

# Be Zealous And Repent

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” (Revelation 3:19 KJV)

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## Preface

Errors have been slowly creeping into the church. Some errors may be intentional while others may be incidental based on generations of tradition. Satan does not care about the sources or the means of errors – all he cares about is devouring souls as he knows his time is short. (1 Peter 5:8), (Revelation 12:12)

The purpose of this essay is to alert believers to some of the errors that have been observed and examine those errors in the light of God’s Word.

Rather than be complicit in error, believers have the responsibility to use God’s Word in love for reproof, correction and instruction – the core means through which His Word is proclaimed for eternal salvation. (1 Peter 2:9), (2 Corinthians 4:2-4), (2 Timothy 3:16), (Luke 17:3), (1 John 4:1)

“For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth.” (Isaiah 21:6 KJV)

“But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.” (Ezekiel 33:6 KJV)

The scope of this essay is limited to an examination of the errors and the deficiencies that may have precipitated them. Specific approaches to remedy them will not be proposed.

The issues discussed have been categorized into doctrinal errors and the organizational deficiencies that have been observed.

It is hoped that the church will correct these issues to avoid the needless destruction of souls, for God desires that none should perish but that all should come to repentance and be saved. (2 Peter 3:9), (1 Timothy 2:4)

“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” (1 Timothy 4:16 KJV)

“Let all things be done decently and in order.” (1 Corinthians 14:40 KJV)

## **1. Doctrinal Errors**

### **1.1. Exclusivity**

#### **a) Of the Church**

##### ***Observation***

It's not unusual for sermons to include statements like, “*We're the only ones that are right.*”, “*We are the last remnant of God's children.*”, “*There are only a few thousand of us chosen ones remaining on the earth.*” It is strongly implied in these statements and a pervasive thought among many that every church outside the group of Finnish Independent Apostolic Lutheran Church (IALC) congregations are apostate. The proof-text often used to support this position:

“And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.” (John 10:16 KJV)

##### ***Examination***

The contextual time frame of the proof-text suggests Jesus is describing the pending expansion of the sheepfold beyond the chosen nation of Israel to the Gentiles. It's unlikely the word “fold” meant the IALC group or any individual congregation.

Addition biblical passages are useful to help reveal a harmonious interpretation (1 Corinthians 14:33), (2 Timothy 3:16) of scripture and disprove a doctrine of specific IALC exclusivity:

“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” (Hebrews 13:2 KJV)

“And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.” (1 Corinthians 12:5-6 KJV)

“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;” (Revelation 7:9 KJV), (Revelation 5:9), (Revelation 14:6), (Matthew 28:19)

Our presumptuous sinful human nature seems to crave exclusivity, Jesus had to rebuke his disciples when they suggested it:

“And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.” (Luke 9:49-50 KJV), (Mark 9:37-42)

Jesus described His church and those who are saved in a very simple ways:

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20 KJV)

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16 KJV), (John 3:36), (Mark 16:16)

"And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:42-43 KJV)

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32 KJV)

See also: (Apostles Creed:Article 3)

## **Conclusion**

No doubt, the signs of the times (including the apostate nature of what we see in the worldly so-called Christian Churches) indicate the last day is fast approaching – and only a remnant will remain:

“...Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8 KJV)

“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;” (2 Thessalonians 2:3 KJV)

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.” (1 John 2:19 KJV)

However, to presume the remnant is wholly limited to the IALC group is unwise.

“For there is no respect of persons with God.” (Romans 2:11), (Acts 10:34)

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:9-13 KJV)

If necessary and according to His purposes, we might recognize some of His children:

“Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.” (Matthew 7:20 KJV), (Matthew 7:16)

“...but try the spirits whether they are of God...” (1 John 4:1-3 KJV)

Otherwise it’s physically impossible to examine every doctrine and every heart in all of creation to observe if they are apostate. To state as much employs the error of Enthusiasm as described later.

“And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:20-21 KJV)

“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” (2 Timothy 2:19 KJV)

Using our presumptuous sinful nature to put our trust in the strength of a self-conceived census of His kingdom is to repeat the error of King David whereby thousands were slaughtered. (2 Samuel 24)

Only God knows the entirety of His chosen nation, let us be content with that:

“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of

children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Ephesians 1:4-5)

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28 KJV)

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?” (Romans 11:33-34 KJV)

“But godliness with contentment is great gain.” (1 Timothy 6:6 KJV)

## **b) Of the KJV Bible**

### ***Observation***

The church has been oddly silent on the use of Bible translations. The King James version (KJV) of the Bible is used exclusively, the mere thought of using a newer translation seems to be off-limits and not open to discussion – as though God’s Word could not possibly survive another translation.

The KJV Bible was written in what we now call “middle English” and is in some ways substantially different from the modern English commonly used in North America. These differences sometimes present a barrier to understanding the Bible and has lead to preaching errors in some sermons.

### ***Examination***

A brief history of Bible translations may be useful here:

The original languages of scripture include Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine Greek. If God’s Word is unable to survive any translation, then we must conclude that it would be wrong to translate from these languages. Yet, the proclamation of His Word was indeed translated during the fulfillment of the prophesy of Joel on the day of Pentecost whereby each could hear the Word preached in his own language:

“And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.” (Acts 2:8-11 KJV)

During the third and second centuries (BC) the Hebrew books were translated into Greek, and during the early centuries (AD) of the Christian church they were translated into Latin and many other languages. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Dr. Martin Luther translated the Bible into German so the common people of his time could read and understand it. Luther’s translation influenced Bishop Mikael Agricola’s work in translating the Bible into the Finnish language.

The King James version of the Bible was not the first English translation available. Several others were published well before then, including the Geneva Bible used by the American Pilgrims. The first version of the KJV bible was published in 1611 and several updated revisions were published, the most notable in 1769.

The middle English used in the KJV includes words rarely used in common modern English, leading to some sermon preaching errors. Recent examples include the words “scrip” and “peculiar.”

“And he said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece.” (Luke: 9:3 KJV), (Luke 10:4), (Matthew 10:10)

The American Heritage Dictionary 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. 2019 (AHD) defines “scrip” in the following ways:

scrip n. 1) A form of money issued by a local government or private organization. A certificate or receipt used to redeem a credit. 2) Stock, as issued by companies. 3) A wallet, small satchel, or bag.

The context of the bible passage suggests the word “scrip” in this case should probably be the 3<sup>rd</sup> definition, a satchel or bag. Yet, the sermon interpreted this word as meaning a “prepared script,” a definition not included in the AHD.

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light;” (1 Peter 2:9)

The AHD defines “peculiar” in the following ways:

peculiar adj. 1) Not ordinary or usual; odd or strange: noticed a peculiar odor in the room. 2. Belonging distinctively or primarily to one person, group, or kind; special or unique.

peculiar n. 1) A privilege or property that is exclusively one's own. 2) A church or parish under the jurisdiction of a diocese different from that in which it lies.

The context of the bible passage suggests the word “peculiar” in this case should probably be related to the definitions regarding “distinctive or primary” and “exclusive property.” Yet, the sermon interpreted this word as meaning “odd or strange,” or a “weird people.”

During the last few centuries there have been many archaeological discoveries of source materials that fortify and refine the content of the biblical sources used for the original KJV translation. Based on these additional sources and using rigorous translation techniques there are a few Bible translations available in modern English that may be excellent literal translations of the original Scriptures.

## **Conclusion**

The exclusive use of the KJV can be a modern barrier to accessing God's Word, similar to the middle ages before Luther made the Bible available to the common German people. The content of the Bible should not be hidden and should be made available in today's common language for believers.

However, choosing a modern translation is not a trivial matter, no doubt Satan has used many so-called translations as his playground for mischief. Some of these works are not really "translations" but instead are "paraphrases" designed to twist God's Word toward it's author's agenda rather than reflect the original content.

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." (Matthew 24:35 KJV)

## **1.2. Reason**

### **Observation**

It's not unusual for sermons to include a quote attributed to 1950s era preacher Dr. A. Benhart Salmela, "*The brain is in cahoots with the Devil.*" Sometimes sermons include statements like, "*It's wrong to read the Bible word-for-word.*" The general thought behind these quotes seems to be a categorical rejection of the use of man's reason for anything biblical. Sometimes the proof-text used to support this claim includes the statement from Jesus:

"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." (John 5:39 KJV)

Since much of the context surrounding this passage is used in a negative way against the Jews, the assumption in the use of the proof-text usually focuses on "Search ... ye think" in a sarcastic negative way, that is, that it's wrong to search the scriptures.

This unique interpretation supports a notion that it is wrong to study or learn the Bible, because it would require the use of reason – man's brain.

### **Examination**

The observation will be examined in four ways: current practices, the gift of reason, related passages, and within a broader context of the proof-text.

#### **Current Practices**

Current church practices contradict the notion that's it's wrong to use man's brain. Singing songs, reading prayers, reading the sermon text, preaching the sermon, following service procedures and monitoring conditions all require the use of reason – man's brain. The notion is also contradicted when Bible study is conducted during Sunday school sessions and Confirmation.

## **The Gift of Reason**

God provides his creation with many gifts – material resources for daily life, governments to curb evil, a church to keep his children spiritually fed, etc. Any one of His gifts can be used for good as well as evil. Man’s brain and the ability to reason is also one of His gifts that can be used for good or evil.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” (James 1:17 KJV)

Through the use of the brain’s reasoning, we are given the ability to learn languages, the meanings of words, how to read, to read His Word, comprehend what it says, and with assistance from the Holy Spirit understand what it means. This is a good use of the brain!

However, history has shown that the use of the brain’s reasoning ability can also be misused. We would be wrong to use reason to reject the truth of His Word or invent new doctrines that are unsupported by the Bible. For example, to develop a conclusion such as: “If God truly is loving, then everyone will be saved and not one soul will be sent to Hell.” This is an evil use of reason, and in this case the brain is indeed “in cahoots with the Devil.”

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Romans 8:7-8 KJV)

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” (2 Timothy 4:3-4 KJV)

## **Related Passages**

The need to learn God’s Word is self-evident through the very existence of the Scriptures. Because the Scriptures exist, clearly they were given for us to read, learn, ponder, and meditate. If learning the Bible was indeed wrong, then the Bible itself would not need to exist. There are many passages that encourage learning God’s Word and meditating upon it:

“I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.” (Psalm 77:12 KJV), (Psalm 63:5-6), (Psalm 119:48)

“The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.” (Proverbs 18:15 KJV)

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” (Matthew 7:7-8 KJV)

“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by



inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:15-17 KJV)

See also: (Genesis 24:63), (Joshua 1:8), (Proverbs 1:7, 29-30), (Proverbs 2), (Proverbs 15:14), (Proverbs 22:17), (Psalm 119:7, 66, 71, 73, 162), (Matthew 4:4), (Luke 2:18-19, (James 3:17), (Philippians 1:9), (Philippians 4:7-9)

Note: “Meditate” as used here assumes the following AHD types of definitions:

meditate v. 1) Engage in focused thought on scriptural passages or on particular doctrines. Engage in devotional contemplation, especially prayer. 2) To think or reflect, especially in a calm and deliberate manner.

Apostle Paul didn’t begin preaching and teaching immediately after being converted (Acts 9:3-18) but instead retreated to Arabia for 3 years. (Galatians 1:17-18) Biblical historians believe it was during this time he restudied the Scriptures in the light of the Gospel. (Galatians 1:12) Later during his active ministry he taught the Scriptures in many locations, including the synagogue at Ephesus for three months, but after a dispute with the Jews he then used the Tyrannus school lecture hall and taught there daily for two years. (Acts 19:8-10)

### **Proof-Text Context**

Examining the observed proof-text (John 5:39) in a broader context reveals a meaning somewhat different than the one assumed. Jesus reminds them of John the Baptist (John 5:31-35) whom the Jews had seen and questioned (John 3:25-36) and rejoiced in the truth of his prophecy in the Scriptures. While John was a great witness of Jesus, God was a greater witness as shown (John 5:36-38) through the power of His miracles, yet the Jews refused to believe this. The Jews knew the Scriptures well, and knew they contained the promise of eternal life, so Jesus exhorts (commands) them to study the Scriptures again, for in them they would discover that they testify of Him, if they would only believe. (John 5:39-47) The negativity of the text is directed toward the Jews refusal to believe, not toward searching or learning the Scriptures.

Jesus recounts His prophecy as found in the Scriptures (this time to believers) after his resurrection:

“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27 KJV)

### **Conclusion**

The Scriptures reveal the true doctrines of faith, rather than false doctrines reasoned by man’s brain.

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” (Psalm 119:105 KJV), (Proverbs 6:23), (Luke 24:32)

The use of reason is required to read, comprehend, contemplate and learn from Scripture. However, reason must remain bound within what Scripture reveals – a handmaid – to go beyond that would indeed be evil. (2 Corinthians 10:5) The potential of using man’s brain (reason) for evil must not preclude it’s use for good with help from the Holy Spirit.

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.” (James 1:5-6 KJV)

Learning the Bible reveals the richness of His Word and the abundance of His promises. What we don’t understand we humbly believe as children:

“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:” (1 Peter 2:2 KJV)

“And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3 KJV)

As soldiers of Christ (2 Timothy 2:3-4) we fight daily across three battle fronts: the world, our flesh, and Satan himself. We must arm ourselves with all the weapons that God provides:

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” (Ephesians 6:11-13 KJV)

“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:” (Ephesians 6:17 KJV)

Learning His Word will arm us with the most lethal weapon we have available – the sword of the Spirit. A soldier that goes into battle unarmed is a worthless soldier!

## **1.3. Liberty**

### **a) Antinomianism**

#### ***Background***

The term “Antinomianism” means “against law” and was coined by Luther in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is a heresy that rejects the use of natural or moral law within the church and asserts that “if we have grace, we don’t need the law.” This heresy has been fought many times through the history of the church – before, during, and after the Reformation. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century it was known as “Nicolaitism” when its adherents (known as the “Nicolaitanes”) approved adulterous immorality while still claiming to be in faith.

## **Observation**

It's not uncommon for sermons to include statements like, *"We're not under the law, but under grace."* and *"We have no standards or written rules, we rely on what's inside our hearts as our rule and norm."* These kinds of statements support the notion that there is no place in the church for God's law.

## **Examination**

God built the natural and moral law into His creation, written into the heart of man already before the Fall. (Romans 2:13-15)

God recited the law (Exodus 20:3-17) then wrote them on stone tablets for Moses to deliver to the Israelites. (Exodus 24:12-18) After breaking the tablets, they were rewritten on new tablets (Exodus 34:1-29) where they were stored under the mercy seat (Exodus 40:20) in the Ark of the Covenant. Though failing at times, they guarded the law throughout their wilderness journeys. It was recited again to a younger generation before they entered the promised land. (Deuteronomy 5), (1 Samuel 4), (2 Samuel 6)

The prophets referenced the law to call upon the people to repent of their sins (2 Kings 17:7–23) and return to God, His commandments (2 Chronicles 7:14), (2 Chronicles 24:19), (Jeremiah 35:15), (Isaiah 1-39), (Joel 2:12-13) and His promises. (Ezekiel 36:25-29), (Hosea 6:1-2), (Jonah 3) The last and greatest prophet (Matthew 11:11), (Luke 7:28) John the Baptist called upon the people to receive a cleansing baptism of repentance (Matthew 3:1-6) to prepare the way for Christ. (Luke 1:17)

Jesus called upon the people to repent. (Matthew 4:17), (Luke 13:3, 5) Through his life, sacrificial death, and resurrection he fulfilled and established the law as prophesied:

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." (Matthew 5:17 KJV)

"And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God." (Ezekiel 11:19-20 KJV), (Ezekiel 36:25-29)

"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."  
(Romans 3:31 KJV)

It is by the law that people recognize both sin and good works. (Romans 7:7), (Romans 3:20), (James 2:18), (Ephesians 6:6-8), (Colossians 1:10)

The primary function of the law is to convict sinners and prepare the way for the Gospel, through the gift of repentance (2 Timothy 2:25) which brings contrition of the heart and faith in the promises of Christ. It is the nature (Ephesians 2:3) of our sinful flesh to hate the law because it finds us dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1), as slaves to sin (John 8:34), and utterly unable to walk in His statutes. Through

repentance we are regenerated (2 Corinthians 5:17), (Titus 3:5) into a new life in Christ (Colossians 2:13) as his servants, delighting in the law (Romans 7:22), and freed to walk in the law of liberty (Romans 8:4) in service to our neighbors.

Jesus beautifully summarized both tablets of the law as love:

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40 KJV), (Mark 12:29-31)

The law describes the attributes of love. To love one another is to live according to God’s will as recorded in the law:

“Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” (Romans 13:8-10 KJV), (Galatians 5:16-25)

The first part of the observed statement, “*We’re not under the law, but under grace.*” is used in error through contextual omission. (It has also been observed in recent years during Confirmation.) It suggests believers may safely ignore the law and good works. A more biblically accurate rendition might be: “*We’re not under the curse and condemnation of the law...*” (Galatians 3:13), (Romans 6:12-18), (Romans 2:12), (2 Corinthians 5:21), (Revelation 22:3) Better yet, the statement should be used within the full context of the original passage.

(The last part of the observed statement is good, since we have indeed been saved by grace alone:)

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8-10 KJV)

The observed statement, “*We have no standards or written rules...*” belies the law as part of creation and written into the hearts of all men, recited by God himself, written on stone tablets, recorded on parchments throughout the ages, fulfilled and established by Christ, repeated in the Apostle’s letters to the churches, and still available today in the published Bible. See also: (Judges 17:6)

## **Conclusion**

To reject the natural moral law as a rule and norm for the church and for the daily lives of believers is to fall into the error of Antinomianism.

“So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.” (Revelation 2:15-16 KJV), (Revelation 2:6)

If the law is perceived as a problem then the fault lies within our sinful natures, not the law. (Romans 7:12), (1 John 3:4), (Romans 6) For the law is the Holy and precious eternal will of God. (Romans 12:2), (1 Peter 2:15-16), (Hebrews 10:36) God’s law is love – to reject the law is to reject love.

See also: (Psalm 119)

## **1.4. Enthusiasm**

### ***Background***

Luther identified “Enthusiasm” as the source of all church heresies. He described it as an internally motivated perception of God’s Will as a replacement for (over and above) His external Word. Enthusiasm uses private interpretations to guide one’s life and are considered greater than Scripture or His means of grace.

Modern forms of Enthusiasm are directed toward inner experiences, either spontaneously produced or through behavior. They often strive to “follow the heart” or seek internal goodness rather than rely on the wholly external righteousness through the Word.

### **a) Heart as Standard**

#### ***Observation***

It’s not unusual for sermons to include statements like, “*We’re safe because God knows the thoughts and intents of our hearts.*”, “*God sent his son because he knows our heart’s intention is not to sin.*”, and “*We have no standards or written rules, we rely on what’s inside our hearts as our rule and norm.*” These statements support the notion of an internal goodness that can be used as proof or justification before God and used to govern our private lives, over and above the external Word.

#### ***Examination***

God’s Word describes the heart of man as profoundly evil, dead in it’s sins and trespasses:

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9 KJV), (Genesis 6:5), (Proverbs 21:2)

"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:" (Matthew 15:19 KJV)

“Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.” (Acts 8:22)

It's true that God knows the thoughts and intents of our hearts. The proof-text often used in the sermons:

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12 KJV)

When used as a sermon proof-text it's often used in a positive way, as though our thoughts and intentions are good and will justify or prove our standing before God. But when examined in its full context it's actually being used in negative way:

“Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” (Hebrews 4:11-13 KJV)

God is able to see our deepest inner most parts, he knows us better than we know ourselves, all our hypocrisy and deceit is exposed, we are naked before Him. (Having convicted the readers of their hidden sins in these passages, the writer of Hebrews then continues in the remaining passages (Hebrews 4:14-16) to pronounce the good news of the Gospel.)

God did not sacrifice his son because of any supposed good intentions of our hearts, but rather because of our evil intents and sinful nature. (Romans 5:8), (Luke 5:31-32), (Mark 2:17)

“For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.” (1 John 3:20 KJV)

When the Bible does speak of the heart in positive ways, it's accompanied by the Holy Spirit, either directly or within the context of the broader text:

"Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." (Psalm 51:9-10 KJV)

"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." (Romans 8:26-27 KJV)

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” (Hebrews 10:22 KJV)

See also: (James 4:8-10)

## **Conclusion**

Our hearts are by nature evil and sinful, we can not rely on our hearts for guidance, our hearts will lead us astray.

“Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” (Ephesians 2:3 KJV)

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;” (Ephesians 4:14 KJV)

To overcome our hearts we must always hearken back to God’s Word for guidance so we may be led by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is given to us through His gift of repentance – contrition of the heart and the receiving of faith – through the hearing of His Word and the means of grace. This gift is completely external to us, it does not come from inside us.

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Romans 10:17 KJV)

It is the external Word that creates, restores, and renews faith. Faith is not generated from an internal private perception of His Will. (2 Peter 1:20)

If we ignore the holiness of the Word and walk according to the precepts of our hearts in ways that are contrary to His Word we deceive ourselves with the error of Enthusiasm.

### **b) Invisible Beacons**

#### **Observation**

It’s not unusual for sermons to include a statement like, “*There’s a little spark inside of us that the world can see to recognize that we are believers.*” This statement supports a concept of an internal hidden beacon that unbelievers may be able to detect if they are being led by God to a place of repentance.

#### **Examination**

The Bible does not seem to support the concept of a subjective hidden internal “beacon,” but rather has many passages that support an objective visible external observance of faith through works.

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14-16 KJV), (Mark 4:21), (Luke 8:16), (Luke 11:33)

“Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (1 Peter 2:12 KJV)

“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” (Titus 2:14 KJV)

See also: (Matthew 7:16), (James 2:17-18), (1 Timothy 5:25)

## **Conclusion**

The world is bound to recognize faith through the external visible good works of believers, for believers were created in Christ for good works.

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10 KJV)

God works in mysterious ways, and how he draws unbelievers to repentance through the proclamation of His Word is not entirely known (Ephesians 1:4-6) nevertheless we all rejoice when it does happen.

Since God’s ways are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9) we must be content with the gift of the revealed Word he has preserved for us and avoid inventing new doctrines outside of His Word.

Proclaiming that believers possess a “little spark inside” that the world can see suggests a doctrine that strays into some of the errors of Enthusiasm.

### **c) Forced Spontaneity**

#### **Observation**

It’s very common for sermons today to begin with statements like, “*The bible opened here.*”, or “*I’m sorry – it might be wrong – but I purposely turned to this chapter.*” The continual repeated use of these kinds of statements have a tendency to create a doctrine of “forced spontaneity” – that it might be wrong to rely on making biblical selections based on any manner of foreknowledge of seasons or the spiritual condition of the congregation.

#### **Examination**

The Bible does support the spontaneous proclamation of the Word during stressful times of persecution:

“And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.” (Matthew 10:18-20 KJV), (Mark 13:9-11)



Otherwise, the Bible does not specify whether sermons must be delivered strictly in a spontaneous manner or not. Historically, before the text of the Bible's New Testament was compiled, Apostle Paul wrote sermons in the form of letters he asked be read to the congregations. (Colossians 4:16), (1 Thessalonians 5:27)

Luther, early in his career wrote many of his sermons, many which were later published. He believed the Gospel should be "prepared plainly and carefully just as a mother prepares the food for her baby." Later in his career, most of his sermons were not entirely prepared but he used his gifts of oration to deliver the Word to the congregations.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Pr. Lars Levi Laestadius wrote sermons, some were sent and read to various communities across Lapland, others were later published.

## ***Conclusion***

Regardless of the current and historic use of both spontaneous and non-spontaneous preaching, we should avoid cultivating a doctrine of "required or forced spontaneity" lest we stray into an error of Enthusiasm, but rather freely use the talents that God provides. (1 Peter 4:10-11), (1 Corinthians 12:4-31), (Matthew 25:14-30), (Luke 19:11-27)

"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness." (Romans 12:4-8 KJV)

## **2. Organizational Deficiencies**

It should not be surprising that doctrinal errors have crept into the church and are being tolerated (or stand undetected) given the lack of administrative guardrails within the formal organization.

### **2.1. Overseers**

#### ***Observation***

The church administration includes the formal offices of "Trustees" to manage the temporal affairs of the church body and material properties according to state legal statutes.

The church administration does not include any formal offices for spiritual overseers such as "Elders" for providing the church with doctrinal guidance according to Scripture.

Some members within the church body might be informally recognized as Elders, however it is not an authorized office, there are no formal qualifications, there is no vetting process for candidates, and they hold no organizational authority.

## ***Examination***

The lack of formal qualified spiritual Elders leaves the church unguarded and prone to errors leading to false doctrines. The Apostles exhorted the churches to diligently seek and train Elders to maintain the pure doctrine and serve the saints:

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;” (Ephesians 4:11-14 KJV)

“For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:” (Titus 1:5 KJV)

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” (Acts 20:28-30 KJV)

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:3-5 KJV)

See also: (1 Timothy 4), (1 Timothy 3:2-6), (1 Timothy 5:17), (Titus 1:9), (1 Peter 5:1-5), (Acts 14:23), (Acts 20:17), (Philippians 1:1), (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13), (Acts 6:3-7), (James 5:14), (1 Timothy 5:19-22), (Hebrews 13:17)

## ***Conclusion***

The Scriptures clearly show the necessity for local offices of qualified (2 Corinthians 13:5-8) spiritual Elders within a congregation. Otherwise, errors leading to false doctrines are left free to creep into the church.

## 2.2. Education

### ***Observation***

Teaching the basics of the Christian doctrine within the church is limited to a short Sunday school for children and a one-time week of Confirmation studies for teens.

Improving the biblical literacy of adults through any form of “study” is considered wrong.

### ***Examination***

History has shown that the diligent teaching of Scripture is necessary to maintain pure doctrine within the church.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Reformation arose from the scholarly study of Scripture whereby the pure doctrine of the church was rediscovered by Luther and others.

The Reformation had been underway for about decade when Luther visited the surrounding congregations to survey the spiritual condition of the renewed church. He found the common people in “deplorable miserable conditions” with regard to basic Christian knowledge and preachers “incapable and incompetent” to teach basic doctrine. This motivated him to write the Large Catechism for preachers and teachers and the Small Catechism for families.

Without diligent teaching, the pure doctrine slips away:

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.” (Hosea 4:6 KJV)

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

The Elders must learn the doctrine of the church, and with the power of the Holy Spirit discern and fight the intrusion of errors and false doctrines and serve the saints in love.

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.” (Romans 12:6-8 KJV)

“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” (John 14:26 KJV)

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” (Colossians 3:16 KJV)

The Elders must teach the adults of the congregation, especially the young men that some may become qualified Elders for the next generation.

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” (Acts 17:11 KJV)

“Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.” (Galatians 6:6 KJV)

“The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.” (Luke 6:40 KJV)

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (2 Timothy 2:2-3)

See also: (Matthew 5:19), (Acts 5:42), (Acts 11:26), (James 3:1)

The men must teach their families and raise their children in the fear and love of God.

“And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” (Deuteronomy 11:19 KJV), (Deuteronomy 6:6-8)

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6 KJV)

“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:15-17 KJV)

See also: (Proverbs 9:9), (Proverbs 11:25), (Proverbs 3:13), (Proverbs 3:21-26), (Psalm 32:8), (Psalm 78:5), (Ephesians 6:4)

See also previous topic regarding “Reason.”

## **Conclusion**

The Scriptures exhort us to diligently teach the doctrine of the church to the congregation to furnish the saints with the full armor of God in defense against all the weapons of Satan. (Ephesians 6:11-13), (Acts 19:8-10), (Matthew 28:19-20)

“Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen” (2 Peter 3:17-18 KJV)

“For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;” (Colossians 1:9-10 KJV)

It is worthy to note English synonyms for “disciple” include “student” and “doctrine” include “teaching.” Therefore, to say that believers are “disciples of His doctrine” is synonymous with “students of His teaching.”

## **2.3. Processes**

### **a) Petitions**

#### **Observation**

The annual meeting of the congregation provides an opportunity to make floor motions to the chairman during the “new business” portion of the agenda.

There is no formal process to petition organization leadership to address substantive issues outside of the annual meeting without involving the entire congregation.

#### **Examination**

While the annual meeting allows members to submit motions from the floor, the process is not appropriate for complex or spiritual issues that require discernment, contemplation, prayer, the searching of Scriptures, discussion and deliberation among the Elders, and formal issue resolution.

#### **Conclusion**

The lack of a formal petition process prevents the formal and documented submission of issue requests.

For example: If a member of the congregation discerns the content of this essay as heretical, how should that member escalate their concern to the organization leadership for review and request that correction and church discipline be exercised in love toward the author? (Matthew 18:15-17)

For example: How should the author formally submit the issues contained in this essay to the congregation for consideration and resolution?

“Let all things be done decently and in order.” (1 Corinthians 14:40 KJV)

## **b) Transparency**

### ***Observation***

Due to the lack of formal offices for qualified Elders and the lack of formal petition processes, it appears that some of the most important congregational decisions are made in an opaque manner through unaccountable internal factions.

### ***Examination***

The lack of due process and transparency leads to major decisions being made behind the scenes without any documented record of the decision process. (1 Corinthians 11:18-19)

For Example: Songs and hymns are added to the common believer’s song book without any apparent vetting process or multi-congregational agreement, resulting in the addition of new content containing errors and false doctrines that can grow into heresies. (Galatians 5:4), (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

For Example: Ministers are benched without any documented corrective attempts or reasons, leaving the matter subject to rumor, hearsay, and innuendo. In addition, it potentially exposes the congregation to uncorrected false doctrines. (1 Timothy 5:20), (2 Timothy 4:3-4), (Romans 16:17)

### ***Conclusion***

Spiritual discernment decisions that may affect church doctrine are the most important and most difficult decisions that a congregation can make. They are at least deserving of the efforts involved in temporal decisions, such as parking lots and septic systems. These decisions must be made in an open, transparent, and impartial manner so that others may review and discern the outcomes according to the teachings found in Scripture. (Acts 5:29), (Acts 26:26)

“Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear. I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.” (1 Timothy 5:19-21)

## **Epilogue**

Believers through the history of the church have already encountered most of the issues examined here. They fought them using the whole armor and Word of God, and through His mercy were victorious. If we are ignorant to these battles how will we avoid the doom of repeating them? And if we repeat them, will Satan now claim the victory and lead us to the eternal lake of fire?

“For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.” (1 Corinthians 11:19 KJV)

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13 KJV)

Consider the consequences of errors that continue unabated:

- When do errors begin to destroy souls?
- When do errors, once established, become heresies?
- When do heresies become apostasies?
- Who can be saved under an apostate false religion?

Ignoring errors as confirmed by Scripture is akin to removing those words from the Bible:

“And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” (Revelation 22:19 LJV)

“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17 KJV)

This essay did not prescribe any specific approaches to remedy these errors. There are likely many different ways to addressing these issues based on available talents and gifts. It may be tempting to select just a few issues to address, however, caution is warranted since many of the issues are contingent and interrelated, necessitating a holistic orderly approach.

Nevertheless, we should be thankful that God is merciful and patient, but his patience is not infinite. (2 Peter 3:9)

“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” (Revelation 2:5 KJV)

The intention of this essay is not to bruise weak consciences but in love (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) warn those in error and bring them to repentance and unity in Christ. (Ephesians 4:3), (Galatians 6:1)

“Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.” (Isaiah 52:8 KJV)

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1 KJV)

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