

Chapter Nineteen

Protestantism

In the 1970s, as a former Roman Catholic seeking truth, I was certainly handicapped by my ignorance of the Word of God. I had no objective standard of truth to help me navigate the dizzying array of “spiritual” options available to me. To make matters worse, I was not yet a “believer” in Bible terms. As a Catholic, I had been “religious” but never had a “relationship” with God. There is a profound difference.

I have never been an “atheist”. Simply from a philosophical perspective, I have always rejected this position. Atheism takes as its premise the absolute fiat statement, “There is no god.” Aside from being arrogant and somewhat prideful, it’s oxymoronic in “proving a negative”.

Someone once said that an atheist is “a person with no invisible means of support.”

I have always believed in a Creator Who sustains and cares for this world and its inhabitants, although my Catholic upbringing distorted my understanding and added much in the way of

fear and guilt. It was then, in 1976, that I read a book that I consider “an avalanche of Truth”. The book was *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell. I was genuinely impressed at the sheer volume and scholarly depth of the material as it led me to a deeper understanding of the authority and reliability of the Bible, explained what constitutes real faith, and showed what a true relationship with God through His Son, Yeshua, looks like. I accepted Yeshua as my Lord and Savior and thus began my spiritual journey through the land of Protestantism.

Due in large part to my ignorance of what different Protestant churches taught, I was understandably confused for a while. It seemed that each different church had quite a different spin on various Scriptures and practices. It reminded me of going to an ice cream shop that offered 37 flavors, although, in this case, there were hundreds. I wasn't trying to be legalistic or prideful, I just wanted to understand the Bible as a whole unit and a continuous revelation, which is what I perceived it to be.

The Apostle Peter gives us an important piece of wisdom regarding understanding the writings of the Apostle Paul in 2 Peter 3:15-16, “Regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you, as also in all of his letters, speaking in them of these things. In those, there are **some things that are hard to understand**, which the **ignorant and unsettled**

twist, as they also do to the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.” Peter is giving us a word of caution regarding how challenging it can be to always understand the writings of Paul correctly. This makes sense when you understand Paul’s extraordinary scholastic background. He was quite learned in not only the Torah but also the Oral Torah and in the Midrashim (interpretations) and skilled at debating. He was fluent not only in his native language of Hebrew but also in Greek. He was trained at the feet of Gamli’el at his yeshiva (house of study). Gamli’el was the grandson of the famous Hillel, a Pharisee and one of the leaders of the Sanhedrin. For Paul, studying under him was the equivalent of clerking for one of the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court.

There is an old joke about Paul . . .

“How will we recognize the Apostle Paul when we get to Heaven?” The answer is, “He’s the one wearing the T-shirt that says, ‘But, I never said that!’”

Two of the most common errors prevalent today, based on misunderstanding Paul, are the teachings known as Replacement Theology and Dispensationalism. I will address them separately.