

WHAT IS BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP?

Dr. W. Aaron Strouse

Introduction

Theological journals that originate from a seminary are often associated with the idea of Biblical scholarship. Because of this, it is necessary for this author to address this foundational issue. What is Biblical scholarship? Who is capable of being a Biblical scholar? Where should one find Biblical scholars? These and other related questions will be addressed.

As the name suggests, Biblical scholarship is obviously related to the Bible. Scholar comes from the Latin word *schola*, meaning a school, and this word denotes a learned person within a particular discipline. By this simple definition, a Biblical scholar is a person who is learned in the Scriptures. Is this all that there is to Biblical scholarship? Based upon this elementary definition it would appear that there are Biblical scholars all throughout the land in various churches. After all, the local church as the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15) is instructed to teach “all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). Furthermore, those within the local church are instructed to “commit” the same doctrine to “faithful men” (2 Tim. 2:2) and to “study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

These passages imply that local churches should be led and ultimately filled with individuals who are learned in the Bible. Is Biblical scholarship really this common? Is it possible for one who is “just” a pastor to be a scholar? What about the so-called layman who is “just” teaching Sunday School? These and other questions must be addressed relative to the matter of scholarship.

God’s Academic Credentials

Because the issue of Biblical scholarship is obviously related to the Bible, it should not be surprising that this issue is *also* related to the Author of the Bible. This point is very significant when one realizes that this Divine Author expects man to believe without seeing what He has said (Jn. 20:29). Because of this, it is imperative for this author to discuss the intellectual capability of God. Is God a Biblical scholar? What are God’s academic credentials that make Him and His Word worthy of our diligent study and trust?

Biblical scholarship is usually designated through the use of various academic degrees. Some of the more prominent degrees include the Master of Divinity (M.Div.), the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), and the Doctor of Theology (Th.D.). Although the specific hourly and writing requirements may differ, the attainment of any one

of these degrees usually demonstrates that an individual has mastered certain areas of theology. Obviously, the more degrees that an individual holds indicates a higher level of scholarship.

With this in mind, it is important to determine the Lord's academic credentials. Notice several passages that refer in some way to God's intellectual capability. Isaiah 55:8-9: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Psalm 147:4-5: "He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. Great is the Lord, and of great power; his understanding is infinite." Isaiah 40:13-14: "Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counselor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?" Isaiah 46:9-10: "Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me. Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." 1 John 3:20: "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Job 38:2: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding."

As these verses attest, Jehovah knows absolutely everything. While the omniscience of God is not a new doctrine to most believers, because of man's emphasis upon the visible, it is very important that one connect this Biblical teaching of God's omniscience to God Himself through several visible and external degrees. By catering to this human fault of "externalism" (which will be discussed later), one is able to visibly see how God "matches up" to all human scholars. If the Lord knows everything, is He intellectually worthy of holding a M.Div. degree? Is He smart enough to hold a Ph.D. degree? How about a Th.D. degree? For those who are eager to grant God one Th.D., is he worthy of holding two Th.D.'s? How about three? Would it be a stretch to give God four Th.D.'s? Obviously if God knows everything, there is no limit to the number of human academic degrees that one could bestow upon him.

Since God is superior in His knowledge, it is not enough that one bestow upon Him human degrees that are common to humanity. Since there are scholarly men who hold Ph.D's and Th.D.s, one should not imply that God is merely *equal* in his knowledge with these humans. Humans should acknowledge His superior intellect through a title that is completely unique to Him. The fact that no human being holds this title indicates that all humans, regardless of how many Ph.D.'s or Th.D.s they may hold, are intellectually inferior to the all-knowing, Almighty God.

Several of the passages, such as Job 38-42 and Isaiah 40, connect the LORD's wisdom with His power. More specifically, God's wisdom and power were and are displayed through creation. Because of these and other passages, this author will acknowledge God's superior intellect with the title of Omniscient and Omnipotent Creator (O.O.C.). Three important truths are indicated by this unique title. First, God is omniscient in that He knows absolutely everything. Second, He is omnipotent in that He is able to do absolutely anything, especially those promises that seem to be difficult. Third, He is the Creator to Whom every human being will one day give an account. All human scholars should keep these three pertinent truths in their thinking as they study the Word of God. In light of this, God's academic credentials would look like this: God (O.O.C.). For those who are

curious, this title is accredited!

Since the Lord Jesus Christ has spoken in His Word, any Biblical passage seen in its proper context could be followed with this weighty citation: God, (O.O.C.). If we “ooh” and “ah” at the sight of a Ph.D. following a human scholar’s name, what should one do when they see the O.O.C. title? Job’s response in Job 40:1-5 answers this question. When Job was confronted with the truth of God’s superior wisdom, he shut his mouth (v. 4: “I will lay my hand upon my mouth”) and submitted to God’s wisdom. It would behoove all Bible students to follow this Biblical pattern of “shut up and listen” when one is confronted with His superior intellect.

Thus, God is the Ultimate Scholar. He is worthy of holding multiple human degrees, and He alone possesses the ultimate and completely unique O.O.C. title. This intellectual superiority carries over to His Word. Every word, statement, or verse within the canon of Scripture is the utterance of God Himself and should be treated as the mind of the all-knowing God.

A Foundational Human Problem

There is a foundational human problem that plagues all of humanity that must be addressed before considering the issue of Biblical scholarship. This universal flaw influences our thinking on many issues, including this issue of defining Biblical scholarship. This author will first identify this problem and then demonstrate how this problem negatively colors our understanding of Biblical scholarship.

1 Samuel 16:7: “But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him; for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” As this passage indicates, there is a direct contrast between the LORD’s viewpoint and man’s viewpoint. While the LORD views man’s internal heart, sinful man is concerned with the visible and external shell of man. The fact that this problem of externalism is a universal problem is demonstrated by the use of the generic noun “man.” *All men everywhere struggle with this fault of externalism!*¹

Because man has a tendency to operate by the external, his mind accepts those things that visibly appear to be rational and logical. A perfect example of this truth is found in the familiar story of David and Goliath, which, it should be noted, comes one chapter after 1 Samuel 16:7. From a visible and external perspective, betting on David to win goes against the common sense rationale of the human race. After all, everybody knows that David is too small to defeat Goliath! However, as this story plays out, God’s invisible hand guided David’s sling and rock

¹ It should not be surprising to know that there is a universal (“catholic”) religious system that caters to man’s problem of externalism. Many of the major tenets of this religious system, known as the Roman Catholic Church, are built upon the foundation of externalism. For example, the catholic teaching of works salvation is based in part upon the fact that most good works are visible and external (Matt. 5:16), and consequently the individuals doing these good works are externally righteous people. This visible means of salvation is in opposition to the invisible cry of faith found in Romans 10:13 (“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”). The beautiful nature of Roman Catholicism is very appealing to the human eye, whether it be the beautiful church buildings, the mystical ceremonies, or the priestly attire. Every human is born a catholic (externalist), and those humans who place their faith in Christ will spend much of their Christian lives struggling against their inborn, catholic tendencies.

to defeat mighty Goliath. Or to use the language of 1 Corinthians 1:27-28 (the New Testament counterpart to 1 Samuel 16:7), God chose the foolish (“am I [Goliath] a dog, that thou comest to me with staves”), weak (“Thou art not able to fight...for thou art but a youth”), base (“and when the Philistine...saw David...he disdained him”) boy named David to confound the wisdom of the Philistines and bring to nought (“and he fell upon his face to the earth”) the powerful (“whose height was six cubits and a span”) giant named Goliath so that no flesh should glory in His presence. Please do not miss the absolutely crucial point that this passage in 1 Corinthians is addressing the modern-day “David” of this age, the local church!

As one can see, this universal problem of externalism leads to rationalistic thinking that “bigger is better.” In turn, this rationalistic attitude of accepting only those things that one can visibly see or that seem to “make sense” leads to an anti-supernatural mind-set that minimizes faith and ignores God’s ability and plan to work through weak and seemingly insufficient people or things. In a word, man’s fallen nature of externalism and rationalism is in direct conflict with God’s chosen plan to use weakness to accomplish His work (2 Cor. 12:9).

What does all of this have to do with the issue of Biblical scholarship? This clash of these opposing perspectives is still felt today in this area of scholarship. Very simply, this universal problem of externalism / rationalism directly and negatively influences one’s thinking in four key areas relative to Biblical scholarship: (1) the *place* of God’s truth--the local church, (2), the *person* dispensing God’s truth--the pastor, (3), the *people* receiving God’s truth--the church-members, and (4) the *plan* of God’s truth--fideism. Because externalism and rationalism “make sense,” it is very possible that many individuals have unwittingly succumbed to this anti-supernatural mind-set. Consequently, these individuals will have a rationalistic, anti-supernatural, and ultimately unbiblical view of scholarship!

Scholarship and the Place of God's Truth: the Local Church

The place of God’s truth is the local church. Any discussion about Biblical scholarship should touch on this fact. 1 Timothy 3:15: “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.” The surrounding context of this passage clearly indicates that this verse is referring to the only church referred to in the New Testament, the local church. In spite of this clear Biblical teaching about the local church and her responsibility to guard and dispense truth, this institution has been attacked ultimately because of man’s universal problem of externalism. Because the local church is foundational to the issue of Biblical scholarship, this author will demonstrate four ways that this institution has been attacked because of rationalistic thinking. This attack ultimately influences ones understanding of Biblical scholarship.

The Rationalism of the Universal Church Theory

Man’s universal problem of externalism leads to the logical and rational thinking that the local church, which is often a relatively small institution, is insufficient to carry out the Great Commission by herself. This condescending attitude is manifested in the popular theory of the universal church. This theory suggests that the best way to reach the world for Christ is for all believers on earth (the so-called universal church) to join together for this great cause. It is imperative that people recognize that the philosophy behind the universal church theory

of “bigger is better” *is absolutely logical and rational from the external, human perspective of man.* However, as 1 Samuel 16:7 indicates, man’s perspective is not God’s perspective. So while the universal church theory is very rational, it is also a very unbiblical theory that contradicts the clear teaching of several passages (Judg. 7:2: “the people that are with thee are too many for me [LORD] to give the Midianites into their hands”). Because of the fact that this theory is very logical, many theologians do not realize that they are forcing this erroneous theory onto the New Testament.²

Believers must recognize that the existence of this so-called universal church in their thinking has negative consequences for the small local church. This is especially important for those who claim to be “strong” on the local church but they “allow” for the universal body. Because this theory states that there are essentially two contrasting usages of church in the New Testament, believers are forced not only to decide which passages refer to which kind of church, but also which church (universal or local) is greater. There are only three possible answers to this last issue: (1) The universal church is greater than the local church. (2) The universal church and the local church are exactly the same in importance. (3) The local church is greater than the universal church. Inevitably, the bigger universal church is deemed to be more important than the small local church. After, all, when you walk by sight, bigger is better! Consequently, the small local church will always be secondary in people's thinking. This condescending and damaging attitude towards the local church is rooted in the foundation of a rational, external, sight-based perspective.

A word should be put here relative to readers examining this issue of the universal church. In 1 Thessalonians 5:21, God instructs believers to “Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good.” To prove something an individual must properly understand all of the various viewpoints on any given issue and then choose the proper Biblical viewpoint. Because the universal church theory is very popular, most individuals know and can cite the theological arguments for this view *because they are readily available in numerous textbooks and study Bibles.* There are several key reasons for the popularity of the universal church theory. First is the fact that this theory does “make sense.” A second reason is the fact that there are passages to do appear on the surface to teach a numerically “one

² Proponents of the universal church continually use passages taken out of context to support this theory. At virtually every “fork” in the road relative to a verse’s interpretation, proponents of this theory ignore that which is clear and build upon that which is unclear. Matthew 16:18 (“I will build my church”) should be interpreted by the very clear, contextual teaching found in Matthew 10 (disciples called out to assemble together) and Matthew 18 (church discipline) to mean “I will edify my already existing church in the future.” 1 Corinthians 12:13 should be interpreted by the very clear, contextual teaching found in 1:10-17 (division over water baptism), 6:16 (unified bodies are “one body”), 11:3 (one Head, many bodies), and 11:17-34 (division over the Lord’s Supper) as teaching a spirit of unified oneness in various bodies of Christ over the ordinances of water baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The so-called proof-text passages in Ephesians and Colossians should only be interpreted after one understands the foundational teaching of Acts 19 (the Ephesians clearly understood *ekklēsia* to refer to an assembly), Acts 20 (the local church is clearly composed of saved people for whom Christ died) and 1 Corinthians (the local church is clearly equated with the body of Christ). Because 1 Corinthians is the first book written of only four books that contain the phrase body of Christ (1 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians), it is foundational to the others. Since Paul taught the same doctrine in every church (1 Cor. 4:17, 7:17; cf. 11:16, 14:33), he did not contradict his foundational and very clear statement to the Corinthians that the body of Christ equals the local church (1 Cor. 12:27) in his other writings (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:25; Col. 1:18). In fact, Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians that he is clearly writing to a local church (1:2; 5:4, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13; 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34; 14:23, 26; 16:2), and this God-given emphasis sets the stage for the proper interpretation of “ye [local church that assembles together] are the temple of God” (3:16) and “ye [local church that assembles together] are the body of Christ” (12:27). It should not be overlooked that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8). If he finished writing 1 Corinthians on a Saturday night, how do you think he would have defined the body of Christ as he taught his Sunday School class the next morning in the Ephesian Church?

body” of all believers on earth (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:4). A third reason is that there is a universal entity of believers on earth, and this entity requires a name.³ The combination of these three points (#1: a rational theory; #2: it appears to be clearly taught in the Bible; #3: a universal entity of believers) solidifies the validity of this theory in peoples’ minds, resulting in countless numbers of “Scofieldites” or “Ryrieites” who slavishly follow C. I. Scofield, C.C. Ryrie, or another promoter of this theory. However, this author, along with many local-church-only “converts,” can attest to the fact that *most* individuals who believe in the universal church theory do *not* have a clear understanding of the key points of the local-church-only view. For those who disagree, the validity of this proposition can be demonstrated rather *easily* and *quickly*. Please summarize the local church viewpoint and then contrast that with the universal church view of the following passages or issues, being careful not to erect the straw-man arguments of “landmarkism” or “Baptist bride:” Matthew 16:18, Acts 2, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 5:25, unified bodies versus numerical bodies, and the definition of the bride and body. It may be hard for some individuals to summarize the local-only view because it is not popular and consequently they have not heard some or any of it before! How can one “prove all things” if they do not properly understand the opposing viewpoint? This challenge to “prove all things” is especially appropriate for those who have held to a theory for many years who may be anxious to charge others with being “divisive”! How does God view those believers who refuse to “prove all things”? How “sincere” and “well-meaning” is someone who disobeys this verse?

Those who accept this faulty foundation of “bigger is better” will accept the unbiblical premise that God uses and needs size, whether it be a big movement (fundamentalism) or a big institution (para-church organization) to do great things. The solution to this rationalistic thinking is to accept in faith the Biblical teaching that God has chosen the small local church to do His work!

The Rationalism of Historical Fundamentalism

The second way that the local church has been hurt because of man’s problem of externalism was and is through the historical movement of fundamentalism. Because fundamentalism serves as the historical background for much of contemporary Christianity, it is necessary to see how this movement has negatively influenced the matter of Biblical scholarship relative to local churches.

A discerning study of the history of fundamentalism (or the history of faulty, catholic ecclesiology) will demonstrate that this movement was clearly rooted in the unscriptural thinking that God needs size (all “conservative” believers on earth) to “win.” There is a very significant reason that is often overlooked as to *why* certain beliefs were considered fundamental (e.g., the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement) and why others were not (believer’s immersion). Since this movement was *clearly* built upon universal church thinking, it should not be surprising that this movement emphasized the fact that the Lord fights modernism through the masses of saved

³ The name for this universal, invisible entity of believers on earth is the kingdom of God (John 3:3, Luke 17: 20, 21). The common response to this statement is that this is merely a matter of semantics that does not really matter. The foolishness of this idea can be easily demonstrated by changing the names of one’s co-workers under the reasoning that the individual names are just semantics. Individual names indicate *different* individuals and their *different* responsibilities. The Great Commission has been given to the local church/body of Christ, and *not* to the kingdom of God!

people, rather than through local, immersionist assemblies. Consequently, this movement elevated those beliefs “essential” for salvation in order to discern which Christian “soldiers” were truly in God’s “army.” Obviously, if you make believer’s immersion (or any other “non-essential”) a fundamental you immediately and dramatically lower the number of soldiers in God’s gigantic army to fight modernism. The movement of fundamentalism looked for the lowest common denominator to unite believers for the so-called greater “cause of Christ,” and the so-called “Baptist fundamentalism” popular today is merely a slightly modified version of this unbiblical philosophy!

It is imperative that people recognize that the philosophy of historical fundamentalism that “bigger is better” *is absolutely logical and rational from the external, human perspective of man.* Because of this foundation of rationalism, fundamentalism will always struggle with the issue of where to draw the line in the sand relative to this rationalistic thinking. Furthermore, the so-called “new-evangelical” movement is the consistent, logical, and normal outcome of the inconsistent and rationalistic movement of fundamentalism.⁴

Please note several specific ways that this movement hurts the local church relative to scholarship: (1) First is the foundational thinking underlying fundamentalism that the Lord Jesus Christ’s “real” work is accomplished through bigness. Obviously, since local churches are smaller than the movement of fundamentalism, the local church is going to be secondary in people’s minds to this bigger movement. (2) This emphasis upon the so-called fundamentals perpetuates the popular thinking that the Great Commission begins and ends with “getting people saved.” This philosophy downplays believer’s immersion and the discipleship training found in Matthew 28 in which new converts are to be instructed to “observe all things.” Consequently, according to this philosophy, it really is not that important to teach doctrinal issues to saved people. Furthermore, according to this thinking, doctrine will always take a back seat to unity! (3) This rationalistic philosophy that “bigger is better” and “God needs size to win” has a subtle controlling influence upon the pastor of a local church. According to this philosophy, if a pastor decides to break from a movement, network, association, or fellowship (all of which are

⁴ Understanding the fact that fundamentalism is built upon rationalistic thinking (“bigger is better”) enables one to see why so many churches, individuals, and institutions “drift” into new-evangelicalism. *New-evangelicalism is the consistent and natural outcome of the rationalistic and inconsistent movement of fundamentalism.* Note the following two issues: First, both fundamentalism and new-evangelicalism allow for the universal body of Christ, citing the popular yet extremely weak interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12:13. In spite of the clear teaching of verse 25 (“there should be no schism in the body”), which, please note, comes *only* twelve verses after verse 13, fundamentalist are *absolutely inconsistent* with their faulty view of the body of Christ because of their emphasis upon separation. This is in contrast to the new-evangelicals who are *very consistent* with their wrong view of the body of Christ as they emphasize unity and love for other believers within the universal body. A primary passage that teaches love for others in the body is found in 1 Corinthians 13, *only* one chapter after 1 Corinthians 12:13.

A second area in which new-evangelicalism is more consistent than fundamentalism is relative to their rationalistic foundation. Both of these movements are built upon the rationalistic idea that God needs size (all believers in the so-called universal body) to “win.” Since the *foundation* of the movement is built upon a premise that does make sense when you are walking by sight, it should not be surprising that theologians apply this sight-based thinking to *other* theological areas (age of the earth, manuscript evidence, the insufficient local church, etc...). Thus, many fundamentalist are *inconsistent* with their rationalistic foundation as they attempt to maintain a fideistic approach to other theological issues. The new-evangelicals, on the other hand, are *very consistent* with their foundation of rationalism as they proudly promote their “scholarly” views of theistic evolution, the gap theory, critical text, all of which are built upon a sight-based definition of “evidence” that is not pleasing to God (Heb. 11:1, 6). Furthermore, this rationalistic foundation easily leads to the sight-based philosophy of pragmatism (“if it works, God must be in it”), which in turn influences one’s view of other issues, including music. Because of the fact that new-evangelicalism is the consistent outcome of fundamentalism, people should not be surprised when individuals such as Jack Van Impe “switch teams” and “drift” over to new-evangelicalism! *These individuals are being consistent with their foundation of universal church thinking and rationalism.*

usually built upon the unscriptural and subtle premise that God need's size to win), he is ultimately hurting the greater "cause of Christ." How could God possibly use a small local church by itself? Because of this thinking, pastors will be hesitant to "rock the boat" and teach something contrary to the established decrees of fundamentalism. (4) Since there is *not* a single verse that lists the so-called fundamentals, fundamentalism has and continues to struggle with exactly how many fundamentals there are (five? seven? nine?) and what these fundamentals are ("How dare you elevate the text issue to the level of a fundamental!"). Thus, fundamentalism is a *selective* and *arbitrary* movement in which man decides the fundamentals (much like the catholic councils), and by logical extension, what "flaws" a local church can have (the fundamentalist lack of love but definitely not the new-evangelical worldly music) and still retain "candlestick status" as one of God's churches (Rev. 2-3). Consequently, this unscriptural movement elevated certain individuals (usually associated with bigger para-church organizations or bigger churches) to decree what these fundamentals are. The elevation of these "fundamentalist popes" downplays the New Testament teaching of pastoral authority and local church autonomy. Consequently, church-members operating under this thinking will have a tendency to check their pastor's teaching with the authoritative decree of the various popes. (5) Because of the fact that fundamentalism is a selective movement, the label fundamental is often a subtle, self-congratulatory pat on the back that says "I'm *already* fundamental in those things that are really important." This subtle attitude hinders honest Biblical study on controversial issues (e.g., the text issue) because one has *already* pre-determined that they are *already* fundamental, which is wrongly equated with orthodoxy or "the faith."

In summary, the movement of fundamentalism has and continues to hurt local churches in all areas, including this area of scholarship.⁵ The solution to this rationalistic thinking is to accept in faith that God has chosen the small local church to accomplish His work in this age.

The Rationalism of Para-Church Organizations

Local churches and the issue of Biblical scholarship have also been attacked through the existence of para-church organizations. These organizations, many of which are bigger than the local church, attempt to come along side (para) the local church to assist with some aspect of the Great Commission, whether it be a para-church Bible college that assists with Bible teaching, or a para-church mission board that assists with missions. By their refusal

⁵ How should one label Christians? The same way that Christ did in Revelation 2-3. He addresses churches alone (including the "new-evangelical" churches of Pergamos and Thyatira) relative to their obedience to His Word. Just as the label fundamental is faulty, using the label new-evangelical is equally faulty. Those who negatively label others as new-evangelical are operating under the assumption that fundamentalism is the Biblical standard, which it is not! The ultimate problem with many within the so-called new-evangelical movement is not that they are outside the "camp" of fundamentalism; rather, it is that they come short of the Biblical standard of guarding "all things" within God's revelation. Since labeling indicates one's standard, why not refer to a so-called new-evangelical church as a church that fails to guard a particular truth of the "all things" of Scripture? For those who obstinately insist on attempting to "reform" the non-Biblical and theologically loaded word fundamental with all of its damaging baggage to mean whatever the Bible teaches ("When I say fundamental I mean this..."), why not use an actual Biblical phrase ("teaching them to observe all things" or "the whole counsel of God") that teaches this truth. Common responses to this challenge include (a) "If I use Biblical phrases to talk about contemporary issues, my people won't know what I'm talking about" and (b) "I don't have time to re-educate my people." For all those Bible-preaching pastors who have to be forced begrudgingly to use Biblical phrases (how terrible is that?), why not take the time to teach the people within your local church how the Bible relates to the contemporary scene? Using Biblical phrases and terminology reveals and helps eliminate the subtle eisegesis found within many religious systems or ideas, many of which contain truth, which are narrower or broader than Scriptural teaching.

to be *under* a local church, these para-church organizations say through their *actions* (regardless of their *words*) that the small local church is incapable and incompetent to carry out the Great Commission without the aid of the bigger and stronger para-church organization. Thus, while those at these para-church organizations will earnestly testify (*words*) that they “emphasize” the local church and that the local church is “very important,” they cannot match the Biblical teaching that the local church is *the most important* and *exclusive* institution for this age.⁶ Furthermore, since *actions* speak louder than *words*, the one question they cannot answer from Scripture is the following: If the local church is so great and wonderful, why are you not under a local church?

Many individuals, including some who claim to be “strong” defenders of the local church (“I believe the local church is God’s institution to do His work in this age”), fail to see this inconsistency. Would people overlook the fact that a Burger King spokesman promoting the Whopper w/cheese Value Meal (combo # 2) is eating a Super-sized Big Mac combo from McDonalds as he makes his sales-pitch? Would people fail to recognize the inherent hypocrisy of a salesman for Ford Motor Company driving around in a Chevy Impala while he talks about how great Ford vehicles are? What about the annual Super Bowl commercials that depict a Coca Cola employee enjoying a Pepsi? Since most people would catch these acts of inconsistency, perhaps those who believe that God’s work (such as teaching the Bible) should be done by the local church should begin to question the leaders of these para-church institutions as to why they do not submit to a local church. Is it not hypocritical to *talk* about how grand and glorious the local church is and then refuse to submit to a local church with their *actions*? Are para-church organizations better than the local church? Is the local church incapable of doing what the Lord Jesus Christ told them to do? Of course, those who ask these questions should listen carefully to make sure that the answers given to these questions are *from Scripture*, rather than pragmatic reasoning, and they should be prepared to deal with the potential ramifications of asking these pointed questions. Indeed, *actions* speak louder than *words*.

It is imperative that people recognize that the philosophy behind para-church organizations of “bigger is better” *is absolutely logical and rational from the external, human perspective of man*. Because of the fact that para-church organizations are built upon this foundation of rationalism, all para-church organizations have and will continue to struggle with exactly where to “draw the line” relative to their rationalism.⁷ Furthermore, while these teaching

⁶ Discerning people recognize that there is a world of difference between the subjective descriptive phrase “very important” and the absolute descriptive phrase “the most important.” The phrase “very important” leaves room for something or someone that is greater. Para-church organizations are very fond of talking about how “very important” the local church is, and while this statement is absolutely true, it does not go far enough in that it conveniently leaves room for another institution (the para-church organization) that is “the most important.”

⁷ As mentioned earlier, the thinking that “bigger is better” is rational and logical from a human perspective. If one accepts this form of rationalism relative to *institutional* superiority, it is only a matter of time before this foundation of rationalism upon which every para-church organization is built influences one’s thinking relative to the *theological* superiority of various viewpoints. Those viewpoints that are seemingly “bolstered” by sight-based, visible “evidence” (whether historical or archaeological) will be deemed theologically superior. The faith-based approach that enables one to accept that the small local church is the best way to fulfill the Great Commission also enables one to accept that a faith-based solution to a so-called theological problem is the best answer! The history of Fuller Theological Seminary provides a perfect example of the rationalistic “slide” upon which all para-church organizations are gradually sliding. If you are trying to impress the “scholars” at the big schools, why would you hold a doctrinal belief that is substantially different from theirs? This practice of trying to “run with the big dogs” in the theological realm is manifested by the smaller Bible college bragging about the number of faculty members who hold accredited degrees from the big para-church organization. Imagine the scorn if someone were to boast of the fact that they had been taught the Bible by their pastor (2 Tim. 2:2) in their unaccredited local church (1 Tim. 3:15) in accordance with the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20)!

institutions are very capable of giving their students a quality education in most areas, both the faculty and the students will have their hands tied relative to accepting weak ecclesiology. This weak ecclesiology is guaranteed in that these para-church organizations must attempt to defend the teaching of the Bible outside of a local church, and this proposition can only be done by accepting the very weak and unscriptural universal church theory. The solution to this rationalistic drift is to accept in faith the fact that Christ has chosen to work through the local church in this age.

The Rationalism of Some Local Church Colleges and Seminaries

There is a fourth way that local churches have been hurt because of universal problem of externalism that leads to rationalism. Just as the universal church theory, the movement of fundamentalism, and para-church organizations are built upon the rationalistic premise that God needs size to do His work, so to *some* local churches manifest this thinking in their respective teaching organizations, whether it be a Bible college, seminary, or institute. Local churches can do this by perpetuating the subtle thinking that God's teaching organization (church) must be big and it must carry an extra-Biblical name (college, seminary, institute) to be academically "legitimate."

The Greek word behind church is *ekklēsia*, and this word is found some 115 times in the *Textus Receptus*. In 111 of these 115 times the word refers to the Lord's local church that is designated to carry out the teaching of the Word of God.⁸ To state this very clearly, some 111 times in the Word of God the Lord called His institution an *ekklēsia*, obviously translated to "church" in the English language. If the Lord called His teaching "organization" an *ekklēsia* 111 times, why do believers feel the gravitational pull to call and promote this teaching "organization" by a *different* name, such as college, institute, or seminary, which is not found in the New Testament? This would be understandable if one of these other terms were used 111 times in the New Testament. However, these words are not found 111 times in the New Testament, so the question remains as why to feel it necessary to identify their teaching ministry by a word that is not emphasized in the New Testament?

The simple answer to this question is the fact that many believers are trying to match and compete with the religious/secular academic "model," most of which is not found in the New Testament but rather in secular society. Historically, the Roman Catholic Church misapplied many Biblical concepts using Latin restatements. This corrupted religious model was copied in the secular educational realm. This religious/secular academic model contains some "neutral" components as well as some that are in direct opposition to clear Biblical teaching. This model includes the various religious names for teaching institutions (college, seminary, institute), religious degrees (bachelors, masters, doctors), the secular standard for verifiable truth (sight-based evidence), the secular practice of sending away to a "center of learning," the secular culmination of learning (commencement ceremony with caps and gowns), the secular practice of offering religious classes along with other disciplines (science, math, medicine, pre-law, and religion),⁹ and the secular standard of quality (accreditation). This "package" of the

⁸ Acts 7:38 refers to the church in the wilderness. Acts 19:32, 39, and 41 refer to the political assembly in Ephesus.

⁹ Churches are instructed to teach the "all things" of Scripture and not other disciplines. The reason why most Bible colleges and universities offer other disciplines along with Bible classes is to protect the students from worldly philosophy. While this is noble, the practice of sending students

religious/secular academic model has been followed by many believers as they attempt to carry out the Great Commission.

Readers should understand very clearly that this author is *not* suggesting that it is categorically wrong to use any of the components from this academic model, such as institutional names or degrees. However, those who want to use portions of this model should understand two important points. The first point is the fact that this academic model is a unified “package” that is largely accepted in the secular realm. Because of this fact, it is somewhat difficult and potentially dangerous to accept some portions of this academic package but not others. For example, those who accept the extra-Biblical institutional name of college but not the extra-Biblical standard of quality (accreditation) will continually feel the need to justify why they are a “legitimate” college although they are not accredited.¹⁰ One could ask why they chose to call their teaching institution a college, an institutional name not found in the New Testament, rather than “just” being a church, an institutional name found 111 times in the New Testament? Is it really that terrible to “just” call a teaching institution a church? Could it possibly be that the world accepts the notion of a college better than it accepts the notion of a church? Does college sound more scholarly than church? Since God’s description of the Corinthian church as weak, foolish, and base is unacceptable to the world (1 Cor. 1:27-28), this author believes that the desire for worldly acceptance is the primary reason why *some* believers attempt to move away from this term. Thus, if one accepts part of this academic model there may be a tendency through time to accept other portions of this model as well.

A second point relates to using the institutional names from this academic model. Again, while this author does *not* believe that it is categorically wrong to use these institutional names not found in the New Testament, there is a very definite set of “baggage” that comes with these terms that can be potentially damaging. There certainly is a practical value in naming the various ministries within a church, and many of these ministries are called by terms not found in the New Testament (nursery, teen group, deaf ministry, etc...). The important difference between these other ministry names (nursery, deaf ministry) and the institutional names (college, seminary, and institute) is the fact that this latter group of names is loaded with baggage that is not found in the former group. Thus, this author is not suggesting that all non-Biblical words be avoided; rather, those words and phrases that carry excess theological baggage should either be replaced with Scriptural terms or there should be a diligent effort to train people as to the Biblical meaning of a term.

The damaging baggage that is sometimes associated with the terms college, institute, or seminary is the unbiblical notion that a local church is *only* required to do the “serious” teaching of the Bible if they have a college, institute, or seminary. In fact, the thinking that only *some* local churches (usually the bigger churches) carry out the serious

to a Christian campus is rooted in the rationalistic thinking that the local church is incapable of protecting these students as they learn a particular trade or discipline. According to the popular thinking, this protection can only be brought about by the “sacral society / state religion” of the Bible college campus in which the students are virtually protected 24/7. What is their protection after they graduate?

¹⁰ Christians who wish to discuss the issue of accreditation for the teaching of the Bible (not science, pre-law, nursing, or other disciplines not part of the “all things” of Matt. 28:20) should begin with an understanding of God’s teaching institution (local church), how the world views this institution (foolish), and God’s form of “accreditation” for the local church (Biblical Spirit baptism found in Acts 2, 8, 10, 19; not the 1 Cor. 12:13 kind).

teaching of the Bible *is absolutely logical and rational, and it does make sense from the external, sight-based perspective of man.* This rationalistic idea is so prevalent that it is often read onto a very clear passage of Scripture in a subtle manner to facilitate one's preconceived idea of how the Great Commission should be done. An illustration of this is the "popular" interpretation of 2 Timothy 2:2. In spite of the very clear contextual teaching of 1 Timothy 3:15 that these books give material for *every* local church to follow (even the churches without a college, seminary, or institute), this teaching is often ignored because one is focusing upon the religious/secular academic model as opposed to the Biblical teaching of Scripture. The fact that many local churches fail to apply the truth of 2 Timothy 2:2 demonstrates that this is indeed a "popular" interpretation.

What the Bible says:

2 Timothy 2:2: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

How this passage is often read:

2 Timothy 2:2: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

2 Timothy 2:3: "Thou art only required to do the previous verse if you have a college, seminary, or institute. However, if thou dost not have a college, seminary, or institute, thou art not required to commit truth to faithful men. After all, you are currently just a small local church. When you start your college, seminary, or institute, then you must start doing (aorist imperative) the serious teaching to faithful men, but not before. Until that time, thou mayest send your young people away to a parachurch organization. Woe to the church that attempts to commit truth to faithful men apart from a college, seminary, or institute. Selah."¹¹

This thinking is manifested in the practical realm by pastor's who already have a local church (God's teaching institution) making statements such as "I'm praying about starting an institute." Statements such as this *usually* imply the thinking that the "serious" teaching of the Bible is not simultaneous with starting a church but rather with starting *another* organization. Certainly, there are specific aspects of a teaching ministry that will obviously need a starting date ("In August we started having night classes"). However, several characteristics should be true of *every* local church that should have a start date that is simultaneous with the start of the local church. Since God desires that everything be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40), *every* church should have an organized system of teaching the Bible, and this organized system of teaching the Bible should start when a local church starts. Since God desires that the whole counsel of God be emphasized (Acts 20:27), *every* church should give thorough training that will equip individuals to preach or teach from all of the Word of God. This process of thorough Biblical training should start when the local church starts. Since God desires that these men be able to

¹¹ This verse is not found in the "best" manuscripts.

“teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2), *every* church should have quality training, and this quality training of the Bible should start when the local church starts. These three characteristics should be true in *every* church, *whether or not a church has a college, seminary, or institute*. Thus, while there may be issues that pastors need to pray about to seek God’s leading (day or night classes, the name of the teaching institution, to have a graduation ceremony or not, whether to use Jostens or Herff Jones for caps and gowns), there are other issues that pastors do not need to pray about because God has *already* revealed His will on those issues.

As one can see, if *every* church did this, *every* local church would effectively function as a Bible college. Indeed this is what *every* church should be in practice. Every time the pastor opens the Word of God he should be functioning as a teacher described in Ephesians 4:11. Since those items found in other academic institutions contribute to learning, it would be Biblically “ok” for a pastor to incorporate some of these techniques in his local church. Imagine the shock of many if a pastor were to give a syllabus to his congregation during a Sunday service or if he were to inform them that they need to follow the distributed “study guide” to prepare for next week’s test? If para-church teaching organizations, which have not been given the Great Commission, are “allowed” to use these techniques, why should not local churches, which have been given the Great Commission, be “allowed” to use them? *Thus, every local church should function as a Bible college, even if it does not use the institutional name of college.*

This author should emphasize the fact that there is a unity among local churches that does allow for fellowship between local churches relative to the matter of Bible instruction. Certainly some churches have individuals who through study and experience are able to pass on valuable wisdom to others. Thus, while this habit of “sending away” is allowed, it does not negate a church’s responsibility to “do” 2 Timothy 2:2. Furthermore, providing “quality” training should not be equated with “knowing it all.” While no man ever reaches the point where he knows everything, men are able to provide quality instruction about the Word of God. Thus, even though pastors of local churches do not know everything and they, like all individuals, will always have room for intellectual growth, they are required to give the quality Bible instruction spoken of in 2 Timothy 2:2.

In summary, the Lord’s institution of the local church has been hurt by these four forms of rationalistic thinking. This thinking is rooted in the universal problem of externalism that suggests that God needs bigness, whether it be the universal church, the big movement of fundamentalism, the big para-church organization, or the bigger local church college, seminary, or institute. The solution these various forms of rationalism is to accept in faith the fact that God has chosen to use the local church to do His work in this age.

The fact that Christ has chosen local churches for the teaching of the Bible prompts two important and related issues that must be addressed. The first issue deals with the matter of quality education within the local church. Are there local churches and pastors of local churches that do a second-rate job of teaching the Bible? Certainly. Are there para-church professors who are very knowledgeable about the Bible? Certainly. However, the solution to this legitimate problem of pastors not doing a quality job of teaching or preaching is not to *change* the institution that does the Bible teaching, but rather for pastors (and all believers) to *understand* that local churches *alone* are responsible for teaching the Word of God. Para-church organizations must accept some of the blame for this scenario. The philosophy that local churches are only capable of the “Sunday school kind of teaching” is precisely the message that these para-church organizations send to all onlookers by their action of refusing to

submit to a local church.¹²

The second issue is related to the subject matter that local churches are supposed to teach. Matthew 28:20 indicates that the local church is responsible to teach “all things” within the canon of Scripture. This phrase indicates that local churches should focus on the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) and not on extra-Biblical material (historical or archaeological) that is often the focus of “scholarly” research at para-church organizations. As 2 Timothy 3:16-17 indicates, the Word of God is sufficient for every need that an individual within a local church may have. To be very precise relative to Biblical scholarship, every truth that the Lord (O.O.C.) wanted churches to have is *within* the canon of Scripture and is *available* to the local church. Because of this fact, local churches should not feel the need to “check” their theological beliefs against the “assured results of scholarship” that can only be done at the superior para-church organization.

Readers must recognize that there is a direct connection between the sufficiency of the Word of God and the sufficiency of the local church. If indeed the Word of God contains everything that is needed for the believer to grow, then the local church, as the guardian of the Word of God, is sufficient to preach and teach “scholarship” as it remains faithful to the revealed Word of God. If, on the other hand, the Word of God is insufficient to carry out the Great Commission, then local churches will also be insufficient as they rely solely upon the insufficient Word of God. If indeed the Word of God were insufficient, then local churches must then rely upon the extra-Biblical research (historical, scientific, or archaeological) done at bigger para-church organizations to validate the various claims of the Word of God.

Is the small, local church capable of doing what God has told it to do? Is this institution, with all of its visible and external shortcomings, able to carry out the Great Commission? One’s perspective determines how they answer these questions. If one’s perspective is to focus on the external, they will see an institution that is often small that appears to be incompetent and insufficient. How could this assembly of believers possibly do God’s work? However, in one walks by faith and understands God’s ability and plan, their answer to these questions will be a resounding “yes.”

Scholarship and the Person Dispensing God’s Truth: the Pastor

The issue of Biblical scholarship is also directly related to the primary person dispensing God’s truth, the pastor of

¹² Local churches do not have the built-in limitations that para-church teaching organizations do. While it is very possible to receive a quality education at a para-church organization in most areas, it is virtually guaranteed that the students at these institutions will graduate with very poor ecclesiology, and this to various degrees, will influence their Bibliology and eschatology. Since para-church organizations teach through their actions that local churches are incapable of doing the “real” teaching of the Bible, it is only logical to conclude that local churches are *also* incapable of guarding the Word of God. Since the notion that the serious teaching of the Bible should be done outside of a local church lacks Biblical support, this is weak ecclesiology. In a word, if a student (or anyone, for that matter) is not questioning the very right of these institutions to teach the Bible, they have faulty ecclesiology. Please note the irony in this situation. These so-called academically superior para-church organizations, many of which point to accreditation as validation of their quality education, are built upon the theologically and academically weak foundation of Scripture taken out of context. They will never be able to “fix” this problem of teaching weak ecclesiology unless they submit to a local church. On the other hand, local church schools, which do not have their hands tied with the ropes of inconsistency, are able to “fix” their respective academic problems with a proper understanding of the Great Commission.

a local church. Since the local church is the “pillar and ground of the truth,” the leader of this institution has the primary responsibility to teach his congregation the Word of God. The fact that the pastor is required to be “apt to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2) and that he is supposed to “commit” to others Biblical truth clearly indicates that the pastor of a local church should “know his stuff.”

In spite of this clear Biblical teaching about the pastor’s responsibility to know the Word of God, *the office of the pastor has also been attacked because of man’s universal problem of externalism.* Just as the institution of the local church is regarded as inferior to the bigger para-church organization, so to the human leader of the local church is deemed inferior to the professor at the large para-church organization. After all, the pastor is “still” serving at the small local church. Perhaps one day he may be smart enough to be “promoted” to the bigger para-church organization. Certainly there are and will continue to be individual pastors that do a second rate job of preaching and teaching the Word of God. This, however, is not and should not be a categorical description of every pastor. Furthermore, while there are *some* pastors who are guilty of weak Bible-preaching and teaching, *every* para-church Bible professor is guilty of weak ecclesiology.¹³

Perhaps the greatest indicator of this philosophy that says that the office of the pastor is intellectually inferior to the para-church professor is the insistence of pastors to use extra-Biblical titles, such as “Doctor,” to bolster the fact that they are intellectually “legit.” The word doctor is a Latin translation of the English word teacher, which is a Biblical description of the pastor (Eph. 4:11). Consequently, there is a legitimate relationship between the words doctor, or teacher, and pastor. In spite of this, this author believes that most individuals use this term doctor not in reference to the Biblical idea associated with the pastor/teacher (a pastor “skilled” in the Bible teaching in a body of Christ, the local church), but rather in reference to the secular and rationalistic model found in Christendom (a professor “skilled” in the Bible and/or another extra-Biblical field teaching at a para-church organization). This is demonstrated by the fact that the title that takes priority with most is not the title clearly

¹³ While professors at these para-church organizations can be very knowledgeable of the Word of God, they are bound by their occupation outside of a local church to defend weak ecclesiology. Very simply, they must “come up” with Scriptural authority to teach the Bible outside of a local church. For example, in an email correspondence with Daniel Wallace of Dallas Theological Seminary (a para-church organization), this author asked Dr. Wallace if 1 Timothy 3:15 referred to the local church or to the so-called universal church. This very intelligent man claimed that this verse referred to the universal church. However, in a phone conversation with his former colleague, Charles C. Ryrie, Dr. Ryrie stated that this verse “clearly” referred to the local church. This author followed up by asking Dr. Ryrie if this meant that para-church organizations should come under the authority of a local church. He declined to answer this question because he did not want para-church organizations to think that he was “against them.” His refusal to answer this question ultimately answered for him! Furthermore, these para-church professors who are continually manifesting their slavish devotion to the universal church theory should consider the subtle “slam” found in 1 Corinthians 6:16 that is foundational to 1 Corinthians 12:13! In his *first* contextual mention of “one body” within the *first* historical book that contains a reference to the body of Christ, Paul is astonished (“What!”) as he indicates that those who do not “get” (“know ye not”) the concept of unified oneness of various bodies (1 man + 1 harlot = 1 body) also do not “get” the most basic and elementary math question (1 + 1 = 2)! If a person is not questioning how 1 + 1 = 1 (one in unity, not numerical value) *they do not understand* that 1 + 1 = 2 in numerical value! God’s usage of the most basic mathematical equation rather than a difficult one (“What! Know ye not that the square root of 3,975 is 63.047601?”) indicates that He wants *every* believer (including those para-church professors who continue to parrot the teaching about the numerically one universal body) to understand the clear Biblical teaching of unified bodies of Christ (“one body”). The Biblical usage of the generic noun “one body” refers to all church-members (who are saved according to Acts 20:28) and *not* to all saved people on earth. Biblically, the smaller entity of the body of Christ (a local church composed of saved people) is part of the bigger entity of the bride of Christ (all saved people on earth according to Revelation 21:2, 9, 24), *but it is not completely identical* to the bride since the bride includes saved people who are not church-members (all those “in Christ” according to 1 Thess. 4:16). The Biblical teaching of regenerated local church membership that is clearly taught in Acts 2:41, 47 and 20:28 is foundational and crucial to the proper interpretation of Ephesians 5:25-27 and Hebrews 12:23.

found in the New Testament (pastor), but rather the title that is usually associated with the “really smart” professors teaching at the bigger para-church organization (doctor). Usually the title doctor comes first (indicating its superiority), followed by the inferior title of Pastor (Dr. John Doe, Pastor). It is almost as if this person wants to be known first and foremost as a “scholar” on the intellectual level of the para-church professors, and secondarily as a pastor (“By the way, I’m also a pastor”). This habit of leading with this extra-Biblical title of doctor seems to be a subtle word of assurance to others that this pastor is not your “normal” pastor who does not get it! Rather, this doctor who happens to be a pastor has the intellectual capability to be teaching at the bigger para-church organization if only a position were available. Certainly, there are many pastors who use this title who are not intentionally trying to send this subtle, derogatory message about other pastors. However, it should be noted that those who experience the negative ramifications of this situation are those pastors who either refuse to use this title or have not received this title (“You’re one of those pastors without a doctorate!”).

In fairness to pastors, this author should emphasize that this situation of using extra-Biblical titles is brought about because of extra-Biblical institutions (para-church teaching organizations). Because of man’s problem of externalism, there is a very subtle tendency to attribute a sense of “infallibility” to those “scholarly” professors at the larger and therefore superior para-church organizations who hold a visible Ph.D. or Th.D. Consequently, the mere pastor, still slaving away at the small local church, is trying to “compete” with the para-church professor at the big and glamorous para-church organization who seemingly has the papal ability to speak *ex cathedra* (“strike one” against the pastor). To make matters worse, this poor pastor is often “just” quoting verses to defend his faith-based views, in opposition to the para-church professor who may be citing visible historical and archaeological “evidence” to defend his viewpoint (“strike two” against the pastor). It is only a matter of time before this pastor’s congregation has “tuned him out” in a patronizing manner on those “tough” issues for which he just isn’t intellectually equipped (“strike three” against the pastor). Because of this scenario, it is no wonder that many pastors end up leaving the “batter’s box” of the local church after they have “struck out” and head for the bigger para-church organization or that they feel the need to “pad” their intellectual “resume” with these extra-Biblical degrees!

This author should emphasize that he is not downplaying formal education that results in a visible, external degree, or learning from another individual (Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 2:2). It must be noted, however, that there is not an educational program or degree from any school that can produce or validate that an individual “knows it all.” Rather, educational programs should provide a solid foundation upon which future study may build and educational degrees indicate that a foundation has been laid. This author insists that the pastor who has received foundational training in the Word of God, including the Biblical languages, is able to build adequately upon this as he prepares his messages and lessons on a weekly basis. Because of the pastor’s obligation to study the word of God, *every pastor should “earn” the title “doctor” or “teacher” through diligent study and preparation.*¹⁴ This diligent

¹⁴ The time to carry out this Biblical study will be available to pastors of any church if deacons are utilized as they should be. According to the Acts 6, deacons were given to carry out important, time-consuming tasks so that the pastors can study the Word of God. Both pastors and deacons must understand that it is “ok” for deacons to do secretarial tasks (answer phones, filing, letter writing) or janitorial tasks (cleaning toilets, painting, etc...). The primary duty of deacons is not to preside in meetings but rather to serve in the church to free up time for the pastor to study the Word of God.

study should be done in the quiet of the pastor's study, and it should manifest itself to his congregation as he opens the Word of God. Consequently, although this pastor may not have a visible Th.D. diploma hanging from his study wall, his congregation should recognize that he has indeed "earned" the title of teacher or doctor.

It should be emphasized that a pastor's responsibility is to the Word of God and not to other extra-Biblical sources of "truth." Just as the local church is responsible to teach "all things," so too the pastor of this institution is called to study the "all things" of the Word of God. Pastors have not been called of God to be historians, archaeologists, or geologists that attempt to produce sight-based evidence that caters to man's problem of externalism. Furthermore, the pastor's authority does not come from the fact that he "knows it all" relative to the Bible or that he has an answer for every possible question. As this author will discuss later, God intentionally hides certain truths so that man will walk by faith and not by sight. The pastor's authority should come from the fact that he inductively demonstrates from the Word of God what the Bible teaches on any given issue. Furthermore, while there are divinely-called pastors who may not know everything, the indwelling Holy Spirit provides them with a God-given "dose" of Biblical discernment. It is possible for para-church professors (or anyone, including the pastor) to get caught up in their intellectual ability and this proud attitude (1 Cor. 8:1) could negate or "quench" the discernment provided by the Holy Spirit on various issue (1 Thess. 5:19).

The solution to this unbiblical "flowchart" where professors are deemed higher than the pastor is the realization that the pastor of a local church is the highest positional office available in this present age. God's flow chart found in Revelation 2-3 indicates that He views the pastor and the local church higher than the president or professor at the para-church. In fact, should not the Lord's silence toward these individuals and institutions be our example in the present age?¹⁵ Although this problem will not change overnight, every pastor can and should educate his people on proper ecclesiology and the numerous practical ramifications of this ecclesiology. This teaching on pastoral authority will not be as self-serving as it may seem if the pastor includes in his teaching the truth found 1 Timothy 5:17-25 that "no man is above the law." The bottom line that all believers must understand is this: Since pastor is a Biblical and superior title, pastors do not need the extra-Biblical and inferior title of doctor to be intellectually legitimate!

Scholarship and the People Receiving God's Truth: the Church Member

The issue of Biblical scholarship must also be connected to the people receiving God's truth, the church-members. *Just as the local church and the pastor have been attacked by man's universal problem of externalism, so too the church-*

¹⁵ This is another area in which historical fundamentalism practiced unbiblical ecclesiology. While the Lord Jesus Christ stated that "all things" are important (Matt. 28:20), fundamentalism is *narrower* than the Lord and says that only the fundamentals are "really" important. On the other hand, while the Lord Jesus Christ only addresses local churches in the New Testament, fundamentalism is *broader* than the Lord and addresses local churches and para-church organizations. The "deafening silence" of the Lord towards these para-church organizations is in contrast to popular and yet faulty ecclesiological statements such as "within fundamentalism" or "inside the camp / movement of fundamentalism." These statements perpetuate the notion that the boundaries that are "really" important are the boundaries of this big movement which includes both local churches and para-church organizations. *Scripturally, it is not important to be "within fundamentalism;" rather, it is important to be "within" a local church that guards "all things."* Because of this New Testament teaching, para-church organizations, while they may be "within" the boundaries of fundamentalism, are not "within" the boundaries of the Lord's plan for this age and they are not involved in the "cause of Christ."

member has been attacked by this damaging philosophy. This catholic thinking has absolutely damaging ramifications upon the people within the local church relative to their ability to receive and understand Biblical truth.

Roman Catholicism divides church-members into the two basic classes of the clergy and the laity. The Catholic Encyclopedia explains this division:

“The laity and clergy, or clerics, belong to the same society, but do not occupy the same rank. The laity are the members of this society who remain where they were placed by baptism, while the clergy... *have been raised by ordination to a higher class, and placed in the sacred hierarchy* [emphasis added]. The Church is composed of two kinds of members: in the first place, those who are the depositaries of sacred or spiritual authority under its triple aspect, government, teaching, and worship; in the second place, those over whom this power is exercised, who are governed, taught, and sanctified.”¹⁶

As one can see, one of the primary purposes of this division was and is to label, associate, or “tag” an individual with a certain class. Obviously, in this two class system, an individual is *either* part of the elite ranks of the clergy (those who are *visibly* devoted to God’s work), *or* they are part of the lowly ranks of the laity. Please note that these classifications indicate something about *both* their intellectual¹⁷ and spiritual¹⁸ capacity. Since the clergy are the “depositaries” of truth (intellectual class), they are the more sanctified individuals (spiritual class). However, in contrast to the intellectual and spiritual clergy members are the not-so-intellectual and not-so-spiritual members of the laity. Although both are members of the same society, there is a very clear and sharp line of division between these two unequal groups.

Like much of Roman Catholicism, this two-class system is both damaging and unbiblical. Perhaps the clearest passage that indicates the unscriptural nature of this system is 1 Peter 5:2-3: “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.” Sandwiched in between these two references to the flock of God is a word translated heritage, which is clearly equated with the flock, or the congregation. This English word heritage is derived from the Greek word *kleron* (κληρων), and it is from this same Greek word that we get our English word clergy.

According to this passage, the flock of God is equated with the clergy. This obviously is in direct contrast to the

¹⁶ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1913 ed., s.v. “Laity.”

¹⁷ “It [laity] tends to appear in sentences where phrases such as ‘not very good,’ ‘not professional,’ ‘common,’ and ‘second-class’ might easily be used in its place. In fact, I put off writing this book for a long time because I wasn’t sure I had an audience or the right to speak. After all, I thought, I’m just a layperson. Just a layperson? I had to learn to think again.” Sue Mallory, *The Equipping Church: Serving Together to Transform Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), p. 13.

¹⁸ “As the gulf between these two grew, the *kleros* in the church became associated with the sacred, the *laos* with the secular. Since the lives of the *laos* were consumed with temporal affairs, they were perceived to be on the low rung of the saintly ladder.” Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003), p. 90.

catholic label of laity or layman used to describe the flock. It is very significant that the very passage that speaks of the *proper label* for God's flock (clergy) is also the same passage that warns against the *improper practice* of "lording" over the flock. The term lord has the idea of controlling or exercising dominion over someone or something. *Is there a connection between wrongly labeling and wrongly lording?* The context indicates that there is. The derogatory and inferior term laity is always set in contrast to the more positive and superior term clergy.¹⁹ Consequently, every reference to laity or layman is a constant reminder that an individual is part of an inferior class. Since these layman are intellectually and spiritually inferior to the clergy, they will be very hesitant to challenge this superior class.²⁰ This, in turn, sets the stage for various degrees of spiritual, physical, or emotional abuse. Since the Lord hates this Nicolaitan (people conqueror) philosophy (Rev. 2:6; 15; cf. 3 Jn. 9), perhaps believers ought to be very cautious how they label God's flock!

In spite of this clear teaching about the congregation being God's clergy, many believers have been wrongly influenced by the various faces of Catholicism, including the movement of fundamentalism,²¹ and obstinately persist in labeling those who are not in the "full-time" ministry as layman. Just as Catholicism uses this label to identify or "tag" an individual as part of the inferior caste, so too many Baptists use this label in the same way. This tag implies that there is some sort of mystical and invisible "cap" (much like a salary cap) that limits this individual. Statements such as "Although he is a layman, he really knows his Bible" imply that there is some sort of intellectual cap upon the class of the laity and this individual happens to be a "rare exception." Likewise, statements such as "Although he is just a layman, he really loves the Lord" imply that there is some sort of spiritual cap on those carnal layman and he just happens to be unique!

Some may disagree with this assessment. However, it is worth asking what is the relevance of bringing up the fact that a Sunday school teacher is a layman if it is not to "label" them as part of the inferior class? How does the fact that the Sunday school teacher is not in the full-time ministry relate to the conversation at hand? Does the fact that the Sunday school teacher has another full-time occupation, whether it be as a plumber, a police officer, or a postman, influence his ability to teach Sunday school? One could ask this same question about the Apostle Paul. Did the fact that Paul was temporarily a tentmaker on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:3) cause him to fall from the elite ranks of those in full-time work and consequently lose some of his "special" or "anointed" ability to

¹⁹ "Clergy is another term, along with 'minister' and 'priest,' that formally designates a leadership caste. The word clergy is almost impossible to use without contrasting it to its counterpart. It has come to mean those who stand over against 'laity.'" Ogden, p. 89.

²⁰ This hesitation to challenge a higher "caste" is demonstrated in other areas (doctor / nurse; teacher / student; master / slave).

²¹ "Since the overwhelmingly primary function of the church was to evangelize, this was also the first task of the individual believer. Americans in the revivalist tradition had come to think of the church as the simple sum of the individual believers. One implication of such a view was that the same rules applied to the parts as to the whole. Therefore, each individual ought to be a missionary. Fundamentalists typically allowed little room for alternative occupations...Moreover, all Christians, except those with bona fide excuses, were called to 'vocational Christian service,' as pastors, missionaries, or the like. Working in medicine, law, or business might be justifiable if one used one's profession for witnessing and used one's wealth to multiply Christian ministries. But even then, justifying one's secular occupation by supporting missionaries might be only a rationalization to escape one's true duty." George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), p. 26.

minister?²² Should Paul's spiritual "stats" include an asterisk or footnote by his second missionary journey (fifteen years in full-time work, three missionary journeys,* twelve churches planted, etc...) to divulge in a forthcoming manner the seemingly all-important information that he was not completely full-time? If this unrelated personal trivia about an individual's occupation is not brought up to label or "tag" them as part of the lower class, then *why* is it brought up at all? Why not bring up *other* unrelated personal data that has *absolutely no bearing* on the conversation at hand ("He is a Sunday school teacher who likes to eat carrots" or "He is a Sunday school teacher who averaged 14.3 points a game his senior year of high school")? The fact that this other unrelated data is *not* typically brought up indicates that the labels laity and layman are definitely *not* neutral terms!

Since there are different levels of Bible knowledge among members of the same church, some may suggest that layman is a legitimate term to describe this situation. There are at least three problems with this. (1) God calls these flock members clergy. (2) There is other Biblical terminology that accurately describes this situation that is conveniently ignored in favor of the unbiblical term layman. Untaught church-members could be described as those who have not yet learned to "observe all things" (Matt. 28:20) or those who have not yet studied to be "approved unto God" (2 Tim. 2:15). Or, to use the language of Ephesians 4, they are not yet "grown up" (v. 15) but are currently "children" (v. 14) in their doctrinal understanding. (3) The significant point that should not be missed is the fact that these Biblical labels offer hope to the individual because they indicate that there is the

²² The categorical idea that "full-time equals the ministry" ultimately hurts local churches, individuals, and families *if* it is carried through to its logical conclusions. Although this idea contains truth (both pastors [1 Tim. 5:17] and church-planters [1 Cor. 9:13-14] should be "full-time" and they are part of the ministry), this two-tiered, clergy / laity mind-set is rooted in Catholicism and goes farther than Scripture does in that it uses the catholic boundaries of ministry ("location of income") as opposed to the New Testament boundaries of ministry ("location of service"). Those who use this faulty boundary follow the externalism found in Catholicism as they equate the most visible parts ("full-time" positions are very visible parts of the ministry) with the whole ("he is going into the ministry to be a pastor"). Since Paul connects the *individual* ministry that God has given to *every* believer with the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:8,14), *every* believer should discern the *individual* ministry that God has for them (1 Cor. 12:5), and then fulfill that *individual* ministry that they have received from the Lord (Col. 4:17) because they will give an account for their *individual* ministry at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:8, 14). While the Roman Catholic Church emphasizes the two *levels* of ministry (clergy and laity; "full-time" and the "laypeople"), the New Testament emphasizes the *individual* ministry within the bigger work of the ministry done by the *entire* body, the local church. The catholic thinking of a higher and more spiritual level is manifested through statements such as "surrender to full-time work" or "I want my daughter to marry a preacher" that suggest through the *isolation* of the most *visible* ministries that these individual ministries are *categorically* greater for *every* individual. Because the categorical idea that "full-time equals the ministry" lacks Biblical support, it leads to confusing, inconsistent, and even foolish (see below) statements and questions. Just how "full-time" must a person be to be in the elite ranks of those "in the ministry"? Must 100% of their total income come from their ministry job? What if they have a paper route and only 98.64% of their income comes from their ministry job? Is this individual still in "full-time ministry"? What if they work two part-time jobs and only 87.31% of their income comes from their ministry job? Precisely what is the percentage of their income that must come from their ministry job for them to be considered "full-time"? A more important question is where is the Scripture that gives this percentage for those who are not called by God to be pastors or church-planters? Is it 73.29%? How about 64.47%? What about 53.28%? Or, to be really "radical," what if 0% of their income came from a ministry job and yet they faithfully serve in the local church as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-8) fulfilling their God-given ministry (1 Cor. 12:5; Col. 4:17) and doing their part in the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12-16)? This financial boundary of ministry was and is perpetuated by para-church organizations (often wrongly called para-church ministries) who can afford to hire more people than the small local church, which will *always* have a very *limited* amount of full-time positions available! Furthermore, the "spokesmen" who perpetuate this financial boundary of ministry are protected financially, whether it be the pastor of a local church who has the Biblical protection of 1 Timothy 5:17, or those workers at a para-church organization who have practical protection by the fact that their service outside of the local church is and probably always will be accepted by the masses as Biblically legitimate. Those who are hurt by this damaging philosophy include those teachers who attempt to be consistent with New Testament ecclesiology and the *numerous* small local churches that can only hire a pastor and maybe a secretary. According to Ephesians 4:12-16 (not this author) the body of Christ (local church) does the work of the ministry. Because of this Biblical teaching, those serving at para-church organizations, including the "full-timers," are not "in the ministry" based upon their work done at these extra-Biblical institutions because they are outside of God's institution.

potential and the mandate to change this situation. For the individual who is not yet “approved of God,” he may one day fulfill this Biblical mandate if he faithfully applies himself spiritually and academically in his local church. The same could be said for the individual who has not yet “grown” into the mature believer that is not “tossed to and fro” by false doctrine. In contrast to this is the aforementioned cap associated with the term laity that suggests that as long as an individual is part of the lower caste they have an intellectual and spiritual limit. Obviously, the only hope for potential change in this “either / or” caste system of Catholicism is to change their caste. According to the popular thinking, this can be done by seeking and obtaining a full-time position. Isn’t it amazing how spiritual and smart an individual can become simply by getting the right job?

Just as the label laity is catholic, so too is the response of many individuals to this Biblical truth. The Roman Catholic emphasis upon tradition is rooted in the fact that those things which have been done historically have a visible edge in a person’s mind. In other words, since they have continually seen in print and heard a particular “fact,” it must be true! Consequently, those “new” truths that they have not seen or heard must be wrong. (How “new” is this truth since 1 Peter 5:2-3 was written in the first century?) Many Baptists demonstrate this catholic emphasis upon tradition in two ways: (1) Continuing to use the labels laity or layman after they have been confronted with the Biblical truth that the flock of God is His clergy, not His laity. As if this blatant disregard for God’s label is not enough, many Baptists add insult to injury by using the very term that is in complete opposition to God’s term. To use a color analogy, what God has called white man stubbornly persists in calling black. Why is there so much opposition to calling church-members clergy? God does. Have pastors deemed their particular congregation unworthy of this title? Are Baptists afraid that this uplifting and edifying label would contribute to a much-needed paradigm shift in people’s thinking that they too can “really” understand the Word of God? (2) Not only do many ignore God’s title, they also ignore the warning about lording over the flock. The condescending label of laity is a subtle form of lording in that it is a continual reminder of the inferior intellectual and spiritual capacity of the laity! Could it be that those who put up the most resistance to this Biblical label of clergy are the very ones who are guilty of lording over their flock?

Since church-members are supposed to be taught “all things,” they do not have the intellectual or spiritual cap that is implied through the use of the unbiblical titles of laity and layman. Whatever the Bible teaches, including those so-called tough and controversial issues, can and should be taught and received by God’s clergy, the church-member. One solution to this catholic mindset is to stop using the unbiblical labels laity and layman. Since these terms do “plant” the seed of inferior intellectual / spiritual capability, perhaps pastors ought to stop reminding their church-members of how dumb and unspiritual they are supposed to be!

Scholarship and the Plan for God’s Truth: Fideism

The issue of Biblical scholarship must also be connected to the plan for the Lord’s truth. All throughout Scripture God has given man instructions and commands that He expects man to believe and obey even though man may not understand exactly why the Lord has said something or precisely how the Lord will accomplish something. Although this principle is clearly taught throughout Scripture, *this faith-based / fideistic approach to truth has been attacked because of the man’s universal problem of externalism.* Because of this problem, man prefers to see visible and

tangible evidence before he believes something that God has said. Because God delights in people taking Him at His Word, He does not always provide the “proof” that man thinks that he needs (Heb. 11:6). In His rebuke to doubting Thomas, the Lord clearly placed His divine stamp of approval upon this faith-based approach when He stated “blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (Jn. 20:29).

The familiar faith chapter of Hebrews 11 demonstrates God’s plan for truth. In this passage, God presents several propositions that are intrinsic to the issue of scholarship: (1) Faith in God’s promises equals evidence (v. 1). (2) Faith is essential to properly understanding the entire Word of God, beginning with Genesis 1:1 and continuing throughout the rest of the Bible. (3) Faith is first and foundational to other actions, whether it is the understanding in verse 3, Abel’s offering in verse 4, or Noah’s obedience in verse 8. (4) Any one of these actions that is not preceded by faith is simply not pleasing to God (v. 6). (5) God *deliberately* tests man with difficult claims that seem to contradict everything that man can see. To be more specific, these claims, although they are not difficult to God, are seemingly difficult to man because of his problem of externalism. For example, the divine promise of rain given to Noah was in direct conflict with the fact that Noah had never seen rain. Likewise, the divine promise of a child to Abram and Sara was in direct conflict with the visible and external message sent out by the “staggering” and virtually “dead” bodies of these two individuals (Rom. 4:19-20). All of the individuals found in Hebrews 11 had to lay aside those visible and external “weights” that would have caused them to commit the sin of unbelief in God’s promises (Heb. 12:1-2; cf. 3:13-19; 10:26).

By combining several of these Biblical truths, one is able to derive a Biblical framework for defining scholarship relative to those “tough” theological issues. First and foremost should be the realization that faith in the difficult claims of God should precede one’s understanding of an issue. In other words, if a individual claims to have understanding of a certain issue and yet this individual does not have faith in God’s various related promises, one can be absolutely dogmatic based upon Hebrews 11:6 that this individual’s viewpoint is not pleasing to God! Furthermore, since faith equals evidence, those who cite this Biblical form of evidence have no need to cringe in fear at the charge of “that’s all you’ve got?” or feel the need to fill in the missing informational links that God failed to provide by referring to extra-Biblical sources.

Many theologians miss this Biblical and faith-based view of scholarship and attempt to appease unbelievers (commonly called liberals or modernists) by providing sight-based, extra-Biblical, and rationalistic “evidence.” Many theologians use this rationalistic form of reasoning as a subtle form of intellectual intimidation against those who are not familiar with all of the latest available historical and archaeological “evidence.” This intimidation technique is usually demonstrated using wordy, verbose sentences that are filled with casual references to obscure historical or archaeological facts. Many times these sentences are prefaced by condescending words or statements such as “of course” or “obviously” which imply that any reader that does not see the “obvious” nature of a truth is an intellectual simpleton. This theological rendition of *The Emperor’s New Clothes* pressures individuals to go along with the masses of the intellectual elite so as not to be deemed ignorant. Just as the courageous child boldly proclaimed that the Emperor was naked, so too pastors should also boldly expose the rationalistic posturing of modern scholarship as the sin of unbelief!

In his “scholarly” attempt to discuss the age of the earth, Gleason Archer demonstrates his membership in the

rationalistic “Doubting Thomas Scholar’s Union” as he dismisses what God (O.O.C.) has said and listens to what human scientists (Ph.D.) have said. The “simpleton” view that holds that the creative process took place in six twenty-four hour days “seems to run counter to modern scientific research which indicates that the planet earth was created several billion years ago.”²³ He then proceeds to elaborate upon some of the extra-Biblical “evidence” that God apparently forgot to include in the “all things” of Scripture:

The more recently expanded knowledge of nuclear physics has brought into play another type of evidence which seems to confirm the great antiquity of the earth, that is, the decay of radioactive minerals. According to the calculations of physicists, uranium 238 over a period of four and one-half billion years will decay through sixteen intermediate stages (thorium 234, etc.) to lead 206, which is a stable mineral and will decay into strontium 87. By computing the proportion of the “daughter” product to the parent radioactive deposit it is possible to estimate the age of the specimen in question, assuming the validity of the uniformitarian approach in geochronology.²⁴

Those who are not familiar with Lord’s plan of hiding the specific how and why of many Biblical truths may be intimidated by Dr. Archer’s references to uranium 238, thorium 234, strontium 87, and lead 206. Since Sunday school classes are not typically taught by those holding a Ph.D. in physics, many of the unfortunate layman who have been listening to their pastor “just” teach and preach from the Bible will be overwhelmed as they try to figure out the proper pronunciation of these scientific terms (“What is sturanium 297?”). As this struggle for pronunciation takes place, the scholar has succeeded in demonstrating his intellectual superiority over the pastor and so-called layman. Consequently, many of these dumb church-members quietly file to the back of the intellectual bus of scholarship to grab their seat as they patiently and humbly wait for the latest “memo” from the world of scholarship that will inform them of the proper age of the earth. Certainly a mere pastor or a dumb layman is not able to study the insufficient Word of God to arrive at this date! This humbling experience may cause some pastors to entertain the question of whether or not to pursue a Ph.D. in physics so that they too can have a “say” in this matter! However, readers should not forget the fact that all “scholars” like Gleason Archer who have dismissed God’s Biblical evidence found in Genesis 5 and 10 will one day have to explain to God why they challenged His superior intellect.

This condescending form of rationalism is also demonstrated in the current text issue. In 1999, the intellectual elite “within fundamentalism” were kind enough to issue a “memo” to all of the “dumb” pastors and layman that dictated the official “camp” position. Apparently, the generals within God’s army of fundamentalism noticed that the privates were bickering over this “non-essential” and decided to once and for all end this nonsense so that God’s army could get back to the “really important” task of guarding the “fundamentals.”²⁵ The official title of

²³ Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 196.

²⁴ Archer, p. 197.

²⁵ “Life is too short and God’s work is too great for Fundamentalist Christians to divide over issues on which God has not clearly spoken...Can we afford to spend so much time on this issue?” *From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man: A Layman’s Guide to How We Got Our Bible* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald International, 1999), p. 218.

the book was *From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man: The Layman's Guide to How We Got Our Bible*. Demonstrating their Catholicism by the absolutely condescending and unbiblical subtitle ("*A Layman's Guide...*"), these writers deliberately went out of their way to emphasize the intellectual gap between themselves and the "dumb" pastors who apparently are not capable of guiding the layman within their own church! In discussing the writing tone, Mark Minnick states that the various contributors "have attempted to write for the layman rather than the scholar."²⁶ J.B. Williams asserts that "the aspiration of this committee it to help both pastors and laypeople."²⁷ Just who are these intellectual giants that can "figure out" these esoteric truths about the so-called science of textual criticism? Furthermore, who has appointed these men to be the scholars for the "dumb" pastor and the even "dumber" layman? Because of their emphasis upon the intellectual hierarchy that is so prominent in Catholic thinking,²⁸ perhaps a better name for the book would have been *Dumb and Dumber: An Idiot's Guide to Textual Criticism for Pastors and Layman*. Just as in Catholicism, this hierarchy controls the doctrine of many within the masses and essentially "dares" anyone of the dumb people to challenge the scholarly elite! It almost seems that the unbiblical label "layman" sets the stage for a subtle form of lording!

As one can see, this idea of scholarship is rooted in the rationalistic thinking that suggests that there is something greater than the local church and someone superior than the pastor of a local church. Several Biblical truths argue against this catholic philosophy filled with subtle references to the intellectual and spiritual hierarchy. (1) God has placed the pastor in charge of the local church (Rev. 2:1). (2) The local church is the center of Biblical learning (1 Tim. 3:15). (3) Pastors within local churches have been called to "feed the church of God" (Acts 20:28). (4) The preaching and teaching of the Word of God (not historical and archaeological "evidence") is able to "build up" the local church and enable those within the local church to accomplish every good work (2 Tim. 3:17), including the work of "holding fast the form of sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13). (5) God wants and expects local church members to grow in their relationship with Him and in their understanding of doctrinal issues (Eph. 4:12-16). (6) The emphasis of Scripture is upon humbly receiving Biblical truth in faith (Jn. 17:8) as opposed to the "figure it out" mentality that caters to man's catholic and proud nature!

Furthermore, because local churches have been told to guard "all things" (Matt. 28:20), every pastor and every "layman" is *able* and *expected* to build their belief system about this controversial issue based upon all of God's revelation. Because these truths come from the Lord, the Ultimate Scholar (O.O.C.), readers should not feel the need to "clear" these Biblical truths through their particular alma mater! Several related truths to this textual issue include the following: (1) Jehovah has promised to preserve every word (Ps. 12:6-7). (2) Christ said that man should live by every word (Matt. 4:4). To do this, man must have every word available. (3) God has said that

²⁶ Ibid., p. xi.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁸ The theory of the universal, *visible* church espoused by the Roman Catholic Church results in a *blatant* and *visible* hierarchy controlled by the pope. Likewise, the universal, *invisible* church theory espoused by those "within the ranks of fundamentalism" results in a *subtle* and *invisible* hierarchy usually controlled by the leader of the largest para-church organization.

there is a deliberate and intentional attack upon the words of God (Rev. 22:16-19; 2 Pet. 3:16). This truth must be ignored or downplayed if one accepts the popular theory that God has preserved His Word in the totality of manuscripts. (4) God did tell us *where* He would preserve His Word. 1 Timothy 3:15 and Revelation 22:16 indicate that the local church is responsible for guarding the Word of God. It should not be missed that those who parrot the mantra that “God has not told us where He would preserve His Word” are usually working at a “superior” para-church organization.²⁹ Could it be that those who think the local church is insufficient to do the “real” teaching of the Bible *also* think that the local church is also incapable of guarding the Word of God? (5) Man has a responsibility to receive the Word of God and not to restore the Word of God (Jn. 17:8). The culmination of these related truths points one in the direction of the Received Text. Furthermore, since God said that man will have every word, believers should trust that the Lord has fulfilled His promise, even though believers will not know exactly how He did it!

Whatever the issue may be, it is imperative that believers understand God’s plan for truth. God, in His superior wisdom, did not accidentally leave certain truths out of the Bible. What He did include in the Word of God is sufficient for believers in local churches. Consequently, local church pastors and members have an obligation to study everything that God says on a given issue, and then accept in faith what God has said, even though one cannot explain every detail that the external, rationalistic, and sight-based human mind demands. When this is done, this is Biblical scholarship.

A word of warning should be issued to the card-carrying members of the “Doubting Thomas Scholar’s Union.” Although every individual joins this society at birth, those who experience the new birth through faith in the supernatural event of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ have a God-given obligation to cancel their membership in this club by heeding the Lord’s teaching in John 20:22: “Jesus said unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.” For those who consistently demand to see visible evidence before they believe, could it be that some of these individuals have never placed their faith in the greatest miracle of salvation? Those individuals that are believers and yet continue to demand visible proof before they believe must one day give an account to the Lord. As those individuals try to explain to the Lord why they taught certain theories rooted in rationalism, will the Lord be impressed with their puny Th.D. or Ph.D. degree? Will the Lord reconsider His viewpoint as these individuals explain to Him that His view just did not seem to make sense because mankind could not see all the evidence that they needed to believe? Will He back away from some of His claims when He “learns” that certain individuals graduated *summa cum*

²⁹ The very *last* passage in the Bible (Rev. 22:16-19) indicates very clearly that local churches guard the words of God against the deliberate attack of unbelievers. It is almost as if God wanted people to remember this truth after they finished reading their Bible! In spite of this Biblical clarity, the intellectual “elite” have succeeded in “educating” many pastors and “layman” through the following training techniques: (1) Emphasizing the superior wisdom of para-church professor over the “intellectually challenged” pastor and “layman.” (2) Constant repetition of the “facts” that “God has not told us where he would preserve His Word” and “there are no intentional textual variants.” To use a number analogy, although many originally and correctly thought that “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ”, the constant repetition by the intellectual elite that “ $2 + 2 = 5$ ” has caused many to second guess a truth that appears to be staring them in the face. Consequently, when these masses are prompted by the intellectual elite to finish the mantra, many individuals dutifully and numbly repeat the “fact” that “ $2 + 2 = 5$ ” as they blankly stare off into space. Of course, this mantra that “ $2 + 2 = 5$ ” has been built upon the foundational mantra that para-church professors love to teach their students that states “I’m just a layman / pastor-what do I know?”

laude from their accredited para-church organization? Obviously, the Lord will not stammer in this future event; those who have questioned the Lord's ability will have to answer to Him for this. Perhaps all believers ought to read and study their Bibles recognizing that every claim and promise comes from One Who holds the title of Omniscient and Omnipotent Creator.

Conclusion

Several points should be made to summarize the issue of Biblical scholarship.

1. Biblical scholarship has been attacked because of the universal problem of externalism. This externalism leads one to accept the rationalistic idea that bigger is better. This rationalistic philosophy is demonstrated by the universal church theory, the historic movement of fundamentalism, para-church organizations, and some local church schools.
2. All believers will struggle with this rationalistic attitude unless they submit their minds in faith to the Biblical teaching that the Lord has chosen small things to do big tasks.
3. Every local church is responsible to provide organized, thorough, and quality Bible training. This organized, thorough, and quality Biblical teaching should start when the local church starts, and it should continue for as long as the local church exists.
4. Pastors are required to do this quality teaching of the Bible, even if they do not have a visible doctorate degree. Furthermore, every pastor should "earn" the title of teacher or doctor through the diligent study of the Word of God.
5. Church-members are God's clergy. The Catholic terms laity or layman should be avoided because they are a constant reminder that an individual is part of an inferior class.
6. God expects man to believe what He has said in faith. Furthermore, God deliberately hides certain truths to try man's faith. Man has a responsibility to believe all the statements that the Lord has made on a certain issue, even though man may not have the understanding that he thinks he needs on every particular issue. Because of this, true Biblical scholarship allows for the fact that "I don't know" is a legitimate scholarly answer if God has not revealed that particular Biblical truth.
7. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Ultimate Scholar who alone is worthy of holding the title of Omniscient and Omnipotent Creator. All humans, including those who only have a Ph.D. or a Th.D., will one day give an account to the Lord. Those who have challenged God's truths (propositions that must be accepted in faith) or neglected God's institution of learning (local church) will have to answer to Him for this.
8. Because of the rationalistic baggage associated with the term scholarship, this author believes that through the process of time this term ultimately should be replaced with Biblical terminology. Perhaps a better way to refer to a Biblical scholar is to describe this individual as an example of the "workman that needeth

not to be ashamed” mentioned in 2 Timothy 2:15.

What is Biblical scholarship? Biblical scholarship occurs when pastors and church-members within God’s institution of the local church diligently study the Word of God and accept in faith any and all claims that God makes. Biblical scholarship by this definition should be demonstrated in local churches by pastors and church-members throughout the world.