

Why Christians Differ Doctrinally - Part XIII. This is a very good review of the series to date.

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[0 : 00] Acts chapter 22, and we shall consider a portion of the Apostle Paul's testimony as he recounts it here when he gives his defense.

We are continuing to pursue the subject of why do Christians differ doctrinally, and how is it that so many different conclusions are reached from various passages of Scripture, and Christians just cannot seem to agree on these things.

And we are delving into that subject not with the kind of depth that might be perhaps even preferred by some, but I trust that it will be more than what would just be considered somewhat shallow.

So it is a very valid question, and it is one that believers have wondered about for a long, long time, and why can't we agree? We all read the same Bible.

How is it that we come up with so many different interpretations, and the only thing they have in common is that each one claims to be the right one? So that is problematic, and we are attempting to give some kind of an explanation regarding this.

[1 : 12] And I would just like to jump in, if I may, with verse 7 of Acts chapter 22, where Paul is relating his personal testimony, and he is telling what happened to him on the road to Damascus as he was en route to capture a number of Christians, Jews who had become believers and had left the country and escaped to a foreign land, namely Syria.

And the city of Damascus up to the north. So Paul was in pursuit of them, and he is giving his testimony and explaining what happens in verse 7.

He says, I fell to the ground. Well, let's look at verse 6. It came about that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus, about noontime, and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said to me, I am Jesus, the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.

And those who were with me beheld the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord?

[2 : 46] And the Lord said to me, Arise, and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.

But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus. And a certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me and standing near said to me, Brother Saul, receive your sight.

And at that very time I looked up at him, and he said, The God of our fathers has appointed you to know his will and to see the righteous one, and to hear an utterance from his mouth.

For you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now, why do you delay?

Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name. And it came about, when I was returned to Jerusalem, and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, and I saw him saying to me, Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.

[4 : 25] And what I want to focus on, to just introduce our subject, is verse 16, when Ananias said to Saul, Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.

Now, it appears very obvious that the way to have your sins washed away is to be baptized. And this, of course, is the conclusion that many have reached.

If you are Roman Catholic, you are familiar with the practice of infant baptism, which simply takes a baby shortly after it has been born, and often in connection with its christening.

And the priest sprinkles holy water on the forehead of the baby, and names the baby, and that is infant baptism. And the rationale behind that, which is held very seriously, and very sincerely, is that this little baby, was born, with a sin nature.

And the baptism, the application of the holy water, consecrated by the priest, applied to the baby, washes away, the baby's original sin.

[5 : 46] So that, in the event that the baby dies, it's covered, and does not go to limbo. Limbo is the place where unbaptized babies go.

But if the baby has been baptized, then it is able to avoid limbo, and is a candidate for heaven. And this is a belief that has been held for hundreds and hundreds of years, and is still seriously adhered to today, by Roman Catholics, and by many other denominations that practice infant baptism.

And, the verse says, wash away your sins by being baptized. John the baptizer, John the baptizer, told his audience, that they were to repent, and be baptized, for the remission of sins.

And it isn't difficult at all, to read these passages of scripture, and understand how, and why it is, that people arrive at some of the current practices, of water baptism.

If you are Roman Catholic, or Episcopal, or some of the other Methodists, some of the Methodists, they sprinkle water, and they practice infant baptism.

[7 : 08] If you are Lutheran, they pour. And if you are Baptist, they baptize by immersion, submerging the entire body under the water, one time backwards.

If you are brethren, they do it, three times forward, once in the name of the Father, once in the name of the Son, and then in the name of the Holy Spirit. And then, you come to grace, and we dry clean.

And what in the world, is this all about? And how, how can seemingly, intelligent, sincere people, reach so many, diverse conclusions?

Who is right? And, today, the prevalent answer, as to who is right, in accordance with, religious pluralism, is, they are all right.

The idea being, of course, that, whatever faith you subscribe to, and whatever their practices, and their doctrines are, they are right, for you.

[8 : 17] If you are, a Presbyterian, then the Presbyterian practices, are right for you. And if you are Nazarene, the Nazarene practices, are right for you. And if you're Baptist, right for you, et cetera, et cetera.

And never mind, that they completely, contradict one another. Because, this way, with political correctness, you can pronounce, everybody right, in whatever it is, they practice, and nobody has to be wrong, and everybody's happy.

And there's nothing to fight, and fuss about. So, their conclusion would be then, of the religious pluralist, that is that, there is, no one, right, answer.

That is, pervasive, and overarching, and should be embraced, by everyone. There is no such answer. Yes, there is.

And the scriptures, set it forth. But not in a fashion, that is easily found, or easily arrived at. It requires, a great deal, of diligent study, and investigation, in order to reach, a conclusion, that is consistent, with the overall, teaching of scripture, from Genesis, to Revelation.

[9 : 37] You have often heard, it said, that you can prove, just about anything, by the Bible. Well, you can. You just, jump in, and take a certain text, and what it says, pull it out, of its context, ignore what the rest, of the Bible says, and go with that verse, and hammer it.

And you can do that. And you will end up, with, a motto like, Acts 2.38, repent, and be baptized, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you will receive, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Slam dunk. And that becomes, the mantra verse, for certain denominations, that believe in, and practice, baptismal regeneration.

That is, you are regenerated, or you are made, a new person, in Christ, when, you are, water baptized. Having believed, then you are, water baptized, then that seals, or finishes, your salvation.

And, that's the verse, they base it on, and, it's hard to argue, with that verse, and what it says. Unless, you bring, other passages, into the picture, that create, conflict, and problems, and leaves you, scratching your head, and say, well now wait a minute, here it says this, and over here it says this, but here it says this, how am I going to put this together, make any sense out of it?

[11 : 08] Well, that's what, Bible study, is all about. And, I am convinced, that's why the Spirit of God, put the Word of God, together in that way, so that you do not get, all of the Bible's mind, on any given issue, in one place.

You just don't. You've got to compare, scripture, with scripture. You have to take, into consideration, what I call, the totality, of scripture testimony.

And, when you see, a certain teaching, or a certain verse, seeming to be contradicted, by another passage, you are right, in stopping, and asking the question, what's going on here?

This can't be. Because, if the Word of God, is the Word of God, as we believe it is, even though it has, many writers, it has but one author, and God does not, speak out of both sides, of his mouth, he doesn't tell one people, one thing, and contradict it, to another people, without explaining, why the differences, have come about, why the distinctions, exist, you have got, to be able, to connect, the dots, and, if you, are going, to content yourself, with simply, choosing, a pet doctrine, and a pet passage, of scripture, and ride that, as your hobby horse, you can arrive, at almost anything, but it is, taking all, of the scripture, into consideration, that will, deliver us, from that.

Now, I have got, some, propositions, that I want, to consider, some of these, I have shared, with you before, and in a way, I apologize, for the repetition, but it has been, a few weeks, since we have been, on the subject, so, I believe, that repetition, is one of the most, valuable learning tools, we have, so, let's go through, this again, and put it together, and let's start, with why Christians, differ doctrinally, why do all, the various denominations, exist, and how did, they come into being, what is it, that makes, Lutherans, Lutherans, and Methodists, Methodists, and Baptists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, or the Nazarene, now I am not, I am not, and for this, you can thank me, I am not, going to delve, into the history, of all of these organizations, and how and when, they developed, and years ago, but suffice it to say, there is a great number, of books, there is a great number, of books, available, handbooks, to denominations, on all of these issues, that will tell you, exactly when a denomination, began, who the founders were, who the principal movers, and shakers were, when they came into being, and their early origins, and what sprang off, of them later, run, all of this information, is readily available, anybody can find it, in a local library, you can even get it online, so it is there, in abundance, if you want to know, the origin, of any of these denominations, suffice it to say, that all of them, have their origins, in their particular, doctrinal convictions, and they were, arrived at, honestly, and sincerely, and sincerely, they were, good, regenerated, people, who loved the Lord, and believed, their particular, doctrinal, interpretations, of the Bible, were correct, no one, is questioning, their sincerity, or their honesty,

[14 : 45] I believe, they reached, these conclusions, even if I don't agree, with their conclusions, I believe, they reached them, with their heart, in the right place, with a desire, to want to please the Lord, unfortunately, having a desire, to please the Lord, is not a guarantee, that conclusions, you arrive at, will be correct, so, since they were all, reading the same Bible, why didn't they all, reach the same conclusions, how could they be, so different, how could, sincere, intelligent people, reach, such diverse, ideas, about what, the Bible teaches, and this is, our current focus, of study, that we began, several weeks ago, and in my pointing out, to you, where I believe, they went astray, by wrongly, interpreting scripture, that led them, to their conclusions, you should ask, this question, how can we be sure, that Marv, is not doing, the same thing, that they did, and the answer is, you can't,

I am as capable, of reaching, wrong conclusions, as they were, I am no different, from them, and neither, is any other, Bible teacher, so, you cannot have, that guarantee, can we say, that because, we pray, over a passage, and ask, God, God, for the interpretation, that we know, it's correct, well, don't you think, Calvin prayed too, don't you think, Wesley, prayed too, don't you think, that Luther, and Augustine, prayed too, I am sure, that these were all, devout, men, of God, with a sincere, desire, to be pleasing, to the Lord, and I am sure, that they all, engaged, in, a great deal, of prayer, for guidance, and direction, but that is, no guarantee, that the conclusions, you reach, are the conclusions, that are true, so I am saying, that,

God has not, given us, his word, and said, now, whenever you read, a passage of scripture, you just pray, and ask me, for the right interpretation, and I will give it to you, doesn't work that way, only the most, naive, will think, that it does, now granted, that really, sounds spiritual, that sounds like, you are really, close to God, you just pray, looking for light, on this passage, of scripture, and the meaning of it, and you pray, and ask the Lord, for it, and you read it again, and ah, there it is, and God gave it to me, well, man down the street, came up with an opposite answer, and he prayed too, maybe he prayed, twice as long, as you did, all I am saying is, prayer is not a guarantee, and God doesn't say, that it is, and he doesn't say, that it works that way, later on, we'll tell you, how it does work, but it only comes, as a result, of diligent, thorough investigation, it involves, a lot of time, and a lot of effort, and a lot of comparing, scripture with scripture, and a lot of, considering, what God,

God has been pleased, to reveal, to others, I remember, an anecdote, that I read about, C.H. Spurgeon, who is one of my heroes, and, he was, speaking to, a group of, pastoral students, who were headed, for the ministry, and one of them, asked, Mr. Spurgeon, a question, and says, isn't it true, that I really, don't need, any commentaries, or any helps, or anything, that anybody else, has written, on the word of God, in order to understand it, all I need, is just, the Holy Spirit, and what he reveals, to me, and Spurgeon, said, it is amazing, how much, some people think, of what God, reveals, to them, and how little, they think, about what God, has revealed, to others, well, we are not, to write off, the writings, of others,

I cannot tell you, how many times, I have thanked God, for the, several feet, of bookshelves, that I have, in my office, that are lined, with the writings, of men, I've never met, but I consider, among my, best and dearest friends, because, they have, enlightened me, greatly, but, they, are not, the authority, they can give light, they can give help, they can give encouragement, they can give, assistance, but, they are not, the authority, scripture, is the authority, and I don't have, a book on that shelf, in there, anywhere, that I am, confident, the writer, is right, on track, 100%, with scripture, because, we are all, flawed vessels, and I am, painfully aware, of my flaws, and, of the conclusions, that I have, had to change, over the years, because, further investigation, of the scriptures, just would not, support, a position, that I previously, held, so,

[20 : 18] I had to scrap it, and say, you know what, I was wrong there, and I have, got to change, my position, because, further light, has indicated, I can't support, that any longer, this is what, the scriptures, seem to indicate, and all of this, is just the result, of study, and it is growing, in the grace, and knowledge, of our Lord Jesus Christ, something that, we are all, committed to do, so, we cannot say, that because, we pray over, a passage, and ask God, for the interpretation, we know, that it's correct, these men, Augustine, and Calvin, and Luther, and Wesley, and we could name, dozens, and dozens, of them, they were, not, deficient, intellectually, they were not, unsophisticated, in their learning, they were, utterly, brilliant, by all standards, and they are, not to be, discounted, these were, sharp, individuals, who had, very keen, minds, and all of these, based, their conclusions, and their positions, upon the conviction, that the Bible, actually taught, and prescribed, what they were, setting forth, as the proper, interpretation, yet, much, disagreement, was, always, evident, between them, over the centuries, regarding, their conclusions, those disagreements, exist, to this day, and continue, to perpetuate, the distinctions, and diversities, among, the body of Christ, known as, denominations, even we, grace,

Bible Church, even we, ourselves, contribute, to the divisions, with our being, non-denominational, our denomination, is known as, non-denominational, that's the denomination, that we are, so, we are, just one, among the many, be advised, however, that distinctions, divisions, and denominations, aside, all who possess, faith, in the person, and work, of Jesus Christ, who died, for our sins, is a member, of the body, of Christ, and will be, in heaven, as a redeemed, child of God, their erroneous, doctrine, notwithstanding, because, the person, and work, of Christ, and our faith, in him, is the sole, determinant, and not, our other, doctrinal errors, I've often told you, every one of us, myself included, has flaws, in our theology, and in our thinking, we have reached, some wrong conclusions, it is inevitable, due to our humanity, and our finiteness, but when we get to heaven, we will all, get straightened out, the thing, that determines, our eternal destiny, is that, which binds us together, as members, of the body, of Christ, if you have a personal, faith, and trust, in Jesus Christ, it doesn't, really matter, whether you're,

Lutheran, or Presbyterian, or non-denominational, or Nazarene, or whatever, because, it is, the finished work, of Jesus Christ, that is the bond, that unites us, he is, our basis, for fellowship, and I have often said, when it comes to doctrine, if you are wrong, about the person, of Jesus Christ, who he is, why he came, what he did, why it matters, if you're wrong, about that, it doesn't make any difference, what you're right about, that is the watershed issue, and it is the only one, that there is, for I delivered unto you, that which first of all, I received, how that Christ, died for our sins, according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and rose again the third day, according to the scriptures, that, is the gospel, everything else, is superfluous, to that, that is the issue, and if you are in Christ, whatever denomination is, it is, however you baptize, or don't baptize, however you take the Lord's table, or you don't take the Lord's table, whatever other peripheral, doctrinal issues you have, they pale by comparison, to that one, it is the person of Christ, that unites us, so, let me give you a brief review, of a few principles, that we've considered, and the first is, the only valid basis, for believing anything, about anything, is because, we believe it, to be true, our believing it, to be true, does not guarantee, its truthfulness, it only reflects, our rationality, and objectivity, or the logic, of our commitment, what we believe, about anything, should comport, or correspond, to reality, or, we should reject it, as untrue, and unworthy, of belief,

Christian, doctrinal beliefs, or religious teachings, doctrine, just means teaching, that's all it means, teaching, positions held, conclusions reached, they are always based, upon someone's, interpretation, of the Bible, either as a whole, or of certain passages, so, which person's, interpretation, are we to embrace, some say, as I've already suggested, doesn't make any difference, each is right, in itself, if you are born, into a Mormon family, then Mormonism, is right, for you, if you're born, a Buddhist, then Buddhism, is right, for you, if you're born, non-denominationalist, then that, is right, for you, that all sounds good, but it is, all wrong, because, there is, a truth, to be known, that is, an objecting, overarching truth, that is to be, embraced, by all, and that is,

God's truth, sanctify them, through thy truth, thy word, is truth, Christ said, so, being born, into something, doesn't make it right, for you, that just means, that's where you are, and that's what is available, to you, and that is what, in all likelihood, you will embrace, and come to accept, as true, and valid, because, you were born, into that, and your parents, believed that, and maybe your grandparents, believed that, and the common, position is, it was good enough, for them, it's good enough, for me, well, that sounds nice, but it's really, sloppy thinking, having generational, beliefs in place, does not guarantee, their truthfulness, and all of this, brings us to the subject, which again, is roundly, denied today, is there, such a thing, as truth, to be known, period, modern, position is, no, there is, no, overarching, objective truth, there is, no basis, for, moral, absolutism, everything, is relative, whatever you go with, that's right for you, and you've got the opposite, that's fine, that's good for you, and on and on, that's, that's the common opinion today, this is where people are, it is, a relativistic, viewpoint, of life, it cannot, be sustained, by logic, certainly, not by scripture, the moment someone says, all truth is relative, they have just made, a self-denying statement, if all truth is relative, then what you just said, is relative, are you saying, all truth is relative, are you saying, that is an absolute, because if you are, you've just contradicted yourself, it's nonsense, there are many issues, in life, that are relative, not everything, is absolute, there's a lot of relativity, out there, but that doesn't mean, that everything is relative, there are absolute truths, and there are relative truths, and you've got to distinguish, between them, but the moment, you try to, eliminate one, and say, everything is relative, that's complete nonsense, everything is not relative, neither logic, nor history, nor the scriptures, will support that, when someone, takes a position, and pronounces it, and expounds it, just because, because of their personhood, just because, of our respect, for them, as a human being, and as an individual, we are to treat them, with kindness, and with respect, simply, because, they are a human being, and they are entitled, to that, that does not mean, that you are obligated, to embrace, and agree, with whatever, they are teaching, but it does mean, that, it deserves a hearing, kindness, and compassion, suggests, that, here is a fellow human being, who has an idea, or a concept, or a doctrine, that is different from mine, and I don't think,

[30 : 31] I agree with the thing, that he is saying, but I am going to give him, an opportunity, to express it, and then, I may tell him, you may hold that position, if you wish, but it is something, with which I cannot concur, and I do not buy it, I don't agree with it, and by the way, that doesn't mean, you hate the person, there are those today, who would say, anybody that you disagree with, you hate them, if you disagree, with homosexuals, why do you hate homosexuals, that is complete nonsense, you can disagree, with someone, and it has nothing to do, with hating them, or liking them, you could just be, non-committal to them, doesn't mean, that you hate them, because you disagree with them, it just means, you disagree with them, other positions, should be examined, and respected, as possibilities, but none, should be embraced, and adopted, as authority, yet, this is precisely, what happened, and continues, to be perpetuated, to this day,

I'm going to say, something now, that's difficult to explain, but it's very, very important, and I don't think that, I don't think that, it is avoidable, I suggest, that, it is probably, impossible, to eliminate this, from our thinking, and that is, there is a great deal, of subjectivity, I fear, that enters in, to the embracing, of objective, positions, and that probably, didn't make much sense, so let me put it, this way, many times, many times, it is difficult, to, be objective, and critically, evaluate, and scrutinize, what, somebody teaches, if, you really like them, if you really respect them, if you really admire them, if you look at that person, and say, you know, he is, he is such a nice guy, therefore,

I'm, I'm just sure, that what he is teaching, is true, you would be surprised, how many people, formulate, their position, on the basis, of the personality, and the charisma, of the person, who is communicating it, yet, I would also add, that is not, altogether, illegitimate, I do not think, that we can just, completely divorce the two, because, God, does use people, to reach people, and he uses personalities, tendencies, there are people, who are, positive, toward my personality, and my style, of communicating, and teaching, and there are probably, just as many people, who are negative, toward it, you know that, Wiseman guy, I don't appreciate him, at all, he really turns me off, I just don't get, what he is talking about, and I don't care, for the way he presents it, then the tendency, is to discount, everything I say, that's just the way, we're made, that's the way, we're put together, and we all know, people like that, you can be, surfing across,

TV land, and you come to, a certain preacher, and you're there, about three tenths, of a second, because you know, you don't want to hear, anything that guy, has got to say, and you just keep, right on going, and then pretty soon, you'll land on somebody else, and oh, I like this guy, he's one of my favorites, well why do you like him, well he's just, such a swell guy, he's just so nice, well maybe he is, but you really need, to talk to his wife, before you reach, those kind of conclusions, but still, all I'm saying is, subjectivity, often, makes its way, into objective situations, where we're, where we ought to be making, a conclusion, or taking a position, on the basis, of its truthfulness, and its, compliance, with scripture, rather than, on the basis, of the personality, of the individual, and it is, very very difficult, for us, to divorce that, because we like, to think, that people, we really like, and admire, are telling us stuff, that we can take, to the bank, that's a danger, there are, very, charismatic people, who come on the scene, and I'm not talking about, people involved, with the charismatic movement, necessarily, although there may be, some of those too,

I'm talking about, somebody with, a lot of charisma, and a polished personality, suave, glib, well spoken, oratorical type style, can just, really, weave word pictures, that's captivating, and all the rest, and it is so easy, to get caught up in that, that you just think, everything he says, is true, because he says it, in such a, nice way, well, it ain't, necessarily so, look at virtually, all of the cult figures, and the paths, of destruction, to which, they have led, many, many people, a la, Jim Jones, for example, and you could go on, and name a whole host, of them, but in reality, it is the same, kind of dynamic, that is at work, in a lot of, what we would call, legitimate, enterprises, powerful people, charismatic speakers, eloquent, think of,

[36 : 49] John Chrysostom, think of, a Wycliffe, and, Tyndale, and Augustine, and Anselm, and, Thomas Aquinas, and, Luther, and Calvin, and, Athanasius, and, on, and, on, you can, these, were, men, of, extraordinary ability, who had a way, with words, and, they would interpret the scripture, and come to conclusions, and, many of the people, who lived back then, as their contemporaries, were relatively, untaught, uneducated, unsophisticated, peon type people, with little or no learning, who were inordinately impressed, with those, who did have learning, and, just tended to put them up, on a pedestal, and everything they believed, everything they said, was, had to be believed, it was true, because, these people are so smart, and, they're so well educated, and, who am I, what do I know,

I'm nothing but a simple plowman, I just walk behind a couple of oxen, all day long, I don't know anything, I can't read and write, I can't, but these are educated people, everything they say, must be true, and you put your confidence in them, and their trust in them, and what they say, may be true, and it may not, but it isn't true, because they're educated, and you aren't, that doesn't make it true, we've got a lot of, educated, I don't know what you would call them, but, they're not cranking out much truth, but they've got, so many degrees, after their name, they look like a thermometer, and yet, that's no guarantee, that what they are teaching, or communicating, is true, numbers, as these people would begin, preaching, and teaching, and, and I don't want to, I don't want to pan them, because, I benefit from them, and from the legacy, that they left behind, but, as the numbers would grow, as they would, as they would study the scriptures, and formulate their positions, and then, began preaching these things, usually, to a very small number, and the numbers, would grow, do you know how many people, the Bolshevik, revolution started with, what we know as communism, that engulfed a huge percentage, of the world's population, put them behind the iron curtain, you know how many people, that started with, 17, 17, were original members, of the Bolsheviks,

Christianity had, 12, plus one, Johnny come lately, called, Paul, and, started with a very small number, and, look what we have, that can work for, ill, or for good, Joseph Smith, and the so-called, golden tablets, that he received, communicated to him, by the angel Moroni, in New York, started with, a very small number, probably just his own family, and it, reached out, and reached out, and reached out, and the next thing you know, there's a huge number of people, now, the Mormon church, numbers, in, the millions, worldwide, became the one man, and his interpretation, and his conclusions, this, is the way, it always, is, it always starts, as an idea, in someone's mind, and they export it, to others, and you reach, a huge number, now, for some people, all, that is required, to legitimize,

Mormonism, or Christianity, or Buddhism, is the sure fact, that there are, millions of people, who endorse it, and embrace it, can millions of people, be wrong, yes, and they very often are, numbers, numbers, of people, who embrace, anything, is no guarantee, for its validity, but, we are impressed, by numbers, how many people, do you have, following, how big, is your church, this is the common thing, among, because, if your church is, big, that indicates, God's blessing, if your church is, really big, if you've got, a mega church, that proves, God's blessing, and we are, impressed with numbers, always have been, numbers, do not, legitimize, any position, that's taken, and you need, to bear in mind, that God has, been pleased, to use, minorities, more than, anything else, so all human, interpretations, are to be considered, as worthy, of examination, to be Bereans, search the scriptures, and see whether, those things are so, but, they are not, to be adopted, as binding, or having, their authority, of God himself, they got, their interpretation, from their, understanding, of the Bible, but that does not, mean, that their, interpretation, is what the Bible, actually teaches, on that subject, and that is true, of me, also, and you need, to bear that, in mind, all human conclusions, including, yours truly, must be, rigidly, checked, with the scriptures, themselves, because, only the Bible, can authoritatively, interpret itself, the Bible, is the, only, safe, interpreter, of the Bible, and that's, why,

I have, belabored, over this, given, by, Miles Coverdale, in 1535, it shall, greatly, help you, to understand, scripture, if thou mark, not only, what is spoken, or written, but of whom, and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering, what goeth before, and what followeth after, now, I talked to you, a little bit, about baggage, I think I mentioned, something about that, in the bulletin, and the tendency, is, for people, who leave, a particular group, for whatever reason, to bring, some baggage, with them, when, Martin Luther, left the Roman Catholic Church, he was, a Roman Catholic priest, after the Augustinian order, John Calvin, was a Roman Catholic priest,

[44 : 20] Wycliffe, was a Roman Catholic priest, Tyndale, was a Roman Catholic priest, Thomas Aquinas, was a Roman Catholic priest, and Selm, was a Roman Catholic priest, Roman Catholic Church, was virtually, the only thing, that existed, by way of, a recognized, organizational, ecclesiastical body, for several centuries, centuries, and what we have today, for the most part, issues forth from, that early established, Roman Catholic Church, because, from the, from the Catholic Church, came the, Church of England, the Episcopal Church, and the Anglican Church, if you will, and from that, came Methodism, and from Methodism, came the Nazarene, and the Church of God, and so on, so, as you go back, and trace our roots, it is very, very difficult, if not impossible, to dissociate yourself, from early, Roman Catholic traditions, they, were, the Church, so, when these men, broke company, with them, they naturally, brought some, of their beliefs, and doctrines, which they had earlier, embraced with them, because, leaving the Church, or the ecclesiastical organization, there's no reason, to abandon, all of the doctrines, you don't throw out, the baby with the bath water, because not everything, was wrong, with the Roman Catholic Church, but they saw, some excesses, and the selling of indulgences, and, denial of justification, by faith, and things like that, so, when they made the break, they brought, some of those beliefs, with them, and, infant baptism, is one of them, so, you will find, Anglicans, Church of England, Episcopal, baptizing babies, for the same rationale, the same reason, and, some of the Methodists, and others, have picked up on that, from them, and they do the same thing, so, the baggage, is a logical, consequence, of severing ties, from a previous organization, but bringing, some of those things, with them, we did the same thing, and we didn't even know it, but, when Grace Bible Church, began, we had the responsibility, myself, with, four other men, Bob Holdsworth, Paul Pannis, Dave Weinbrenner, and Jim McGinnis, we had the responsibility, of drawing up, the bylaws, and the constitution, for Grace Bible Church, how were we going, to conduct ourselves, as a local church, and the constitution, pretty much sets forth, our doctrinal position, and the bylaws, set forth, how we are going, to implement, or put into practice, our doctrinal position, how we're going, to organize ourselves, how we're going, to function, how we're going, to be governed, and so on, and you know,

I don't think, a moment's time, was even given, as, we five, sat down, for hours, and hours, I don't know, how much time, we spent on this, but we spent, a lot of time, many many hours, over a period of months, formulating, writing, and rewriting, and writing, and rewriting, and comparing, and scrapping, and starting over, I don't know, how many times, but it took us a long time, to come up, with these bylaws, but one thing, that we never questioned, and that was, church government, the church, from which we came, was, an independent, Baptist church, that had, a congregational, type government, that is, church would have, an annual, business meeting, or other special, business meetings, as we're seeing, fit, and the congregation, voted on things, that were proposed, and it was a, congregational rule, and a majority rule, and that's how, major decisions were made, that's how a budget, was adopted, that's how, a pastor was called, or dismissed, or whatever, and we never gave it, a moment's thought, but that that's the way, it's supposed to be done, because, that's the way, we'd always done it, that was the only thing, we knew, that was baggage, that we brought over, and you know, it wasn't until, several years later, when we started, examining the issue, of church government, that we came to the conclusion, congregational government, congregational rule, nothing scriptural about that, what appears to be scriptural, from all of the writings, of Paul, especially to Timothy, and Titus, the pastoral epistles, and the church epistles, is that, a church is governed, by, a plurality, of elders, it is an elder rule, if you will, well shut my mouth, how did we miss that, we missed that, because, congregational government, was all we knew, all we thought of, of course it's right, it's automatically right, and it was just baggage, that we brought with us, now what do we do, we got a dilemma, we talked about this, two or three different times, among the elders, and you know what, most of us felt like, let sleeping dogs lie, after all, maybe a congregational type, government, isn't exactly, scriptural, but it isn't anti-scriptural, is it, and what would be involved, in changing it, what would you have to do, well, who is the governing body, as our bylaws, and constitution, exists now, you are, congregation is, who has the final word, on any decision, or whatever, congregation does, so how, are you going to change that, well, the only way, you can change it, and be true to your bylaws, which of course, you have a moral obligation, to do, is you have to get, the congregation together, call a congregational meeting, and present, your findings to them, and, appeal to them, to surrender, their, autonomy, and their authority, as it now stands, and transfer it, to, a board, of elders, good luck, good luck, but, our, overriding,

concern, should be, not, the way, we've always, done it, but the way, that scripture, sets forth, some, would be of the opinion, let sleeping dogs, lie, that ain't broke, don't fix it, we've had, congregational rule, for 40 years, it has, served us quite well, then you run, the risk of falling into, what shall I say, if it works, it must be right, and that can be, a fatal position too, it's one that is, embraced a lot, by a lot of churches, you do what works, don't worry about it, don't worry about it, being biblical, just do, what works, and if it works, it proves that God is blessing it, so I throw this out, simply as a kind of, confession, and also, as what I think, can be an excellent example, of the fact, that anybody, and everybody, is capable, and, likely, to bring some baggage, with them, from whatever, they come from, it is just, virtually impossible, intellectually, and emotionally, to leave, everything behind, because, not everything, you're leaving behind, is deemed, wrong, or ill-advised, might have a lot, of good with it, so you bring that too, but it's very difficult, sometimes, to be sufficiently, discerning, so that you make the break, in such a way, that you re-examine, everything, and had we done that, we probably, would have never come up, with recommending, a congregational type government, but you know what, that was one of the things, that we were really, quite sure of, and as it turned out, we were wrong, at least, in my opinion, we were wrong, so,

I throw that out to you, as an example, of baggage, and I also throw it out to you, as an example, of, giving thoughtful, prayerful, serious consideration, as to, what, the congregation, should do, about it, if anything, and one of the reasons, I'm doing it now, is because, we remain, in a transitional type, ministry here, and I'm thinking of, whoever my successor, may be, and trying to, leave the most, biblical kind of setting, for him, as is possible, and, we don't know, we don't know, how much longer, I'll be here, none of us, has any idea, how long any of us, are going to be here, but when you're 75, or coming upon it, the odds, start changing a little, you know, so, we want to have in place, everything that we can, that is, as biblically, compliant, as possible, so it's something, that you need to think about, no, we're not going to have, a business meeting, about it next week, at least I don't,

[54 : 45] I don't plan to, but I just want you to, I just want you to be, thinking about that, because, we have, an obligation, to the authority, of the word of God, and not, an obligation to, this is the way, we've always done it, that, is fatal, and we've got, a few minutes left now, so I'll entertain, any comments, or questions you may have, anyone, Dave, one of the things, Pam and I find, most valuable, about the Miles, Coverdale rules, and interpretation, if we think, if Premier is to, who, is that particular, scripture written to, that seems to clear up, an awful lot, right off the top, when people get all, bogged down, when people try, to figure out, what that scripture, you are so right, and we're going to, dissect that, Miles Coverdale thing, more and more, as we go through it, and we are going to, look at the subject of, yes we must revisit, this baptism thing again, and he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved, and he that believeth not, shall be damned, we're going to have, to look at that, and it's in Mark's gospel, and so on, okay, okay, okay, well,

Bob Smart, went to be with the Lord, about 1020 a.m. this morning, so, we are saddened, and we are rejoicing, let's pray for the family, Father, it is because, of the truths, that we have been considering, and the truth, behind the truths, that we are able, to come to you now, with a sense of, grief, mingled with joy, grief, over the departure, of a greatly loved man, man of God, man honored, and revered, by everyone here, and yet, with joy, because, of that same, word, that is provided, which is, more than mere words, to be absent from the body, is to be present, with the Lord, and we are grateful, that you have seen fit, to take Bob, as opposed to the, many weeks, or even months, that could, lie ahead, of additional, languishing, and pain, and we are grateful, that he is, ushered into the presence, of a loving, heavenly father, and our concern now, turns to Joanne, and the loss, that we know, she is suffering, the pain, is indescribable, and yet, the grace, that is all sufficient, is likewise, indescribable, and we know, that Joanne, will be drinking, deeply from those wells, and we pray, that you will use, the home going, of this dear brother, to remind, each and every one of them, of what they really believe, and why it matters, how we, can be of help, or assistance, we want to be available, in any way, shape, or form, as a church, or as individuals, and we thank you, for, that wonderful, wonderful truth, that, these bodies, are going to be changed, from, corruptible, to incorruptible, and, mortal, to immortal,

Bob has already, experienced that, praise be unto you, for what you have accomplished, through the Lord Jesus, and for the fact, that because he lives, we too shall live, thank you, for the pleasure, the privilege, of having known, this remarkable man, the impact, that he's made, on so many, thank you, for the legacy, and his children, and his grandchildren, for the memories, we look forward, to that, wonderful time, what a reunion, it's going to be, with no goodbyes, we bless you, for it all, in Christ's name, amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.