

CHAPTER 4

THE ERRORS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN RELATION TO THE BIBLE, AND MY RESPONSES TO SOME OBJECTIONS MADE BY A CATHOLIC LADY

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 (RSV)

²⁹*“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

Deuteronomy 29:29 (ESV)

³¹*Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”*

John 8:31-32 (RSV)

*The sum of thy word is truth;
and every one of thy righteous ordinances endures forever.*

Psalm 119:160 (RSV)

*Open my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of thy law.*

Psalm 119:18 (RSV)

² *preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths.*

2 Timothy 4:2-4 (RSV)

“.....But this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.”

Isaiah 66:2 (b) (RSV)

‘Sola Scriptura’ – the Bible is the only proper source of truth and doctrine, not the Church and not other people.

The Latin phrase ‘Sola Scriptura’ means ‘the Bible alone’. That was one of the great slogans of the Reformation of the sixteenth century. However, it was already well known to genuine, Bible-believing Christians and always had been, long before the Reformation. For example, a long line of men like John Wycliffe and William Tyndale had known it and taught it throughout the fifteen centuries before the Reformation.

So had Christian groups such as the Waldensians who were outside the Catholic church and had never lost the true gospel in the first place. Nevertheless, albeit belatedly, the evangelical reformers came out of the Roman Catholic church in huge numbers when they realised that we are in fact saved:

a) by grace alone,

- b) through faith alone,
- c) in Christ alone and
- d) that all authority for teaching and doctrine comes *from the Bible alone*, not from the church and not from any man, least of all the Pope.

That last slogan, ‘*the Bible alone*’ is very important. We need to be very clear on the question of where we can validly get our beliefs, doctrines and practices from. Otherwise, we might get them from any number of people or places and could become confused and deceived. Even the Church itself is not a valid source of any doctrine. It has no authority to add to, take from, or alter anything that the Bible says.

That includes the real Church, even where the people concerned are genuine. It is not the purpose of the Church to create, develop or adjust any doctrine whatsoever. All the doctrine that God has chosen to reveal to us is already set out within the Bible. There is no more, and will not be any more, until Jesus returns. So, neither the Church as a whole, nor anybody within it, has any authority to add to, take away from, or change, anything that the Bible says:

⁵ *Every word of God proves true;
he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.*

⁶ *Do not add to his words,
lest he rebuke you, and you be found a liar.
Proverbs 30:5-6 (RSV)*

¹⁸ *I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, ¹⁹ and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.*

Revelation 22:18-19 (RSV)

It is mainly as a result of adding to or taking away from what the Bible says that all the past heresies and false doctrines were invented. That is how things like purgatory, priests and celibacy were thought up and brought into the churches by the so called “Church Fathers”. (See below and also see Book Eight in this series) However, the idea that the church is entitled to add to, take from or adjust what the Bible says is not just something that happened in the past. It is still happening now.

Those who do this, even if they are not from the Roman Catholic church, feel entitled to adjust what the Bible says. Their argument is that “*It was the Church that gave us the Bible, so the Church can rewrite or reinterpret the Bible too*”. That line of reasoning is bogus, but it is used to justify changing what the Bible clearly teaches about such things as the need for elders to be male, the prohibition of divorce and remarriage, the wrongness of homosexual activity and so on.

All these teachings are being reversed today by liberal churches, and even in many evangelical churches. They do so on the mistaken basis that the church is entitled to do so as it moves with the times and tries to keep in line with changing public opinion and fashions. However, it is *not* true that the Church has the right to revise or update the Bible. It is not even true that the Church *gave* us the Bible to begin with. It did not.

God Himself gave us the Bible through the prophets and apostles and it was He who inspired them. He was the real author of the Bible and therefore nobody has the right to alter anything the Bible says, not even the Church. I emphasize this because it is no longer only the Pope who claims this supposed right to add to and alter what the Bible says. The practice has spread much farther afield. Therefore, even in evangelical churches, we must be on our guard against this illegitimate practice.

I emphasize this point about not adding to or taking away from God's Word because I have recently been corresponding with someone I know, who is a member of the Roman Catholic church. I gave her a draft copy of Book One and she replied, criticizing me on the basis that I rely solely on what the Bible says and never on what the Church says. Her argument was that the Bible is not the *only* authority and that we need the Church as well.

By that she meant the Roman Catholic church, which teaches that the Pope has equal authority to the Bible and can speak on God's behalf in order to add to what the Bible says. I will quote a few of the objections that she made. I have edited out some of her points, because they are about other unrelated issues, but I have kept the meaning fully intact for those that are reproduced below. I will set out some extracts from her email to me (in italics) and then I will put my replies below them in ordinary font:

Objection 1

My problem is that the God you are writing about is not the one I know and love. My overall impression is that the one you are writing about is the God of the Old Testament whom the people of Israel were beginning to glimpse and whom the prophets by and large recognized more truthfully in his absolute "otherness" from our (humanity's) sad and woefully limited expectations. This is one reason why the leaders of the people by and large failed to recognize the true revelation of God in Jesus, he was so not what they were expecting.

Response 1

Let me begin by challenging your phrase '*the God of the Old Testament*'. It is widely used but it wrongly implies that God used to be a certain kind of person but that He is now different, or at least that He behaves differently. That is not the case. God was the same at every stage in the past and He will remain the same at all future times. We know from the book of Malachi that God does not change:

"For I, the LORD, do not change..."
Malachi 3:6(a) (RSV)

I gather that the particular aspects of God's nature and future intentions that you do not accept are primarily to do with Him being about to judge the world, punish sin and sentence vast numbers of people to spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. You approach all of that, as many people do, by suggesting that that was how He *used to* operate in the days of the Old Testament but that He no longer does.

The problem is that the Bible does not support what you say. On the contrary, the vast majority of what we know about Hell and the Lake of Fire (two separate places) was told to us directly out of the mouth of Jesus Christ Himself. Therefore it comes from the *New Testament*, for example:

²¹"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'²²But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."

Matthew 5:21-22 (NASB)

²⁷"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery';²⁸but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose

one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

Matthew 5:27-30 (NASB)

²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. ³²“Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. ³³But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 10:28-33 (NASB)

²⁰Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. ²¹“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²²Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. ²³And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.”

Matthew 11:20-24 (NASB)

These are just a few examples. There are many more that could have been quoted. Note that all of those statements are from the *New Testament*. Moreover, they were made by Jesus Himself, not by a prophet on His behalf. Thus we have to accept that that is how the judgment will be. Jesus is very clear about it. What is more, we are told in various places that it is *Jesus Himself* who is going to be the Judge. He is the one who will sentence people:

⁴²And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

Acts 10:42-43 (NASB)

Many people prefer to focus on what verse 43 above says about Jesus and forgiveness. Yet verse 42, which concerns judgment, is equally true. Moreover it is specifically speaking of Jesus Himself being the Judge, not God the Father. That point is made even more clearly later in Acts:

³¹because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

Acts 17:31 (NASB)

Accordingly, however much it might distress us to think about judgment and punishment, we cannot and must not hide the fact that those are things that God will do. Indeed, Jesus Himself will be the Judge. If we do hide, or even understate those facts, then we are constructing a false image of God based on what we would *prefer Him to be*, rather than what *He says He is*. We have no right to do that. Neither does it help ourselves, nor anybody else, if we do so.

You are correct that the majority of the Jewish people of Jesus' day did not recognise Him. However that was primarily because they had focused their minds on one aspect of how they expected the Messiah to be, i.e. a conquering King who will judge the nations and lift Israel up to be the leading nation on earth.

They focused on that, all of which is perfectly true, because they *liked* those aspects of what the Messiah would be. They did not like the idea of Him also (and firstly) being a suffering servant who would die for His people and for the world. They did not relish such an image of the Messiah, even though Isaiah clearly prophesied that He would also be like that.

Accordingly, the Jewish people of the first century were wrong to reject the idea of the Messiah being a suffering servant and to insist on Him being *only* a conquering King and Judge. However, we are equally wrong today if we insist on seeing Jesus *only* as a suffering servant and not as a conquering King and Judge. The truth is that He is *all* of those things, and more besides.

Therefore we see the real Jesus not by restricting ourselves only to those features of His which we prefer, but by accepting *everything* that the Bible says about Him, whether or not we like the sound of it. To do otherwise is to come dangerously close to disobeying what apostle John said in Revelation chapter 22.

He warned us not to add anything to, or take anything away from, what the book of Revelation was saying. The same applies to all of God's Word. We must take it as it is, without adding, subtracting or altering anything:

¹⁸I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; ¹⁹and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

Revelation 22:18-19 (NASB)

Objection 2

The Bible without a Christian community to which it belongs and out of which it grew is like a chap with one leg - unbalanced. I agree with you that the Bible is of vital importance, but so is the church (Christian community in its many shapes, forms and guises) and one without the other leads to all sorts of imbalance - as we see with the myriad of exclusively Bible-focused denominations, each with their own unique interpretation of Scripture, or with a church like the Roman Catholic which is also unbalanced because its people don't read the Bible in order to get to know Jesus better. All are losers. I see the two, Scripture and church, as totally interdependent.

Response 2

If all you mean is that we need the Bible and we also need Church, or Christian community as you put it, then that is clearly correct. Who could argue otherwise? We are plainly told that we need the Bible. We are also plainly told that we need to be part of the Church and to be actively involved in it as a setting within which we can learn and grow. So far, so good. Where the difficulty arises is if we start to say, as the Roman Catholic church does say, any of the following things:

- a) that each of us individually is not '*qualified*' to understand the Bible for ourselves and that its meaning has to be decided for us, and explained to us, by the leaders of the Roman Catholic church. In fact, we do not need the Roman Catholic church to do this on our behalf. Nor do we need any other church, for that matter.
- b) that the leadership of the Roman Catholic church is entitled to add to what the Bible says and to provide new teaching and form new doctrine which is not found anywhere in the Bible. Examples of this would include the concepts of:
 - the papacy

- the priesthood
- purgatory
- limbo (for unbaptized babies)
- oral confession to a ‘priest’, instead of confessing our sins directly to God, or to one another, as the Bible tells us to do.
- ‘saints’
- the veneration (or even worship) of Mary
- the veneration of ‘saints’
- praying to ‘saints’
- the supposed sinlessness of Mary
- indulgences
- the wearing of scapulars
- relics
- infant baptism
- the idea of the church being a huge hierarchy, with layer upon layer of people in authority over others. Instead, what the Bible presents to us is a network of individual, local churches, all of which are fully independent and equal and not under the authority of any outsider.
- the idea of a single bishop (*episkopos*) ruling over a whole region (called a diocese) instead of being simply one of a *group* of elders or overseers who are all *within* an individual local church, as they are described in the Bible.
- the concept of there being such a thing as ‘clergy’, as distinct from ‘lay’ people (the Bible creates no such distinctions or groups and treats all Christians exactly the same).
- the supposed *eternal virginity of Mary* (even though she was a married woman and the Bible expressly states that Joseph did not ‘*know*’ Mary *until* after Jesus was born. It also refers to, and even names, other sons that she had. It refers to Jesus having sisters too. It could hardly be any clearer that they lived as a normal married couple. Moreover, Jewish law, and indeed the law of virtually every nation, requires consummation in order for there to be a marriage. If there is no consummation there is no marriage. At any rate, there are grounds for an annulment. On that basis, if Mary and Joseph did not consummate their marriage, which they clearly did after Jesus was born, they would have remained unmarried. Had that been the case, Jesus would have been brought up by a couple who were not validly married. That state of affairs would have been dishonouring to Jesus and also to Mary and Joseph.)

The above list of man-made doctrines is far from being exhaustive. There are many other practices and doctrines within Roman Catholicism which are nowhere to be found in the Bible. It is not merely a question of interpretation; the things they do and teach simply aren’t in the Bible at all. Indeed, in many cases they are the direct opposite of what is taught in the Bible.

The Roman Catholic church actually accepts the fact that many of these things are not in the Bible. It meets that objection head on by saying that the leaders of the Roman Catholic church are *entitled* to develop and add to the teachings of the Bible. During the Middle Ages they began to teach that the Popes were not only equal to the Bible, but effectively higher than it.

Thus they claim to be entitled to rule on what it means and also to add to it. When they do so they claim that those new teachings are equal to, or even higher than, what the Bible says. So, while I would fully agree with you that we need both the Bible and the Church, I cannot accept that they should interact in the ways described above.

The Church cannot give rise to wholly new teachings and practices not found in the Bible. The Church is not a supplement to the Bible. Neither is it a source of ongoing additional revelation from God. The canon of Scripture is closed. Therefore no new doctrine will be revealed to us, at least not until after Jesus returns to the earth.

In short, the Bible is the Bible and the Church is the Church. They are entirely different things and were created for different purposes and roles. Thus we are to obtain all our doctrine from the Bible and none at all from the Church or from anybody within it. Men can, of course, *teach* the Bible, but when they do so they are merely to set out their views as to its meaning and application. They are not to add to it or create their own brand new or additional doctrines.

Moreover, it is then the duty of every individual believer, to decide for himself whether that teacher is right or wrong on any given point. One cannot and must not delegate that duty to any other man, whatever title or role he claims for himself. Nobody has ‘authority’ over us to tell us what we must believe or how we must interpret anything. On the contrary, every teacher must simply give out his teaching in an attitude of humility and gentleness.

Then he must leave it to each individual to judge for himself what is right and to reject whatever is not right. The classic example of this is seen in the book of Acts, where Paul himself, probably the greatest teacher and Bible scholar who ever lived, was teaching at Berea, having just left Thessalonica. Luke tells us that the people of Berea listened to Paul but then went away and checked everything he said against the Scriptures (the Old Testament) to see whether it was true or not:

¹⁰The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

Acts 17:10-11 (NASB)

Far from criticizing the people of Berea for this testing of Paul’s teaching, or being affronted by it, Luke praised them highly. We should all be like the Bereans and exercise the same diligent scrutiny of everything we hear or read, *whoever it comes from*. That is the proper duty of each individual member of the Church.

We are meant to decide *for ourselves* what is true and what is false. We can certainly be helped by leaders and teachers but we can never abdicate our own personal responsibility or accept any other man as being “*in authority*” over us in relation to the Bible or within the church generally.

You may wish to refer to my Book Eight on “*Biblical and unbiblical churches*” for a fuller examination of the whole subject of authority and what it means and doesn’t mean. What the Catholic church and also most Protestant churches do, whereby certain men are supposedly in authority over us, is an idea created solely by men. It is nowhere to be found in the Bible. Indeed, it is the very opposite of what the Bible teaches.

Objection 3

I'm saying this as the impression I got from your writing is that the Bible is of supreme and overriding importance and I question that. Jesus did not come to give us the Bible but to inaugurate God's kingdom on earth, a kingdom which is continuing, developing, growing and which the Spirit is guiding, even with all the mistakes and misunderstandings we all contribute to it! This kingdom is not set in stone but in the blueprint of the life of Jesus and then the early Church, which we read about in Scripture and which is lived out in each age and culture in a slightly different way - God is a God of tremendous variety after all. The principles are of course true for all time but their expression will be richly varied.

Response 3

It depends what you mean when you suggest that I present the Bible as being “*of supreme and overriding importance.*” It clearly is that, in the sense set out in my responses above. However, the Bible *itself* is not something which we are to worship. Its value and importance is derived from the fact that it is *God's Word*. Every page of it contains what He is saying to us. Nevertheless, we are not to focus on the Bible for its own sake, as if it was some relic or shrine. We do so because it contains, in written form, the very thoughts and words of God. He not only desires, but commands, us to study these.

So, we are to pore over the Bible with great care and attentiveness, because of *who* wrote it and sent it to us, just as a young woman would do with letters sent to her by her fiancé. The letters themselves are not the issue, nor the paper, nor the ink, but the one who wrote them and sent them to her. Thus, when we see her reading and re-reading his letters, we do not say, “*There's a woman who loves letters.*” We say “*There's a woman who is in love with the sender of those letters.*”

Accordingly, we would not misunderstand her emphasis on those letters or criticise her for the time she spends re-reading them. We know full well that her real devotion is directed towards her fiancé, not the letters themselves. The letters are only valued because *he* sent them and because they contain *his* words, *his* feelings and *his* thoughts.

Indeed, far from criticizing her for the attention she pays to his letters, we would be surprised and concerned if she did *not* read them and re-read them. Imagine her leaving his letters partly or totally unread, or perhaps reading them only once and then putting them away in some drawer, not to be thought of any further. We would question the true extent of her love for that young man, and with good reason.

So, we are not to worship or idolize the Bible. However the time we spend studying the Bible, and the diligence we show in doing so, can rightly be seen as a form of worship of God Himself. Indeed, amongst the Jewish people, study of the Bible was seen by many as being the very highest form of worship. Worship is to “*ascribe worth*” to God and what more sincere way is there to do that than by *studying* His Word - learning it, memorizing it and applying it?

Turning next to your assertion that Jesus “*did not come to give us the Bible, but to inaugurate God's Kingdom on earth...*” it seems to me that you are confusing two separate things and/or assuming that the latter precludes the former. You say that Jesus did not come to bring us the Bible. However, one of His very names is “*the Word*”:

***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
John 1:1 (NASB)***

¹⁴And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14 (NASB)

Moreover, Jesus Himself was involved in the process by which the Bible was given to us, for example:

- a) The gospels contain His teaching and He is directly quoted within them as well as written about.
- b) Apostle Paul received His teaching by direct revelation given to him personally by Jesus Christ Himself when he was carried up into Heaven. Paul was shown and told things that went far beyond what the other apostles knew:

Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ²I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. ³And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows ⁴was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. ⁵On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses. ⁶For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me. ⁷Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!

2 Corinthians 12:1-7 (NASB)

- c) Likewise, apostle John was given a major revelation on the island of Patmos. Jesus appeared to him and showed him what would happen in the future. He wrote what Jesus told him to write:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, ²who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

Revelation 1:1-2 (NASB)

⁹I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, ¹¹saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

Revelation 1:9-11 (NASB)

¹⁷When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, ¹⁸and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. ¹⁹Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things."

Revelation 1:17-19 (NASB)

- d) There is also very good reason to believe that Jesus was directly involved in the giving of the Law to Moses. In particular, it seems that it was He who wrote the 10 commandments on the tablets of stone for Moses with His own finger.

¹⁰The Lord gave me the two tablets of stone written by the finger of God; and on them were all the words which the Lord had spoken with you at the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly.

Deuteronomy 9:10 (NASB)

This passage is probably being alluded to in John's gospel when Jesus writes in the dust on the ground with His finger when dealing with the men who were holding the woman who had been caught in the act of adultery:

³The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court, ⁴they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. ⁵Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" ⁶They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. ⁷But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.

John 8:3-8 (NASB)

As Jesus wrote with His finger it would appear that He was drawing their attention to the fact that it was He Himself who had written the commandments in the first place. Thus He was far better placed than those men to say what ought to happen to that woman.

Let's turn now to your final point when you say:

"This kingdom is not set in stone but in the blueprint of the life of Jesus and then the early Church, which we read about in Scripture and which is lived out in each age and culture in a slightly different way - God is a God of tremendous variety after all. The principles are of course true for all time but their expression will be richly varied."

You said all this in the context of arguing that Jesus did not come to give us the Bible, but to inaugurate God's Kingdom and also in the context of questioning whether the Bible is of supreme and overriding importance. What you appear to be saying, or hinting at, is that:

- a) What the Bible says is not the highest or final authority that we have.
- b) What the Bible says is not permanent or unchangeable. Therefore what it teaches can be added to, or even altered, by the pronouncements of Popes over the centuries, such that doctrine can grow and develop.
- c) Taking together a) and b) above, one has to conclude that the ultimate or highest authority is not what the Bible says, but what the church says. More precisely, it is what the Popes say. Although you suggest at various points that the Bible and the church exist alongside each other as equal sources of authority, the reality is that there can never be two highest authorities. One or other must ultimately prevail. The Roman Catholic church believes that the Pope is not only equal to, but effectively higher than, the Bible. That must be so, because he can not only interpret it but also add to it, and even alter it. By contrast, I believe that the Bible reveals all that God has chosen to tell us and that nothing at all will be added to it until after Jesus returns. Therefore no man, least of all the Pope, is qualified to add to or subtract from what it says or to alter its meaning in any way.

You also imply that what the Bible teaches must be allowed to adapt and move around with flexibility as time passes and also depending on what culture or race we belong to. That is a popular view and is often advocated. However, it cannot be right. The Bible does not merely teach *principles* which we (or our leaders) can then implement and adapt as seems most appropriate in the context of our culture or our time in history.

Biblical principles are permanent. That said, the Bible also teaches *facts* as well as principles. Those cannot be moulded, edited, reinterpreted or added to by anybody. Therefore, for example, when the

Bible teaches that salvation can be found only in Jesus Christ, that is equally true in the twenty first century as in the first. It is also equally true in Europe, Asia, Africa, America and so on.

There is no scope for modifying or relaxing that fact so as to accommodate other people's views or traditions. What Jesus said is either true or it isn't. Likewise, all of what the apostles said is either true or it isn't. Our proper task therefore is not to reinterpret, modernise or modify what they said, but simply to *find out* what they said and then to obey it.

Objection 4

...your claim that "God wants you to read it all" (i.e. the whole Bible) Do please tell me how you can make this categorical statement about what God wants - on the basis of what? "Who can know the mind of the Lord or who can be his counsellor?"

Response 4

There are many reasons why I feel able to say that God wants all of us, not just leaders and teachers, to read the whole Bible rather than just limit ourselves to favourite passages. Firstly, we only see the whole truth when we read the whole Bible and realise how inter-connected it is. The Bible regularly alludes to other passages or events.

Therefore you could only understand any part of it properly if you also knew about those other passages to which it is referring. But those are all over the Bible. Therefore, as I mentioned earlier, we need the whole Bible to be able to say we have the truth because only the whole Bible provides the full picture and the whole truth:

*The sum of thy word is truth;
and every one of thy righteous ordinances endures for ever
Psalm 119:160 (RSV)*

In other words, whereas every verse of the Bible is "true", only the Bible as a whole can be called "the truth." That is because everything the Bible says needs to be read and understood within the context of the whole book or letter within which it is said and also within the wider context of the whole Bible. Jesus and His disciples were constantly quoting from, or obliquely alluding to, passages from the Old Testament.

However, you would never know that unless you knew about those other passages or events which are being referred to. A second reason is that God has commanded that His laws and precepts should be kept diligently. But how can anybody *keep them diligently* unless they first know exactly what they are? And how can one know all that without reading *all* of them?

*You have commanded your precepts
to be kept diligently.*

⁵*Oh that my ways may be steadfast
in keeping your statutes!*

⁶*Then I shall not be put to shame,
having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.*

⁷*I will praise you with an upright heart,
when I learn your righteous rules.*

⁸*I will keep your statutes;
do not utterly forsake me!*

Beth

⁹*How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.*
¹⁰*With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!*
¹¹*I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.*
¹²*Blessed are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes!*
¹³*With my lips I declare
all the rules of your mouth.*
¹⁴*In the way of your testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.*
¹⁵*I will meditate on your precepts
and fix my eyes on your ways.*
¹⁶*I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.*

Psalm 119:4-16 (ESV)

Note also that in verse 13 above, the Psalmist says that he will declare *all* of God's rules/decrees. How could he possibly do that unless he reads *all* of God's Word? The above is just one sample passage. There are many others where we are commanded to rely on and abide by *all* of God's laws, decrees, precepts, statutes, commands, promises, ways, principles, words, testimonies, instructions, ordinances etc.

That obligation is beyond dispute, but how can we obey or abide by all of those things unless we first know what they all are? And how can we know what they all are without reading them all? Moreover, how can we know whether or not a book or letter contains any of the precepts, principles, decrees, ways and so on that we are meant to learn and abide by unless we have read all of it?

In other words, how can we say, until after we have read them, that the less well known books like Isaiah or Ezekiel or Romans and so on are unnecessary or unprofitable? The only way you could reach that conclusion would be by reading them. No fair-minded person could advocate a policy of rejecting or discrediting them before they have even been read. That being so, it follows logically that we must read all of the Bible, even if only to decide whether to obey it.

Thirdly, if one stops to think about it for a moment, it is self-evident that God wants us to read and study the whole Bible rather than just parts (or none) of it. The clue comes from the fact that it is *God's* Word as opposed to anybody else's word. If we accept that what is written is God's own Word, not just men's writings, then why do we even need to ask whether we *should* read it all, or whether we *need* to read it all or are *obliged* to do so etc? It is completely obvious.

Surely the burden of proof is entirely the other way round. It is for those who believe that we do *not* need to read all of God's Word to prove that we *don't* need to do so. In the absence of such proof, then we are safe to assume that the very status of the writer, i.e. God Himself, makes it plain what we are to do and how highly we are to value what He has written, or caused to be written.

That should clearly be our general default-setting. Nevertheless, if you would like to see some verses which directly support the proposition that we should read all of God's Word, not just parts of it, then let's look at a few. There are many others too. The best place to start might be Paul's second letter to Timothy:

¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
2 Timothy 3:16-17 (RSV)

Paul says that these various attributes and benefits apply to all Scripture. How much clearer could he be? Paul means that it is *all inspired* and that it is *all profitable*. That being so, why would we want to leave any of it unread? He then sets out various reasons why it is so profitable, as we saw earlier. The Psalmist greatly expands on those reasons, particularly within Psalm 119.

It is no coincidence that the longest psalm is the one which sets out the Psalmist's love for the Scriptures and lists the numerous different benefits which it brings to us if we study it and cherish it. I go into these in some detail in chapter one of this book, so please refer to that chapter. However, these two short extracts would be especially useful to look at here:

⁷ *I will praise thee with an upright heart,
when I learn thy righteous ordinances.*
⁸ *I will observe thy statutes;
O forsake me not utterly!*
⁹ *How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to thy word.*
¹⁰ *With my whole heart I seek thee;
let me not wander from thy commandments!*
¹¹ *I have laid up thy word in my heart,
that I might not sin against thee.*

Psalm 119:7-11 (RSV)

³³ *Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes;
and I will keep it to the end.*
³⁴ *Give me understanding, that I may keep thy law
and observe it with my whole heart.*
³⁵ *Lead me in the path of thy commandments,
for I delight in it.*
³⁶ *Incline my heart to thy testimonies,
and not to gain!*
³⁷ *Turn my eyes from looking at vanities;
and give me life in thy ways.*
³⁸ *Confirm to thy servant thy promise,
which is for those who fear thee.*

Psalm 119:33-38 (RSV)

These extracts indicate the attitude the Psalmist had to all of God's Word, not just to certain parts of it. Also, how could anybody say that God wants only the Psalmist to feel that way about His Word and that the rest of us should not or need not? Likewise, if the Psalmist was right to feel that way, as he clearly was, then how can we say that he was only referring to certain favourite passages of Scripture? He plainly means the whole Bible.

The Psalmist uses virtually every word you can think of to list the different features or qualities of Scripture that he cherishes. Can you imagine the Psalmist, if he was alive today, limiting himself to reading bits of the gospels but ignoring Paul's letters and most of the Old Testament? Yet that is exactly what many people do. I know because they have told me.

You go on to challenge my assertion that we should study all of God's Word by asking "*Who can know the mind of the LORD or who can be His counselor.*" You imply that because we do not know *all* of God's mind, we cannot know *any* of what he wants or thinks? We clearly do not know all of God's thoughts on all subjects, because He has not disclosed all of them to us.

Nevertheless, we can certainly know His mind on those thoughts which He has disclosed to us. The Bible sets out very clearly where God stands and what He thinks on a host of issues. It is particularly clear concerning His wish for us to know and cherish His written Word, as Ezra did:

¹⁰For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Ezra 7:10 (RSV)

Finally, let us take note of what the prophet Samuel said to King Saul when Saul had disobeyed God's instructions. Saul sought to justify himself by saying that although he hadn't done what he had been commanded to do, he and the people had, nonetheless, offered sacrifices to the LORD. Samuel replied by making it clear to Saul that even if we do offer sacrifices to the LORD or the equivalent in terms of worship etc, what really counts to God is that we should:

- a) *hear* His voice (hearken) and
- b) *obey* what He says.

²¹ But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.” ²² And Samuel said,

“Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

²³ For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king.”

1 Samuel 15:21-23 (RSV)

Now, if God is telling us through this episode that He wants us to hear and obey His Word, then what other conclusion can we reach but that we must seek to find out what He has said? But that requires us to read His written Word. How else can we know it in order to obey it? Or, are you going to argue that what Samuel said only applied to *King Saul*, or that it only applied to situations where God's Word is spoken to you *verbally* by one of His prophets?

If so, what would be your authority for that? Moreover, if that was the case, why would Jesus have rebuked His own generation for failing to pay attention to the *written* prophecies of Daniel which spelled out when the Messiah would come?

We know for sure that God wants us to *obey* His written Word. That cannot be denied. However, if we accept that we are meant to obey it then it must follow that we are to read it, and to read all of it. Imagine a soldier who has been given written orders from his commanding officer which he is supposed to carry out.

What would be said to that officer if, on receiving the written orders, which run to many pages with maps, diagrams and explanatory text, he was to put them to one side without reading them? Or what if he was just to skim-read some of the main parts of the orders? What would happen to him at his Court Martial if his defence was conducted along these two lines of reasoning:

“Firstly, I do of course accept that I am supposed to obey orders, but I didn't realise that I was actually meant to read them. Secondly, I would have obeyed if the General had been present and had spoken his instructions to me, but I didn't realise that he expected me to treat his written orders as being equal to him instructing me verbally, face to face.”

Look now at this passage from 2 Kings. It relates to the way the people of Israel failed to listen to, or obey, what God had said through Moses and the prophets:

¹³Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets and every seer, saying, “Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, My statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through My servants the prophets.”

2 Kings 17:13 (NASB)

Note that in the above verse we are told that God wanted His people, Israel, to keep His commandments and statutes according to *all* the law, i.e. all the Law of Moses. That means all of the first five books of the Bible. It also states that they were meant to keep all that was sent to them via the prophets. So, that means the whole of the rest of the Old Testament, because it was all written by a variety of different prophets.

In other words, the people are being rebuked because they did not abide by what God had said to them via *the whole Old Testament*, not just the five books of Moses and not just any particular prophet. So God does not distinguish between the books of the Bible or imply that some are more important and others less so. They are all to be taken note of and obeyed. But if that was God’s expectation of them, why should we assume that He would expect less of us?

Surely He would require at least the same of us, or even more, since it is so much easier for us to get access to God’s Word than it was for them. In this next verse the people are criticised because they did not obey *all* that Moses had commanded, i.e. all of the five books he wrote. Admittedly it is only referring to those five books, but the point here is that God expected them to listen to, and do, *all* that Moses had said, not just parts of it:

¹²because they did not obey the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed His covenant, even all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded; they would neither listen nor do it

2 Kings 18:12 (NASB)

If the people disobeyed *all* of what Moses said, then that must imply that they were obliged to obey *all* that he said. But how could they obey or disobey *all* of it without first reading/hearing *all* of it? Surely I am just stating the downright obvious? If so, why argue against it, unless one’s real motive is that one actually dislikes some of the things that the Bible says, or else that one simply doesn’t want to make the effort to read it all?

Objection 5

This gives the impression that one can become a Christian in isolation from any Christian community, in which case we can expect a billion or so new denominations!

Response 5

Strictly speaking, a person can, and does, *become* a Christian entirely on their own. It is an individual decision which each person can and must take by themselves. They have to repent, believe, be baptised in water and receive the Holy Spirit. All of that is done by and to the individual without necessarily involving any community, though fellow believers can certainly help.

However, from that point on, if we speak of *growing* as a disciple or *continuing* in the Christian life, then there is undoubtedly a need for the Church. That is one reason why we are commanded to meet together with other believers locally:

²⁴and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NASB)

Accordingly, we are definitely meant to meet together with other believers for fellowship, discipling, teaching, worship, and so on. But that does not mean that we delegate to that group, or to its leadership, any of our own personal responsibility to read, study and interpret the Scriptures for ourselves (see Book Eight for more detail).

As for the forming of ‘denominations’, they do sometimes arise as a result of people reading the Bible and seeing that their current Church is teaching error. However, that would only justify the establishment of a new *local church*, not a denomination. They tend to arise as a consequence of the unbiblical way in which most churches are conducted.

Biblically, there is only one Church. It consists of all *genuine* believers, wherever and whenever they live/lived. That is what the Bible means by *the Church*. However, there are multitudes of individual, independent, self-governing, local churches. These are small groups of people “*assembled together.*” Indeed, the Greek word ‘*ekklesia*’, which is translated as ‘church’, means an ‘*assembly*’, i.e. a group of people who meet. It does not mean a denomination.

The concept of a ‘denomination’ is alien to the Bible and does not occur within it. All churches referred to in the Bible are independent, self-governing and led by their own local elders. Denominations are a man-made idea, the first of which was the Roman Catholic Church. All the others which have been formed since share, though to a lesser extent, its authoritarian and hierarchical characteristics.

At any rate, the point under discussion is that all of us are simultaneously under a duty to study the Bible for ourselves and yet, *also*, to meet together with other believers locally. These are by no means contradictory or mutually exclusive objectives. Otherwise the Bible would not have told us to do both.

As to why denominations arise, it has very little to do with individual Christians studying and interpreting the Bible for themselves. Instead, denominations tend to arise because sinful men have a craving for power, authority and control. They like to build empires consisting of many local churches over which they can then rule. They are not meant to do that. The Bible provides for each local church to be wholly independent. They are not meant to be led by one man.

Neither are they meant to be supervised by any regional bishop, nor any national or international headquarters or Pope figure. No such things or people exist in the Bible. First century local churches were each led by a group of about 3-10 mature men from *within* each church. They were called ‘*elders*’ or ‘*bishops*’. None of them were paid.

Neither did they have any titles like ‘Reverend’ or ‘Father’. They were not ‘priests’ and they did not wear special clothes, say mass, or conduct any other rituals or special liturgies. They were ordinary local men and they were not subject to, or subservient to, any external person, structure, group or hierarchy. There is another less sinister reason why denominations arise.

Despite the fact that the Church is not meant to consist of hierarchical organisations, even sincere people have sometimes felt that the only way to differentiate themselves from denominations teaching false doctrine was to set up new ones teaching true doctrine. They don’t know that the concept of denominations is not biblical and therefore they see them as a good way to uphold right doctrine. It is viewed almost like a kite-mark which guarantees the authenticity of a product.

A classic example of this is the Methodists. John Wesley led a movement in the eighteenth century which was a reaction against the laxity, error and false teaching of the Church of England. After his death (*not before*) that movement became an organisation, or denomination, with a hierarchical structure of its own.

Then, in due course, it too fell into error, became lax, and taught false doctrine. Sadly, that decline prompted many sincere people to leave Methodism and set up new churches. Alas, they too eventually made the same error of turning these into denominations, thus keeping the unfortunate cycle going.

So, your point is based on what I would consider to be a mistaken assumption. That is that you imply that the Church is meant to be one in the sense of being a single, organised, hierarchical structure led by one man, i.e. the Pope. Those who advocate this believe that we can then rely on him to keep our doctrines correct for us. That is the position of the Roman Catholic church, but it is wrong, as explained above. It is not the biblical basis or model for church. Indeed, it is the very opposite thereof.

Therefore the practice whereby each believer learns the Bible for himself and takes seriously his own responsibility to weigh the teaching of others and decide for himself what the Bible is saying, does not create denominations. How could it, given that the Bible does not tell us to create denominations? It only ever tells us to start independent, self-governing local churches. What reading the Bible does is to create mature, responsible, biblically-literate individuals.

They can then function as they are meant to within those independent, self-governing local churches. It has nothing to do with the forming of denominations. Whereas you appear to see that autonomy, freedom and independence as a bad thing, or at least as a dangerous thing, I see it as good.

At any rate, I see it as *biblical*. It is the only way for us to act like Bereans (see above) and to contend earnestly for the faith. That is what we are commanded to do, i.e. confronting and responding to error wherever we come across it:

³Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

Jude 3 (NASB)

Objection 6

...Millions of practising pagans who "joined the church, not because they believed in the Bible or had repented." Of course not - they joined the church because they believed in the person Jesus Christ as God's Son, Saviour of the world, who died and rose again so that we might again enjoy fellowship with God. The New Testament had hardly been assembled at that point - people joined for the new life in Jesus that Christians witnessed to - it had absolutely nothing to do with believing in the Bible. Nowhere will you find any apostle saying belief in the Bible was essential; the Good News is not "believe in the Bible" but believe in the person Jesus Christ. The Bible is supplementary, important of course, but it is itself NOT the message, and without the Christian community, i.e. the church, there wouldn't have been the Bible - the two, Bible and community, go together.

Response 6

Let me deal with your various points in turn. Firstly you appear to be challenging my assertion that when the Emperor Constantine claimed to have become a Christian and effectively took over the visible church, multitudes of pagans came into the church but kept their pagan beliefs.

I'm not sure what evidence you have to support your view that those pagans "*believed in the person Jesus Christ as God's Son...*" The evidence is that most of them did not believe anything of the sort, or at least not genuinely. In support of those assertions I would make two main points:

- a) If the flood of people who joined the church from A.D. 315 onwards were genuine, then why did they delay doing so until after the Emperor Constantine had joined the church and made it legal? Why didn't they join earlier when doing so would have invited persecution?
- b) If those pagans were genuinely and thoroughly converted then why did they not immediately abandon their pagan beliefs and practices on joining the church? Instead, they brought their pagan beliefs and practices with them and kept them. Those were then incorporated into many (not all) of the churches so as to create the hybrid that we now know as the Roman Catholic Church. I say '*hybrid*' because Roman Catholicism is a combination of some elements of Christianity together with an equally large, or even larger, amount of paganism, plus other man-made ideas and traditions too. That mixing together of incompatible beliefs is where the things set out below came from. Like the longer list I made above, these are now central parts of Roman Catholicism:
- *Priests* – these are not found anywhere in the New Testament but they were found in the pagan temples.
 - The many pagan and self-aggrandizing *titles* which the Popes adopted, for example '*Pontifex Maximus*', which was previously one of Caesar's titles.
 - The word *Easter*, which comes from the goddess *Ishtar*, also known as Ashtaroth.
 - *Saints* – a similar point arises with the misuse of this word. In Roman Catholicism, a saint is believed to be a very special person who is elevated to that exalted status after their death. They are seen as someone to whom we can and should pray. But in the Bible the word '*saint*' is only ever used to refer to *every ordinary believer*, in much the same way as we would use the word 'Christian'. Moreover, it means *while they are still alive*, not after they have died. In particular, it does not carry any suggestion of having a special status.
 - The *vestments* worn by priests. The New Testament contains no reference to priests, i.e. there is no such role. There is also no reference to special garments. However, the pagan priests did wear such garments, which match exactly what Roman Catholic priests still wear. This issue of vestments is not a minor point. It adds to the wider error of the creation of a special "*clergy class*". This is nowhere to be found in the Bible. Indeed, Jesus deplores it, when speaking to apostle John in Revelation chapter two.
 - The veneration of statues of *Mary and child* – The real Mary, as seen in the Bible, is barely mentioned in the New Testament after the early chapters of Matthew and Luke. The same is true of Jesus as a baby. In fact, the first century Church paid little or no attention to Mary or to the infant Jesus at all, least of all to statues of them. The ancient images which we see of a woman and child are not actually of Mary and the infant Jesus. They are of 'Semiramis', the wife of Nimrod of Babylon, and of 'Tammuz', her infant son, or their Greek or Roman equivalents. These statues were then adopted by the early Roman Catholic church and 'rebranded' as Mary and Jesus. See below.
- c) The very concept of a 'priest' is not biblical. The only biblical way in which the word 'priest' is still in operation (until Jesus returns and sets up the Millennial Temple) is in the sense of the priesthood of all believers. In other words, every believer is described in the Bible as a priest:

⁵ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 1:5-6 (RSV)

- d) The Bible says that to indicate that we no longer require a priest, or anybody else, to represent us before God or to act as our intermediary. Every real Christian is now a priest and Jesus Himself is our High Priest and intercessor.
- e) The worship of the ‘*Madonna*’ figure, i.e. the mother with child, dates all the way back to very early Babylon. Semiramis was the wife of *Nimrod*, who was the first world dictator, and therefore a ‘type’ of antichrist. His wife, Semiramis, was a brothel keeper and she became pregnant by another man. But to prevent any retribution from her husband, Nimrod, she had him, and the Babylonian priests, drugged. Then she had Nimrod killed by being torn apart and dismembered. When her child, Tammuz, was born she claimed that he was Nimrod reborn, i.e. reincarnated. Therefore the figures of Semiramis and Tammuz, the mother and infant, became gods in pagan Babylonian religion. Moreover, the worship of these gods was transmitted onwards to virtually every other false religion in Greece, Rome, Scandinavia, India and many other places.
- f) That is why, all over the world, and in particular in Rome, there were statues of a woman with a baby. But the point is that these were not Mary and Jesus. They were Semiramis and Tammuz, or their Greek, Roman or other equivalents. Moreover, because Nimrod’s body was torn apart the Babylonians made another monument in the form of a huge phallic symbol to represent his male member. This became known as an ‘*obelisk*’ and several of these were constructed in many different countries. Centuries later, in the European colonial era, many of these were taken away and shipped over to the West. That is why there are now obelisks in Paris, London and even Washington DC.
- g) Like the obelisks, the veneration of the statues of the mother and child began in Babylon and then spread all over the world, long before the time of Christ. In fact, the origin of the word ‘*Madonna*’ is as follows: The name given to Nimrod was ‘*Baal*’ meaning ‘*Lord*’. The name given to Semiramis was ‘*Baalti*’ meaning ‘*My Lady*’. That was subsequently Latinised and thus became ‘*Madonna*’, which is the name now used for statues of Mary. However, the term was first used for *Semiramis*, not *Mary*. Moreover, it was not a term that first century Christians ever used in relation to Mary and, of course, she is not referred to in that way in the Bible.
- h) The apostles and first century Christians would have been horrified to see what later transpired and how the veneration (and worship) of Mary was imported into the churches by the pagans who joined it after the emperor Constantine’s alleged conversion. Mary is also referred to within the Catholic church, but *not* the Bible, as “*the Queen of heaven*”. That is not an appropriate way to refer to the real Mary. It is not what she actually is and it is not how she would describe herself. Neither did anybody in the Bible or in the early church ever call her that. Who then is the real “*Queen of heaven*” and where does the phrase come from? Again, the answer is that it is *Semiramis*, also known as *Ishtar*, the Babylonian fertility goddess, who was also later called *Venus* by the Romans.
- i) When the early Roman Catholic church began to absorb and adopt the beliefs and practices of the pagans, it took over this concept of the Queen of heaven. They ‘Christianized’ the practice and applied it to Mary instead of Venus, Ishtar or Semiramis. Surely, no right-thinking person can deny that it was wrong for them to do that. It is equally wrong for any of us today to continue to use that title, ‘Queen of heaven’, for Mary, or indeed to idolize her in any way whatsoever. Here is what God had to say about the so called Queen of heaven via the prophet Jeremiah. She is clearly identified as a false goddess and we see that the people’s worship of her appalled and angered God:

17 Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? 18 The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger. 19 Do they provoke Me to anger?” says the Lord. “Do they not provoke themselves, to the shame of their own faces?” 20 Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Behold, My anger and My fury

will be poured out on this place—on man and on beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground. And it will burn and not be quenched.”

Jeremiah 7:17-20 (NKJV)

- j) We also see that the people of Jeremiah’s day had the same stubborn determination to emphasize the Queen of heaven that we see today within Catholicism. They preferred to rely on her and trust in her than God Himself. They also insisted on believing that it was she who helped them and that they should continue to worship her and offer sacrifices to her, despite everything that the prophets had said about how this idolatry angered God.

¹⁵ Then all the men who knew that their wives had burned incense to other gods, with all the women who stood by, a great multitude, and all the people who dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying: ¹⁶ “As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not listen to you! ¹⁷ But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, were well-off, and saw no trouble. ¹⁸ But since we stopped burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine.”

¹⁹ The women also said, “And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, did we make cakes for her, to worship her, and pour out drink offerings to her without our husbands’ permission?”

²⁰ Then Jeremiah spoke to all the people—the men, the women, and all the people who had given him that answer—saying: ²¹ “The incense that you burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings and your princes, and the people of the land, did not the Lord remember them, and did it not come into His mind? ²² So the Lord could no longer bear it, because of the evil of your doings and because of the abominations which you committed. Therefore your land is a desolation, an astonishment, a curse, and without an inhabitant, as it is this day. ²³ Because you have burned incense and because you have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord or walked in His law, in His statutes or in His testimonies, therefore this calamity has happened to you, as at this day.”

Jeremiah 44:15-23 (NKJV)

You say that as at the year A.D. 315 “*the New Testament had hardly been assembled...*” You are mistaken. I assume that you are referring to the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397 when the Canon of the New Testament was officially recognized by those present at the Council. However, the findings of that church council were merely a formal acknowledgment of what was *already well known by all the genuine Christians.*

The gospels and the other books and letters of the New Testament were already recognized as Scripture, i.e. divinely inspired and equal to the Old Testament books, even during the first century. In fact they were so recognized even during the lifetime of the apostles. For example, the apostle Peter, when discussing Paul’s letters, says:

¹⁴Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, ¹⁵and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, ¹⁶as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

2 Peter 3:14-16 (NASB)

Thus, Peter declares, *even while Paul is still alive*, that Paul’s letters are Scripture. He compares people’s distortion of them with how they also treat “*the rest of the Scriptures...*” During the first

century, from the very day when the apostles' letters were written, they were faithfully copied by hand and sent all over the Roman Empire, not just to the original recipients.

That is why we have, even today, over 5000 surviving copies of the New Testament books and letters, even back to the first century. So, let's be clear that the first century church most certainly did value and focus upon the Scriptures, both Old and New Testament. Furthermore, they did so from the very beginning of the Church, not merely from AD 397.

Moreover, we do not owe anything to the Roman Catholic church when it comes to either preserving or propagating the Scriptures. On the contrary, far from promoting the reading of the Scriptures, or even the teaching of them, the Roman Catholic church has always been a major hindrance. From the outset they did all they could to *prevent* the translation or distribution of the Scriptures. They did not want them to be read by ordinary people.

Their reason for obstructing the distribution of the Bible to the people was simple. It was that they knew very well that what the Bible says did not correspond to their teachings and practices. It provoked far too many uncomfortable questions. They were also acutely aware of the fact that people who read the Bible tend to end up leaving the Roman Catholic church.

That has been the case throughout history and it is still the case now. Indeed, I am an example of that myself. They didn't just fail to promote the Bible. They literally *banned* so called "lay" people from reading the Bible at all. Only the priests were allowed to read it.

That said, though technically permitted to do so, the vast majority of priests rarely looked at the Bible either. It barely featured in their training or their thinking, for the same reasons that it was withheld from lay members. The hierarchy of the Catholic church did not want priests to start getting ideas or asking awkward questions, any more than they wanted their congregations to do so.

Even today, only a tiny proportion of the Bible is ever read out aloud in Catholic churches and it is always carefully selected extracts from a few books. They do not read it all out on any kind of comprehensive rota, because too many questions would arise if the people were to read or hear *all* of it.

When priests are trained today the overwhelming emphasis is on the traditions and rules of the Roman Catholic church, not the Bible. All of the priests that I have ever met, which is a very large number, have known very little of the Bible. They don't read much of it themselves, either in public or privately, just as all the lay Catholics that I have ever met don't read it either.

I personally never opened a Bible until I was 18, despite having been brought up in a Catholic home and school. Nobody that I ever knew, in all my years in Catholicism, and ever since for that matter, has ever read it either. So, although the official ban on reading the Bible has technically been lifted, it makes very little practical difference.

The tradition of ignoring the Bible is so firmly entrenched in Catholic culture that, even today, the vast majority of Catholics do not read the Bible anyway, whether they are officially allowed to or not. Indeed, you concede yourself that they don't read it.

Next you say that "*Nowhere will you find any apostle saying that belief in the Bible was essential.*" Again I think there is confusion here, because you go on to say, "*The Good News is not 'believe in the Bible' but believe in the person Jesus Christ.*"

Neither I, nor anybody I have ever met, would suggest that we should believe in the Bible in the same way that we are to believe in Jesus Himself. Of course not. Jesus is the *object* of our belief and the person in whom, or upon whom, we are to believe and put our trust. We do not believe in the Bible in

that sense. However that is not an argument against believing the Bible. Neither does it diminish its importance in any way.

The Bible is a unique book, given to us by God, which is the one and only valid source of teaching and practice. It is the one and only way that God has chosen to impart His thinking to us and to tell us what we need to know, believe and do. Thus it makes no sense at all to purport to follow or believe in Jesus, whilst minimising or down-playing the importance of the only book which contains His Word, and which He gave to us.

Imagine a soldier was to say that he does not believe in/follow/obey the *written* orders of General Eisenhower because he believes that he only needs to accept orders that are given to him *verbally*, face to face, by General Eisenhower himself. That would not be viewed as respect or right thinking but as foolishness, neglect of duty and even insubordination.

In fact, Winston Churchill made it a rule in World War II that he would not be held accountable for any order purporting to come from him unless it was in writing. In that way he sought to protect the accuracy and reliability of the onward transmission of his orders.

God's approach is rather similar. He has given us everything that we need to know and believe in written form. Anything beyond that may or may not be a good idea. But, whatever it is, it cannot be guaranteed to have come from Him. The written Word of God is our safeguard, or quality control, to prevent us adopting the false beliefs and practices of mere men in place of what God Himself is telling us.

Therefore, returning to your point, if we are to say in any meaningful way that we believe in/follow/obey/focus on Jesus Christ Himself, then we really must have careful regard to His written Word which He procured for us and gave to us. The Bible makes this point frequently:

⁸This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success.

Joshua 1:8 (RSV)

⁴⁵“Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; it is Moses who accuses you, on whom you set your hope. ⁴⁶If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. ⁴⁷But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”

John 5:45-47 (RSV)

³¹Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

John 8:31-32 (RSV)

²³Jesus answered him, “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

John 14:23-24 (RSV)

¹⁴I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁵I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth.

John 17:14-17 (RSV)

³And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴He who says “I know him” but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; ⁵but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him:

1 John 2:3-5 (RSV)

¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (RSV)

“Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 7:21 (RSV)

I have included a pretty long list of passages above but it could have been much longer. I see no way around this. Those who say they love God and love Jesus are speaking foolishly if they then go on to say anything which relegates the importance of God’s written Word. Obeying it is obeying Him. Devotion to it is devotion to Him. Neglect of it is neglect of Him. That is the case, notwithstanding the fact that God and His written Word are manifestly not the same thing, as we all know.

Objection 7

Your idea that every person should be a Bible student is not how Jesus says we are to follow him.

Response 7

Please refer to the responses I have given above. Hopefully you will now agree that both Jesus and His disciples, not to mention the Old Testament prophets and writers, placed huge importance on the need to know and believe the written Word of God. Jesus Himself exemplified that. He made the effort all His life to memorize God’s Word.

Therefore, when He was tempted by the Devil His response every time began “*It is written...*” He could not have done that unless He had first learned particular passages by heart, which is one of the best things we can ever do. Nevertheless, being a Bible student is not the same thing as being a disciple. The latter is obviously a wider concept.

Being a disciple *involves* study of the Bible, i.e. the whole Bible, but it is not limited *only* to that. However, I have never suggested that it is. As to whether we should study the whole Bible, it seems to me that the burden of proof is very much on you to demonstrate that study of the whole Bible is *not* what we are all called to do.

The only exceptions I can readily think of are the illiterate, the mentally handicapped and those who are too poor to possess a Bible at all. If one is not in any of those groups, how could one justify deliberately choosing *not* to study the whole Bible? Surely one would need a reason? You haven’t given any so far.

By the same token, how and why could a person justify limiting themselves only to certain portions of God’s Word that they find easy, agreeable, non-threatening, non-convicting etc? What reason is there *not* to study the Bible, or not to study all of it, given *what* it is and *who* gave it to us?

The main ones I can think of are laziness, lack of interest, unbelief or unwillingness to obey? But those are all invalid. Can you think of any valid reasons? In all my years in the Catholic church I was never told of any. The main reason I personally never looked at the Bible until I was 18 is that I never saw anybody else do so.

What is the relevance of all this information about Roman Catholicism if you are not a Catholic?

If you are not from a Catholic background you might possibly be wondering what the relevance is of all this material about the errors and problems of the Roman Catholic church. For example, people from a Reformed/Protestant background, and even more so Non-Conformists, Pentecostals and Charismatics, tend to think that they have nothing in common with Catholicism and that they do not share any of its errors.

They assume that all of that was left behind at the Reformation in the sixteenth century. Actually, that's not true. All the denominational churches share at least some of the features and errors of Catholicism. They just don't realise it. The Reformation did not achieve a complete removal of the errors of the Roman Catholic church. Far from it. If only it had.

The Reformation was actually quite limited in its scope. It exposed and removed some unbiblical beliefs and practices, but by no means all. Therefore, all of this information about Catholicism may be far more relevant to you than you might imagine. Take for example the Roman Catholic doctrine that says that their leaders are the only people on Earth who are qualified to interpret the Bible and even that their leadership, the so called *Magisterium*, is infallible in all matters of faith and practice.

The reality is that every non-Catholic denomination also has an element of that kind of warped thinking. They would not say any of it explicitly, as the Catholic church does, but it is, nevertheless, what many leaders think, deep down. The majority of the church leaders that I have ever met have shared this feature to one extent or another, whether they were Catholic or not.

In other words, they are 'clergy-minded' to one degree or another. That is they see themselves as specially anointed and set apart, such that what they say is obviously right and should not be contradicted. I have referred to this attitude, when it is found in *non-Catholic* clergy, as being '*Magisterium-lite*'.

Moreover, to one extent or another, the majority of the leaders of all the denominational churches share the same hierarchical, authoritarian, 'Nicolaitan' attitudes of the Catholic church. Very many leaders in non-Catholic churches feel that it is their right to rule over their people. At any rate, many of them do so, just as much, or almost as much, as any Catholic priest does.

I have spent about 20 years of my life in the Catholic church and just over 30 years outside of it, in various denominations. Regrettably, I have to say that I have seen all the same authoritarian attitudes and haughty behaviour on the part of leaders in *every* denomination that I have ever had dealings with.

It is partly because they all struggle with the same flesh nature. However, it is also because they have inherited far more of the beliefs and practices of Catholicism than they realise. They simply don't see it in themselves, or recognise where it comes from.

Therefore, I would urge you not to dismiss these issues, or the further points set out below from the Catholic Catechism, as having no relevance to you. They are very likely to be playing a part in your life, whatever denomination you come from. However, even if you have no church background at all, you still need to know about the errors of Catholicism.

Firstly you need to be able to recognise and identify those errors in order to avoid being misled about points of doctrine. Secondly, you also need to be aware of this in order to avoid the dangers of Nicolaitanism, i.e. being dominated by authoritarian clergy who see themselves as having the right to rule over you. The more you understand the nature and origins of this kind of thinking, the better you will be able to recognise it when you see it, and to protect yourself and your family from it.

If you are from any kind of non-Catholic denomination, even by background or upbringing, you are likely to find that the unbiblical doctrines and practices that come from Catholicism have affected you and are still affecting you to some degree, even if you feel sure that you are immune to them. Imagine that the colour orange was to deny that it is related to the colour red or that it shares any of red's characteristics. What if it said: "*I am orange through and through – there's no red in me*"

We would smile because we know that the colour orange is actually about 50% red and 50% yellow by its 'background'. Therefore the colour red is still playing a major part in the life of the colour orange, even though that fact may not be apparent to itself, or even to others. In the same way, many Protestants and also Pentecostals, Charismatics and others are unaware that much of what they do and believe is of unbiblical origins and has its roots in Catholicism.

Much of it comes originally from the so called 'Church Fathers', rather than from the Bible (see below). The errors and false teachings of those men of the second to fifth centuries, still affect the way that people today interpret the Bible, and also the way they operate as churches. Please see Book Eight in this series for a full discussion of the differences between biblical and unbiblical churches and why those differences matter.