



January 14, 2024

“The Topics of Acts 1”

SS 9:30, Service at 10:30 with King’s Kids Presentation.

News:

Wednesday Classes at 6:30

Annual Church Meeting, 9:30, Next Sunday, January 21st, Celebration at Noon

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Acts chapter 1 subjects broached:

1) Can a true Christian lose their salvation?

Theodore Beza’s Supralapsarianism:

Logical ramification... God’s sovereignty requires irresistible grace...

Grace is only offered to some...

God knows all, so He created some for failure ...

Jacobus Arminius Reaction:

Logical ramification... Human free will to choose Grace...

Human agency to change one’s mind...

Consciously or subconsciously...

The entire issue has to do with perspective: God’s _____ ours _____

2) Is suicide a one-way ticket to eternal separation from God? One of the most common ideas voiced by suicidal people is, “I’ll show you – you will miss me when I’m gone.”

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

Yet, when we tell a suicidal person that they are being selfish or just passing their pain to others, or pointing out to them how they should think of their family and friends, it actually creates in them more guilt piled on top of their already negative feelings.

Something far better is letting them know that you care about them, are thinking about them, are praying for them, and are willing to be there for them.

If you are a suicidal person, please reach out. Reach out to God, to your pastor, to your family, to your friends, or at the least to the hotline, 988.

I believe the increase in suicide is directly due to... A) a diminishing concern for God:

B) a lack of connected community:

C) an increasing self-aggrandizement:

3) Was the church’s first decision-making paradigm flawed?

Human wisdom, training, expertise, and opinions only get in the way of discerning Christ’s Will for His church.

Elders are not chosen for their talents, but for their humble surrender to the Will of the Lord in church matters.

Their methodology was actively submissive to Christ. They did their very best with the resources available to them and they trusted Jesus to choose.

You must approach reading the Bible exactly as you approach finding God’s Will in prayer... Humbly... If you approach any aspect of Christianity with a strong personal bias, you will simply continue to see what you want to see and hear what you want to hear.

4) Was Peter forgiven for betraying Jesus while Judas was condemned for the same thing? “Get behind Me Satan” (Matthew 16:23). Peter “went out and wept bitterly” (Mark 14:72).

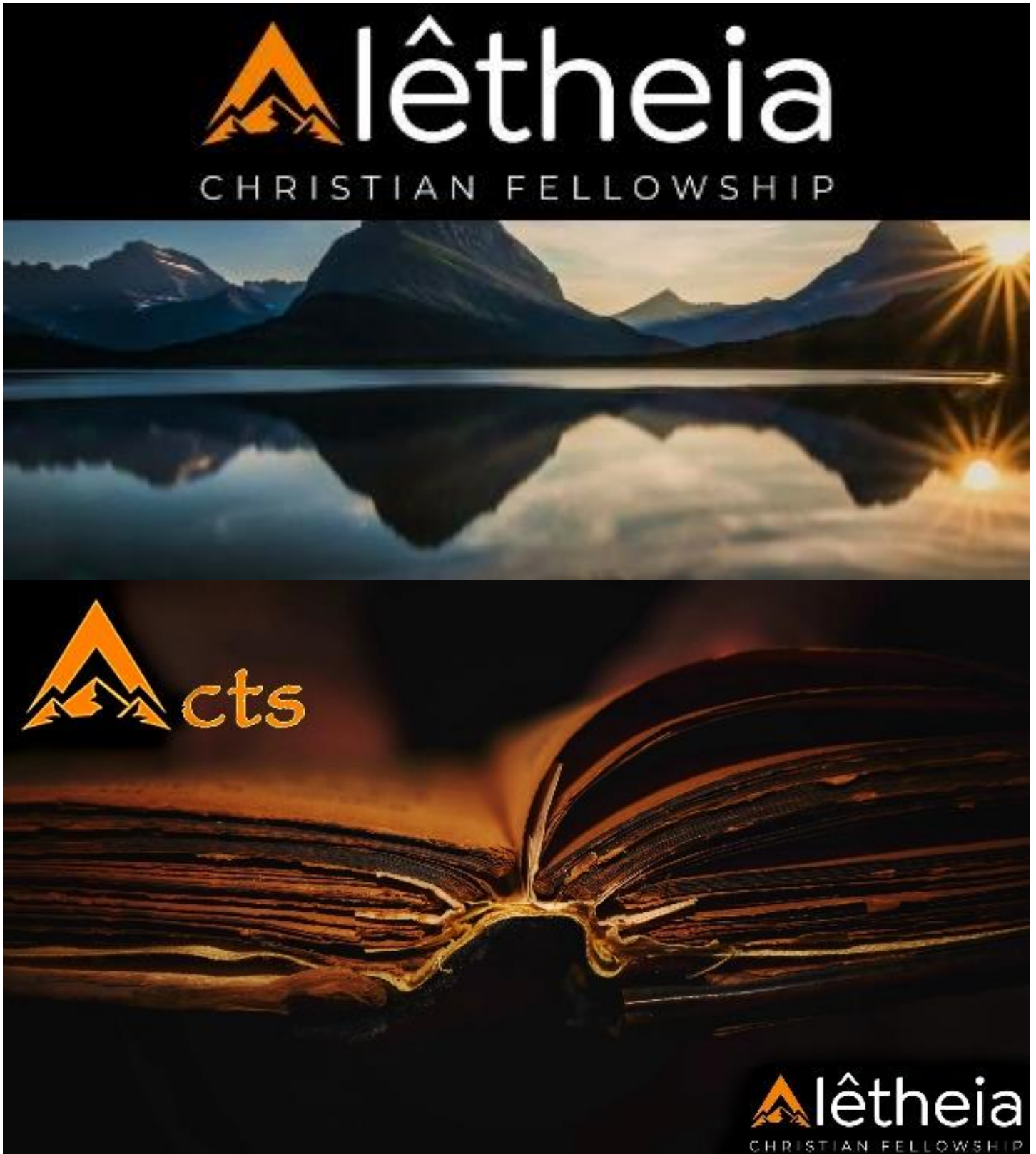
Satan entered into Judas (Matthew 22:3), but after realizing that Jesus was condemned, “he felt remorse” he returned the money, openly declared his sin, and then killed himself (Matthew 27:3–5).

Not everyone in the church is *in* the church (I John 2:19).

We cannot judge a human heart and we don’t know the final disposition of all things. Do the words that Jesus spoke from the Cross, “Father forgive them,” not apply to Judas?

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

Name _____ Address _____
Phone _____ Email _____



Today is my least favorite type of sermon... It is topical. If you like it, you're welcome. If you don't, well we only

do this a couple of times a year. Last week we finished chapter 1 of the Book of Acts and I said that there were issues brought up by the narrative that Luke never intended to address. Issues such as apostasy? 1) Can a true Christian lose their salvation? It seems as though Judas did.

In addition, we have in the opening chapter of Acts a report of the aftermath of Judas' suicide. 2) Does his suicide confirm his final destination? Is suicide a one-way ticket to eternal separation from God?

We also saw the church make the very first church decision in history. 3) Did they make a good decision or was their decision-making paradigm flawed? Is casting lots wrong?

Finally, we saw Peter in charge and were reminded about the radical forgiveness that Christ Jesus bestows. It begs the question though, 4) was Peter forgiven for betraying Jesus while Judas was condemned for the same thing? Was it that Judas' betrayal was somehow worse than Peter's, somehow worse than yours or mine?

Again, Luke was not answering any of those questions, but since they came up naturally in the text and they are still questions that are germane today, I thought that we should answer them. And no, I don't know what the Germans have to do with it.



1) Can a true Christian lose their salvation? People who say yes are lumped into a group called Arminianists. Jacobus Arminius was a pastor who in the late 1500's reacted to Theodore Beza's Supralapsarianism. Beza was John Calvin's primary successor, and he articulated a logical supposition that God's Sovereignty demanded that no human could resist His Grace if He offered it to them.

The idea being that a person cannot thwart the Will of God for their life, contra verses like Luke 7:30, “But the Pharisees and experts in religious law rejected God’s plan for them, for they had refused John’s baptism.”

Therefore, God simply does not offer Grace to most people and then taking that a step further, it must be that God actively and intentionally created some humans to be eternally saved and the others to be eternally condemned – the second group never, even before conception, had any chance of Salvation at all. That’s Supralapsarianism. Today it’s assumed to be Calvinism or Reformed. It’s not, most “Calvinists,” don’t go that far and Calvin himself certainly never did.

Arminius objected to Supralapsarianism and in doing so he emphasized human free will to choose Grace or reject it, but that led to the logical supposition that if a person chose Christ, that person could change their mind and reject their Salvation whether consciously by denouncing Christ or subconsciously by failing to live up to the Salvation standard.

Within the broad strokes of Arminianism there are those who think that they are Saved and have lost their Salvation multiple times, perhaps multiple times in a

single day. For them, the Holy Spirit is like a yoyo entering a repentant person and then fleeing that person when they have an impure thought. Other Arminianists think that once a person has been Saved and afterwards has fallen away, they cannot be restored again, they are lost forever, because they have committed the unforgivable sin.

Well, is any of that right? In a nutshell, which is where it belongs, no. Beza's Supralapsarianism is wrong because God intentionally creating people to be eternally tormented is certainly not Agapê. But Arminius' focus on man's free will comes at the expense of Christ's completed work and inevitably leads to fear and legalism. Where Salvation becomes about someone being wise enough, brave, enough, noble enough, good enough, to accept Grace and then good enough to maintain their Salvation status. That fosters both a feeling of superiority over non-Christians too vile and foolish to likewise choose Jesus. As well as an endless cycle of emotional ups and downs for such a Christian due to their uncertain Salvation condition and sheer terror of committing the unforgiveable sin.

The Holy Spirit is not a yoyo and is not so frail and prudish that He must flee evil. If that were so, He couldn't remain on earth at all. Finally, it is not true that rejecting Jesus is the unpardonable sin. If it were, Peter would never have been restored. The unpardonable sin is rejecting Jesus till your dying breath. While breath remains, there's hope. Unfortunately, we often don't know when it's our last breath.

What about Hebrews chapters 7 and 10? It's obviously far too complicated to tackle here, but rest assured that neither chapter was intended to be a treatise on losing one's salvation. In context, both chapters are the strongest possible exhortations to Christians to stay the course – not to get complacent – not to take anything for granted and to “fight the good fight” until the very end.

Oftentimes a person seems to be a Christian perhaps even to themselves, but they are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. When such a person falls away it is because they were never truly Christians in the first place.

On the other hand, a person who is Saved and indwelt by God's Holy Spirit is Saved. Such a person may resist the Holy Spirit in them and do incredibly dumb things, but fortunately man's unfaithfulness never results in God's unfaithfulness – our character cannot change His character.

The entire issue has to do with perspective. From God's perspective everything is already set in stone – in fact, it's all already happened. However, that reality does not change the Truth that for us, from our finite temporal and spatial existence it is nothing but one free choice after another.

The concept is well illustrated by what many people believe is a contradiction in the Bible. Philippians 2:12b&13a, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you.

The exhortation is for you to take God seriously enough to diligently strive to obey Him as a Christian, but to then realize that it will never be your effort, but His within you. God does it all, but He constantly informs us that from our perspective we must choose Him each day... That is what is meant by active surrender.

We could certainly talk about it further, but I'd rather have you wrestle with God about it for a while.



2) Judas sure enough killed himself. Suicide is a super tough issue. I imagine that most of us have been touched by that tragic reality and horrible loss. The statistics, and the psychology, and the moral implications don't matter when you are experiencing the pain of suicide. I don't want anyone to think that I'm glib about the very real effects upon those left to pick up the pieces or uncaring towards those who feel like suicide is the answer.

In the aftermath of suicide those remaining are often plagued by guilt wondering what they should have, or

could have, done to prevent it. In addition, they are quite focused on the deceased – thinking of them often and holding memorials honoring them. Officiating at such services I've often heard people say something to the effect that "at least she's in a better place," or "at least he's not suffering anymore."



*"SUICIDE DOESN'T TAKE
AWAY THE PAIN,
IT GIVES IT TO
SOMEONE ELSE."*

It's how we make ourselves feel better because it is true that "Suicide doesn't take away the pain, it gives it to someone else." Sometimes that is a contributing factor to a person taking their own life – particularly with young people. One of the most common ideas voiced by suicidal people is, "I'll show you – you will miss me when I'm gone – you will be devastated and

mourn me – you should have paid more attention to me.”

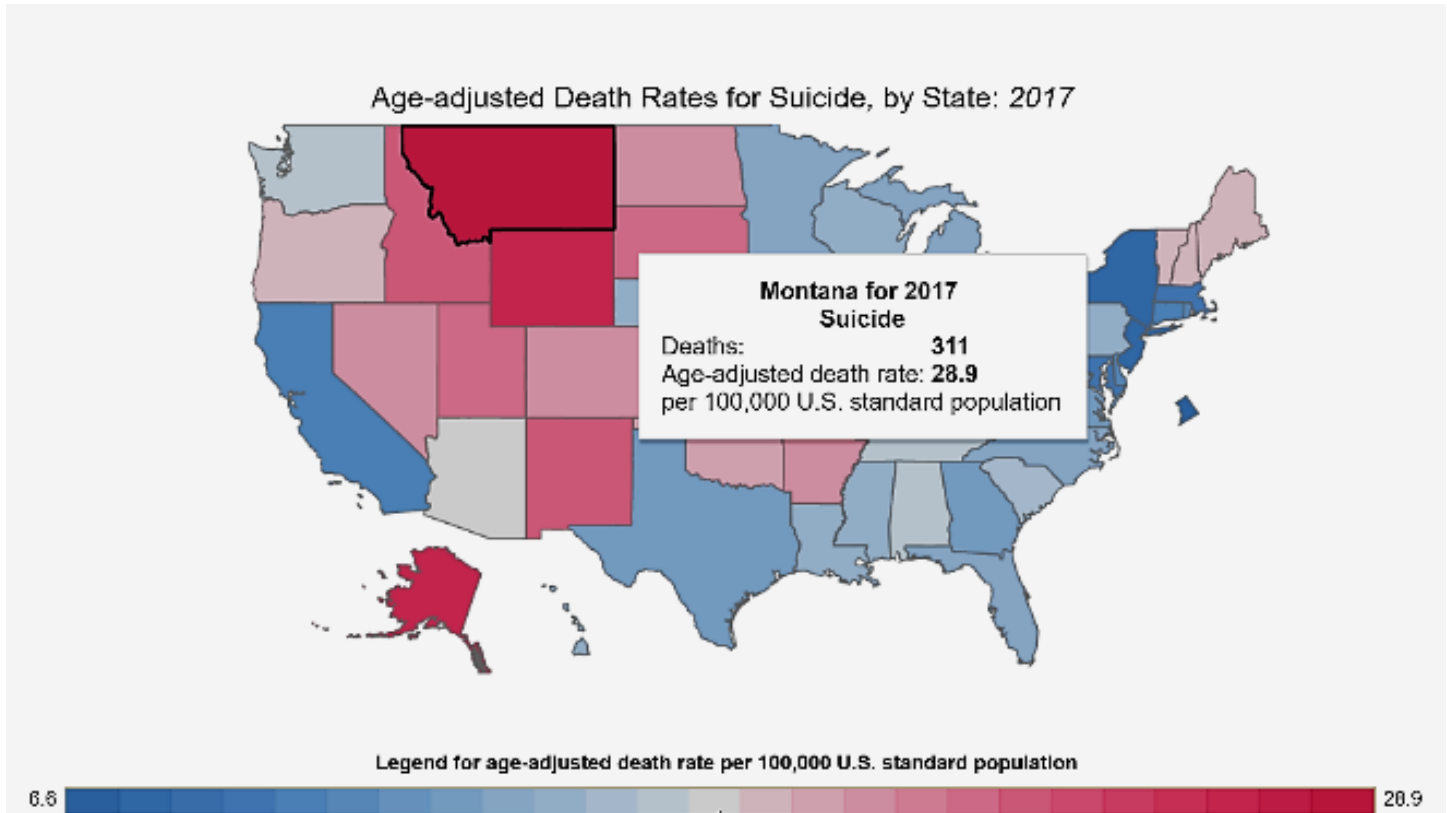
Yet, when we tell a suicidal person that they are being selfish or that they are just passing their pain on to others, or pointing out to them how they should think of their family and friends, it actually creates in them more guilt piled on top of their already extremely negative feelings.

While suicide is often an incredibly selfish endeavor, pointing that out won't help. No one who has ever attempted suicide did it to be selfish from their perspective. They did it because, at the time, it seemed like the best and perhaps even the only option. A person who hasn't suffered depression can't really understand what depression is like and the same can be said for suicidal thoughts. It's hard to grasp something that you've never experienced.

So, when talking with such a person, what is far better than telling them to quit being self-centered and to simply quit whining and buck-up is to instead be a nonjudgemental friend who listens. The best thing, of course, is prayer because ultimately only God can truly help, but a close second is just being there.

If you don't know a suicidal person, you're probably not looking. If you do know a suicidal person letting them know that you care about them, are thinking about them, praying for them, and willing to be there for them, is helpful. If you are a suicidal person, please reach out. Reach out to God, to your pastor, to your family, to your friends, or at the very least to the hotline, 988.

The biggest problem with the majority of suicidal people is that they "seek a permanent solution to a temporary problem." We should ask why that is and unfortunately, the reason is that the problems don't seem temporary to them. At the same time though the vast majority of suicides are thought to be last-ditch cries for help and are therefore thought to be preventable.



Statistically, suicide rates have increased in the U.S. almost 40 percent in the last 20 years. Now, each year in America, more than 12 million people seriously think about suicide, 3.5 million make plans to commit suicide, and almost 2 million people attempt suicide. 1.5 million of those 2 million were females. That means that 75 percent of attempted suicide were by women.

Of all the attempted suicides by both genders 50,000 were fatal. 50,000 fellow American citizens died as a result of their suicide attempt. 10,000 of them were females and 40,000 were males. Yes, 75 percent of attempts are by women, but 80 percent of fatal attempts are by men. In other words, females are three

times more likely to attempt suicide, but men are five times more likely to succeed. Put it another way, 1 in 150 women die in the attempt, while 1 in 10 men do.

Nearly all of the “successful” men are white men – about 38,000 of the 40,000 and the highest rate among them is veterans followed by alphabet men.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for those between the ages of 10 and 34. The leading cause of suicide is relationship problems. The very best way to prevent suicide is sincere relationship building.



In studying the issue at great length, I believe the increase in suicide is directly due to a diminishing

concern for God, a lack of connected community, and an increasing self-aggrandizement. All of which are corrected by Biblical Christianity.

Take the leading cause, relationship problems... they are largely due to relationships with wrong motives. If I'm trying to get everything I need and want from my wife, and she fails to live up to my needs and wants – then I'm sunk.

The most common timing of suicide by teens is right after initial sex with someone of the same gender or with a group including people of the same gender. Again, that's an example of seeking relationships with wrong motives.

The answer is find your worth in Christ.

We tell suicidal people that they are important, that they matter, that they are special, unique, and perfect just the way they are. They must go on because we all need them so badly. The Biblical message is the opposite. The suicidal person, like everyone else, is desperately wicked and entirely expendable, but Almighty God has a purpose for them that is greater

than anything, greater than anyone and greater than all the tragedy, sadness, and depression, in the world.

The diminishing of God in our culture plays a big part in the contemplation of suicide. When we are convinced that our life was given to us by God and that we therefore belong to God and from that recognize that my life is not mine at all...that changes things. Beyond that, to then also realize that The Creator of the Universe has a plan and a purpose for my life... Well, that's a lot different than one of the most used excuses for suicide, "It's my life, I'll end it on my terms."

A lack of connected community is huge. People are so incredibly isolated even when they are in a crowd. Biblical Christianity is all about genuinely connected community and the life affirming relationships that it fosters. Countries with the highest sense of community togetherness and close proximity of extended family have the lowest suicide rates.

Finally, the self-aggrandizement of people, particularly the younger generations. I mean the term in two different but intimately related ways. First is the total focus and near worship of kids by their parents. It's the give everyone a trophy syndrome. We tell kids from the

moment they are conceived that they are perfect in every way. It creates the most narcissistic adults possible, and narcissism leads to hedonism and hedonism leads to nihilism.

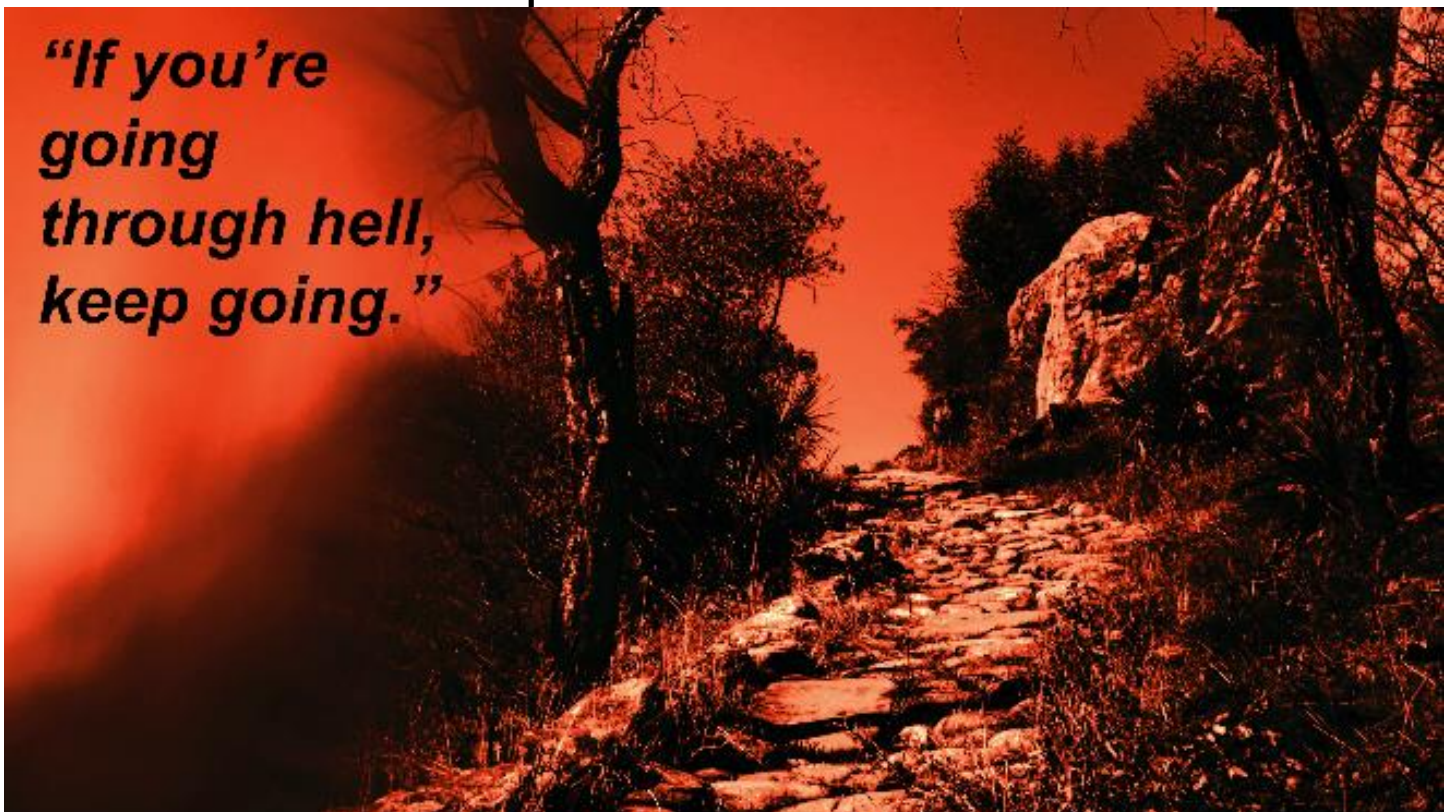
The second way that I mean it is that such people are hyper-concerned with their own image and through the instant assessment of their own state of being made possible with social media they think something is monumentally and disastrously wrong if their life isn't perfect. Any long-term difficulty, sadness, or depression is intolerable.



Again, Biblical Christianity is the solution because it says that not only is your life not yours, your life isn't

about you at all! Your life is of tremendous value to God as you find that value in Christ and your life has both meaning and purpose as you allow God to use you to build His eternal Kingdom.

Is suicide a sin? Yes, of course, absolutely. As a comedian put it, "Suicide is man's way of telling God, 'You can't fire me – I quit.'" Is it unforgiveable? Of course not. Christ's sacrificial death is sufficient to cover any and every sin except for the unforgiveable sin of unbelief in Him. Obviously when an unbeliever kills himself that's a problem.



"If you're going through hell, keep going." "If you are looking for a sign not to kill yourself this, is it."

Reach out to the lifeline within your grasp. Any who genuinely seek God will find Him... When I say genuinely, I mean properly as well – in other words to genuinely seek God, means that you humble yourself and seek Him on His terms, not your own terms.

I had a conversation with a young man and essentially told him that. He said that he was fairly certain that God did not exist because one day he went out into the woods by himself and told God that he was ready and that if God was real, He should show Himself in some indisputable way. Well, God didn't show up, ergo, no God.

A momentary whisp so arrogant as to command Almighty God and concluding that He doesn't exist because He didn't appear like some genie summoned by his master. It is only the humble who will ever see God. Please humble yourself and genuinely, properly seek Him.

If you are a surviving family member or friend, trust in God and cast away any guilt, move forward, learn from the pain, try to be a better friend in the future, be more aware of others and their feelings, and above all, love. As Jesus loved, and with His love, love others.



3) Church decisions. If, and by if, I mean since, the church is the Body of Christ on earth, His disciples animated by the Holy Spirit it stands to reason that church decisions need to be His decisions. It stands to reason that if we truly believe that the church is the Kingdom that Jesus is currently building and that it therefore belongs to Him, then Jesus should call the shots.

What that means, when we consider it properly, is that any experience, or wisdom, or opinion, or agenda, that we have is nothing but filthy rags. I have so often said that I am not interested in the human qualifications of the Elders, including myself. I do not consider our

education, or knowledge, or expertise, I certainly do not want to hear our personal opinions, and I am viscerally repulsed by our human agendas. When it comes to church decisions, I don't want to hear what people think – I want to hear what Jesus thinks!

In order to make our best faith attempt at doing that, we deliberately empty ourselves of ourselves. Through prayer and intentionality, we try to hold our wisdom, opinions, and agendas at arm's length while genuinely seeking to hear from the Holy Spirit.

Well, the ancient church's first decision was clearly like that with the exception that the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out. They chose Matthias to replace Judas by casting lots for that reason.

Their methodology was as actively submissive to Christ as it could have been given their circumstances. They did their very best with the resources available to them and they trusted Jesus to make His Will known to them through those means.


Nearly every Bible scholar since then has said something like the church no longer needs to cast lots because it has the Holy Spirit. Yet very few of them

discuss how the Holy Spirit helps Christians make church decisions.

It is identical to how the first church chose Matthias. Not in the details, but in the broad strokes. It all comes down to a burning desire to hear from God on the matter – it's all about one's attitude. Most church decisions are made by human beings either overtly or covertly pushing their own agenda. Many do so with the best of intentions.

They, like nearly everyone nowadays, have incredibly strong opinions about what they think is best and they fight, in a variety of ways, to get those ideas implemented. Notice that none of the 120 people in the room 2,000 years ago did that.

Notice further, that what so many Christians do today, is they assume that their ideas, plans, and opinions basically come straight from the Burning Bush. We can have a church of 150 people with 150 different ideas about a thing and all of them believe that their idea represents Jesus' idea.



“Well, yeah God led us to all those other churches... but He’s leading us here now.”

Here’s the real kicker... For everyone... And I do mean everyone, there is a limit to how many times they will tolerate the church choosing a path other than the one they believe was the right one. For some it’s once, for others it may be a thousand times, but everyone can be pushed to a place where they vote with their feet and reject the local church to which they once thought God had called them to. All because they didn’t get their way, one too many times, and of course they then rationalize that by saying that their way was God’s way, and the church is what is off course and out of step with the Holy Spirit.

You don't think that the Apostles, disciples, and family members of Jesus all had their own opinions about what to do, how to do it, and whom they thought would be the best replacement? You don't think that there were those in the group that thought "Matthias... really?" Yet, all of them very humbly and very prayerfully considered what needed to happen and what was available to them and then doing their very best to get it right they trusted Jesus to show them His choice. And then, they all unanimously got on board with the program.



The Elders of Alêtheia try very hard to replicate their attitude. We take up what needs to be taken up and resist the urge to do more than that. Once an issue is

taken up, we do our very best to define the issue and the possible solutions. We humbly approach the answer with much prayer and discussion. We then do our very best to hear the gentle encouragement of the Holy Spirit towards a particular direction.

Nearly all decisions made are unanimous consensus agreements. In other words, all of us feel comfortable in our spirit about the decision. On occasion, one or two Elders are not so sure. They don't necessarily agree, but they also don't disagree, at least not strongly enough to hold the line, and so they agree to consent. As a result, all Elder-made decisions at Alêtheia Christian Fellowship over the last 20 years have been unanimous decisions. When even one Elder strongly disagrees, we table the issue until we can get to consensus.



Again, it's all about desiring God's Will done far more than our own will done. It's about assuming that our own personal assumptions may be misguided and trying to see through them to what Jesus wants us to do. There have been several decisions at Alêtheia over two decades that were to my detriment, things done that personally hurt me, or my family. Things that I would not have gone along with if this was a business that I started instead of a church. "Yet, not my will done, but His."

It's much the same for your personal life in Christ. You want to know what Jesus wants you to do? The first step is ferreting out what you want to hear and then

being extremely suspicious if His answer matches your desire. I have very rarely found that to be the case and when I say very rarely, I mean never.

To find God's Will, you must be mentally prepared for Him to tell you anything. That means being prepared to hear the opposite of what you want to hear. Look, the one who always tells you exactly what you want to hear is Satan. Jesus will tell you the Truth.

It's the same in reading your Bible. When you read your Bible – and notice I said when, not if, when you read your Bible, you will miss some nuances because of language, and some others because of culture, and still because of proficiency. A good teacher can help with that, even if it is only written notes. The biggest hindrance to understanding what you're reading is your attitude and no one but you can help with that.

You must approach reading the Bible exactly as you approach finding God's Will in prayer... Humbly... Ever so humbly and as such with an attitude that says I don't know anything, I desperately want to hear from You Lord, no matter how hard it might be to hear. No matter how scary, or distasteful, or difficult, I want to know the Truth, not to simply have my bias confirmed.

If you approach any aspect of Christianity with a strong personal bias, you will simply continue to see what you want to see and hear what you want to hear. You will be blinded to the Truth and unable to hear from the Holy Spirit. It requires monumental humbleness to truly meet Jesus and it requires the same to get to know Him.



4) Radical forgiveness is found in God through Christ – that we know for sure. Was Peter forgiven for betraying Jesus while Judas was condemned for the same basic thing? The Bible tells us that Jesus called Peter Satan right to his face. “Get behind Me Satan” (Matthew 16:23) Jesus sternly told Peter. It wasn’t the first or last

time that the Lord rebuked him. Peter was told at the Last Supper that he would deny Jesus three times before morning, and he did! The Bible tells us that afterwards Peter “went out and wept bitterly” (Mark 14:72). That’s it. Peter wept bitterly.

The Bible tells us that Satan entered into Judas and that after Judas realized that Jesus was actually condemned, “he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” Judas, “threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and left; and he went away and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:3–5).

Yet, without any question at all, Peter was fully restored, and Judas was dead. Was Judas a Saved person who lost his Salvation? No. First, he wasn’t technically Saved because Christ hadn’t yet been Glorified. Was he Christ’s though – I mean that’s the question, was he Christ’s and then fell away? Well, it’s quite obvious that Judas served a purpose that was absolutely necessary to God’s plan, but at every point Judas was given opportunity to choose his course.

It's quite reasonable to conclude that Judas was never truly part of Jesus and so never really part of the fellowship of Apostles. The Bible constantly warns the church against wolves within the church flock. God's Word tells us that not everyone in the church is in the church and that it is oftentimes impossible to know the difference at least for a while. In speaking about this issue directly the Apostle John wrote in I John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be evident that they all are not of us."

One of the primary reasons we struggle with this issue is because we cannot judge a human heart and we don't know the final disposition of all things. It's possibly a wayward Christian was never actually a Christian at all and it is also possible that such a person is a Christian who has run off like the Prodigal Son and will also, like him, return one day in sackcloth and ashes.



Our fundamental issue with that second notion is that we think our current level of rebellion against God's Will for our life is so much less than it really is... when it's all just a matter of degree. Hypocrisy is a vile sin. We all agree on that, yet are we actually guilty of it? Do we pretend to be upstanding Christians while looking down upon those we deem lesser Christians... Noting their faults, but failing to see our own? Can Jesus forgive you for sowing disharmony by complaining, but not another for drunkenness? Can Jesus forgive you for assassinating someone's character by gossiping, but not another for church hopping? Can Jesus forgive you for your impure thoughts, but not another for their impure actions? Romans 14:4, "Who are you to

condemn someone else's servants? Their own master will judge whether they stand or fall. And with the Lord's help, they will stand and receive his approval."

We simply do not know these things, which is precisely why God tells us not to judge these things. That's exactly what I Corinthians 4:5 addresses, "do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord Returns, Who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of human hearts...".

We assume that Judas will spend eternity separated from the Lord he betrayed, but we don't know that for sure. The biggest reason we conclude that Judas is eternally condemned is because of tradition. The Catholic Church automatically condemns him because he committed suicide. The suicide, for them, confirms that Judas is forever lost.



Because that was the Church's position, countless stories, plays, commentaries, movies, etc., have been made depicting Judas the worst resident of Hades. 700 years ago, Dante Alighieri, in his "Divine Comedy," placed Judas being tortured in the deepest pit of the "Inferno," which is the Ninth Circle of Hell. It is a poem from Catholic tradition and has strongly reinforced that tradition.

The best actual, Biblical, case for Judas' eternal separation is Jesus' prayer recorded in John 17:12b, "not one of them perished except the son of destruction, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled." The "Son of destruction" bit is what's most important. It

could mean that Judas would be destroyed physically, but it probably means destroyed eternally, but I wouldn't stake my life on it.

Judas was so devastated by his betrayal of Jesus he killed himself. Do the words that Jesus spoke from the Cross, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34) not apply to Judas? Contrary to recent popular tripe, Judas was no hero, and he was no victim, he was a betrayer of innocent blood and I'm not saying that he will be in Heaven with us, but I'm also not saying that he won't. I'm saying that I trust God with the judgement.

What have we learned today? I hope the major takeaway is that The Lord Jesus Christ is the answer to every question in life and death. Seek Him, trust Him, obey Him, and rest in Him.