

**Watch words** – deceptive words – words that I would ask what they ‘really’ mean to be him and to be more specific! *But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. II Timothy 3:13*

**Warning words** – words, people, things, etc. that the Lord specifically warns us to ‘beware’, avoid, withdraw, have no company with, not take heed, mark & rebuke!

**Commentable words** – words I believe ‘can be’ worth considering in today’s world, etc. As parents, many us will recognize these words/phrases in our lives. So, unless one knows the truth from the RISEN SAVIOUR, these are the words that will sucker people to this speaker and to his/her false teachings. There are lot of quackings going on today so just because it sounds like a duck, it doesn’t mean it is a duck anymore.

**My Own Comments** – my comments (all in blue) that I just can’t let go by without me saying something! All my words, thoughts and comments will be based from a rightly divided (Paul ONLY) King James 1611 Bible as well as from 15 years of teaching and preaching the words of the RISEN SAVIOUR through Paul as our only apostle, exactly as God has stated for over 400 years!

*Scripture words – direct quotes from a King James Bible. (reference in red)*

Any words that are in simple black text are from the article as written and published by Andy Stanley.

---

## WHY ‘THE BIBLE SAYS SO’ IS NOT ENOUGH ANYMORE

By Andy Stanley • November 9, 2016

### Part I of my personal critique.

---

First, the elephant in the room. I believe the Bible is without error in everything it affirms. I believe what the Bible says is true, is true. Neither of those statements is original. I learned the first one from Dr. Norman L. Geisler and the second one from the late Dr. Charles C. Ryrie. I was fortunate enough to study under both of these distinguished scholars. But long before I made the acquaintance of either, I was already convinced of the infallibility of the Scriptures. I was convinced for the same reason the late Dr. E.V. Hill was convinced. During our commencement address, he held up his big, black, well-worn, leather preaching Bible and declared loud and proud, “I believe the Bible is the inerrant, infallible, unchanging Word of God. And the reason I believe ... is my momma told me!”

My momma told me too.

So did my daddy.

In fact, while studying for my Th.M., my daddy, Dr. Charles F. Stanley, was embroiled in a battle for the soul of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). At stake was the Bible. He and a handful of other influential SBC conservatives worked tirelessly to rescue the convention from an academic stream that threatened to undermine the convention’s long-standing commitment to the infallibility of the Bible. In the end, they were successful. All that to say, the integrity of the Bible is neither a purely academic nor an emotionally neutral topic for me.

Ok, first of all...

1) When people, preachers, pastors, etc. say the word 'the bible' (and they say it all the time), I have and will continue to ask them, "What do you mean when you say 'The Bible?' Please be more specific! Is it an NIV, RSV, etc.? Which one of modern bibles can I open and study because it is not only the Word of God, as I hear you say."

*"Where is the one single 'The Bible' as you always call it, that is 'the' words of God. I don't mean one that simply contain the words of God, as I have heard it said, but where is the 'the one' that all the words are all words of God! Where is that Bible that you keep mentioning that is the inerrant, infallible, unchanging Word of God when there are over 400 so-called bibles that HAVE made changes away from the King James 1611 Bible, (and by the way, all of which always compare themselves to the KJB) even though you say, 'The unchanging Word of God'. Is there 'the Bible' anywhere for me today?"*

Things that are different simply cannot be the same. There are some changes, in fact, that are exact opposites of the KJB – and many, even thousands of words along with many many complete verses are simply removed.

I ask you, *"Where is YOUR Bible? May I see it? May I have one, too or do I just have to trust you and you only as my final authority in all matters of faith and practice in my daily life?"*

2) ALL the so-called big names in this entire article, including his own dad, are all Great Commission, NON-King James Only, non-Rightly Dividing 'scholars.' They are all famous for their own wisdom of words and good words and fair speeches yet God says He does not use these kinds of scholars, professors, pastors, etc. **I Timothy 6** says they are *proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, suppose that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.*

So, if we want to obey and follow God's warnings, AND save ourselves a lot of wasted study time and time taken away from our own reading, then based on that verse in Timothy, we can immediately mark Andy Stanly and stop right now – we can choose to stay away from his good words and fair speeches and truly be pleasing God. However, if you want to continue into this 'critique,' it is your time. I will gladly continue with my critique. I will try to be as simple and nice as I can be. So don't use me as an excuse to stop reading this. Let the 'Scriptures' speak to you. It is time you considered what the RISEN Saviour says to the Gentiles only, not what Jesus said to the Jews only in the gospels and Hebrews to Jude, etc.

If you would, just put this question in the back of your mind, *"What will it take for you to drop all these preachers, evangelists and pastors who are skilled in their marketing techniques but also corrupt the word of God as they are speaking NOT in the sight of God nor do they speak in the risen Christ! See **II Corinthians 2:17** For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.*

## Big Guns

While Charles Ryrie will always be remembered for his **groundbreaking study Bible**, Norman Geisler will be remembered for his participation in the development of **The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy**. The statement was produced in 1978 at an international summit of evangelical leaders. It was signed by nearly **300 scholars**, including **James Boice, John Gerstner, Carl F. H. Henry, Harold Lindsell, John Warwick Montgomery, J.I. Packer, Earl Radmacher, Francis Schaeffer, R.C. Sproul and, of course, Dr. Geisler**. Following the conference, **Dr. Geisler** was asked to edit for publication the 14 papers presented at

the conference. Topics included Christ's view of Scripture, alleged errors and discrepancies, the human authorship of inspired Scripture, philosophical presuppositions of biblical errancy and more. Two years later, the collection was published under the title *Inerrancy*.

That was my textbook.

Dr. Geisler was my professor.

I am not impressed – he is a bible corrector and God tells us he is: “...*proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.*” (I Timothy 6:4,5)

Let's look back to a few sentences...

1) Apparently a 'man' can make a groundbreaking study Bible? He can write something even better than the Bible itself? And I do mean, the King James 1611 Bible because that has been around for a 'long time' – and it seemed to do fine without Charles Ryrie's help! But suddenly, he was able to make some changes to make it groundbreaking? So much for their use of the word 'unchanging.'

You can see for yourself that he not only added his own notes, but he changed the words, verses, etc. either in the text or in the footnotes. I always just wag my head when someone thinks they have to 'change', or 'correct the bible, as they say, in order to make it easier to understand.

Honestly folks, I was able to do that myself, as have many many others, simply by rightly dividing to follow Paul ONLY, exactly as the 'Scriptures' say – I didn't have to change / correct ONE WORD! It all makes perfect sense, as it has been for 400 years and still is! Isn't that a groundbreaking thought?

Just think, isn't that amazing - God could actually inspire AND preserve his words, just like He promised. Take note, though – NO OTHER BIBLE except the KJB contains that promise... ever wonder why they had to change that promise in all of today's bibles? Psalms 12:6,7... check it out – I am not just whistling Dixie, either – I can't whistle and I am not from the south – but that doesn't matter, does it!

So, I ask again, where is that 'the bible' that you mention over and over in your article? Where are the words of the Lord that He promised to *preserve them from this generation for ever*. Where are they today? Do they exist? If you are asking me, I will say Yes – in a KJB! If they ask you, you should be honest and stop using 'the Bible' in your sermons – because you don't believe 'the Bible' to be Scripture – and while you allow all the bibles today, you don't accept any of them!

PS – I can play Dixie on the piano, though! 😊

2) So, at this 'conference' Stanley attended, he learned about Christ's view of the Scriptures? Let's see, the word Christ refers to the risen Saviour in Paul's books. So how did they learn about Christ's view of the Scriptures other than simply reading and following Paul? Oh, you mean what Jesus said about the OT Scriptures? Is that what you mean? Yes, I do believe it is! I can promise you they didn't look to what Christ – the RISEN SAVIOUR – said to Paul as Scriptures to the Gentiles!

3) 'alleged' errors and discrepancies? He ought to know – Ryrie himself identified them and corrected them himself – thus his 'groundbreaking study bible.' They are not 'alleged' if they say they are proven! So, they truthfully do NOT believe the Bible is what they outwardly say it is. Or... they do not believe the KJB to be 'the Bible' – but they certainly can't believe all the other modern bibles are 'the bible' either – not with all the thousands of 'corrections' they have all made... and continue to make as they continue keeping the presses hot by putting out a new 'easier to understand bible' all the time.

4) ah yes, I love to hear them mention inspired Scripture... now there is a point to pin them down finally. Ask them and they might tell you. It took me 4 hours – from midnight to 4 a.m. to get a pastor to finally admit that when he says 'the Bible' he was meaning the Greek – and that the 'originals' are his final authority. But when I asked them if I may see those originals to see for myself, he himself said they don't exist. Uh, ok – duh!!! Don't you see a problem here?

5) the philosophical presuppositions of biblical errancy? What in the world is that? Whatever it is, doesn't it sound so scholarly? If it is philosophical, then it is man's opinion. So if they are going to say they are challenging what people say about 'mistakes' in the Bible, then they must believe their own 'corrections' are the correct ones and those others are not! Of if they say there are no errors, but they can't produce the originals to prove their statement – but they still won't say it about any bible version, KJB or any of the others... So, what could their final authority be – other than themselves?

6) Ask a question and see the answer! Oh, so the book "*Inerrancy*" is his textbook, eh! So, if I want to read, study and find clarity in my Bible, I have to read another book about the Bible? I see. So, if I can understand my bible without your book, then you don't make any money off of me, do you? But you say that if I want to understand my own Bible, a book that you say does not really exist, then I need to read YOUR book?

Are you saying that YOU can put a copyright on your book and keep the truth for others but God cannot? Really? I have to ask you, "What did God do in those 400 years of a written Bible without you around to help people understand it?"

## Part II of my personal critique

From here on, you will possibly see less 'blue' comments on the 'words' that are repeated by Andy Stanley because my commentary would be the same. I will still highlight the word, but will often leave off some of the comment already made for that word/words. Other than that, though, you will see that I still have plenty to say – and actually, I am not saying all that I could say; my fingers just can't keep up with my commenting!

He called a couple of weeks ago to check on me. He's 84. I haven't talked to him in years. "Andy," he said, "folks are giving you a hard time. I understand what you were saying." He was referencing a message titled "The Bible Told Me So" that caused more than a few to question my view of Scripture and my understanding of how the canon came to be. The message was part of a six-part series titled Who Needs God. The target audience was the increasing number of millennials who grew up in church but outgrew their faith.

So, we see Andy expose his mixed up belief a little deeper when he brings up the 'canon'. Is when the 'canon' was decided upon when **I Corinthians 13:10** took existence? Without going

into a deep scholarly study, we can easily say no – it was not available to the common plowboy, as it was said, meaning the development of the KJB which was completed in 1611.

From this point on, as you read through this article by Stanley, you continue to see words referring to scripture except three – “King James Bible”. So, if you need to, go back to my comments about his use of the words ‘the bible’, ‘scriptures’, ‘inerrancy’, etc. He is being totally dishonest and deceitful.

Now folks, it really doesn’t matter whether or not he is aware of that false background and ‘foundation made of sand’ as he is simply just following the norm of his bible correcting father and previous writers from the Great Commission camp (because they only believe the originals - which no longer exist). I figure it is the latter – he really doesn’t know what he is saying compared to what he is meaning. But like I stated, it doesn’t really matter - remember the words: ‘deceived’ and ‘deceiving’. Either way, that makes him an evil man and seducer, whether or not you like his style, approach and marketing technique. (See **II Timothy 3:13**)

2) Then he makes the comment about the millennials who 1) grew up in church and 2) outgrew their faith. Let’s consider those two comments about the ‘millennials’, the name used for the younger people today (they really should be called ‘tribulationals’, not ‘millenniums’ – I doubt they will make it o the millennium.)

These are people that have probably never even heard of ‘one bible’ – King James Bible other than it is just another of the hundreds. They might have heard that it is the only one that makes the ‘outrageous’ claim of being the ONLY ‘Bible’ – the very words of God, inspired and preserved.

Their bibles, if they ever had any, had/have NONE of the promises and major doctrines that the KJB has taught for 400+ years. No wonder the millennials think we are nuts – or like Festus said to Paul, “*...thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.*” **Acts 26:24**

### 1) “Grew Up In Church”

- a. When these people were kids, they heard all the promises they were told that God made to them – of course, most of the promises were the promises given to the Jew, NOT to the Gentiles and so of course, would NOT come true. In fact, the preachers seldom ever talked much about the promises of the Risen Saviour, which WILL come true!
- b. These kids saw the threats of the severity of God being thrown at their parents during those ‘barn burning’ ‘hell-fire-brimstone’ sermons – along with those tear jerking “you don’t love God” sermons- yet, they never saw that severity of God take place. It always looked like either they were getting away with sin from God or that God doesn’t exist. They eventually choose ‘that God doesn’t exist.’
- c. These kids grew up hearing all the supposed ‘*signs that shall follow them that believe*’; 1) *cast out devils* (they only saw that happen in ‘Chick Comics’); 2) *speak with new tongues* (even though the scriptures say that women were not supposed to do that, they saw mostly women doing it – it was even a woman who started the Foursquare movement of Pentecostalism - Aimee Semple McPherson.) They didn’t see anyone 3) *take up serpents* without eventually being bit; 4) they didn’t *drink any deadly thing* because they saw kids who were poisoned and died; 5) they could easily tell the healers were shysters, many of whom ended up in jail for taking money under false pretenses; others were simply exposed as religious shysters with their hidden microphones, etc.. The only *signs* they could ‘see’ were the



Pentecostal ones that their own pastors preached against because they would say those signs were for the Jews only; but yet, they also heard about the Great Commission their church was teaching and kept using the same verses that talk about those signs for Christians in **Mark 16**. The kids knew something was not right.

- d. These kids saw their parents going to those long-winded, fancy prayer meetings and participated in prayer circles, prayer chains, etc., but saw no responses other than having the pastor say, *“God is God and God can do what He wants when He wants and how He wants – God answers prayers with yes, no, maybe.”*
- e. Kids saw a new ‘bible’ or two show up each year. They know the bibles say different things, so there must not be ‘any’ real bible, ya know, what I mean?
- f. They were ‘beaten’ as kids with old testament punishment from Proverbs and Psalms – well beyond what normal punishment should be – it really was abuse... or... they were told by relatives and professional that ‘any’ corporal punishment was abuse – and so the kids developed bitterness and hatred towards their parents, thanks to the school counselors and social workers, etc.
- g. Kids today have ‘wised-up’ to the false teaching going on in the churches today – i.e. the entire Great Commission and all the missionary endeavors (such as “God called me to this island” – and then in a few months, God calls them to a different location? Uh huh – right!
- h. The music changed in the church and the kids liked it but the parents denied it – or the music did not change from the ‘old stuff’ and the kids hated it! Or, as I witnessed in Las Vegas, one of the church soloists who sang “How Great Thou Art” was also a stripper in one of the casinos. And parents wonder why their kids doubt what they see and hear in their church to be real with a real God?
- i. The money the parents had – and I mean were forced to give to the church while the pastor drove round in a fancy sports car - or the church had a pricey fountain – or the pastor would preach ‘build and they will come’ which they found later, they still didn’t come.
- j. The pastor would preach one thing and then do another in his own life.

I could go on and on... but the point is, people have left the church, there is no doubt about that. People didn’t leave the local church like we did, looking for more truth from God and our KJB. They left being mad and hating God and eventually rejected the existence of God totally.

Andy Stanley does not recognize the truth to why they have left.

Andy can blame the bible, and how it is perceived, but when one considers all the hundreds of bibles that now exist, and the confusion that comes from all those bible’s, he really ‘has no clue’ as to why folks are not ‘satisfied’ in their church.

As you continue to read this critique, you will see how blind even he is to the falseness of the Great Commission; the commission that all churches base their foundation on in Acts 2 through Peter and how blind Andy Stanley is to the gospel of the Risen Saviour through Paul – in a KJB.

It continues to amaze me that these ‘scholars’ miss the simple truth – I am not surprised, but always amazed that they miss something so obvious!

And now, Andy Stanley is going to get people to be thrilled with what he has to say about the millennials and they will follow him, and yet, they STILL will not be led to the simple King James Bible – always known as the Scriptures!

Sigh!!! – but go ahead and read on – I will show you even more proof of his mixed up gospel teachings. Again, a nice guy and a whiz at marketing his own gospel, but the truth does not have to be marketed, nor can it be and what he does do an excellent job of marketing, is still not truth.

## 2) Outgrew their faith

- a) How in the world can someone ‘outgrow’ their faith? I suppose Andy will explain that later on in this article, so let’s wait and see.
- b) I do know this – that NONE of these guys, including Andy Stanley, know anything about the *faith OF Jesus Christ*. You ask, “How can you say that? Because NONE of their Bibles say that. ALL of the Bibles have changed the “*faith ‘OF’ Christ*” to “faith ‘IN’ Christ.”
- c) They always talk about ‘their’ faith being strong, etc. They know nothing about ‘*the faith.*’
- d) **Romans 10:17** says, *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* And because they have rejected and thrown out the word of God, they have no faith. They don’t have the faith OF Jesus and of course, without the KJB, their own faith wavers and they eventually let the ways of the world take over. And if some of them truly are saved, then they allow themselves to be bewitched, *that ye should not obey the truth...* – **Galatians 3:1-3**. More on that later, too, I am sure.

## Part III of my personal critique

More on that later.

“Andy,” he said, “I understand what you are saying but not everybody does. You need to put something in print so *they* know *you hold to inerrancy*.” I assured him I would. But I also assured him the *they* he referred to wouldn’t change their opinion because I’ve been in this long enough to know my take on inerrancy is not really the issue. *He laughed. “I know, but you need to put it in print anyway.”*

So he laughed, eh? Hmmm. So, his words don’t make it clear enough – he needs to have it in print to make sure they ‘get it’? I wonder if what he has in print is even the same thing he says. In other words, he can say something differently than what he supposedly believes, but if someone calls him on it, then he can pull up this printed statement that gets him out of the spot his spoken words got him into?

And he says inerrancy is NOT the real issue? Really? Yet, Andy repeats the words ‘the Bible’ yet there are hundreds of them in print. You say you believe inerrancy yet you change and ‘correct’ the KJB right along with all your scholarly heroes.

Maybe – just maybe, inerrancy IS the issue. Read on folks, and you will see that inerrancy is the issue, but he either doesn’t realize it himself, or he is very aware that inerrancy doesn’t really exist – because of his false manuscripts – or his history of textual evidence takes him back to Origin – proving his texts have been and continue to be corrupted. (*Deceiving and being deceived!*)

So here we are.

I love that man. In **seminary**, we called him Stormin' Norman. I remember walking out of class after his final **Apologetics 101** lecture, staring up into a clear Texas sky and whispering a short prayer: "I've always believed ... but now I know." He began the semester with the premise, "*Something exists.*" From there he built an argument for the existence of God, miracles, the historical reliability of the New Testament documents, the resurrection and finally the infallibility of the Old Testament based on Jesus' statements regarding the Hebrew Scriptures. It was life changing. I've been drawing from that well for over 30 years.

However, he has 'drawn on that' stuff for 30 years, but never touching Paul's books – you know, the words from the RISEN SAVIOUR?

So when I read about and hear about my incoherent view of **Scripture**, my liberal leanings, how embarrassed my father must be, I smile and think, *You have no idea*. So for anyone out there who is still a bit suspicious, I affirm **The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy**. Heck, I studied under the man who co-authored the whole thing.

There ya have it folks – his 'final authority' comes from the Chicago statement. I am not suspicious of Andy, I KNOW. I have him pegged – a nice guy, with a great approach but teaches the gospel of Jesus, a gospel to the Jews while he ignores / rejects the gospel of the Risen Christ, through Paul in a King James Bible.

Warning words:

**apologetics** *"(Greek: ἀπολογία, "verbal defense, speech in defense") is a field of Christian theology that aims to present historical, reasoned, and evidential bases for Christianity, defending it against objections."* – (Wiki).

The truth, however, is that the apologetics classes in seminars are used to attempt to disprove the King James Bible through history, reason and supposed evidences found over time and has been the main source and contribution to the modern Ecumenical Movement today. This description of the professors, etc. fits appropriately: *"...proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. (1 Timothy 6:4,5)* I must quote these verses again and again and again in this critique!

**seminar** – a religious higher educational institute that corrects, destroys and rewrites Scripture in the name of scholarship, history and education. – Paulson...

**Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy** – *"At a conference sponsored by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy and held in Chicago in October 1978, more than 200 evangelical leaders formulated the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. The statement was designed to defend the position of Biblical inerrancy against a perceived trend toward liberal conceptions of Scripture. Those signing the statement came from a variety of evangelical Christian denominations."* – Wiki...

*"Under the statement, inerrancy applies only to the original manuscripts (which no longer exist, but which can be inferred on the basis of extant copies), not to the copies or translations themselves. In the Statement, inerrancy does not refer to a blind literal interpretation."* – Wiki...

If you want to see if your spiritual hero signed on to this ecumenical and



eternally damning statement, click the following link.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago\\_Statement\\_on\\_Biblical\\_Inerrancy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_Statement_on_Biblical_Inerrancy)

This is a list of people who, in God's eyes, are: "...*proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.* (I Timothy 6:4,5)

We are to have nothing to do with them and because Andy subscribes to this as his basis for his teaching and final authority, whether you like Andy and his marketing approach or not, you and I are to "...*from such withdraw thyself.*" (I Timothy 6:5). I already have – will you?

That is really and truly simple, isn't it - and I have it in writing, too! Inerrancy IS really the issue!

**This is as far as my personal critique goes for now – July 22, 2017.  
Stay tuned as I will continue this asap!**

---

## Methodology and Theology

The confusion related to my most recent series stems more from methodology than theology. Two things in particular. First, I *preach without notes*. In my quest for an engaging presentation, I sometimes sacrifice precision. Sometimes I'm more precise at the 11:00 a.m. service than at the 9:00 a.m. By the time the 4:30 p.m. service rolls around, I usually have my act together. Usually. A second technique that is sometimes confusing for the occasional viewer is *my habit of saying what I suspect skeptics are thinking about something I'm saying*. In my effort to state their assumptions, I sometimes sound as if I *share* their assumptions. Similarly, I *look for opportunities to affirm an unbeliever's assumptions*. I say things like, "I don't blame you a bit for thinking that way." For listeners accustomed to preachers taking every opportunity to correct, chastise and reprimand unbelievers, my approach is confusing. But for the father whose 23-year-old son agreed to give church one more chance ... well ... folks like that hug my neck and send me gift cards.

During "The Bible Told Me So," I wanted educated, dechurched millennials to know that I knew that those who supposedly know everything are convinced there was no worldwide flood or Hebrew migration from Egypt. While addressing them directly, I gave them the benefit of the doubt to make the following point: *Even if those events never occurred, it does nothing to undermine the evidence supporting the resurrection of Jesus and thus the claims he made about himself.* And yes, as noted above, I know Jesus made claims about the Jewish Scriptures. But this was one sermon in a series of six ... I hadn't gotten to that yet.

As I explain in *Deep and Wide* and *Communicating for a Change*, I approach a message series like a single, two- or three-hour message divided into four or five parts. I'm comfortable with tension, unanswered questions and leaving people hanging. Not everybody is.

But to recap, yes, I believe the Bible is without error in everything it affirms. Yes, my approach to preaching is not traditional. Yes, my approach at times leaves those outside our local congregations wondering if I'm still an evangelical. So in light of all that, along with the fact that here I am once again having to explain myself, shouldn't I consider changing my approach?

No.

Actually, I would like you to consider changing yours.

Here's why.

The world has changed.

The approach most of us inherited doesn't work anymore. Actually, it's never worked all that well. In a culture that had high regard for the Bible, the traditional approach held its own. Those days are over. They've been over for a long time. If you think I'm using culture as an excuse to maintain a flawed hermeneutical approach, consider this.

In 2015, I took seven staff members to Nashville to attend the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission conference on "Homosexuality and the Future of Marriage." In the opening session, Dr. Al Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, made a comment that took my breath away. Nobody else in the room seemed the least bit bothered. I wrote it down and then went back and listened to the session again online to make sure I heard correctly. Speaking specifically about Southern Baptist churches, he stated:

*"The vast majority of people who've ever been baptized by our people are our own offspring. We've never been very evangelistic in terms of people who weren't those to whom we gave birth."*

Seriously? The SBC has never been evangelistic beyond people to whom they gave birth? If that's the case, and he should know, it seems to me my friends in the SBC, along with church networks everywhere that embrace a similar approach, need to hit pause and rethink things. Perhaps everything. Not their view of Scripture. But perhaps their approach to talking about Scripture. More specifically, their approach to talking about Scripture in a culture that doesn't take the Bible seriously anymore.

Eight years ago I shifted my approach. I didn't announce it. I just did it. The results have been remarkable. You may not like my approach. That's fine. I just hope you don't stick with an approach you inherited because it's comfortable. As I tell leaders all the time, "Marry your mission; date your model." Your preaching and teaching model is just that—a model.

It may be time to break up.

### **It's Worse Than We Thought**

It's no secret the religious landscape in America has shifted. Fewer and fewer Americans are self-identifying as Christians, while more and more are identifying as religiously unaffiliated. As you've heard by now, this group has been nicknamed the "nones" because they checked "none of the above" on religious affiliation surveys. According to Pew Research Center's [2014 Religious Landscape Study](#), nearly one quarter of Americans claim no religious affiliation, representing a 7-point jump in just seven years. Young Americans are more likely to be religiously unaffiliated than older Americans with millennials comprising 44 percent of the nones. Millennial nones are walking away from the faith they grew up with, the faith of their parents, in record numbers.<sup>1</sup> Surveys, podcasts and blogs leave one with the distinct impression that the version of faith this generation grew up with left them unprepared for the rigors and questions of academia and adulthood. This is especially true for those who pursue education beyond high

school. The dechurched who grew up in church exit because they find the version of Christianity they've grown up with unconvincing, uninspiring and irrelevant.

It's important to recognize that millennials don't perceive their understanding of Christianity as a *version* of anything. For them, their version is the only version. The version of Christianity they were raised on *is* Christianity. More and more find their version of faith ill-suited for the undeniable realities, both scientific and sociological, of the world in which they find themselves. If we're going to reach the unchurched, underchurched, dechurched, and postchurched with the gospel in a culture that's trending post-Christian, we must rethink our *approach*. Changing times call for changing approaches in order to accomplish our unchanging mission of making disciples.

But first another word or two about those looking for the back door.

## Post-Christian

According to the 2014 Religious Landscape Study referenced earlier, nones represent nearly 23 percent of Americans. Think about that ... 23 percent. That's just under 56 million people. Chances are, you are related to a none or two. You certainly know a few. You've baptized some. You probably drove a few to camp. You gave some current nones their first Bibles. You know their parents—their heartbroken, disappointed, frightened parents.

We've been told for decades that we live in a postmodern culture. While we struggle to define the term itself, few of us would disagree with the assessment. And if we're honest, even fewer of us have adjusted our ministry approaches to compensate for this reality. But here's something we can all get our heads around. We are now a *post-Christian* culture. One distinctive feature of postmodernism is its rejection of uniformitarianism, the insistence that there is only one right way of thinking and behaving.<sup>2</sup> Post-Christian takes that to a frightening new level. Former *National Review* editor John O'Sullivan provides the following helpful definition of post-Christianity:

*A post-Christian society is not merely a society in which agnosticism or atheism is the prevailing fundamental belief. It is a society rooted in the history, culture, and practices of Christianity but in which the religious beliefs of Christianity have been either rejected or, worse, forgotten.*<sup>3</sup>

There is an important distinction between a non-Christian and a post-Christian. The reason our evangelistic endeavors result in more recycling than actual conversion is that our methods and approaches assume non-Christian rather than post-Christian.

That must change.

In a non-Christian society, people may have never heard anything about Christianity and, therefore, have few to no preconceived notions. A post-Christian society is the opposite. In a post-Christian society, people have been exposed to Christianity (in our case, for generations) but are opting out for a different worldview, a different narrative through which to make sense of the world. In a post-Christian society, people know the stories; they just don't believe 'em. Or in many cases, they don't believe 'em *anymore*.

The Barna group has developed a metric for identifying a post-Christian. This metric is based on stated beliefs and practices, such as belief or disbelief in God, church attendance, spiritual practices, etc. As it turns out, more and more Americans who identify as Christians qualify as post-Christians based on their actual behaviors. According to the Barna Group, 48 percent of Americans qualify as "post-Christian"<sup>4</sup> ... 48 percent! Bottom line: Many, perhaps most of the nones in America have had some connection to Christianity in their pasts but have rejected it. They are not non-Christians in the way we are accustomed to thinking about non-Christians. They are post-Christian. That's a whole nother thing. This group has

been there, done that, and has a closetful of camp T-shirts to show for it. This presents a unique challenge for us in terms of apologetics and evangelism. It requires a new approach.

The approach I'll unpack in the remainder of this article is neither new nor original. As I will attempt to demonstrate, it's modeled on the preaching of the earliest Christian evangelists—the ones who turned the world upside down and who against all odds fueled a movement that captured the attention and, ultimately, the participation of the pagan world both inside and outside the Roman Empire.

Maybe we should do that again.

## The Bible Tells Me So

For post-Christians, common sense, science, philosophy and reason are the go-tos for worldviews and decision-making. Post-Christian nones have a low tolerance for faith-based answers to fact-based questions. At the same time, like most of us, they aren't exactly on a truth quest either. They're on a happiness quest. Many walked away from faith because faith didn't make them happy. That's never a presenting reason. Nobody wants to appear that shallow. But scratch beneath the surface and you'll find the quest for happiness plays a big role. When faith is viewed as an impediment to happiness, goodbye faith. The seemingly irrational, anti-science version of faith many were brought up on makes it that much easier to simply walk away. Given all of that, this next statistic should not come as any surprise. When asked about their views of Scripture, 72 percent of nones said that it is *not* the Word of God. This data is corroborated by data compiled in a massive study conducted by the Barna Group.

From 2011 to 2016, the Barna Group, in collaboration with the American Bible Society, collected, tracked and analyzed Americans' perceptions of and engagement with the Bible. They released their findings in the book *The Bible in America: The Changing Landscape of Bible Perceptions and Engagement*.<sup>5</sup> In the introduction, David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, outlines the most significant trends from the six-year study. First and foremost, "increased skepticism." The following quote is a bit long, but it's extraordinarily important. In fact, if you want to stir up your next staff or elders meeting, just pass out copies of the following:

*More people have more questions about the origins, relevance and authority of the Scriptures ... the steady rise of skepticism is creating a cultural atmosphere that is becoming unfriendly—sometimes even hostile—to claims of faith. In a society that venerates science and rationalism, it is an increasingly hard pill to swallow that an eclectic assortment of ancient stories, poems, sermons, prophecies, and letters, written and compiled over the course of 3,000 years, is somehow the sacred "Word of God." Even in just the few years Barna has been conducting "State of the Bible" interviews, the data is trending toward Bible skepticism. With each passing year, the percentage of Americans who believe that the Bible is "just another book written by men" increases. So too does the perception that the Bible is actually harmful and that people who live by its principles are religious extremists.*<sup>6</sup>

In 2011, 10 percent of Americans qualified as skeptics when it came to the Bible. In 2016, just six years later, that number had more than doubled. Doubled! Currently, 22 percent of Americans do not believe the Bible has any divine underpinnings.<sup>7</sup> But the current *percentage* is not the real story. The real story is the current *rate* at which culture is dismissing the Bible as uninspired, untrue and irrelevant.

But it doesn't stop there.

Twenty-seven percent of millennial non-Christians believe "the Bible is a dangerous book of religious dogma used for centuries to oppress people."<sup>8</sup> Journalists, scientists and scholars—the likes of Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins and the late Christopher Hitchens—have provided plenty of one-sided commentary to support that narrative. Download and read Sam Harris' *Letter to a Christian Nation* and ask yourself how well a 20-something-year-old, Sunday-school educated, college student's faith would

stand up under that kind of barrage.

### **So What's A Girl To Do?**

As bleak as all that sounds, I'm not discouraged. For one reason, as we all know, the original version of our faith was extraordinarily robust. Once upon a time our faith was stronger than Roman steel and tougher than Roman nails. Against all odds a small band of Jesus followers defied an empire and claimed their leader came to replace the temple. Two-thousand years later, we're still standing. All over the world. And we have the internet! So I'm not worried. But I'm not sitting around praying for revival either. I grew up in the *pray for revival* culture. It's a cover for a church's unwillingness to make changes conducive to real revival. You want revival? Start assuming there are post-Christian people in the room. All the rooms. Begin evaluating through the eyes and ears of post-Christians.

Don't know any?

That may be part of the problem.

Appealing to post-Christian people on the basis of the authority of Scripture has essentially the same effect as a Muslim imam appealing to you on the basis of the authority of the Quran. You may or may not already know what it says. But it doesn't matter. The Quran doesn't carry any weight with you. You don't view the Quran as authoritative.

Close to half our population does not view the Bible as authoritative either. If you're trying to reach people with an undergraduate degree or greater, over half your target audience will not be moved by *the Bible says*, *the Bible teaches*, *God's Word is clear* or anything along those lines. If that's the approach to preaching and teaching you grew up with and are most comfortable with, you're no doubt having a good ol' throw-down debate with me in your head about now—a debate I'm sure you're winning. But before you chapter and verse me against the wall and put me in a sovereignty-of-God headlock, would you stop and ask yourself: *Why does this bother me so much? Why does this bother me so much—really?*

OK, commence with the debate.

But finish the article.

## **Breaking Up**

Years ago our organization made several decisions to better position us to minister to and recapture the attention of post-Christian people. We adjusted our sails. We cast our nets on the other side. We ... you get the picture. And why wouldn't we? The data Barna and others have collected should cause all of us to stop and rethink what we're doing. Al Mohler's statement should cause our hearts to skip a beat. As I mentioned earlier, it was about eight years ago that I adjusted my preaching to compensate for an increasingly post-Christian audience. I adapted my approach. An adaptation that, as we've seen, left some of my conservative Christian brothers and sisters wondering about my orthodoxy. I get that. I just wish they would ask more questions and make fewer accusations. I'm easy to find.

As part of my shift, I stopped leveraging the authority of Scripture and began leveraging the *authority* and *stories* of the people behind the Scripture. To be clear, I don't believe "the Bible says," "Scripture teaches," and "the Word of God commands" are incorrect approaches. But they are ineffective approaches for post-Christian people. I don't regret teaching my children that the Bible is God's Word. But my grown-up kids understand their confidence in the Bible is rooted in their confidence in who Jesus is based on the testimonies of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, James and the apostle Paul.

Shifting the conversation away from the authority of Scripture to the authority, courage and faithfulness of the men and women behind our Scriptures has not only enabled me to better connect with post-



Christians, it's done wonders for the faith of the faithful. The stories of the men and women behind the Scriptures are rich, inspiring and, unfortunately, not as well-known as you might think. For my latest example, go to [WhoNeedsGod.com](http://WhoNeedsGod.com) and watch the last 10 minutes of part six. To wrap the series, I leveraged the story of James to encourage nones to reconsider the claims of Christ, just as James the Just had to do after the resurrection of his brother. As you'll see, this in no way undermines the authority of the Bible. It actually underscores the historical roots of our Bible. You'd be shocked by how many students and adults in your church view the Bible as a *spiritual* book that says *true* things to live by as opposed to an inspired collection of documents documenting *events* that actually *happened*. This is why I will continue to insist that *the foundation of our faith is not an inspired book but the events that inspired the book*; events that inspired writers, borne along by the Holy Spirit, to document conversations, insights and events—the pivotal event being the resurrection. While it's true we would not know these events occurred had they not been documented, two other things are equally true. First, they were documented years before there was a Bible (i.e., New Testament bound together with the Jewish Scriptures). Second, it is the events, not the record of the events, that birthed the “church.” The Bible did not create Christianity. Christianity is the reason the Bible was created. The reason many Christians struggle with statements like these is they grew up on “The Bible says” preaching. And that's fine as long as one *first* believes the Bible is inspired.

Notice I said *first*.

Let me state it another way.

If someone is *first* convinced the Bible is God's Word, you can leverage “The Bible says” language. But let's be honest. What do you call people who *first* accept the Bible as God's Word *before* they've read the Bible? What do you call someone who takes someone's word for something as significant as “This book is the infallible Word of God?” What kind of person would go for that?

A child.

When did you come to believe the Bible is God's Word? Be honest. Chances are you arrived at that conclusion the same way I did. Your momma told you. Or your pastor told you. You accepted the authority of the Bible long before you read it. In my case, before I was *able* to read it! Only a child would accept the Bible as God's infallible Word before knowing what was inside the Bible.

Anything wrong with that?

I hope not. I did the same thing *for* (Richard Dawkins would say *to*) my children. And I'm glad I did. But this explains in part why we have a difficult time doing effective evangelism outside the circle of the already indoctrinated and the already convinced. Very few people reading this article embraced the Bible as God's Word as adults. The few who did were probably predisposed to hold the Bible in high regard as a result of some experience in childhood. My point? If we're going to reach post-Christians, we must change the way we *talk* about the Bible. Remember, we don't live in a non-Christian culture. We live in a post-Christian culture. Most educated people have an educated opinion about what the Bible is and isn't. They don't walk into your church with blank slates. They walk in with full slates. Consequently, we must begin the conversation on the lowest rung of the ladder. That's not hard to do. And no, it doesn't require that we water things down and ignore mature believers in the room. People who think it's either/or just haven't seen it done well.

## Precedence

While there are no New Testament examples of sermons designed with post-Christians in mind for obvious reasons, Luke documents four occasions where two prominent leaders in the first-century church adjusted their approaches in light of their audiences. Specifically, they adjusted their use of and reference

to their Scriptures, our Old Testament, based on the assumptions of their listeners. While they tailored and adapted their *approaches*, their *central message* remained the same.

That's all I'm asking you to consider.

## Exhibit A: Peter and the Jews

In the second chapter of Acts, Luke documents what is thought to be the first Christian sermon delivered after the resurrection. The setting is the city of Jerusalem during the Jewish festival of Pentecost. The preacher is Peter. The audience, Luke tells us, was a crowd of "God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). But they weren't there to hear a sermon. They had come together to figure out how this strange band of Galileans had mastered such a wide variety of dialects. The Jewish makeup of the audience is corroborated by Peter's opening statement, "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem" (Acts 2:14). Peter begins by explaining that the phenomenon they just experienced was not the result of a few too many mimosas. "No," he says, "this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel." He goes on to quote several lines from the book of Joel (2:28–32) to confirm that the event they just witnessed was predicted in their Scriptures (Acts 2:15–21). Then he directs their attention to the recent events concerning Jesus of Nazareth, events with which many in his audience would have been quite familiar. Following that, he states his thesis, his big idea.

*"... and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead" (v. 23-24a).*

Peter again turns to the Jewish Scriptures (Psalm 16:8-11), this time to demonstrate the resurrection was the fulfillment of Scripture (vs. 25-31). Then he gets personal: *"God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it"* (v. 32). After another quick appeal to Psalm 110:1, Peter delivers the homiletical coup de grâce, the final point, the big "so what" of his message: "Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah" (vs. 32-36).

Throughout the message, Peter leverages his version of "the Bible says," "the Scripture teaches." This makes perfect sense given Peter's audience. This was a group that held their Scriptures in high regard. If their Bible said it, that settled it. It didn't hurt that most of Peter's audience believed those particular Scriptures pointed to a future Messiah. Peter simply connected the dots. He connected their existing belief, which was informed by the Jewish Scriptures, to a current event.

## Exhibit B: Peter and the Gentiles

Eight chapters later, Luke records a second message delivered by Peter, this time to a Gentile audience in Caesarea. Peter had been invited to the home of Cornelius, a Roman centurion. We can't begin to comprehend how difficult it was for Peter to step across the threshold of a Gentile home. In the awkward opening lines of his message, he freely admits this was his first time to do so. And this was approximately 10 years after the resurrection!

Best we can tell, this was the first evangelistic presentation made to an exclusively Gentile audience, in this case Cornelius' close friends and relatives (Acts 10:24). After an introduction that must have offended every Gentile in the room, Peter dives into his message. Here it is.

*"You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

*"We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*

Peter doesn't leverage "The Bible says" this time around. He doesn't quote from the Jewish Scriptures. Whereas it made up about 25 percent of his message to the Jews, not so here, which is understandable. While Gentiles respected the Jewish Scriptures for their antiquity, they didn't consider them authoritative. On the contrary, as Peter readily admits in his regretful introduction, Jews and Gentiles had as little to do with each other as possible. The Jewish Scriptures were given to the Jews. So Peter focuses almost exclusively on the well-known and thus verifiable events surrounding the life, death and, ultimately, the resurrection of Jesus. Peter is clear; Jesus was more than a Jewish Messiah. The resurrection had implications beyond the nation of Israel. Jesus, Peter declared, was appointed by God to judge *all* the living and *all* the dead, both Jews and Gentiles.

Once his case was made, evidence presented, he adds:

*"All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*

When you read this closing statement in context, clearly Peter isn't using this nonspecific reference to the prophets as a selling point. It reads as almost an afterthought. And he doesn't bother to reference or quote a specific prophet. Assuming Cornelius and his family were not familiar with the Jewish prophets, it wouldn't have made much difference anyway. Some argue this vague reference to prophets was actually for the benefit of the Jews who accompanied him to Cornelius' home. This view certainly makes sense based on what happened next. No sooner had Peter gotten that last line out when:

*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.*

Notice who was most impressed:

*The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. (Acts 10:44-46)*

This was, in fact, what the prophet Joel predicted. The Jews in the room put two and two together. There was no denying it. The Gentiles were in!

While Peter's messages differ in their use of the Jewish Scriptures, both have as their central theme the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. That's what mattered most. That's still what matters most. This is why I'm absolutely convinced of the following: In the marketplace—not the church—in the public square, in the classroom, we must shift the debate away from whether the entire Bible is true and focus the debate on whether Jesus rose from the dead. That is *the* issue. And that is an event for which we have overwhelming evidence. And no, our evidence does not come from the Bible. Evidence for the resurrection comes from the eyewitness testimonies of Jesus' first-century followers who documented not what they believed but what they saw. Later, these documents were collected and included in what would later be titled the Bible. If that sounds like a distinction without a difference, you are mistaken.

## **Exhibit C: Paul and the Jews**

The apostle Paul makes the clearest argument for adjusting one's approach based on one's audience. Read these familiar verses with that in mind.

*Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)*

Paul's mission? "Win" 'em and "save" 'em.

His approach? Whatever it took to "win" 'em and "save" 'em.

Paul was not married to a method. He was completely sold out to a mission. Let this phrase rattle around in your mind for a few minutes:

"... so that by all possible means I might save some."

Which means, Paul?

"All possible means."

So, you may take one approach one day and a different approach a different day? Am I reading you right?

"All possible means."

Is that really necessary? Doesn't the Spirit do the work?

"All possible means."

But isn't it enough to preach the Word and let the seed fall where it may?

"All possible means."

And why do you go to such lengths?

"... for the sake of the gospel."

What if we just did that for a year? What if we opted for the "all possible means" approach? What if we decided to do whatever it takes?

That's when the world changes.

Again.

If there was ever a first-century preacher who had the goods to leverage "the Bible says" and "the Scripture teaches," it was Paul. As a Pharisee, he was trained in the Law. He studied under Gamaliel. We know from his letters that his intellect and reasoning abilities were second to none. His message recorded by Luke in Acts 13 is mind-blowing. Standing in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, surrounded by Jews, Paul begins his message with Israel's migration from Egypt. From there he walks his audience through their own history right up to the era of King Saul and King David. But when he gets to David, he pivots:

*“From this man’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised.”* (Acts 13:23)  
From there Paul dives right into the details of Jesus’ arrest, crucifixion, burial and, of course, the main event:

*“But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.”* (Acts 13:30-31)

Then he connects the dots:

*“We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus.”* (Acts 13:32)

But he’s not finished. Diving back into the Jewish Scriptures, Paul quotes from the second psalm. He makes application to Jesus and then wraps it all up with a warning from the prophet Habakkuk.

No notes.

No net.

It’s dizzying.

But his point is unmistakably clear and no doubt offensive to some in the room.

*“Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.”* (vs. 38–39)

Translated: Jesus did what Moses couldn’t.

Paul’s message to his Jewish audience is similar to Peter’s in Acts 2. Paul, like Peter, knew when it was appropriate to leverage “the Scripture teaches” and when to leverage something else.

Case in point.

## **Exhibit D: Paul and the Gentiles**

While Paul’s pedigree made him a formidable opponent for Jews intent on discrediting the Jesus movement, Jews were not his primary audience. Paul was called to take the gospel to Gentiles. The majority of Acts is dedicated to Paul’s missionary endeavors throughout the Mediterranean basin. During one of these trips, Paul took the opportunity to preach to a gathering of educated upper-class Greeks. Fortunately for us, his traveling companion Luke documented what took place.

In Acts 17, we find Paul waiting in Athens for the arrival of Timothy and Silas. While wandering through town, he couldn’t help but notice the place was full of idols. This eventually led to a heated debate with a group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who were confounded by Paul’s insistence that ... ready for this ... someone had risen from the dead (Acts 17:18). As a result they brought Paul to the Areopagus and gave him an opportunity to make his case, which, of course, he was more than happy to do. But his message in Athens is nothing like his message in Antioch. He doesn’t start with the story of the Jewish exodus. He begins by complimenting his audience on their interest in the gods.

*“People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.”* (Acts 17:22b)



Not only does he choose not to mention the Jewish exodus, he chooses not to quote from the book of Exodus. Specifically:

*"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below."* (Exodus 20:4)

How did he resist?

If his goal had been to be *right* or to *make a point*, he wouldn't have resisted. He would have just *preached the Word*. But Paul wasn't there to be *right* or merely make a *point*. His goal was to "win" some and "save" some. *So he chose not to quote from the Scriptures*. He quoted one of their poets instead. Rather than assuring them their gods didn't exist, he chose to talk about the God they missed. He referenced an altar dedicated to an unknown god. This was the ancient Athenian way of playing it safe. You know, just in case they missed one. Did your mom ever set an extra place at the dinner table in case someone dropped by? Same idea.

At this point in his message, Paul employs an unusual preaching technique. I've been using it for years. Just about every time I do, I'm criticized by Christians outside our churches. But I learned it from Paul. My latest attempt is in part one of the series I referenced earlier, *Who Needs God?*

So what is this unorthodox approach Paul models for us?

Paul summarizes the Genesis account of creation, including a reference to Adam, without referencing Genesis or Adam. He teaches Scripture without referencing Scripture. How unusual. Why not do what he did in Antioch? Why not give 'em chapter and verse? Why so seeker sensitive all of a sudden? We can only guess. Odds are if Paul had referenced his source, his audience may have turned him off. When your mission in life is to win some and save some, you *never* give up influence unnecessarily. When your mission in life is to be *right*, maintaining influence isn't important. I bet you know parents who wish they could go back and parent with the goal of maintaining influence rather than simply being right. You can *right* kids *right out the door*. *You can right kids right out the door of the church as well.*

Paul does two more unusual things in this message. He tells the Athenians they need to repent of their idolatry. But that's it. He doesn't reference all the other things they needed to repent of. And the list was long. But the most unusual facet of his message to this elite group in Athens is that *he never mentions Jesus*.

Don't move by that too quickly. And don't resort to, "Well, Luke may have left that part out." That's ridiculous. If you hold to the doctrine of inerrancy, that's the equivalent of blaming the Holy Spirit for leaving it out.

Anyway.

Paul *references* Jesus in his message. He just doesn't bother to identify him.

*"For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."* (Acts 17:31)

According to Luke, that's how the message concluded.

He left his audience hanging.

You should try that.

Was it effective?

*When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."*

What do you know! A two-part series.

*At that, Paul left the Council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. (Acts 17:33-34)*

To say Paul's approach to the Gentiles in Athens differed from his approach to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch would be the understatement of understatements. But his central message was the same. God has done something in the world on behalf of all humankind. He has punctuated and authenticated this great work by raising someone from the dead! "Come back for part 2 and I'll tell you his name."

## Wrapping Up

While my approach to preaching is not traditional, hopefully I've convinced you it's not original either. Now you know why I'm not willing to give it up. Now you understand why I want you to join me. We may be miles apart on the particulars of our theology, but that's not an obstacle for me. Besides, if we don't unite around what we have in common, the day will come when it no longer matters where we differ. The approach to preaching most of us saw modeled and, consequently, unwittingly inherited is perfectly designed for a culture that no longer exists. Fortunately, first-century church leaders have modeled the way forward. The real question is, are we willing to follow their lead? Are we ready to acknowledge the new normal and adjust? If we genuinely care about the unchurched and the post-churched, we will. If we genuinely care, we will adopt the apostle Paul's mantra: *So that by all possible means I might save some.*

Here's a question I ask church leaders every time I get the opportunity.

*What is the faith of the next generation worth?*

What is the faith of your children worth? Your grandchildren? Think about it. What is the faith of the next generation worth? I say **everything**. I say it's worth any change necessary to ensure the version of faith the next generation leaves home with is the enduring version—the faith of our first-century fathers. The version that was harder than steel and tougher than nails. The version rooted in an *event*, not a book.

So will you consider retooling in order to win some and save some? Are you willing to take a long, hard look at everything you're currently doing through the eyes of the post-Christian? Are you ready to be a student rather than a critic? We don't have time for tribes. We don't have time for the petty disagreements that only those inside our social media circles understand or care about. We're losing ground. The most counterproductive thing we can do is criticize and refuse to learn from one another. So come on. If you believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, that's all I need to know. And in light of what's at stake, in light of who is at stake, perhaps that's all you need to know as well.