

The Present Challenge to the Lord's Assemblies

Dr. Thomas M. Strouse

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Peter wrote to his scattered church members who established congregations throughout five providences in Asia Minor and cautioned them. He proclaimed, saying, *“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator”* (I Pet. 4:17-19). Because of the influence of anemic doctrine and the abundance of vast affluence within American Christianity, the Lord's assemblies have received numerous challenges in doctrine and practice. To exacerbate the challenges are the social-political-cultural (“woke”) and financial influences, encroached upon independent Baptist churches. America is now a country whereby many have never been told “No!” by any authority nor held accountable to anything. Whereas Baptist churches with fundamentalist baggage¹ have the tendency to weave these influences into biblical doctrine and practice, and the outcome is always disastrous. This essay will be a challenge to return to and to hold fast biblical Christianity. Doctrines and practices that were the essence of the faith *“once delivered”* (Jude 1:4) have now been diverged, dismissed, or even denied. This effort will examine the main biblical doctrines and practices including bibliology, theology proper, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology, while refuting the “new” heresies of old.

DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE

BIBLIOLOGY

Although independent Baptist pastors in America have held to the use of the *KJV* in private and public, the old argument of “the readability of the *KJV*” has stirred out of slumber again. To be sure, there are some passages that are difficult to understand at first glance in the *KJV*, but this is true with almost any serious English translation. But the Baptist church member must recognize the personal responsibility that Paul enjoined to Timothy the pastor and church member, saying, *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (II Tim. 2:15). Further, the Baptist pastor must query with the question, has Satan stopped saying, *“yea, hath God said”* (Gen. 3:1)? Are all older and newer translations the same except for readability? Is the *Geneva Bible* (1560) the same as the *NIV* (1973) except for updated spelling and readability? No, the real issue is not readability but the underlying Greek text for the New Testament (NT). Satan questioned the word of God, and textual critics who propose manuscript

¹When biblicist pastors receive the call to shepherd fundamental Baptist churches, the respective membership will quickly diminish in size because truth will root out Protestant doctrine and practices of fundamentalism!

evidence based on unprovable “superior” favorites which evince Gnostic tampering continue to “minister questions” (I Tim. 1:4). Two developments have surfaced of recent among independent Baptist churches.

First, because of the purposeful “dumbing down” of the educational level of the American public in general, and because of the lack of theological training of pastors for biblical assemblies specifically, American Christians in Baptist churches have become grossly ignorant of basic biblical truths in the Scriptures. Therefore, a slew of efforts to improve the “readability” of the *KJV* have surfaced. For instance, the following are examples of easy availability for the Christian public: *NKJV* (New *KJV* [1984]), *MKJV* (Modern *KJV*, Jay Green [1990]), *KJV 2000* (Robert Couric [1993]), *KJ21* (Deuel Enterprises [1994]), *AKJV* (American *KJV* [2009]), *MEV* (Modern English Version ([2013]), *KJVER* (Easy Read [Whitaker house 2015]), and *SKJV* (Simplified *KJV* [Barbour Publ., 2022]). Most if not all of these translations remove the “*thee*” and “*thou*” distinctions, omit “*est*” on the end of present tense verbs, and upgrade archaic but accurate terms. There is the tendency that these efforts prepare the reader to transition to modern versions. Rather than go with these the reader is encouraged to consider the *Defined KJB* (D. A. Waite). Furthermore, Scripture memorization becomes confusing and eventually ignored for those brought up on the *KJV*.

The second development is the replacement of the *KJV* with a modern version such as the English Standard Version (*ESV*). Although the *ESV* may be easier to read than the *KJV*, the Critical Text (CT) of the Greek NT behind the *ESV* contains only about 93% of the words of the Received Text (TR) of the Greek NT behind the *KJV*. The modern versions are not theologically neutral, but are based on the Gnostic-laced CT. The following are several examples of the aberrant translation philosophy that challenges the reader with “*Yea, hath God said*” through changes, questions, or omissions.

Examples in *ESV*:

Mk. 16:9-21 > “And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. *SOME OF THE EARLIEST MANUSCRIPTS DO NOT INCLUDE 16:9-20.*”

Rationale for *ESV*:

The Gospel of Mark ends at this point in some witnesses, including two of the most respected MSS *aleph* and B...Several MSS have marginal comments noting that earlier Greek MSS lacked the verses, while others mark the text with asterisks or obeli (symbols that scribes used to indicate that the portion of text being copied was spurious). Internal evidence strongly suggests the secondary nature of both the short and the long endings. Their vocabulary and style are decidedly non-Markan. All of this evidence strongly suggests that as time went on scribes added the longer ending, either for the richness of its material or because of the abruptness of the ending at v. 8. (Indeed, the strange variety of dissimilar endings attests to the probability that early copyists had a copy of Mark that ended at v. 8, and they filled out the text with what seemed to be an appropriate conclusion. All of the witnesses for alternative endings to vv. 9–20 thus indirectly confirm the Gospel as ending at v. 8.) Because of such problems regarding the authenticity of these alternative endings, 16:8 is usually regarded as the last verse of the Gospel of Mark. There are three possible explanations for Mark ending at 16:8: (1) The author intentionally ended the Gospel here in an open-ended fashion; (2) the Gospel was

never finished; or (3) the last leaf of the ms was lost prior to copying. This first explanation is the most likely due to several factors, including (a) the probability that the Gospel was originally written on a scroll rather than a codex (only on a codex would the last leaf get lost prior to copying); (b) the unlikelihood of the ms not being completed; and (c) the literary power of ending the Gospel so abruptly that the readers are now drawn into the story itself...The readers must now ask themselves, "What will I do with Jesus? If I do not accept him in his suffering, I will not see him in his glory." Double brackets have been placed around this passage to indicate that most likely it was not part of the original text of the Gospel of Mark. In spite of this, the passage has an important role in the history of the transmission of the text, so it has been included in the translation.

Lk. 22:43-44 > *ESV* note: Some manuscripts omit verses 43 and 44.

Rationale for *ESV*:

Several important Greek MSS... along with diverse and widespread versional witnesses lack 22:43-44... However, a number of MSS mark the text with an asterisk or obelisk, indicating the scribe's assessment of the verses as inauthentic. At the same time, these verses generally fit Luke's style. Arguments can be given on both sides about whether scribes would tend to include or omit such comments about Jesus' humanity and an angel's help. But even if the verses are not *literarily* authentic, they are probably *historically* authentic. This is due to the fact that this text was well known in several different locales from a very early period. Since there are no synoptic parallels to this account and since there is no obvious reason for adding these words here, it is very likely that such verses recount a part of the actual suffering of our Lord. Nevertheless, because of the serious doubts as to these verses' authenticity, they have been put in brackets.

Jn. 1:18 > *ESV*: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

Rationale for *ESV*:

The *ESV* is not a legitimate translation of the Greek words, purposefully. Supposedly, *monogenes theos* (only begotten God) is the harder reading therefore it is preferred (!), even though the majority of MSS support the biblical reading *monogenes uios* (only begotten Son). The verb "begat" or the noun "begotten" always refers to the father-son relationship in Scripture. The expression "only begotten God" sounds strange as well as unbiblical and suggests a created and secondary deity as argued by the Arians (AD 325).

I Tim. 3:16 > *ESV*: "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Rationale for *ESV*:

The Byzantine text along with a few other witnesses read (*theos*, "God") for (*hos*, "who"). What scribe would change *theos* to *hos* intentionally? "Who" is not only a theologically pale reading by comparison; it also is much harder (since the relative pronoun has no obvious antecedent, probably the reason for the neuter pronoun of the Western tradition). On the other hand, with *theos* written as a *nomen sacrum*, it would have looked very much like the relative pronoun *hos*. Thus, it may have been easy to confuse one for the other. This, of course, does not solve which direction the scribes would go, although given their generally high Christology and the bland and ambiguous relative pronoun, it is doubtful that they would have replaced *theos* with *hos*. How then should we account for *theos*? It appears that sometime after the 2nd century the *theos* reading came into existence, either via confusion with *hos* or as an intentional alteration to magnify Christ and clear up the syntax at the same time. Once it got in, this theologically rich reading was easily able to influence all the rest of the MSS it came in contact with (including MSS already written, such as a A C D). That this reading did not arise until after the 2nd century is evident from the Western reading, *hos*. Thus, the cries of certain groups that *theos* has to be original must be seen as special pleading in this case. To argue that heretics tampered with the text here is self-defeating, for most of the Western *fathers* who quoted the verse with the relative pronoun were quite orthodox, strongly affirming the deity of Christ. They would have dearly loved such a reading as *theos*.

I Jn. 5:7 > *ESV*: For there are three that testify:

Rationale for *ESV*:

See my commentary, Thomas M. Strouse, "*Keep Yourselves from Idols.*" *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (Cromwell, CT: Bible Baptist Theological Press, 2022), pp. 240-242:

"Copies of these wrested texts perpetuated through the centuries and ultimately identified as *Textus Criticus* or Critical Text (CT). The elite members of the coalition of the scholars of the modern textual critics² believe that they have put forth the formidable manuscript evidence argument against the inclusion of the *Comma Johanneum*.³ After all, they posit that only nine "late" (after 10th century)⁴ and therefore inferior Mss. include the *Johannine Comma* (Mss. 221, 2318, 2473, 61, 88, 429, 629, 636, and 918). Of course, they fail to

²The "scholarly experts" of the *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (NY: United Bible Society, 1971), included the editors Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce Metzger, and Allen Wikgrin, all of which were associated with apostate churches and denominations and had no credible testimony of the new birth. The psalmist quoted the query of Jehovah, saying, "*But unto the wicked God saith, **What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee***" (Ps. 50:16-17).

³Several beneficial works have responded to the scholars of *academia* who have attempted to recover the mirage of the non-preserved Greek text of the NT. The exhaustive work by the late Michael Maynard, *A History of the Debate over I John 5:7-8: A Tracing of the Longevity of the Comma Johanneum* (Tempe, AZ: Comma Publ., 1995) is invaluable. Also, those of Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended!* (Des Moines: The Christian Research Press, 1973), Donald A. Waite, *Defending the King James Version* (Collingswood, NJ: The Bible for Today Press, 1992), and Jack A. Moorman, *Early Manuscripts, Church Fathers, and the Authorized Version* (Collingswood, NJ The Bible for Today Press, 2005), will edify the Christian.

⁴The contrived textual criticism mantra that "oldest is best" is feckless because doctrinal deviation in textual changes occurred in the first century (cf. II Pet. 3:15-16). Error followed on the heels of truth!

mention that there are only twelve Mss. before the 10th century that testify to the omission of I Jn. 5:7, namely, Mss. 01, A, B, K, L, P, Φ, 048, 049, 056, 0142, and 0296. Certainly, the number of “early” Mss. omitting the *Comma Johanneum* (12x) is not overwhelming considering that some 480 Greek Mss. of *First John* exist.⁵ In fact, there is historical testimony that Greek Texts existed in the past that did contain the *Johannine Comma*. One point of fact occurs in the work of the president of St. John's College, Oxford (1648-1650), Francis Cheynell, who made several telling affirmations about the disputed verse I Jn. 5:7:

“But it is objected by some that the words, ‘These three are one’ I Joh.5.7 are not to be found in some ancient Copies, and therefore it will not be safe to build a point of such weight and consequence upon such a weak foundation. To which we answer, It is true that these words are not to be found in the Syriac Edition, but they who speak most modestly, do acknowledge that the Syriack Edition is not Authentick”...“But then it is farther objected, that these words ‘These three are one’ are wanting in some other Greek copies; for answer I proceed with my observations”...“8. These words, I Ioh.5.7. are to be found in copies of great antiquity and best credit.”⁶

The Latin patristic Cyprian (AD 210-258) referenced the disputed passage, saying, “*Dicit Dominus, Ego et Pater unum sumus; et iterum de Patre et Filio et Spiritu sancto scriptum est: ‘Et tres unum sunt.’*” Translated, the references to Jn. 10:30 and I Jn. 5:7 read as the following: “The Lord says, ‘I and the Father are one;’ and again it is written of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, ‘And these three are one.’”⁷ Cyprian the Gnostic knew of the existence of these references whether he believed them or not.”

The Received Bible Movement

The *Received Bible Movement* looks to the Bible for its prediction and to history for its fulfillment. The following are biblical principles which find their fulfillment in the Received Texts of the OT and NT, and in translations built upon these Received Texts (Hebrew Masoretic and Greek Received Texts), such as the OT and NT of the 1611 KJV:

1. God's Words are preserved in Heaven.

- a. “*For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven*” (Ps. 119:89).
- b. “*But I will shew thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince*” (Dan. 10:21, 11:2 ff.).
- c. “*The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw...*” (Amos 1:1).
- d. “*The word of the LORD that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw...*” (Mic. 1:1).

⁵Arguments from “majority” and “antiquity” are not how truth is established for church members. They have the Spirit of God indwelling who guides into all truth. The “office” of textual critics is unbiblical and therefore worthless!

⁶Francis Cheynell, *The Divine Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Or, the Blessed Doctrine of the Three Coessential Subsistents in the Eternal Godhead Without any Confusion or Division of the Distinct Subsistencies, or Multiplication of the Most Single and Entire Godhead* (London: T.R. and E. M., 1650), pp. 251-255.

⁷A. Cleveland Coxe, Revised Editor, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Translations of the Writing of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, Volume V, Cyprian I:6, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1951), p. 423.

e. *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, 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"* (Rev. 1:1).

2. God's Words were inspired perfectly in the autographa.

a. *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"* (II Tim. 3:16-18).

b. *"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"* (II Pet. 1:21).

3. The Lord promised to preserve these inspired Words for each subsequent generation.

a. *"Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever"* (Ps. 119:160).

b. *"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away"* (Mt. 24:35).

4. He used the Jews to preserve the OT Scriptures and the NT candlesticks to preserve the OT and NT Scriptures

a. *"Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them [Jews] were committed the oracles of God"* (Rom. 3:2)

b. *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen"* (Mt. 28:19-20).

5. These preserved inspired words were made available for each generation.

a. *"For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off...But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it"* (Dt. 30:11, 14).

b. *"And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God"* (Lk. 4:4).

6. His NT churches have recognized, received and preserved the Lord's Words while rejecting wrested Words and forged canons offered by Satan.

a. *"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe"* (I Thess. 2:13).

b. *"As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction"* (II Pet. 3:16).

c. *"That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand"* (II Thess. 2:2).

d. *"Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"* (Gen. 3:1).

7. These same churches were the basis for the Received Bible Movement begun by the Lord Jesus Christ, Who received canonical words from the Father and in turn gave them to His apostles who in turn received and inscripturated His words.

a. *“For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they **have received** them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me”* (Jn. 17:8).

b. *“Then they that **gladly received his word** were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls”* (Acts 2:41),

c. *“Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria **had received the word of God**, they sent unto them Peter and John”* (Acts 8:14).

d. *“And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also **received the word of God**”* (Acts 11:1).

e. *“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they **received the word** with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so”* (Acts 17:11).

f. *“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye **received the word of God** which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe”* (I Thes. 2:13).

8. The Lord has given His explicit words of revelation to man in order that man may be able to demonstrate his stewardship with all of God's words at his respective judgment.

a. *“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day”* (Jn. 12:48)

b. *“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works”* (Rev. 20:12).

9. The Lord Jesus Christ expects man to receive by faith His revelation and produce accurate translations based on the Received Bible movement which originated with Him.

a. *“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word”* (Jn. 17:20).

b. *“Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith”* (Rom. 16:25-26).

10. This Received Bible Movement was recognized and so named in 1633 (*textum...nunc ab omnibus receptum*)—the Received Text (TR) movement.

11. The Lord's NT immersionist assemblies have employed the TR and KJV texts in their Baptist confessions from the 17th to 21st centuries.

Conclusion

Does the Bible predict that God will not preserve His words and that man must restore them? Of course not! The need for Textual Criticism and its product, the Critical Text, is non-existent. Discerning Bible believers may rejoice that the Lord has not only promised to preserve His words but in fact did preserve them for accurate translations in the languages of the world. Furthermore, He revealed the divinely authorized institution to carry of the ministry of Scripture preservation—the NT immersionist assembly. The Lord Jesus

Christ has preserved His words through His preserved churches to the glory of God! One evident fruit of this truth is the Quadricentennial anniversary of the KJV (1611-2011).

The Critical Text Alternative

The following are a composite of the propositions posited by proponents of the Critical Text of both the OT and NT and its subsequent modern versions including the ERV (1887), the ASV (1901), the RSV (1952), the NAS (1971), the NIV (1973), and the ESV (2001), as the alternative to the Received Text and KJV:

1. That God **did not promise** to preserve His words (but just his concepts [hence “word preservation”]). *Contra* “*The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.*” (Ps. 12:6-7).
2. That God **in fact did not preserve** His inspired words. *Contra* “*But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*” (Mt. 4:4).
3. That man’s responsibility is not to receive by faith the Lord’s preserved words, since they are in fact “not preserved,” but “**to restore or reconstruct**” the non-preserved words of God to a close approximation of the originals. How one would know when and where the non-preserved words are finally “restored” is not known nor should be asked. *Contra* “*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day*” (Jn. 12:48).
4. That “Christian” scholars are to do this restoration or reconstruction process by using **the principles of secular Textual Criticism**, which include using the “oldest and best manuscripts” and the “hardest” readings, which must be closer to the originals and therefore more pristine, since early, pious scribes always improved the manuscripts by changes and/or additions. *Contra* “*For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe*” (I Thes. 2:13).
5. That the **Holy Spirit is not involved** in revealing the words of Scripture, but instead the practice of Textual Criticism is the means that the best of Christian scholarship may employ to determine the right readings in manuscript evidence. *Contra* “*But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him*” (I Jn. 2:27).
6. That Christian scholars **may trust the textual research and interpretation of theological infidels and liberals** since they are unbiased critical scholars. *Contra* “*But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee*” (Ps. 50:16-17).
7. That NT church members **should not expect to hear the voice of the Lord** regarding His words since He works exclusively through Textual Critics and secular Textual Criticism. *Contra* “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me*” (Jn. 10:29).

8. That this **process of restoration will continue** as long as archaeologists continue to discover ancient manuscripts for Textual Critical scholars to continue to apply their secular principles. *Contra* “*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*” (Rev. 22:18-19).
9. That all manuscripts are “**good**” and therefore must be considered in the manuscript pool, even though there are many doctrines affected in their voluminous differences. *Contra* “*Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?*” (Gen. 3:1).
10. That these manuscripts are “good” because there **was no known conspiracy** to change the text of Scripture. *Contra* “*And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction*” (II Pet. 3:15-16).
11. That para-church organizations and pseudo-church groups **have the exclusive privilege** to be the primary agencies involved in determining textual readings and changes. *Contra* “*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*” (I Tim. 3:15)
12. That the Lord's churches and pastors **have no little or no stewardship responsibility** in bibliology, including receiving, recognizing, preserving and defending of the Scriptures, which are not preserved anyway. All responsibility and authority is left to the Textual Critics. *Contra* “*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches*” (Rev. 2:6).
13. That Christians should expect to have the **underlying Greek and Hebrew texts in an unstable and evolving form** which will bring uncertainty and questioning to believers through the corresponding translations; but this is normative. *Contra* “*Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?*” (Ps. 22:20-21).

Conclusion

It should be apparent that the Critical Text Alternative to the TR is neither predicted in Scripture as a viable option nor based on any biblical principles. Therefore, it must be rejected as humanistic and diabolical, the subtle product of “*the doctrines of devils*” (I Tim. 4:1). It is a Gnostic-laced text fabricated and perpetuated by Bible critics and favored by cultists and theological liberalism. Its fruit is doubt and carnality within professing Christianity.

THEOLOGY

Gnosticism

Gnosticism is still prevalent in the world and in the assemblies. The LBGT “Woke” movement heresies including multiply genders and transgenderism find support in the genderless Unknown God and the ascent up the genderless *pleroma*. In other words, the Gnostic devotee may have a different or unlimited genders as he/she moves up the *pleroma* in his/her next life! Churches need to evangelize all sinners and baptize repentant and changed sinners.

Another form of Gnosticism has appeared relative to the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. It has been posited that God the Father had “*prepared a body*” (Heb. 10:5) for the Lord and placed it in the womb of Mary without any contact to the adamic race. The “pure and holy Lord Jesus Christ had no physical connection” with sinful mankind. Nevertheless, Isaiah prophesied the truth of the virgin birth (Isa. 7:14; Mt. 1:22-23) wherein through conception (Lk. 1:31) with the Holy Ghost she conceived (Lk. 1:35) and He was made of a woman (Gal. 4:4). The Lord Jesus is the perfect God and perfect Man.

SOTERIOLOGY

Repentance

The Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed, saying, “*repent ye, and believe the gospel*” (Mk. 1:15). Luke cited the precious Saviour Who declared twice, saying “*I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*” (Lk. 13:3, 5). Repentance finds its pattern in David, who prayed, saying, “*Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions*” (Ps. 5:1). With him the prayer was remorseful, contrite, open, and he blamed no one else (i.e., Bathsheba) nor put up walls of spin control.

Nevertheless, Baptists have had the tendency to ignore or downplay the requirement of repentance in the “sinner’s prayer” as the “convert” believes on Jesus and “accepts” Him as Saviour. Although this is not to say that the word “repent” must be in the worded expression as if a magical formula, but the sinner needs to acknowledge his wretched condition before the holy God. The publican said, “*God be merciful to me a sinner*” (Lk. 18:13). Many public invitations and Gospel tracts merely ask the sinner if he “has accepted Jesus in his heart.” Baptists need to preach repentance and faith (Acts 20:21), evincing a remorseful heart that brings forsaking of sins (Prov. 28:13) and the fruit of righteousness (Jam. 3:18).

Reformed Theology

The Reformed “Grace” churches have hid the T.U.L.I.P theology behind the public image of the teaching about good marriages, sound families, morality, etc., to their credit. However, the “Grace” movement promotes Christian liberty to the extent that Baptists have liberty to drink alcohol, dress immodestly, and live worldly. This has been appealing to many Baptists who have left fundamentalist Baptist churches. Under the guise of divine love, however, the Reformed movement teaches the God of hate Who hates the “non-elect” and has predestined the non-elect sinner to hell. Man has no responsibility in making his calling and election sure (II Pet. 1:10). The outcome of this heresy of course brings great lack of assurance to the adults and angst concerning the salvation of their children. The biblical teaching on the Book of Life posits that all are in the Book of Life but that the elect must obtain their salvation through the conditions of repentance and faith prior to death (II Tim. 2:10). The God of the Bible is a God of Love and not a God of Hate!

ECCLESIOLOGY

Mystical Body of Christ

Many Baptists of all stripes have embraced in doctrine and practice the heresy of the “mystical Body of Christ,” “the universal invisible church,” “the Ghost church” “the ‘something bigger than the local church’” view since the eighteenth century Baptist John Gill. This popular heresy has affected the doctrine and practice of church discipline, of the Lord’s Supper, of believers’ baptism, of church membership including the lack of accountability, of home and foreign missions and mission boards, and now the popular practice of parachurch ministries existing within and through NT assemblies.

What the Bible says about "the Body of Christ"

One Body

The second unproved assumption is that *"the body of Christ"* refers to the universal, invisible, mystical realm of regeneration that all Christians enter at salvation and which constitutes the Church. However, close scrutiny to the New Testament reveals that Paul never identified the body with the realm of regeneration. The Apostle Paul utilized the ecclesiological expression *"the body of Christ"* (σῶμα Χριστοῦ) twice (I Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12), denoting Christ's possession of His Body. He used other combinations of the expression as well, such as *"one body"* (ἐνὶ σώματι) eight times (Rom.12:4; I Cor. 10:17, 12:12 [2x], 13, 20; Eph. 4:4, and Col 3:15), *"one body in Christ"* (ἐν σῶμά ἐν Χριστῷ) once (Rom. 12:5), *"His body"* (τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ) twice (Eph. 1:23, 5:30), and *"the body"* (τοῦ σώματος) twenty times (I Cor. 12:12, 14, 15 [2x], 16 [2x], 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, Eph. 3:6, 4:12, 16 [2x], 5:23, Col. 1:18, and 2:19).⁸ Every ecclesiological reference to σῶμα Paul utilized was in an epistle to a local church. He never addressed non-baptized, and therefore non-church member, Christians.⁹

The first chronological reference to *"one body"* is significant and establishes the foundational meaning to the term. In a non-ecclesiological illustration, the Apostle stated, *"What? Know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? For two, saith he, shall be one flesh"* (I Cor. 6:16). This sordid example nevertheless establishes Paul's meaning of "one body." The man and the harlot are two bodies uniting with one purpose in mind—fornication. This union of immorality is comprised of two individual bodies, which are indeed distinct one from the other, but are united in a common goal. Paul used the expression *"one body"* to mean "united bodies." The man's body was distinct from the harlot's body. Their union of bodies never constituted some sort of "mystical body of fornication." *"One body"* to Paul meant one man's body united with

⁸The NT also refers to the physical body of Christ, using variations of these expressions (cf. Rom. 7:4), which expressions are not germane to this essay.

⁹Although some may hopelessly cling to a universal church from Paul's address to *"all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord"* (I Cor. 1:2), I Corinthian repudiates local church problems and offers solutions which would not be pertinent to or authoritative over non-church member Christians.

one harlot's body (two literal bodies = united bodies [in purpose] = "one body").¹⁰ This usage of "one body" in the Pauline *corpus* must remain intact since he never rescinded it. Therefore, throughout the Apostles' Epistles, "one body" means either numerically one body (e.g., Eph. 4:4) or "united bodies." When this Pauline interpretation is applied to ecclesiastical passages, it becomes apparent that the Apostle stressed unity among various local church bodies (cf. I Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18), as well as unity within each body of Christ. The Lord Jesus is the Head of each of His local churches or Bodies (cf. Rev. 2-3). Just as the omnipresent Lord is the Head of each man (I Cor. 11:3), so is the same Lord the Head of each one of His bodies in Christ.¹¹

Several test passages may be offered for proof of the Pauline interpretation of the "united bodies" definition. In I Cor. 12:13, the Apostle affirmed that he and the Corinthians ("*are we all baptized*") had been baptized "*into* (εἰς) *one body*," or water baptized with reference to united bodies. The body in which Paul had been baptized was the Damascus ἐκκλησία and the body in which the Corinthians had been baptized was the Corinthian ἐκκλησία. These bodies were united in common doctrine and practice (cf. Jude 1:3). Another "difficult" verse is Rom. 12:5, wherein Paul declared "*So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.*" Paul certainly was not a member of the church at Rome since he had not been there, but presumably he was still a church member of the Antioch assembly from which he was sent (Acts 11:26, 13:1-4). The church body at Rome and the church body at Antioch were "*one body in Christ*," or united bodies in Christ.

Ye are the Body of Christ

In concert with the aforementioned arguments for the Pauline usage of "united bodies" is Paul's obvious and clear reference to the Corinthian church as a "*body*." This New Testament writer declared under inspiration to the Corinthian ἐκκλησία, "*Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular*" (I Cor. 12:27). Greek scholars Robertson and Plummer struggle with the interpretation of this verse because their pre-conceived and unproved assumptions conflict with the anarthrous construction σῶμα Χριστου. They state,

"Body of Christ" is the quality of the whole which each of them individually helps to constitute...It does not mean, "Ye are the Body of Christ," although that translation is admissible, and indicates the truth that each Christian community is the Universal Church in miniature; nor, "Ye are Christ's Body," which makes "Christ's" emphatic, whereas the emphasis is on *soma* as the antithesis of *mele*. Least of all does it mean, "Ye are a Body of Christ," as if St. Paul were insisting that the Corinthians were only *a* Church and not *the* Church, a meaning which quite remote from the passage. Nowhere in the Pauline Epistles is there the idea that the one Ecclesia is made up of many

¹⁰The rationalistic thinking Christian may argue that one equals one but divine revelation says "*for two, saith he, shall be one flesh*" (I Cor. 6:16).

¹¹It should be noted that each of the Lord's Candlesticks is both an organization (Tit. 1:5 ff.) and an organism (cf. Eph. 4:11-16).

Ecclesiae...He means here that the nature of the whole of which the Corinthians are parts is that it is Body of Christ, not any other kind of whole.¹²

They reject the clear meaning that Paul addressed the Corinthian church as "*the body of Christ*,"¹³ one among many, and rather argue for the fallacious and facile "Platonic body"—the Corinthian body was a visible manifestation of the true body. Moving beyond theological assumptions based on Platonic philosophy, one should ask how the Corinthian church was the body of Christ in Corinth. First, it had the Lord Jesus Christ as the Head (I Cor. 1:1-3; 11:3). Second, it was the living organism with feet, hands, ears, and eyes (I Cor. 12:15-22). Third, it was the means by which the Lord Jesus would accomplish His Great Commission in Corinth and the surrounding area (Mt. 28:19-20).¹⁴

The interpretation that $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ Χριστου refers to the local church may be applied to several representative passages. In Eph. 1:22-23, the Apostle equated the $\epsilon\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\alpha$ to the $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ ("*the church, Which is his body*"). Since all 115 references to $\epsilon\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\alpha$ in the *Textus Receptus*¹⁵ refer to a visible assembly (civic [Acts 19:32, 39, 41], Israel [Acts 7:38], or Christ's [Mt. 16:18, *et al*]), it follows that the $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ was the visible assembly at Ephesus. Paul declared that this same body at Ephesus would include both Jews and Gentiles as fellowheirs,¹⁶ a mystery not taught in the OT (Eph. 3:5-6). Furthermore, the Apostle taught that Christ was the savior of the body, the Ephesian church for which He gave Himself (Eph. 5:23, 25). The Lord loved and died for the church at Ephesus. Now it is true that He loved and died for other churches, for all Christians and all OT saints, and for the whole world (Jn. 3:16). But all this verse requires is that He loved and died for the Ephesian body of Christ. Paul also affirmed that the Lord was the Head of the Colossian body of Christ (Col 1:18), which had close association with the churches (bodies) at Nymphas' house and in Laodicea (Col 4:15-16).

Those that assume that the body of Christ refers to all Christians regardless of any church membership must prove from exegesis that their assumption is valid. To do so they have several biblically exegetical obstacles to overcome. First, they must show that the body of Christ is exclusively a soteriological expression, which they cannot do since the term is found only in Epistles addressing local churches. Second, they must demonstrate exegetically that "*one body*" cannot mean "united bodies" but instead must mean numerically "one"

¹²Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1955), p. 332.

¹³This genitive construction is a Semitism which makes the *nomen regens* (body) articular since the *nomen rectum* is a proper noun (Christ).

¹⁴The Great Commission for Christ's assemblies includes baptizing converts. The so-called mystical body of Christ does not baptize converts because of the vast confusion evinced in Christendom surrounding the ordinance, and because of the lack of biblical authority.

¹⁵The Critical Text rejects "*to the church*" in Acts 2:47, along with other proto-Romish attacks on NT ecclesiology such as omitting the requisite faith for believer's baptism (Acts 8:37), and promoting the territorial church ("then had the *church* rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria") in Acts 9:31.

¹⁶The reality of I Cor. 12:26, "*And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it,*" should set in when one recognizes this could only be applied to the local church.

body. Third, they must explain exegetically, without assuming, that Paul did not address the Corinthian church as "the body of Christ."¹⁷

In summary, since the unproved assumptions of the popular view of Spirit Baptism and the mystical body of Christ are Scripturally challenged and found wanting, it stands that they are not true. What is true is that Spirit Baptism was a first century spiritual phenomenon that has since accomplished the Lord's purpose and has ceased, and that the term body of Christ refers to the Lord's visible churches by which He fulfills the Great Commission through this His only agency.

Ramifications

The ramifications of the biblical teaching that the local church is the body of Christ, that Spirit Baptism was a temporary phenomenon, and that the mystical body of Christ does not exist are broad and serious. If there is no con-current Spirit Baptism and no mystical body then there is no divine authority for organizations or efforts outside of the local church to practice the Great Commission. Since the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20) requires evangelism, baptism, and instruction in the Word of God, para-church organizations have no divine authority for their existence. If there is no divine authority for para-church organizations then there is no divine authority for para-church Bible colleges/seminaries, mission boards, or structured church fellowships, associations or conventions.¹⁸ These so-called "handmaidens" to the local church have no authority "to help" the Lord's candlesticks because the latter have His presence (Rev. 1:13) as their respective Head (Eph. 1:22-23) and all power to accomplish His Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20).

The impact of these para-church "handmaidens" on the Lord's candlesticks has been biblically and theological disastrous. Scholars operating in the realm of the "big" universal church offer unbiblical and therefore confusing theological restatements of the Scriptures. Their weak ecclesiology impacts other doctrines such as bibliology, soteriology, and eschatology. They foster notions such as "God has preserved His Word in all the extant manuscripts through the scholars of the mystical body of Christ,"¹⁹ "all the saved are in the

¹⁷Some have claimed that the Corinthian church had the character or quality of "body of Christ-ness" but was not the true "body of Christ." This may be likened to saying that a four-legged animal with a wagging tail has all the characteristics of a dog but it is not a true dog; it is merely the visible manifestation of the universal, invisible dog!

¹⁸This is not to suggest character flaws in Christians who participate in para-churches. Many Christian leaders, because of the faulty teaching of "fundamentalism," are untrained in or ignorant of consistent, exegetical NT ecclesiology. Surely those who are convicted by ecclesiological passages will respond in obedience. After all, Solomon asserted, "*Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning*" (Prov. 9:9).

¹⁹These para-church "scholars" claim that they will restore the original Greek NT text, which they say the Lord never promised to preserve (cf. Ps. 12:6-7; Isa. 40:8; Mt. 4:4, 5:18, 24:35; Jn. 17:8 *et al*), back to a mid-fourth century "oldest is best" rendering based on Gnostic-laced Greek manuscripts and anti-supernatural rationalistic techniques of textual criticism. They conclude that the best theory for the transmission of the NT text is either manifested in the apostate Critical Text or the novel Majority Text (which still has no English translation since its creation in 1982), even though neither "theory" is predicted by the Scriptures. As of 2005, these critics have not produced for Christendom the original wording for the Greek NT, since the techniques of textual criticism continue to change and the discoveries of archeology continue to uncover new manuscripts.

universal Church," and "Christ will rapture the Church."²⁰ To them "true" scholarship occurs in the para-church university or seminary where theologians, trained by other para-church theologians, postulate the "truth" of Scripture. The local church is ill-equipped and the pastor is ill-prepared to do the real work of the ministry in the realm of scholarship, they maintain. These scholars, whether they have any affiliation with a local church or not, have earned doctorates from accredited para-church academic institutions,²¹ and therefore think that they have the last word on theology. Their condescending attitude toward the Lord's assemblies is supposedly justified because they are the "doctors" of theology since they are in "the big church."

This disastrous impact undermines the authority of the Bible and usurps the ministry of the Lord's ἐκκλησία. Scripture states that the church is "*the pillar and ground of the truth*" (I Tim. 3:15),²² that the ἐκκλησία is to "*commit [theological training] to faithful men*" (II Tim. 2:2),²³ that the church member "*is to study to shew thyself approved unto God*" (II Tim. 2:15),²⁴ and that the assembly has been given Christ's gift of "*pastors and teachers*" (Eph. 4:11).²⁵ The local church as the divinely ordained doctrinal training institution is the Lord's "college." College comes from the Latin *collegium* that means a group of colleagues who have banded together around a particular guild or trade. The particular "guild" in which the local church is engaged is the scholarly pursuit of studying the Scriptures (cf. Acts 17:11).

Para-church organizations not only produce disastrous results in theological academia, but also in the area of missions. Para-church mission boards usurp the privilege and responsibility of local church missions. The Great Commission is the divine mandate to plant immersionist assemblies both locally and worldwide. Only the Lord's candlesticks can produce NT churches. Para-church mission boards cannot baptize converts and cannot commission missionary candidates. Nevertheless, these same boards develop a hierarchy of unbiblical offices, such as "missions president/director," and dictate to "their" missionaries and to the pastors of supporting churches, their policies, practices, and doctrines. The NT teaches, in contradistinction, that the church at Antioch acted as Paul's "mission board" and sent out Barnabas and the Apostle (Acts 13:1 ff.). To be sure, other churches such as the Philippian church helped support Paul's missionary endeavors on his second journey (Phil. 4:15-16).²⁶

²⁰The NT never says that "the church" will be raptured. Paul does state that those "*in Christ*" (i.e., the Kingdom of God) will be caught away (I Thess. 4:16-17).

²¹There should be no question that man-centered accreditation brings federal funding which in turn "broadens the financial base" of the academic institution. The Lord's assemblies have no biblical warrant to seek academic accreditation and the consequent federal funding for their local church ministries (cf. II Tim. 2:15).

²²All that theological scholarship accomplishes outside of the Lord's ἐκκλησία will have built in biblical limitations in its lectures, syllabi, books, journals, videos, ministries, etc., and will not advance authoritative understanding of the truth.

²³It is difficult to comprehend how para-church ministerial institutions will prepare men biblically for the work of the ministry in local churches. In fact, they do not have biblical authority and consequently they are unequipped to do so.

²⁴For the church member and for the local church itself, God's approval is the only accreditation needed.

²⁵The English word "doctor" comes from the Latin *doctores* which is the translation of the Greek διδασκάλους, as in the Latin Vulgate "*pastores et doctores*" (Eph. 4:11). The pastor is the doctor of the Lord's ἐκκλησία, as he is the one who teaches "doctrine."

²⁶The author is not ignorant of the complexities of visas, taxes, language schools, funding, etc., for modern NT missionaries, and is not suggesting that there is an easy and simple answer to these difficulties. Nevertheless, the biblical pattern should be followed rather than man's contrived and non-authoritative efforts.

Much of the same criticism could be leveled toward highly structured Baptist fellowships. The unbiblical mindset of the universal church produces the necessity for organized hierarchy outside of the local church. Fellowships, associations and conventions, which develop organizational structure beyond the local church, end up usurping the autonomy of each of the Lord's assemblies. The presidents, regional directors, etc., of these non-authorized structures tend to dictate to the churches resolutions which in turn become "suggested" tenets for orthodoxy and fundamentalism. Some pastors feel intimidated and hesitate to reject these suggestions, ultimately embracing the "traditions" of men (Mk. 7:7) and incorporating these tenets in their particular ἐκκλησία.²⁷ The NT does teach that there is a place for churches to fellowship around *"the faith once delivered unto the saints"* (Jude 1:3). Furthermore, the churches of Galatia were united in biblical doctrine around the Lord Jesus Christ, while retaining their respective autonomy (Gal. 1:2; 3:27-28).

A popular but unbiblical development is the parachurch evangelist who has his own evangelistic association operating out and through a NT assembly. Although the evangelist may be a member of his home church and approved by his home church pastor, his entity is not fully supported by the home church but is largely self-supported by offerings given to his "evangelistic association." In other words, his support goes directly to his "evangelistic association" bank account, as his ministry is financially independent of any church or pastor. Although the evangelist may have a loose accountability to a NT assembly, his "ministry" is a financial entity separate from any assembly. From a biblical perspective, if a man wants to do the work of an evangelist (cf. II Tim. 4:5), he needs to be a staff member of an assembly and financially supported by his sending church.

Once the Lord's churches recognize that the unproved assumptions of Spirit Baptism and the mystical body of Christ have no biblically exegetical defense, then they may realize the authority, importance, and dignity the Lord gives exclusively to His candlesticks. The Scriptures teach that the church at Jerusalem had the divine authority²⁸ in precept and set the precedent to practice the Great Commission. Christ gave the precept of the Great Commission to the apostles who were representatives of the 120 disciples who made up the Lord's ἐκκλησία on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:20). This ἐκκλησία began to evangelize, baptize and instruct Jews and Gentiles as the Book of Acts gives ample precedent. The Scriptures make some amazing and outstanding claims for the Lord's churches. For instance, Paul taught that Christ, Who is Head over all His

²⁷For instance, Resolution 04-07 "Concerning Unity in the Essentials" for the 84th meeting of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship, Inc., in 2004 stated "Historic Fundamentalism exercised great latitude among the brethren regarding conviction over which good men disagree. Therefore we must not so restrict this latitude in our day by narrowing our fellowship exclusively to those brethren with whom we agree on all points and hereby hinder the greater cause of Christ. We must continue to study, know, and defend the essentials and to agree to disagree, if necessary, on those which are not (such as philosophy of youth work, pastoral authority, political involvement, versions, certain aspects of Calvinism, dating, divorce, evangelism/discipleship methodology, etc.)...we must prioritize an active love for our brethren, so that we demonstrate a Biblically-based tolerance towards those with whom we disagree." "2004 FBFI Resolutions," *Frontline*, July/August 2004: 23. This non-authoritative essential/non-essential dichotomy of Scripture is for "the greater cause of Christ," in a word, for the non-existent "universal, invisible church."

²⁸This divine authority is primarily vertical, that is it is from Christ through His Word, to all of His churches. The authority is not horizontal primarily, *contra* Landmark, Successionist, chain-link Baptists, flowing historically through the ordinance of baptism.

creation, completely fills His body, the local church (Eph. 1:23).²⁹ He revealed that the saints in the local churches teach the angelic realm redemptive truths (Eph. 3:10). He averred that local churches, like the Ephesian church, grow up in Christ to become mature bodies through doctrinal teaching (Eph. 4:11-16). He proclaimed that the Lord Jesus Christ both loved and died for individual church members (Eph. 5:25) and that He will cleanse the church members through the washing of the word to present each ἐκκλησία as glorious (Eph. 5:26-27). Elsewhere, the Apostle taught that the local church, the one with a bishop and deacons, was the pillar and ground of the truth (I Tim. 3:1-15). The Lord spoke through the Apostle John and gave His apocalyptic revelation to seven local churches (Rev. 1-3). When one realizes that the Scriptures teach the local church is the Lord's sole institution for His presence, worship and service, then one recognizes the glory, dignity, and honor that should be attributed to each and every one of Christ's assemblies.

Conclusion

The popular view that the Holy Spirit baptizes believers in the mystical body of Christ simultaneous with their respective salvation is based on two assumptions that cannot be proved from Scripture. Advocates of the popular view assume that their interpretation of Spirit Baptism is exegetically defensible and that the mystical body of Christ exists. This view has a catholic history and was built upon a fallacious exegesis of Scripture. Historically, the patristics read into biblical passages Platonic catholicity, producing a universal church concept for ἐκκλησία. Biblically, the architects of this view assumed that some Scriptural references to church and body were universal, fostering the Platonic notion of reality in the Idea and not in the particular. After the Reformation, Protestants needed a mechanism to place Christians in the catholic body and foisted their hermeneutics on I Cor. 12:13, culminating in the exegetically incongruous and historically novel Spirit Baptism interpretation.

The biblical view, in contrast, clearly reveals the nature of Spirit Baptism both in its prophecy and in its fulfillment. Scripture predicted that Christ would baptize believers, subsequent to their salvation, in the Holy Ghost. Exegesis of the Book of Acts demonstrates that this occurred four times for certain believers of the Jews, Samaritans, Roman Gentiles and Greek Gentiles (Acts 2, 8, 10-11, and 19). The result of Spirit Baptism gave private indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit to these believers, and public authentication and empowering to the Lord's new institution of the ἐκκλησία. Careful exegesis of I Cor. 12:13 reveals Paul's concern that the Corinthian church would be united around the church ordinances—baptism and the Lord's Supper. Since Paul wrote Ephesians after the last example of Spirit Baptism in Acts 19, he revealed, with no inconsistency, that there was one remaining baptism—water baptism. Furthermore, the Apostle revealed that his definition for "*one body*" meant either numerically one body (in a locale) or "united bodies" referring to several local churches, thus eliminating any mystical notions about the body of Christ. With full biblical authority, Paul could and did say to the Corinthian church, "*Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.*"

The ramifications of the biblical interpretation of Spirit Baptism and body of Christ effectively eliminate the authority and need of para-church organizations attempting to fulfill the Great Commission. These "handmaidens" to the Lord's churches have no biblical authority or spiritual wherewithal to be "*the pillar and*

²⁹With Christ as its Head, the local church is both an organization and an organism.

ground of the truth." New Testament churches have Scriptural authority based on the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20); para-church organizations must derive their authority elsewhere. When the Lord's assemblies are freed from the false assumptions and unbiblical exegesis for the existence of para-church organizations such as Bible colleges, mission boards and organized fellowships, then they will begin to give biblical authority, importance and dignity to the ἐκκλησία which the Lord Jesus Christ loves. *"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular"* will take on a new, and *the* biblical meaning, for their respective assembly

Church Discipline

The practice of church discipline was taught and prescribed by the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 18:15-18) as a means to purge out unrepentant sinners in the assembly (I Cor. 5:1-7). The goal, of course, is restoration of the disciplined member to the assembly. The Lord's assemblies are autonomous, and should not be influenced, dismissed, persecuted, affected, or demeaned by outside entities, including the government, the ecumenical movement, or other NT assemblies. When saved sinners join one of the Lord's churches, the Lord sets *"every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him"* (I Cor. 12:18). When the unrepentant member receives church discipline, the only avenue for restoration is repentance before the church of which he received discipline. He is not free, floating about in the universal invisible church awaiting membership in another church. Seemingly, the pastor/church that receives a disciplined church member violates the Scripture and disrespects the autonomy of and accountability of the assembly from which the member was cast out. Sister churches need to honor the Lord by honoring the autonomy of the Lord's assemblies.

Consistent church discipline is the heavenly design to edify church members by holding unrepentant troublemakers accountable and to remind faithful members to continue in faithfulness. The biblical assemblies of the Lord and the Apostle Paul regularly practiced church discipline because of the hardness of man's heart. The Lord's assemblies that do not hold members accountable will not practice church discipline and will become weak spiritually

Trending Issues

Covid forced the Lord's assemblies to consider significant issues such as church agility and governmental congeniality. Although pastors and churches have the liberty to maintain facilities for the public meetings of the assembly, and to rent or own "church" buildings, each needs to answer the question about the reality of the agility of the assembly. Are the assembly leadership and/or individual members willing to leave the facility if they are forced with the choice to choose between the facility and doctrinal truth? It seemed that during 2020 Covid some could not say *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"* (Mk. 12:17) and *"We ought to obey God rather than men"* (Acts 5:29).

Second, the Lord's assemblies do not need to seek congeniality with the government for secular privilege or empowerment when they have the Lord's presence! The first century Christians obeyed government (Rom. 13:1-7) with the exception cited above and attempted relationships only for evangelism. Paul believed and taught about the Lord's universal concern, protection, and benefit for His assemblies, saying, *"And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all"* (Eph. 1:22-23). Churches have the responsibility to pray for human

authority, as Paul averred, saying, *“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty”* (I Tim. 2:1-2).

The Value of the Pastor (By Dr. M. Ryan Strouse)

Introduction

What is the attitude of paying the pastor in your church? Double honor or muzzle? Bless or be stingy? The Lord gives each assembly different levels of stewardship over tithes, offerings, and in some cases property. Scripture is clear that the primary utilization of tithes and offerings is to support the Gospel preaching ministry of the Pastor. However, Christ and Paul reveal the persistent attitude of undervaluing the labor of the pastor (Mt.10:10; I Cor.9:3-14; I Tim.5:17-18). Furthermore, the normalization of major capital expenditures in churches has justified attitudes of stinginess in paying the man of God. Again, each church has different stewardships and different scenarios with their pastor (is he a tentmaker like Paul? Does he refuse remuneration?). The simple point to be made: what is the heart attitude toward paying a pastor?

Sadly, many churches have finance committees comprised of “captains in industry” that apply secular, stingy attitudes towards blessing the highest spiritual ministry in the Lord’s churches (Rev.1:20). One must begin to consider how the predominant idol of this world (money – Mt.6:24) drives covetous hearts within assemblies. The “self-made” captains of industry come into assemblies with haughty, covetous attitudes that passively or actively demand a platform in the financial decision-making process. Subsequently, the “muzzle the ox” attitude creeps in.

What is the outcome? An insidious vice-grip on the pastor from the so called “finance committee.” The proverbial tail is wagging the dog. The pastor is given his rations, which in many cases is not enough to invest in any equity outside the “pastor’s package” (parsonage, insurance, etc.); subsequently, the pastor can lose freedom to preach the Word since his temporal livelihood is completely bundled by those with a “muzzle the ox” attitude.

Biblicist churches need to reassess the motivating attitude of their church finances:

- What is the prevailing attitude?
- Who has the authority in the church? Finance committee or Pastor?
- What is more important?
 - Long term capital investments that may not house sound doctrine in the future?
 - Or a pastor who is given the freedom (no secret tentacles of control) to preach the Gospel to the lost and combat self-deception in the assembly?

The following is a brief, non-comprehensive outline on the value of the pastor.

Apostle Paul’s Advocacy for Paying Pastors

- Paul instructed Timothy and the Ephesian church (I Tim.5:17-18), and separately the Corinthian church (I Cor.9:3-14) – pay your pastor what he is worth!
- Why? There has always been a secular heart attitude that *undervalues the labor of pastors* in the Word.

- Furthermore, we will see how covetous hearts that seek to muzzle the pastor parallels the behavior of false teachers that undermine and speak evil of the pastor in an effort to overthrow an assembly (II Peter 2:10-14).

What is the value of a pastor? Do you place value on the visible or spiritual?

- Secular: sight based, materialism, volume based, outcome based
- Biblical: faithful, fear of the Lord, steadfast, unmovable, and his fruit is the sanctification of LC.

Value of the Pastor

- Ministry of the Gospel: Redemptive reversal of lives...darkness to light (Jn.1:5)
 - Anything more valuable than your salvation from hell and sanctification from self-deception?
 - How quickly we secularize the excellency and glorious gospel of Christ (II Cor.4:4, 7; Eph.1:17)
- Position: Right hand of Christ (Rev. 1:20)
- Responsibility:
 - Spiritual direction of assembly: Rev.1:20, 2:1
 - Rule and Watch over souls: Heb.13:7, 17
 - Prayer and study: Acts 6:4 *“But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”*
 - Doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction.: II Tim. 3:16-17
 - Care of the church: II Cor.11:28
- Authority: final say on decisions.
 - Acts 15:13 *“And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:”*

Does he Rule well? Worthy of Double Honor

I Timothy 5:17-18 *“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.”*

- Double honor or Muzzle the ox? No middle ground...attitude to bless or to be stingy?
 - What is your heart attitude toward paying the pastor.
- Rule well → in line with the previous responsibilities of the pastor.
- Historically poor attitudes on compensating pastors
 - The pastor makes more money than church members to instruct them from the Word...rubs against pride...keep them poor.
 - Treat their work as volunteerism since there is “no external fruit” of labor
 - Parsonage, poor benefits, and tight salaries – great for the church, bad for the pastor
 - gives church power to manipulate spiritual direction of pastor through the livelihood of the pastor...this is cruel, but a normalized deviance.
 - Bless the missionaries, muzzle the pastor.

- Meanwhile, the masses pay false teachers abundantly and willingly to tickle their ears (Mic.2:6, 3:11; II Pt.2:3ff).
 - Assemblies allow covetous false teachers to beguile others into speaking evil and muzzling the pastor

Church Money Attracts Covetous Hearts

- Churches must realize the persistent issue – the storehouse of tithes and offerings is “blood in the water” for covetous hearts and false teachers (Micah 2:6-11, 3:11; II Peter 2).
- II Peter 2:10-14
 - Church tithes and offerings attract covetous hearts → undermine to control or overthrow pastor.
 - False teachers arise from within churches.
 - V.3 – (cf. Micah 2:6, 3:11). “*through covetousness*” – motivated by a money grab
 - V. 10 – “*speak evil of dignities*” – subtle coup against the pastor...erode confidence in the pastor
 - V.13 – intimate subterfuge and deception - “*while they feast with you*” (v.13b)

Do Not Undervalue those in the labor of the Gospel!

I Corinthians 9:14 “*Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.*”

- There should be no apology for paying a pastor according to his labor.
- V.1 – “*Are not ye my work in the Lord?*”
- V.6 – “*power to forbear working*”
- V. 7-8 – warriors, farmers, and shepherds eat of their own labor.
- V.9 – cite Deut.25:4 – “*Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth the corn*”
- V.11 – Is it such a great matter to reap carnal (temporal payment) for spiritual labor?
- V.15 – Preach the Gospel, live of the Gospel.

Pastor's set the example for diligent ministry in the Word

II Thessalonians 3:8 “*Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you.*”

- Paul ate bread provided for him in exchange for his labor and travail in the ministry.
- He set the example of diligence for the disorderly busybodies
- II Thessalonians 3:10 “*For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.*”

Challenging Baptism Texts

With the desire to maintain numbers in attendance and membership, many Baptist assemblies have changed the names of the church to a more generic name, which eliminates any “denominational” name such as “Baptist” (*sic*). When the name Baptist is deleted, the doctrine of baptism is diminished. With the diminishing emphasis, Scriptures that deal with baptism are ignored and/or misinterpreted by pastor and people alike. The meaning, mode, and practice receive little interest, and confusion on certain difficult passages abounds. The following are several notable passage of neglect or perversion.

1. Mark 16:16 “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Context and Interpretation

The Lord qualified the first clause with the second clause. He did not say, “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not and is not baptized shall be damned.*” What damns? The lack of faith, not the lack of faith and the lack of baptism. He expects all Christians to be baptized, but the Lord does not teach that baptism saves.

2. Acts 2:38 “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.”

Context and Interpretation (from my commentary on Acts, Volume 1):

The urgent request received a quick response and a decisive reaction. Peter gave the biblical order that salvation comes first and then baptism. Succinctly, he stated as did both John the Baptist and the Lord, saying, “*repent*”³⁰ (Μετανοήσατε³¹ *Metanoesate*). For instance, John preached repentance and demanded the fruit of repentance from the Pharisees, saying, “*Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand...Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance*” (Mt. 3:2, 8).³² The Lord Jesus Christ demanded the conversion of sinners, saying, “*repent ye, and believe the gospel*” (Mk. 1:15).³³ The specific sin of which the Jewish audience was to repent and which brought sharp conviction, was that of crucifying the Messiah.³⁴ Repentance and faith result in

³⁰It is significant that Peter did not say initially or only “*believe,*” since regeneration comes through repenting from sin and turning in faith to Christ (Heb. 6:1). Certainly, he did say to the jailor “*believe,*” but no doubt he urged him to repent first (Acts 16:31). The current “easy-believeism” movement omits the message of repentance (arguing that John’s Gospel does not employ the verb “*repent*” or the noun “*repentance*”), but the “converts” will suffer the consequences about which the gracious Lord warned, saying, “*I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*” (Lk. 13:3, 5).

³¹The *aorist* imperative (cf. 3:19), demanding urgency, comes from the μετανοέω *metanoëo* verb (34x) and means literally “to change the mind” (see also 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; and 26:20). The verb occurs 34x in the NT, 14x in Luke’s writings. The noun μετάνοια *metanoia* occurs 24x in the NT and 11x in *Luke* and *Acts*. The Hebrew verb נָחַם *nacham* is the OT equivalent for “to repent.” The “change of mind” results in the “change of behaviour” (*vide* Jon. 3:9-10).

³²For the Pharisees they needed to change their mind about salvation being obtained by a physical heritage back to Abraham (Mt. 3:9). The masses of people responded biblically, as Scripture averred, saying about them how they “*were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins*” (Mt. 3:6).

³³For biblical conversion, the sinner must meet the conditions of repentance and faith, which conditions they can and must meet. As they do, the Lord empowers them, saying, “*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*” (Jn. 1:12-13; see also Acts 20:21; Heb. 6:1). The Lord demurred about the multitude, however, saying, “*And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life*” (Jn. 5:40).

³⁴“*The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy*

conversion as sins are instantaneously and eternally forgiven, as Peter declared later, saying, “*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord*” (Acts 3:19). The Apostle Peter used the plural *aorist* imperative “*Repent*” and then switched to the singular *aorist* imperative “*be baptized*” (βαπτισθήτω³⁵ *baptistheto*) and the singular adjectival construction “*every one of you*” (ἐκαστος³⁶ ὑμῶν *hekastos humon*) to denote individual repentance and faith.

Baptism subsequently follows repentance “*for the remission of sins*” (εἰς³⁷ ἄφεσιν³⁸ ἁμαρτιῶν³⁹ *eis aphesin hamartion*). The three thousand repented of sins, had a change of heart concerning Jesus the Messiah, received the divine message, and became ready candidates for baptism. Peter did not teach baptismal regeneration as the immediate and greater contexts of Scripture demand conversion before baptism. The public act of baptism is the fruit of a regenerated life (Mt. 28:18-19; Rom. 6:3-5; Col.2:12).⁴⁰

3. Acts 22:16 “*And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*”

Context and Interpretation (from my commentary on Acts, Volume 3):

The Greek expression is theologically tantalizing but linguistically and theologically simple. Ananias used a participle (“*arise*”), an imperative (“*be baptized*”), an imperative (“*wash away*”), and a participle (“*calling upon*”). The participles are adverbial and the actions precede chronologically the main verbs. The literal rendering is the following: “*arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, having called upon the name*

One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses” (Acts 3:13-15).

³⁵See note on 1:5. Neither repentance nor baptism is corporate but individual!

³⁶See note on 2:3.

³⁷The Greek preposition εἰς *eis* is employed many different ways and must be interpreted contextually. Here εἰς carries the sense of “*on the basis of*” or “*at*” as also in Matthew’s use, saying, “*because they repented at the preaching of Jonas*” (Mt. 12:41). The men of Nineveh repented because of the preaching of Jonah; their repentance did not produce Jonah’s preaching anymore than the sinners’ baptism produced repentance!

³⁸The noun ἄφεσις *aphesis* occurs 5x in Acts and a total 17x in the NT, referring to the “*release,*” “*pardon,*” or “*cancellation*” of something; hence “*remission.*” The *Vulgate* reads *remissionem*.

³⁹The feminine noun ἁμαρτία *hamartia* occurs 174x and is the common word for “*sin.*” It translates חַטָּאת *chatta’ah* (296x) and is the source for the English “*hamartiology.*” The expression ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν (“*remission of sins*”) occurs also in Mt. 26:28; Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3; 24:47; Acts 5:31; 10:43; and 26:18.

⁴⁰The Lord required baptism for all Christian converts, saying, “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned*” (Mk. 16:16). Unbelief damns! Furthermore, baptism saves the Christian from the world as the flood saved Noah from the world, Peter declared, saying, “*Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ*” (I Pet. 3:20-21). Baptism does not save from the filth of the flesh!

of the Lord.”⁴¹ In other words, for Saul to be baptized he needed to arise. In order for Saul to wash away sins, he needed to call upon the Lord who would accomplish this spiritual reality. This was a Semitic Chiastic structure:

- A. “Having Arisen” (adverbial *aorist* participle treated as an imperative)
- B. “*Be baptized*” (*aorist* imperative)
- B.’ “*Wash away*” (*aorist* imperative)
- A.’ “Having called upon” (adverbial *aorist* participle) “*the name of the Lord*”

The instruction that Ananias gave was biblically and theologically sound. He knew that baptism did not save (cf. 8:37). Salvation must precede baptism (see 16:31-33), which was certainly the case for Saul of Tarsus. He had trusted the Lord, received the welcome as “*Brother Saul,*” and received baptism three days later!⁴² The baptism that the Apostle Paul received was believers’ immersion, which baptism movement started with John the Baptist (Mt. 3:1-17; 28:19-20).⁴³ Baptism is a church ordinance that immediately inducts the baptizand into membership of the assembly. Either Ananias or someone else baptized Saul of Tarsus into the membership of Damascus Baptist Church. Now Paul identified publicly with one of the churches of the *Way!* No doubt, some of the audience had heard of John the Baptist, and perhaps some had submitted to the baptism of John or knew one the multitude that had received his baptism years earlier at Jordan (Mt. 3:5-6).

4. **1 Peter 3:20-21** “*Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. ²¹ The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*”

Context and Interpretation

The floodwaters separated Noah and family from the world of sinners. They were “saved” or delivered or separated from the sinners by the floodwaters. The point of Peter was that public baptism into a NT assembly identifies the former sinner with Christ and His assembly and saves him from identification with the world;

⁴¹The same structure occurs in the Lord’s Great Commission (Mt. 28:19). He used the adverbial *aorist* participle and treated it as an imperative, saying, “*Go ye,*” which must occur chronologically before the *aorist* imperative “*teach* (all nations);” e. g., “having gone, teach all nations.”

⁴²If Paul believed in baptismal regeneration (which he did not), he certainly was derelict at Corinth. He said, “*I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God*” (I Cor. 1:14-18).

⁴³Again, Kistemaker commented with confusion, saying, “The Jews were acquainted with Levitical baptism (*sic*) and that of John the Baptist. Christian baptism was visibly demonstrated at Pentecost...,” Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary. Acts*, p. 790.

there are no “secret Christians.” The parenthesis makes it clear that baptism does not deal with sin but is a good conscience of obedience to Christ’s command (Mt. 28:19-20).

ESCHATOLOGY

Two common problems in eschatological exegesis are the so-called indicators that we are in “*the last days*”⁴⁴ because of the current political, social, and cultural turmoil, and that the Olivet Discourse teaches the Rapture. Concerning the “non-sign ‘Signs,’” much of this confusion stems from heretical ecclesiology and the so-called “church ages” of Rev. 2-3. For instance, fundamentalist prophecy gurus and para-church “church-watchdog authorities” such as David Cloud maintain that we are in the “Philadelphia/Laodicea church-age” which began in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries⁴⁵ (*sic*) because of the “Israel is back in the land” prophecy fulfillment⁴⁶ (*sic*), and of “technology is in place” (*sic*) requirement for Satan’s reign.⁴⁷

The second problem is ignoring that the Rapture was a mystery revealed to the Apostle Paul, as he affirmed, saying, “*Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed*” (I Cor. 15:51-52) and “*For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord*” (I Thes. 4:16-17). Although the precious Saviour knew of His mystery of the Rapture, He developed the eschatology of the Olivet Discourse based on the prophecy of Daniel (Dan. 9:24-27). The Discourse did not include the Rapture (Mt. 24:38-41), but instead revealed the fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy that those taken will be taken in judgment and those left will be left to enter into the Millennium as believers (Zech. 14:16).

The Lord’s assemblies need to heed Paul’s admonition, “*For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself*” (Phil. 3:20-21).

⁴⁴Contra “*Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time*” (I Jn. 1:18).

⁴⁵David W. Cloud, *Advanced Bible Study Series. Revelation* (Port Huron, MI: Way of Life Literature, 2007), p. 79-81.

⁴⁶Contra with the Tribulation and Millennium prophecy of Isaiah: “*Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the LORD: shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb? saith thy God.*” (Isa. 66:7-9).

⁴⁷Cloud, p. 24. Paul taught the imminent return of Christ (I Thes. 4:17). Satan does not need man’s technology!

CONCLUSION

Our independent Baptist assemblies need to focus on independence from the ungodly influences of American society and to perpetuate biblical Christianity as modeled in the doctrine and practice revealed in Scripture. The erosion of truth has occurred within the doctrines of Bibliology, Theology Proper, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology as well as the resultant practices. The Lord's churches should minister within a fallen and falling society and influence the world with biblical Christianity. The question becomes "who influences whom" with the contrary perspectives of life. The Lord Jesus Christ came to give spiritual life to the sons of Adam in a fallen world under the wicked spirit of the prince of darkness. No longer are the days of spiritual apathy and passivity slivered in through the casual bliss of the American way that shaped many American churches. The American business model is not inspired. The organizational structure and practices for the NT assembly are replete throughout the NT Scriptures. Rather than further compromise with the truth, the Lord's assemblies must recommit with great diligence to "*thus saith the Lord*" by precise teaching and active obedience. Amen!