive seeking does not necessarily mean you are sincere or that you will not fall away. Whether you make a decision that lasts a lifetime, or whether you come to Christ after long seeking, why don't you stop making up things to regulate people and come serve the gospel with me from now on?

Christian Otaku : You are using a straw man to attack me.

Bible Reader: I wish. Then we would not really have this rift between us. And don't you see that of all the people, you are the one attacking others the most? All my criticisms would not amount to a tenth of what you inflict on people. The truth is that many "decisions" for Christ are indeed genuine and permanent, but they don't happen as often among you because your preaching is so weak in power, because you so quench the Spirit of God, and your people are so hard-hearted. This is why your conversions, if they are real in the first place, are always dragged out. It is not because they are more serious or informed.

Christian Otaku : I really don't care about Jesus, but I feel a debate coming up and I am getting so aroused. Let's come over to my place on social media.

Bible Reader: Eww. Stop.

46. The Carnal Anti-Gospel

**"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you."
(John 16:7, ESV)**

Why do Christians think that people had more ready access to God's power when Jesus was on the earth, and the apostles were alive and active? It is because they are carnal. It is because they are unintelligent, unbelieving, and unspiritual people.

By faith, we have a greater access to a greater amount of divine power today than when Jesus walked the earth. By faith, we can reach the same Jesus today without needing his bodily attention. By faith, we can perform the same ministry today without needing his bodily commission.

Why? First, it is because Jesus fulfilled his mission in redeeming his people. Second, it is because Jesus fulfilled his promise in sending his Spirit. Those who teach as if we have less access and less power today unmask themselves as satanic agents against the gospel of Jesus Christ in these two defining aspects of the history of redemption.

Their doctrine means either that Jesus failed in his mission, or Jesus failed in his promise. This would in principle make them non-Christians, destined for hellfire. If we are recklessly lenient, we would at least call them super-super-STUPID. However, it seems that this anti-gospel is the opinion of the majority.

47. Faith: Instant and Constant Access

And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven....I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." (Mark 2:3-11, ESV)

In his day, people took up their beds and tore off their roofs to meet Jesus. In our day, we can meet Jesus right under our roofs and without leaving our beds — by faith, in the spirit, and through his word. Still, high-minded religionists harden their hearts and refuse to receive from God, and even teach against it.

48. The Culture of Faith-Shaming

The church cultivates a faith-shaming culture. Christians are berated when they expect God to honor what he said and to grant them what he promised. Jesus practiced only doubt-shaming. And he did a lot of it. He did not insinuate his displeasure. He bluntly scolded people for their doubts. Contrary to what some Christian teachers claim, Jesus demanded faith not only from the religious leaders and his immediate disciples, but he demanded faith even from those common people who were suffering. When a desperate father pleaded, "If you can, please help us," Jesus shoved the responsibility back to the man and said, "If I can?! All things are possible to him who believes." The man hurried to say that he had faith, but confessed that he had some unbelief. On another occasion, a woman fell at his feet and begged him to save her demon-possessed daughter, but he refused until she showed him some faith.

When I behave the same way, Christians would attack me as insensitive, and ironically, as not "Christ-like." This is one of the criticisms against those who emphasize Scripture's teaching on faith to receive from God. The complaint is that when you demand people to have faith in God and to overcome by faith, you make them feel guilty and ashamed. This is supposed to be wrong. They claim that life is hard, and a Christian teacher is supposed to acknowledge it. The same people attack a "seeker-friendly" gospel, and keep talking about sin and repentance, sin and repentance, sin and repentance. But what about the sin of unbelief? And what about repentance for being weak? God demanded even Jeremiah to repent when the prophet showed weakness as he faced hardship and danger. "Where is God when I hurt?" Man, where is your faith?! You see, these people love to talk about sin and repentance when they refer to things that they feel comfortable enough to confront, but when the subjects truly begin to threaten their religious pride and identity, suddenly it is insensitive and even unbiblical to mention them. The truth is that they love a seeker-friendly gospel, but one that is friendly to themselves, and not necessarily to anyone else.

Was Jesus callous? No! Don't you get it? He refused to patronize the people. He refused to treat them like they were hopelessly inferior to the religious elite. Can't you see it? Faith in God is what brings people out of the abyss. Faith is what saves you from meaningless and unnecessary suffering. Faith delivers you from this hostile world of sin and death. Jesus loved the people. He had an overwhelming compassion toward them. True love does not offer mere comfort, but it connects people from faith to faith, and drags them out of their troubles, even if it takes a miracle. When you are desperate, that's when you need faith the most. You don't want to be excused from it. Our message is that if they reached God by their faith, then you can reach God by your faith. Does this sound like heresy? Bad hermeneutics? For those whom God has called, it is the best news they have ever heard, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Most of those who came to Jesus in faith did not know God's promises nearly as well as the Pharisees did. Many were the common people of Israel, who were not theological professionals, and did not have the same access to Scripture. But they had faith, and the

scholars did not. Some of those who had the strongest faith were Gentiles. They barely knew enough about Jesus to assume that he could help them, but their faith dwarfed the scholars and zealots. In one case, Jesus said, "I have not found great faith like this in Israel." In another instance, even though he already denied the request, he relented when the Gentile woman insisted on what she wanted by faith. Jesus said that many from all corners of the earth would sit together with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but those who were religious insiders would be cast out into darkness. Many who present themselves as defenders of orthodoxy are in fact unbelievers. This is not some theory for us to ponder just so we could then admire our own profundity. It is a reality. It is happening right now. Look around you. The people that seem to be most religious, most knowledgeable, most strict about their orthodoxy, most zealous for discussion — many, so many of them, will burn in hell.

Jesus said that you will recognize them by their fruit. What does this mean? He said that a good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit, and a man speaks out of the overflow of his heart. In other words, among other things, fruit refers to what a person says. The religious scholars said derogatory things about Jesus because their hearts were evil. You will recognize false prophets and false teachers in the same way. They will say the same things that the religious scholars said. Just as the false teachers attacked Jesus in his day when he performed signs and wonders, the false teachers of today will react the same way against the ministry of faith, healing, prophecy, and miracles that is performed in the name of Jesus. They called Jesus a deceiver, and a magician. They said he manipulated the people, and worked miracles by the power of demons. The false teachers say the same things today, even though the Christians that they attack are saying and doing the same things that Jesus did on the basis of his teachings...well, precisely because they are saying and doing the same things that Jesus did.

You might think that the prominent theologians and apologists of our day are exempt from condemnation. Perhaps they are misguided on certain issues, but they are safe from judgment. Surely they are the servants of Christ. This is a dangerous assumption. The Pharisees defended the law of Moses and the resurrection of the dead, but when the Giver of Law and the Prince of Life became a man and stood before them, they killed the fellow! And then they went after his disciples! They were the theologians and apologists of orthodoxy, but Jesus said that they could not escape the damnation of hell. Why? Perhaps their words were sometimes correct, but God said, "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." They did not really believe. Their religion had nothing to do with God. They were only asserting their personal philosophy under the covering of the Old Testament religion.

Just because someone appears to teach and defend Christian orthodoxy does not mean that he is an exemplar of faith. All of this might have nothing to do with Christ. The Christian faith is what he prefers as a covering for his personal philosophy. It suits his personality, so that he would vehemently defend the Christian faith, because he is protecting his own identity. It does not mean he believes any of it. He might be one who honors God with his lips, while his heart is far from him. There is no need to be paranoid and suspicious of everyone. You will recognize him by his fruit. Watch what he produces and how he reacts.

Like the Pharisees, when the situation becomes too real, when it comes demanding faith, when it comes expecting the promises and miracles of God, when it comes performing healing and prophecy, he snaps and kills the thing. There — he is a phony. If he hardens himself, if he attacks and criticizes, and if he conspires to stop it, then he is crucifying Jesus again in his heart.

And this is why he will burn.

49. Suffering: An Existential Fetish

Christians often consider the Puritans experts in spiritual depression, or "melancholy." I think they were experts in remaining in it, and not triumphing over it. Just because they wrote a lot about it means nothing if they kept struggling with it. Their endless lists on every topic promote boredom, depression, anguish, and rage instead of resolve the issues they address. People who study the Puritans for help on this matter might feel like they have found their kindred spirits among these tedious divines, but there is only resonance, and no breakthrough. When a demon comes to oppress them, they would invite it to sit down and have tea with the thing. They would study it and live with it for years.

They think the solution is to seek God, and seek God, and seek God, and repent for who knows what, and seek God, and seek God, and seek God, and repent some more. They are always "seeking" God and digging for more things about themselves they could repent of. They often seem more obsessed with themselves than with Jesus Christ. It is useless to seek God if you refuse to do what he tells you! All of it is futile if you wallow in your feelings and your doubts, and keep going through religious motions. God is over here, but you are all the way over there "seeking" him when you are just talking to a wall and being pious, being fake and stupid. You are not really seeking God if you refuse to listen, and if you refuse to believe. You want to think of yourself as humble and zealous, but you keep hardening your heart against the blood of Christ. No wonder you are depressed. No wonder the doubts and struggles persist. You want them, because they make you feel special. But when you really seek, you find, and it is finished. You don't need to write six hundred pages showing off to people on how much you have contemplated about it.

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). I have peace. My heart is not troubled. I am not afraid. I was not like this before I became a Christian. I was so fearful and depressed that sometimes I could not even leave my room. When God called me to faith, I was reborn in Christ. I immediately started to study my redemption, my charter of emancipation. I learned. I renewed my mind. I studied about faith in Jesus Christ and his happy promises. I did not spend my time scrutinizing my problems to death, then raised them from the dead, apologized to them, nursed them back to strength, then cried out to God about how they had returned, and then tortured them with a bunch of boring lists until they killed themselves just to get away from me. I focused on the merits of Christ's suffering and atonement rather than the merits of my own depression and repentance. I did not take pride in my shame, but I reached for Christ right away. Then I took this peace Jesus left me. Then I refused to let my heart be troubled. Then I stopped being afraid. And I became happy — more happy and more consistent than anyone I know.

Paul wrote, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). I was so anxious that I was immobilized in life. But I turned my mind to Christ, and I

stopped being anxious. In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, I told God what I wanted. And what Paul said became true. God's peace invaded my heart and fortified my mind to this day. Peter said that although you do not see Christ now, you have faith in him, and so you rejoice with "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). If you say you believe him, why don't you have this joy? Shouldn't you at least admit that you ought to have it? It does not take a five-volume analysis just to admit that.

Christians keep saying that we must deny ourselves, crucify ourselves. Hurt yourself, and you will be saved. They have no idea what the Bible really teaches about this. When you parrot, "Take up your cross," make sure you know what it means, or do not say it. Keep pushing, and God will eventually answer, "YOU are the cross, and I will throw you off!" (see Jeremiah 23:33). The majority of those who keep yapping about denying selves and bearing crosses are so self-centered and annoying. Now if the Bible says to deny ourselves, have you done what it says? And if you have done what it says, then shouldn't you also experience what it says? Then why don't you have peace that passes understanding? Oh, I shouldn't have said that. Now you are back in the corner moping and analyzing yourself again.

Preacher, why don't you throw that encyclopedia on melancholy out the window, and declare to your people "joy unspeakable and full of glory"? Is a joyful and confident gospel that much of a curse to you? You reply, "Jesus was a man of sorrows." You read that off a calendar, didn't you? Those of us who read the Bible see that there is more to this: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:3-5). This is Isaiah 53, man. How could you get it wrong? Of course he was a man of sorrows — he was carrying our sorrows! Of course he was smitten and afflicted — he was punished so that we can have peace. And it does not say "by his wounds we are wounded," but by his wounds "we are healed." We receive the opposite of what he suffered. To say that Jesus was a man of sorrows, so that we also live in sorrows, is to attack the atonement and the blood of Jesus Christ.

This anti-gospel manner of thinking is common. The suffering of Christ is portrayed as something we need to naively imitate. He suffered in our place, and endured many things so that we would not have to. Our suffering, when it happens and when it is legitimate, is different from his. Christians who are too inept to make simple distinctions on the matter — and most are totally inept — should not teach about it. They tend to burden people with unnecessary suffering, and in a way that even suggests that it is spiritual and meritorious. This kind of teaching allows Christians to wallow in their unbelief and sadness, and at the same time feel like their suffering is meaningful. Unbelief is shockingly stupid, but at the same time, it makes people so arrogant that they would measure everyone else by it.

For Christians, suffering is an existential fetish. Perhaps you like this system of religious pain and struggle, because it makes you feel pious. You are turning yourself on, you sicko.

It has nothing to do with living for Christ. You are fake. If you deny yourself, then Christ would live in you, and you would exhibit his qualities and powers. If you deny yourself, then you would have faith, joy, peace, healing, and the power of the Spirit, and all the things that Jesus Christ suffered to obtain for you. God even raised him from the dead and ordained him to oversee the application of redemption, to make sure that you receive what belongs to you in Christ, and that no one can take them away from you. But what do you do? You spit in his face, you step on his blood, and then you preach about it as if it is gospel.

50. From the Cross to the Throne

A theology of the cross is valid only if it serves as an introduction to a theology of the throne. It can never stand on its own. If you preach about the crucifixion of Christ but not the resurrection and glorification of Christ, then you allow the impression that either Jesus is still on the cross or in the grave (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Philippians 2:8-9). Thus your doctrine becomes an anti-Christ message. You probably wish to impress people with a message of humility and suffering, but it is in fact a message of heresy and blasphemy.

Despite their self-proclaimed expertise on the history of redemption, much of the complaint about a theology of triumphalism stems from the fact that the theologians refuse to acknowledge that at this point in redemptive history, Jesus is not on the cross or in the grave, but he is on the throne, seated together with his people (Ephesians 2:6). Accordingly, the complaint about an over-realized theology is often an excuse to put aside gospel promises that are explicitly stated as available for this life, and that are in some cases meaningless after this life.

Where is Jesus now? He is not on the cross. He is not in the grave. He is on the throne at the right hand of God. Then why are you still "at the foot of the cross," unless you are an unbeliever, still wondering what happened to the man of Galilee? We must preach the cross, and we must affirm the cross. You cannot come to God and be saved without the cross. But if we stay there, it means that we are not believers, and we have never been identified with Christ by faith. Now if you truly believe that Jesus was raised from the dead and seated on the throne, and that we have been seated together with him, then why don't you talk like it and act like it? Why don't you have faith as if you speak in the name of the King of Heaven?

The theology of the cross carries much relevance for the Christian, but someone who refuses to acknowledge that Christ is no longer there will always have a skewed interpretation of it, and on some issues, a satanic interpretation of it. Hear a theology of the cross only from someone who teaches a theology of the throne. And where there is an actual problem of triumphalism, only such a person is qualified to address it.

51. Power Over Demons

Satan could speak to Jesus, but could not force him to do anything (Luke 4:1-13). Satan might attack a person by harassing him, but a Christian who knows his authority in Christ can make him leave, just as Jesus made him leave. The Bible says that the devil is like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). So he can attack. But the Bible also says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). So we can win.

Based on the little you have told me, I should not offer a definite opinion on whether your friend is under demonic attack, and whether the sudden and strange physical condition is directly related to the occult sin he committed. If it is a demonic attack, then it seems that his depression was the beginning of it, and the things that followed were subsequent stages that made the situation worse. King Saul had been harassed by an evil spirit for a time, but when he became desperate, he visited someone with a familiar spirit, a witch or necromancer, and it made everything worse for him.

Your friend's spiritual problem started earlier, and the fact that he pursued or permitted an illegitimate attempt to alleviate it indicates a deeper issue with him than simple depression or a physical condition. This has to be addressed, otherwise he would be targeting the symptoms only, and something worse might happen later (John 5:14, Luke 11:26). Learning, believing, and affirming the word of God must be the major part of the solution. He has to unravel wrong beliefs and attitudes, and change his behavior. This is more important than addressing the symptoms.

Some sicknesses are more likely or directly caused by demons than others. A physical illness without an apparent physical defect is more probably a demonic attack. For example, if a person has a broken eardrum, or if he was born without one, then it is probably not demonic, but it still might be. We would pray for the eardrum to be healed or command an eardrum to be created. If a person is deaf but there seems to be nothing wrong with him even under doctor's examination, then it could be a demonic attack. Sometimes a minister either cannot investigate or does not need to. He would know one way or another by the Spirit, and command the spirit of deafness to leave.

This kind of attack can happen to a Christian, especially under certain conditions, such as accident, trauma (intense and sudden fear, grief, etc.), abuse (physical, verbal, sexual, etc.), false teaching, lack of faith, grievous sin, among others. Although we can discuss the matter, we often cannot arrive at definite conclusions about specific cases. However, we know the essential piece of information. We know that there is healing in Jesus Christ. A Christian can immediately return to fellowship with God through repentance and teaching, affirming the goodness of God and the atonement of Christ, and demand the attack to cease. This is ultimately the best solution for all kinds of conditions, because if someone else does this for him, there is the chance that the attack will return. So even if someone else does it, the person must still follow up with repentance, teaching, and so on.

As for the method for casting out demons by a minister, it will somewhat vary according to the person's knowledge, disposition, spiritual endowment, and degree of faith. For the sake of brevity, we will consider treatment for Christians and non-Christians at the same time, even though Satan cannot affect Christians to the same extent. And keep in mind that the vast majority of those who claim to be Christians are in fact non-Christians. Fake Christians, including pastors and theologians, can be thoroughly demon-possessed. Perhaps this is why they resist the Spirit of God. Cessationism is Satan's ultimate protection.

Those who are very invested in the "deliverance" ministry often take the approach of assuming the condition (that everyone has demons), probing the mind (digging into the childhood like a psychologist), guiding the person (through repentance, forgiving others, renouncing the occult, inherited curses, etc.), forcing the manifestation (making the demons take over the person to a degree), addressing the demons (asking for their names, etc.), and then casting them out. This is not the biblical model. Most of these steps are overemphasized, and often unnecessary.

Sometimes there is mention of a thing or two about the person's childhood. Sometimes it is necessary to renounce the occult. However, these steps often seem necessary only because they are assumed to be necessary. The spirits can often be cast out immediately, and then these things can be taken care of as part of the person's continuing development in the Christian faith. Certainly, if a person's mind has been taken over because of involvement in the occult, such that he cannot offer his consent, the spirits can be cast out first, and then he can be told to renounce his former life. If he refuses, then as Jesus said, the evil spirits will likely return to him along with ones that are even worse.

Perhaps it seems anticlimactic to cast out an army of demons in ten seconds, but this is what we should often expect. Don't cast out demons to cause a spectacle or to show off your talent. Do it to demonstrate the kingdom of God: "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matthew 12:28). If you are such a man of faith and power, you would do it quickly. You would tell the spirits to shut up and get out. David did not give Saul a questionnaire. He just played music and the evil spirit would depart (1 Samuel 16:23). Music was one way the Spirit of God worked through him. It succeeded, and it was marvelous at the time, but it actually demonstrated weaker authority than what an ordinary Christian possesses (Luke 7:28). I don't need to play music. I don't need a harp. Sometimes I only need to show up (Acts 19:15). This was probably why the people were astonished at Jesus' approach. It was possibly unprecedented — without tools, without rituals or gimmicks, and without praying for God to act, he spoke to the spirits and they obeyed him (Mark 1:27). We wield the same authority in the name of Jesus, and take the same approach when we cast out demons (Acts 16:18).

A Christian who speaks with spiritual authority might force some spirits into manifestation as he exercises the ministry of preaching and teaching. God has ordained and anointed him, and divine power is evident as the man speaks. The spirits might scream out, and cause their victims to roll on the floor, foam at the mouth, or speak in strange voices. They did this under the ministry of Jesus. When this happens, the Christian should command the

spirits to shut up and leave. Or, the spirits would sometimes leave silently while such a man speaks, without causing any trouble. The victims would later discover that they have departed, and that the associated symptoms have ceased. Some ministers might not speak with such power that the spirits would be compelled to reveal themselves, but when the spirits take over their victims in other situations, probably under the normal course of their lives, then they can be cast out.

If there is reason to suspect that a person has evil spirits even though there has been no manifestations, they can also be addressed and commanded to leave. There is this practice in some ministries where the minister commands the demons to show themselves even when the victims are not exhibiting signs of demon control at the moment. I am against this. The biblical approach is to respond to these manifestations when they happen "naturally," if they need to happen at all. They would occur under the pressure of a speaking ministry, or the victims would be brought to the minister while the demons have control over them.

Moreover, do not consult the demons themselves on how to cast them out. They are liars. Speak to them as little as possible. You might assume it should be unnecessary to make a point of this, but some people have an unhealthy fascination with demons, and with their power over demons. However, if they are truly spiritual, they would be more impressed that their names are written in heaven than with the fact that evil spirits must submit to them in the name of Jesus (Luke 10:17-20). Authority over demons in the name of Jesus should be taken for granted, but we can never thank God too much for the gift of Jesus Christ.

A Christian who ministers with authority can often force demons to leave without directly addressing them. Using the example of a deaf person again, if I do not find any reason to bring up a spirit, I can just command the ears to be opened, and the ears could open even if the problem is not physical but demonic. This is because the intention in my command is for the ears to open. I don't really care why they were closed in the first place. I don't need to know how it is to be done. If there is enough power behind it, the demons could be forced out anyway.

Avoid most ministries that specialize in "deliverance ministry," because they are too obsessed with demons. Their first method is to assume the presence of demons, probe the person, and cast out the spirits. When someone is brought to me, unless the demons are already in manifestation — moving and speaking through the person, and controlling him — I would take the teaching route first, because the person would need the teaching even if you first cast out the demons. When a Christian is strong in his spirit and exercises an authoritative ministry of preaching and teaching, some people are automatically delivered as he speaks. The diseases and demons are forced out, and the people also grow stronger as they listen, which will eventually enable them to fend for themselves.

Deliverance from evil spirits comes under the healing ministry of Christ and his work of atonement (Matthew 8:16-17). The Christian has the right to be free. He can declare, "Jesus took my infirmities and bore my sicknesses. I will not tolerate this. I command the demonic

attacks to cease, and I command my body to receive healing and return to normal." He might need to say it one time, or insist on it a thousand times, but he will succeed if he has faith. Jesus resisted three times before Satan left him (Luke 4:1-13). When a Christian receives deliverance this way, that thing is less likely to return. And if it tries, he will know how to overcome it again.

As for Matthew 12:29, it is more about Jesus' ministry strategy than about casting out demons from individuals. It includes all the things he did — preaching the gospel, healing the sick, casting out demons, and ultimately, saving his people. He came to destroy the works of the devil (John 10:10, 1 John 3:8), not just by casting him out of individuals (Acts 10:38), but by all that he did. He broke the devil. And then he plundered the devil, and continued to plunder him through his disciples. In context, the verse means that Satan would not do this to himself, but Jesus was doing that to Satan.

From: email

52. Faith, Healing, and Philosophy

We walk by faith (with biblical revelation as our foundation and first principle), and not by sight (not by our sensation or intuition). Contrary to speculation, I did not learn this from some philosopher. Some people assume that the entire topic revolves around several professors and their followers. We learned faith from the Bible, and there was no controversy.

This has been our principle in the ministry of healing, and we apply it to every area of life. Faith in the word of God regardless of sensations, even against what we see and feel at the moment, has been our bread and butter for years. This is the kind of faith that looks only to the word of God despite contradictory circumstances and overcomes them.

Philosophy added only technical jargon and structure to what we knew. We still rarely use jargon when we talk among ourselves. There is no need for them, because we are not pompous weirdos, and we prefer the biblical terms. We use jargon to discuss these things with those who communicate in technical terms.

53. Stupid Supreme

Unlike the scholars and zealots, some common people immediately grasp the differences between epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics when I teach on philosophy and apologetics. Christian religionists still mix them up, even though they consider themselves intellectually astute, and are constantly discussing these matters. They still stumble over free will, communication vs. causation, "the author of sin," and other simple matters.

54. Philosophy and Self-Knowledge

A biblical philosophy will never result in a denial of the self-knowledge promised by the biblical gospel. It will never weaken it even slightly. A biblical philosophy will guarantee the self-knowledge promised by the biblical gospel. It will affirm as certain – beyond any doubt – the self-knowledge affirmed by a biblical theology.

Christian otaku still wonder about this, and some of them demand answers from me, even though I never belonged to the camp that is the target of the challenge. I have always insisted – to the fullest extent and without reservation – the knowledge and assurance that the Bible promises. The Bible teaches us that the Spirit testifies with our spirits that we are God's children, and by him we cry, "Abba, Father." Those in my circle experienced this the first day we became Christians, and learned about it from Scripture probably within the first week or so.

This self-knowledge is guaranteed by the Bible, and generated by the Spirit. There is no issue with epistemology, and no issue with the limitations of human faculties and methods, because it is not something that we perform or something that we discover, but it is something that the Spirit causes, and something that he performs apart from our effort. This private knowledge is not employed for public argument, but we still have this private knowledge. It is a gospel fact. If your philosophy denies this, your philosophy can burn in hell.

People have stumbled over this. The Catholics lack assurance for their own reasons, but they should not have assurance to begin with, because they are not Christians. Following the Catholics, the Puritans, the Reformed, various other Evangelicals, and some zealots of Christian philosophy, also lack assurance because they trip over their own traditions and theories. It is utterly pathetic. Theological otaku study voraciously, debate endlessly, but never come to a knowledge of the truth. Of course we have self-knowledge. Of course we have assurance of salvation. We can have all the knowledge that the Bible says we can have. Anything weaker than this is an anti-Christian philosophy, and an anti-Christ religion.

55. Otaku, not Disciples

Some Christians have never been duped by the master heresy of cessationism. Although they know some liberal theologians believe it, they faintly grasp that "Christians" could believe a horrifying dogma like this. So they never need to review arguments on the continuation of God's power over and over and over again, but they have been living in it and pursuing more of it. To them, there has only been the constant reality of God's power, not a cessation or continuation of it. The issue should have never arisen.

Imagine Christians getting stuck on polemics about the existence of God, or even on the cessation or continuation of the existence of God. So every time they mention God in their sermons, they have to argue for his existence in order to begin the main topic of the message. Imagine adding several controversies on top of that. Although the sermons would seem lengthy and substantive, the people would not be fed as much spiritual meat as they think.

If they are Christians, they are ready to learn about God and about how to worship him, not about whether there is a God, or whether he continues to exist. With the constant baggage, a message on marriage would take two hours, and about five minutes would be spent talking about marriage. Most of the time would be devoted to controversies, and nowadays, to politics. The marriages continue to fall apart.

Christians should engage in receiving and ministering the power of God. They should not still be hung up on tedious explanations in the mere continuing operation of it. It is like wading through a thick, muddy swamp. Don't you feel like that when you circulate among most Christians? You devote much of your energy into stealing a breath now and then, when you wish you could free yourself from the filth to run and fly.

The Christians are working, listening, thinking, but how much are they really being fed? Are they really productive? Or, do they feel such exertion, not because they are learning and growing, but because they are struggling to stay alive? And as they do, they pull others down with them into the swamp. They spend so much time in studies and debates, but they are useless people. Their efforts offer an illusion of meaning and progress. What is the problem? They are otaku, not disciples.

56. Faith Speaks to Faith

Writing for different groups result in different materials. Imagine writing a systematic theology for an unbeliever, then one for the typical Christian, then one for your closest apprentice, or even your wife. All three would have value, and they would be very different. The unbeliever might show some appreciation for the first version, and probably less with the other two. The apprentice would benefit from all three, but in the long run he would want to read the third one over and over again. If you could write only one, you might wish to write the third one, because you could pour all your heart into it, but you should probably write the second one, since it would be the most versatile.

There are some things you would not say to an unbeliever, or say as much, not because of hesitation on your end, but because he is not ready to listen. You can say more to a Christian, but sometimes he is barely better than the unbeliever, and it is counterproductive to tell him everything you know (Matthew 6:6, Mark 4:34, John 16:12). As another example, I would not write a system of argumentation for the general public that contains my unrestrained thinking on the subject, not even for the Christian. He does not need it to defeat every unbeliever in the world, and he would probably use it to bully his wife anyway. But I can say more to a trusted apprentice.

Most Christians are a drag. Forget about making them run and fly — you need to evangelize them! Forget about teaching them the strongest principles in applied apologetics — they are still whining about methodology. However, with someone who is of one mind, one faith, and one Spirit with you, you can share all your thoughts and experiences with God. When faith speaks to faith, there is no holding back, no preemptive qualifications, no tedious polemics, but only the building up of one another from faith to faith, from glory to glory, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. This is what we ought to strive for in our own circles of believers. Look around you. If you are just drowning in religious otaku, then instead of continuing to waste your life for their approval, it would be better to come out from the illusion of piety.