

The Constitution of Faith

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The Constitution of Faith

As No Other Nation

Across the nation we are witnessing a renewed interest and debate regarding the foundation our country was built upon. At the heart of that debate are two central issues, first were our founding fathers men of faith and second what was the original intent of the articles and amendments they offered up in our United States Constitution?

My ambition is not to step into any type of constitutional debate but I am thankful we have the constitution to provide a clear and intentional guideline for our nation. The problems that arise regarding our constitution do so only when someone seeks to distort its meaning by twisting words and reading between the lines. In the end the constitution is a beautiful and profound document that I feel will survive whatever challenges it may face.

Unfortunately, I am concerned the faith in God so clearly held by the majority of our founding fathers may not survive. Even though their faith is well documented and gaining new credibility I simply don't think that will be enough for the faith of our founders to survive. At least not in the way they had hoped. For a nation to continue to identify itself as a Godly nation it has to house within its borders a Godly people. That is not to say we no longer claim a faith in God but is claiming faith enough to hope for the continued and gracious hand of Divine Providence?

The founders not only believed in God they gave God the glory for their very existence. There are countless quotes, letters and speeches attesting to that fact but none

say it more concisely and clearly than a statement from Virginia Statesman John Page when he wrote to Thomas Jefferson in 1776 just after the Declaration of Independence was signed, “*God preserve the United States. We know the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, do you not think an angel rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm?*” They knew they were weaker, they knew they were slower and they knew and often testified that the only reason they had succeeded was by the gracious hand of Divine Providence.

I have often wondered, why America, why that moment in time, why did God Bless us as no other nation before us? How was everything that has been accomplished in the short time since our founding even remotely possible? Then one night while reading in *I Samuel* I noticed something I had never noticed before. At least I had not noticed it so powerfully and so profoundly. It was God’s heartache.

Think about what God said to Samuel after he had prayed to God because Israel was crying out for a king.

1 Samuel 8:7 Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. 8 As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day,

It hit me at that moment. All God ever wanted from His children is for them to want Him.

Just as in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve chose what Satan offered instead of what God promised. Now the Children of Israel, God’s chosen people, who had been

promised everything if they would just choose God was saying no. Can you imagine how God must have felt or must feel when we really let Him down? Of course He always knows its coming. None of us can see as God can but we can relate to the understanding and expectation that eventually those we love are going to let us down. We brace ourselves for those inevitable moments but it still hurts.

God goes on to tell Samuel to give them their king but to warn them what a king will want. Still the Israelites said no and with that rejection of God as their King they set in motion a long and terrible journey of subjective rule.

I found myself grieving for God as I reread that passage and thought how His creation had rejected His guidance, His love, His protection once again and then I began to wonder, has anyone gotten it right since? Has any other nation allowed God to be their King? Certainly Constantine, the first Christian emperor sought God's guidance but he was still emperor, it was not quite the same. I began searching at that moment for something, anything similar and I have found nothing. Nothing that compares to the nation forged by our founders as they sought freedom from tyranny looked to the gracious hand of Divine Providence and claimed the promise made to the Children of Israel so long ago.

Is it possible, we were the first to really make God our King since that time? Is God the reason our country has been blessed like no other? Abraham Lincoln seemed to think so. Just eighty-seven years after the Declaration of Independence was signed he said, "*We*

have grown as no other nation has ever grown.” He credited, *“The gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us.”* However in that same address he identified the greatest mistake we could ever make as a nation when he said, *“But we have forgotten God... and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.* Are we now making the same mistake? Have we also forgotten God? Have we just as the Israelites and so many others have done before us again said no to the gracious hand of Divine Providence?

If so, what’s next? How do we turn it around? First, we remember we serve a gracious God and second we look for our way back home. God always provides one and He outlined the steps we must take in *2 Chronicles 7:14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.* He gives us the instructions we just have to choose to follow them.

Is it really that simple? Just seek Him, turn away from evil and He will hear us and heal us? I believe it is and I believe the toughest part is not simply turning away from evil but to really seek God once again. That is what *The Constitution of Faith* is all about, seeking God and understanding the foundational elements that direct our belief in Him and the promises we have as His people.

Preamble

Most of us know the preamble to the Constitution. It is usually a memory work assignment in about fifth or sixth grade. As I began to look for comparisons between what I believe is *The Constitution of Our Faith* and The United States Constitution, the preamble jumped off the page.

Think about the words in the preamble. *We the people in order to form a more perfect union*, where do we need to be more united than in our foundation of faith in God and Christ His Son? Wouldn't our unity in faith help instill justice and provide domestic tranquility? Can you imagine how strong we would stand in defense of our faith against the enemy if we would stand united? Would we see an increase in the overall well being and general welfare of our fellow man? And would we and those who come after us finally feel the freedom of the salvation provided for all of us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ? Isn't that a wonderful concept? To be united in faith and see what a difference it can make in the world.

We the People, Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ, in Order to form a more perfect Union of the faithful, establish justice to the ends of the earth, insure domestic tranquility and the blessings of the Father, provide for the common defense against all enemies foreign, domestic and within the heavenly realm, promote the general welfare caring for the helpless, poor and weary and to secure the blessings of liberty endowed upon us by the Creator for ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution of Faith.

Article I: The Creator

Section I: What are the Odds?

Could the earth have simply occurred by chance? Our faith in a Creator is under a constant assault that says evolution is an irrefutable fact. Scientist and evolutionist declare creationist superstitious, religious fanatics. Yet they adhere to a theory that when calculated against reasonable odds would not only be improbable but irrefutably impossible. For the earth to occur by chance every possible element essential for its formation would have to be aligned so perfectly, so succinctly at just the right time, just the right place under just the right conditions to make it an absolute impossibility. This is not a statement I would have made just ten years ago. At that time, like so many other Christians I struggled with questions after watching media coverage of the latest fossil find or scientist of the hour as they declared new breakthroughs in understanding our planet and the formation of the universe.

Everything changed for me when I met and began to study the work of John Clayton. Mr. Clayton was an atheist who had set out to write a book to disprove the Bible and instead converted himself not only to a belief in God but in Christ His Son. Fortunately Mr. Clayton is also a Scientist. His book, *The Source*, is filled with detailed calculations and research that can calm even the deepest scientific mind to a harmony with a Creator and the scientific evidence we see all around us.

To calm my non scientific mind I needed just a few key answers. The first we have

already outlined in this section and look to John Clayton's work for the answer. In his book he discusses the odds of the earth coming into existence by chance. Working through a very conservative and short list he calculates the odds using only 10 variables such as, being in the right kind of galaxy, having the proper planetary mass, not being near a black hole, having the right kind of star and other very obvious and necessary requirements for an earth like planet to occur by chance. The odds were one in one-hundred and fifty thousand million-millions. The number looks like this;

1 in 150,000,000,000,000,000

The amazing thing about this number is that it is calculated so conservatively. If Mr. Clayton had taken into consideration every variable necessary for an earth like planet to just occur, the number would not fit on the page. That was simply all I needed to hear to quiet the questions in my mind. Now when I hear about the latest fossil find or great scientific break through I look for God in the discovery. (*John Clayton, Nils Jansma, The Source, 2001, 27-29*)

Section II: Divine Design

I have an illustration I use frequently. It requires one small prop, a simple lead pencil. Not the mechanical type, just an old fashioned stick of wood with lead and if possible I prefer to use one without an eraser. I like to keep it as basic as possible. I show the pencil to the group I am speaking to or the random atheist or agnostic that crosses my path. I tell them I picked the pencil from the pencil patch in my yard. I usually get a grunt or a

chuckle and then you can see it in their eyes when they begin to comprehend the point I am about to make. It is obvious. Non-believers will argue there is no God and that it is impossible for me to find a pencil, just a simple stick of wood and lead formed and ready for my use in a pencil patch but declare a tree just occurred by random chance. Both suggestions are absurd.

Mention the name Darwin and everyone knows who you are talking about. In my opinion he did more to undermine faith in God than anyone in our history. Everything I have studied so far in relation to creation and evolution eventually cross paths with the work of Darwin. In Clayton's book, he actually gives Darwin a little bit of a break when he says;

“Back in Darwin's time when it was believed that the cell was nothing more than a simple blob of protoplasm, it was much easier for biologists to assume that the first cells had evolved from basic chemicals rather quickly and easily.”

Clayton continues by saying the assumptions made long ago have been declared completely inaccurate due to advances that now allow us to see inside a cell. He illustrates his point beautifully as he compares the workings inside the cell wall to a microscopic city containing complex factories with a security wall that allows raw materials in and manufactured products out. He describes a state of the art communication system that not only coordinates maintenance and production schedules

but keeps inventory as well and a library that catalogues every unique function and characteristic of the cell while also housing the complicated code and translation programs of the DNA and RNA molecules. (*John Clayton, Nils Jansma, The Source, 2001, 42-43*)

Another design illustration I often use with kids involves a bag of Lincoln Logs. I use the blocks to build a basic cabin to show the kids everything you need to build a structure is accounted for. I then put the blocks in a ziplock bag, shake it up and dump it on the table. I do that about 4 or 5 times and then I ask the kids how many times would I need to do that before the blocks would fall into a perfect pattern for all the pieces to fit together and reconstruct the cabin we had built just a few minutes earlier? Even the youngest child will tell me it is impossible. So, the next time you have an opportunity to take a walk in God's Creation, look around and think about the perfect design of everything in creation you see, the way all the right pieces and parts came together in just the right way at the just right moment in time. The trees, the sky, the blade of grass, every bird, bee and bug every drop of rain. They all have a purpose and a perfect design and there is no doubt no possible possibility other than the God in Heaven our Divine Designer.

Section III: Does Age Matter?

My son and I recently spent a few days in Washington D.C. and had the opportunity to visit the Smithsonian's Natural History Museum. One of his classmates made a statement regarding the bones and fossils on display that concerned me, he said they were fake. Trying to understand the geological and fossil record has been one of the toughest

questions to answer as a Christian. It is a question many are uncomfortable with and they simply should not be. In *2 Peter 3:8* the apostle Peter reminds us of a very important aspect of God. *With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.* I've heard John Clayton say it often and here the Apostle Peter confirms it, time was created for man God does not measure His existence in time. The problem we have is when we try to harmonize the fossil record with man's idea of the Biblical time line.

First let's look at a point Mr. Clayton made regarding the Biblical timetable. He says the assumptions made regarding dates and years given in the Bible assume four things; First, that we have no undated verses in the Bible, second, that the Bible genealogies are complete, third, that the purpose of a genealogical record was a chronological record so they are all written in order and finally that all historical periods are represented. He concludes that any dating method that attempts to use the Bible as a basis will have to apply these assumptions and they all appear to be incorrect. (*John Clayton, Nils Jansma, The Source, 2001, 178*)

Taking this into consideration the notion that we as humans can assign a number of years to the time the earth has been in existence is incorrect as well. Now let's take a look at a couple of the undated verses in the Young's Literal Translation. *Genesis 1: 1 In the beginning of God's preparing the heavens and the earth – 2 the earth hath existed waste and void, and darkness is on the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God fluttering on the face of the waters,* Verse one alone could account for every fossil and geological record

we may ever find. What was going on in the beginning of God's preparing? Was he laying the foundations of the earth as He said to Job in *Job 38:4*? Could this have been the time period when dinosaurs walked the earth?

In verse two it says the earth hath existed waste and void, waste and void for how long? How did it become waste and void? Did possibly an asteroid hit the earth as the geological record indicates and cause it to enter into a period of being waste and void? The mistake we make when looking to the geological record and man's concept of Biblical time continues to be time was created for us. The Bible was written for our understanding and no record of the details as God laid the foundations of the earth was necessary to our understanding of who God is. So, the only thing I would like to change at the Museum of Natural History is the heading over the door. It should more accurately say. In the Beginning...

Section IV: The Missing, Missing Link

In the course of my lifetime I could not begin to count how many times the headlines have declared, Missing Link Found! Of course the follow-up information offering details that show a different side of the story are never headline news. In Lee Strobel's book, *The Case for the Creator*, he had the opportunity to interview Dr. Jonathan Wells, a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute in Seattle. As I mentioned in Section II: Divine Design, Darwin's name always comes up when discussing issues of evolution and in this interview they had the opportunity to discuss Darwin's Tree of Life, significant because many museums still have the illustration prominently displayed even though the fossil

record does not support it's theory.

As Dr. Well's shared this information with Mr. Strobel he added that Darwin knew the fossil record failed to support his Tree of Life. Darwin's theory suggests the evolution of a species happens slowly and very gradually over an exceedingly long period of time but the fossil record supports a more explosive tendency, specifically the Cambrian explosion. The Cambrian explosion has been called the, *Biological Big Bang*; According to Dr. Wells;

"We suddenly see most of the major animal phyla that are still alive today as well as some that are extinct. He goes on to say, This is absolutely contrary to Darwin's Tree of Life. These animals which are so fundamentally different in their body plans, appear fully developed, all of a sudden in what paleontologists have called the single most spectacular phenomenon of the fossil record." (Lee Strobel, *Case for a Creator*, 2004, 43-44)

John Clayton wrote extensively about the Cambrian Explosion as well and from a Bible stand point suggests;

*This would be a beautiful example of the fossil recorded verifying when God said let the water teem with living creatures, it did exactly that. (John Clayton, Nils Jansma, *The Source*, 2001, 120)*

Another consideration in the missing, Missing Link is the absolute fabrication of reconstructed images of prehistoric ‘man’ based on little or sometimes no fossil record. I say no record because of the case of the Nebraskan man. John Clayton included this information in the *What is Man* section of, *The Source* book. The Nebraskan man was reconstructed by scientist based solely on a single tooth. Despite the extraordinarily limited fossil record the reconstruction was based upon, the Nebraskan man was used as part of the argument supporting evolution in the Scopes Monkey trial of 1925. It was only later discovered that the prehistoric tooth used in the reconstruction was not from a man at all but a giant wart hog.

Sadly this is not an isolated incident and the practice of overstating, manipulating and completely fabricating the fossil record to support scientific theory happens far too often. *(John Clayton, Nils Jansma, The Source, 2001, 146) (Goldschmidt, The Material Basis of Evolution, 1940, 84-89)*

Lee Strobel also recalls the same type of fossil manipulation when he recounts an evolutionary icon that he credits having had an affect on his early slide into atheism.

“World Book’s two-page spread highlighted a parade of prehistoric men. Second in line was a lifelike bust of Java man from the American Museum of Natural History, accompanied by an outline showing his profile. With his sloping, forehead, heavy brow, jutting jaw, receding chin and bemused expression, he was exactly what a blend of ape and man should look like. For

me, studying his face and looking into his eyes helped cement reality of human evolution.”

It was later discovered the reconstruction of Java man that had such a profound affect not just on Mr. Strobel but countless young minds looking for truth and understanding was based only on a skull cap, a femur and two teeth. All of which are now thought to be from separate specimens. (*Lee Strobel, Case for a Creator, 2004, 43-44*)

As I conclude *Article I: The Creator*, I would like to encourage further study of the sections we have touched on. The information available will not just solidify a belief in God but it will empower you to know and understand the truth. John Clayton and Lee Strobel are not just Godly men but they are former atheist and I think that is noteworthy as well. Far too often many of us take for granted our beliefs. They are instilled in us at a young age and rather than making our faith our own we simply go through the motions and allow the theories of the world to water down our convictions. These men found God in a desperate search to disprove Him. Theirs is a pure unadulterated belief in what has been proven by the evidence. We can all learn from the example these men have set. It is by questioning and seeking we find the truth and conviction we must have to keep our faith on solid ground in the days ahead.

Thomas Jefferson once said, *“Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, He must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blind-folded fear.*

Article II: The Fall

Section I: A Friend of God

In *Genesis 1:26* God said, “*Let us make man in our image,*” and by doing so set in motion the plan for mankind. The concept that God is all knowing concerned me as a kid. If He, is in fact all knowing, then why would He have created man to fall? The answer is revealed in the creation statement we just quoted. Man was made in the image of God with independent thought. Yes, God knew man would fall but through the falling away we come back to the relationship with God that He wanted from us in the beginning, a relationship of our own choosing.

About a year ago I heard a question from a student that was almost identical to the one I just shared. He raised his hand and asked, “If God knows everything I am going to do, why does it matter what choices I make?” I was not the teacher overseeing the class that day and I felt compassion for the teacher trying to give an answer that would satisfy the young man. The answer he gave sounded something like I had heard my entire life and I could see in the boys’ eyes he was not buying it.

The class continued on and I said a little prayer to myself. *God, what can we say to this kid to help him, help us understand?* Within a moment it occurred to me. I asked the teacher if we could revisit the young man’s question and then I had the student name a

movie he really enjoyed and had seen several times. He did and I said, suppose you go home today and watch that movie, you know what is about to happen, you can probably quote the lines but if you could, would you want to step in and change the action and the dialogue? If you do the outcome of the movie could change. Of course there may be parts that are hard to watch. We have all watched dramatic movies that have a beautiful resolve at the end but you have to go through a great struggle to get there.

I told him, God has already seen the movie and He knows the outcome. I am sure it is hard for Him to watch sometimes and yes unlike us He can intervene and I believe sometimes does but more times than not He is a good Father and allows His children to function through independent thought, make their own mistakes and rise out of the ashes on the other side better for the struggle. Honestly in that moment God gave me the answer not just to the question the student had raised but to one I had been wrestling with my entire life and like my fellow teacher had struggled time and time again to clarify for myself and those I have an opportunity to teach.

God has seen the movie. He knew from the moment he said, *“Let us create man in our own image,”* that sometimes it would be hard to watch. However it is on that road of our own choosing where we sometimes stumble and fall that, *He renews our strength and we soar on wings as eagles* back to Him, a creation returning home in the image of the creator, a true friend of God. (*Genesis 1:26*) (*Isaiah 40:31*)

Section II: The Search for God

There is only so much to be said about falling away from God. We can look at our history and see moments when we fell further but once that separation takes place the only thing that really matters is how do we get back?

At the earliest moments in our history those who did not worship the God of our creation looked for answers on their own. Some like those at the time of Noah found no meaning in life and became obsessed with selfish desire and we all know how that ended. Others looked around, saw God in the design and the beauty of creation and sought Him or at least an understanding of God.

Many of the early religious practices embraced mysticism and multiple deities and may have ties to Hinduism, possibly one of the most ancient religions. Hinduism recognizes many different divisions but shares an overall belief in reincarnation. There was no founder nor does the religion follow a set of creeds but has a triad of gods as primary figures with sub gods for nature, sky, fire and storms just to mention a few. One division of Hinduism actually recognizes thousands of deities. Many of the ceremonial practices and the multiple god worship are reflected in the religious practices of the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans.

Buddhism was an off shoot of Hinduism. It began with a young man named Siddhartha Gautama who lived about five-hundred years before Christ. He was the son of an Indian ruler, but discontented with life. It has been said he was consumed with the problem of the pains and grief of existence. Just like those at the time of Noah he didn't see God but wanted to find

meaning in life. At age twenty-nine he left home looking for wisdom. He lived a life of self denial very much like a monk or hermit. He finally realized the lifestyle was pointless and the way to overcome suffering was to put away all selfishness and show love to all living beings. He began teaching and his followers referred to him as Buddha, which means enlightened one. He did not believe in the soul but that you could find peace in this life by showing a selfless love for all things. If you were able to do that you had reached nirvana and when you die you would pass your goodness, your karma, on to those beings whose lives you touched.

Since Siddhartha Gautama aka Buddha, left no writings, Buddhist Monks many years after his death tried to develop his teachings into a written work but due to disagreements failed. Seeing the turmoil in the Buddhist movement, the Hindu community took this opportunity to undermine the group, convincing many followers that Buddha was in fact the reincarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu and brought many back into the fold.

One division of the Hindu faith and the most prominent one in India today employees the caste system with strict limitations placed on the lower caste. You are born into your place in life and you can not change it. The lowest class is still referred to as the untouchables. It was a large benefit for Hindus at the rise of Buddhism to push it away so they could regain control of the people. (*American Peoples Encyclopedia, 1952, 4-315-4-316*) (*Webster's II, 2001, 144*) (*Webster's II, 2001, 524*)

We need to understand faith and religion from our ancient history to fully appreciate the blessings and the clarity we have today if we just look for it. In our early history for those who

did not know the God of Abraham there was a desperate search for God and for meaning in this life. For those who looked into the sky, the mountains and the forest, saw the design and knew there was a God, they wanted to know Him. For those who saw nothing in creation and just an existence like Buddha, they had to either find and make peace with a fallen world or stop caring, falling into a life wrapped up in selfish desire and doomed for destruction like those who lived at the time of Noah.

Throughout our scriptures we find those who sought the God of Israel and waited and longed for the promise of, *a Light for the Gentiles*, as was prophesied in *Isaiah 42:6*. Our ancient ancestors wanted to know God and we see that clearly throughout history. Mankind needs direction, needs meaning and needs God.

Even now we see the search continuing. New age religious practices reflect many of the theories and rituals of Hinduism and the worship of the elements rather than a creator. They embrace mysticism and prophets and priests that declare they know the way to God often insisting on complicated demands and rituals from those who are faithful to their call. In *Matthew 7:15-20* Christ warned against false prophets and referred to them as *ferocious wolves in sheep's clothing*. He warned, *by their fruit you will recognize them*.

The simplistic, clear message to truly finding God often gets lost in the noise. Is the way back too simple to seem real? *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*. Jesus Christ, The way home after the fall. (*John 14:6*)

Article III: The Savior

Section I: Why did Christ Have to Die?

As much as the question presented in the first section of *Article II* concerned me, none bothered me more than trying to understand, why? Why did Christ have to die? As a child I remember vividly every year watching, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. I sat and waited for Linus to step out onto the stage and recite *Luke 2 verse 8-14*. It was the story of the birth of Christ. I remember how it always made me sad because I could not think about anything except that He was born to die. It is another one of those key answers I needed in my search for, *The Constitution of Faith*, I needed to understand.

Over the course of the last several years I have read most everything written by Bodie and Brock Thoene. They are a husband and wife team, she is the primary writer and he is a historian. Together they have written novels that are so solid in historical fact they are used in many university classrooms to help students gain a better grasp of history and the life experience of the time period they are studying. Their latest work is a historical novelization of the time period when Christ lived. It is within those novels that I gained a better and more significant understanding of why Christ was born the way He was born, which is essential to understanding why He had to die.

Of course He was born in the City of David, the town of the prophecy but also significant is a historical observation the Thoene's make in their novels. Bethlehem was the home for the shepherds responsible for the lamb sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. Probably because of convenience those traveling to Jerusalem opted to purchase a lamb

upon their arrival and history shows that the Bethlehem community was responsible for providing those lambs. So not only was Christ born in the city of David as prophecy foretold but the last Lamb sacrifice was born among the lambs set aside for the temple as well.

The Thoene's also lead me to a better understanding of Christ's sacrifice in a publication they share at Christmas called, *Why a Manger*. In this book Bodie tells of a Christmas back in 1985 when their young ewe had suddenly died giving birth and left a motherless lamb. The same night another ewe in their flock had given birth to a still born lamb. Unsuccessfully they tried to coax the surviving ewe into accepting the orphaned lamb.

Finally the veterinarian said he knew of an old trick shepherds used to help an orphan lamb be accepted by a different mother but it wasn't pretty. It involved hiding the live lamb under the fleece of the dead lamb. They agreed it was worth a try and after taking both lambs away the Vet and Brock returned with the live lamb wrapped in the fleece of the ewe's stillborn baby.

The lamb was placed in the feeding trough, 'the manger' so the ewe could discover the lamb on her own. I am sure by now you can see where this is going, the Thoene's and the vet stepped back and watched as the ewe began to sniff at the orphan lamb recognizing the scent of her lamb she nudged the newborn out of the trough and encourage the lamb

to nurse. Wrapped in the fleece of her lamb she now accepted the orphaned lamb as her own. (*Bodie and Brock Thoene, Why A Manger? 2006*) (*Bodie and Brock Thoene, Sixth Covenant, 2007*)

I shared this story with a dear friend a few months ago and her eyes lit up. Beth was raised on a farm like I was but had more experience with livestock. When I finished telling her of the Thoene's Christmas in the stable she said, she also remembered how difficult it was to try and get an adoptive mother to accept an orphaned offspring. She said the key was to get the baby to nurse and the scent of the mother would spread throughout the baby and she would recognize it as her own. I looked at her a little confused not really understanding her point at first until she said, "Don't you see? That is the Holy Spirit."

Then it hit me, Christ the last Lamb sacrifice covers us in His blood making us acceptable to His Father just as the still born lamb did for the orphaned lamb. Then once accepted through drinking in what the Father has to offer the Holy Spirit fills us up with His Essence. The more we drink the stronger that essence becomes allowing us to not only be a part of the family but to stand out with His Aroma for the world around us.

2 Corinthians 2:15 For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

Section II: The Messianic Prophecies

Growing up in a home of Christian Faith we never spent much time on the prophecies of the Old Testament. I think it was assumed we already knew what we needed to know. We spent a lot of time on the great Bible stories of the Old Testament. We learned those stories well but never really delved into the absolute miracle of Jesus Christ and the miracle of the prophecies.

Ask most people about Jesus and miracles and you will hear that the dead were raised to life, the sick made well, the deaf to hear and the blind to see. Very few will share with you the miracle of the details surrounding the prophecies. I mentioned one prophecy from Isaiah earlier in article II section II. Jesus was the promised light for the Gentiles. A prophecy that is probably not specific enough to impress a nonbeliever but what about the prophecy that He would be born in Bethlehem, *Micah 5:2*; of a virgin, *Isaiah 7:14*; of the House of David, *Jeremiah 23:5*; during the killing rampage of Herod, *Jeremiah 31:15*; His ministry preceded by a messenger, *Isaiah 40:3*; His ministry beginning in Galilee, *Isaiah 9:1*; betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, *Zechariah 11:12*; betrayed by a friend, *Psalms 41:9*; the field purchased with the silver, *Zechariah 11:13*; silent before His accusers, *Isaiah 53:7*; crucified with thieves, *Isaiah 53:12*; His hands and feet would be pierced, *Psalms 22:16*; bones not broken, *Psalms 34:20*; darkness over the land, *Amos 8:9*; buried in a rich man's tomb, *Isaiah 53:9*; and on and on it goes. (*Josh McDowell, Evidence for Christianity, 2006, 198-229*)

There were several hundred prophecies fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament

was written over a thousand year period with many different writers. How could anything be possible other than Jesus Christ being exactly who He claimed to be? Josh McDowell wrote extensively about the prophecies of the Old Testament as did John Clayton. Mr. Clayton also recorded the work of mathematician Dr. Peter Stoner. Dr. Stoner had his graduate students calculate the odds of Jesus being able to fulfill just eight of the prophecies I mentioned. Much like the calculable odds exercise we examined in article I, section I, the odds of Jesus fulfilling just eight of the prophecies is not just improbable without divine intervention but irrefutably impossible. The number calculated was 1 in 10^{17} . The number looks like this;

1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000

This number, just like the number calculated earlier regarding the chances of the earth just occurring, was calculated so conservatively that if all the prophecies fulfilled by Jesus Christ were taken into consideration we could not begin to comprehend the number. *(John Clayton, Nils Jansma, The Source, 2001, 197) (Prophecies Concerning the Messiah, 2000, on-line, March, 17)*

Section III: Jesus Christ According to History

When looking to the historical information on Jesus Christ the most logical source is what early Christian writer Justin Martyr referred to as the memoirs of the apostles.

Unfortunately when trying to speak to the world about Jesus they will often dismiss the writings as being biased and pure fiction. We will address the validity of those writings in article IV section II. For the moment let's see what other record of Jesus Christ we can find.

I have studied and have been fascinated by archaeology for many years, however I think an early interest in archaeological finds caused my faith to waiver. I was very confused by fossils that showed the earth to be much older than I had been taught to believe. In article I we covered the questions I needed answers to and found. Since that time I have embraced the information revealed in archaeological expeditions throughout the Holy Land. Where science and critics once thought the Bible an inaccurate record skeptics are proven wrong with each new discovery.

Because of my love for archaeology I was first in line when *Zondervan* published its *Archaeological Study Bible*, a great source for all types of historical discoveries from antiquity. One of the most valuable ancient resources when trying to understand a historical period or a person of history is what was written by the ancient historians, philosophers and teachers.

One of the best known ancient historians is Josephus. Josephus was a Jewish Historian. (Wrote in the first century, completed *Antiquities* in A.D. 93) Much like the Sadducees of Jesus' time, he was a friend to those in power and sought more the approval of Rome than his own people. For that reason his record of Jesus has been called into question and

many critics do not count it as a valid testimony. As you will see from the excerpt he refers to Jesus as the Christ. This is not a statement someone in his position would make. As we know from Biblical text those who sought Rome's approval wanted Jesus silenced for fear he would cause problems and they would lose their position of favor with the Roman authorities.

At this time Jesus a wise man (if it is appropriate to call him a man), appeared. For he was a worker of incredible deeds, a teacher of men who happily receive the truth, and he drew to himself many Jews – and many Greeks, too. This man was the Christ. And when Pilate had executed him at the instigation of the leading men among us, those who had first loved him did not give up. For he appeared to them on the third day alive again (the divine prophets had spoken concerning him of these and countless other wonders). And to this day the tribe of “Christians” (named after him) has not vanished. (Antiquities, 18. 63-64) (Zondervan, Archaeological Study Bible, 1751)

Many scholars now believe the statements declaring Jesus the Christ and references made to the resurrection were added by a Christian scribe later on. Unfortunately, most who call into question the validity of Josephus's writings never examine additional excerpts that also confirm the existence of Jesus. In *Antiquities*, 20. 200, he mentions the death of James and identifies him as the *brother of Jesus the so-called Christ*. He acknowledges the existence of John the Baptist in *Antiquities*, 18.5.2., when he writes about the destruction of Herod Antipas's army by a rival king and records that the Jews

credited the destruction of Herod's Army as divine retribution for his murder of John. It is unlikely that Josephus did not understand the significance of keeping a record of John or was unaware of his ties and kinship to Jesus. (*Josh McDowell, Evidence for Christianity, 2006, 178*) (*Zondervan, Archaeological Study Bible, 1898*)

I have watched many documentaries regarding the writings of Josephus. These are secular productions which looked to examine his work and determine whether or not it had been tampered with over the course of time. The conclusion was always that the work was not genuine. Therefore many discount his writings on Christ without ever taking an objective look at the additional entries I just mentioned.

Josh McDowell in his book, *New Evidence for Christianity*, conducted the same examination and came to the same conclusion. However, Mr. McDowell looked at the additional references as well. He said when you consider the statement by Josephus regarding James; he refers to James as, *the brother of the so-called Christ*. Telling us first, that he did not feel the need to state who Jesus was because he had already addressed his existence earlier in his text and by referring to Jesus as, *the so-called Christ*, it shows Josephus was very aware of the teachings and beliefs of the Christians in his midst. Mr. McDowell agrees with the theory that the statements declaring Jesus the Christ and to the resurrection were added by a over zealous Christian scribe but he believes that by removing the lines in question you get a more accurate idea of what Josephus originally wrote; (*Josh McDowell, Evidence for Christianity, 2006, 177-178*)

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man. For he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; And the tribe of Christians so named from him are not extinct at this day. (Antiquities, 18. 63-64) edited excluding Messianic references

One of the most highly regarded writers of antiquity is the Roman Historian Tacitus, (Tacitus lived A.D. 55-120 and completed his work, *Annals*, in about A.D. 115). In *Annals*, 15.44 he records a history of Nero and writes about Nero's efforts to quiet rumors that he had set fire to Rome. Tacitus states he falsely blamed the Christians and subjected them to horrible torture. Tacitus also refers to Christ's execution by Pontius Pilate and to a, *pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated but through the city of Rome also (Annals, 15.44)* Some believe the mention of the, *pernicious superstition*, may be a subtle reference to the stories about the resurrection. (*Josh McDowell, Evidence for Christianity, 2006, 171*) (*Zondervan, Archaeological Study Bible, 1751*)

One of my favorite written records of antiquity is the work of Greek Satirist, Lucian. (A writer in the late second half of the second century Around A.D. 180) He did not like the Christians and had no reason to record evidence of their existence and seems to have done so in jest. I think of him as the Bill Maher of the Ancient Greeks and find it a bit

ironic how his record is one of the strongest validations outside of the Christians writers to prove the existence of the early Christians and the One they followed.

The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day - the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.... You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property. (Lucian, The death of Peregrine, 11-13) (Josh McDowell, Evidence for Christianity, 2006, 172)

Julius Africanus is a Christian writer (wrote in about A.D. 221) but makes references to two ancient historians that mention the unexplained darkness that occurred at the time of Christ's death. Thallus who wrote a history of the eastern Mediterranean world (around A.D. 52) and Phlegon who wrote a history titled, *Chronicles*. Both writers argue the darkness occurred due to a solar eclipse which was impossible due to the time of year but neither denies the event of the crucifixion. (*Julius Africanus, Chronography, 18.1*) (Josh McDowell, Evidence for Christianity, 2006 173-174)

In *Acts 18:2* Luke writes about Paul in Corinth as he meets Aquila and Priscilla who

had just been expelled from Rome by Claudius. Roman Historian Suetonius confirms this event and refers to it as well in his history *Life of Claudius* 25.4. (written about A.D. 120) (*Josh McDowell, Evidence for Christianity, 2006, 172-173*) (*Zondervan, Archaeological Study Bible, 1751*)

Additional information regarding these and other writers of antiquity can be found in Mr. McDowell's book. But I think the closing remarks on the topic from the *Zondervan Archaeological Study Bible*, sums it up best.

To put the issue in perspective, it is important to realize in general how scanty evidence of any kind from the ancient world actually is. Many persons and episodes from ancient history would be unknown to us except for mention in a single historical document or inscription, and there are significant gaps in our knowledge. All things considered, the evidence for the historical Jesus in ancient sources, to say nothing of the New Testament and the Christian church, is ample.
(*Zondervan, Archaeological Study Bible, 1751*)

Section IV: Fulfillment of the Law

During the Sermon on the Mount Christ told the multitude He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. Looking back it is easy for us to see, at least in part what he meant. Christ was the last lamb sacrifice. At His crucifixion the law handed down to Moses on Mount Sinai regarding the sacrifice made at Passover came to a conclusion. Even the curtain that hung between the tabernacle and the holy of holies was torn at the moment of His death, tearing away the barrier

between us and God for the final time.

Christ made it clear, things were about to change but He said so much more. Just after He declared the law fulfilled but not abolished he admonished the crowd that unless they could be more righteous than the Pharisees they could not enter heaven. Can you imagine hearing that and trying to understand? I try to think of who Christ was talking to or who the apostles were writing to when I read the record we have in the New Testament. I wonder, did they understand what He was saying? Do we?

When faced with that question I like to give this example; Athletes understand what it is to condition, to work out, train and get in shape. If you are part of a winning team your coach will give you a set of guidelines for summer training, let's call them summer laws. As soon as your season starts or your summer ends, you have fulfilled your summer training schedule and it is over, some parts for good. However some aspects of that summer training, those summer laws, will continue as you work throughout the rest of the year.

Just because your summer training is over does not mean you no longer have to stay in shape. You still need to run and lift weights, eat right and do all the things that were part of your training, your summer laws. You have to keep it up, continue to abide by those laws if you want to continue to be a great athlete; the catch to all of this? It does not matter how good you are, how perfect you train, how well you know the game, ultimately you can't fulfill what you want until the coach puts you into the game.

Isn't that what Christ was saying to the multitude? The laws are good, abide by them, expand upon them but remember, you can't do this without Me. In *John 14:6* Christ said, *I am the way and the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through me*. Christ was the fulfillment of the law, all of the law. Some came to an end others keep us in shape and ready for the battle we will face until Christ takes us home.

Article IV: The Church

Section I: What is the Church?

A group of people gathered together for a common purpose. That is how Webster defines *The Church*. Not if you look up the word *church* but when you look for a definition of the word *assembly*, that is the definition you will find. *Assembly*, is the word that we have wrongfully translated as *church* in our scriptures. So for future reference anytime you see the word *church* in scripture you should change that to the word, *assembly*. In the Young's Literal Translation of the Bible you will not find the word, *church* referenced at all. The word *church* was assigned to the *assembly* of Christians by early spiritual leaders as they sought to control the people who worshiped Christ. (Webster's II, 2001, 67)

I think in the beginning it was a noble cause. Early Christians were dealing with a lot of false prophets and those who would distort the testimony of the apostles. So, early *church* leaders wanted to protect the message and thought by assembling a unified body of people world wide they could protect what was being taught.

The problems arose as it does with any group when a struggle for power begins. We have seen

the same issues in our country. Our constitution was written to provide a protection of separate powers so no single branch of government can take over and become a dictatorship. The early church faced the same issues, in their attempt to unify they dictatorized the assembly of believers. The saying power corrupts but absolute power corrupts absolutely is illustrated clearly in our *church* history. Unfortunately the lack of Biblical manuscripts for the common man and the lack of education, the inability to read, left Christians at the mercy of *The Church* leaders for over a thousand years.

The rise of reformation within *The Church* happened because leaders saw the perversion of scripture and demanded a change. John Wycliff in the 14th century demanded the right of every man to examine the Bible for himself and declared that Christ alone was the head of *The Church*. Wycliff was responsible for the first English translation of the Bible, dubbed The Reformers Bible and distributed to traveling priest throughout the countryside. (*Dr. Bruce L. Shelley, Church History in Plain Language, 2008, 227-231*)

In his book, *Church History In Plain Language*, Dr. Bruce Shelley credits Martin Luther with igniting the fire of reformation when he nailed his 95 propositions for theological debate to the door of the Castle Church in 1517. He preached the radical concept that the word of God held authority over the body of believers not the earthly established *Church* and that we are saved by faith not by works. Dr. Shelly writes;

He did not discourage good works but argued that the inner spiritual freedom that comes from the certainty found in faith leads to the performance of good works –

by all true Christians. "Good works do not make a man good," he said "but a good man does good works." (Dr. Bruce L. Shelley, Church History in Plain Language, 2008, 240-242)

Another monumental step on the road to reformation happened in about 1526 when an English Priest named William Tyndale declared to a fellow priest, *"I will make it possible for a boy behind a plow to know more scripture than you do."* He later smuggled copies of the New Testament into his homeland. He was eventually imprisoned but his work carried on through Miles Cloverdale and John Rogers. According to Dr. Shelley, King Henry VIII at first wanted the new Bible translation shared throughout the land but became concerned when the copies created too much excitement. In the end he issued regulations limiting the reading of the Bible to wealthy merchants and aristocrats. *(Dr. Bruce L. Shelley, Church History in Plain Language, 2008, 268-269)*

The history of the suppression of scripture and the sorted past of *The Church* is unfortunately one of the biggest obstacles believers face when trying to reach those looking for answers. Arguments from agnostics or atheist are often based on events of *Church* history. Just like our nation *The Church* has come under much fire for a sorted past of historical information that is at the very least incomplete and at times completely fabricated.

In the Prologue to his book Dr. Shelley states; *"Many Christians today suffer from historical amnesia. The time between the apostles and their own day is one giant blank"* He continues to argue that the missing history causes a distortion and misrepresentation of Christianity. *(Dr.*

Bruce L. Shelley, Church History in Plain Language, 2008, prologue xv)

This is one of the same issues that inspired, *The Constitution of Faith*, and that I addressed in the introduction, *As No Other Nation*. Watching Glenn Beck and David Barton clarifying our national history and seeing the difference that it made for so many moved me to share what I have learned in my own search for answers but on an issue that matters more than any nation and that is the truth behind the history of, *The Church*, or let's start referring to it properly, *The Assembly of Believers in Jesus Christ*. We see now with complete clarity that *The Church* is the group of believers who came together for a common cause, the cause for Christ.

Possibly the only other subject more encumbered with an incomplete history or an absolute fabrication of its history is the evidence supporting what guides all believers in Jesus Christ, The New Testament.

Section II: Why the New Testament is our Guide.

Possibly the greatest question asked in defiance to Christianity is, why the New Testament? Many will acknowledge God but will fail to recognize Christ as the Son of God. As we discussed in *Article III Section IV*, Christians believe what John recorded in *John 14:6* where Christ said, *I am the way and the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through me*. We have already discussed the historical record of Christ outside of scripture in *Article III Section III* but what about the historical record of the scriptures?

As I began my search for answers I asked the same question over and over, why do we look to these writings? I had heard the opinions and stories since college of how the Biblical text had been rewritten or distorted to fit what spiritual leaders wanted it to say. I didn't toss the Bible aside because I trusted those who told me it was authentic but when I would ask for an explanation and clarification I never got a straight answer.

I can't count how many times I would ask, why the New Testament and was told, "Well, it's from the canon." My next question, "So, what's the canon?" Depending on who I was talking to I would get one of two answers. First from the Bible scholar I would get an answer I could not follow down a philosophical road that they either completely understood and were just excited to share way too much information about or they didn't know and wanted to sound like they did. Secondly, I would get an answer that fully illustrated they didn't have a clue but were a little embarrassed to admit it.

I stayed really frustrated on this journey but I did not stop searching. Finally I stumbled across the work of Josh McDowell and Dr. Bruce Shelley. We have already referred to their work but will look to their research once again. Josh McDowell's book, *Evidence for Christianity*, is a big scary book, as I tell the teenagers I often teach but it is a must for Christian households.

It is a reference book and I find myself not reading it cover to cover but constantly turning to it for specific topics. The first time I opened the book my only concern was answering the question, why the New Testament? Mr. McDowell lays this out concisely and clearly. He says

there are several things to consider when you try to authenticate ancient literature or written works of antiquity.

The first consideration is, of the copies you have, how far removed are those copies from the time in which the author actually wrote the manuscript? This is a huge concern because the material they used for ancient writings would degrade and fall apart over time. The reason ancient scrolls found in museums are under dark protective lighting is because if exposed to the elements they will simply fall apart. Due to this consideration we can't say we have what Matthew wrote in his own hand. What we do have are the painstakingly copied manuscripts of the scribes from that time.

So, how much time passed between the copies we do have and when the work was first written? Mr. McDowell makes his point of authenticity for the New Testament by comparing the samples of our New Testament manuscripts to works of other writers of antiquity. His list includes many different examples but we are going to look at just the best known writers; first, the works of Homer, there are four-hundred years between what Homer actually wrote and the first copies preserved. For Caesar, there is a time span of one thousand years. The time gap for the works of Plato, one-thousand three-hundred years and finally for Aristotle the time gap is one-thousand four hundred years. How do these works compare to the time span of the copies we have of the New Testament? There is only a fifty to seventy-five year span between the copies we do have and when the work was first written and as new discoveries are made that number is getting closer to about thirty-five years.

The second consideration when authenticating ancient literature, according to McDowell, how many copies do you have? He says you also need to understand that when we say copies we are talking about fragments of the work, not word for word copies. Now, back to our list of well known writers, for Homer, there are six-hundred and forty three copies, Caesar's Gallic Wars is supported by only ten copies, Plato just seven copies and the work of Aristotle, forty-nine copies. Now, how many copies do we have of the New Testament? If you count just the Greek manuscripts we have Five-Thousand Three Hundred and Sixty-six. However the New Testament was unique in the since that it was written as a missionary tool and translated into many languages. So, if you count all the manuscripts, in all the languages we have twenty-four thousand six-hundred and thirty three.

We could simply stop there and when I first began this study that was all I needed to know. Later as I reviewed Mr. McDowell's work I was struck by an even more astonishing feature unique to the New Testament and that was simply this. If you destroyed all of the copies and fragments of copies we had of the New Testament, because it was so widely used and so widely quoted in other ancient writings, you could completely reconstruct the entire New Testament with the exception of only eleven verses, within only 150-250 years after Christ walked the earth. Incredible! (*Josh McDowell, Evidence for Christianity, 2006, 65-75*)

Any honest scholar can not look at this evidence presented by Mr. McDowell and refute the New Testament without completely disregarding the works of the great philosophers. This, much like the calculable odds exercises we have examined require either acceptance of the truth or a

willingness to ignore the facts presented. Unfortunately far too often people will ignore what they are not comfortable facing. To face the truth of God the Father and Christ His Son is to accept accountability for your actions.

Again this is almost enough to quiet my concerns, why the New Testament, but there are still several questions that continue to eat away at my thoughts. The canon, what is it? How did we decide which books to include and how do we know that some of the leaders in the last two-thousand years have not done a little editing themselves? To answer these questions we need to know a little more about church history. Dr. Bruce Shelley's, *Church History in Plain Language*, is another must have for any Christian home. It is there I gained a better understanding of the reasons so many want nothing to do with Christianity. Unfortunately, our history is riddled with horrible stories of martyred Christians, not just by early Roman emperors but by others claiming the name of Christ then slaughtering those who didn't practice the same type of baptism, taught that Christ alone was the head of the church or fought for the right of all men to study scripture for themselves. It is a sad and heart breaking history but one we all must face and understand if only so we don't repeat the mistakes of our past.

Dr. Shelley does a wonderful job clarifying all of these concerns. The word *canon* is a Greek word which means, "*a measuring rod*", Shelley says;

It was a standard for judging something straight. So the idea transferred to a list of books that constituted the standard or "rule" of the churches.

The *Old Testament Canon* consisted of the books the Jewish people used as their measuring rod, their standard for judging what they believed to be straight. When you hear someone speak of the “*Torah*” that is what the Jewish people referred to as *the instructive* books recorded by Moses. They also have a break down of books from *the prophets*, called the *Nevi'im* and the *Ketuvim* which refers to, *the writings*, such as Ruth, Job, Ester, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Psalms and Proverbs.

The word *testament*, means *covenant* and became a descriptive designation to the *old covenant* (*Old Testament*) and the *new covenant* (*New Testament*) we have with God. Dr. Shelley even clarifies the reference we make to “*The Bible*”. The word “*Biblia*” was a word used to describe a special collection of books, *the books* or the *Biblia*. One early Christian translator actually referred to the collection as *The Divine Library* and eventually as they published the books into one collection the *Biblia* became singular the *Bible* which simply means *the book*.

As to the question, how can we trust this set of books? Dr. Shelley also addresses this issue. The decision as to which books would be used in the collection did in fact fall to the religious leaders of the age but there were specific guidelines. The most important was the connection the book actually had to the apostles. Was the author an apostle or at least an associate of the apostles such as Luke who was an associate and close follower of the Apostle Paul? Also, was the letter or manuscript used in worship? Dr. Shelley writes of an early Christian writer named Justin Martyr who wrote in the middle of the second century:

On the day called the Day of the Sun all who live in cities or in the country

gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits:

The early Christian leaders did a very thorough job critiquing the work considered for the *New Testament Canon*. Still, you will continue to hear arguments stating many books were discarded but I think the Apostle John most clearly defined the reason in *John 21:25* John states, *Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.*

Now think back to what we covered earlier regarding how many copies or fragments of copies we have of New Testament manuscripts and remember just how over whelming those numbers are. Early Christians had a lot of material to work with and they used it. So, when a concern is raised over whether or not these books we call the New Testament are the same books the early Christians used or are they simply King James' version of those books the answer is clear.

According to Shelley the list of books as we know them today was assembled together in the Muratorian Canon by A.D. 190 with the exception of Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter and 3rd John. The complete list was available by A.D. 367. As you can see long before the Crusades, the Dark Ages, Christian Reformation or King James himself, the Bible was assembled and used by the early Christians. Many of our translations of today rely on the literal meaning of the original text and provide further assurance that what we study is actually what was written. (*Dr. Bruce L. Shelley, Church History in Plain Language, 2008, 57-66*)

By this point you are either convinced or just not facing the truth. I feel that certain about the information I have shared. Still, I can't close this section without presenting one more profound observation from Josh McDowell. In *Article III Sections II and III* we covered the messianic prophecies and the Christ of history, both issues help to verify that the information recorded was true. However, Mr. McDowell says we should also take note to the specific references the apostles make to themselves as eyewitnesses. Often they not only declare themselves eyewitnesses but that those around them are as well.

In *Acts 26* Paul is brought before King Agrippa by the Roman Governor Festus. He tells the king his story, how he once persecuted Christians till the day Christ spoke to him on the road to Damascus. Then he tells the king, all of what has happened you are aware of, *it was not done in a corner*.

He was saying, you know all of this, it was done out in the open, not in secret. He challenged the king, he gave him the opportunity to challenge back and say at the very least I don't know what you're talking about but instead we see how Paul was getting under his skin. King Agrippa scoffed and said "*Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?*" then later he takes up for Paul and tells Festus, this man has done nothing wrong and if he had not already appealed to Caesar we could let him go.

The Day of Pentecost gives us our best example of witnesses beyond the apostles. In *Acts 26:22-41* Luke records how Peter called out the crowd. Peter said you saw the wonders, the signs, the miracles but you still put Him to death. Think about what Peter had said to them, how

severe and horrible the accusations were. If what Peter was saying had not been true the crowd would have torn him apart but instead Luke writes, *they were cut to the heart... and three-thousand were added to their number that day*. Again, had what Peter said not been true, do you think a crowd of at least three-thousand would have let him get away with saying it?

The apostles declared themselves and others eyewitnesses. They went to their deaths declaring the truth and if everything the apostles said was not true then they died for a lie. I am paraphrasing lecture points from Mr. McDowell but I have to share what he said. Think about it, eleven were martyred, killed in horrific ways for what they declared true. Some will say no big deal people die for a lie all the time. Of course, we see such things all over the news but the thing you have to remember is that even when someone dies for a lie, at the time of death they thought it was the truth.

The apostles witnessed the death of Christ on the cross, saw him dead and in the tomb, then saw Him raised to life three days later and they were not alone. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul talked in detail about how Christ appeared not just to the apostles but to more than five-hundred and then he added, *most of whom are still living today*. Those are astounding numbers, to try and fabricate into a hoax. Any liar will tell you to keep a secret or protect a lie you need to keep it to yourself not share it with more than five-hundred witnesses. The apostles died not for a truth they hoped for but a truth they and many others were eyewitness to. (*Josh McDowell, New Evidence That Demands a Verdict, On-Line Lecture, Parts 1-6, links provided in reference notes, 2007*)

Section III: What now?

For some reason I don't think the early Christians ever had to self motivate. Can you imagine being one of those who Christ appeared to after the resurrection? As I have said in earlier sections when I read the words written by those early Christians I try to think about what was happening around them.

So, try to put yourself there, can you imagine being one of those witnesses and then staying quiet about it? Even if you feared for your life wouldn't you cry out for a truth that big? I suppose it is easy to imagine how bold we would have been had we been there but all that really matters is what we do now.

If we believe what we say we believe how do we stay quiet? How do we not fulfill The Great Commission handed down by Jesus Christ just before He ascended into heaven? Matthew recorded it like this; *28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

So, what do we do now? If we really believe, then we find our voice. We take a stand. Not in arrogance and self righteousness but in love and respect for all those who are still wandering, still lost and have no idea what is waiting for them. One of my favorite verses is one I hear every time John Clayton speaks, he refers to it often, *1 Peter 3:15 Always be prepared to give an*

answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

I saw a video clip the other day that I believe sums this up better than anything I've seen or heard. One of our elders, Lee Hodges presented this to our Wednesday night worship assembly. I have no idea how old it is but the message is so powerful. It was a personal message from Penn Jillette of Penn and Teller. It is a bit bizarre to have such a powerful message coming from a committed atheist and inspire so many Christians but he did. In the video he is talking about an encounter he had with, "a nice man from his show." The man gave him a Bible with a personal message and you could tell he really appreciated the gesture but it was not what he said about the man that struck so many but what he said about those of us who believe. He said;

"If you believe that there is a heaven and hell and people could be going to hell and not getting eternal life and you think it is not worth telling them this because it could be socially awkward... how much do you have to hate someone to believe everlasting life was possible and not tell them about it." (Penn Jillett, Bible Gift, On-Line, link provided in reference notes)

At the end of *Article I*, I made a statement regarding how we seem to learn a lot from those who have not taken faith for granted. Throughout, *The Constitution of Faith*, we have looked to the work of brilliant researches, many that had been atheist and now again we learn so much from someone who knows so little about The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit. Thank you

Penn for saying what many of us did not have the courage to say or maybe admit to ourselves. How much do we have to hate someone to not tell them about Jesus Christ? So, what now? Isn't it obvious?

Section IV: Worship without Walls:

To worship without walls is to worship fully and completely. Not just in our structured worship time but in a way that let's the world see Christ in our daily lives. When my husband and I placed membership with our congregation, it was because of the activities they were involved in not what was happening during the worship service. More and more we are seeing that it is our acts of worship and the things we do in our communities and the world around us that make a difference. Seeing believers in action shows Christ to the world in ways we could never do inside worship services.

Our congregation has been active in Africa, specifically digging wells. I am told the response in the villages when the drill truck arrives is always, who are you and why are you doing this? Of course the door is then open to teach them about Christ. If you have not had the chance, be sure and read, *The Hole in Our Gospel* by Richard Stearns. It is a great reminder of what Christ meant when He said in Matthew 25:40-46 *when you do something for the least of these you do it for Me.*

Keeping our focus on showing Christ to the world is our greatest act of worship but we need to be mindful of the message we send when we come together as believers as well. If someone that

had never participated in a worship service walked into our assemblies would they stay? Would they feel welcome? What message would they hear while they are there? Would it be a message of encouragement and helpful instruction or would they sometimes hear a message that vilifies others who know Christ but we criticize because we don't operate or worship in the same way. I don't think a large assembly is ever a place where those types of issues should be raised but let's say there is something that simply can't be ignored, would they hear love or disdain in the message? We need to work diligently to stop looking for the differences we have with other believers and focus on the one thing that matters that we do have in common, Jesus Christ.

I think that is singularly one of the biggest issues holding back full revival in this country. It was one of our primary reasons for existing as a nation, the right to worship freely. I also think we need to realize, God never expected us to agree on everything. Even the apostles couldn't get along. In *Mark 10* they argued over the seating arrangements in the kingdom. Can you imagine some of the disagreements they had that aren't recorded? They were human and so are we. God inspired Luke to record the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas in *Acts 15* and I think it was to show us that just because we can't always work together does not mean we can't work for the same goal.

In Mark 9:39 the apostles came to Jesus, and said *"we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."* Jesus told them, *"Do not stop him,"* because *"No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, 40 for whoever is not against us is for us."* Another example of Christ saying we are all in this together, they do not have to be with us to be for us.

None of this should be used as an excuse to stop identifying with a congregation or an assembly. Life in this world is tough and we need other believers to keep us strong. One of the most important aspects of a Christian's life can be the time they spend with other believers. That is not to say if you are truly in a secluded situation that you can not be lifted up by worship. Some of my most spiritual times of worship take place alone in the woods but there is power in numbers. Christ said in *Matthew 18:19* *Where two or three come together in my name, there I am with you.* The Young's Literal Translation says, *there am I in the midst of them.*

We all should long to be a part of an assembly with Christ in the midst. The key is finding the place where you meet God. I heard someone complain the other day about having to always wear a suit on Sunday. I guess they have a dress code where he worships and you will find places that follow a strict dress code. Honestly, there is nothing wrong with a dress code, an order of worship or a set of rules that a congregations follows. The problem as I said earlier arises when one group of believers vilifies another group of believers because they do not worship or serve God in the same way.

I have struggled to find my place in worship for many years. As I searched and tried to understand what I believe and not what I was taught to believe I continued to read and reread the New Testament. I found many things that were outlined in the worship I was familiar with and I found many things that were ignored. When I was younger I would often ask spiritual leaders and teachers to help me understand why some things were embraced and others excluded. I

typically received an answer that went something like this, “*Many of the things the apostles instructed the early Christians to do were because of the time period. They had to abide by what was expected within the laws and common respect of the society they were in. Some of the guidelines they used simply don’t apply to us.*”

My follow up question to that statement was, “*in that case shouldn’t we view everything the apostles did as guidelines based upon the time they were living in?*” And should we not be more careful about allowing those guidelines to replace the laws that had been like a *yoke on the neck of the Children of Israel*. Those are Peter’s words in *Acts 15:10-11*, not mine.

Comments like these never got me kicked out of class but I was known as a bit of a trouble maker at the Christian Universities I attended. My struggle continued throughout my adult life. You see a key component to the assembly I worship with is the passage in *1 Corinthians 14:34* where Paul admonishes women to be silent in the assembly. I have struggled with this verse my entire life because for most of my life I have felt compelled to be a vocal part of worship. I am not the quiet type and usually the things I felt the need to share were a little over the heads of the children I was allowed to teach. When my husband Mark and I married I was more knowledgeable about scripture than he was. It seemed unreasonable that I would have to speak through him.

Still this verse really bothered me. I want to do what Christ wants me to do and if that means that I need to sit down and shut up I can do that, for Christ. One night while struggling with a completely different question in my mind I began reading *1 Corinthians 14*, the passage just

before verse 34. I was reading and not really thinking about where I was in the text. It was an odd moment because just as I read a passage that really comforted me on one issue, I continued to read and unexpectedly, there I was again, reading where Paul told me to sit down and shut up and it still didn't feel right.

I continued to read and this time everything changed, it hit me with astounding clarity for the very first time. The line just after the declaration for women to be silent and in submission, Paul added, *as the law says*. The Young's Literal Translation says the same thing, just with a 'th' on the end, *as also the law saith*.

This was like someone unlocking the door to my cell. I began to replay the conversations and discussions I had in the past with some of my teachers and spiritual leaders. It occurred to me how this supported their argument. It was because of the law that certain guidelines were given for the early Christians. They had to have guidelines that took into consideration their way of life and to keep order during the worship of the assembly. It makes perfect sense. What does not make sense is that Christ would free us from the law, spend His entire ministry calling out the Pharisees and the Sadducees for the burden they had placed on others through the law, then send out the apostles to give birth to a whole new batch of laws and a new group of Pharisees.

Christ was clear nothing we do can save us only His sacrifice allows us to be in the presence of God. It is not the works, the tradition or even the guidelines the apostles set out for the early Christians, it is Jesus Christ. Remember the verse we referenced in *Article III Section IV*? Christ

told the crowd at the Sermon on the Mount that unless they could surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees they could not enter heaven.

As I continue to study, what seems more obvious in the message of the apostles is that it is a written record from a body of believers, dealing with issues as they arose. The decisions and guidelines they offered were not a set of laws but an effort to keep harmony in the assemblies of Christ. We see in their record, when an issue would arise, they would consult each other, discuss it and pray about it.

The notion of common sense comes to mind now as I read the *memoires of the apostles*, as early Christian writer Justin Martyr referred to them. They used common sense in making decisions to guide the early believers in living a life that embraced freedom and would reflect to the world the very image of Jesus Christ.

Most likely some of you reading this do not agree with some of the things I have written. It's OK we don't have to agree but before you completely dismiss my thoughts I want to share an illustration with you. Josh McDowell included this in his book we've been referencing. He has written many books featuring the overwhelming evidence of Christ and in this one on page 450 to be exact, he tells of an incident when a group of students decided to present their history professor with a copy of one of his evidence books. They asked him to read it and offer his opinion. A few months later one of the students followed up with the professor.

The Professor said he had in fact read the book and thought it was one of best argument books he had ever read. He also said that he did not know how anyone could refute what Mr. McDowell had presented. Then he shocked the student when he said that even though he found the arguments irrefutable he could not accept the conclusions because of his *worldview*. It was his preconceived notions, so engrained in him they prevented him from accepting the concept of God much less His Son even though, as he said himself, the evidence was irrefutable. (Josh McDowell, *Evidence for Christianity*, 2006, 450)

When considering issues that I have presented, especially in this last section, if you find them disagreeable, ask yourself, *could it be because of my congregationalview?* I know the material I have discussed in this last section is interpretive. I have struggled for a very long time to study with fresh eyes, fresh mind and most importantly a fresh heart. I have known so many who have changed their views on an apostolic guideline when they are faced with something personally that causes them to dig deeper into the text and decide for themselves what their heart tells them it says rather than what someone told them it says. Of course we do that sometimes trying to justify what we want it to say. I've really struggled with that. For a long time I kept my thoughts to myself for fear I wanted it my way, not God's Way.

I have a favorite pulpit story about an old woman that reads her Bible everyday. She has read it more times than she can count and one day her grandson asked her why? Why read it again and again? She just laughed and said because I learn something new every time. As I continue to study I hope I share her attitude and never become so locked in my '*congregationalview*' that I forget to see what God will teach me, this time.

As I said earlier in this section please don't take this as a call to check out of organized assemblies and worship time or upend every worship service that is full of tradition and apostolic guidelines. Just as Paul made guidelines for the early church because of the law we have to be considerate of the worships and assemblies that have been established because of the guidelines and laws laid out by the apostles. There are many that would not be able to worship without those guidelines and to take that from them would be as wrong as denying others an opportunity to worship without a dress code, spend more time in praise than study or dare I say it, allow a woman to take part.

I am not here to claim I have all of this figured out but the one thing I do know for certain is that when I stand before God, I stand alone, Christ there interceding of course, but alone. I won't be able to say, *"God, I didn't do what you wanted me to because my preachers or my teachers said I shouldn't."* They might be wrong. As much as they encourage and comfort and guide me, the one thing they can never know is the mind of God. It is up to me to understand what God and Christ have for me and want from me as I seek to live a life for Christ, to make my worship, worship without walls and seeking in all things to do the will of my Father in heaven.

Amendment to The Constitution of Faith

Amendment I: Grace

Our United States Constitution contains twenty-seven amendments. *The Constitution of Faith* needs only one, the Grace of God. The concept of grace is something I did not understand for many years. When I was younger I often wondered if I could be good enough to go to heaven. It was when I began to understand grace that I no longer wondered but knew I could never be that good, at least not on my own. The following illustration was presented by my friend Tom Haddon several years ago.

In *Matthew 19*, when Jesus was approached by the rich young ruler. The young man asked what he must do to inherit eternal life and Christ said, “go, *sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*” The young man went away sad because he was very rich.

Then Jesus told the disciples “*it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*” The disciples heard this and I think it worried them, the text says, *they were greatly astonished.* So they asked, “*Who then can be saved?*” In both *Matthew* and *Mark* the passage reads, *then Jesus looked at them.*

I can almost see Christ looking each one of them in the eye and shaking His head a little frustrated and saying do you still not get it? “*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*”

None of us can do this alone. None of us are worthy but through the Grace of God we have access to the only amendment to *The Constitution of Faith* we will ever need.

The Grace of God

Ephesians 2:4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

Reference Notes:

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