

The UNION

Get Ready to Meet the King!

God Calls His Church to
Truth, Faith, and Holiness

2016
Edition

Joan H. Richardson

The UNION

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by Joan H. Richardson

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CHAPTER 4

The State Church

Having established the biblical view of heresy, we know heresies are doctrines or teachings that neither conform to His Word nor agree with His Holy Spirit, and these two are One. Whether a teaching is heretical isn't dependent on its comparison with traditional orthodoxy or doctrines men have parroted for centuries. The dogma of the Roman church, forced upon the conscience of the people, should be carefully studied, comparing it exclusively with the Word of God. Does it stand the test, or will the Light of Truth expose its deadly errors?

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice. (John 18:36-37)

The Nominal Church

In the fourth century, a post-apostolic gathering of bishops established its church doctrines under the auspices of the Roman emperor in Nicaea, a city in present-day Turkey. Historians have written and taught about the controversial figure and emperor, Constantine, who called for the creation of an organized church when, in AD 324, he planned the first Council of Nicaea.⁶ Was that a good thing, or had the wolf slipped into the fold?

“With emphasis on doctrines which left unaffected our way of life, the Christian Church could accept Constantine as its prize convert. And yet Constantine, after his alleged conversion, murdered his conquered brother-in-law Licinius; sentenced to death his eleven-year-old nephew, killed his eldest son, Crispus; brought about the death of his second wife; took the nails that

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were supposed to come from the cross of Christ and used one in his war helmet and another on the bridle of his war horse. Yet he was canonized by the Greek Church and his memory celebrated as ‘equal to the apostles.’ He talked and presided at the opening of the Council of Nicaea, which was called to frame a creed, and he was hailed as ‘a bishop of bishops.’ Could this have happened if the men who had gathered there had made the Sermon on the Mount an essential part of the Creed? It had no place in it, so Constantine could be at home.”⁷ – E. Stanley Jones

Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed *are* ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

(Matthew 5:3-12; cf. Prov. 11:17; Ps 24:4; 2 Chr. 36:16)

Those who cling to their pagan roots cannot be one with Jesus Christ. Constantine's profession of faith was based on a vision of the cross, appearing to him and promising him victory in battle, which indeed he gained. But a vision doesn't constitute a man's salvation. Faith in Christ, repentance, and a transformed life that continues to grow, living by faith: that's the proof. Constantine professed the faith but honored the gods of his past. Nevertheless, the emperor passed a cursory inspection by the bishops. How could that have happened?

Christians had suffered terrible persecution from the time of the inception of the faith in Jerusalem. When Constantine ended Rome's violence against them, did the leaders close their eyes to his ungodly behavior? His imperial authority gave them what they'd wanted: personal safety, social acceptance, undisturbed

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lives. For whatever reason, they chose to defer to the emperor of Rome rather than to believe the Word of God with fear.

The mandate had been, *Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* (See *Mat. 4:17*) But Constantine took another route, coordinating his plan for years. Though poorly conceived, his carefully designed deathbed experience included first naming his successors to the throne and then confessing his sins to receive baptism just before his death. For this, his personal priest was his constant companion. What seemed to work was not the way.

Those who'd suffer martyrdom as a result of the compromise were without blood on their hands, unlike the emperor and the misled bishops of the fourth century church who failed to realize the long-range effect of the empire on the Christian faith. Thus Mystery Babylon invaded the church that negotiated with Roman imperialism when its bishops denied the Word of God, deferring to the charm of Constantine. The ancient spirit of Babel entered with all her idolatry just as the persecution ended, and most churches blindly agreed.

Sixty years after the Council of Nicaea, world history took another significant turn when one bishop declared himself the sole ruler over all bishops and dominated the churches of the world from one seat—Rome, a declining empire. He called his institution, *catholic*, meaning “universal.” The Roman pope used the capital city as his home base, brandishing imperial-like authority over the rest. Only the Eastern church bishop resisted his presumption. Though a participant of the early councils, the Greek Orthodox pope remained independent from Rome.

The apostasy began when the bishops presumed they could change the words of God in 325. Over the centuries, the spiritual condition of the organized church became deplorable: jealousy and lust for authority superseded any desire to gain the humility or truth of Jesus Christ. Doctrines were adopted as *orthodox* by councils that were unspiritual, opinionated, and pagan.

Prior to these changes, the churches had only received their directives from the writings of the apostles under the guidance of each assembly or of a visiting bishop. The order of service included interaction by its attendants, unlike services today. (See 1 Cor. 14:23-40) Though believers had meditated on the Word and searched the Spirit for understanding, the fourth century bishops

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soon changed that. The state church grew to have the same arrogance that had crucified our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

When leaders took extreme measures to squelch what they considered heresies, the institutional church gained its notorious reputation of violence and injustice. Rationalizing their sins, church leaders turned from the power of the Holy Spirit. *Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? (1 Cor. 5:6)* [The leavened lump is a lump of dough, figuratively the brain.] The institutional church falsely taught salvation by rites, ceremonies, and works, creating their religious “school of thought” and commanding all to enroll.

The expression, “puffed up” is used by Paul six times to the church in Corinth. He challenged their boastfulness, one against another, though the gifts had come from God. The Corinthians seemed rich in gifts, but the apostles were spectacles, fools in the sight of others. They had been abased, not exalted, but the churches were deceived by trusting in worldly wisdom rather than the purity of Christ. Leaven in their minds influenced their behavior.

Paul made it clear: knowledge puffs up, but love builds up, not by flattery but by speaking the truth in love. Leaven, on the other hand, represents false teachings we receive, leading our carnal minds to pride: the Colossians were puffed up in their carnal minds. (Col 2:18) Are we proud in boasting about worldly things—our possessions, our knowledge, or our tolerance of sin? Leaven interrupts our love for God and for others.

Vain opinions are often received before they are tested by the Word of God. They might be reasonable to a worldly mind; however, if we believe what is false, how can we know what is true? If what we receive is not true, its deception makes us unclean. Will we look to our hope? *And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (1 Jn. 3:3)*

Because the thoughts and ways of God are not like ours, the teachings of men that seem rational often contradict the Word. We might devise reasons to receive them, but rationalizations are unspiritual, and just a little leaven inflates the whole mind and directs the way we think.

The Spirit and the Word war against the mind of the flesh; if we study the Word by the Holy Spirit, He corrects our carnal

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way of thinking. Studying scriptures by believing, then receiving His inspired words, our spiritual minds open to His Spirit for our understanding. From our hearts to our minds, we see by His revelations.

The Lord spoke deep mysteries with simple words that all men could understand by faith in Him, but the geniuses couldn't comprehend as long as they depended on their minds without faith in the Holy Spirit. To this day, the key that unlocks the Bible is our faith.

The Elite Church

The scholars of Rome tell us common people shouldn't read the Bible because, if they can't figure it out, how could we who are not scholars possibly understand it? Do we see how the devil divided us by elitism in the church? Jesus Christ hates elitism! Its walls must come down for the church to be one in His Spirit. Who will bear the blame? Pride destroys the soul.

Have none of us sinned? Does no one fear God? But if we believe, we should understand what was written to believers, not to intellectuals! Are we so intelligent that we refuse to confess our sins? Then, we're not innocent of a great transgression; but perhaps, by humility and love, together we will win the day.

Today's apostasy did not happen overnight. Centuries after the first councils, popes and their cohorts added to their dogma while the integrity of the Bible was pushed aside. Men claimed the power to turn the church into an institution of bishops and archbishops, as well as *nunciatures*—ambassadors to nations on behalf of the Vatican, as if it were a little nation inside Italy. Imagine that!

The kingdom of Jesus Christ is not patterned by this world; it operates invisibly but is powerful to the tearing down of every word and every thought that rises up against the Word of God. Against powers and principalities, our Savior died for us; rising to justify us, He lives forever. His army has been called to holiness; warring for the truth, we take up the sword of His Word with the shield of our faith to defeat the same powers He defeated on behalf of mankind.

Men were pressed into spiritual servitude, forced against conscience to accept decisions of councils that reproached the Word by their carnal minds. Spirits of covetousness, deceit, and

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murder filled hypocrites who called themselves Christians. As with Lucifer, their atrocities were the inevitable fruit of pride; yet they continue to promote themselves, mostly unopposed.

Mother of God

The veneration of Mary began as early as the second century in Alexandria, Egypt. Though Roman dogma insists they do not worship Mary, rosaries and prayers to her testify against them. But Jesus taught us how to pray: *And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name ...* (See Lk. 11:2; also Mat. 6:9)

Mary is not the “Mother of God” any more than the pope is the “Holy Father,” but deception is rampant in the church of Rome. The young virgin conceived the Messiah as the Son of man, for she herself was mortal. Although the angel Gabriel declared to her that she was *highly favored* (See Lk. 1:28), in fact, Mary is not often mentioned in the Scriptures. She described her gratitude to God for regarding *the lowly state of His handmaid*. (See Lk. 1:48) To exalt her as perfect, a woman born without a carnal nature, is a serious error. Seeking her presence elevates her as an object of prayer and petition—tantamount to idolatry.

The statues of the beautiful virgin and of Christ are adored for their aesthetic beauty, but the truth is, neither Mary nor Christ were outwardly attractive: *He had no form nor comeliness ... no beauty that we should desire him* (Is 53:2b), and his mother must have been unattractive as well. Have we known how much it cost Him to be born of a woman?

They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple service, and the promises. The ancestors are theirs, and from them, by physical descent, came the Messiah, who is God over all, praised forever. Amen.
(Romans 9:4-5 HCSB)

Mary was the mother of Yeshua’s mortal flesh but not of His eternal Spirit or essential Being. As Deity, the Word of the Father entered her seed; then the Word became His Son. Paul wrote that Jesus was born of the seed of David according to the flesh (See Rom 1:3). YHWH, unlimited as Spirit, made His Word

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His own Jewish Son, and the celestial universe rejoiced as they bowed with awe and wonder.

Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." ...

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:20-21, 31-35 NIV)

Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at him. (Matthew 13:54-57 NIV)

An Immaculate Conception

In Nazareth, they knew who his brothers and sisters were. But the Roman church teaches the perpetual virginity of Mary, dogma the Bible does not confirm. Not declaring Joseph with children prior to his marriage to Mary, the Scriptures mention Jesus' brothers and sisters. Since the Bible is true, we know Mary was not a virgin after the birth of Jesus because it would have been a sin for Mary to keep herself from her husband. Wives and husbands are commanded to share their bodies with each other. Their physical union is the consummation of holy matrimony: God said, *they shall be one flesh* (See Gen. 2:24) before the fall of mankind in Eden; therefore, marital sex is not a sin.

In 1854, Pope Pius IX⁸ declared the virgin Mary was born without original sin. In other words, in the nineteenth century, a

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pope declared for the first time in history that Mary was born sinless, without any inclination to sin, and further, that she lived a perfect life. The Scriptures do not support that teaching, yet another Roman church doctrine remains to this day, despite the Bible that declares Christ to be the only sinless One.

Mary was a virgin, which was necessary for God to beget a Son through mankind to save mankind. He had not chosen a virgin because virgins are sinless; rather, the angel told the virgin, she would bring forth the Son of God. Had she not been a virgin, she could not have known her baby was the Son of God.

Even so, Mary is not the focus of the Bible. God was in the Messiah-Christ, “Anointed One,” to reconcile believers to Himself; He is highly exalted, and no other gods are acknowledged.

Certainly, Mary was blessed among women; she was chosen by the extraordinary grace of God. In her words to Elizabeth, the woman of faith accepted her role as the birth mother of Messiah. At that time, she knew the child she’d bear would be her Savior:

And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. (Luke 1:46-47)

Beloved, every spirit believe not, but prove the spirits, if of God they are, because many false prophets have gone forth to the world; in this know ye the Spirit of God; every spirit that doth confess Jesus Christ in the flesh having come, of God it is, and every spirit that doth not confess Jesus Christ in the flesh having come, of God it is not; and this is that of the antichrist, which ye heard that it doth come, and now in the world it is already. Ye—of God ye are, little children, and ye have overcome them; because greater is he who is in you, than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:1-4 YLT, Literal translation) [i.e. He is in our flesh by His Spirit who indwells us.]

The Word of God entered carnal flesh exactly like ours for the divine purpose of conquering our temptations and setting us free from sin. Yeshua demonstrated the way to walk after the Spirit and not the flesh, looking to the cross, counting His flesh dead, He yielded His soul to the will of the Father’s Spirit.

Even so, the Roman church reasoned that Jesus was without sin and therefore didn't struggle against our carnal flesh with its

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innate tendency toward iniquity. Their natural reasoning is faulty: His human nature caused the wilderness temptations; the Father predestined His Son for this. It was imperative that He be tempted as we are in order to become our compassionate High Priest. He conquered the flesh and finished the work, giving every believer His victory. Now we persevere, surrendering our lives to the Spirit by faith in His resurrection.

When we repent to receive God in the Savior, He sends His Spirit to live within our carnal bodies. The Spirit that caused His conception into carnal flesh enters us by grace through faith that makes us new creations; born of the Spirit. The old is gone, the new has come! God certainly lives in the body of the believer, even with its sinful nature, but He has already overcome it all in Christ! Now His Spirit empowers us to overcome as He did in Jesus, and He gives us His victory over the mortal nature, defeated by God in Jesus Christ.

His Holy Spirit at work in us delivers us from our sins, but if we don't believe it, we deny He took our sins away in Christ; yet if He took our sins away in Christ, then He overcomes our sins in us by our confidence in Him. By faith in Him we win!

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. ... But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

(Romans 8:9, 11)

The Roman church teaches that Jesus appeared to us in a body something like ours but without its sinful nature. The Vatican teaches that He was necessarily birthed by a virgin whose body was without sin. The dogma insists that in this way, Jesus came in sinless flesh. Popes have even imagined the virgin herself was immaculately conceived; the contrary is true: Mary's carnal nature was necessary for the mission of our Savior to succeed: a mortal body was required for Him to be the High Priest of mankind. Had He not come into this world in our flesh, He would not have been able to die, and His resurrection would be meaningless if He had never died. Furthermore His entrance

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into our flesh was essential for us to overcome our sinful nature by faith in Him. Otherwise there's no good news at all!

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:3-4 NASB)

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. (Hebrews 4:15 NIV)

Had the Word not entered the exact *likeness of sinful flesh*, (*above*) He certainly would never have been tempted in every way as we are. If He was God in perfect flesh, how was He tempted by the devil? God is never tempted to sin; however, He sent His eternal Word as the Seed of God made flesh to be a man who was tempted just like us. YHWH did this to experience our struggle against the strength of the flesh, knowing that in the weakness of our weakest condition—for He was *like a root out of dry ground—the weakness of God is stronger than men!* (See *Is. 53:2; also 1 Cor. 1:25*)

This is how faith is put to the test: do we believe the Scriptures as they are written? then has the Word changed our lives, resulting in faith that works when it's tried by fire? The Lord never overstates the facts, but we must believe His words.

The cunningly persuasive devil convinces the hearts of men to believe that God came in a perfect and sinless body, and that while in perfect form, the devil tempted Him. That doctrine is blasphemous! As the Word, Yeshua's indestructible life wasn't dependent on His flesh but on His soul's perfect identification with the Father. His name is the expression of the Father's heart, for His Name is the Word of God. As He told His disciples, "*the flesh profits nothing.*" He subjected His flesh to the commands of the Father, and by His obedience, He is able to share His inheritance of everlasting life with all who walk in His Spirit.

Today His risen body is perfect, free of temptations; however, initially God sent His Word as the Substitute for mortal

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man who could not overcome his enslavement to sin. The Word of God Himself was in Jesus, living the perfect life He had searched the world to find. He offered His only begotten Son as the eternal Sacrifice for sin; having lived the only perfect life, He did it from the inside out. As it is written, ... *the word of the LORD endures forever.* (See 1Pet. 1:25a; Read also Jn. 1:1-5, 6:63)

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. (James 1:12-15)

Our proclivity to sin occurs because our flesh was conceived as mortal. Since we yield to temptation, our sins dissociate us from our holy and perfect Creator. Unlike carnal man, Messiah expressed His identity with words from God as the Prophet of a new covenant described by Moses. His human weakness was of the virgin's seed, making Him the Son of man; but His godliness and wisdom came by the Seed of the Father as the Son of God. With His Word as His Son, God was in a man like us from the moment of His conception, and His Word was a fire in His heart:

The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; According to all that thou desirest of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the LORD said unto me, They have well *spoken that* which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him. (Deuteronomy 18:15-19) –YHWH prophesied the first coming of Messiah to Moses.

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If an immortal body had been necessary, Messiah could have descended from heaven in one, but God sent His Holy Spirit to a virgin from David's line and begot His only Son. Thus He fulfilled His promise that a descendant of David would be seated on his "everlasting throne;" seemingly a paradox till the Sacrifice came and made the way for such a throne by His resurrection.

Now we take up our cross to follow Him, daily gaining His victories over our flesh by faith in the power of His Word within us. He has already been here—in this flesh, as a brother of the Jews. The good news is, He knows us from the inside out.

Sanctified ones live by their faith: what He did in our flesh He will do in us as we put our carnal nature to death. By our faith in His death and resurrection, each day He raises us to life by His Spirit and His Word. His life-giving Spirit proves His blood washed away our sins, forever justifying us who follow Him, walking in His Spirit. When we repent and believe in Jesus' death and resurrection, He sends His Spirit into our hearts to live as He did when He walked on earth.

Our faith is tested by trials that bring forth the fruit of patience to bear more fruit as we persevere. Now we die daily by faith in His power, and by tenacious faith, we overcome the temptations of our flesh.

His Word conquers sin and death in us as we practice yielding to Him and confessing the Scriptures. He conforms us to His likeness by His Spirit, living in us. His Spirit is the power of His life that's in His Word as He refines us with its fire.

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. (Romans 6:6-10)

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered,

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being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.
(Hebrews 2:17-18 NKJV)

[the gospel] ... which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake, (Romans 1:2-5 NASB, brackets added for clarity)

What a mystery! God accomplished the unique, miraculous birth of His Word as His own Son, integrating the eternal with our temporal mortality. His thoughts and His ways are beyond our comprehension. He endured the greatest suffering and pain of any man, only for our redemption. Even angels increase in wisdom and understanding as they observe His love and grace expressed toward us.

About Titles

“But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Matthew 23:8-12 NKJV) – Jesus

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”
(Romans 8:15 NASB)

Jesus told us not to address *anyone* as “Father,” referring to the impropriety of giving titles to spiritual mentors. He does not permit iconic leaders; we are brothers and sisters, but men deliberately disobey Him. Why do we refuse to obey God? Why do men guide the flock of Christ into sin? Who are they?

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The title “pope” actually came from the word *papa, abba, or daddy*. The title, “Holy Father,” is presumptuous. No apostle called himself “The Holy Father!” The apostles and prophets would have cried out, “Blasphemy!”

Our Holy Father rules above powers and principalities in heaven and earth. He’ll judge men for the evil things they’ve done, especially when they lay claim to His glory or authority. The idolaters will be made mute like their carved statues.

“Pontifex Maximus”⁹ was a title first created by Rome’s second king, Numa Pompilia for Numa Marcius, the pagan high priest during the eighth century BC. The pagan priesthood of Rome had been called Pontifex Maximus for nearly a thousand years. Kings and emperors had ruled as pagan priests, claiming its title. Then Leo I, in a lofty state of mind, claimed the church crown as *Pontifex Maximus* [from Latin, lit. “Highest Bridge”, referred to a bridge across the Tiber where Romans offered sacrifices to their gods.]¹⁰ It had been a title of the papal office since the fourth century, but Pope Leo I¹¹ made it official in the fifth century. Written over the doors, entryways, and other areas of the Vatican, carved in stone, the pagan words remain in pagan Rome.

Recitations

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Matthew 6:6-8 NIV)

Repetition is useless and wearisome to God and man. Prayer is communication with the only Holy Father by worship, praise, intercession, petition, and thanksgiving. By prayer we participate in a relationship with God, speaking to the Father as His children in Jesus’ name. Prayer might be silent meditation or audible speech; we might whisper or cry out in prayer. When we ask, we must believe He hears and will respond to us. *But without faith it is impossible to please God.* (Heb. 11:6a) Words by rote while counting rosaries is no way to speak to our Father.

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Prayers to Saints

Praying to our fellow believers is not the practice of those who trust in Jesus, and the exaltation of anyone other than God is blasphemous. Communication with the dead is necromancy—an abomination to God. We who believe exalt God in Jesus Christ.

“And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

“These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. (John 16:23-27 NKJV) – Yeshua-Jesus, the truth and life.

The apostle John was caught up to heaven where he saw the mysteries and revelations that Jesus had received from the Father *to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.* (See Rev. 1:1-2 KJV) What an awesome God we serve! In Revelation, Chapter 19, John describes a messenger whose voice came from the throne in heaven:

And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they

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which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See *thou do it* not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. (Revelation 19:5-10)

The sound that came from the messenger was the voice of a brother, a highly honored saint, who insisted, John must not bow before him! He must not pray to him or worship him. He must worship God. No saint was closer to God than this one whose voice came from the throne and commanded the beloved John to worship God alone.

*Relics of the Saints*¹⁶

Italy's cathedrals are among the most beautiful in the world, and the touring visitor includes them on his sightseeing agenda. At Saint Peter's Basilica, the tomb of Peter is allegedly under the altar. The church of the pope, San Giovanni in Laterno and the adjacent Sancta Sanctorum (called the "Holy of Holies") hold relics, allegedly the skulls of Peter and Paul, wood from the table of the Last Supper, and even the holy umbilical cord!

In San Paulo are Paul's tomb and the chains he wore in prison before his martyrdom in Rome. Relics at San Croce in Gerusalemme are from the cross and crown of thorns; there's even the finger of doubting Thomas! At San Silvestro in Capite, the RCC preserves the head of John the Baptist. The mummified bodies of saints who died in catacombs are located in Sicily, but Rome has "the best catacombs,"¹⁷ with its many body parts of saints and relics of believers who were martyred there:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had been *living* in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in *shedding* the blood of the prophets.' So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of *the guilt* of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? (Matthew 23:29-33 NASB) – Yeshua [Jesus]

CHAPTER 5

The Keys to Freedom

But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter *had been* to the circumcised (for He who effectually worked for Peter in *his* apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

(Galatians 2:7-9 NASB)

Saint Peter

Peter opened the gospel to Jews in Jerusalem and to the gentiles in Caesarea, having received the keys to the kingdom from Messiah Yeshua. When Peter declared the Word, he made the narrow way accessible to all nations. By the Sea of Galilee, Yeshua had commanded him to feed His sheep, and in obeying, Cephas [Peter] became a worthy minister of the gospel, particularly to the Jews for whom Messiah had come—His own sheep. Peter's congregations were not mainly gentiles but Jews.

"But you," He asked them, "who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!"

And Jesus responded, "Simon son of Jonah, you are blessed because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is already loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:15-19 HCSB) [Nathaniel was the first disciple to call Yeshua the Messiah (the Christ) and the Son of God. Martha of Bethany declared it before her brother Lazarus rose from the dead man's tomb.]

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Jesus had given Simon Peter—the emotional, at times, weak disciple—the name Peter,¹² from the Greek word, *petros*, which is translated, “rock.” It became his new name, yet think of the New Jerusalem, with its walls of twelve foundations, named after the twelve apostles. The word used to describe an enormous boulder, however, is *petra*, as the ancient city, Petra, which was hewn in massive rock.

Peter was the impulsive disciple, but Jesus Christ called him *Petros*, “a rock,” which symbolizes stability and strength; in the same way, before Abraham could have children: “*As it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations.’ He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.* (Rom. 4:17 NIV)

But the Lord’s play on words used the variant, *Petra*, also meaning “rock,” alluding to the disciple’s confession of Jesus as the Son of God. The *Petra* is God in His Son as the only true Salvation. [Cf. Rom. 4:17 also.] The Savior would establish His church on the Rock of God with us, *Immanuel*, the only begotten Son. If anyone says, “God has no Son,” he speaks from the spirit of anti-Christ because the Son of God is the foundation of our faith. (See 1 John 2:22-23)

Do not fear, do not be afraid;
Have I not told you from that time, and declared it?
You *are* My witnesses.
Is there a God besides Me?
Indeed *there is no other Rock*;
I know not *one*.” (Isaiah 44:8 NKJV) –The Word of the LORD

Jesus first named him *Cephas* when He met and gathered His closest disciples to travel with Him: *and having looked upon him, Jesus saith. ‘Thou art Simon, the son of Jonas, thou shalt be called Cephas,’ (which is interpreted, A rock. (from Jn. 1:42 YLT)*

When the Father revealed the identity of Messiah to Peter, he spoke the founding doctrine of the church. Jesus told Peter he had been blessed to receive such a revelation, reminding him that he was a *petros*; but the Son of God was the Rock, the *Petra*, in the Word of his revelation.

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Soon after that, Jesus prophesied His rejection by the leaders in Jerusalem and His approaching death and resurrection. Simon Peter rebuked Him for saying those things. *But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan! for thou art an offence to me: (See Mat. 16:23)* Had Yeshua perceived that he'd wanted to impress his fellow disciples?

Peter had taken the Lord aside to speak to Him, positioning himself in front of Jesus, facing the disciples behind Him. Jesus turned from Peter to see them, but Peter saw them as he was speaking to Jesus, so that they also heard Peter's words. Who was Peter's audience, the Lord, or his peers?

Immediately, Jesus told Peter that he was speaking words from Satan. When the Lord said, "*Get behind Me, Satan!*" He commanded a disingenuous Peter to join the others behind Him. He then told them all to follow Him—denying themselves, their egos, selfish wills, and desires by carrying a cross daily:

But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me Satan: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men. And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. (Mark 8:33-35)

A man with a revelation might consider himself greater than his brothers; his pride opens the door for the devil to use him. Had Peter thought his epiphany made him the leading disciple? Had he neglected to believe Jesus' words, which would have prevented his sin? He'd be an apostle like the others, but he had given Satan opportunity by vying for a place above his brothers.

Once more, after the resurrection, when the Lord told him how he would die, John was there, and, *Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me. (Jn. 21:21-22)* Sibling rivalry is ancient, and His children can fall into it; but to follow Christ, we must reject self-consciousness, redirecting our wills to the will of God. We must put sins

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to death to follow Yeshua; thus we reckon our former nature on the cross in His body. To enter Christ, we must put all self-centered ways to death; then we can walk in His Spirit.

Though he correctly identified Jesus as Messiah, the Son of God, Peter was not the first to realize it: Nathaniel said the same of Him when he first met Jesus. However, Peter opened himself to temptation and fell. Then Yeshua made it clear: God Himself was in Christ—the only Rock—declaring, ... *upon this rock, I will build my church.* (See Mat. 16:18) Believers would establish their faith on the only Rock—God in His own Son, our Savior.

He is the foundation of the church: *For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* (1 Cor. 3:11) The Word of God is the same Rock on which Moses stood; God hid Moses in the cleft of that Rock when He passed before him. The Rock in the wilderness of Horeb supplied water for the Hebrews as they journeyed; that Rock supernaturally moved with them as the manifestation of the unchanging Rock of living water. Moses delivered the lyrics of a song to the people, not singing but speaking, till he finished:

Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work *is* perfect: for all his ways *are* judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right *is* he. ... (Deuteronomy 32:3-4) [He would publish—broadcast—His holy, unspeakable Name!]

The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men *must* be just, ruling in the fear of God. And *he shall be* as the light of the morning, *when* the sun riseth, *even* a morning without clouds; *as* the tender grass *springing* out of the earth by clear shining after rain. (2 Samuel 23:2-4) – David [The Rock of Israel is YHWH; His name, in His Word: God in Yeshuah.]

As time passed, when Roman soldiers martyred him by inverted crucifixion, Peter's uncompromised confession was His Savior, the Rock of Israel. Finally, his faith was as solid as a rock as Peter followed Jesus in his death. Others, even today, have declared the faith, facing trials and persecutions beyond description to conform to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus:

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Stephen, the first Christian martyr,¹³ witnessed to the Jews in Jerusalem who stoned him to death. Before dying, “*Look,*” he said, “*I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.*” (*Acts 7:56 NIV*) Stephen did not shrink from death; his faith was certain. They beheaded James the son of Zebedee, along with one of his captors who, upon seeing the faith of James, also confessed Messiah as his Savior. Matthew was pinned to the ground and beheaded. They cast James [Jacob], one of Jesus’ half-brothers, from the temple tower and then smashed his head with a club. Matthias was stoned and beheaded. Pagans crucified Andrew on an X-shaped cross in Asia. Mark was dragged to pieces in Alexandria where he spoke against their idol Serapis. The Romans beheaded Paul after his confinement in Rome, and Thomas¹⁴ was speared in India. Jude, James’ brother, was crucified in Syria. Bartholomew was beaten and crucified. The Greeks hanged Luke from an olive tree in Athens. John was exiled to the island of Patmos after being boiled in a vat of oil and emerging unharmed. While in exile, John was caught up into heaven after which he wrote *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. Years later, according to Foxe, the Romans released him, and John returned to Ephesus where he died in AD 98. Of the original twelve, John was the only apostle who died of a natural cause.

Since the first apostles were slain as eyewitnesses, the integrity of their words, sealed by their shed blood, provided future generations with the gospel. Their steadfast confessions of the Son of God set the first foundations of the walls as examples for us. They built their lives on Yeshua as the unchanging Truth, making us one in Him by the same faith.

The Lord foreknew Peter would waver under the fear of persecution. In His darkest hour, three times he denied he had anything to do with Jesus. Then before Pentecost but after His resurrection, He saw Peter in his boat, maybe broken by his sin and without a vision, fishing. (How Peter loved fishing!)

For his sake, Yeshua appeared at the water’s edge that day. Though Peter had turned to his love for fish, Christ exhorted him to be a shepherd who would feed His sheep—not a fisherman, catching fish. The Shepherd entrusted His own sheep to Peter, not that he was a great man, but that his weakness was an

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opportunity for the glory of God. Yeshua said, *Feed My lambs; Shepherd my sheep; Feed My sheep.* (See Jn. 21:15-19) God had sent Jesus to Jews, His sheep; He called Peter to feed and care for them. Later, He called Paul as the minister to the gentiles.

Though Peter's complete transformation came through years of trials, his endurance became the most impressive attribute of his character. If we stagger at the thought of severe persecution, we can look to Peter and be encouraged by the weak, unreliable, wavering disciple who became a steadfast witness, retaining the faith, and proving Christ's *strength is made perfect in weakness.* (See 2 Cor. 12:9)

When we receive what God has said, nothing can separate us from Him, but He wants us who want Him, even when the way is hard. We must *work out our salvation with fear and trembling* (See Php. 2:12): *Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* (Mat. 7:14) Jesus said His kingdom is not observable but exists in the unseen hearts of believers.

The Keys of the Kingdom

When He gave Peter the keys to the kingdom, Jesus chose him as the first to take the gospel to the Jews in Jerusalem and to the gentiles in Caesarea. What are its keys? They are words of revelation, wisdom, knowledge, and understanding that open the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven to all who believe.

Fifty days after His resurrection, on Pentecost [Shavuot], the Holy Spirit *came upon* one hundred twenty of the disciples as they waited for the Lord's promise for empowerment. Suddenly the wind of the Spirit rushed into the room; appearing as tongues of supernatural fire, He touched each head with a holy anointing. That morning, they spoke languages to Jews from many nations. The Spirit had come upon them, filling them as they praised God and boldly declared the gospel with understanding for everyone.

The Spirit equipped Peter with words that surpassed the power of his sword. When Peter held the sword in his heart, not in his hand, he preached to those he had previously feared, telling them they had condoned the crucifixion of their Messiah. He wielded the sword of the Word with conviction and clarity, and his audience was cut to the heart, spiritually circumcised. Repentant, they believed and worshiped the Savior they had

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rejected. As they confessed their sins to God, they were baptized [immersed] in water—as the token of the new covenant, buried underwater to rise in newness of life. The Spirit empowered them with life from heaven. And they were all Jews:

Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter *said* to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:37-41 NASB)

Thousands of Jews turned to faith in Yeshua, many of whom were Jewish priests (See Acts 6:7), but the persecution continued. Pressured by leaders, synagogues rejected Jews who believed Yeshua was Messiah, but after the stoning of Stephen, the opposition waned. At that time, Peter went to Joppa and stayed at the home of a man named Simon.

Meanwhile, a Caesarean named Cornelius, a devout gentile who believed in the Hebrew God, had a vision: the angel of the Lord appeared to him, telling him to find Peter who was in Joppa at Simon’s home. The following day, Peter prayed on a rooftop,

And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice *spake* unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, *that* call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the

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vessel was received up again into heaven. (Acts 10:10-16)
[Formerly unclean beasts came from and returned to heaven for the Lord made all foods clean, receiving the gentiles.]

When Peter followed Cornelius' servants and entered the gentile home, it was something he had never done. By this act of faith, Peter unlocked the second awakening to the gospel; this time, the God of the Jews, whose gospel first came to His own, now welcomed the gentile nations. Peter's faith fulfilled biblical prophecies to spread the salvation of YHWH to the entire world! The Holy Spirit strengthened the faith of Jews and gentiles together. Filling them with the oil of joy, His fire burned in their hearts to spread the Word to the world, and everything changed.

Though Peter had introduced the new covenant to gentiles, years later he would stumble into the hypocrisy of turning to the legalism of the former covenant in order to please the Jews who were still living under the law. He began to lead freed Jews and gentiles into the same false teaching. Though Christ had chosen him to ignite the great spiritual awakening, Peter was falling into his own fallibility until the Holy Spirit in Paul boldly interrupted him:

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

"We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:11-16 NIV) [Paul referred to the new birth that makes a man a Jew; here gentiles

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are sinners. *The law* refers to the regulations and ordinances that had separated the Jews from the gentiles by their works.]

The natural man cannot please God, no matter how many prayers are spoken. The “good works” of our mortal nature are cut off by self-righteous pride. Only the blood Jesus shed for us can atone for such sins. We receive His atonement by faith, and He washes us clean; finally, we can live as new creations in Him.

A Second Blessing

The Lord conferred another blessing on Peter:

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:19)

After Jesus blessed Peter, He blessed His other disciples in the same manner. While with them in Capernaum, He said,

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:18-20)

Binding and loosing deals with disputable matters that affect personal convictions. In matters of binding or loosing, we must not judge our brothers. This authority never changes the moral laws of God and can never be used to alter His commands to believers. Most disputable matters concern mutual convictions, i.e. as a believer agrees with another believer, they each must be convinced in their own minds, yielded to the Word, including the moral laws of God. Finally, decisions on the issues in question don't make one believer holier than another whose convictions differ; we remain in the union. The Bible exhorts us to refrain from making judgments against matters not judged by the Word:

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Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. ...

One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. ...

... You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. (Romans 14:1, 5-7,10 NIV)

Simon, a magician, became a believer in Christ. Then Philip baptized him in Samaria while immersing other new believers in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Peter and John arrived to pray for them to receive the Spirit, observing the laying on of hands and the subsequent baptism of the Spirit, Simon wanted to buy it,

saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."

(Acts 8:19-23 NASB)

The Price of Purgatory

If Simon thought he could purchase the gift of God with money, what happens to those who think they can buy the grace of God with money, purchasing the prayers of priests for the favor of God? Did the disciples pay Jesus for His prayers? But these ideas are normal to Roman Catholic thought; these things don't alarm them, because they have been raised to believe them, indoctrinated. Many Protestants are also persuaded to believe false teachings, unaware of their precarious spiritual condition.

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The RCC believes there is a place called purgatory, a place of purging, situated between hell and heaven, where sinners must pay penance for their sins in a sort of netherworld until they receive the sufficient number of prayers to rescue and deliver them into heaven. The idea is far off the mark of the Scriptural truth. If that teaching were valid, extortionists, pornographers, drug lords, murderers, and every rich Catholic could purchase the grace of God, but taking money for the grace of God is an evil practice of the Roman Catholic Church.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

The Holy Spirit works within our hearts by His grace, changing us into the likeness of Messiah as we believe. By the miracle-working power of His Spirit and His Word, we gain the right to become children of God, created for His good works.

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise. (Luke 23:42-43) [His Spirit is everywhere.]

For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing *is* God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we *are* always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (for we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. (2 Corinthians 5:4-9)

No amount of personal flagellation or suffering can wash away our sins and grant us grace with God. That way of thinking negates the cross. If we buffet our bodies through

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fasting, it is for discipline and self-control. If we fast otherwise, it is to focus on God alone as we pray in intimacy with Christ. Our sufferings buffet the nature of our flesh as the spiritual man matures, but all of these things occur in the land of the living, not the dead.

Though great sufferings might free us from sin as a refining fire would, they can't take our guilt away. By His grace, we believe in His atonement, and Yeshua takes our sins and guilt away. Then as we receive the words of God, He makes us holy:

And just as it is appointed for people to die once—and after this, judgment—so also the Messiah, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him. (Hebrews 9:27-28 HCSB)

All men will face the judgment, and those who practice iniquity will face condemnation. *And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. (1 Jn. 3:5)* As we persevere in faith, we are freed from sin and death:

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

... For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:9-11, 21 NKJV)

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all

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who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. (John 5:24-29 NKJV) –Yeshua

For ages, the church murdered believers who had accepted what had been passed down from the first century. The Roman Catholic Church had kept the people from the Word, outlawing its translation into languages they could understand. However, a man named Gutenberg invented a printing press, and after the Bible was disseminated, there was no way to quench its fire!

Transubstantiation

The ceremony known to Protestants as Holy Communion is called “the Sacrifice of the Eucharist” by the Roman church, which erroneously teaches the perpetual sacrifice of Christ. The dogma states that His body is broken and His blood is shed at every Mass, which disputes the truth of God.

First sanctioned by the Fourth Lateran Council¹⁵ in 1213, the doctrine of transubstantiation teaches that the bread and wine given at communion actually *transform* into the substances of Messiah’s body and blood. For more than a thousand years, this had been unthinkable till this teaching became church dogma. Pope Innocent II also put to death those who rejected the change and who believed the earlier doctrine that the bread and wine are significant representations with spiritual effects. Centuries later, the Protestants would return to the representational elements as Christ had explained them.

Therefore *it was* necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another—He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die

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once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. (Hebrews 9:23-28 NKJV)

According to the Scriptures, the Lord Jesus suffered once to shed His blood for our sins; now He lives forevermore. Soldiers once nailed His flesh to the cross. Then His Spirit raised His mortal body and transformed it into an immortal body—from death to life! He then ascended into heaven in the same body, made incorruptible by the Holy Spirit.

If we believe Jesus died for us and broke the power of sin and death, as we take this truth into our hearts, the words we believe give us the life of His Spirit. The words that come out of our hearts, not the food in our bellies, make us clean; or else the evil in our hearts makes us unclean.

Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. (Matthew 15:17-18) – Yeshua

For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. *Whereof* the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This *is* the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these *is*, *there is* no more offering for sin. (Hebrews 10:14-18)

When we receive the unleavened bread, we remember His death and realize our carnal man was crucified in His flesh. The broken bread represents His broken flesh and His death, resulting in the brokenness of our own flesh by our faith in His sacrifice:

So Jesus said to them, “I assure you: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life in yourselves. Anyone who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day, because My flesh is real food and My

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blood is real drink. The one who eats My flesh and drinks My blood lives in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on Me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the manna your fathers ate—and they died. The one who eats this bread will live forever.” (John 6:53-58 HCSB)

Yeshua spoke in spiritual and figurative terms as He taught the people who’d followed Him to the other side of the sea. The elements of bread and wine spiritually represent His flesh and blood that atoned for us in His death. When we receive the elements, we take in [eat] the bread, remembering His flesh and receive [drink] the wine, which figuratively is His atoning blood, in remembrance of His sacrifice. Spiritually the elements are real to us, but not physically; that which is spiritual is life to its partakers, a sacred communion. His words are spirit and life.

Other such idiomatic expressions of eating occur throughout the Word: *Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.* Prov. 18:2 *Thy words were found, and I did eat them* ... of Jer. 15:16; *The wind shall eat up all thy pastors* ... of Jer. 22:22; *He said to me, Son of man, eat what you find [here]. Eat this scroll, then go and speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and He fed me the scroll. “Son of man,” he said to me, “eat and fill your stomach with this scroll I am giving you.”* Ezk. 3:2-3a; *They eat up the sin of my people* ... of Hos. 4:8; *The sword shall cut thee off; it shall eat thee up like a cankerworm* ... of Nah. 3:15; *But He said to them, I have meat to eat that you know not of. ... And Jesus said unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.* Jn. 4:32, 34; *I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter* ... (See Rev. 10:9-10)

When the Hebrews ate physical manna in the wilderness, they ate it as their physical sustenance though the manna had spiritual implications. They died in the desert for their unbelief in the faithfulness of God.

Jesus said He is the bread that came from heaven; but unlike the Jews’ unbelief in the desert, we must take in His atonement

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as the bread that has spiritual significance. Soon after speaking, He took them aside and explained his words to His disciples:

“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. (John 6:63-64 NIV)

If all could have believed, they would have eaten His *words*, but all of His disciples did *not* believe. When the time came, Yeshua ate the Passover in an upper room in Jerusalem with the twelve. While sharing the Seder meal and taking the bread to break it, Judas took the sop, left the room, and betrayed the Lord whose arrest came with a kiss from His betrayer that same night.

Before Yeshua shed His blood for our sins, He shared the Passover with His disciples. At the end of the meal, Yeshua said of the matzoh, *Take, eat; this is my body before they crucified Him.* He said of the wine, *Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood, before shedding His blood.* After taking the fourth cup, the “cup of redemption,” He called the wine, *this fruit of the vine*, saying He would not drink it again until the day came in His Father’s kingdom. He did not change the substances but explained their sacred significance for the first time in history:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed *it*, and brake *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom. (Matthew 26:26-29)

Yeshua often used metaphors and similes to explain spiritual things; at the Seder, He illustrated His approaching death by alluding to Himself as the sacrificed Lamb of the new covenant. Then He prophesied that after three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, He would rise from death to announce He had accomplished His mission. We *eat* His words by *receiving* them;

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the elements stand for the atonement of His death and therefore affect their partakers:

For I received of the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat, this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine Himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats or drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come. (1 Corinthians 11:23-32 NKJV)

When we take the unleavened bread and *the fruit of the vine*, we remember Jesus' broken flesh and shed blood that provided everlasting life. For this reason, each believer must examine his heart, judging it by confession to the Lord or even to another believer. In this way, we prepare to receive the elements in good conscience, knowing the Lord has forgiven and cleansed us from all unrighteousness according to 1 John 1:9. If there's sin in his heart and he takes the elements with an impure conscience, the Lord will judge him; otherwise he would be condemned with the world. Carefully considering our hearts, we pause for others to do the same before we take in the sacred elements that bring His suffering and death to our solemn remembrance:

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“For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it *is* the blood *that* makes atonement for the soul.’ Therefore I said to the children of Israel, ‘No one among you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who dwells among you eat blood.’ Whatever man of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who hunts and catches any animal or bird that may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust; for *it is* the life of all flesh. Its blood sustains its life. Therefore I said to the children of Israel, ‘You shall not eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off.’

(Leviticus 17:11-14 NKJV)

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:4 NIV)

We who want the truth must not rationalize the Scriptures to please ourselves. The nature of the flesh seeks its protection, resisting its destruction and shunning the cross; unless our desire for Jesus Christ overrules the resistance of our flesh, we are vulnerable to deception. However, if we eat [receive] the Word, chewing it [meditating], swallowing it [storing it in our hearts]—dying to live, believing the truth, we will be changed into His likeness.

Historically, the Roman world practiced paganism, and its sculpted images brought their cities substantial gain. Artists throughout the Empire received their income as idol makers. When Christianity threatened the trade of the craftsmen and the division of an empire, fourth century bishops compromised the truth for comfort and traded our faith in the living God for the idol worship of Rome’s pagan culture.

Though some among them argued against their decisions, the majority voted to approve them; in their apostasy, they departed from the Holy Scriptures, which God had provided through His chosen people the Jews. Their councils made unholy doctrinal decisions, dividing congregations and destroying knowledge. From that time, more doctrines and teachings tumbled into heresies by more demonic deceptions. The sins of the fathers are visited on the generations that follow their patterns.

CHAPTER 6

Rites and Wrongs

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8 NASB)

Rite of Christening¹⁸

Christening began as a rite in the church during the early second century. Its practice, sprinkling water on a baby, does not appear anywhere in the Scriptures. There is no mention whatsoever of infant christening.

Four obvious problems come to mind, which concern the rite of christening babies. First, babies cannot possibly recognize themselves as sinners and repent of their sins to receive the Lord for their salvation. Next, no one else can make that choice for them. Third, in churches where infants are christened, baptism by immersion is rarely available for the convert to Christ. Finally, it is a false notion that sprinkling water and speaking words over an infant cleanses him from sin and makes him a new creature; the Scriptures clearly bear witness against the doctrine.

The Greek word, *baptisma*, means to plunge underwater, to submerge, or to immerse. In the apostolic writings, baptism was first performed by the prophet in the desert. John was probably familiar with the Essenes, a sect of Jews who lived in the same wilderness of Judea and practiced baptism as a ceremonial rite for cleansing. But John called men to repent and be baptized as an act of faith to prepare them for the Messiah. When He also came to be baptized by John, Yeshua intensified its meaning; pointing to His death, burial, and resurrection, the Son of man would empathize with humanity; then the Spirit came upon Him.

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. (Acts 2:38)

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Baptism was given to us as the outward sign of a spiritual reality. Buried with Yeshua in His death by repentance, by faith in His forgiveness, we are raised with Him into new life. The spiritual experience of repentance and faith in the life of Jesus Christ ushers us into salvation, the gift of grace from God. Paul explained the spiritual significance of our redemption:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:1-4)

Jesus never said, “Just sprinkle water on yourselves and your babies, and you will all be born again” or, “Be submerged into water and you will be born again.” That would be unspiritual. Neither sprinkling nor submerging causes a new birth, because it’s a supernatural experience given to the repentant sinner who receives Jesus into his heart by faith. Repentance and faith are mandatory for everyone who seeks the kingdom of God. If we believe anything else, we deny the words of God:

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

(John 1:12-13)

After believing the gospel, the biblical ordinance of baptism is the token of our spiritual experience. In the Spirit, we were vicariously immersed into His death and burial, and we were vicariously raised out of death with His resurrection. Because we were buried with Him in His death, we died to be raised in Him, born again by the Spirit of His life.

We live new lives because we have experienced a spiritual baptism that we publicly confessed by a physical baptism in water. The new birth is not by the will of man; it does not occur by ritual. The new birth is a miracle from the God of creation.

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Apart from ceremony, the Holy Spirit acts on the heart and nature of the contrite sinner who turns to the Savior by faith. The conversion from death to life occurs by an act of the Holy Spirit: He miraculously opens our spiritual eyes. Jesus described the process of the new birth to Nicodemus, a religious Jew:

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (John 3:5-8 NIV)

As we vow our new lives to follow Jesus, we take the steps He took into the frigid waters of the Jordan; then the Spirit gently descended upon Him, just as He is given to each believer who obeys Him. By our obedience, the ordinance of baptism ushers us into discipleship. According to the Scriptures, as we repent, believe, and are baptized, we are granted the gift of the Holy Spirit, and those who don't argue the point are blessed:

God exalted this man to His right hand as ruler and Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." (Acts 5:31-32 HCSB) – Peter and the apostles

Would Naaman have been cleansed of leprosy, had he not obeyed the prophet Elisha when he commanded him to wash seven times in the Jordan? Likewise, immersion is an act of obedience, showing men and angels we believe in the death and resurrection of the Lord. But baptism does not save us any more than circumcision saved the Jews. Nevertheless those who argue against baptism are self-willed, opposed to the commitment true repentance brings, or they are believing men, not God.

Believers must be baptized to receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit because we have been commanded to do so, and our faith is only alive by obedience; we yield to His command, and He blesses us. Is that difficult to understand? Is our salvation

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not a cooperative effort? Do we work out our salvation with fear and trembling? (The thief on the cross did.) This is not burdensome—it was our hearts' desire when we turned from sin to Christ. Are His words now problematic since our teachers insist we don't need any more? In that case, someone might question the validity of our doctrines and the sincerity of our intentions.

Baptism is an object-lesson for those who lack understanding and a statement to those who realize its significance. It is the confession of faith and a good conscience by obedience to the Word. More than that, baptism is mentioned several times in the apostolic writings as the step of faith that follows repentance; it's the new covenant token of our spiritual vow.

In opposition to the Scriptures, Roman Catholic doctrine declares that infant christening¹⁹ remits all sins, whether original or personal; that christening marks the soul as belonging to God; that by the ceremony, the infant is born again and receives new life; that the rite of christening infuses grace, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the fruit of the Spirit, making the baby truly a child of God. These are all presumptuous and false teachings.

Most denominations follow these erroneous doctrines that please their ears but make the cross ineffective. Martin Luther, “father of the Reformation,” also taught that infant christening results in the forgiveness of sins. Furthermore he taught that the ceremony delivers its participants from death and the devil; that it sanctifies them for holiness and eternal life and saves them through a new birth—all this, by a ritual! These were taught to Martin by men from whom he received his formal education; the errors of Martin Luther's training weren't from the Spirit of God.

Though there is no Scriptural precedent for infant sprinkling, Presbyterians and some Reformed churches purport that infant christening is like infant circumcision in Abraham's covenant. However nowhere in the apostolic texts is such an analogy drawn; nor is the rite of infant or adult christening mentioned anywhere in the New Testament; even so, their insistence is an example of the intellectual dishonesty and arrogance of the institutional churches that deny the truth. Some point to first or second century practices, but they only confirm that deceptions began spreading in the early years; apostles warned us of them and wept. Roman Catholic traditions perpetuated the teachings.

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A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.
(Romans 2:28-29 NIV)

Moses, by whom God gave the Law, discerned the difference between ceremony and relationship with God. He understood the weaknesses of his own nature and realized only a merciful God could pardon his past transgressions and provide his future hope. He trusted in the grace of God, but tens of thousands of circum-cised Hebrews lost their lives in the wilderness because God destroyed them in His wrath for their unbelief. They were made an example for us all.

Papal Infallibility

Our Savior upbraided religious leaders for substituting the words of God with theirs. By falsifying the unchangeable Word, they slander the virtue of the One who holds the keys of hell and death. When a leader teaches the church to believe that his words may supersede, substitute, subtract from, or add to the words of God, that leader and his faith blasphemes the Holy Name.

And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.
(Deuteronomy 30:6)

Neither rituals, ceremonies, nor celebrations of feasts can accomplish the work of our faith in His death and resurrection. But the Lord has required us to repent of stubborn rebellion and be baptized; immersion is the test: will we obey or argue against the Word of God? Do we believe Him or another?

Every word of God *is* pure: he *is* a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar. (Proverbs 30:5-6)

In 1075, Pope Gregory VII ("the Great") declared that all popes are inerrant and are saints. He then ordered statues, which

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were sculpted in his likeness and placed in churches throughout Europe. Pope Gregory VII, who is revered as one of the greatest popes, was responsible for the Gregorian Reforms, mostly based on the *Dictatus Papae*,²⁰ or Dictates of the Pope. The following are among the list of dictates, ordered by number: 2. That the Roman pontiff alone can with right be called universal. 8. That of the pope alone all princes shall kiss the feet. 10. That his name alone shall be spoken in the churches. 12. That the pope may depose emperors. 19. That he himself may be judged by no one. 22. That the Roman church has never erred; nor will it err to all eternity, the Scriptures bearing this witness. 26. Anyone not at peace with the Roman church shall not be considered Catholic.

These preposterous ideas have gained a great following, but whoever desires to be like Jesus must humble himself, not presuming a high place—Christ called us to serve others in love. He who created the universe sent His Word to live with us: did He command the disciples to kiss His feet, or did Jesus wash theirs? He told them to do the same. Should the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be spoken in churches, or is the position of the pope as important as the sovereignty of God?

All government is from God; He alone seats rulers to bless, judge, or test the deeds of men. There are no good men, but God alone reserves the right to seat or depose them, and no mortal equals Him. Only the laws of God are higher than the laws of nations, yet popes have imagined their position permits them to alter the Ten Commandments!

Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and *for the* praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. (1 Peter 2:13-16 NKJV)

The Scriptures declare each of us will be judged for what is done in the body, whether good or bad. No man is exempt from the Judgment: every *idle word* will be judged, but our hope is in Christ who changes our hearts and our words. (See Mat. 12:36.)

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According to the Roman Church, the Roman Church has never erred. But what's the truth? The only true universal and apostolic church consists of everyone who trusts in the Savior, yields to His Spirit, and obeys His words by the strength He provides; we are universally one who believe the Holy Bible. ["Catholic" means *universal*, and apostolic refers to the first apostles.] Those who deny or distort its words will be judged by the Creator, the Father to all who find refuge in His Son.

In 1870, the First Vatican Council of Pope Pius IX wrote the *Declaration of Papal Infallibility*.²¹ The official church dogma declared that when the pope sits on the "chair of Peter," he speaks as the supreme apostolic authority, his words being *equivalent* to those of God! Popes had used this "right" several times prior to the year of its declaration, having been oblivious to the fact that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. Only God is holy, and His Word stands true forever:

"You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command YOU. (Deuteronomy 4:2 NASB)

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book. (Revelation 22:18-19)

The Second Commandment

Thou shalt not make thee *any* graven image, or any likeness of *anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the waters beneath the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and the fourth *generation* of them that hate me, and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep My commandments. (Deuteronomy 5:8-10) [Mercy for the obedient]

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God commands that we not use carved images in worship, whether things in heaven, on earth, or in the waters beneath. The Vatican denies the use of its idols for worship but insists carved idols are used to inspire hearts. The living Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ resides in the hearts of us who believe in Him. Do we need idols for inspiration? Isn't the Spirit of Christ enough to inspire us? But Rome tests God, rejecting His commandments!

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

(1 Corinthians 6:9-11 NKJV) [washed, sanctified, justified by God!]

Wherefore should the heathen say, Where *is* now their God? But our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Their idols *are* silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so *is every one that trusteth in them.* (Psalm 115:2-8)

Exposing the truth rather than denying it is imperative if we are to stand before God. In everything, darkened hearts oppose the light of God in Jesus. We have no light in ourselves unless we believe and walk in His Spirit. By the fear of God, we resist evil, but He stores up wrath against men who make a pompous display of self-righteousness to conceal centuries of darkness and sin. Here is the hypocrisy: when men have an outward appearance of holiness but are inwardly evil, all their righteousness is filthy rags:

He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to

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him. Judas saith unto Him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. (John 14:21-24)

See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it. (Deuteronomy 12:32 NIV)

The early bishops compromised the faith of the apostles. The evidence is in their writings and decisions that differed from the Scriptures. Their lukewarm affection for Christ swayed the leaders to find safety in the courts of the emperor. The few who remained faithful became objects of ridicule and hatred by the unfaithful. Ultimately, the institutional church killed them.

The Ten Commandments of Catechism²²

Insolence blinded the leaders; considering themselves wise, they became fools by deleting, making additions, and distorting the inspired Word. In 787, the Second Nicaean Council²³ ignored the second of the Ten Commandments that prohibited carved images for worship. By deleting it, the Roman church skewed the commands that Christ said will never be altered.

They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. (1Thessalonians 1:9b-10 NIV)

By the decision of the Roman church council, idol worship has remained the standard of the imperial-like Church. By the addition of idols in places of worship, the bishops protected pagan religious practices throughout the empire. In the doctrinal statement of the Roman Church, its statues are described as permissible since they are religious in nature; however, their religious nature is specifically the reason God condemned carved images. Despite the Holy Word, the second commandment has been deleted in the Roman version since the eighth century.

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Speaking to the religious hypocrites,

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, because I came from God and I am here. For I didn’t come on My own, but He sent Me. Why don’t you understand what I say? Because you cannot listen to My word. You are of your father the Devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and has not stood in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of liars. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Who among you can convict Me of sin? If I tell the truth, why don’t you believe Me? The one who is from God listens to God’s words. This is why you don’t listen, because you are not from God.”

(John 8:42-47 HCSB)

The history of Roman Catholicism²⁴ reveals the fourth century churches morphing into a Christian-pagan religion, only a nominal church that demonized those who refused to comply, persecuting them as “heretics,” which often meant torture and death for the impenitent. Nevertheless only those who believed the Holy Word and possessed the Holy Spirit belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ and loved Him by faith in the inspired Scriptures and the original directives from the apostles. Excommunicating them, the church condemned the “infidels”; yet the real heretics were the manslayers, the hypocrites! God doesn’t demand we believe a religious system made up by men. To the contrary, He sent His Son and raised Him from the dead to save us from death and hell.

Happy Ishtar?

At the first Council of Nicaea, bishops and other church leaders agreed to celebrate the festival called *Easter* as the day of the resurrection of Christ. Though that might seem innocent, it was not. By defaming the Jewish Feast of First Fruits, the actual day the Lord was raised, they defamed its holy prophecy. To this day, they have not rescinded the antichrist decisions. Had they been ignorant of the Scriptures, perhaps unaware of their sins? Didn’t they know better than to create another religion,

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one more familiar to pagans? Reverting to their previous roots, the gentiles changed the significance of our Jewish faith: Yeshua had fulfilled the prophetic purpose of the celebration when He became *the firstfruits of them that sleep*. (See 1 Cor. 15:20)

The bishops omitted the Jewish festival that prophesied the resurrection of the Savior. Though the festivals aren't required in the new covenant, God had honored the Jewish feasts in the life of Yeshua. He who created them does not disdain them; rather, He fulfilled them. And the feasts are witnesses to the Word.

The bishops removed the feasts that witness of His death, burial, and resurrection and agreed to adopt an ancient Roman festival to a fertility goddess in preference to the Hebrew Day of First Fruits: “We further proclaim to you the good news of the agreement concerning the holy Easter, that this particular also has through your prayers been rightly settled; so that all our brethren in the East who formerly followed the custom of the Jews are henceforth to celebrate the said most sacred feast of Easter at the same time with the Romans and yourselves and all those who have observed Easter from the beginning.” [from the Synodical Letter of the Council of Nicaea,²⁵ AD 325.]

“The custom of the Jews”? The festivals were not customs—God had commanded His people to observe them, commemorating their history, putting Israel on display, and revealing His inspired prophecies, which He had integrated with the festivals. The Jewish feasts pinpoint the times for the arrival of the Savior and His redemptive acts with astonishing accuracy.

Unlike the Word of God, the goddess of fertility and war, Eostre or Ishtar of Babylon, (*Ee-ster*) is found in the ancient epic tale *Gilgamesh*,²⁶ which took place in Uruk (Ur?) of Mesopotamia, or Babylonia. It's Ashtoreth of the Philistines, counterpart of Baal, called Gilgamesh or Nimrod. Its name is linked to “aster,” or star. Since Babel, it was worshiped as a goddess of harvest and fertility—Babylon invaded the church.

Israel had often fallen into spiritual adultery by joining the gentiles, prostituting themselves to the gods they'd created. The LORD judged His chosen people, yet they repeatedly engaged in pagan worship, spurring more wrath.

Today we worship on Easter Sunday, then take the children home to their rabbits, eggs, and chicks—all fertility symbols—

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incongruous with the risen Savior who once said, *Let the little children come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.* (See *Mat. 19:14; Mk. 10:14; Lk. 18:16*) What are we teaching the children?

In time, churches throughout the empire followed suit, celebrating Easter with Roman pagans rather than the proper Day of First Fruits with Messianic believers. Our faithful God has not yet poured out wrath against the hypocrisies of a false church, but His chosen Israel will be received again. He didn't rescue us from sin to compromise with idolaters—we need to be saved! We need sanctification and holiness by the Holy Spirit, not by the works of the flesh.

When we walk in the Spirit, we obey the Lord, but His laws judge the works of the flesh, condemning men who change His words with leaven, adding traditions to hypocrisies; as well as men who treat the Holy Spirit with contempt by returning to the works of self-righteousness. The councils misled us, but God gave us His Word and His Holy Spirit to sanctify believers.

He answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? ... Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

*‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth,
And honor Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me,
And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”*
(Matthew 15:3, 6b-9 NKJV)

Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said to them, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “It is because we have taken no bread.” ... “How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—*but* to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that He did not tell *them* to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (Matthew 16:5-7, 11-12 NKJV)

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Leaven is the metaphor used for false teachings, traditions, and opinions. Jesus saw it in rabbis who could not understand His statements because they'd embraced fallacies. Have we done the same? With their opinions as points of reference, they couldn't reorient their hearts to the truth. This made them the sons of their father the devil: they had received his lies.

When we receive lies, we follow the enemies of God who oppose His words. Religious institutions teach vanities as facts. If we receive their hypocrisy by believing other men, we will also approach the Scriptures with preconceived ideas in leavened minds, and we too will be puffed up—proud, even arrogant. Can men change the Word of God? No, His Word stands forever, but when we believe men, we trust their perspectives as well.

Rather than drawing close to God, we remove the effect of His Word with various opinions that muddle our ability to know the truth. By misinformation, renewed hearts and minds can become proud and unbelieving, lukewarm and compromised.

In the earliest congregations, Jewish and gentile believers worshiped, agreeing as one. Then in AD 321, the Edict of Constantine²⁷ substituted the seventh day Sabbath of the fourth commandment with the *Venerable Day of the Sun* as the “day of rest.” In 364 the Council of Laodicea²⁸ confirmed Sunday as the sanctified day of rest for Christians worldwide.

While now the churches called the seventh day of the week *the Sabbath*, only their priests were permitted to observe it. They reasoned since Christ rose on the first day of the week, they'd change a commandment. Lightly esteeming them, they thought it unnecessary to keep the laws of God. Their changes pleased pagans but not Jewish believers who refused to defile the Scriptures.

As the years passed, the church compromised the Sabbath altogether, calling their new day of rest “the Lord's Day” and eventually rewording the commandments to fit their alteration. The first apostles never dreamed of altering the day God had made holy, the Sabbath of the Ten Commandments! As with all moral laws, it had existed before Eden. God had sanctified and called His Sabbath holy because He had rested from His work of creation on the seventh day. [*Sabbath / Shabbat* means “rest.”] As its Lord, Christ kept the Sabbath holy. (See Mk. 2:28; Lu 6:5)

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The hypocrisy is obvious: imagining believers don't need to obey the commandments of God, bishops changed the Scriptures by creating their own laws, which they then insisted believers must obey! Despite the truth, the changes remain in what the RCC now calls the "Ten Commandments of Catechism."²⁹

Concerning the Sabbath, the Protestant churches followed what they had always regarded as the Lord's day, not stopping to think that God grafted us into an olive tree, Israel. Its root should bear us, not the other way around; however, most of the bishops turned the churches from our Jewish roots to pagan customs.

They refused to preserve the Ten Commandments, which Jesus said would not pass away till everything is fulfilled. The RCC later taught that missing Sunday Mass was a *mortal* sin.³⁰ If it was a mortal sin, who committed the sin but the ones who changed the laws of God for a pagan culture? who perpetuated this? The churches did!

For though I be free from all *men*, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some.

(1 Corinthians 9:19-22)

Bishops ordered Christians to desist from their practice of keeping the Sabbath as their day of rest, denouncing them as cursed heretics for observing the Jews' seventh day while calling their God our own! If not for the Hebrew Scriptures, how would they have known about the Sabbath at all? After the Edict of Constantine,³¹ businesses closed on Sundays in all the empire. By ratifying the decision forty-three years later, the council in Laodicea sanctioned the earlier edict.

That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: who are Israelites; to whom *pertaineth* the

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adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of *God*, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. (Romans 9:2-5)

Therefore accept one another, just as the Messiah also accepted you, to the glory of God. For I say that the Messiah became a servant of the circumcised on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises to the fathers, and so that Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy.

**Therefore I will praise
You among the Gentiles,
and I will sing psalms
to Your name.**

Again it says: **Rejoice, you Gentiles, with His people!**
And again:

**Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles;
all the peoples should praise Him.**

And again, Isaiah says:

**The root of Jesse will appear,
the One who rises to rule the Gentiles;
the Gentiles will hope in Him.** (Romans 15:7-12 HCSB)

The Lord said, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Since He is the Lord of the Sabbath, we believe His words. (See Mk. 2:27-28) The Sabbath is a day for us to rest. The question is, "Do we rest in Him?" But another thought comes to mind: willing to accommodate pagans, the bishops strengthened Rome's Empire, Constantine's preeminent desire.³² By altering the laws of God and ordering their transgression, they separated the gentile and Jewish assemblies, which disintegrated as the institutional church became pagan. Is that morally acceptable?

During the six centuries of papal Inquisitions that began in the thirteenth century, up to fifty million people were killed. Is this Christianity? Does the Lord Jesus appear in any of this violence and murder? He does not! The bloodshed of the Roman

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church is led by one man, its pope. By the murder of Christians and Jews, the Roman Catholic Church has slain Christ and his brethren while using the holy name of Jesus to mask their evil practices. This is the anti-Christ spirit that entered the church..

In 1096: Roman Catholic crusaders slaughter half the Jews in Worms, Germany. 1098: RC crusaders slaughter the entire city of Antioch. 1099: RC crusaders massacre 70,000 Muslims and Jews when they capture Jerusalem. 1208-1226: RC crusaders murder almost the entire population of southern France, Albigenian Christians. 1236: Roman Catholic crusaders destroy Jews in the Anjou and Poitou regions of western France, trampling 3000 to death under their horses for their refusal of baptism. 1243: Roman Catholic mobs burn alive all the Jews in Berlitz, Germany. 1298: RC mobs burn alive all the Jews in Rottingen, Germany. April 26, 1349: RC mobs burn to death all the Jews in Gernersheim, Germany. 1348-49: RC mobs blame the Jews for the bubonic plague and hang, burn, and drown them by the thousands. 1389: RC mobs murder 3000 Jews in Prague when they refuse baptism. 1481-83: Under the direction of RC Spanish Inquisitors, authorities burn 2000 people at the stake. 1540-70: RC armies slew 900,000 Waldensian Christians. 1550-60: RC soldiers tortured, hung, and burned 250,000 Dutch Protestants. 1553-58: The RC Queen Mary I (“Bloody Mary”) ruled England, burning hundreds of Protestants at the stake. During the 15th and 16th centuries, translations of the Bible were burned with the martyrs. 1572: St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre. French RC troops murdered 10,000 Protestants in the first three days and another 8000 as the slaughter spread to the countryside. 1618-48: The Thirty Years’ War was a religious war, instigated by the Roman Catholic Jesuit order of priests in an attempt to kill all the Protestants in Europe. 1641-49: 100,000 Protestants were slain in Ireland by the RC Jesuit order and its agents. 1685: 500,000 French Protestant Huguenots were slain by order of the RC king, Louis XIV. 1938-45: RC Fuhrer Adolf Hitler and Monsignor Tiso slaughter six million Jews in Europe. 1941-45: RC Ustashi of the fascist state of Croatia kill one million Serbian Orthodox Christians with killer squads often led by Franciscan priests, monks, and friars, according to the plans of Jesuit prelates, Aloysius Stepinac and Ivan Saric.⁵⁴

CHAPTER 7

The Apostasy

Peter, the Lord's half-brothers, and the other apostles were married, and while they evangelized, they often traveled with their wives. *Cephas* [or *Petrus*, i.e. Peter (*Simon*)] was married:

Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? (1 Corinthians 9:5-6 NIV) [Notice the apostles' wives worked to help support their husbands' ministries.]

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. (Mark 1:29-30 NIV)

About Celibacy

Marriage is a sacred institution. God gave us the blessings of marriage and procreation before the fall of Adam. Godly saints have married over the ages, finding their blessing in the nuptial covenant, but doctrines of demons command men to abstain from natural sexual desire in its appropriate place, marriage. The Roman priesthood is under a vow of celibacy. With priests as sex offenders, why does the church insist on such a vow?

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars whose consciences have been seared with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. (1 Timothy 4:1-3 NIV)

In 1123, the First Lateran Council³³ forbade marriage within the priesthood. The Second Lateran Council,³⁴ which convened in 1139, called the marriage bed "impure" in canons six and

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seven. This was the first general law of celibacy in the church. Has the church changed her attitude? The Roman church altered its philosophy about marriage. Today's church honors marriage and the family with a strong stand for the life of the child; some priests have married, but with limitations on their ministries. However, history shows a number of *popes* were married.³⁵

Marriage must be respected by all, and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge immoral people and adulterers. (Hebrews 13:4 HCSB) [Keep marriage moral]

Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

(1 Corinthians 7:3-5 NKJV)

So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. *“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:28-32 NKJV)

Pope Urban II³⁶ imprisoned married priests and sold their wives and children into slavery, adding the money from the sale into the church coffers. At the Fourth Lateran Council of 1213,³⁷ under Pope Innocent II, celibacy became mandatory for clerics, sanctioning a declaration made at the First Nicaean Council.

While victims of sexual abuse³⁸ by priests cry out for justice, the Vatican does not protect children from a celibate priesthood; popes could prevent the ruination of lives, but embrace doctrines of demons instead. Nothing can make an anti-Christ church holy, having taken its stance against the Word of God for centuries.

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The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:18-20 NIV)

Wake Up and Watch!

Deliberately breaking a single commandment is a “grave mortal sin,”³⁹ according to the Roman Catechism. Nevertheless, the councils that became the Roman Catholic Church broke the fourth commandment by changing the Sabbath to the first day of the week, disregarding the Word of God on His sanctified day of rest, which He made holy on the seventh day of His creation. If God had not said it is important to keep the sacred day, He would not have made it the longest commandment of all ten, giving rest to handmaids and servants, and even to their beasts on the seventh day. Does it matter? Not if we don't esteem the Ten Commandments, but God doesn't honor pagan customs.

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has not God chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself,*” you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. For He who said, “*Do not commit adultery,*” also said, “*Do not murder.*” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2::5-13 NKJV; ref. Ex. 20:13, 14; Deut. 5:17, 18) [The royal law of love refers to the Ten.]

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Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made. (Genesis 2:3)

The Roman church omitted the second commandment and divided the tenth into two to make up for the loss of the second. In this way, their version appears as The Ten, but with obvious duplicity, permitting idols in the church. The RCC is a religion of works, replacing the laws of God with its own. Unlike their leaders, Jesus esteemed all Ten while He Himself rested in the Father. His Sermon on the Mount revealed their authority:

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-20)

As the Lord of the Sabbath, Messiah continued the sermon, naming requirements far greater than the Ten. We who receive Him are a dwelling place, His holy temple. As it is written: *Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the Sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings.* (Lev. 23:3) It isn't as though we are under the heavy yoke of the Law; we walk in His Spirit, and His commands are our pleasure.

While we rationalize to discount the Word, we are short-sighted, ignorant of the wisdom of God. Once we discover the truth, we must believe it; then it changes us forever. At rest in Him, we abide in Him, and He lives through us. The Sabbath of the Lord is truly in our dwellings. His mark is not a low calling or a shoo-in. It's a race, a purposeful *pressing on to the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*, (See Php. 3:12)—a crucified life that bears its cross daily.

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Our goal is perfect holiness, or we have no goal at all. We can't become accustomed to change unless we expect Him to conform us to His likeness. The object of our faith never declines but begins and ends with spiritual renewal. Apart from revelation by the Holy Spirit, we can't understand the words of God.

The renewal of our minds and hearts requires that we do just three things: believe the Scriptures, take in their words, and rely on Jesus' Spirit to open our understanding. If we have questions, we ask Him, *pressing* Him for answers till we understand. Only He can do the work, and He will do if we are willing. If we fall, we confess our sin, and He forgives and picks us up. If we suffer discipline, His steadfast love keeps and comforts us.

Pagan Rome

For centuries, the church in Rome slaughtered our brothers and sisters wherever dissenters opposed her. Untold numbers of godly Christians suffered martyrs' deaths for disagreeing with the Roman Catholic Church. Popes manipulated emperors and kings to execute their opponents, behaving as adherents of false Christianity mixed with brutal, bloodthirsty Rome.

Unlike this world, Jesus never commanded us to love, not slay our opponents, and He lived that way. He said that hatred is murder in our hearts—it condemns us. The Lord commanded us to follow Him in humility and gentleness with meekness toward God—considering our own weaknesses.

Though we must contend for the faith, opposing false teachings by Scriptural truth, tearing down strongholds by believing God, and exposing deceptions by speaking the truth; our intentions must always be to free those in bondage to sin.

Where was the heart of Jesus in Crusades and Inquisitions? When saints, Jews, and dissenters were tortured on the rack, the pyramid, and the skull crusher, where was the gentle, humble follower of Christ then? He was replaced by devils—wolves in the fold—torturing and killing men, women, and children who had done no harm but had faith in the love of Christ—all in the holy name of the Lord! Even today the god of all false religions hides behind many names that don't truthfully identify him.

The dogma that the Vatican “has never erred, nor will it ever err” has continued to deceive multitudes, even after the 1960's

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when Pope John XXIII⁴⁰ refuted the long-held declaration that the marriage bed was impure. The truth is, the system changes with new additions from every pope, shifting on a sandy foundation.

Knowing how dismally the church of Rome has erred, all who believe in Jesus Christ must come out of her. We must all depart from lying spirits to seek the truth. Whoever rejects the truth will fall for a great delusion because all who deny the light love darkness, the reason for the condemnation! (See Jn 3:19-21) If we love Christ, we live in the light as His Spirit changes us.

Unlike the Vatican's dictates, both the Tenakh [OT] and the apostolic writings, which were largely drawn from the Tenakh, are true. After His resurrection, Messiah opened the words of the Law and the Prophets to His disciples' understanding. Popes have never represented the Lord; they are mere men, presuming a place Christ granted no man.

The blood of martyred saints is on the hands of the papacy, while the world blindly overlooks its many offenses. Although popes profess to follow the Bible, their teachings consistently circumvent its words by mixing truth with falsehood. Their lies have enriched the church purse for over fifteen hundred years!

The apparent unity of Roman Catholic churches is not the answer to our schisms. What good is a union of churches that all believe the same lies? The truth is never seen in the strength of multitudes on earth; there is never safety in numbers. Truth is the strength of all who believe the words of God, and though only few remain, we will overcome the world. We will not find the truth in institutions, scholarly opinions, or big congregations. Yeshua declared it at the place where He met Martha; He was on His way to raise Lazarus from the dead:

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26 NIV)

A man might look righteous, even loving, but his thoughts belie his outer man, and God knows his thoughts. Even the devil can appear as an angel of light, but that doesn't change who he really is. Jesus said to Pilate, *My kingdom is not of this world*, (See Jn. 18:36a) and He said, *The kingdom of God cometh*

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not with observation. (Lk. 17:20b) Of men who lust for power, Paul wrote:

For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. (2 Corinthians 11:13-15 NKJV)

The Mother of Institutions

As centuries passed, the errors increased until the Roman church became like the world: violent, hateful, and prone to deception. Citing Scriptures without knowledge, bishops were soon chained to just one religious authority: the papacy whose church emerged from the Roman Empire.

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, *who* was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth *his* brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. (1 John 3:11-15)

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

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In the following passage, the word *you* is addressed to the believers who have overcome the false prophets and the spirit of anti-Christ; *them* and *they* describe false prophets and teachers; the words *we* and *us* identify the apostles and all who receive their words by the Holy Spirit:

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

(1 John 4:4-6 NIV)

A Great Deception

In the late 1500's, Protestants began their departure from Catholicism, resulting in denominations that multiplied over the centuries. Sometimes by revelations and often by traditions, new leaders rose to draw like-minded believers into their folds. Still under the influence of Catholicism, most retain roots from Rome with teachings that represent a religion unlike the apostles' faith.

There is a way *that seems* right to a man,
But its end *is* the way of death.

(Proverbs 14:12 NKJV; also 16:25)

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1)

Each has an innate sense of righteousness and justice, but as years pass, some change their requirements, relaxing their own standards because they are unwilling to accept responsibility for their actions. But not even time can tarnish His standards. The way we walk in His shoes is to let Him walk in ours.

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. (Rom. 10:3 NKJV)

The Apostasy

The deception of self-righteousness is rampant in the world. Its greatest camouflage is its use of the Christian vernacular apart from a spiritually transformed life, but a man can become proud if he has forgotten that he was cleansed from his past sins.

Paul said, *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.* (Gal. 2:20) Nothing less will do.

The self-righteous man relies on sheer willpower for favor with a god he imagines; however he has neglected the true God of the entire Jewish biblical account. He adds and deletes its words to accommodate the nature of a god he prefers. Haven't many churches done this? Having practiced sin for so long, is only a veneer of righteousness left? Continuing in sin apart from repentance, many insult and spurn the Spirit of grace.

The Holy Spirit fulfills the righteous requirements of the moral law, manifesting His spiritual attributes in us. As we yield to the Lord, He instructs our hearts and minds to form us as His masterpiece. His way is narrow, but He bears our burdens, and we find rest in His arms.

"Enter by the narrow gate, for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14 NKJV) – Jesus

"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:48 NASB) – Jesus

Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

(2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 NASB) [Re: the coming Day of the Lord.]

How might history see today's American church? Merciful historians might tell of those who resisted the injustices and unrighteousness of a pagan culture but were overpowered by the majority who compromised the truth of God to be at peace with

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the world. Left to ourselves alone, we are imperfect; nevertheless, by faith in His atonement, we grow into His righteousness, and God perfects us—He makes us holy as He is holy.

My Conclusion

A great apostasy began in the early years of the fourth century—an organized apostasy that transformed the nature of the church by an entirely new perspective. The leaders now perceived the church as an institution, operated by Rome, in which bishops in long robes had an outward appearance of righteousness that often did not reflect the inward man of the heart.

The Roman Catholic Church has been ruled, not by the Bible, but by men, climbing a ladder of hierarchy for political favors and personal advantage. Thus, Roman Catholicism is a political institution that has sought power over the whole earth, and it has sought out and murdered those who refuse its dictates.

Roman Catholics are not terrible people. Nevertheless, the institution was taken over by men of the anti-Christ spirit since the time of Pope Siricius and Leo I, who claimed authority over all churches. Even so, some gentle and loving people have stayed who should have left; they might have kept the law of love, but its corrupt leadership has its own set of unrighteous dictates. As the wheat grows among the tares, they are not uprooted until the day of judgment when the secrets of men's hearts are revealed.

The true Christian church is not an institution or an organization. Yeshua said it is not observable because true Christianity, the kingdom of God, is within us—it's a matter of the heart. The true faith is based on the gospel of Jesus Christ, which He announced by calling all men to repentance, to faith in His death and resurrection, and to a new life by relationship with our heavenly Father, our Abba, through His Holy Spirit, sealing us as His own. Jesus said those who obey Him are those who love Him, and we are loved by His Father. We follow Him by the Word, the knowledge of the truth, and the Holy Spirit of God.

Joan H. Richardson



Web site: www.FaithOnEarth.org

Youtube Channel: www.tinyurl.com/mejz8dc
or youtube.com/channel/UCR75MHiRPlékPTLJ2GcXwZg

Contact for speaking: Joan@FaithOnEarth.org

Other books by your sister: *A Thorn in My Flesh*
Mysteries of the Ancient Word

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Recommended Films

- The Bible Dir: John Huston/ Genesis
- The Ten Commandments Dir: Cecil B. DeMille
- Follow Me story of Yoni Netanyahu
- The Jesus Film Book of Luke
- The Gospel of John Dir: Philip Saville
- The Hiding Place story of Corrie Ten Boom
with Jeannette Clift, Julie Harris
- Life Is Beautiful by Roberto Benigni
holocaust survivor
- Orchestra of Exiles doc/ Israel's first orchestra
- Exodus Dir: Otto Preminger
novel to film/ regaining the nation
- God's Outlaw story of William Tyndale
- Against All Odds: Israel Survives 9-hour epic
documentary of miracles
- A Woman Called Golda with Ingrid Bergman
- Judgment at Nuremberg..... with Spencer Tracy,
Burt Lancaster, all star cast
- Six Days in June doc/ Dir: Levi Eshcol
- Wallenberg A Hero's Story with Richard Chamberlain
- Winston Churchill: Walking with Destiny documentary

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- The Cross: the story of Arthur Blessitt Dir: Matt Crouch
- The Hope : The Rebirth of Israel by CBN Films
- The Boy in the Striped Pajamas a Miramax film
- Israel Inside Israel's contributions to the world
- The Miracle of Israel by Jewish Voice Ministries
- Nicky's Family..... documentary of a righteous gentile
- The Lady in Number Six interview/ oldest holocaust
survivor at 109 years old
- Forgiving Dr. Mengele interview of survivor twin
- The Danish Solution The rescue of Jews during WWII
- The Impossible Spy A true story/ Israeli hero
- Amish Grace based on true story of forgiveness
- The Case for Christ Lee Strobel/evidence for Jesus
- Expelled Ben Stein investigates evolution
- The Rabbi Who Found Messiah: by WND Films
The Story of Yitsach Kaduri and His Prophecies
- Above and Beyond Israel's first air force
- My Italian Secret Rescuing the Jews
- A Lamp in the Dark Adullum Films

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Resources

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