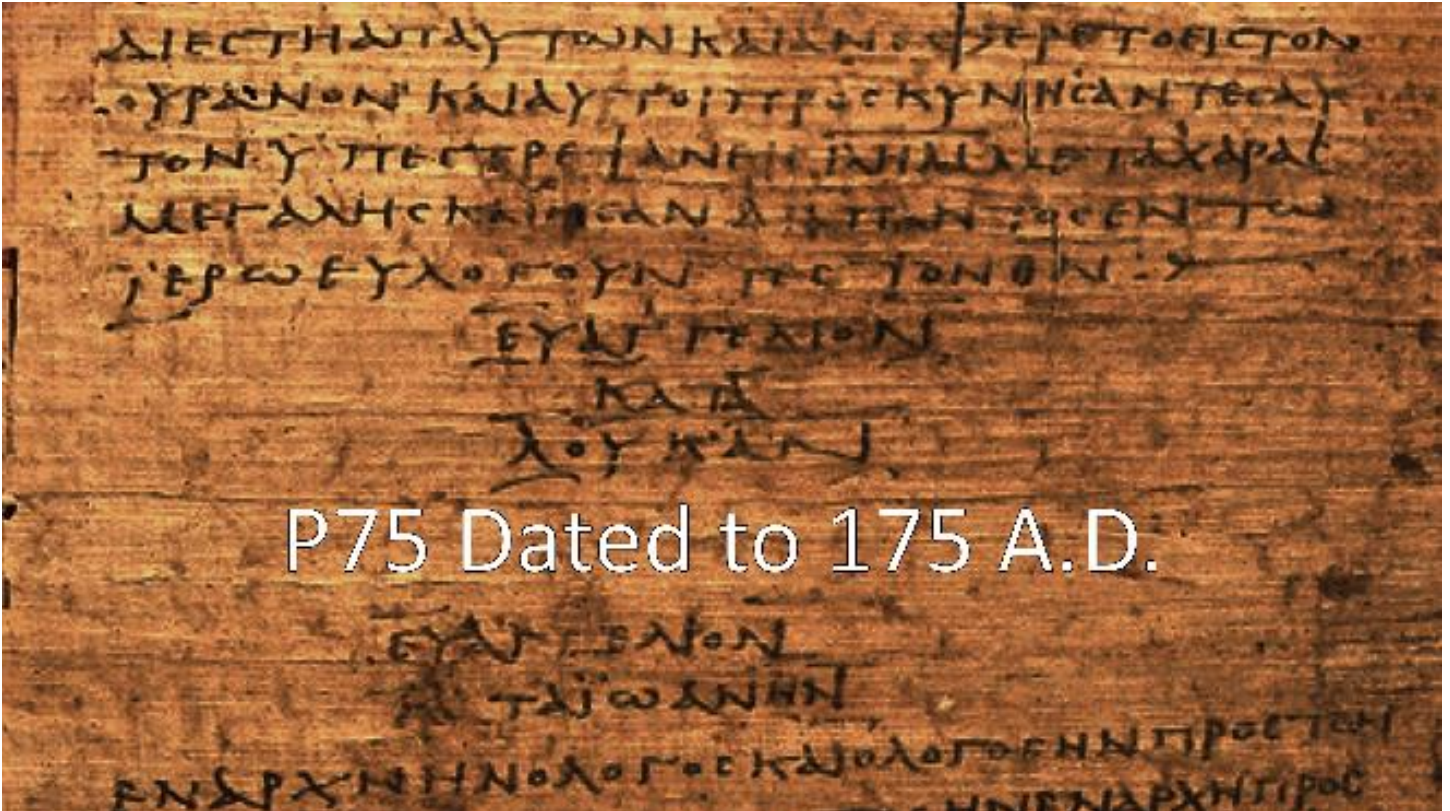


In giving you an outline, I'm not afforded many surprises, so – no outline today. Our next endeavor, as

you can plainly see from the slide, is the Book of Acts. This will be a bit different than our previous studies in that we are going to use the Book of Acts as the framework to also go through the Letters or Epistles of the Bible as they naturally occur in the historical setting and chronology in which they were written. As an example, when we get to the place where Paul wrote to the Galatian churches, we will pause our progress in Acts and go through the Book of Galatians before continuing.

Now, since that's our plan, getting through the Book of Acts is not the goal. We're not trying to finish it and move on, instead we're using it as a launch pad for other Bible Books. We may be working on this adventure until Christ Returns and that's okay, because I promise you that there is no topic pertaining to Christianity that can't be studied as we journey together through Acts in this way.

What is the Book of Acts, sometimes called, "The Acts of the Apostles," or better "The Acts of the Holy Spirit," and sometimes simply called "Acts"? It is the second volume of a two-volume work written by Luke, primarily for the church, under the patronage of a very wealthy benefactor named Theophilus.



P75 Dated to 175 A.D.

Luke's first volume opens with, 1Since many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, 2just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 3it seemed fitting to me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in an orderly sequence, most excellent Theophilus; 4so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1–4).

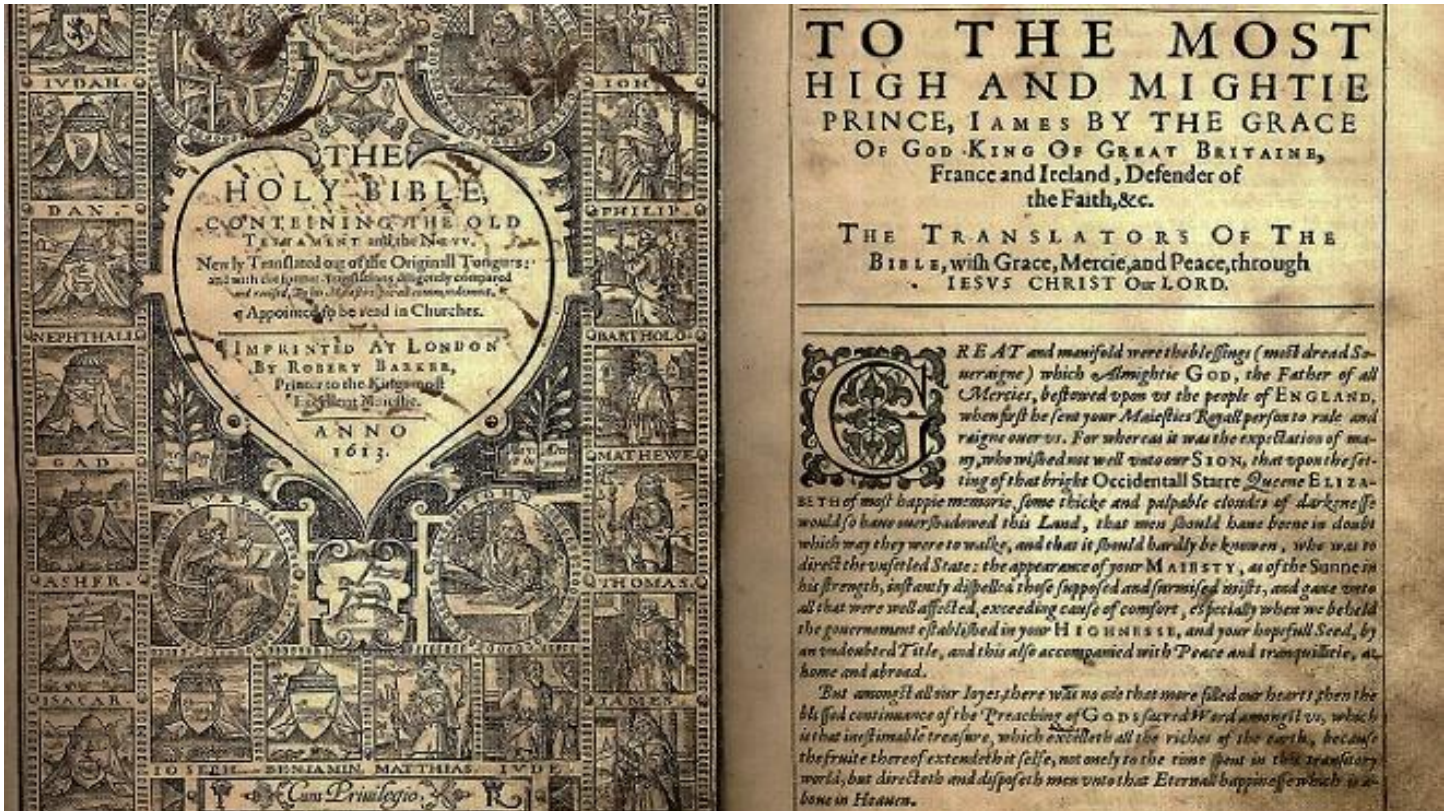
Theophilus was a fairly common Greek name attested to as early as the third century B.C. The name means “one who loves God,” or “one who is loved by God.” Of

course, originally the god in mind was one of the Greek gods in their mythological pantheon.

Some people suppose that Theophilus wasn't a person at all, but that the title is a generalized term to address the reader or listener directly. That the term simply means that Luke dedicated his work to all those who love God and are loved by God. It's nice, but untenable. Theophilus was, without question, a real dude.

The superlative title "most excellent" in front of his name along with the formatting parallels the standard practice at that time of giving a nod to the benefactor, or sponsor, of a work. God used the wealthy and powerful man, Theophilus, to enable the researcher-author Luke, the time, and resources to produce his two-volume composition, which we know as the Bible Books, Luke, and Acts.

Theophilus was almost certainly a Gentile upper-class landowner most likely from modern-day Turkey or perhaps northwestern Syria. He was a convert to Christianity who was interested in recording the advent of Christ and Christianity while the eyewitnesses were still extant.



Dedicating the work to him in this way is similar to how the KJV of the Bible is dedicated to its benefactor, King James the VI of Scotland and I of England and Ireland, which starts off, TO THE MOST HIGH AND MIGHTY PRINCE JAMES, BY THE GRACE OF GOD KING OF GREAT BRITAIN, FRANCE, AND IRELAND, DEFENDER OF THE FAITH... this dedication to the King goes on for another whole page.



The author was Luke, Greek Λουκᾶς (Lü-käs), which is a diminutive or pet name, shortened from one of the following Latin names; Lucius, Lucilius, or Lucanus. We know that Luke was a Gentile Christian, most likely from modern-day Turkey or Syria. He was a physician by training and that, together with his name, means that he was very likely a slave. Probably the slave of Theophilus.

The vast majority of doctors in the Roman empire of the first century were slaves who served as physicians to their wealthy master and his family. There were no hospitals or doctor's offices as we know them. Outside of slave doctors serving the Roman legions as

battlefield medics, practically no one outside of the aristocracy, landed gentry, and affluent merchant class, ever saw a doctor. The superrich would own a doctor as a status symbol much like owning racehorses or an extensive library. Much the same way that hyper wealthy in Americans today have “Concierge Doctors” on call.

The most likely scenario is that Theophilus and his slave doctor Luke became Christians at the preaching of the Apostle Paul. Then Theophilus loaned Luke to attend to Paul as he continued his missionary travels. It’s possible that their conversion took place earlier, but Luke actually joined Paul in about August of 49 A.D., in the port city of Troas, near modern-day Istanbul, during his second missionary journey.

At some point in the process, maybe very early on, Theophilus probably freed Luke. Our best evidence is that by 60 A.D. when Luke accompanied Paul to Rome, he was a freedman and possibly even a Roman citizen owing to his education, profession, and his former master’s status.

The Apostle Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and moved to Caesarea where he was imprisoned for two

years before appealing to Caesar and being sent on to Rome for two more years. It was during this time roughly between 58 and 62 A.D. that Luke researched and wrote both his eponymous Gospel and the Book of Acts.

Why two volumes and not one? First the Gospel of Luke is the longest of the four Gospels and ends where it does because it is the maximum length of a typical book or scroll back then. There wasn't room for any more information without making the book unwieldy. Second, because it is a nice dividing place where the story goes from the ministry of Jesus Himself to the ministry of Jesus through His church.

The Book of Acts then is a theological history of the first 30 years of the early church. What that means is that it is written as an historical narrative, but a very selective history, designed primarily to advance a theological foundation for future generations of Christians.



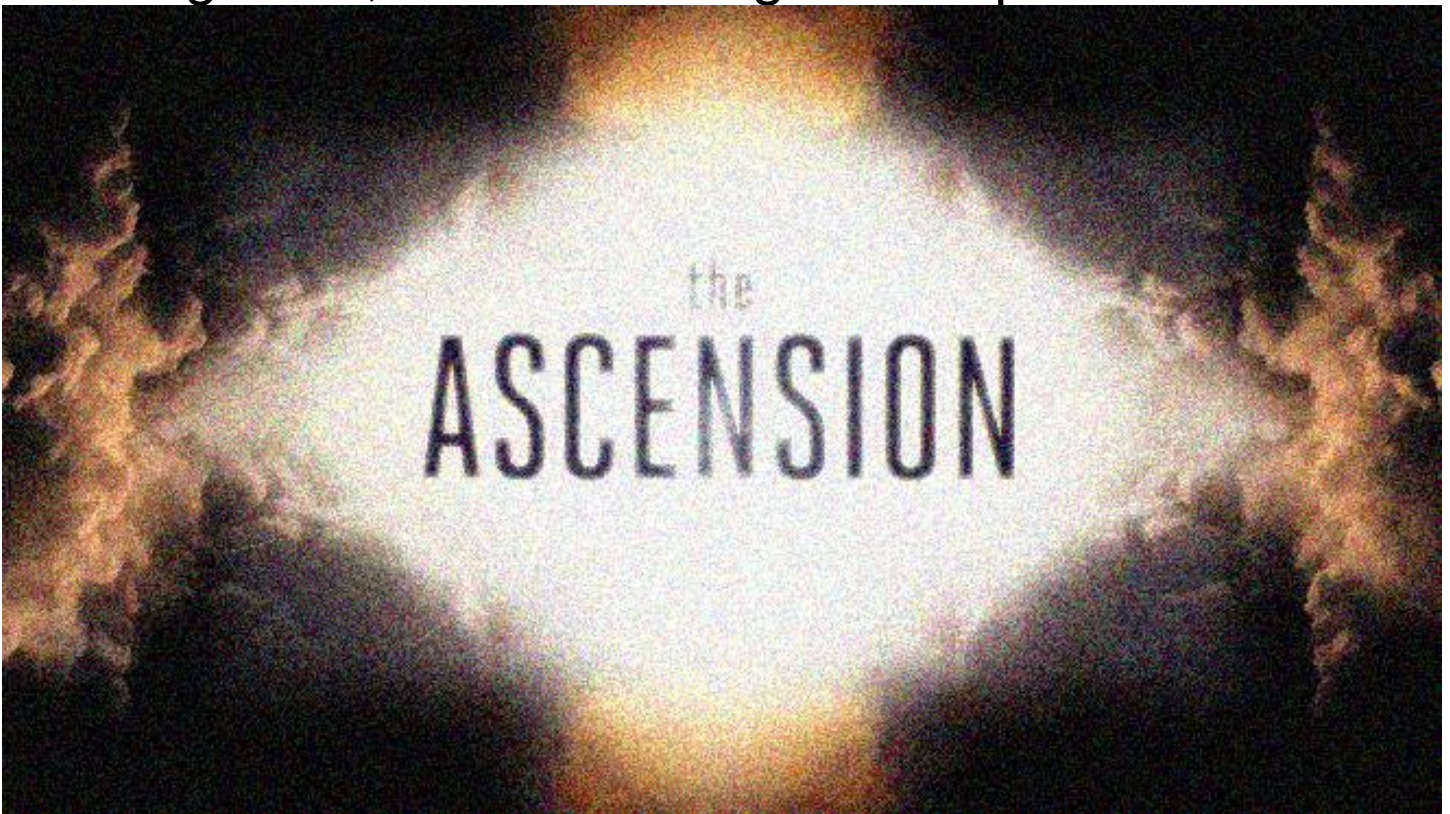


Acts 1:1-3, 1The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had given orders by the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen. 3To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of things regarding the kingdom of God.

This opening, and the next 8 verses up through verse 11, function as the formal introduction. You've no doubt seen the second and subsequent episodes of a television show where they start off with a recap of what's happened so far to catch you up and set the

stage for the new episode. This is the same. A recap is literally short for recapitulation and Luke recapitulates the ending of his Gospel here, in order to join the two volumes together and set the scene for what's coming.

As a rhetorical technique, Luke does a masterful job. There are many little nuances that could be pointed out, but I'll mention just one. The Gospel of Luke closes with Jesus leading His disciples to Bethany, blessing them, and then being taken up into heaven.



In the formal introduction of Acts Luke begins with “until the day when He was taken up to heaven,” and ends in verse 11 with, “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven.” This “taken up” event not only

connects the two volumes; it also frames the introduction of this volume.

In between we get the summarization of the end of the Gospel as the introduction of the continuation. Luke reconfirms several facts in the process. Jesus was an historical, genuine, individual Who both taught and confirmed His teaching with supernatural proofs or signs.

He was bodily taken from earth up to heaven, but not before He had given His marching orders to His chosen leaders of His church and provided many convincing proofs of His bodily resurrection from the dead. This all took place over a 40-day period of time. The Apostle Paul wrote in I Corinthians 15:3–11, “<sup>3</sup>For I handed down to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup>After that He appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; <sup>7</sup>then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; <sup>8</sup>and last

of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

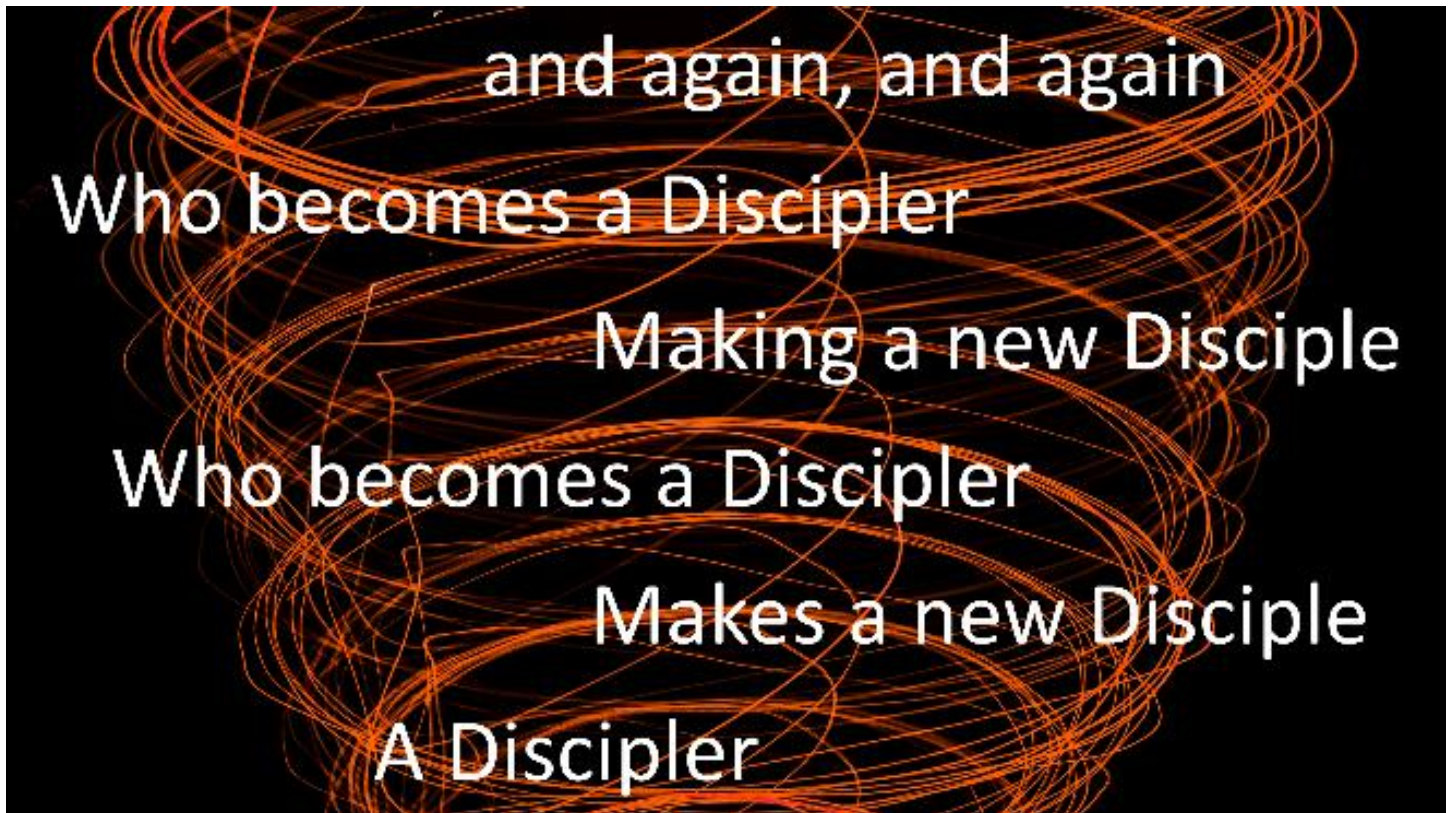


Jesus chose His Apostles – He hand-selected those through whom He would lead His church. They were, according to the Bible, to devote themselves “to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). Hearing from Christ through the Holy Spirit in prayer as they taught what He wanted taught. Nothing has changed except for the in-person commission.

All four Gospels, the Book of Acts, and many of the Epistles, give the Great Commission in one way or another. The clearest is at the end of Matthew’s Gospel. At His Ascension, where Luke records in the

opening of Acts that Jesus “gave orders by the Holy Spirit to the apostles,” Matthew elucidates those orders, “18And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. 19Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18–20).

The key phrase for the point I’m making is that they would teach people “to follow all that Jesus commanded them.” That means that each subsequent generation was to follow in the footsteps of each preceding generation. That’s what it means to disciple – it is to preach and baptize and teach people to likewise be disciples and to then disciple others. That is the cycle, or better yet the upward spiral of Christianity.

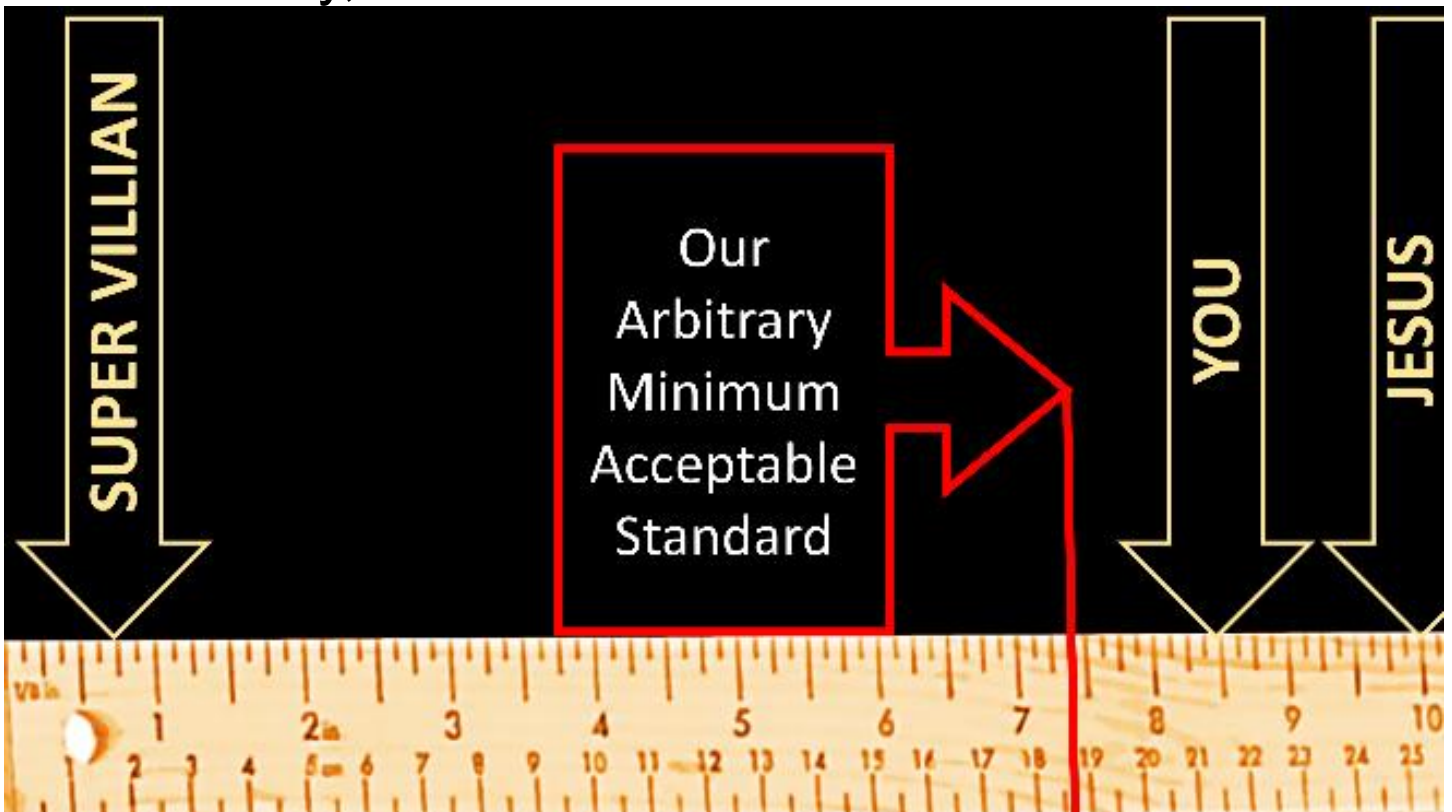


As we saw at the end of our study in John's Gospel the role of the pastor is to feed and protect the local flock to which Jesus assigns him and that means to disciple people – to preach, baptize, and teach – to disciple people so that they will in-turn disciple others. No one is supposed to get Saved and then rest on their Christ-given laurels.

Here's a way of looking at it that could be helpful... I say it often, but normally far more subtly than I'm about to... The difference in thoughts, words, and deeds, between the most devout Christian and the most heinous sinner is a matter of degree, only.

There is, at one end of the attitude-palaver-behavior spectrum the most self-controlled Christian, and at the other end, the most self-centered hedonist.

Everywhere on the scale between them and including them is merely a measure in degrees of Christlikeness from not very, to much better.

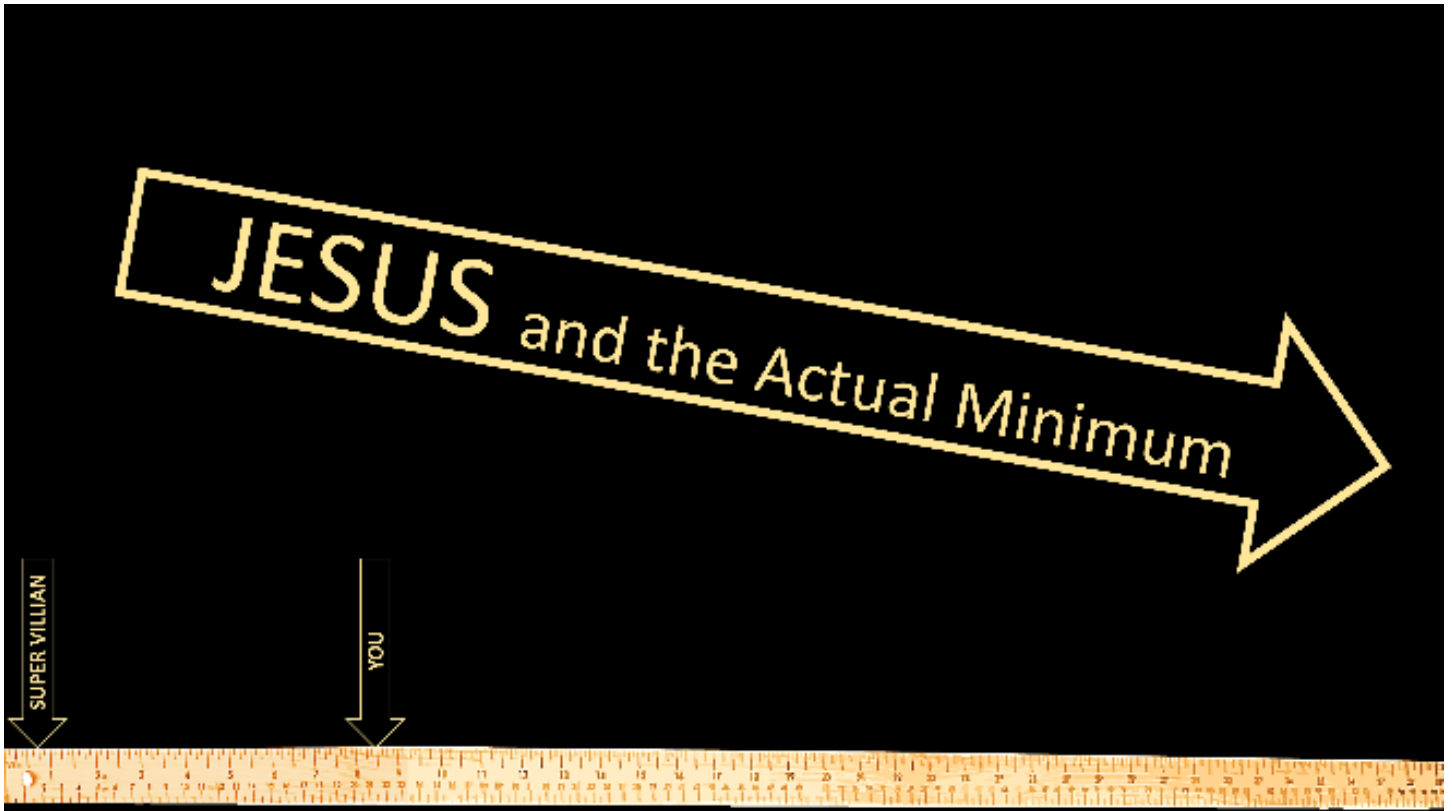


Contrary to the opinion of some, no one is ever without sin. If you think that you can go even a moment without sin, you simply need to define sin more accurately and it wouldn't hurt to be a bit more realistic in your self-assessment either. Sin is only ever mitigated by the Blood of Jesus.

Since no one is actually Christlike there is no reachable point on the scale where Christlikeness could be achieved. Therefore, we arbitrarily decide where good enough exists – we usually delineate that standard just below where we perceive our position on the scale to be, which ironically, is usually a higher position than reality would warrant.

The way we view the scale is something like this where perfect attainment of the goal is barely out-of-reach, and so the difference between Jesus and me is small while the difference between me and thee, is huge. Well, that's exactly backwards. I can't make an accurate slide of what's really going on... but you get the idea.





Christlikeness is farther out of our reach than the most distant object in the universe and we're all living on what is nothing more than a tiny speck of dust just within our own solar system – it's ridiculous. You might say it's like the ants in an ant farm comparing themselves to the kid who owns them, but it's far worse than that.

Why did I think that this would help? When we smugly feel better about our Christian walk than we should, we tend to underperform. What do I mean? I'm not talking about the performance of legalism; I'm talking about the performance of Love.

Legalism tries to earn. Not only is that impossible, it diminishes Christ's completed work in fully Saving a person and it puts all the focus on the individual and their effort – their performance. So again, what do I mean underperform? I mean that the person who accurately assesses their own need for the Savior is in a position to be truly humbled by the magnitude of Grace and is genuinely grateful for the munificence of Salvation. Such a person performs because they love.

Absent the activity of love for God through the fullness of your life – your thoughts, words, and deeds – one would rightly conclude that love was absent as well. The absence of love is a symptom of an absence of faith and that is how James can write, "I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:18), by his works of love for God. This is in complete agreement with Paul where he wrote that righteousness, "is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace" (Romans 4:16).

It cannot be Grace if we earn it, so it is by faith, but it is the changed life – the works of love – that prove one's faith is true and sufficient.



The disciple who actively disciplines is the Christian who gets it. My point, my friends, is you have a love obligation to Christ that is far greater than you could ever repay in a million lifetimes, so let's, at the very least, show our love, our humble gratitude for His love, by actually obeying His command to be active members of His Body being disciplined as we disciple others.

Many Christians want to do more, but either divert that desire into self-improvement, enrolling in yet another Bible study, or creating a goal of more prayer, more reading, more fasting... Or the desire is diverted into ministry within the church; leading worship, teaching

classes, helping with all the stuff that needs doing... Both of those endeavors are great, and I applaud you for doing them and encourage you to do more, but... The mission field is outside of these walls.

We do all the things we do to build you up, feed you, strengthen you, and protect you, so that you can share Jesus with the world. Verse 3 finished where Jesus had taught them the “things regarding the kingdom of God.” That’s not the Kingdom in Heaven, or the Kingdom to come on earth in the end, but the Kingdom to be built by Jesus through His church and you are to be an integral part in the continued building of that Kingdom now.



Acts 1:4&5, 4Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; 5for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” All four Gospels confirm that while John the Baptizer baptized with water for repentance as a means to prepare people to accept the Messiah, Jesus, the Son of God, would baptize with the Holy Spirit. At several points in John’s Gospel Jesus explained further what that meant. In chapter 7 Jesus quoted the Prophet Isaiah in saying that “Living Water” would flow within the person who believes in Him. Then John clarified that statement in verse 39, writing that Jesus said that “in reference to the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

Jesus told His disciples in John 14:16&17, 16“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper [that is to say another, παράκλητος (pä-řä-klā-tōs), we say, Paraclete], so that He may be with you forever; 17the Helper [Paraclete] is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him; but you know Him because He remains with you and will be in you.”

Then Jesus told them in John 15:26, “When the Helper [Paraclete] comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, namely, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, He will testify about Me.”

The Holy Spirit is the other paraclete and His primary task is to point people to Jesus. Within the Christian person His task is unchanged. It is to continue pointing God’s children to their Lord and Savior Jesus and that is done almost exclusively by illuminating the teaching of Jesus which the Holy Spirit inspired men to record in what we call the New Testament. John 14:26, “The Helper [again, the other Paraclete], the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and remind you of all that I said to you.”



The “teach you all things” part was accomplished through the creation of the Written Word of God that we now possess. Today the Holy Spirit teaches us by way of illuminating the Bible. We talked about that a lot when we were studying John. There is no new revelatory teaching by the Holy Spirit anymore. Such new teaching would alter Christianity. The Bible is all that it should be. The Holy Spirit inspired it and has maintained it as the Message of God to you and me that God wants us to have. If God wanted it different – it would be different.

By that means, the Holy Spirit molds the Christian into the image of Christ. The Apostle Paul in Romans 12:2

explained “do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The transformation into greater Christlikeness takes place, not by some nebulous force, or some emotional correction, or some unknown spiritualism, but as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit by learning what He teaches. His illumination of Truth in us is Light to us and it is that which alters our perception of reality and enables us grow to be more like our Lord and God, Jesus.



That is the ever-increasing Fruit of the Holy Spirit culminating in self-control. Self-control is where a person actually chooses to live as God desires rather than as they desire. That is Christian maturity, and it is



expected from every Christian. Again, we don't control our lusts, appetites, and desires in order to be accepted... We do that because we have come to know that we are already accepted.

Finally, the Fruit is increased, not by osmosis, not by endless studies alone, but by getting busy about the Master's work in building the Kingdom of God where it can be built. We grow by doing. We grow by allowing the Holy Spirit to minister to others through us. These are the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.



Never ever, under any circumstances, are His Gifts for the person through whom the Holy Spirit operates. It is always inaccurate to say that a person has the Gift of

whatever – the accurate way to say it is that the Holy Spirit chooses to minister through a particular person with particular Gifts of His choosing.

This is the ministry of the other Paraclete – ultimately to build up the Body of Christ on earth, which is the church. That's the goal of God to build a Kingdom, not a network of independent citizens.

The Apostles and other disciples were to wait for the Holy Spirit before their full ministry could begin because Christianity has never been about God's people building the Kingdom, but God building it through His people.



Acts 1:6–8, 6So, when they had come together, they began asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time that You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” 7But He said to them, “It is not for you to know periods of time or appointed times which the Father has set by His own authority; 8but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth.” Confirmation of what we’ve been saying. The Holy Spirit power through Christians is what accomplishes God’s Will on earth, and it is His Will that all people receive His ministry of Grace, personally. Through human touch and relational interaction Jesus still meets people where they are when we allow Him to do so.

The most important word in that regard in this passage is Samaria. It means that God wants us to minister to everyone including our worst enemies.

Notice that Jesus firmly established that the outcome of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is none of our business. We are not supposed to be preoccupied with times and dates, and signs and seasons... We are not supposed to be preoccupied with all the things of this present

world and how those things may or may not play into the end times. We are supposed to be preoccupied with allowing the Holy Spirit to use us as He sees fit to build the Kingdom of God as He determines is best. That means leaving the results of ministry in His hands.



Acts 1:9–11, 9And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were watching, and a cloud took Him up, out of their sight. 10And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, then behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them, 11and they said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” That’s a pretty

cool way to finish off a formal introduction. Jesus is not only alive, He's coming back. He is returning and His reward is with Him for all those who fix their eyes upon Him and follow how and where He leads without having to know why.

Technically, we call this the Ascension of Christ. He presently sits at the Right Hand of All Power, Authority, and Glory. His return is called the Parousia where He will finally and formally set everything right and then hand the keys of the Kingdom over to the Father. and we will reign with Him forever.