

The Top Secrets of the Bible

Simplified and abbreviated

Eighth Draft Tues. Feb 21, 2012, unedited
by Bruce Williamson no
graphics or art work yet. Now with page
numbers.

(Or what Biblical scholars and well-educated ministers learned years ago,
but that most Americans have never heard of.)

the secrets The humor the surprizes

The prayers, the sex

The Odd and the weird

What people love and despise

Ancient manuscripts to translation problems

*A full year of a high-quality seminary education boiled down to 4
dozen pages*

**Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical,
Pentecostal, Greek and Russian
Orthodox, Feminist and Liberation
Perspectives are all included.**

Spirituality of all kinds.
The Saints and heros

Plus *Art, literature and culture*
Introduction

Believing that nothing is more common than not seeing the forest for the trees, I have condensed, abbreviated many things within the Bible and spirituality. I have done so in the confidence that external details may be of less benefit to you, than the greater insight that comes when you can say, "So, this is a forest." So I have aimed for the greater good of the larger vision. I hope you will see the forest. The trees are nice, too. To save you time, I have included Top Ten Lists, and other lists.

My hope is that you will begin a voyage of discovery within Scripture and within your own soul. Yes, I hope you learn some stuff -- stuff that is strange, weird, sacred, funny, sexy, even the secrets that are rarely told.

I have not tried to teach a party line. But instead, I present multiple viewpoints and insights with the confidence that "the spirit will guide you into all truth." I truly believe that "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." I even think that the Lord intends that we should puzzle over some matters.

A stance of humility is traditional here where the author thanks people and then accepts all errors as his own. Instead, with a big smile I report

[Cartoon here to build your self-esteem for surely you will conclude that you could do better.}]

And yes, a special thanks for all who have checked for bad jokes, factual errors, and oversimplifications.

1. The reason you can not find many things in the Bible is because, you suppose they are in the Bible, but in fact, they are not.

Absent from the Bible are:

“Cleanliness is next to godliness.” (from John Wesley)
Traditional wedding ceremony, (from Book of Common Prayer)
No Wedding vows,
No Ordination for clergy – except for one worm that was ordained in the book of Jonah, and laying on of hands for special missions
No command to have an earthly King,
No list of duties for deacons, (The qualifications are named, not the duties.)
No lectionary – although it appears they had one in the O.T. temple,
No order of worship or mass,
No penance,
No Easter eggs, (From ancient Coptic church. The Coptic church still exist in Egypt, Sudan, and perhaps in Houston and Dallas, Texas.)
No proofs of God’s existence, (from Aristotle and other philosophers)
No evangelical “Plan of Salvation”
No doctrine of the Trinity,
No ‘sinners prayer,’ but some Scriptures like the prayer of the Prodigal Son, and a few psalms come close
No Christmas trees (from missionaries to Germany who coopted a pagan symbol)
No Christmas celebrations (from early church evangelists to Rome, coopted winter holiday celebrating/worshiping Saturn.)
No creed beyond the Schema (Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord.) and “Jesus is Lord”
No actual name of God,
No physical description of what Jesus looked like,

[Cartoon – I know it is here somewhere]

And many traditions and teachings, dogmas and doctrines are either, not named nor explained. The elaboration of doctrines, practices and traditions happened in the long history of the Christian movement. Usually a metaphor or symbol mentioned in the Bible is expanded and explained through the ages by theologians of the church.

2. The prophets of the Old Testament were against organized religion.

3. Many are surprised, even shocked to find out certain passages within Scripture. Try these subjects and statements on for size. Did you know these things were in the Bible?

Surprising Things In The Bible

Go to Bethel O Israel and sin, go to gilga and multiply transgressions... for so you love to do” Prophet is speaking out against attending public worship.

“Ye are all gods.” Did you consider yourself divine? Yes, this is in the Bible twice and once by Jesus.

“You are the light of the world.” Yes, Jesus is the light of the world and so are you. Start shining.

“God ordained a worm.”

That war crimes, and brutality are condemned. – Prophet Amos

If you abuse your wife, God will not answer your prayer.

“In times of ignorance, God winked at their sin.”

From the rising of the sun . . . in every nation Malaci 1: 11

“He (King Saul) lay naked all that day and night.” I Samuel 19: 24

While going out to murder some Old Testament Pentecostal-style prophets, King Saul got so happy in ecstatic, joyful worship that he lost his clothes.

King David exposed himself while dancing before the Lord. 2 Samuel 6: 20
David’s wife strongly objected. Note she was King Saul’s daughter and probably was especially touchy on this wild ecstatic dancing as beneath royal dignity.

Three elders are hanged for sexual harsement. This is in an Apocrapal book, Susana and the Elders. Through the ages this has been a popular subject for paintings – not the hanging, but the nude Susana taking her bath. Example: Thomas Hart Benton’s popular in Kansas City painting Susana and the Elders. Note that the elders look very much like Missouri farmers.

“All cretians are liars, gluttons and evil beasts.” So says the Apostle Paul quoting a popular comic playwright of the time. Paul is explaining to Titus why ministry

on the Island of Crete is so hard. ‘They are all liars, gluttons and evil beast. Your job Titus is to fix the situation.’ This is the humor of exaggeration and maybe St. Paul’s attempt to provoke Titus into thinking, “Well, the people here are not all that bad.”

“Now you are speaking to us plainly and not in figures of speech.”

Yes, the disciples became frustrated trying to figure out what Jesus was saying. Too many parables and figures of speech annoyed them.

A food program for needy widows of the very ancient church in Jerusalem.

A mission/relief offering to aid ancient Christians in Judea in a time of famine, economic hardship.

Two complaints that the Apostle Paul and Jesus were hard to understand are recorded.

4. **Love it? Or Hate it?** Through the ages several verses have been extremely controversial. Top nominations **for The Most Controversial Bible Verse of All Time** would include:

“What does he require of you, but to love mercy, do justice and walk humbly with your God” Micah the Prophet

The verse implies that organized religion is not needed, and leaves out faith and repentance, and appears to undermine financial support of synagogue or church. So some hate it. Others love this Scripture because they see it as a wise and wonderful insight into what God actually requires of all humankind.

“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father, except by me.”

Jesus in John’s Gospel

“This is my body, this is my blood”

Jesus as recorded by the Apostle Paul
Thousands have been killed over this verse.

“On this rock I will build my church. . .”

Jesus to Peter. Is this the establishment of the Papal office and the Roman Catholic Church or something else?

The social safety net of the Old Testament. (See next page.)

5. Ancient Israel split into two different nations over the issues of big government, high taxation and high government spending.

6. King Solomon's program of empire and big government spending is a near copy of the Egyptian Pharaoh's model of nation building. King Solomon's rule undermined the Jewish laws (Torah) of hospitality, social ethics, and community solidarity.

====6. The Old Testament law (Torah) included many provisions to create a social safety net to provide for the care of the poor and keep Israel from being like Egypt with millions in poverty and servitude while the Pharaohs spent the nation's wealth on giant palaces, temples, pyramids, and a huge army.

Social Safety Net of the Old Testament

- A. Full harvesting of fields prohibited.
Edges and corners reserved for poor,
Going through the fields twice to get everything is prohibited,
- B. Redeemer kinsman system,
- C. No interest allowed, cloak as collateral for loan must be returned by nightfall.
- D. Year of Jubilee = lands returned, slaves go free.
- E. Tribal allotments and special allotments for priests.
- F. Hospitality ethic includes all in territory – you can be a foreigner, a gentile passing through or living in Israel. The safety net is for everyone.
- G. You self-define yourself as needing the safety net. No forms to fill out, no tribal chief needed to give you the OK. It covers everyone who imagines that they need it.

As a system it is designed to sustain the life and dignity of the poor and marginalized. The vision is one of ethics, community solidarity, and not becoming a Hebrew--speaking version of Egypt.

Many modern Christians find it difficult to identify systems of exploitation. The ancient Hebrews had no problem identifying peonage, slavery, and economic exploitation of whatever disguise. Their religious and political slogan had been, ***“Let my people go.”*** They clearly understood that God was against oppression, and economic systems where a few grew rich while many others were stuck, degraded. They knew marginalizing people was clearly against the known will of God.

“ He who oppresses a poor man insults his maker.”

Proverbs

7. Abraham

8. Jacob and Esau
7. The Joseph saga
8. Moses and the Covenant at Siani.
9. How Dumb Can a Prophet Be.

Balim and his ass

Balim so wanted to make a profit from his prophetic position. The money was on the table. All he had to do was curse the Hebrew people fleeing from Egypt. The problem was God intended to bless, not curse them. The prophet is spiritually blind to the danger he is putting himself into. He urges his ass to keep moving. But the ass sees what Balim does not, the angel of the Lord ready to kill if necessary to stop Balim from cursing God's chosen people. Suddenly the ass speaks warning Balim of the danger ahead.

10. The book of Jonah is about bigotry and prejudice. Jonah himself is portrayed as a spiritually sick man. God punishes Jonah with sunburn for wanting to see God pour fire down upon Nineveh.

Jonah fears success in ministry and the mercy of God. After preaching that the pagan city of Nineveh was about to be destroyed for its great wickedness, Jonah waits at a safe distance on a nearby mountain for God to burn up Nineveh. Nineveh repents in sack cloth and ashes and asks for God's mercy. The only person to get burned was Jonah who got a bad sunburn waiting for the fire and brimstone to fall.

Jonah became depressed and angry with God, and says that he knew all along that God was merciful and compassionate. Jonah was depressed, perhaps even suicidal. The thought of a merciful and compassionate God was more than he could handle.

11. Mary the mother of Jesus was a populist in her politics, and knew the Old Testament Scriptures that were pro-populist, and anti-establishment by memory. See Luke 1. It sounds like a Scripture for an Occupy Wall Street rally.
12. The whole Bible is slanted in favor of the poor and marginalized people like orphans, widows, and immigrants.
13. The Bible as a whole is slanted toward peace and is generally anti-war, and is against military establishments and military alliances with other nations.
14. The Bible contains multiple competing viewpoints on many issues. It is a library, not a book.
15. Most, if not all, the disciples of Jesus considered themselves good Jews.

The Apostle Paul is an exception, and we know that he certainly thought of himself as a Christian. James the brother of Jesus and a key leader in the Jerusalem church lived his entire life as a kosher Jew and faithful Christian.

16. All of the Apostles of Jesus and most believers in Jesus Christ for the first two or three hundred years *never saw a copy of the whole Bible and never saw a church building.*
17. For a few centuries no Christian ever thought about what denomination to belong to, or what type of building their church should have.
18. The original name of the Christian faith was “followers of the way.” People who were part of the Christian faith were originally called believers, disciples, or followers of the way.
19. There are no ordinations in the Bible. But they did pray for and lay hands on people going on special missions. Also, according to the King James Version “God ordained a worm” to eat a castor oil plant that was shading Jonah, so Jonah would be sunburned and in his pain would understand God’s compassion in refusing to burn up the city of Nineveh.
16. Baptism is the ceremony that initiates a believer into ministry, since the New Testament viewpoint is that all believers are ministers of Christ.
17. The popular Bible verse John 3: 16 is likely a theological summary statement from the Apostle John that follows his account of Jesus and Nicodemus, and is not Jesus’ words to Nicodemus. This wonderful summary statement includes verse 17 also (“For God did not send his son into the world to condemn it, but to save it.”)
18. Since ancient times there have been multiple versions of the Bible. The reason it appears that the apostles misquote the Old Testament constantly is the apostles are quoting from the Septuagint version and our Bibles today translate the Old Testament from the Masoretic version of the Old Testament.
19. Most Bibles printed in the last 100 years contain extra information that most people never notice. For example, many Bibles show alternative wordings found in some manuscripts, or show how the Dead Sea scrolls are a little different. Guides to this information are usually printed in a preface. Often words that have to be added are marked by italics.
20. Most Bible translations have a slight slant or bias. The general slants are as follows for these popular versions.

- a. The King James Version, and New King James are slanted toward sounding well when read by a skilled reader in public worship and ceremonies. King James himself ordered the Bible translators to come up with elevated language that read well out loud. The New King James continues this tradition. Clearly supports doctrine and practices of the Church of England. These versions do an excellent job with the poems in Scripture.
- b. New International Bible has a slight slant toward evangelical thought, and is the top selling version purchased by evangelical Christians. Clearly supports the virgin birth of Jesus.
- c. Revised Standard Version and the New Revised Standard Version are slanted toward quality mainstream scholarship, and blend desires for modern English usage while staying close to the wordings of the KJV and William Tyndale, that is, they read well out loud but without an elevated language in most passages. Poetry sections are good, maybe even better for readers that have a hard time with Shakespeare's English.
- d. Good News for Modern Man, also known as Today's English Version is slanted toward ease of reading for persons who do not read well or for whom English is not their native tongue.
- e. The Message by Eugene Peterson is highly slanted toward the 'equivalence of thought' method of translation, and towards current English language usage. It also has a slight Calvinistic slant. It is very good with many passages by the Apostle Paul, and will help many readers follow Paul's sometimes intricate thoughts. The Message is not as good in translating the poetry in the Bible.
- f. The Amplified Version is slanted toward bring to the reader the choices and nuances of words that translators have to deal with. It helps readers think beyond literalism and understand the choices translators must make.

21. The Gospel of Mark is likely the Gospel according to Peter as recorded by Mark.

22. The first part of chapter 1 in the Gospel of John is the first chapter in Genesis in the ancient Targum version of the Old Testament. The Targum was a loose paraphrase (thought equivalent translation) of the Old Testament. While the Targum was not published in written form till after the Gospel of John was published, John's introduction reminds you and me of Genesis chapter 1, because this is Targum paraphrase of Genesis chapter one.

23. Another view is that the prologue of John is carefully thought out bridge between Greek thought, Hebrew Scripture, and John's incarnational theology (the idea that God has become human in Jesus.) See William Barclay's Daily Study Bible.

24.

25. The big reason some Gospels were left out of the New Testament is that they overstressed the deity of Jesus Christ, and seem to shortchange his genuine

humanity. Also they left out Gospels that speak of an entirely spiritual world. The ancient church was unwilling to have this approach (known as gnosticism) where good thoughts can replace right action. The hungry are feed by soup kitchens, not meditation centers where we all think happy thoughts about food.

26. The Gospels are not simple reportage of facts, like a small town newspaper printing up the police report. *“A housewife alone on Elm Street reported a suspected burglary. Officer Garza discovered that her cat had set off the alarm. Officer Garza put the cat out and reset the alarm.”* Instead all four of the Gospels are narrative theology that portray Jesus and teach the faith in a narrative/story format.

A hundred years ago people were often taught that the Gospel writers were simple men probably with low levels of literacy that just made a simple reportage of the facts. Back then dogmatic theology and philosophical theology were in fashion and widely read and taught.

Now Biblical scholarship has advanced and scholars can recognize that the Gospel writers were skilled, sophisticated narrative theologians, which is a good thing since most people find doctrinal, dogmatic and philosophical theology boring, difficult and unappealing.

Cartoon or photo bore the bark off a tree

Pastor can I sell your sermon ...sleep aids

In addition by leaving four records of the ministry of Jesus the Gospel writers created the best tools for teaching and spreading the faith that have ever been produced.

27. Were you taught misinformation in college English? Prose poems * were not invented by Charles Bauldaire in his book Little Flowers of Evil. The Bible contains several wonderful prose poems that predate Bauldaire by two thousand years or more. Great prose poems of the Bible include the following.

Great Prose Poems of the Bible

“Though the fig tree does not blossom” Habakkuk 3: 17 -19

In very modern poetry style, the poet prophet considers the problem of evil.

“In the beginning God created” Genesis 1

“A Time for Everything” Ecclesiastes 3: 1 -8

“Remember Your Creator in your youth” Ecclesiastes 12: 1 -7
Before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken
A moving portrait of growing old.

“Every garment rolled in blood” Isaiah 9: 1 – 7

The first two verses are in prose, then the prophet begins his great prose poem.

Please do not leave out the battle clean up scenes from your church's Christmas play. How will the children know that Bethlehem is next to Armageddon? How will you appreciate the greatness of the prose poem? Read the whole poem by the Prophet Isaiah.

“Have you not known? Have you not heard?” Isaiah 40: 21 – 31

This soaring poem begins with questions and ends with the image of the eagle in flight. It certainly is more than regular writing or prose and uses many poetic techniques. It invokes awe and reverence toward God and patience in our walk of faith. It is one of the greatest prose poems of all time.

“The Fast of the Lord” Isaiah 58

“If I speak with the tongues of men
and have not love, “ I Corinthians 13

This is the famous love chapter of the Apostle Paul. It is a prose poem.

Of course, in English translation all the psalms of the Bible come out as prose poems, so you could consider all of them as prose poems.

- *Prose poems are a half way literary form that are half way between poetry and prose.*
Think Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and I Corinthians 13, the love chapter. Both are elevated, poem like, yet they are not printed up in lines as a poem is. Nor did Lincoln nor the Apostle Paul think in terms of line, rhyme and meter, as a regular poet does. This form is now called a prose poem.

Paintings here of Jesus

Jesus in the Gospels

Why Do We Have Gospels in the New Testament?

The letters of the Apostle Paul were written before Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The ancient church felt that his letters were simply not enough. The letters contain precious little about Jesus himself and his teachings. The Apostle Paul is sharply focused upon guiding the young churches of the mediterranean world, and dealing with the problems of these churches. So with the first hand memory of Jesus in danger as the witnesses grew old and died, some by persecution, the necessity of making a permanent written record became plain.

So the ancient church wrote the Gospels. And even before they published our present four Gospels, modern Biblical scholars are confident that there were proto-Gospels (like first drafts of the Gospels,) a list of quotes and teachings of Jesus that is now called Q, and that a passion week record of the last week of Jesus' life and his death, and resurrection was already committed to writing.

But the main point is that with just the letters of Paul and others, the New Testament would be shockingly incomplete and inadequate to tasks of teaching and evangelizing.

In colloquial English, they needed more Jesus. And they knew it.

Why more than one Gospel?

Geography is probably the key factor. With the Roman Empire's assault upon Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the ancient church ceased to have a central headquarters. So different areas of the scattered ancient church produced Gospels. This is the view of Bart E. Ehrman and appears to be the correct answer.

How many separate accounts of the life of Jesus do we have?

It depends upon how you count. If you count Matthew, Mark and Luke as one account, then perhaps the answer is two. If you count the two items in Paul's letters as a super-short account, then 3. If you count Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the little bit in Paul's letters, then you could say we have 5.

Why Didn't the Early Church Consolidate the four Gospels into one single Gospel account?

This suggestion was made and considered, but the variety in material and perspective by having four Gospels was felt to be too valuable to lose.

In a Gospel do you need or want a Christmas story?

Now in writing a Gospel, the first issue is, "Do you need the Christmas story?"

Matthew and Luke thought an account of the birth of Jesus should be included; Mark and John left out the Christmas story, although John's Gospel begins with a Christmas theology of the incarnation.

Early Family Life

The Gospel writers said very little about the early childhood or family life of Jesus. We do have the names of his four brothers and know that Jesus had sisters.

Silent Years A long section of years until Jesus is about 30 years of age are completely left out. The long tradition of the church is that Joseph died, and that Jesus as oldest son took up his father's trade of carpentry and supported the family in Nazareth.

Location – on the edge of Israel

Jesus grew up in the village Nazareth. Nazareth is in a border area on the northern side of the geography dominated by a Jewish population. In Galilee where Jesus lived and where he found disciples like James and John, Peter and other disciples was a mixed population of a variety of ethnic groups.

Scholars of the sociology of leadership including intellectual and spiritual leadership have long cited Jesus of Nazareth as an example that liminal conditions of mind or geography (border regions) produce a very high proportion of national and world leaders.

Napoleon is from the Island of Corsica, not France proper. All the founding fathers of the United States lived on the edge of the British Empire in liminality. Pablo Picasso did not come from the heart of Spain, but from Catalonia, and then long lived in France.

El Greco was a Greek artist born on the island of Crete, then migrated to Italy, and then settled in Spain.

Challengers to convention and those that reach new creative insights usually come from border lands where people and ideas mix. Persons from liminality often find thinking outside the box a natural. So it was for Jesus.

So put it in your memory, on the border of Israel, a few miles from the ancient battle field of Megiddo, that we call Armagedon is where Jesus is from.

Baptism

At about 30 years of age, Jesus is baptized by his first cousin John the Baptist in the river Jordan. Yes, that is another border area. And if we take as correct, the guess that at some point John lived with the Essenes, that would make John the Baptist another person living in major liminality.

The Essenes baptized everyone in their monastic like communities everyday to wash away their sins. John is baptizing in between Jerusalem west of the Jordan river and the areas of Essene institutions on the east.

Traditionally baptism was for gentile converts to Judaism. A purification ceremonial baptism or washing for brides was also common. But the main baptizers in Judaism were the Essenes sect.

John the Baptist is uncomfortable with baptizing Jesus. John reasons he is unworthy to baptize Jesus and that Jesus should baptize him. Jesus insists. Upon coming out of the water, some people hear a voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved son, listen to him." Others hear only a rumbling sound. The Holy Spirit descends like a dove. (Special note: This is especially rare in the New Testament to find all three persons of the Trinity within the same scene, or within a few sentences. Of course, the Bible never says Trinity.)

John the Baptist points out Jesus and says, "***Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.***" Besides the affirmation that Jesus holds a very special place in God's plan, these words contradict the sacrificial system of the Temple in Jerusalem. But many ancient Jews expect the genuine prophets of God to be critical of organized religious establishments. Huge numbers of Jews conclude that John the Baptist is another in the line of Old Testament prophets.

The Bible specifically notes that John performed no miracles. His message was one of moral repentance to prepare yourself for the coming of God's next action.

Temptations of Jesus and Vision Quest

Immediately after his baptism, Jesus is led by the spirit into the wilderness for what we call the temptations of Jesus. An anthropologist would call an extended fast while alone in a wilderness place, a vision quest. While in Western Civilization this is outside of our normal experience, most primitive peoples of the world recognize a vision quest is what a holy person does before beginning public activity. The quest typically includes an encounter with dark forces, guidance or insight into a holy mission, and an aspect of comfort. Jesus' temptation includes all of this.

The temptations are not to vice or outward sin, but rather are to shortcuts and to a low road in performing his ministry as messiah.

The temptations embody and symbolize three short cuts or dead ends to his ministry. They are:

A. To reduce the Gospel to meeting physical needs while ignoring the spiritual. This is indicated by ‘turn these stones into bread.’ Jesus affirms instead, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God.”

B. To worship power, or wealth or the world, instead of God.

I assume that the devil could deliver on his offer of all the Kingdoms of this world. But to gain success at the cost of leaving loyalty to the Lord is identical with total moral and spiritual failure.

“The tragedy is that time after time when faced with the choice between love and power, the church has always chosen power over love.”

■ Henry Nouwin

C. To gain a cheap acceptance through showmanship.

This is the swan dive off the tower of the Temple. Yes, that would attract a crowd of superficial followers. Jesus objects that this is testing God, and we are not allowed to put God to the test.

In the Temple and Synagogue

Jesus as a Jew, worshipped on the sabbath in the synagogue “as was his custom.” In his home town, they handed him the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah for him to read the Scripture.

He read, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.

He has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor,

Isaiah ____ And then Jesus added the shocking statement, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled.”

Teachings

The central teachings of Jesus include the familiar teachings: God as Father, hypocrisy is rejected, a deep emotional trust in God is appropriate, repentance from sin is called for, prayer is important, forgiveness is possible, compassionate action to meet human distress is godly, and that the commandment to love is supreme.

Less widely known and understood are the paradoxical teachings of Jesus – whoever would save his life must lose it, no one puts new wine in old wineskins. The challenges that Jesus makes “you must be born again,” and “whoever would be my disciple must take up his cross daily and follow me” are also paradoxes. The mystical teachings of Jesus also are less widely known and appreciated. These include “I am the

vine and you are the branches,” “you must be born again,” and “without me you can do nothing.”

Traditionally through history the church has given less emphasis to the mystical. The Catholic church and the Orthodox churches have done better in this regard than Protestants, but still many would say doctrinal, and institutional concerns have often overshadowed both the mystical teachings of Jesus and the long, rich mystical tradition of the Church of Jesus (Jesus movement.)

I am getting a bit heavy here. Please see my material on dogs: **Your Dog is Meditating**, and **Your Dog As a Guru** for lighter material on mysticism. It could change the way you see your dog. See my website JesusSpirituality.com and find the dog humor.

Teaching Stories With a Question Mark

Teaching stories commonly called parables were a main teaching method of Jesus. Some stories end with a moral statement. But often the stories ended with a question, either stated or implied that leaves us to ponder an issue for ourselves. In a way, the parables function like koans, the Buddhist riddles that appear non-sense that promote deep thought. So the budhaist question is “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” Jesus asks, “Who was the neighbor to the man who fell among the thieves?” at the end of the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The unstated and sometimes overlooked implied questions of the parable are: “Why did the official religious functionaries pass by the wounded man bleeding by the side of the road?” And other questions naturally follow including:

“Where were the priest and Levite going?

Was to a religious convention?

Was it to a seminar to study the hospitality code of the Old Testament?

“Were they afraid of becoming ritually unclean?”

And the most personal question of all “If I saw a crime victim in the street bleeding, would I pass by without helping, or getting involved?”

Many careful student of the Gospels are left with the impression that Jesus wanted his followers to struggle with the issues, and did not want his followers to skip deep thinking. Other serious thinkers believe that Jesus used these teaching stories, koan like questions and paradoxes to open up his followers to a new consciousness beyond conventional morals and wisdom (Read John 3 “you must be born again.” “you are a teacher of Israel and you do not know these things.)

Abundance and Feasting in a Hungry World

The closeness of hunger in the ancient world and the abundance of food and consumer goods in the developed industrial societies have likely caused us to overlook or ‘spiritualize’ the instances when Jesus speaks of food and confronts hunger. Besides the

resurrection of Jesus, the only miracle mentioned in all four Gospels is the feeding of the five thousands.

In the Parable of Lazarus and the rich man, the rich man dies and finds himself in hell. It is hard to overlook his sin. He let Lazarus starve to death right in front of his house while he “feasted sumptuously every day.” Couldn’t the rich man at least have had his servants or slaves take the scraps of food left on the plates out to Lazarus?

These self-centered, hard hearted rich do not deserve any special warning since they have Moses. Moses here means the Torah law from the five books of Moses that is read in every synagogue every Saturday.

Let us remember Jesus taught in a hungry world. Everything about food is emotionally loaded. Heaven is described as a great feast.

Jesus on Prayer

Jesus was known as a person of prayer. He slipped away for times of private prayer. And on several occasions his public prayers were recorded. And Jesus left several instructions on prayer.

Teachings of Jesus On Prayer

- A. We are to persist in prayer and not give up.
- B. Mere repetition of words is useless.
- C. God already knows our needs. Prayer is not to inform God of situations that he is unaware of.
- D. We are to “pray for workers for the harvest,” since “the harvest is plentiful and workers are few.”
- E. We are to pray knowing that God is our father and desires to give us good things and in Luke the Holy Spirit.
- F. We are to pray for God’s will to be done.
- G. Those who make a show of their prayers and religiosity already have their reward of public adulation from those who are impressed with shows of outward piety.
- H. Jesus recommended private prayer. “Go into your closet and shut the door.”

The Lord’s Prayer

The Lord’s Prayer (Our Father) is a model prayer from Jesus. As a model it is intended as a teaching device on how to pray, but has been used since ancient times as

a public and private prayer in set form. In Scripture the prayer is found in in a longer version in Matthew and in a shorter version in Luke.

The prayer is in the plural through out -- “Our Father, give us, lead us, deliver us.” So even in this prayer guide from Jesus we are not seeking our private advantage, but praying for the good of a greater whole. Jesus does not define what the greater grouping is. Is it my family,? Or the community I live in? The prayer does not support a hyper-individualism. We are not asking for food while others do without, or from escape from evil or the evil one, while other people are caught in the devil’s snare.

The prayer begins with reverence – ‘hallowed be thy name” and we pray for the will of God to be done, which implies that at times God’s will is not being done in this world. The Kingdom is the better that could be present if God’s will was done. Now this thought could be taken as God needs to do more, or we as his creatures need to align our actions more closely to his will. Clearly it is we who need to change and not God.

Catholics less often use the formal ecclesiastical ending of the prayer. This ending is however used by the priest in the mass. “For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.” Many scholars regard this ending as an ecclesiastical addition to adapt the prayer for use in public worship.

Jesus commented only one part. The part on forgiveness, saying that our forgiveness depends upon our extending forgiveness to others. Jesus in several parables stressed this thought.

Jewels of Jesus Spirituality

The Disciples

The Women

The Miracles

Proclaiming the Gospel

The Messianic Secret

The Conflict

The Three Victories – Resurrection and Exaltation

The Gospels point to three great victories. The first is obvious, but implied and often overlooked. Jesus was murdered to silence him and end his influence. For twenty

centuries and counting the voice of Jesus continues to be heard, and his influence is growing.

The second is life triumphs over death. In his resurrection God/Jesus wins victory over death.

The third is exalted into glory. “And given a name above every other name that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

The Four Gospel Books

Matthew

Matthew’s Gospel comes first in order of presentation within our New Testaments, and it serves as a vital link between the Old and New Testaments. The Gospel of John also is a major tie linking the two testaments together.

Contents:

A Christmas story and genealogy, the baptism of Jesus, temptations in the wilderness, paradoxical list of blessings, Sermon on the Mount with the Lord’s Prayer (Our Father) in the longer version,

Matthew presents Jesus as a greater Moses, who teaches a higher ethical standard that is the fulfillment of the Torah (law/ethics of Moses.) Jesus is also the King and Messiah (greek term is Christ.)

Key Concept and Repeated Word: Fulfilled

Plenty of Parables:

The Central Paradox of Christ’s Teachings:

“For those who want to save their own life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

Besides Matthew 16: 25, the Central Paradox is also found in all four Gospels (Luke 9 Mark 8 , and John 12: 24 – 26. Very few items are recorded in all four Gospels. Not the Lord’s Prayer – in only 2 Gospels, not the birth of Jesus -- only 2, Not the beatitudes – in only 2, Not the last supper, . Of miracles the feeding of the 5,000 and the resurrection of Jesus are the only miracles in all four Gospels. You can confidently assume that this Central Paradox of Jesus is of great importance for all 4 Gospels to contain it.

My question to you is “Why is this central paradox so important?”

The Great Commission -- Matthew 28:

The verb Go is not a command. It is 'as you are going.'

How did we get Bible translations? What about ancient manuscripts?

28. Bible's versions are not translated from ancient manuscripts but from things called texts. Scholars have made a science out of making these texts. Texts can be purchased by anyone for a few dollars, but manuscripts are worth many millions of dollars, are not for sale, are kept in glass cases, and the guard usually has a gun.

King James of England had Erasmus the scholar of the Middle Ages make the text used by the King James translators. Erasmus wanted to check the manuscripts in the Vatican but he did not have the time to make the trip. King James was in a big hurry. Desiderius Erasmus completed his work in 1516. Besides the Vatican, manuscripts have been kept at Saint Catherine's Monastery at Mt. Sinai, in St. Petersburg, Russia, at the British Museum and in libraries and museums at Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Duke Universities, even in the National Archive in Tirana, Albania.

The internet, photography, carbon dating and the study of ancient languages and alphabets and statistical analysis of the various manuscripts have made the study of and making texts a highly specialized field. But it is now a more open field of study, since digital copies of the manuscripts are easily posted on the internet.

New manuscripts or pieces of manuscripts, sometimes as small as a postage stamp are discovered at a rate of about one a year. The average is way up now with the recent big discoveries in the National Archive of Albania.

29. While people worry about copying errors in the Bible manuscripts, the vast majority of errors are so simple that anyone that can read ancient greek, Coptic or some other ancient language could do the work of a textual scholar. The most common errors are misspelled words, duplicating the same word, omitting a word, and copying the same line twice in a row.
Copying the same line twice in a row row.

{Cartoon test: how did you do? (You caught my two errors , didn't you?)}

30. The parables of Jesus are designed to provoke thought and challenge you to a different understanding. The parables of Jesus in this sense are similar to the koan thought riddles of eastern/Buddhist tradition. "What is the sound of one

hand clapping?” asks the Buddhist koan. Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan and asks, “Who was the neighbor to the man who was robbed by thieves?”

So the ‘hurry up, tell me what the parable means’ approach is not an appropriate way to approach the parables of Jesus. They are told to change your mindset, shift your state of consciousness. Instead, slowly consider the rich man who looks up and sees poor man who starved to death at his gate comforted “in the bosom of Abraham,” while he is in torment “because of this flame.” Nor are the brothers of the rich man who now knows where his selfishness leads allowed an extra warning, since they Moses (the Torah) to warn them. Since the Torah was read out loud at the synagogue every Saturday.

Perhaps, you will also note that Jesus was really a Jew, as were all twelve of the disciples. As the Gospel says “He went to the synagogue as was his custom.”

31. You are missing the jokes. Humor does not translate well across languages and culture. That is why you don’t know the humor in the Bible.

When Jesus said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for rich man to enter the Kingdom . . .,” the disciples and the crowd probably laughed. This is the humor of picturesque exaggeration.

The longest humor passage in the Bible is from St. Paul in I Corinthians chapter 12 beginning with verse 14 through verse 26. A giant eye ball, or a giant head or hand for a human body. This is again the humor of exaggeration and absurdity. This is not even extra clean humor, because by “less presentable parts” the Apostle Paul means ass and genitals.

The Apostle is writing to promote unity and acceptance among members of the Corinthian church. What we call tolerance of differences. Did he figure that humor would break the tension in dealing with a touchy subject? Perhaps. Or did he just want to make his point in shocking, powerful and unforgettable way? That is with joke.

By the way many Scriptures have modern jokes that go with them.

Mormon to Mark Twain “Just show me in the Bible where it says a man can not have several wives.”

Mark Twain – “Nothing is easier to do. Jesus said, “No man can serve two master. For he will love one and hate the other.”

32. Some key words are not actually translated, but are transliterated.

These include baptism, deacon, and bishop and Jehovah. Some serious criticism has been made occasionally of this practice as an example of slanting the translation.

Also because language and human thought is highly metaphorical, some words differ quite a bit in translation. And it would be very difficult for the translators to avoid doing this. For example the word for “top lid of the Arc of the Covenant” becomes “expiation,” or atoning sacrifice, or simply a sacrifice for sin. But since on the Day of Atonement the blood of the sacrificial lamb was sprinkled on the top lid of the Arc of the Covenant by the high priest, the name of the lid becomes a metaphor for an atoning sacrifice.

33. The Gospel books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were written after the letters of the Apostle Paul. The New Testament books are not in chronological order of their writing.

34. The order of events in the Gospels are not in exact chronological order, but are instead arranged in different ways. This includes perhaps some grouping by subject matter, or perhaps by the number 7 or the feasts of the Jewish year.

35. Coopt is a wise move in influencing people, especially large groups of people. To coopt is to adopt the language, symbols or customs of a group of people, or from the other side for the purpose of persuasion or showing respect for another person’s culture. This has been done repeatedly throughout Christian history. Examples of coopting include Christmas trees, and celebration of Christmas.

Ancient evangelistic missionaries co-opted the winter celebration of Saturn, so ancient Romans could convert to the Christian faith and not give up their winter holiday. Likewise, many pagan Germans enjoyed yule logs, had great family memories of burning Yule logs, so the missionary evangelists co-opted the tree symbol as a Christmas tree. Even today, mega-churches adopt rock bands and music and elements of rock concerts to help younger generations feel at home in church.

36. The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous come from Ignacian spiritual exercises for Jesuits. They were adapted and given to the founders of AA by a popular Episcopal priest in Pittsburg. Undoubtedly the acceptance of AA into mainstream American life has been helped by countless Catholic priests and bishops who recognized the Twelve Steps as a paraphrase of revered Catholic practice.

This is not co-opting in my mind. The priest gave a wise and straight answer to the question he was asked. The question was, “Do you know anything that can help drunks get sober?” He then took a sheet of paper and wrote out the beginning steps or exercises of new Jesuits.

The Saint Francis prayer that so many people first saw in the Big Book of AA appears to have come to America either A.) from an American soldier returning from WWI with a Saint Francis prayer card printed in France, or B.) it came from a Jesuit within the United States that knew this prayer which is probable from a Jesuit summary of the spirituality of St. Francis rather than from the saint himself.

There is a known devotional of Saint Francis that is similar the Prayer of Saint Francis, “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.”

37. While far from perfect, the congregations of ancient Christianity were more informal, warmer and emotionally caring than the typical churches of today. O. H. Mowyer, PhD and former President of the American Psychological Association was correct in identifying the early church as being much more like a support group than churches are today.

This warmth and caring is reflected in the 5 times that Paul instructs in Scripture to “Greet one another with a kiss,” or “Greet one another with a holy kiss,” or “Greet one another with a kiss of love.” Also, St. Paul’s instruction to “confess your sins one to another,” sounds like the general procedure of a self-help group.

While the modern Christian movement is handicapped in evangelism by a cold, institutional atmosphere in modern congregations, the ancient church of 100 and 200 A.D. was empowered by the obviously warm and caring atmosphere, and supportive accepting group dynamics.

38. What is the Jesus Prayer? It is a one sentence prayer highly regarded in Eastern Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, and Russian Orthodox Churches, and is used like a mantra. The prayer is just one sentence long, but saying the prayer in an abbreviated form is highly encouraged.

The full prayer is “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon me a sinner.”
Popular abbreviated forms include:

“Jesus have mercy on me.”
“Jesus have mercy,”
“Jesus mercy,” and simply
“Jesus.”

The words of the prayer come from combining the shout of the blind man on the road, “Lord, have mercy on me,” with the prodigals son’s prayer, “Father I have sinned against heaven and before you. . .”

The Russian book The Way of the Pilgrim popularized the Jesus Prayer. In San Antonio, Texas retired Episcopal Bishop Hibbs teaches the prayer, and has a book upon it, entitled “Build An Alter in My Heart.”

39. While there is a lot of sex in the Bible, Sigmund Freud's interpretation of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden as a symbol for sexual discovery and experience is likely incorrect. Ancient Hebrews did not have Victorian attitudes towards sexuality, and would not have equated sexuality with sin or disobeying God. Instead, they would have identified sexuality as part of the "good" that God created and then blest in the creation pronouncement ("And God saw it and said "It is good.")

This Freudian interpretation is an example of reading into the Scripture what is not actually there. If you want to sound learned, proud, or want to impress your friends, call this "isegesis ," which is, of course, the opposite of exegesis, a careful reading of what is actually there in the Holy Scripture.

Overlooked Material in the Bible

A great deal of material and subjects within the Scripture are often overlooked. Consider the following areas:

Tolerance:

As American culture becomes more coarse, rough and uncivil, perhaps more attention is needed upon the several Scriptures that teach tolerance toward others. Amazingly, some Christian groups have come to understand tolerance as a moral failing or weakness. I recommend a careful study of the Pro-Tolerance Scriptures.

Pro-Tolerance Scriptures

The Golden Rule of Jesus – do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Malachi 1:11 From the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts.

Matthew 5 Judge not, for ye shall be judged.

Why do you judge the servant of another.

First take the board out of your own eye

James/?? God is no respecter of persons

James A rich man ... a poor man sit at my feet ... making distinctions among yourselves

shhiboloeth

Movements and Interpretative Systems:

Several movements within the Christian faith have shaped and influenced churches and how people live out their faith. Someone, probably several people, near you have been influenced by these movements.

Franciscan renewal: St. Francis and his many followers advocated a back to the simplicity of the Gospel, and were a major moral and spiritual force in the renewal of the Roman Catholic Church. He opposed an institutional church that he felt was corrupt, materialistic, and falling far short of the Gospel. His down to earth, profound personal faith provided continuing inspiration for multitudes of followers of Jesus Christ, both Protestant and Catholic. He is now considered the patron saint of ecology.

Protestant Reformation:

A less institutionalized form of the Christian faith emphasizing salvation by grace and the authority of the Bible took hold in Germany and Northern Europe under the leadership of Martin Luther. Luther a very able Biblical scholar found that “penance” in the Vulgate Latin translation of Scripture was a poor translation of the Greek word *metanoia* or repentance. He denied the authority of the Pope, demoted tradition as a guide to faith preferring to follow the teachings of the New Testament.

Counter Reformation:

In a powerful response to Protestantism, the Council of Trent reaffirmed traditional Catholic doctrine, tightened administration of the Catholic church, such as requiring high church officials to actually be on the job. Many abuses were cleared up or reduced. A missionary and evangelistic program was launched within Catholicism that reached around the globe. Hence, today there is a Catholic presence in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Fundamentalism:

A very conservative even reactionary movement that started in the United States. It stresses supernaturalism in faith, is hostile toward social change and the rise of science. Fundamentalism often carries a hostile, bitter emotional tone, and the angry stance, lack of a positive program, and anti-intellectualism caused many who basically agreed on the theology to find fundamentalism unacceptable.

Some Baptist pastors defined fundamentalism as “No Fun, Lots of Damn, and Mental Less.”

Many have concluded that Fundamentalism is closely connected to the dynamics of the authoritarian personality described by Adorno. Hence, we have fundamentalists in Islam, in Hinduism, and even in Buddhism.

Classical Liberalism - An optimistic, positive interpretation that stressed the image of God in all persons, prayer and the person of Jesus. Classical liberalism expected the gradual improvement of individuals and societies with rising level of education and Christian influence upon society.

Classical liberalism mostly died in World War I from the huge casualty numbers of trench warfare. And the combative nations were all nominally Christian. What was left of classical liberalism was then battered by Barth and Brunner and other Neo-Orthodox theologians who stressed human sinfulness. Education and scientific progress could not produce or guarantee a better grade of humans, since humans were constantly falling into pride, selfishness, greed, violence, tribalism and self-deceit.

Pentecostal Movement

Neo Orthodoxy

Neo Orthodoxy movement was led by heavy weight, European theologians coping with modern thought, a cynical world and the aftermath of World War II. They reasserted the reality of sin, the importance of close and careful Biblical study, and the importance of faith. They opposed as unrealistic the optimistic tenor of classical liberal theology.

Karl Barth claimed liberal theology had not prepared him to truly do the work of a pastor. He said that after 6 weeks in a village pastorate he had run out of stuff to preach, and so had to turn to the Bible for material. In Scripture he found abundant treasure.

The emotional tone of the neo-orthodox appealed to many. These were serious individuals, academic and intellectual heavy weights, and were clearly in tune with the times in that they thought sin and evil could not be erased from human experience by optimism, education or scientific progress.

Additionally, neo-orthodox stressed the power of ‘sin’ as persistent in human life, and this inner sin (what was previously understood as original sin) was enduring, even if one went on a holy crusade against some particular sin. In fact what would happen, said the neo orthodox, was that while a person was on crusade against some particular evil, the crusader himself would predictably fall into other sins of

meanness, lying, arrogance. And that the net result would be more sin rather than less.

Neo Orthodoxy seemed like familiar territory for many believers. Here, Christ was redeemer and Lord, repentance was a necessity, and salvation was through grace by faith. And God was revered as awesome and holy. For many Americans neo-orthodoxy didn't seem like a movement at all, but just a new generation of Lutherans and Presbyterians (Reformed or Calvinist) from Europe that were much like Lutherans and Presbyterians that lived down the street.

If at times the neo-orthodox theologians were hard to understand, at time they were as plain as day. When Karl Barth visited the University of Chicago and was asked to summarize his massively long theology by a newspaper reporter, he answered,

“Jesus loves me; this I know for the Bible tells me so.”

The term neo-orthodox came from the idea that they had found a new path through modern scholarship and analysis of history and thought to come to the traditional Christian faith. Their path was new, the end result was “the old, old story” of the Gospel.

Evangelical Movement

Seeker Sensitive Movement

Emergent Movement The shorthand comic definition of emergent is wrought iron crosses, and black velvet curtains.

* * * * *

Philosophy and Philosophical Theology

The problem of evil & suffering

The problem of evil and suffering is “Why is there evil and suffering in the world that God in his goodness created?”

The Bible addresses this question in several places.

1. The Book of Job in the Old Testament.
2. the Book of Habbakuk in the Old Testament.
3. Psalm 72
4. In the theology of incarnation and the cross of Jesus found in all four Gospels and within the various letters of the New Testament.

5. Victory of God revealed in dramatic imagery in the New Testament book of Revelation.

I personally find most satisfying Habakkuk – we live by faith in a world of suffering, that is, we stay loyal to the Lord. And in Psalm 72 the Psalmist is discouraged of trying to think through the problem, but he says, “When I went into the House of the Lord,” that is in worship he was renewed in his faith. The Psalmist concludes, “As for me it is good to serve the Lord.” These are personal and subjective answers.

On a larger scale Isaiah 53, the four Gospels and the Apostle Paul say God in Jesus Christ has taken on humankind’s suffering, sin and death upon himself in the cross of Jesus Christ and has victory in the resurrection/exaltation of Jesus Christ. And in Revelation the vision of heaven’s glory where God wipes away every tear, and death is no more, and God makes all things new. Here the lamb of God that has borne the suffering is celebrated as exalted as cosmic Lord.

So to the philosophical problem of evil, the Bible gives 5 different religious answers. The professional philosopher or cynic may not be satisfied with these answers, but multiplied millions of believers have been.

Art and Culture and Literature

[Image of Icon]

40. Eastern Orthodoxy started out highly supportive of art for devotion. Of course, these greek orthodox Christians didn’t have to use Bible translations like the rest of us. They read their Bibles in Greek, and in Greek the Bible says Jesus is the icon of God. So surely, making icons, portraits of Jesus is proper Christian thing to do. The icons were and still are being produced to promote prayer, and devotion.

The harsh critique of the icons coming from both Judaism and Islam provoked the Iconoclast controversy in the Byzantine Empire. Both Jewish and Moslem critics claimed the icons violated the Ten Commandment, “Thou shalt not make any graven image.” Other Byzantine Christians joined the criticism feeling that some of their fellow believers had slipped into superstition. . For 90 years the smashing of icons by iconoclasts, and the hiding of Christian art by devoted Christians continued. When the Iconoclast controversy was over, art and icons as devotional aids had won the day. It took 90 years.

39. A similar anti-art movement also occurred in the Protestant Reformation. A Calvinistic mob smashed the art in the Geneva Church where John Calvin would later pastor.

40. In England a similar ugly, anti-art, anti-Catholic conflict destroyed much devotional art upon government orders. It is likely that William Shakespeare's father tried to protect art and defend Catholic worship. Shakespeare's father-in-law was tortured to death for his defense of Catholic worship.

41. Marshal McLuen author of The Media Is The Message taught this conflict was caused by a Civilization-wide shift from visual learning to lineal print based learning. He may be right.

42. Stained Glass windows were visual teaching aids for children and adults. The great medieval cathedrals of Europe were constructed in a time of low literacy levels. The faithful were taught and repeatedly reminded of key facts of faith by their visual depictions in the stained glass.

The stations of the cross are not only devotional aids, but teaching tools. They help believers remember details about Jesus.

41. Those wonderful line drawings in Good News for Modern Man, and La Palabra de Dios por Hoy are from the French artist, Annie Vallotton.

42. The musical work The Passion of Saint Matthew is called "of Saint Matthew," from the influence of Martin Luther, who took a dim view of homogenizing the different Gospels. Dr. Joel Gregory, Professor of Preaching takes a similar line when he advises, "Preach the peculiarities of the text."

43. The earliest known depictions of Jesus in art are now at Yale University and are now posted on the internet. They show Jesus with short hair and no beard.

[drawings of jesus ancient}

44. America's most prolific artist depicting Jesus as a black in race was Charles Johnson of Los Angeles, California. His images of a black Jesus were widely used in curriculum and posters in black churches.

45. Of course, a similar thing is done in the many depictions of Jesus as a Northern European with light brown hair, and blue eyes. Japanese artists have drawn and painted the image of Jesus as oriental. A leading Catholic journal sponsored an art contest to find a multi-ethnic image of Jesus for the year 2000.

46. The laughing Jesus image so popular in Latin America was likely created by an unknown artist of Latin America.

47. Did someone bring their dog to the Last Supper? I doubt it. But the old master painters of the Renaissance often included a dog on the floor. I have no idea why. They also included a towel, bowl and jar of water in depictions of the Last Supper of Jesus. These items were from the washing of the feet service of Jesus.

Many modern reprints of the art leave out the towel, the bowl, the jar of water and the dog. I think the reprints sell better without the towel, bowl, water or the dog.

48. The American artist, ...Thomas Eaton..... has been described as anti-Christian. I doubt it. He spent many Sundays joining faculty and students at the Catholic Seminary in Philadelphia for meals. And he painted several portraits for free for members of the faculty and other high Catholic officials in the United States on the east coast.

45. Thankfully, due to Moslem tolerance many of St. Sophia's icons and art works remained intact even as St Sophia was converted into a Mosque used for Muslem worship for many centuries.

45. In ancient Rome the art symbol for a miracle or miracle worker was a magic wand, so in the catacombs Christian art often shows Jesus holding a stick, or magic wand while working a miracle.

49. After the Emperor Constantine legalized the Christian faith and started promoting it, the ancient Greek Christians turned to Greek theater for methods to conduct public worship to large crowds. They made their worship services and structured their mass in some ways like Greek theater. And when they came together to explain how God is a Trinity, they used the Greek theater term for 'mask.' persona to described the three persons (masks) of the Trinity.

Greek actors performed while wearing masks so that one actor could play multiple parts in the play. God, so said these ancient Greek theologians, was like one actor who played three different roles by changing his masks (persona.)

47. Jesus' Sermon on Lost Things is constructed on the string of pearls rhetorical model. That is it is one choice story after another, all making a similar point. You remember the last story The Parable of the Prodigal Son. The other two stories are "The Lost Coin," and "The Lost Sheep."

Spirituality

50. Easy believism is the notion that there is nearly nothing to salvation and the Christian life. A mere tip of the hat toward God, a mental assent to a creed, a quick ritual and easy believism imagines that the blessings of faith are all yours. Easy believism attitude can be found in both Protestant and Catholic forms.

Like floating down the river on a tube . . .

"They are baptized, but not evangelized."

Pope John Paul, II speaking of millions of Catholics in Latin America

Easy believism sometimes thinks about what is the bare minimum a person has to do to be a Christian.

{Cartoon , kid asking teacher ‘what is the least I have to do to pass this class.?’}

{ Cartoon A better approach – little kid stands in offering plate – “I’m giving my all to Jesus.” }

“Christianity has not been tried and found wanting. Christianity has been tried and found difficult.”
-- G.K. Chestson

The Top Ten Big Mistakes of Biblical Ignorance

Avoid all of these and you will be smarter and look smarter

48. Imagining that the Bible is one book is a big mistake; it is a library. A collection of books written over centuries by a variety of authors. The historical periods, customs and places are different for different Bible books.
49. Imagining that there is one spirituality in the Scripture, instead of many distinctly different forms of spirituality in Holy Scripture.
50. Reading stuff into the Bible, when you should be reading carefully to hear what the Scripture says is another common big mistake.
51. Assuming the Bible functions as an answer book so you don’t have to think. Why would you even imagine God didn’t want you to think?
52. Imagine that there was a long period of centuries of oral tradition when the Gospels were told and retold before they were written down. In this mistake people confuse parts of Genesis with the New Testament. Parts of the OT especially the earliest parts, were told and retold many times.
53. Thinking that “proof texting” is serious Bible study or doing theology well. “Proof texting” often takes Scriptures out of context, and lists it with other Scriptures that may or may not relate to the subject in question. It is not serious Bible study. Remember what Shakespeare wrote,

{clip art of William Shakespeare}

“The Devil can quote Scripture for his own purpose.”

54. The opposite of “proof texting” is not knowing any Scripture that relates to your topic. With no Scriptural citation, you can imagine nearly anything you want and

assume that it make some kind of sense. In short, it is better to have a Scripture than not having one. But try to do better than “proof texting.”

Forgetting that Jesus and all 12 of his disciples were jews.

Assuming that the Biblical writers had to use the methods of organization and writing that you use. All the Scripture is from half way around the world, and about two millennia old. Hey, it’s going to be different. They did it their way, not your way.

Jumping around from one area of Scripture to another so fast that you never know what’s going. Yes, this mistake is channel surfing in the Good Book.

Various Types of Spirituality in the Bible

- A. Spirituality of Purity – This includes a variety of purity spiritualities. The Kosher rules of the Old Testament are a purity spirituality. But so is the beatitude of Jesus, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Also in the Old Testament, “he who has clean hands and a pure heart.” Reflects an ethical spirituality, with perhaps Kosher added. Psalm 1 is a purity spirituality with meditation on the Torah (law, ethical standards) added to ethical living.

Modern versions of purity practices include vegetarianism, chastity, recycling, environmentalism, not using profanity, and excluding exposure to violent or sexual images in media. Fair trade practices which are mostly social justice practice are for a small but growing group of American consumer a purity practice.

Please note: Pollution is a very Old Testament word. It is, of course, the opposite of purity.

- B. Spirituality of Holy Places – The concept that holy places are more sacred and that the divine is more available in certain “thin places” to use Marcus Borg’s term is very ancient. Jacob feels his camp site at Bethel is a holy place. He dreams of the ladder to heaven with angels ascending and descending. Years later when afraid of meeting his brother, Jacob wrestles with God/ an angel, perhaps his own soul, seeking to be blessed. Consider Abraham Lincoln’s phrase “the angels of our better nature.”

Pilgrimages to Lourdes, or retreats to Sedona, Arizona, or Muslims going to Mecca are examples of the spirituality of special places.

- C. Ethical – In ethical spirituality the moral life is seen as the focus of spiritual life. Matthew’s Gospel is saturated with ethical spirituality.

Luke's Gospel is also filled with an ethical spirituality stressing compassionate action.

- D. Unitive – there is much unitive spirituality within the Bible. While today many people identify unitive spirituality with the Eastern religion and thought, the New Testament has plenty of unitive spirituality. Unlike eastern thought, the Bible does not teach that all things are unified now, but that all things will be unified in God in the future, and that God's unifying efforts have already begun in Jesus Christ.

“in Christ there is no male nor female, no slave nor free, no greek nor barbarian.” 4 or 5 times Paul repeats this thought

“there are a variety of gifts, but only one spirit.”

“what if the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?”

“One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.”

The Apostle Paul's letters often express a unitive view. Christ is resurrected and exalted into ‘the right hand of the Father,’ and God's healing and unifying work is part of the divine plan of salvation. This is the gist of much of St. Paul's spirituality and thought.

[Special Note: *Has there been a deliberate effort to diminish or hide this aspect of the Christian faith?* I consider this a genuine possibility, since unity spirituality and ethics tears down the structures of racism, sexism, segregation, and the domination of the poor and marginalized by those who seek to bolster their self-esteem at the expense of others, or to gain economic advantage in unjust systems.]

- E. Incarnational Spirituality – Here the indwelling Christ continues to minister to the world through our efforts. And the faces of the poor, hungry and dying may hide the presence of Christ within. God himself has clothed himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, born as an infant ***in 2x check spelling Bethlehem's*** stable. Think of Mother Teresa and the Sisters of Charity to remember what incarnational spirituality is.

[Stock photo of Mother Teresa]

Theologically incarnational spirituality is founded upon the person of Jesus Christ, his birth and incarnation and his teachings.

“In as much as you did it unto the least of these you did it unto me.” “Lord when did we ever see you naked and not clothe thee,

hungry and not give you food . . .” “ Depart from me. I never knew you.”

Redemptive and Transformational Spirituality

Life as a Journey

Agape Mysticism/Compassion Spirituality

Sacrificial & Eucharistic

Nostalgic

Divinely Authorized King/Sacred Homeland

Romance, Sexuality, and Getting a Mate

55. **Baal worship was the fertility religion in the Old Testament times and Baal is the Cannite male diety.** His female counterpart was Ashorite 2xcheck. Baal was depicted in idol form as a bull, or as a large upright phallic symbol. The pagans thought spring came to the earth when the male and female gods got together for sex. To ensure the coming of spring the followers of baal had sex orgies as worship to arouse their pagan gods.

55. Moses lost his temper when he saw the Hebrews had made a golden calf. And the Old Testament prophets carried on a long and protracted struggle against these pagan practices and beliefs. In its place they asserted the faithfulness of God provided for the coming of spring, and asserted the authority of the covenant with God at Sinai and the prohibition against idolatry.

56. Lack of sex was a big ethical dilemma for ancient and medieval ethical thinkers when it came to money and interest. They understood that if you loaned your neighbor your bull, it would be reasonable that you should get the bull back, plus a few calves. But interest was wrong when lending money, since gold and silver coins don't do it and reproduce. Finally, ethical thinkers decided interest was a rent upon money, like renting a house.

57. Over population was rarely a concern in the ancient world. But having your tribe or group die out from famine, war, or epidemics appeared as a genuine danger. Notice the promise of innumerable descendents for Abraham was the promise of God. The Psalmist celebrated the sight of plenty of children around the table.

56. A good place to meet women in the ancient Old Testament world was the local well, since women drew water for their families and men also came to get water for themselves and livestock. Where did Jesus meet the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4? At the well of Jacob in Samaria.

Dr. Amy Jill Levine, Vanderbilt Divinity School

57. Jewish weddings in ancient Palestine were big events, and lasted several days. They included feasting, games, and at times plays for entertainment.
58. The Song of Songs, also known as the Song of Solomon is plainly romantic, sensual, some would say an erotic, wedding drama. This was part of their folk culture wedding celebration entertainment. Read it in modern versions. It is easier to catch the meaning in more modern Bible versions.

Note: Parts of the Song of Songs are still included in Jewish weddings today. For example: "His banner over me is love."

59. If man's brother died and had no children or sons, his brother's duty was to marry her and get her pregnant so his brother's part of the family line would not die out. If he wanted out of this duty, he could get free of it by being slapped in the face with a sandal and spit in the face before the elders in the gate.
60. The Old Testament reflects sharply divided views on foreign wives. The approach ranges from "Get rid of them now!) to a "good woman is hard to find," and you had better appreciate her. She is more valuable than rubies (Proverbs 31.) The genealogy of Jesus included two foreigners, and one was the prostitute Rahab of Jericho.
61. The Old Testament peoples take an especially hard line in places against the crime of rape-murder. Killing everyone in the town where the crime happened made sense to many people.
62. "Eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" might seem harsh to you. But it was meant to stop excessive brutality in punishment. The formal name for "eye for an eye" is the law of limited retribution. Note also, if a slave lost a tooth from a blow from his owner, the slave went free for the sake of the tooth.
63. Esther in the Bible was a consolation prize to cheer up Xerxes after his military defeats. Did you see the movie **The 300** ?

64. St. Paul is often thought of as anti-feminist, but He told men to love their wives so much that their wrinkles went away. That sounds awfully tough on the men.
 65. St. Peter was married man, it seems. The Bible talks about his mother in law and his mother in law's house. Paul says Peter took his wife with him on his travels. Biblical scholars take that as evidence that Peter was married.
 66. Onan's sin has usually been called 'coitus interruptus.' I won't describe it. See Genesis 38: 7 – 10.
 67. Praying to get pregnant is the Biblical norm. Praying not to be pregnant is the modern norm.
 68. Moses and his wife had a sharp argument over circumcision. She was against it. She threw the bloody foreskin of the baby at him.
 68. Jesus said nothing that is recorded about homosexuality.
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68. Good Reading

Of course, I've left out so much out of this brief guide. But I do hope that this summary could be for you a small sample and perhaps you will hunger for more. Here are my recommendations.

Creative Ministry by Henri J. M. Nouwen

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The Soul of Christianity

World Religions

What Is Christianity? By Adolf Harnack

Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church is Transforming the Faith
By Diana Butler Bass

The Individual and His Religion by Gordon Allport

The Varieties of Religious Experience by William James

More about the life of faith and religious experience than you have ever imagined being in one book. Contains a subtle

Pragmatism and Other Essays by William James

On Being A Christian by Hans Kung

Orthodoxy by G. K. Chesterson
Unique defense and exposition of the conservative approach to faith.

Mere Christianity by C. S. Lewis
Classic, high quality exposition of the Christian faith

Preaching from John's Gospel by Kyle Yates

What's So Amazing About Grace by Philip Yancey

The Shaking of the Foundations by Paul Tillich

Sermons: Biblical Wisdom for Daily Living by Peter J. Gomes

Give Me a Big "J" by Arthur Blessit is
Pentecostal zeal and evangelism, following Jesus, Gospel as radical from the evangelist that carried across around the world.

The Daily Study Bible by William Barclay a series of popular commentaries
So you can understand the Bible in detail

The Tragic Sense of Life by Miguel Unamondo
A Spanish Catholic philosopher's defense of the Christian faith against rationalism, skeptical intellectuals and philosophical attacks against faith

On Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time by Marcus Borg
is from the skeptical left-wing of Biblical scholarship. Still he well states that jewish context of Jesus, so I've included it. If the skeptical and far left wing scholarship leaves you cold or undermines your faith, then another choice is massive The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.

Or, read the old classic The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah is a conservative classic that connects Jesus to the jewish context, and does not forget that Jesus was Jewish.

A Generous Orthodoxy by Philip Yancey 2xcheck author's name

The Shaking of the Foundations by Paul Tillich

Against an Infinite Horizon by Ron Rollenhesier
What it means to sense the presence of God in everyday life.

Forgotten Among the Lilies: Learning to Love Beyond Our Fears by Ronald Rolheiser
How our anxieties and issues keep us from love.

The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering A Felt Presence of God by Ronald Rolheiser
On feeling the presence of God. Includes more formal theology, but in Rolheiser's understand style. Positive applications of philosophical 'proofs of God' with mysticism that is not weird.

Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther by Roland H. Blanton

The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity by William Paul Young

A Guide to the Gospels by W. Graham Scroggie
Classic older scholarship filled with details on Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
This book is a treasure.

The Will of God by Leslie D. Weatherhead

63.) The life and ministry of Jesus in the 4 Gospels

Each Gospel is a portrait of Jesus, an account of the Gospel, and provide guidance in living the Christian life.

While many moderns have wanted to get back to the historical Jesus, or have an object account of his ministry, what we actually have in Scripture are several interpretive portraits of what Jesus was about and who he was. Think of an artist painting an oil painting. The final product reflects the artist's style, skill and aim. A skilled artist does more than capture a likeness, the best portraits capture mood, personality of the subject as well as the artist's style.

Foreshadowing the End

Vision and Voice on the Mountain

Betrayal and Trial and Politics

The Last Passover of Jesus

His death and burial

Resurrection and Exaltation

The Mission Continues

The Synoptic Problem or Synoptic Blessing

Oral Traditions, first drafts and editors and publishers

Questions about synonyms: The Kingdom of Heaven, Kingdom of God, or Eternal Life or life

63 . The American Founder of Reformed Judaism named his personal column in the Jewish journal he published, "About Jesus."

64. There is a surface religion with a veneer of faith and there is the depth of faith.

These two are very different things. . One can recite the right answers by rote, the other is about struggling with the questions. One is about organs or pianos, stain glass or video screens, my denomination is better than your denomination, chief seats in the temple, and being recognized by others as holy, prayerful and generous. "They already have their reward," says Jesus with irony.

The surface faith thinks it has arrived, when it has just started on the long journey of faith. Political and economic power can easily come to a mutual understanding with surface religion. But the powers that be have always known that deep faith is potentially dangerous, often hard to deal with, and can not be bought off.

The surface religion is conventional, steady, and mostly comfortable like a stuffed chair, or bowl of soup. It asks you to join the church, attend and provide some financial support. Deep faith is radical, disturbing to conventional norms, and can be both a challenge and a shock. It is Moses standing before the burning bush. It is Jacob wrestling with God/angel/his own soul, because he can not go on as he has lived in the past. The faith of depth is struggle, like Jacob wrestling with God. It is Thomas saying "I will not believe," and then crying out, "My Lord and my God." (I believe, help thou my unbelief. ***2xcheck Scripture***. The deep faith asks for heart allegiance, heart change. Deep faith often appears as paradoxical, mystical, marching to a different drum.

Surface faith is looking for human ingenuity, Power and good connections to do the work of God. Deep faith is looking beyond human strength, to divine power. It understands the Psalmist is not talking geography when he says,

"I lift up mine eyes unto the hills – from whence comes my help."

The Old Testament slogan sums all this up,
“Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord.” The New Testament wording is *“holding the form of religion, but denying the power of it.”*

65. All of theology of whatever slant or persuasion is built around two polarities
– God above us and God with us.

In graphic form they are the vertical and horizontal lines. The vertical is how God is above us and this world. The horizontal line is how divine and sacred life is present with us on this earth in the ordinary of daily life. Different theologies vary the proportions of God above and God here. That is one reason they are different.

66. Billy Graham reported that in the course of his life that he has been born again three times. The first time he was born again to Christ. The second time he was born again to see the needs of the poor. The third time he was born again to the necessity of world peace. What about you? Have you seen the light more than once? What do you believe about maturing in faith? Have you been synthesized to new issues over the years? See material on the maturing of the evangelical movement.

67. **Seeing God**

Five times the Bible says, “No man has ever seen God.”

The Scriptures do record some close encounters, however.

Close Encounters – Very Close to Seeing God

Abraham sees the floating lamps Genesis

Jacob wrestles with God/angel/ his own soul in the night . Genesis

Note after the vision Jacob meets his brother Esau. Jesus repeated the words describing their meeting in his description of the Father greeting the Prodigal Son.

Exodus 24: 9 -10 Elders of Israel and Moses look down and see brick work of heaven.

Exodus 33: 18 – 22 Moses sees the reflection of the glory of God while looking the other way.

Isaiah 6 In a vision or trance Isaiah sees the Lord high and lifted up and his glory filled the temple.

Corinthians Paul said he knew a man (himself) who was caught up into highest heavens, but was not allowed to tell what he saw.

Rev John in the prison camp on the Island of Patmos said that he was caught up in the Spirit on the Lord's day. He records his vision including a description of the appearance of the Risen Jesus.

67. Lambeth Bible Study method of African Bishops.

The Saints

Theology

Greatest Scriptures of All

Groups and movements

Though Provoking Quotes

It is striking how little there is in the Bible of what might be called "theology" proper. God is everywhere present, but not as an object of inquiry or even systematic description.

-- James Kugel [The Great Poems of the Bible](#) Page 55

Kugel is correct of extended formal theology. There are just 3 Bible books of extended formal theology – Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. The theology of the Bible is hidden within the stories, dreams, visions, history, laws, poems, and hymns. It is in instructions for dealing with church problems, in sermons, and in Gospel narratives.