

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship

February 10, 2019

“Choose Your Influence”

9:00 ~ Fellowship.

10:00 ~ Service with the King's Kid's

NEWS

Dedication Today: Caleb Ezekiel Bowker

Potluck March 3rd

Joint Elder/Deacon/Staff Meeting with Wives, March 7th 6:00pm

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- 1) Can you avoid false prophets by not trusting anyone?
 - 2) Can we have a healthy church if we use our human wisdom to judge others? What about if we never judge anyone?
 - 3) Can you see why someone might choose a faith basis that is different than the one you choose?

MATTHEW 7:15&20 ~ ^{15NASB}“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16“You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17“So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18“A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20“So then, you will know them by their fruits.

False influencers work to influence you with what will hinder your progress on the _____ and threaten to derail you from it entirely.

Are you a person who can _____ your two-headed monster of ignorance and carnality?

The primary reason Jesus put this section where He did, is because the practice of guarding against false influencers always becomes an exercise in _____ others in the church.

If we allow people to _____ other people, let alone encourage it... We may be in for quit a ride. It may promote a unity of belief, but it will come at the expense of _____ unity.

When people look for what's wrong, they're never _____.

On the other hand, if we don't allow _____ in the church, we may be unified as a group, but it will foster a total disunity of belief.

The judging that creates church disunity is almost always a human judgment of _____, rather than God's judgment of reality.

We also know from verses 1-5, that if, we can humbly allow the Agapê of God to _____ through us, we have a chance.

Now we apply that reimagined axiom from verse 12 here. Judge others in the Christian Community, from that same _____ basis and understanding. Treat people right.

Jesus limits the scope by saying the false influencers He's talking about are _____. He's talking about "Ravenous wolves." The bad tree bears, not bad fruit, but evil fruit.

Verse 16 gives us the litmus test, that Jesus reiterates in verse 20, What does this have to do with the Old Testament _____?

Many people think "Fruits" has to do with deeds, actions, lifestyle, or spirituality. Others think the "Fruits" has to do with the results of a person's ministry.

The "Fruits" that Jesus is talking about is not what anyone could notice if they just looked. The fruits have to do with the _____ itself.

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!

It is the content of what they are peddling, which is why Jesus tells us it requires vigilance. The only way you know what's counterfeit, is to become an _____ in what is real.

1) Disbelief - it never happened. That's called _____.

2) Distrust - it may have happened, but there's no one I trust with the details, so no one can know for sure. That's called _____.

3) Institutional inspiration, or church revelation - it happened, and God reveals the details to the leadership of the church. The _____ is the final authority.

4) Individual inspiration, or personal revelation - it happened, and God reveals the details to me personally. Each _____ is their own final authority.

5) Biblical inspiration, or revelation through the written Word - it happened, and God revealed the details to the Inspired Bible writers and then preserved the resultant Scriptures through time. The _____ is the final authority.

Check all that apply – detach and place in the offering or the prayer box

_____ I want to talk with the pastor about _____

_____ I want prayer for _____

_____ I want to volunteer to _____

_____ I want more information about _____

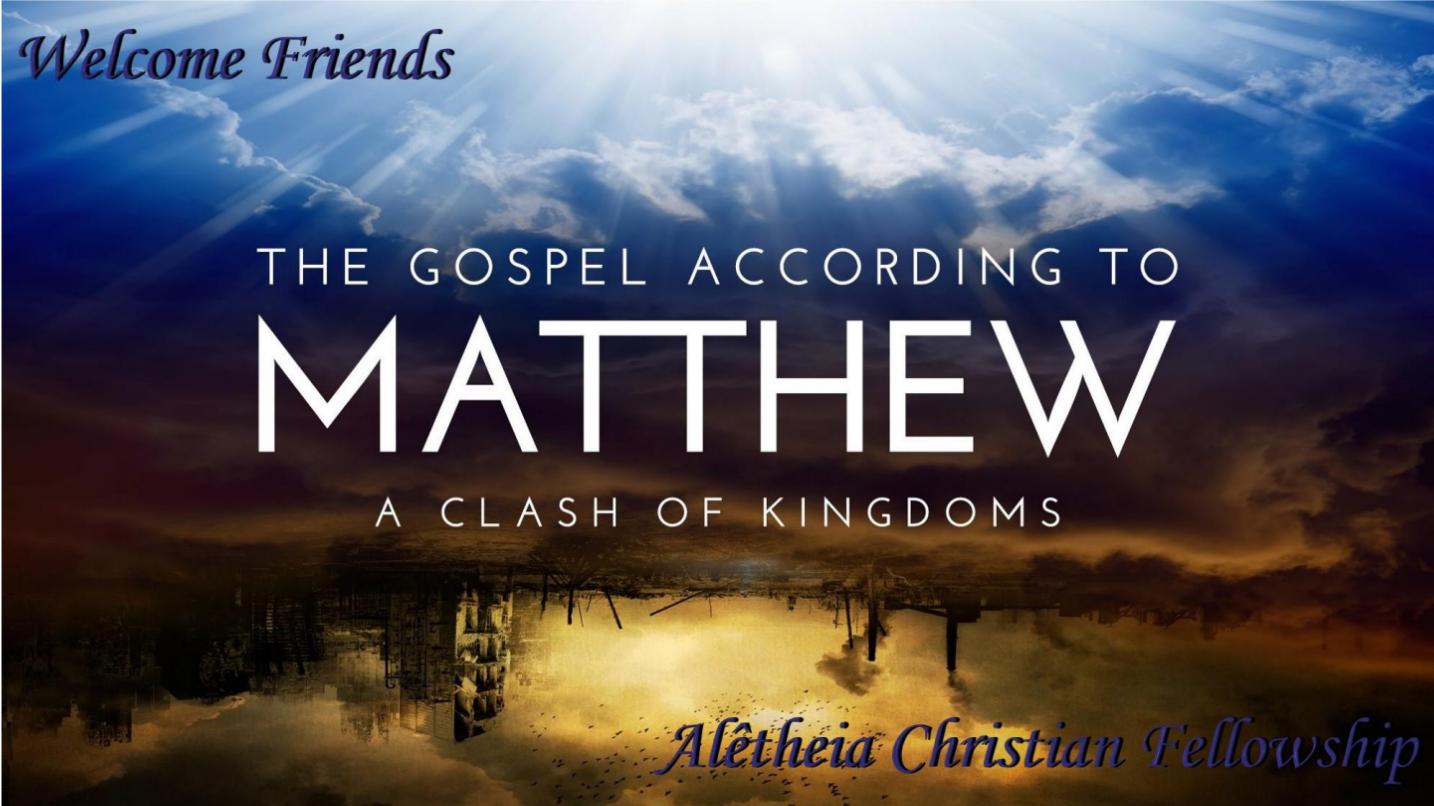
_____ Other _____

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Alêtheia ~ Matthew 7e ~ 021019

Welcome Friends



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
MATTHEW
A CLASH OF KINGDOMS

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship

Last week we took a cursory look at verses 15-20.
Let's read them again to refresh our memory...



Matthew 7:15-20 ~ 15NASB“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16“You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17“So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18“A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20“So then, you will know them by their fruits.



Last week's sermon title was, "Choose your path." According to Jesus there are only two possible realities. You're either a full-fledged Kingdom of Heaven person, or you are a full-fledged kingdom of the world person.

As far as the Word of God made flesh is concerned, there are no other possibilities. We love to obfuscate - we love to blur the lines, play both sides against the middle, pretend that there is a vast range of possibilities and degrees, but God who dwelt among us says, it's one or the other.

Figure out which one you are, and be that person. Choose your path. Once you wisely choose the hard road with the narrow gate, you will find that there are many obstacles along that path that must be overcome.



One of the biggest, most common, most warned about and yet, most successful, obstacles of all, is false influence peddled by false influencers. These people work to influence you with what will hinder your progress on the already difficult path and their activity will threaten to derail you from it entirely.

Many folks get the idea that since that is true, the solution is isolation or a hyper critical judgmentalism. They will simply reject all influencers. It's a fool's errand. First it is impossible and second, we all need true influencers in our lives. That is why this sermon is titled "Choose your influence."

Because, whether you think about it or not, no person is truly autonomous - "No man is an island entire of itself." Every bit of information we have comes to us by way of others. You are taught by teachers, by the books they wrote, by the media they produce, by the association they give.

You have been influenced by influencers your entire life and it will continue to be so. What you can do, is "Choose your influence." Carefully, wisely choose. I like the saying, "You are what you eat."

What you choose to metaphorically eat has to do with motivation. Do you desire to eat a healthy diet or lazily eat what is easy, prepackaged junk? Are you a person who can say, "I will struggle, strive and work to know more each day"? Are you a person who can say, "I want to know the Truth, no matter how distasteful it

seems to me - I want the Truth"? Jack Nicholson's character famously said, "You can't handle the truth."

Jack is a fine actor, but he's no Marine. While that character was unconvincing to me and Travis, the truth is, most can't or won't "Handle the truth". Can you? Will you?

Are you a person who can actively overcome your two-headed monster inside - that two-headed monster of ignorance and carnality?

We do it through complete and total, 1active 2trust, in God. Make no mistake, nothing short of active trust will do.

It is so important. God repeatedly warns us about false influencers among His children. He warns us throughout the Old Testament, especially in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah and Zechariah. Jesus warns us in Matthew, Mark and Luke & John. We see it in the Book of Acts. John warns us in his First Letter and in Revelation. The Apostles Peter and Paul both warn us. Jesus's brothers James and Jude warn us... My friends, it is a big deal - it, like

Agapê and church unity, is a much bigger deal than most Christians realize.

It is so subtle, so progressive, so appealing to the flesh, that most Christians cannot even recognize it for what it is...

So, the primary purpose of these verses is to warn the church about false influencers. The primary reason Jesus brings it up where He did in His sermon, is the practice of guarding against false influencers always becomes an exercise in judging others in the church.

If we allow people to judge other people, let alone encourage it. We may accomplish a unity of belief, but it will come at the cost of total disunity within the church.

What I mean, is that when people look for what's wrong in others, when they examine others looking for fault, watching for error, searching for falsity... They will never be disappointed.



Talk about a witch hunt. “Grab your pitchforks and torches.” Anyone can look at anyone else with the goal of ferreting out what’s imperfect in them, and they will always be successful - they will always find something wrong.

Not only are the people being judged imperfect, those doing the judging are, themselves, imperfect and so is their judgment. When the dust settles, the result may be a group of like-minded people - but unfortunately, the group so unified in its belief will ultimately be a group of one.

Run the exercise long enough and eventually, each person will have their own peculiar belief - their own personal denomination, their own unique dogma.

There is a concept that Hell is like that. It is a destination for people who are so strict in their belief - so judgmental of others, which is to say, so full of themselves, that they can't get along with others. The idea is that as they interact with others, they find what is unacceptable in them and must separate from them. Given eternity, every soul there finds something objectionable in every other soul there. Each soul becomes more and more isolated, until ultimately, they are all separated to the greatest possible extent and so each one is utterly alone in the "Outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth," as Jesus describes it (Matthew 22:13, etc.).

Why the weeping and gnashing? Not due to loneliness, but due to the fact that there is only one remaining person they can judge. Once no one else is left, they must inevitably judge themselves too... and since they can't separate from what they find objectionable in themselves, they go insane.

It's an interesting idea, because it is what happens when people are so sure they're the only ones who have it right.



They end up moving to Montana, living in a remote shack up a goat trail and grumbling about everyone and everything.

Anyway, while scrutinizing and exiling all those who are not perfect, may achieve a semblance of personal unity of belief, it comes at the expense of church unity.

The internet or cyber churches like E-Church are good examples. They take it a step beyond home churches,

where everyone can stay in bed and just blog. Each individual person is their own autonomous pastor and priest, denomination and church. I'm sure it's what Jesus had in mind.

On the other hand, if we don't allow judging in the church, we may be unified as a group, but it will foster a total disunity of belief.



Progressive Christian denominations like the Episcopal Church USA are good examples where, in the name of unity, anything goes, including a refusal to believe in the deity, perfection, sacrificial death and bodily Resurrection of Jesus.

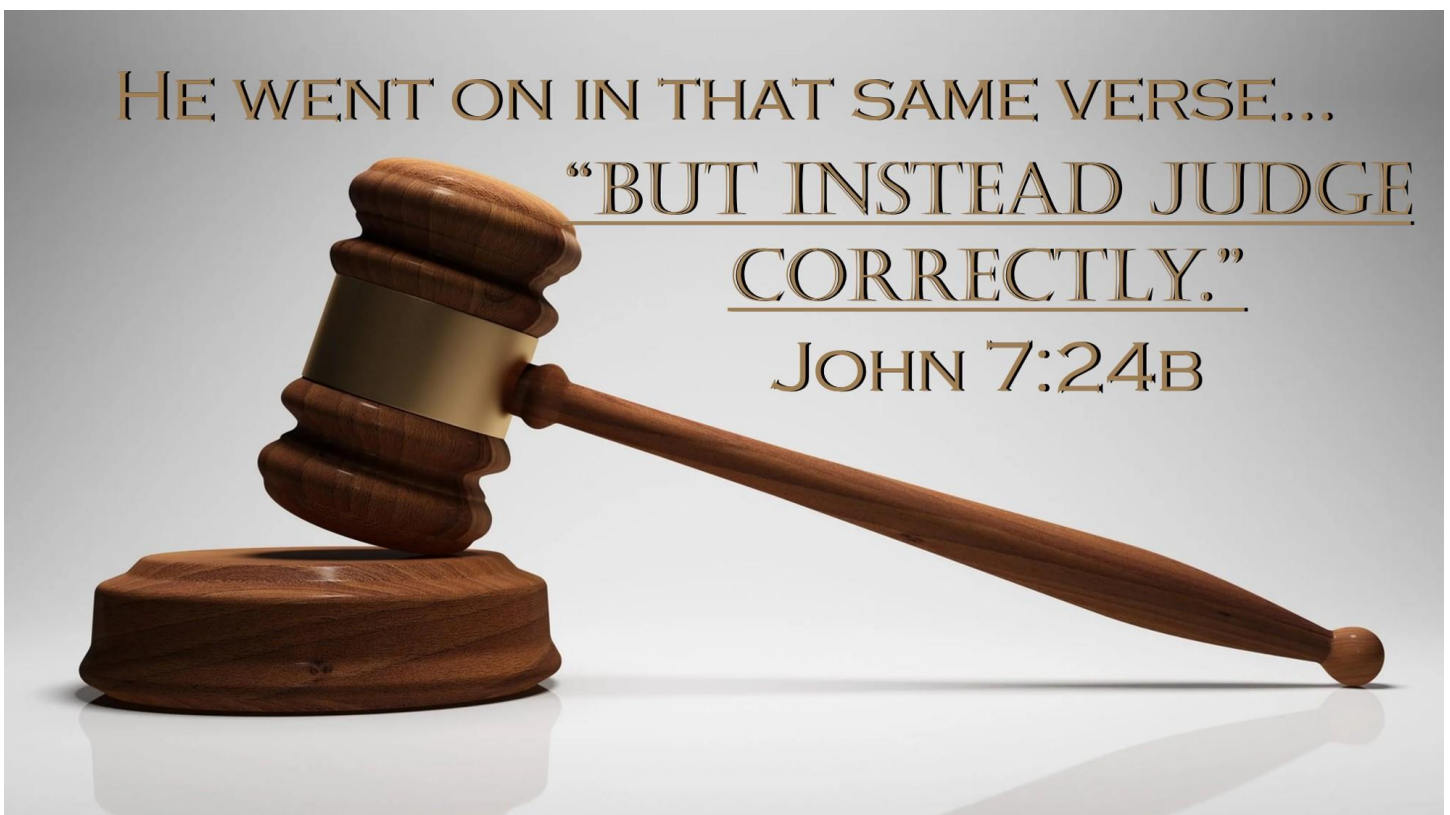
What's the answer? Jesus has given it to us through the entirety of His sermon, especially in this chapter. Especially in verses 1-5.



The judging that creates church disunity is almost always a judgment based upon the judge's beliefs, desires and preferences, rather than on the Judge's beliefs, desires and preferences. It is a human judgment of appearances, rather than God's judgment of reality through one of His human representatives.

We know from verses 1-5 that we can never judge anyone as to their eternal destination or value to God.

We also recognize from that passage that we, as the human we, should not judge anyone for anything, because in our humanness we are blind.



However, we also know from verses 1-5, that if, we can humbly allow the Agapê of God, to judge through us, we have a chance. Only then can we “Judge correctly.” It still might end badly. They might turn on us, or trample our gift underfoot. But our conscience will be clear before the Lord. Ultimately, their struggle will be with Him.

So, we judge others how the perfectly just, righteous, merciful and loving, Jesus in us, would judge. See that? Verse 12 taught us to treat others, how we would like to be treated. But, not as we desire from our individual human idiosyncrasy... No, from that perfect ethical basis and understanding as true Kingdom of Heaven people. Treat people how Jesus would treat them. Treat people right.

Treat them correctly... Judge them correctly.

Well, now we apply that reimagined axiom here. Judge others in the Christian Community, from that same ethical basis and understanding.



Examining another, as to the kind of influencer they are in the church, must be a judgment of care, concern and love, that seeks what is good, beneficial and noble. It desires restoration and it carries unlimited grace in that pursuit.

From such a foundation we must judge in order for the unity of the church to be a unity in both belief and practice.

That's what Jesus is talking about here.

What He's not talking about is judging every little foible, every personality flaw, every personal defense mechanism, every individual mistake.

Jesus limits the scope dramatically by saying the false influencers He's talking about are actually evil. He's not talking about the teacher who makes a mistake, or the preacher who misspeaks, or the Elder that irritates you, or the pastor who doesn't lead the way you think he should.



He's talking about "Ravenous wolves," who are synonymous with "Thorn bushes," "Thistles" and "Bad trees," that are "Cut down and thrown into the fire."

Based on this and what comes in the next few verses, these are not God's children. For us, these are fake Christians in our midst spreading false influence to try to corrupt the church. This is hugely serious - never make such an accusation lightly.

The bad, or corrupt, or unsound, or diseased, tree bears, not bad fruit, but evil fruit. They bear the exact same fruit as their father the Devil bears. It is the same Satanic influence. An influence, incidentally, that always has an element of questioning God's Word.

Verse 16 gives us the litmus test, that Jesus reiterates in verse 20, "You will know them by their fruits." Notice it has nothing to do with the Old Testament tests. Here again, is proof that He has in mind a much bigger scope than Old Testament type prophets.

It is remarkable how many Christians fail to understand or misunderstand this simple test. It makes sense that we would though... Failing to perceive the true nature of Jesus's test would be precisely what Satanic influence would strive to do.



Many people think “Fruits” has to do with the deeds and actions of the person, or their lifestyle, or their spirituality.

Many others think the “Fruits” has to do with the results of a person’s ministry, their success in numbers, or money, or audience size. Some look at the deeds, actions, lifestyle, spirituality, or success of their students, or their congregation, or their spiritual children.

The thinking goes that the “Fruits” must be visible and obvious to someone who is looking, and so we tend to think of sinful behavior or unsuccessful ministry.

My friends, these false influencers are wearing sheep's clothing, outwardly, they are some of the most wonderful seeming Christians you've met. What they peddle is appealing and so they also lead some of the most outwardly successful ministries known to mankind.

No one will ever come close to the true influence of Jesus and yet many saw Him as a sinner and when He was executed for blasphemy there were only a small handful of followers remaining.

The "Fruits" that Jesus is talking about is not what anyone could notice if they just looked. The fruits have to do with the influence itself.

Evil fruit from an evil tree is false influence from a false influencer. It is the influence that must be judged, not the person. It is their belief and the agenda that they push on others that must be examined.

It is the content of what they are peddling. What do they espouse, what do they teach, what is the substance of their influence?

Why does Jesus tell us it requires real vigilance?
Because the only way you know what's counterfeit, is to become an expert in what is real.

Fight your two-headed monster. Work to know the Truth and then you will spot what is false with ease. Choose your influence.

How?

We must start with a basis. As far as I know, no one here is an eye-witness to the life and death and life of Jesus.

We all have to take someone else's word for what happened, and we all have to learn what it means from teachers, mentors, influencers.

No one can figure it out on their own. You can't even read the Scriptures unless someone translates and publishes them, and someone teaches you how to read. As I said, "No man is an island." As Sir Isaac Newton said, "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants."

1) Disbelief ~ it never happened.

2) Distrust ~ it may have happened, but...

3) Institutional inspiration ~ it happened, and God reveals the details to the leadership of the church.

4) Individual inspiration ~ it happened, and God reveals the details to each individual personally.

5) Biblical inspiration ~ it happened, and God revealed the details in the Scriptures.

We must start with a basis for investigation. There are basically five propositions or blueprints to operate from.

1) Disbelief - it never happened. That's called atheism.

2) Distrust - it may have happened, but there's no one I trust with the details, so no one can know for sure. That's called agnosticism.

3) Institutional inspiration, or church revelation - it happened, and God reveals the details to the leadership of the church. The church is the final authority.

4) Individual inspiration, or personal revelation - it happened, and God reveals the details to me personally. Each super-spiritual individual is their own final authority.

5) Biblical inspiration, or revelation through the authority, inerrancy and infallibility of the written Word - it happened, and God revealed the details to the Inspired Bible writers and then preserved the resultant Scriptures through time. The Bible is the final authority.

Your first task as you construct your spiritual building is to establish the foundation. All Christian buildings must, by definition, be built on the foundation of Christ.

How you understand that foundation, how you see it laid out and how you proceed to build upon it can be thought of as one of those five blueprints. Which of the five will you use?

1) We can dismiss the first as an illusion. You've heard that "There are no atheists in foxholes." Well, I'll tell you there are no atheists anywhere. Everyone believes in something, whether they admit it or not.

2) We can dismiss the second one as pure laziness. I know people who proudly claim that they are agnostics as though it's a more enlightened position.

Agnosticism is the Greek way of saying the Latin derived word ignorance. Ignorance literally means that you don't know because you have ignored the information. It is stupidity on purpose.

I have no respect for agnostics. Get off your brains and seek, search, study, investigate, turn over every proverbial stone, and then tell me you can't figure it out.

3) The third option grew out of a basic realization. The church as represented by Bishops of well over 300 regions or cities worked together to define not only particular Christian doctrines like the Trinity, they also defined the content of the Bible itself.

I wasn't like Jesus handed the Apostles a complete Bible with both Old and New Testaments finalized. The church had to figure out what Old Testament Books to include and what New Testament Book to add to that base.

It is easy to see why many felt that it was the church that gave authority to the Bible, rather than the Bible giving authority to the church. The church was the means by which the Holy Spirit would reveal the Truth.

The church leadership was already hierarchical. while Paul, Peter and John were still alive. Small church groups with deacons over seen by elders, larger groups led by a pastor. Pastors in a city or geographical region overseen by city or regional bishops. Quickly, there grew a hierarchy among Bishops with power eventually being consolidated in Rome as the capital of the Empire.

The belief by about 400 A.D. was that the Bishop of Rome was the supreme leader and as such was in direct communication with God. If the Pope said it officially (ex-cathedra), it was the same as coming from the Burning Bush. By logical necessity the later revelation would supersede the Bible.

Oftentimes, Protestants can't understand why Catholics have extra-biblical or non-Biblical practices. "Don't they know that's not Biblical?" Of course, they do, but for them the revelation of the Holy Spirit through the Pope takes precedence over the Bible.

It creates a progressive revelation. Over time Catholicism has changed and continues to change. That's a big reason the Eastern churches separated 1,000 years ago and a big reason the Protestants separated 500 years ago.

4) The fourth basis has been around since day one, but it didn't really come into its own until it met with American modernism about 100 years ago.

That "Man is the measure of all things," is an Enlightenment sentiment that flowered at the end of the 19th century. Individual liberty leads to individual responsibility. Instead of following the institution, I follow my own personal convictions.

Because of the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation, people in the 16th century, questioned the church's authority. Because of the Enlightenment and other related movements, academics and scholars in the 18th century, began questioning the Bible's authority.

By the early 1800's in America there was a great unease about the footings of Christianity, you couldn't

really trust the church and you couldn't really trust the Bible, so what could you trust?

It's no coincidence that several cults and weird breakaway denominations got their start in that period of questioning. Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, and many more. In addition, with the authority, independence and self-esteem of the individual growing stronger each decade, all denominations went through massive splits into multiple new denominations.

By the early 1900's America was ripe for a deeper separation called the Pentecostal Movement. Within the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Third Wave movements, the individual person became more central.

It evolved into a practice of how God speaks to the individual and eventually led to everyday folks elevating their personal beliefs above all else.

Church became about the personal experience of God - how the individual felt the Holy Spirit's presence.

The Pentecostal movement breathed life into the institutional churches, but also influenced them to think more about what the church was doing for them and meeting their needs, rather than vice versa. It is also a progressive, ever-changing basis.

5) The final proposition, basis or blueprint is the Bible taken as it is and understood consistently and contextually.

It was the basis recognized by the Reformers 500 years ago and it has resurged in the last 50 years to counter the counter-culture.

The idea is that God Inspired the writers more than 19 centuries ago, God illuminated the church to accept and preserve precisely what God wanted us to have in this present time.

It is the only blueprint that is static, unchanging and non-progressive. It is my considered opinion that it is the only stable platform to operate from. In order to understand that blueprint I am constantly studying all manner of topics and all manner of beliefs, and all manner of scholars. I work harder at it than is possible

for most people. I can because you all provide for my needs, so that I can devote myself to the task.

As part of your reward, I do my best to present it for your consumption. You must determine whether it is a false or a true influence.

You must decide what other influences you will embrace. To do that you must work at it and be willing to unlearn erroneous things, relearn true things and learn for the first-time deeper things.

Judgment is required... Just make sure it is Godly judgment. John MacArthur's *Reckless Faith* states that, "Federal agents don't learn to spot counterfeit money by studying the counterfeits. They study genuine bills until they master the look of the real thing. Then when they see the bogus money, they recognize it."

I read an article by a guy who doubted the truth of that claim and checked it out. He found out that it's true and was given a short course in identifying real money by the Treasury Department. After a few minutes he was shown several fake bills and easily identified them all as such.

Closing his article, he wrote, “When a person knows what to look for, when he has been trained to examine the bill for particular identifying characteristics, identifying genuine from fraudulent can be done with great accuracy, even on the basis of only a small amount of training. I successfully identified each piece of counterfeit currency.” - Tim Challies.

The same principle applies. In our case it is more challenging because it requires a lot more training and work and it often means shutting out voices that are telling us what we want to hear - what would be easier and more comfortable.



There are some Biblical things that can be interpreted in different ways, but far fewer than the wolves would like you to realize. So, next week, Lord willing, I'll share how not everyone who says they teach the Bible, actually teaches the Bible accurately.