

Commentary — From the Margins *Questions Asked*

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1–4)

4.

When approaching the Bible [the books], there is an imbedded assumption of infallibility for Christians: the Bible is the infallible Word of God. But scholars know better, which has caused some scholars to become agnostics; has caused most scholars to become agnostics. They know that the Bible is a humanly written book, subject to human foibles; that textual problems exist. How the laity can read Scripture for forty, fifty, sixty or more years and not see these problems testifies to the genuine lack of Bible study taking place within greater Christendom ... Christians tend to swipe their eyes over a line here and a line there, putting this precept with that precept, but never arriving anywhere; never really *reading* Scripture, and certainly never *studying* Scripture, which is perhaps “good” in that they haven’t become agnostics—

Christians repeatedly demonstrate that they are extremely poor readers of text, but for most Christians, Christianity has never been about a text but about a personal relationship with Christ Jesus, whom Christians know almost nothing about, thanks to the Adversary and his ministers.

For centuries, the Roman Church prevented its laity from reading Scripture. For cause. Scripture can be more easily misread than read, as evidenced by the great number of assemblies, sects, and denominations that take whatever they believe *directly from the Bible* ... they cannot all be reading the same book: the divisions between just denominations are great, with my ancestors having been hunted as if vermin by both the Roman Church and the Reformed Church in the 16th and 17th Centuries CE, less than five hundred years ago, for their belief in *Believers Baptism*, adult baptism. Now, the descendants of those who were hunted alongside my ancestors cling to Sunday observance and a triune deity and have only “professional” relationships with me, a Sabbatarian Christian who rejects the assignment of personhood to the glory [the divine breath that sustains heavenly life; the bright fire] of God, *pneuma Theou* (see Ezek 1:26–28). [To

pneuma tou Theou — the breath/spirit of the God — always takes a neuter definite article, thereby linguistically denying to the spirit of God personhood.]

Christianity isn't about taking an ideology, a way of life from a book. Schoolchildren learn from books; infants do not, nor do adults. For what does Scripture say, "All your children shall be taught by [YHWH], / and great shall be the peace of your children" (Isa 54:13 — the first clause is the physical portion of the thought-couplet).

In John's Gospel, Jesus cites the physical portion of the preceding thought-couplet, adding it to one of the most profound statements in the New Testament:

So the Jews grumbled about him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.* It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—not that anyone has seen the Father except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." (John 6:41–51 emphasis added)

In this Christian era, unless the Father draws the person from this world, the person—no one—can come to Jesus. But of those persons drawn by the Father from this world and delivered to Jesus for nurturing and schooling, Christ Jesus will raise all of them up on the last day because they will have eaten the flesh of Jesus, a figurative way of saying that the man Jesus dwells within each of them in the form of His spirit [*pneuma Christou*] being in the spirit of the person [*to pneuma tou 'anthropou*] as the spirit of God [*pneuma Theou*] is in the spirit of Christ [again, *pneuma Christou*].

Paul briefly addresses the subject of being taught by God:

For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives us His holy spirit [*to pneuma autou to 'agion eis 'umas* — the spirit of Him the Holy into us]. Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for *you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another*, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. (1 Thess 4:7–10 emphasis added)

We as Christians are taught by God through the *Parakletos*, the spirit of truth. We should have been taught the Commandments of God by our human parents; for keeping the Commandments is the outward or physical expression of love for God, neighbor, and brother.

If our parents neglected to teach us to keep the Commandments, as is the case with an increasing number of adults, then we are not free of the obligation to know the Commandments: we simply have to learn them on our own. Finding a copy of them didn't use to be difficult in the Western world—actually it was for

the Roman Church removed a Commandment and split another to arrive at the proscribed number of Ten.

Keeping the Commandments doesn't make a person spiritually minded; nor does it curry favor with God. Keeping the Commandments is, again, the basis for showing love for God, neighbor, and brother. It is the reasonable expectation of all who live, regardless of whether the person has ever seen an inscribed copy of this Royal Law.

Paul writes,

For God shows no partiality. For *all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law*, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. (Rom 2:11–16 emphasis added)

Who told Christians that they do not have to keep the Law, that Christians are not under the Law? Does not being under the Law prevent the Christian from perishing when the Christian transgresses the Law? Not according to Paul although the lawless will quickly cite:

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh [outward circumcision, the subject of the epistle]? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does He who supplies the spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. For *all who rely on works of the law* are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised spirit through faith. (Gal 3:1–14 emphasis and double emphasis added)

Abraham's belief of God was counted to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6), but his belief of God was about having an heir come from his own loins. And this belief was tested at Mount Moriah when Abraham was told to sacrifice the fruit of his righteousness, his son Isaac, with James writing about the testing of faith:

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are

committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So *speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.* What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body [soma] apart from the spirit [pneumatōs — breath] is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. (Jas 2:8–26 emphasis added)*

Belief of God [faith, *pisteos*] has no life without being put into practice through those things that hands do, that the body does ... when I had a chainsaw-outboard dealership on the Kenai [1976–1979], I both ran the business as well as did all of the service work, which at times was nearly overwhelming. During the summer dozens of customers would daily ask me to get for them this or that, and occasionally I would forget to order a part or an item. When the customer returned to inquire about the item, despite my sincere resolve to tell the truth, I found it too easy to say, *It's been shipped*. Delivery to Alaska in the 1970s took a while. I and many other businesses could use shipping as an excuse for delays. And as soon as the customer would leave the shop, I would phone in the order and have it airfreighted even if I lost money on the deal: I had already lost more than money when I said that the item had been shipped.

Good intentions only gets a person in the door; Abraham's belief of God only got Abraham a son, Isaac. Abraham's belief of God didn't get Isaac to adulthood. It was what Abraham did [Gen chap 22] that brought Abraham's righteousness coming from his belief of God to life, which isn't how Christians usually think of *life* ... Abraham became the personification of righteousness when, by his actions [works], brought his belief of God to life by proceeding with the sacrifice of Isaac until stopped by the Lord.

In a contrary way, the giving of the Law brought Sin to life through sin being personified in the sinner:

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to

covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. (Rom 7:7–11)

We, as sons of disobedience, consigned to disobedience (*cf.* Eph 2:1–3; Rom 11:32), are the personification of Sin, the demonic king of the South, when we transgress the Law ... when the Christian attends weekly Sunday worship services, the Christian is the personification of Sin; for what advantage is it to the Christian to not worship idols if the Christian transgresses the Sabbath?

But, do Christians really not worship idols, or at least one idol, the Bible as the infallible word of God?

The collective mindset of Christians has made an idol of Scripture, reading here a little, there a little, taking precept and stacking it upon precept as if these precepts were *Lincoln logs*, constructing from mostly tradition a house in which they can safely dwell until faced with death. Then things come apart for far too many: doubts arise. But it is usually too late to do anything about these doubts. There isn't time enough left in life to build for themselves another house, one that is not far from the first, but one that will have the *Christian* living in this world as Jesus lived; living as an outwardly uncircumcised observant Jew, keeping the Sabbath, eating only clean meats, taking no usury, demonstrating love for neighbor and brother by doing for others those things that the man Job did, demonstrating love for God by the person's obedience based on belief/faith [*pisteos*].

But what should a Christian believe about God; about Christ Jesus? The author of Luke's Gospel writes to *Theophilus* [*lover of God*] a Greco-Roman style biography of the man Jesus, as he has come to know the history of Jesus from being an observer, to confirm that whatever *Theophilus* has been taught about God and Christ Jesus is correct. Presumably, this same author wrote the Book of Acts to show that those things done by Christ had a counterpart in things done by the primitive Church, especially by Paul, with the Book of Acts written in the form of a Second Sophist novel, and with its concluding scene [in which hero and heroine come together] destroyed for this concluding episode would have had Paul being martyred as a stand-in for Christ Jesus, thereby elevating Paul to the status of being Christ [to being the Bride]. And such an ending would never do; for with this ending, Christendom itself would come to an end.

Between the 1st-Century CE and the 4th-Century CE, from which comes the first complete codex of New Testament scripture (plus a few extra texts), the ending of Mark's Gospel underwent revision to make it better conform to Luke's Gospel, and what was said to Jesus when raised from baptism in Luke's Gospel was revised to make it conform with Mark's Gospel. But Matthew's Gospel and John's Gospel remain at odds with Luke's Gospel: the *Jesus* in Matthew's Gospel and the *Jesus* in John's Gospel—while not being the same *Jesus*—differ in small but significant ways from the *Jesus* in Luke's Gospel; for in both Matthew's Gospel and John's Gospel, the Theos who created all things physical (the God of

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) entered His creation as His unique Son, the man Jesus, whereas in Luke's Gospel and particularly in the Book of Acts (see Acts 17:24, 30–31), God the Father was the Creator of all things physical, not the Logos [*o Logos*] who was God [*Theos*] and who was with or of [*pros*] the God [*ton Theon*] in primacy [*arche*] when this Logos gave up equality with God and entered His creation as His unique Son (*cf.* Phil 2:5–8; John 1:1–3, 14; 3:16).

Without a definite article, the Greek icon <*arche*> should not be translated into English as <*the beginning*>, but translated into English as <*primacy*> as in the Roman Emperor being the *first citizen* of Rome, thereby having *primacy* over all other Romans ... translators have to supply the article that the author of John's Gospel did not include in his opening to this Gospel that seems to have been written to set things straight, thus ending the confusion created by the Synoptic Gospels, especially Luke's Gospel with this author's talkative *Jesus* on His way to being crucified.

The authors of Matthew's Gospel, of Mark's Gospel, of John's Gospel don't tell readers why these authors wrote their texts; these authors don't give further readers much information about themselves or give readers their justifications for writing the texts we have in the biblical canon. Only the author of Luke's Gospel discloses his reason for writing, and his reason was to confirm what a Greek convert [or category of converts] had been taught at some earlier period.

The structure of an oral narrative would have as its first element the storyteller's justification for telling [authority to tell] the ensuing narrative, which is how the author of Luke's Gospel begins, with this beginning satisfying orality's cultural demands. Thus, the reader or the one to whom Luke's Gospel is being read does not suspect narrative difficulties to appear in the ensuing story, but would willingly accept what follows, an account of the supernatural birth of John the Baptist and the elevation of Mary through the Magnificat, thus beginning the tradition of Mariology.

Luke's Gospel doesn't begin with Jesus' ministry, as it theologically should, or with the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob in heaven prior to this God of living ones entering His creation as His unique Son. Rather it places importance on Zechariah and on Mary, mother of Jesus, with the angel Gabriel appearing to Zechariah, father of John, and to Mary. Likewise, the Book of Acts doesn't begin with the Apostle Paul, but with Peter speaking on Pentecost and with Peter and John in the temple shortly after Pentecost, thereby structuring Zechariah and Elizabeth in Luke's Gospel as the chiral image of Peter and John in Acts, with the temple as the background for both images. This structure will also have John the Baptist in Luke's Gospel being the chiral image of the Apostle Paul in Acts, with John the Baptist's indeterminable imprisonment by Herod in Luke forming the chiral image of Paul's indeterminable imprisonment in Acts. Therefore, as the man Jesus carried on John the Baptist's ministry of repentance at a higher level—at a spiritual level—the glorified Christ Jesus will carry on the Apostle Paul's ministry at a higher level.

Again, those Christians who have truly been born of God through the indwelling of Christ Jesus will have within them the mind of Christ and will be

taught by God Himself through the *Parakletos*, the spirit of truth that is from the Father.

Spiritual infants receive and ingest spiritual milk, bottled in branded cartons: Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Mennonite, Mormon—the brand names go on for longer than I want to pitch them. Eventually, though, these infants mature enough that they can digest baby food, which still isn't solid food but a softened gruel, bland and tasteless. It is now when these spiritual toddlers are ready to be taught to walk uprightly before God by keeping the Commandments ... will they keep the Commandments? No. Are they able to keep the Commandments? Again, no, even though they can come closer to keeping the Commandments than they realize, especially those who will not try to walk uprightly.

Is a human infant born able to walk uprightly as a biped? A fawn stands immediately after birth; a calf usually stands before the cow finishes licking her calf clean. A newly birthed whale calf swims immediately. But a human infant is truly helpless for days, weeks, even months; for human maturation forms the time-linked shadow and copy [the chiral image] of non time-linked spiritual maturation ...

How long it takes for a human son of God to walk uprightly before God isn't determined by the passage of time, but by the exercise of judgment, of discernment:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (Heb 5:12–14)

To distinguish good from evil, a spiritual yardstick is needed, with this yardstick being the Royal Law. The person who knows not to tolerate one person murdering another person; not to tolerate one person stealing the property of another person, judges the deeds of the murderer or of the thief, and condemns these deeds, with Paul writing,

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you." (1 Cor 5:9–13)

Spiritual maturity comes through discerning spirits; through judging the deeds of the Church, not excusing unrighteousness, thereby introducing leaven into unleavened dough. And what would the pastors of this world's Christianity have disciples do: *don't judge others*, with the passage most often cited being Romans chapter 14:

So then ***each of us will give an account of himself to God***. Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a

stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in holy spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. *The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. **Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.*** But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith [*pisteos*] is sin. (Rom 14:12–23 emphasis and double emphasis added)

You are to judge the Church, beginning with yourself; for you must give an account—a judgment—of yourself to God. And if judgment begins with the household of God (with yourself and with myself), then what will become of those who do not know that judgment is today upon them?

For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. (1 Pet 4:17–19)

A Christian matures not through how many years have passed since the Christian was baptized, or through how many times the Christian read the Bible cover to cover, or by the number of seminary courses taken or the degrees received. The Christian matures spiritually by judging him or herself, purging evil from within the person, and by extension, from within the Body of Christ. And to know what evil is, the person is taught by Moses, by Christ Jesus, by God the Father. So what should *Theophilus* have been taught that Luke's Gospel should have confirmed?

First, returning to John the Baptist disappearing from Luke's Gospel as Paul disappears from Acts, John's preaching of repentance ends somewhat abruptly:

So with many other exhortations he preached good news [gospel] to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison. Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the holy spirit descended on Him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:18–22)

There is a consistent logic throughout Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts that is humanly more sophisticated than is the central metaphor of Matthew's Gospel, but a logic that rings false for me ... more about this later.

Who taught Greek converts to live as uncircumcised Judeans? Peter did:

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For *before* certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, **how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?**" (Gal 2:11–14 emphasis and double emphasis added)

In Peter's own epistles, he writes,

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

1Pe 1:12 It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the [gospel to] you [by] spirit holy sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but *as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."* [Peter's citation is from Lev 11:44–45, and concerns clean meats] And if you call on Him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Pet 1:10–19 — this is Peter beginning to feed Christ's lambs: see John 21:15)

If converts are to live as uncircumcised Judeans—for with the giving of the spirit, the outer self of the person ceases to be of importance—to live as circumcised of heart Judeans, inwardly keeping the Commandments and spurning those things that defile the person (i.e., corruption coming out of the person by either words or deeds), then what a person eats or doesn't eat is of scant importance, but what the person desires to eat or not eat is of paramount importance. If the person desires to be *common*, desires to eat what common humanity eats—swine, crab, shrimp, lobster—desires to live as a common person of this world, in this world, then the person is not special; has not been born of God. For Peter in his *feeding of lambs* also writes,

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, *you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame." So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that

the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But *you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet 2:1–10 emphasis added)

Peter introduces the possibility that not all who convert to *the Way* [Christianity] have the tasted the reality that the Lord is good; not all are truly born of spirit; not all are truly infant sons of God. But those who have been born of spirit have become living stones being built into a spiritual house, the cornerstone of which is Christ Jesus. And about this the Apostle Paul wrote,

But *I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it.* And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and *each will receive his wages according to his labor.* For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw--each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Cor 3:1–15 emphasis added)

Before Paul began his ministry, was there a foundation laid for the house of God, the building to be constructed from living stones? Was there any foundation anywhere for the temple of God? Not a trick question. Did the Apostles upon whom Jesus breathed His breath, thereby directly transferring to them His spirit [*pneuma Christou*], saying when He did, *Receive spirit holy* (John 20:22), lay the foundation for the living temple of God? Apparently they did not; for Paul went on to write,

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit [*to pneuma tou Theou* — the breath of the God] dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (1 Cor 3:16–17)

If what Paul writes is true—and it is—then disciples would not nor should not have ever again entered Herod's temple, the temple of a differing deity, not something that the author of Sophist novel, Acts, understood; for this author who sought to confirm what *Theophilus* was taught has his *Paul* (as well as Jews who converted to the Jesus Movement) repeatedly going in and out of Herod's temple

as the counterpart [chiral image] of John the Baptist preaching repentance in the wilderness.

The Jesus of John's Gospel breathed on ten of His first disciples, with the number ten being significant; for ten Jews were necessary to begin another synagogue of Israel—and what's seen in Jesus' disciples directly receiving the holy spirit on the same day as when Jesus ascended to the Father [the day of the Wave Sheaf Offering as Sadducees reckoned when this observance was to be kept] is the formation of another sect of Israel, a sect not based on physical circumcision or biological descent from the patriarchs, but a sect based on descent from Christ Jesus through the indwelling of the spirit of Christ in the convert. This new synagogue was an assembly of inner selves; an assembly of those who had/have tasted the goodness of God. Thus, in this assembly, there was neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free. Every person was a slave of righteousness, purchased from the Adversary by the blood of Christ. Every person was priest in the temple of God, the spiritual house built of living stone, with Christ Jesus being the high priest of this synagogue, this sect, this *Way* that would have circumcision of the heart establishing entrance.

Now, where in Paul's epistles does Paul speak of entering the temple and subjecting himself and his gospel to the scrutiny of Levitical priests?

For you [Galatians] have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I [Paul] persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when He who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to me, in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God because of me. Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. (Gal 1:13–2:2)

If Paul met privately with the Peter (and James) three years after he was called, he did not go to Herod's temple. If it was fourteen years later before he returned to Jerusalem for the so-called Jerusalem Conference of Acts chapter 15, and if he privately set before those who seemed influential the revelation that he had, then the so-called Jerusalem Conference didn't occur as recorded in Acts 15 ... the account in Acts is fictionalized history, necessarily written after Paul was no longer alive to refute the account beyond what Paul wrote when he said, *In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!*

Why would Paul feel it necessary to, in his Aristotelian argument to the holy ones in Galatia (in his argument against outward circumcision, the mutilation of the flesh), to even introduce the possibility that he was lying? In deconstructing this odd remark, a reader would have to conclude that the Circumcision Faction was teaching that Paul's gospel was other than what Paul claimed; that Paul had spent more time in Jerusalem than he admitted; that Paul knew he was teaching falsely, a charge still leveled against him by some Sabbatarian Christians who contend that Paul hijacked the Jesus Movement, wresting ideological control of this Movement away from the first Apostles.

If Paul truly laid the foundation of living stones for the spiritual temple; if each disciple truly born of spirit is a living stone, then why would Paul or Peter or John ever set foot in Herod's temple? They won't have, at least no more than they would have entered Apollo's temple ...

I don't attend other pastors' congregations. Why should I? Really, what have they to teach me when all will be taught by God? They either know what I know, or they are spiritually immature or spiritually false. For what would I hear in their services? That according to Daniel's visions, there will be ten resurrections of the Holy Roman Empire, when Rome, the Roman Church, and the Roman See are not mentioned in any of Daniel's visions.

If I am to judge myself and by extension, to judge the Church of God, what sort of judgment will I render on fat sheep that push and shove lean sheep, when these fat sheep are without spiritual understanding: they either don't know Scripture, or they deliberately tell lies about what Scripture says. And it would be extremely disrespectful of me to argue with them in their own congregations ... this is how Paul would have felt about returning to Herod's temple. He simply would not have done so. He would have kept himself separate from unbelieving Jews, not even eating with them. He certainly didn't eat with the Circumcision Faction at Antioch when Peter separated himself from uncircumcised Gentile converts so as not to offend the Jews that had come from Jerusalem.

Now, if Paul felt strongly enough about not succumbing to the Circumcision Faction that he would publicly rebuke Peter for trying to keep peace with them, Paul would have felt strongly enough about the temple being the Church that when he visited Jerusalem, he would have visited the Church in Jerusalem, but he wouldn't have visited the temple—

Also, there is a logistical problem in what the author of Acts writes about the pre-Paul Church of God:

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the holy spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself." And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So *those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.* (Acts 2:37–41 emphasis added)

*

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But *many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.* (Acts 4:1–4 emphasis added)

How large of a city was Jerusalem in 31 CE?

Unfortunately, no good census records exist for 31 CE. but in 70 CE, when Jerusalem's population had been swollen by the Roman commander Titus' tactic of permitting all who wanted to enter Jerusalem to enter, but permitting no one to leave thereby exerting pressure on Jerusalem's infrastructure (food and water supplies), approximately 97,000 prisoners were taken when Roman legions sacked the city.

In 31 CE, Jerusalem should have had a permanent population of about 25,000, a number that can be supported from its size. Its population, however, would have swollen to more than a 100,000 the three seasons [Passover, Feast of Weeks, Tabernacles] when all male Israelites were to appear before the Lord in the place where He set His name. Thus, Jerusalem was both small enough to notice 8,000 converts to the Jesus Movement, and large enough to cater to these converts, especially if they sold all they had and contributed the moneys to a common pool used to feed everyone.

But no one even fifty years after Calvary seemed to notice converts to the Jesus Movement. In fact there are only four secular references to Christ Jesus or to the Jesus Movement in the first century after Calvary, with two of these references coming in the 2nd-Century CE.

If a sect of 8,000 were to suddenly appear on the theological horizon today, would they not be noticed? Would others not be talking about them? Would Homeland Security not be worried about them? Of course there would be talk ... but there wasn't any talk about these 8,000 in the 1st-Century, strongly suggesting that no mass conversion occurred on Pentecost or anytime that summer, meaning that the author of Acts expanded the actual number of converts to the Jesus Movement by a substantial factor.

Josephus claimed that approximately 1.1 million Jews were killed in the rebellion against Rome from 66 to 70 CE ... assuming this number is correct, there were still enough Jews left to twice more rebel against Rome, in 115–117 CE and in 133–135 CE, and to have a substantial influence on Roman politics, and by extension upon the early Christian Church. The decrees of Emperor Hadrian [135 CE] against Judaism made it necessary that the early Christian Church establish ideological and political distance from Judaism; thus, following Hadrian's decrees, most Christians brought to an end their *Jewish* practices. They became different from Jews and Judaism, thereby escaping the full impact of Hadrian's draconian decrees.

But it isn't the separation of Jew from Christian convert that here interests me. It is the number of Jews that would have, should have made a thrice annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Assuming all male Israelites came to Jerusalem three seasons in a year (Ex 23:14, 17; Deut 16:16), there would have been more than a

million Jews in Jerusalem for the holy days, a number that would have been difficult to feed and house for the period between Trumpets and the Last Great Day, and between Passover and the last Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And in a million people flooding into Jerusalem three seasons a year—against assuming that every Israelite male made the trek to Jerusalem—8,000 converts could disappear, attracting no attention at all.

But the size of the Temple and the Temple Mount was a limiter.

Under Herod's rebuilding of the Second Temple, the Temple Mount doubled in size, going from about 18 acres to nearly 37 acres. In comparison, America's National Mall, from the Lincoln Memorial to Grant's Memorial is approximately 309 acres. And for the immediacy, discounting the size of structural walls and entrances, the maximum number of people that could have stood on the Temple Mount would have been about 100,000 persons, with an absolute upper limit being 200,000. It is more likely that Jerusalem's population temporarily expanded to 80,000 during high Sabbath observances, with the author of Acts' 8,000 representing a tithe of those who would usually appear before the Lord three seasons a year.

If a tithe [10%] of an Israelite's grain harvest belonged to the Lord [still belongs to God], and if disciples are represented by the early and latter grain harvests of Judean hills, then it follows that a tithe of Israel belongs to God and the remainder of Israel does not, with this principle found in Nehemiah 11:1–2.

The author of Luke's Gospel and of Acts had to get his number of converts from somewhere, and the most logical place is from a tithe of those Israelite males that came to Jerusalem three times a year to appear before the Lord where He set His name. If there truly had been the sudden conversion of three thousand in a day, then shortly afterwards, five additional thousand, Roman officials would have hurriedly sent a flurry of letters to their superiors, reporting this strange occurrence and asking for instructions on how to handle what would seem to be a contagious outbreak of enthusiasm. But no such correspondence occurred. And even a century after Calvary, the Jesus Movement was still a small, obscure reformist movement that did not worship the Emperor as god.

The Jesus Movement is an anti-family movement—

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (Matt 10:34–37)

—and as such, Christianity as taught by Jesus, John, and Paul would have been very difficult to “sell” to Greek converts, for whom family was everything. It was really after Hadrian's edicts against Jews and Judaism following Judea's third revolt against Roman rule in approximately sixty years that Christianity divested itself of its Jewish roots and achieved popularity among Greeks ... without Sabbath observance and the Law, Christianity rapidly gained popularity. But this form of Christianity was so distorted that Christ could not be found in it, not something that greatly disturbed the Adversary.

As a writer, one of the things I realized early on was that fiction had to be believable. Because the fictional story being told was not true, even when based on historical events, the story had to be absolutely believable or the reader's *suspension of disbelief* would be broken, and the reader would put your book down and not return to it.

When writing non-fiction, whatever happened actually happened and can be reported as having happened: if something unbelievable happened—in 1975, I had a three-log-long tree fall across the top of me, bounce up in the air twenty feet then fall across me a second time before being hurled two hundred or more yards; there was a witness to this event—then something unbelievable happened and the miracle can be discussed. But a fictional text does not permit the unbelievable to occur. Only the believable is permitted, with the tradecraft of the author making the believable seem absolutely factual via sequencing the release of information.

Why late 1st and 2nd Century Greek Sophist novels are not widely read today has to do with the tradecraft of their authors: they were really not very good at telling their stories, at least not by 20th and 21st Century standards. Their plotting had motifs being like prayer beads, with these motifs strung together on a journey that treks through imprisonment, a trial scene, and a shipwreck, this journey keeping hero separated from heroine for most of the story.

When I moved down from Alaska to pursue a Doctorate at Idaho State, I settled in a small town south of Pocatello. I hadn't been there long when it was learned that I had a Greek copy of the New Testament. The Bishopric of the local ward soon realized that I knew more Scripture than they did; so while they would come and ask questions, they kept youthful missionaries away. But I thought it interesting how they sought to introduce me to Mormonism: they gave me a copy of the Book of Mormon, asked me to read it, and see if it didn't seem true ... it didn't. It was written in fake 17th-Century grammar, and it contradicted itself and history in too many places. But perhaps the greatest problem was the teaching that human persons could become angels.

The author of Hebrews wrote,

And to which of the angels has He ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? (Heb 1:13–14)

Angels serve human sons of God, heirs of God. It would be a step backwards for a human son of God to become an angelic son of God, but this is a subject I have written about many times—and one I will again write about elsewhere.

The tactic of asking a person to read the Book of Mormon and see if it doesn't seem true apparently works reasonably well for Latter Day Saints, but then, how many "Christians" read the Book of Acts and believe what is written in this Sophist novel? Even more than believe the Book of Mormon, with the Book of Acts having no more truth in it than has the Book of Mormon.

Unless a Christian has within the person the mind of Christ and is being taught by the *Parakletos*, the spirit of truth, the person simply cannot understand Scripture. The person remains deceived by the Adversary. And this is a large

problem within Sabbatarian Christendom, which has taken—with less than no understanding of Scripture—Acts 4:10–12 and used it as doctrine, as a litmus test to determine who is and who isn't of Christ.

Perhaps it is because I inherited an audio difficulty from my father and then passed this difficulty on to my daughters that I am acutely aware of the gospel Paul taught: *IT ISN'T THE SURFACE OF THINGS THAT MATTER!* It is their substance.

- It isn't the sounds of words that matter. Witchcraft focuses on the sounds of words. It is what meaning you attach to words that matter.
- It isn't physical breath that matters, this breath supplying the oxygen molecules needed to sustain the dark fire of cellular oxidation that sustains physical life. It is the bright fire that is the glory of God that matters, this bright fire sustained by the breath/spirit of God.

I read like other people read, but I also read like an author, like a person interested in the tradecraft of writing. In a literal sense, I left an outboard repair shop in Kodiak, Alaska, to enter University of Alaska Fairbanks' graduate writing program Fall 1988, with no more English undergraduate coursework than the Freshman Comp sequence, the first semester of which was taken at Willamette University Fall 1963, and the second semester at Anchorage Community College Spring semester 1981. And in the quarter century between when I began college as a 16 year old Math/Physics major, and when I returned to college in UAF's Creative Writing program, I read more than cereal boxes and the Bible. I would suggest that other Christians read more than political commentaries and Scripture.

In an essay published in 2001 collection titled, *From the Margins*, I wrote,

SMITH, LOGGER, FISHERMAN, WRITER

Since the narratives of Homer, life in Western literature has been portrayed as a journey, the metaphor being that the passage of life equals distance traveled. Often the journey is a voyage, a motif present even in a story like *Moby-Dick*; Thoreau quietly floated the Merrimack. The downstream river trip can signify that a person can't go back in time, that an adult can't recapture his or her youth, that no fountain-of-youth exists. But Homer's *Odyssey* tells of a figurative upstream journey like a salmon's migration to its spawning gravel, the gravel of its birth, where it will breed and die.

A voyage into the unknown is living life itself, the unknown representing tomorrow, holding, perhaps, danger and excitement but most often the mundane. Literary heroes dared sail 20,000 leagues under the sea, or to the center of the earth, or more realistically, to trek over the Great Silk Road or mush dogs to the South Pole. A few of us humans have even walked on the moon. For more of us, though, a drift or fishing trip down Alaska's Kenai River is enough venturing into the unknown. We want to know most of what tomorrow will bring. We are not really looking for excitement, only for interesting things, those things that John Haines concedes to travel writers. The thrill-seeker is considered abnormal. We would like to have control of our lives. In literary shorthand, we want heaven

when we die; we want to believe an idealized destination awaits us at the end of this voyage called life. Then the obstacles we encounter won't matter. The distance of our voyage doesn't matter. Only arriving matters. We can leave all of our problems in that metaphorical river we travel as if those problems were old tires or tin cans, oil slicks or biotoxins.

But it takes no courage to continue living shackled to the trash that the heavenbound person will leave behind at death (although nearly every religion believes humanity's ultimate destination is heaven, the focus of ancient Hebrew prophets was making the deserts here on earth bloom). It takes courage to clean up that left-behind trash, to pick up those pieces of our character that hang like plastic grocery bags on submerged tree branches ... I once sailed out of Kodiak, heading for Whale Pass and Raspberry Strait. We were outbound for a week of longlining halibut. My wife was putting away boat groceries, and after rounding Buoy Four, I looked behind us to see if a following vessel had made the turn or whether its skipper was heading directly across Marmot Bay. And there behind us, one every hundred yards or so, were floating the cardboard boxes in which we had packed our groceries aboard, each bobbing like a buoy. They were like the crumbs of Hansel & Gretel.

All of us leave a trail, but not all of us leave distinguishable footprints.

Courage is required to take that first step into an uncharted tomorrow, one in which our character is our only marker. It is there, at that first step, where most journeys end, or rather, fail to begin. Once a person is well on his or her way into the unknown, coping, adapting, learning, stretching oneself to do what wasn't before possible takes over. The momentum of the journey doesn't let a person think about not continuing. Explorer, pioneer, pilgrim—few have seen themselves as courageous. Survival is what the journey is about until the unknown becomes the familiar. Courage is about getting started.

I am familiar with reluctance to begin. I have felt hesitation, even fear. When I first went to sea, I knew very little; plus, I experience rather severe motion sickness. All the while I lived along the Oregon Coast, I fished freshwater. I didn't go to sea (I don't even like sitting in a passenger car; subtle movements make me vomit). I probably hadn't been across the bar at Newport, Oregon, ten hours total before I, after selling my Kenai chainsaw/outboard dealership, bought a 29-foot Bartender sitting on barrels in Homer, Alaska. I hadn't been to sea in Cook Inlet, let alone out of the Inlet. Acquaintances thought I was crazy, but I knew I wasn't. I was merely pushing hard against foolishness. But I was also facing some tough decisions: I had begun to dislike myself. Having a sales/service dealership had magnified character defects that I thought I had cleaned up. I needed to get away, at least for a while, from the temptation to tell customers that a piston or a CD module or whatever had been ordered when I had forgotten to order it. The telling of the little lie had become too easy, and it isn't the big hunks of trash like old car bodies that kills a river. It's the little things like oil droplets that smother life. One droplet here and there doesn't kill, but one droplet becomes another and another until there's an oil sheen, then a slick, and finally the river catches fire, a definition of life in hell or in Gary, Indiana.

What I didn't know about the sea was so great that I believed I could sail to Kodiak, and possibly into the Aleutians. But I did know enough to be scared: in a very real sense, I was afraid of the unknown. I had heard stories of how rough the

weather was in the Barren Islands, on Shelikof Strait, at Sand Point, King Cove, Dutch Harbor. I knew mileage-wise how far away Kodiak was. I bought charts of the archipelago. But for the three years I had been selling outboards to Cook Inlet fisherman, admittedly, to mostly setnetters, I was told many, many horror stories about Shelikof Strait. So when these Inlet fishermen learned that I had bought a boat their advice was that I should stay in Cook Inlet, and fish out of Homer or Seldovia, perhaps Kenai or Kasilof. But at Kodiak, I was told by an equal number of fishermen about how terrible the weather was and the tides were in Cook Inlet. As far as Kodiak fishermen were concerned the only place that began to compare in roughness with Cook Inlet was fishing at False Pass. But when I sailed south to King Cove, I spent a Sabbath afternoon with a fisherman who regularly fished False Pass, and he told me the worse seas he had ever seen were on Shelikof Strait, that no place was as bad as there.

Every fisherman I spoke to in 1979 said somewhere else was worse than where he fished. ...

Considering the possibility that the Book of Acts is truly a Second Sophist novel—and it is—can be scary; for what if you are wrong? What if I am wrong? What if I had turned around and gone back to Homer in May 1979, instead of sailing to Kodiak, then in July, on to Dutch Harbor? I'll never know; for that isn't what happened. Sobeit.

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